Izaak Walton League of America

2012 Farm Bill Issue Briefs

I. The conservation compliance covenant

July 26, 2010

The Izaak Walton League of America is a private, non-profit conservation organization that for more than 88 years has supported strong federal conservation policies on private lands, especially agricultural lands. Our nationwide membership lives, works and recreates in rural communities. We have a decades-long record of supporting farm families and collaborative efforts to achieve conservation that sustains agriculture, rural economies, habitat, and all natural resources.

I. Recognize and re-prioritize the existing and logical covenant between taxpayers and producers represented by the conservation compliance regimen: Wetland Conservation Provisions (WC or "Swampbuster") and Highly Erodible Land Conservation Provisions (HELC) including "Sodbuster" and HEL-compliance.[1] Conservation compliance is a means for ensuring that where public money is invested, the public's interests are protected by requiring basic levels of protections for soil, water, and wetlands. Furthermore, prioritizing compliance will require no additional Farm Bill investment and in fact can result in saving federal dollars. Specific actions include:

a). Re-establish compliance requirements for federal crop insurance benefits so that all existing or new crop and revenue insurance or other risk management programs must be subject to all existing or new conservation compliance provisions. This is critical considering the high level of interest[2] in making insurance mechanisms a more integral and primary component of the federal farm "safety net," and associated proposals to reform insurance mechanisms to increase their use among crops and regions of the country where use of insurance is not currently prominent.

b). Require all land in production, both HEL and non-HEL, to have a conservation plan to be eligible for any USDA benefits.[3] This would strongly encourage producers to create and follow conservation plans.

c). Enact a nationwide "Sodsaver"[4] provision to remove incentives to convert marginal lands by requiring non-cropland and native sod parcels greater than five acres converted for planting an annual crop to be ineligible for all existing or new crop and revenue insurance or other risk management programs and disaster benefits.

d). Enact an additional conservation compliance component to require a row crop planting setback from water bodies and pathways—producers choosing to plant a buffer that meets technical standards may enroll in continuous CRP, or applicable CREP, to receive payment on those acres.

e). Revise all soil conservation plans approved, applied, and maintained before July 3, 1996 to at minimum meet current planning standards on highly erodible cropland.

Questions: contact Brad Redlin, Director of Agricultural Programs for the IWLA at bredlin@iwla.org or 651.649.1446 ext. 13

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[1] National Food Security Act Manual http://directives.sc.egov.usda.gov/ViewRollUp.aspx?hid=17128&sf=1

[2] U.S. House Committee on Agriculture, 2012 Farm Bill hearings commenced April 2010 http://www.farmpolicy.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/HouseAgPetersonCropInsSafetyNet10May3.mp3 & http://www.farmpolicy.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/PetersonSafNetCropInsu10May15.mp3 (more: http://www.farmpolicy.com/?p=2194&print=1)

[3] Conservation Districts of Iowa, 2012 Farm Bill Testimony, Committee on Agriculture, U.S. House of Representatives, Des Moines, IA, April 30, 2010 http://agriculture.house.gov/testimony/111/h043010/Weems.pdf

[4] Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008, Title XII - Crop Insurance and Disaster Assistance Programs, Sec. 12020. Crop Production On Native Sod, and http://www.iwla.org/index.php?ht=d/ContentDetails/i/1359/pid/223