



National Association of Conservation Districts

September 18, 2006

The Honorable Bill Frist
Majority Leader
United States Senate
S-230 Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Harry Reid
Democratic Leader
United States Senate
S-221 Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader Frist and Democratic Leader Reid:

The National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) is concerned about the continued impacts of drought conditions across the U.S. The nation's 3000 conservation districts work with millions of cooperating landowners and operators at the local level to provide assistance in managing and protecting private working lands throughout the United States.

As you may know, conservation programs like the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the Grasslands Reserve Program (GRP) and Conservation Technical Assistance are critical in helping landowners manage the natural resources of the land. Conservation practices such as no till, conservation buffers and land set-aside programs have had a tremendous impact on soil quality and water retention. The benefits of providing technical assistance for farmers and ranchers to understand the importance of incorporating conservation practices into their operation and financial assistance for them to undertake these practices are seen in the retention on soil quality in these drought areas. The CRP program alone prevents 450 million tons of soil from eroding each year. Given the severity of the current drought, it is very likely we would be experiencing a disaster similar to the Dust Bowl were it not for conservation practices on the land.

To address the varying needs associated with changing drought conditions, NACD supports establishment of a National Drought Council to develop and coordinate drought response and contingency plans and make recommendations to Congress. We believe it is important to take a long term approach to addressing drought assistance, ensuring the land is properly managed and assistance is coordinated, such as is outlined in S. 802, the National Drought Preparedness Act. Conservation districts could have valuable input on such a committee, understanding the important interaction between conservation and productivity of the land.

As Congress considers emergency aid for areas affected by drought, any emergency aid should ensure continued economic viability for farmers, maintaining their ability to manage lands in a sustainable manner. We ask that Congress not overlook the benefits that have been provided by conservation programs in maintaining soil quality and the future viability of agricultural operations. This approach should allow for future productivity of the land and a coordinated response to regional disaster concerns.

We appreciate your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,

Bill Wilson
President

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