



National Association of Conservation Districts

September 13, 2007

Senator Tom Harkin
Chairman
Senate Agriculture Committee
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Saxby Chambliss
Ranking Member
Senate Agriculture Committee
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Chambliss:

As you know, the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) represents the 3,000 conservation districts across the country. Our members are instrumental in helping USDA deliver Farm Bill conservation programs and leverage funding from federal, state, and local natural resource programs.

NACD wants to ensure that Farm Bill conservation program delivery continues to be as efficient and effective as possible, meeting local priorities and needs, and providing technical assistance and expertise to help farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners undertake and maintain conservation practices.

With regard to the delivery of conservation programs, we support the current roles of USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service and Farm Service Agency. We do not feel that it is appropriate for Congress to legislate a change in roles or program administration within the Farm Bill. We fully respect your work on these important issues, but would encourage a Congressional hearing or further investigation before legislating any change. NACD is willing to work with you to provide additional information and participate in this process. We hope that any potential action would be taken in consultation with the Secretary with a review of the field office structure, an understanding of technology, operating systems, staffing needs and potential efficiencies to be gained. We do not believe that shifting program administration would automatically result in cost savings, and that these other areas must be reviewed to ensure any benefits would be gained.

Currently, NRCS's administration of conservation programs includes a significant portion for the delivery of technical assistance, which includes technical expertise, individual field visits and working directly with landowners. As you know, it is frequently the case that producers are willing to make conservation improvements to their operations, but they need assistance to do so – both the financial assistance that Farm Bill conservation programs provide as well as the technical assistance associated with programs allows for technical work with producers on their specific contract/conservation practice.

NACD looks forward to continuing to work with you to ensure that conservation programs are meeting the needs of producers across the country, and doing so in the most efficient and effective manner possible. We ask that you do not make program administration changes without thorough review and an understanding of the impacts of this action.

Sincerely,

Olin Sims
President

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