



Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition Recommendation	S. 3042 -- Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018	H.R. 2 – Agriculture and Nutrition Act of 2018
<p><b>1. Increase Farm Bill conservation title funding and acreage caps so they more closely reflect farmer demand and meet the critical need for conservation practices.</b></p>	<p>No cuts to conservation program funding.</p>	<p>Overall conservation program funding is cut by \$795 million over 10 years.</p>
<p><b>2. Improve voluntary working lands, easement, habitat and river restoration, and invasive species control programs so the U.S. Department of Agriculture can meet farmer and partner demand to conserve farmland, wetlands, grasslands, rivers, streams, and forests.</b></p>		
<p><u>Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)</u>            Increase and restore baseline to at least \$500 million.             Increase and restore baseline to at least \$500 million.             Improve wildlife habitat, watershed restoration, and water quality benefits through prioritized placement of easements.             Improve program efficiency for landowners and partners.</p>	<p>Increases mandatory funding: \$400M for FY19-21, \$425M for FY22, \$450M in last year. Over ten years, increase \$1.6 billion in baseline. Biggest increase of any program.             Flexibility on match requirements, eliminating the cash-match requirement and including other costs associated with securing deed.             WRP focus on water quality easements; more flexibility to restore alternative vegetative communities on wetland easements to address wildlife habitat and other wildlife goals.</p>	<p>Increases funding to \$500M per year through FY23.             Does not generally require greater prioritization of easements but does set aside 10% of conservation funding – including easements – to source water protection.             Allows enrollment of forested parcels, Adjusted Gross Income limit exemptions, and more flexible cost-share matching requirements. However, changes also include amending the requirement for general conservation plans so that they are only required for highly erodible land and changes the</p>

	<p>Increases county cap for WRE acreage from 10 to 15 percent.</p> <p>Flexibility for land trust certification; no change regarding mineral development; removes plans from easement deed terms but keeps requirement for plan as condition of assistance.</p>	<p>requirements for mineral development on ACEP lands.</p>
<p><u>Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCP)</u></p> <p>Fully fund and improve the Regional Conservation Partnership Program to increase flexibility in program administration and better facilitate partnerships with landowners and other nonfederal partners.</p> <p>Provide incentives for innovative practices with the greatest potential to address regional Great Lakes concerns.</p>	<p>Provides \$200M/year as mandatory baseline funding, in addition to 7% from EQIP, CSP, and ACEP, for a total of around \$350M/year.</p> <p>Adds CRP and Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act as covered programs.</p> <p>Policy changes from Stabenow-Ernst bill, which the Coalition supports, in base text.</p> <p>Projects no longer required to go directly through covered programs. Requires the Secretary, to the maximum extent practicable, to distribute the percent of funding or acres from donor programs to projects that have similar purposes of those programs.</p> <p>No national funding pool; 60% to Critical Conservation Areas and 40% to State/multi-state projects; new grant authority (up to 30% in direct grants) to test new ideas.</p>	<p>Funds the program at \$250 million per year through FY23 with mandatory funds, on par with existing funding. It repeals the 7% set aside from covered programs. In addition, it allows for longer contracts if necessary, requires a simplified application process, and quantification of a project's environmental outcomes.</p> <p>It adds CRP as a covered program and updates eligible activities under the program to include source water protection.</p>
<p><u>Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)</u></p> <p>Secure a robust increase in Conservation Reserve</p>	<p>Bill increases CRP acreage to 25 million acres. Rental rates capped at 88.5% of county average rental rates. Incentive</p>	<p>Overall acreage caps increased to 29 million acres by FY23. However, overall rental rates per acre are cut and it establishes a</p>

<p>Program funding that approximates historical levels of enrollment to accommodate demand and meet soil, water, and wildlife conservation goals.</p> <p>Expand the working lands options (particularly grazing) within CRP in ways that decrease costs per acre and increase benefits for soil, water, and wildlife.</p> <p>Refine prioritization of CRP funding to align with regional water quality and conservation priorities.</p> <p>Promote innovative conservation practices through enrollment under Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, Continuous Conservation Reserve Program, and State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement.</p>	<p>payments allowed under certain market conditions.</p> <p>CRP acres would be eligible for haying and grazing except where State Technical Committees weigh in on certain land that should not be hayed or grazed. Authorizes cost share for fencing and other water distribution practices for grazing.</p> <p>Prioritizes certain land to address sediment and nutrient issues by authorizing Clean Lakes, Estuaries and Rivers Initiative (CLEAR – buffers, filter strips, wetlands, etc.) at no less than 40% of continuous acres, and wildlife through State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) initiative at no less than 30% of continuous acres.</p> <p>Reauthorizes CREP at no less than 20% of continuous CRP. More matching flexibility.</p>	<p>declining scale for subsequent enrollments; cost shares for practice, establishment, and seeds are reduced.</p> <p>The bill expands opportunities for owners and operators to use haying, grazing, etc., under an approved plan.</p> <p>The bill does not refine the prioritization of CRP.</p>
<p><u>Environmental Quality Incentives Program</u></p> <p>Increase the minimum amount of Environmental Quality Incentives Program funding invested in wildlife to 10 percent and sustain initiatives for soil health, landscape conservation, and wildlife.</p> <p>Prioritize funds to protect drinking water sources and formally recognize source water protection as a U.S. Department of Agriculture priority.</p>	<p>Provides mandatory funding at \$1.473 billion in 2019, stepping up incrementally to \$1.595 billion by 2023.</p> <p>Increases the wildlife set-aside to 10%, decreases the livestock set-aside to 50%.</p> <p>Annual contracts for annual wildlife practices of up to 10 years.</p> <p>Prioritizes source water funding within EQIP/CSP.</p> <p>Instructs Secretary to review environmental criteria, cost-</p>	<p>Increase EQIP funding to \$3.0 billion by FY23.</p> <p>Maintains 5% minimum for wildlife.</p> <p>While the bill does not specify source water protection as part of EQIP, it does set aside 10% of funds for source water protection efforts from each conservation program except CRP.</p>

	<p>share rates, and conservation practice standards.</p> <p>Soil health pilot program at \$15M/year. Incentives for best practices on soil health.</p>	
<p><b>3. Maintain existing conservation program compliance requirements to sustain the conservation of valuable wildlife habitat, water quality, and land.</b></p>	<p>Maintains link between conservation compliance and crop insurance. Includes language directing the Secretary to identify “categorical minimal effects” within 1 year of enactment with sideboards to ensure environmental laws are followed. Directs Chief of NRCS to provide a report on the number of wetlands with an area of not more than 1 acre delineated in ND, SD, MN, and IA based on the best available science.</p>	<p>This bill maintains the link between conservation compliance and crop insurance subsidies. However, the bill also includes unnecessary new requirements for wetland compliance.</p>
<p><b>4. Expand funding for and flexibility of conservation technical assistance to promote adoption and implementation of successful practices to increase soil health, improve water quality, increase farm productivity, and conserve valuable wildlife habitat.</b></p> <p>Develop incentives, support innovation and clarify definitions of technical assistance to allow for creative public-private partnerships, including technical services from agricultural retailers, nongovernmental organizations, and partners to enhance uptake of conservation practices on farms.</p>	<p>Added language for 4R certification; added authority for third party certification.</p> <p>Directs Secretary to better align conservation practice standards between NRCS and FSA.</p>	<p>HR 2 expands the definition of who can deliver technical assistance to producers to include third party providers such as an agricultural retailer or other commercial entity and provides for alternative certification methods for third party providers</p>

<p><b>5. Strengthen methods for demonstrating conservation success and improve research and evaluation of conservation programs.</b></p> <p>Support uniform and transparent methods for measuring success and demonstrating the value of Farm Bill programs.</p> <p>Provide authority and funding for measurement and evaluation of conservation outcomes for all Conservation Title investments.</p> <p>Support and expand the Conservation Effect Assessment Program to assess the impacts of conservation practices on wildlife and water quality.</p> <p>Continue to support Agricultural Research Service work demonstrating efficacy and opportunities for improvement, including soil health practices that benefit land owners, increase productivity, and protect the environment.</p>	<p>RCPP includes new provision on outcomes requiring projects to identify environmental, social, and economic outcomes of projects.</p>	<p>Does not include the Healthy Fields and Farm Economies Act, introduced by Reps. Marcia Fudge and John Faso. The Healthy Fields bill gives USDA better tools and authority to measure, evaluate, and report on conservation program outcomes.</p> <p>Requires greater outcome-based reporting for the RCPP. Other programs are not included.</p> <p>Does not address the CEAP program.</p>
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