



SEEKING
**COMMON
GROUND**
FOR CONSERVATION

**An Agricultural
Conservation Policy Project**
by the Soil and Water Conservation Society

**REFORMING THE FARM BILL:
IDEAS FROM THE
GRASSROOTS**



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SOIL
AND WATER
CONSERVATION
SOCIETY



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The Soil and Water Conservation Society

The Soil and Water Conservation Society is a not-for-profit scientific and education organization. SWCS serves as an advocate for the conservation profession and for science-based conservation policy.

The mission of SWCS is to foster the science and art of soil, water, and related natural resource management to achieve sustainability. Members promote and practice an ethic recognizing the interdependence of people and their environment.

A 13-member board of directors governs the Society and its affairs.

SWCS has 10,000 members worldwide. They include researchers, administrators, educators, planners, legislators, farmers, ranchers and students. These individuals represent nearly every academic discipline and institution concerned with the management of land and water resources.

Membership benefits include *Conservation Voices* magazine and the *Journal of Soil and Water Conservation*, networking opportunities, representation in policy circles, and discounts on books, conferences and workshop registrations.

To help carry out the SWCS mission, chapters throughout the United States, Canada and the Caribbean conduct activities at local, state, and provincial levels and on university campuses. These 75 chapters represent the grassroots element of SWCS. Each chapter elects its own officers, sponsors conservation-related conferences and other activities, and formulates local recommendations on land and water conservation issues.

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Introduction

The Soil and Water Conservation Society undertook its Seeking Common Ground for Conservation project early in 2000. The project's intent is to help key agricultural and conservation leaders identify changes needed in U.S. agricultural conservation and environmental programs and to help them and policymakers shape proposals to enhance the conservation provisions of the 2002 farm bill.

Project Description

SWCS conducted five regional workshops involving eighty-two invited state and local leaders with first-hand experience of the strengths and weaknesses of current conservation policy and programs. Participants representing the agricultural, water quality, and fish and wildlife conservation communities developed concrete recommendations for reform of U.S. agricultural conservation policy and programs based on their direct experience with these programs and conservation problems in their states and localities. This document summarizes those five workshops: the Great Plains Workshop conducted June 26-27, 2000, in Denver, Colorado; the West Workshop conducted July 17-18, 2000, in Sacramento, California; the Midwest Workshop conducted July 24-25, 2000, in Indianapolis, Indiana; the Southeast Workshop conducted August 21-22, 2000, in Nashville, Tennessee; and the Northeast Workshop conducted September 11-12, 2000, in Albany, New York. The names and affiliations of workshop participants are listed in the appendix of this document.

Workshop participants were asked to develop two agendas for the reform of agricultural conservation policy and programs: (1) an incremental agenda, consisting of refinements in existing programs that would allow current authorities and programs to work better for agriculture and the environment and (2) an agenda for large-scale change in our nation's approach to land stewardship that would dramatically accelerate progress toward improving the economic health and environmental performance of farm and ranch land.

A policy advisory committee was established to help translate the more than 300 ideas developed by participants in all five workshops into proposals for reform of the conservation provisions of the farm bill. This committee includes individuals with personal experience in the farm bill policy process. The names and affiliations of policy advisory committee members also are listed in the appendix of this document.

SWCS will publish a report in 2001 that communicates the findings and recommendations of workshop participants and the policy advisory committee. Communication efforts will focus on two main groups: (1) policymakers who will directly determine the outcome of the farm bill debate and (2) opinion-leaders within nongovernmental organizations, interest groups, and academia who can influence the outcome of the policy process through their advocacy activities. SWCS will communicate the meaning and importance of the proposals to policymakers and opinion-leaders directly through briefings, invited testimony, and other opportunities. Indirect communication will occur through print and broadcast media. SWCS will also support state and local interests working to use the farm bill process to enhance the environmental sustainability of U.S. agriculture.

Workshop Process

Each of the workshops followed the same agenda. After a short explanation of the project and expected outcomes of the workshop, and following self-introductions, participants presented their ideas for incremental change in existing conservation programs, one idea at a time, in round-robin fashion. Each idea was recorded on a flip chart for future reference. Discussion was limited to any necessary clarification of ideas as they were presented. Thereafter, participants presented their agendas for large-scale change, with discussion again limited to clarification of ideas as they were presented. Each individual's agenda for large-scale change was recorded as an individual flip chart. These two processes typically concluded the first half-day of each workshop.

The second day of each workshop was devoted to a discussion of the ideas presented the previous day. Similar ideas for incremental change were grouped into clusters overnight by staff. The clusters varied somewhat from one workshop to the next, depending upon the ideas presented. The clusters of incremental change ideas are reported herein as presented at each workshop.

Because of the number and diversity of ideas generated and the limited time for discussion, a voting process was used in each workshop to help target discussion around the ideas for incremental change. Each participant was given seven green dots and seven red dots. The green dots were used by participants to identify ideas they liked, could support, and in their view would make a big difference. The red dots were used to identify ideas participants thought were bad and could not support. The dots could be placed on any cluster of ideas or on individual ideas within clusters. A combination vote was also possible: Participants could signify support for, or opposition to, most of the ideas within a cluster by placing a dot on the cluster title, while registering one or more contradictory votes on specific ideas within the cluster. Only one dot could be used for each idea or cluster of ideas.

At the completion of the voting process, discussion was focused on those ideas receiving large numbers of either red or green dots, indicating agreement for or against the idea, or where there occurred a somewhat equal distribution of both colors of dots on an idea, indicating obvious differences of opinion.

Discussions of the agendas for large-scale change were handled somewhat differently. The agendas presented by participants were not combined or clustered, but remained as individual proposals for change. A voting process using seven red dots and seven green dots was again used to help focus discussion of the large-scale suggestions, but using a different approach. Participants used the green dots to indicate the top seven components of their vision for a new national agricultural conservation agenda. They used the red dots to indicate components they thought should not be part of that new agenda. Dots could be placed on the title of an individual's agenda to indicate support for, or opposition to, all of the ideas contained within that agenda. As in the voting on the incremental agendas, a combination vote was possible where participants could signify support for, or opposition to, most of the ideas within an individual agenda by placing a dot on the agenda title, while registering contradictory opinions on one or more of the specific ideas within the cluster. Only one dot could be used for any one idea, and no more than one dot could be used to support or oppose an entire agenda.

At the completion of the voting process, discussion was focused on those ideas receiving large numbers of either red or green dots, indicating agreement for or against the idea, or where there was a somewhat equal distribution of both colors of dots, indicating obvious controversy.

A court reporter captured the entire discussion at each workshop. The resulting transcripts were used to create the workshop summaries.

Great Plains Workshop: Ideas for Incremental Change

Following are re-creations of the actual cluster flip charts from the Great Plains Workshop, with narrative highlights relating to selected clusters of ideas and individual ideas. Alongside the cluster title at the top of each flip chart are arrows representing participants' opinions regarding the entire cluster. Arrows pointing up represent green dots placed by participants. Arrows pointing down represent red dots placed by participants. Similarly, arrows are representative of participants' opinions regarding individual ideas within each cluster. Individual ideas that did not receive green or red dots are preceded on each flip chart with a bullet or dot.

To get an idea of the relative support, or lack thereof, among clusters of ideas and individual ideas, consider not only the votes received by individual ideas, but the total for the cluster as well. For example, within the Conservation Reserve Program cluster, the idea to revise the Environmental Benefits Index to favor marginal land did not receive any votes. Because the CRP cluster received ten supportive votes, however, assume that those ten participants favored this revision of the EBI.

The clusters of ideas and individual ideas within clusters that received several votes, either in support of or in opposition to them, should be seriously considered when thinking about improvements to be made in current conservation policy. Even those with several votes that contradict each other should be considered as ideas that may be controversial but warrant careful thought.

Because of time constraints, not all of the individual ideas were discussed, nor were all the clusters of ideas.

The clusters are presented with those receiving the largest number of green dots listed first.

Ideas pertaining to the Conservation Reserve Program, except those related to funding, were grouped on one flip chart creating this cluster of ideas. Note that the arrows at the top of the flip chart represent participants' reactions to all the ideas within the entire cluster.

↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)

↓↓↓↓ Allow emergency haying/grazing where there is a 40 percent reduction in forage – or the land is declared a disaster.

- Allow enrollment of larger tracts plus easements.

↑↑↑↑↓↓ Give groundwater contamination a higher priority through the Environmental Benefits Index (EBI).

↑↑ Allow more flexibility in planting mixtures for CP4D (establishment of permanent wildlife habitat cover on noneasement land).

- Revise the EBI to favor marginal land.
- Provide flexibility to maintain existing cover on reenrollment without reduction in rental payment .

↑↓↓↓↓ Eliminate emergency haying and grazing.

↓↓↓↓↓ Establish a strategic hay reserve by allowing 25 percent of the land within each CRP contract to be hayed each year after the first 2 years of establishment and eliminate emergency haying.

↓↓↓ Assign higher rental rates for irrigated land.

“We had guys that took a 10 percent reduction in their payments per acre and hayed 2 ton per acre, and because of the emergency feed stuff, sold that hay for 100 bucks a ton. So they got \$230 an acre off of CRP land...”

“Our family actually believed that we would not be able to hay it and were stupid enough not to put land into CRP because we might need that land for a means of growing forage some year. Well, gee, seven out of ten years, we could have hayed it!”

Common Ground

Workshop participants strongly supported continuation of the CRP. There was significant support as well for greater **flexibility in recommended planting mixtures on CRP acres** within this region, for enhance wildlife habitat and other purposes.

Emergency haying and grazing received a great deal of discussion. It was generally agreed that emergency haying and grazing should be allowed, but the focus should be on using forage from CRP acres to support livestock needs on that same farm or ranch. Landowners should not be allowed to sell hay from CRP acres for a profit.

Most participants thought a **strategic hay reserve** was a good idea, but they felt such a reserve should be created outside the CRP.

Concerns

Because the designation of areas in which **emergency haying and grazing** can be allowed has often been a political decision, participants suggested that emergency haying has almost become a common-use situation in some areas.

Although there was agreement that soil erosion, water conservation, and groundwater contamination in the **field corners of center-pivot irrigation systems** are environmental issues that need to be addressed, no agreement was reached on how best to approach these issues. Enrollment of these corners in CRP, perhaps under the continuous sign-up, was seen as one option, but existing rental payments are well below what producers can receive through loan deficiency payments on crops grown in those areas. Increasing rental payments to the extent required to attract participants on irrigated land would drain already limited funds from other more environmentally sensitive land. It was estimated that there might be 4 million acres or more of center-pivot corners that could be eligible for enrollment.

↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑

Funding

↓↓ Increase **Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)** cap to 45 million acres.

↓ Remove the **CRP** cap and set annual enrollment goals.

• Increase **Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)** enrollment to 250,000 acres/year.

↓ Increase **Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)** funding to \$150 million/year and allow 5-year agreements.

↑ Consistently fund **Stewardship Incentive Program (SIP)**, increase funding for sustainable agricultural and education, emphasize training research.

↑ Provide annual funding for **Farmland Protection Program (FPP)**.

↓↓ Increase funding to \$5 billion/year for total conservation.

↑↓ Increase funding for **Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D)**.

↑ Reactivate the small watershed program, and emphasize structure rehabilitation.

Ideas pertaining to funding and program cap expansion, regardless of program, were grouped on one flip chart creating this cluster of ideas. The arrows at the top of the flip chart represent participants' reactions to all the ideas within the cluster.

Common Ground

There was a great deal of support for increased funding for conservation generally. Several reasons for raising the **CRP acreage cap** were offered -- to increase environmental benefits and to strengthen the original commodity surplus control objective of CRP. *"CRP has done some great things in terms of water quality and decreasing soil erosion, and through the last farm bill we're seeing some tremendous wildlife benefits. But, by shifting the acres to more environmentally sensitive areas, we've shifted those acres to less [agronomically] productive areas... We're producing more [commodities] in the areas that got taken out of CRP in Iowa than we put in in areas that are in Texas, Oklahoma, and Colorado."*

Although **EQIP** was not included on this flip chart, discussion produced agreement on the need for additional EQIP funding as well.

Concerns

Concern was expressed about removing or increasing the cap on **CRP**. If this were to happen without a corresponding increase in funding for conservation across the board, funding for other conservation programs might be diminished.

Those who placed red dots on the proposal to **increase funding generally** did so to express their concern that \$5 billion was not enough money to do the conservation job.

Although there was support expressed for **RC&D** programs, it was agreed that their effectiveness is often closely tied to the quality of the RC&D coordinator and the governing board or council.

Ideas pertaining to the Continuous Conservation Reserve Program and Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, except those related to funding, were grouped on one flip chart creating this cluster of ideas. The arrows at the top of the flip chart represent participants' reactions to all the ideas within the cluster.

↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑

Continuous Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)

↑ Make tree planting requirement in riparian areas more flexible.

↑ Allow larger wellhead protection areas to be eligible.

↑ Make seasonal streams eligible.

- Make CP23, wetland restoration, eligible.
- Lower the state match required in CREP, provide a grant option for CREP.

↓↓↓ Transfer administration of continuous CRP from Farm Service Agency (FSA) to Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and do not include acres enrolled in CREP in the general CRP cap limits.

- Allow producers with water bank contracts to roll land over into CRP.

Common Ground

There was broad support for continuing the Continuous CRP and CREP, including most of the above suggested changes.

Because of the potentially great benefit to improved water quality, there was strong support to make **seasonal streams** as formerly designated by NRCS using United States Geological Survey (USGS) blue-line and blue-dot maps eligible once again for the installation of riparian buffers and filter strips through continuous CRP.

There was also strong support for increased flexibility in **tree planting** requirements in riparian buffers installed on marginal pasture. *“There are areas in the prairie in western Nebraska and eastern Colorado that have always been grass and I think should be grass. I don't think we need to look at putting 300 trees per acre in those areas.”*

Size of **wellhead protection** areas should not be determined administratively. *“In our area they're now restricted to a thousand-foot radius of a wellhead, and most of our communities need areas that may extend out a couple miles from the wellhead.”*

Concerns

There was less support for transferring administration of the continuous CRP and CREP from the **Farm Service Agency** (FSA) to NRCS. CRP is currently administered by FSA, but *“most of the continuous practices are fairly technical in nature, so it only makes sense that the agency with the technical expertise should administer it.”* There was a general reluctance to push this suggestion, however. *“We already have enough battles going on between FSA and NRCS. I don't want to fight that battle.”*



Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)

↓ Allow wetland creation

Common Ground

There was strong support expressed for WRP.

The recommendation to allow **wetland creation** as an acceptable practice received broad support among participants. *“We’d certainly like to see wetlands creation be incorporated into WRP. We utilize a lot of areas that are not historically wet for groundwater recharge basins that if utilized enough will become, we feel, very good wetlands habitat areas.”*

Concern

One concern regarding the inclusion of wetlands creation as an acceptable practice was the use of created wetlands in a **mitigation strategy**. *“If you do not allow those created wetlands to be used as mitigation to offset something else, then I’m okay with it. My concern is that when you create wetlands, somebody wants to use that as a credit to mitigate something else they’ve done in destroying a wetland value, and I don’t want that to happen. If we’re going to pay for this, I want this to be all new value, not credited as mitigation someplace else.”*

Only one idea specific to the Wetlands Reserve Program was suggested. However, a flip chart was created for this program with the unfulfilled expectation that other ideas for WRP might be generated during the workshop. WRP ideas specific to funding were grouped separately among other funding ideas. Note that the arrows at the top of the flip chart represent participants’ reactions to the single idea on this flip chart.

Ideas pertaining to technical capacity, staffing capacity, infrastructure, and technology cutting across programs, regardless of source or agency; were grouped on one flip chart creating this cluster of ideas. The arrows at the top of the flip chart represent participants' reactions to all the ideas within the cluster.

"I don't have any quantitative figures, but we really need to boost the NRCS technical assistance staffing. We've seen it continually erode, and that staff which is left has been increasingly assigned to wetlands problems and helping out with CRP assignments and everything else. So we're not getting near the assistance on the ground for supporting the water quality efforts and our other conservation measures that we used to."

↑↑↑↑↑

Capacity

↓↓↓ Remove the technical assistance (TA) cap in Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC), establish a mentoring program, and provide assistance through third-party vendors

↑↑↑↑ Boost NRCS technical assistance staff.

↑↑ Provide TA through state agencies.

↑↑↑ Increase one-on-one assistance.

↑↑↑ Initiate a USDA grant program for partnerships.

↑↑↑↓ Funds for self-assessment and implementing action plan.

Common Ground

Broad support was registered for increasing the staffing capacity to help landowners carry out conservation work, but there were different ideas about where that added staffing capacity should be placed. Many felt a need to increase **NRCS technical staff**.

Other participants thought program delivery could also be achieved through the use of **third-party vendors, state agencies, and/or grants to partners**, such as Ducks Unlimited for WRP and Pheasants Forever for the continuous CRP/CREP. *"They [third-party vendors] can deliver the same kind of technical assistance and services to clients as a government employee. I don't see anything wrong with being able to contract with people like that to get the job done."*

"If soil and water conservation districts want to help fund or co-fund, if the Game and Parks Commission... or a private organization wants to assist in promoting a particular program, that's great."

There was also strong support for funding to help producers develop and implement their own conservation plans similar to the Farm-A-Syst approach of **self-assessment and implementation**.

Concerns

Some participants expressed different concerns about relying on **third-party vendors** for technical assistance (TA) and for program delivery. One concern had to do with the quality of assistance: *"On the positive side, it [for-profit TA] gets conservation on land that may not have been there. The negative side is that they're looking at it from the context of a profit motive and they may prescribe things like an annual set-aside program or programs that have tendency to generate cash flow... whereas... an NRCS person may have a motive for saying 'I see a resource problem here. It can be addressed in a variety of ways, some of which would be annual payments, some of which might be multiyear payments, some of which might be a permanent easement.'"*

Another concern had to do with the implications for the future workforce, *"I see this [use of third-party vendors] as another opportunity for the federal government to lay out money... on a contract basis... that gives them more latitude to reduce their force. And then all of a sudden the money disappears, but it doesn't look like they affected anybody's job by doing it... and the program goes away."*

There was opposition to funding for **self-assessment** if the process allowed for self-certification or self-determination of wetlands.

New Programs

- ↑↑↑↑↑ Establish a range riparian reserve program.
- ↑↑↑↑↑ Provide incentives to preserve mature riparian areas.
- ↑↑↑↑↑↑ Improve riparian areas, pay to protect existing areas, and integrate riparian areas with upland management.
- ↑↑↑ Establish an easement program to protect grazing land, including existing land and land coming out of Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).
- ↑↓↓↓↓ Reinstatement Agricultural Conservation Program (ACP) and Great Plains Conservation Program (GPCP).
- ↑↑↓↓↓ Use Federal funds to purchase water rights to protect fisheries
- ↑↓↓↓↓ Establish a critical watersheds program that requires all operators to have a water quality plan. Provide 100 percent financial assistance for related capital costs.

Ideas that described a new program, objectives, or authorities not included in current USDA programs were grouped on one flip chart creating this cluster of ideas. Because the ideas were often distinctly different from each other, participants were not allowed to vote for the whole cluster. Therefore, no votes are shown at the top of the flip chart.

Common Ground

There was widespread agreement that a **riparian reserve program** be created for the West that encourages protection of mature riparian areas and improves other riparian areas. The most popular approach was to defer grazing in riparian areas to allow woody vegetation to establish and integrate those areas into a planned grazing system, with grazing limited to the dormant season to maintain the woody vegetation. This would improve water quality and wildlife habitat while allowing limited grazing.

Monitoring should be associated with this program to demonstrate its effectiveness.

Concerns

A concern expressed about the **riparian reserve program** was this: If such a program were implemented nationally, riparian areas in the eastern U.S. would *“suck up a lot of money in a program like this if the regs aren't structured correctly.”*

Ideas that were not related to specific programs but were different priorities and principles that cut across multiple programs or jurisdictions were grouped on one flip chart creating this cluster of ideas. Because these principles and priorities are distinctly different from each other, participants were not allowed to vote for the cluster. Therefore, no votes are shown at the top of the flip chart.

Principles and Priorities

- ↑ Target a portion of financial assistance (FA) and technical assistance (TA) to Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) watersheds.
- ↑ Emphasize management practices instead of land retirement.
- ↑ Increase coordination among federal/state conservation programs.
- ↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↓ Provide safe harbor under Endangered Species Act, provide cost-share with a local component to target protection and restoration efforts.
- ↑↑↑ Provide high incentives in priority watersheds.
- ↑ Evaluate sustainability of conservation programs.
- ↑↓↓ Develop pollutant based systems/best management practices (BMPs).
- ↑ Encourage multi-agency/multi-jurisdictional efforts.
 - Increase local control of watershed management and let governors develop unified implementation strategies.
- ↑↓↓↓ Empower local governments to impound water and install structural measures.
- ↑ Incorporate conservation in urbanizing areas.
- ↑↓↓↓↓ Let governors develop unified implementation strategies.

Common Ground

There was fairly strong support for producers' efforts to protect **endangered species** through USDA conservation programs, specifically with NRCS technical assistance. *"To protect and make sure there's not further species lost in this country, we're most assuredly going to need the help of private landowners who manage the land.... But right now, in many cases they're expected to do it without any financial support from the greater society who has said this is a goal of ours."*

"I'd rather see NRCS and the farm bill be the appropriate agency to give an incentive."

"A voluntary, incentive-based program has the potential to keep species from becoming listed."

There was little support for the idea that state governors should be the ones to coordinate the collaboration of federal, state, and local agencies and private sector organizations in the joint implementation of complementary programs, such as EQIP, CRP, Clean Water Act, Section 319. *"...[G]overnors are, by necessity, political figures and would be making decisions based on their political future, and I would not support tying in governors...."*

Concerns

Some questioned whether funding for **endangered species** should be included in a farm bill. Concern was raised regarding the magnitude of funding needed and where the funding might come from within existing USDA programs. *"We're spending over \$100 million for three birds in Grand Island, Nebraska. So if there's, as I understand, 10,000 endangered species listed, this is a real Pandora's box. The problem is enormous."*

"There's the potential for stealing money away from other programs that need our attention by adding this new program for something we don't fully understand yet."

↑↑↑↑↑

Commodity Program Linkages

↓↓↓ Target or cap all program payments.

↑↑ Strengthen the linkage between commodity programs and conservation.

• Shape payments to discourage breaking out and farming of environmentally sensitive land.

↑↑↑↑↑ Reduce/eliminate incentives that threaten environmentally sensitive areas.

↓↓ Require compliance for all programs.

Several ideas were presented that had something to do with changing the way commodity support programs or incentives currently work to benefit and not be detrimental to conservation. Those ideas were grouped on one flip chart creating this cluster of ideas. The arrows at the top of the flip chart represent participants' reactions to all the ideas within the cluster.

Common Ground

Although there was no consensus on requiring **compliance for all programs**, there was considerable agreement that producers participating in agricultural programs should be held accountable for their conservation actions, or lack thereof. *"We're pouring millions of dollars out there into agriculture. I'm one of the ones that's getting the check, too... and I think if you're going to be there at the public trough, then the public ought to be receiving something in return for it."*

There was some support for strengthening linkages between **commodity programs and conservation**. In particular, workshop participants supported the elimination of perverse incentives in federal agricultural programs (crop insurance, loan deficiency payments, disaster payments) that encourage farming on environmentally fragile land. *"I think the approach we should take is to change everything to a conservation program. Rather than spending \$15,000 or \$20,000 a year to get around the payment limitations, I'd like to see that guy have \$15,000 or \$20,000 in his pocket that he could spend on conservation."*

"We'd... be better off to pay it on conservation rather than anything else."

Concerns

Some participants thought **expanding compliance** would detract from providing technical assistance to producers. *"We don't have enough people to do the right things that need to be done. To emphasize more policing and compliance, I think, right now at a time when we're so fraught with inability to provide good service is that it's the wrong emphasis."*

There was no consensus on capping program payments. In **support of caps**: *"There is a problem when we get to the point where we have this 10 percent that's getting these huge payments..."*

"If you look at it historically, when those programs were started, we did have a more homogeneous sort of structure in agriculture. We didn't have this dispersion that we now have in terms of size and structure. It discriminates against about three-fourths of agriculture. You're in great shape if you grow corn and wheat and cotton and peanuts and rice, but forget about it if you happen to be raising cattle or pigs or fruits or vegetables."

In **opposition to caps**: *"I like to see the family farm. Farms didn't get bigger solely because of these programs. There's a lot of things going on, globalization, that's causing these things... It's not just happening in farming. It's happening in every retail business, distribution business. They're getting huge. I don't like to see it, but that's the reality."*

"The survivors [in agriculture and the sheep industry in particular] have tried to enhance their efficiency of scale in their family operations, and you're going to discriminate against them because they've gotten bigger?"

Clusters of ideas for incremental change that received no additional discussion

Because of time constraints, the following clusters of ideas did not receive additional discussion. The order of discussion was based upon the number of green dots or red dots, represented here by arrows pointing up and pointing down, respectively, beginning with clusters with at least five green dots or red dots.

Ideas pertaining to the Environmental Quality Incentives Program were grouped on one flip chart creating the following cluster of ideas. The arrows at the top of the flip chart represent participants' reactions to all the ideas within the cluster.

↑↑↑

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

↑↑ Reserve some EQIP funds for whole farm plans, carbon sequestration, management intensive grazing.

↑↑↓ Environmental benefits should outweigh the costs of implementation.

↑ Encourage more local input in the development of the state program, use only education assistance to market the program, and dovetail with Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program.

↑ Establish a flexible spending formula.

↓↓↓↓ Add incentives to increase instream flows.

↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↓ ↓ Give higher funding priority for irrigated acres.

↑ Encourage managed grazing systems as opposed to confined feeding operations. Too much emphasis on priority areas for funding.

Only one idea was suggested for the following three topics. However, a flip chart was created with the unfulfilled expectation that related ideas might be generated for the topics during the workshop.

Communication/Education

• Increase public support for all conservation programs through public awareness.

State Technical Committee

↑↑↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ State technical committees should do state natural resource assessment and develop measurable program objectives.

Emergency Watershed Program

• Expedite on-the-ground response.

West Workshop: Ideas for Incremental Change

Following are re-creations of the actual flip charts from the West Workshop, with narrative highlights relating selected clusters of ideas and individual ideas. Alongside the cluster title at the top of each flip chart are arrows representing participants' opinions for the entire cluster. Arrows pointing up represent green dots placed by participants. Arrows pointing down represent red dots placed by participants. Similarly, arrows are representative of participants' opinions regarding individual ideas within each cluster. Individual ideas that did not receive green or red dots are preceded on each flip chart with a bullet or dot.

To get an idea of the relative support, or lack thereof, among clusters of ideas and individual ideas, consider not only the votes received by individual ideas, but the total for the cluster as well. For example, within the Conservation Reserve Program/Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program cluster, the idea to eliminate whole-farm bids did not receive any votes. Because the CRP/CREP cluster received five supportive votes, however, assume that those five participants favored elimination of whole-farm bids.

The clusters of ideas and individual ideas within clusters that received several votes, either in support of or in opposition to them, should be seriously considered when thinking about improvements to be made in current conservation policy. Even those with several votes that contradict each other should be considered as ideas that may be controversial and warrant careful thought.

Because of time constraints, not all of the individual ideas were discussed, nor were all clusters of ideas.

The clusters are presented with those receiving the largest number of green dots listed first.

Ideas pertaining to the Conservation Reserve Program and the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program were grouped on one flip chart, creating this cluster of ideas. The arrows at the top of the flip chart represent participants' reactions to all the ideas within the cluster.

↑↑↑↑↑

Conservation Reserve Program / Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CRP/CREP)

- Raise CRP cap to 45 million acres emphasizing buffers and grassland and higher rental rates.
- ↓ Include long-term/permanent easements.
- Expand to watershed scale.
- ↑↑ Make grazing land eligible.
- Eliminate whole-farm bids.
- Allow field splitting.
- Facilitate the transition of land coming out of CRP to grazing.
- Make fish/wildlife a primary purpose.
- Make CREP work better for fish habitat.
- Give more emphasis to riparian buffers and wetlands.
- ↓ Increase EBI points for fish and wildlife.
- ↑↑ Provide safe harbor from increased regulation if endangered species populations increase as a result of CRP practices.
- Emphasize restoration of native grassland.
- Increase CREP incentives.
- ↑↓↓↓ Address what happens when CREP contracts expire.
- ↑↓↓↓ Give states flexibility in CREP to manage commodity supplies.

“Sage hens have found that they like the habitat. And we [CRP lands] turn out to be the core of where the sage hen doesn't appear to be in danger. So now we're nervous that if we leave it in the CRP we can never take it out because we may have an endangered species soon.”

Common Ground

There was fairly strong support for protecting producers from increased regulation if populations of **endangered species** increased as a result of the producers' enrollment in CRP or CREP.

Likewise, there was interest in making **grazing land eligible** for program enrollment and to allow grazing as an economic use of CRP land if, in both cases, an intensive grazing management plan was required. *“The best way to get perennial grasses and better habitat on CRP is if we had a [intensive] grazing component.”*
“...[G]raze it once ever five years or burn it.... Just say you can't walk off and leave it. You have to do some kind of management of your grassland after you plant [it].”

Concerns

Workshop participants wavered in their support of the CRP. Questions were raised during the discussion about whether the CRP is achieving its environmental goals or has become simply a set-aside program to support producers. If it is not achieving its environmental goals, participants suggested that the funds could be better allocated elsewhere. *“If you took 15 percent of the CRP dollars out, you could fully fund the EQIP program at \$500 million.”*

“I've got some CRP ground, and we're making more money on that CRP ground than we did when it was in production.”

↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

↑ \$500 million funding for EQIP.

↑↓↓↓ Reinstatement annual cost share.

↑↓ State technical committee should have more say in funding allocations.

- Reduce the amount of upfront planning that is required to apply for program.

↓↓↓ Eliminate the existing application process.

↑ Allow carryover of CCC funds for EQIP.

↑ Cost-share to keep ground covered.

↑↓↓↓↓↓ Target EQIP funds to federal and regional priorities.

- Fund precision ag technology.

↑ Use education funds to quantify environmental benefits.

↑ Use EQIP funds across state, tribal and provincial boundaries to address regional problems.

- Deliver producer education at most effective times.

↑↓ Raise cap on EQIP payments to \$100,000 with incentives to go higher.

Ideas pertaining to the Environmental Quality Incentives Program were grouped on one flip chart creating this cluster of ideas. The arrows at the top of the flip chart represent participants' reactions to all the ideas within the cluster.

Common Ground

There was fairly strong support for EQIP among workshop participants, particularly if the suggested improvements were incorporated into the program. *"I think everybody was...initially kind of against it [EQIP] and fighting it, but what I hear now...is it appears it's going to work and let's give it a good chance..."*

Concerns

There was general agreement that **targeting priorities** for EQIP should be set at the state level. *"A lot of stuff [priorities] comes out of the federal government [that] they don't fund, and we're still supposed to do it. So if we're going to do priorities, let's do the ones that we [states] want to do."*

Concern was expressed about cost-share funding outside priority areas.

There was less than full support for reinstating a **statewide cost-share** program within EQIP. *"The EQIP program as it is now constitutes... up to 35 percent by decision of the state conservationists to go to statewide initiative programs. So... we're already committing 35 percent of the funds to that annual cost-sharing opportunity.... I don't think we need to reinstate it, I think it's there."*

Some participants felt the funding was not meeting conservation needs outside designated EQIP priority areas. *"I like the old ACP program... We still have at least 30 farms... that want to do something And that's the end of it." "If [EQIP is] funded like it needs to be, these things would be taken care of."*

There was agreement that **sufficient funding** for the program would accommodate both national priorities and local needs. *"It seems to me at \$500 million there's enough money for both [national priorities and local needs], but until we get to that level... [we must make] hard decisions about where that money goes."*

Ideas pertaining to the Wetlands Reserve Program were grouped on one flip chart creating this cluster of ideas. The arrows at the top of the flip chart represent participants' reactions to all the ideas within this cluster.

↑↑↑↑↑
Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)
↓↓ Increase WRP cap to 2 million acres.
↑↓ Allow the enrollment of 250 million acres in WRP annually.
↑↓↓↓↓ Make seasonal flooding of rice land eligible.

Common Ground

There was moderate support among workshop participants for this program.

Concerns

Participants who expressed opposition to increasing the WRP cap did so because of concern over the **competition** among conservation programs for available funds and not so much because of their objection to the WRP itself. *“That’s quite a lofty goal...for NRCS to do those plans.... You’re just taking it from somewhere else. There isn’t enough assistance.”*

The available acreage of rice land, coupled with the already existing **wetland benefits of rice land**, limited support for making the seasonal flooding of rice land eligible for WRP. *“600,000 acres of rice after this year would eat up [most of] your one million [acres].... Rice lands are already creating or benefiting wetlands, and they’re functioning as wetlands. I’d rather see the money in WRP sent to wetlands than to a commodity that gives wetland benefits....”*

“The argument in support of seasonal flooding eligibility is based on the wildlife benefits provided.”

↑↑↑↑↑

Farmland Protection Program (FPP)

↑ Dramatically increase funding for FPP.

↑↑↑↑↓↓ Make rangeland eligible.

↑↓↓↓ Limit agricultural use to benefit species.

• Fund FPP at \$250 million/year.

↑ Increase the Federal share of FPP to 75 percent

Ideas pertaining to the Farmland Protection Program were grouped on one flip chart creating this cluster of ideas. The arrows at the top of the flip chart represent participants' reactions to all the ideas in this cluster.

Common Ground

There was strong support for increased FPP funding to meet growing local and state demands. *"There's huge interest out there in going into farmland protection.... The biggest problem is trying to find dollars available to buy these agricultural easements."*

"For states or counties to try to come up with funding is tough. And if we can get some kind of federal planning and matching it would definitely help that program."

Concerns

Some participants questioned whether investing in FPP was **the best way** to protect agricultural land. *"We've got 30 or 40 years to preserve the farmland we're going to save. Today, conservation easements are selling for \$1,200 an acre.... [To protect] the 4.5 million acres we're talking about...we're talking about \$15 to \$20 billion.... You could run one heck of a PR campaign in stabilizing the population for far less than the \$20 billion it's going to cost to save it that way."*

The effectiveness of Washington State's Growth Management Act, a **regulatory approach**, was discussed. *"...[20-acre minimum development size and] impacts fees [for land, road construction, sewer, schools] have to be paid prior to development...[and] tend to preserve agricultural land in the sense that people tend to pack into cities because it's cheaper to maintain the infrastructure."*

During the discussion of farmland protection and urban sprawl a participant suggested that conservation easements to benefit specific species should be initiated. Some participants thought that, because of the increasingly dynamic nature of agricultural operations, emphasis should be on giving producers some flexibility to **enhance wildlife habitat** without limiting agricultural options.

"Things change so fast in agriculture. The limitations that I might have agreed to two to three years ago might put me out of business four or five years in the future. I'd rather get the synergism by enhancing wildlife rather than limiting the agricultural options."

Ideas pertaining to technical capacity, staffing capacity, infrastructure, and technology cutting across programs regardless of source or agency, were grouped on one flip chart creating this cluster of ideas. The arrows at the top of the flip chart represent participants' reactions to all the ideas within the cluster.

↑↑

Capacity

- ↑ Increase NRCS staff on tribal lands.
 - Increase funding for training.
 - Update technical guides and practice standards.
- ↑ Collect resource inventory and assessment data on tribal land.
 - Fund watershed groups to initiate and implement programs.
- ↑ Create a private sector conservation implementation service.
 - Provide comprehensive nutrient management planning training/certification for private sector.
- ↑↓↓↓↓ Use the nonprofit sector to deliver programs.
- ↑↑↑ Increase NRCS staff.

Common Ground

Workshop participants agreed that **technical assistance** to producers was insufficient to meet the existing needs and, in some way, should be increased.

Concerns

Some workshop participants expressed discomfort with **utilizing the nonprofit sector** for program delivery purposes. *“There’s already a system in place to work with the private landowners [conservation districts] and they’re trying to get funding to do the same thing. So why do we need another layer or two to do the same thing? Oregon let watershed councils... get established... So now you have two groups fighting for the same dollars to do the same thing.”* *“Private planners are in the NRCS office getting all the information [needed to develop a dairy plan], and the staff is educating them to be able to do what NRCS is trained to do. I think we’re better off spending that money and increasing staff at NRCS, people who already know how to do it and are trained to do that.”*

Support for the nonprofit sector to provide **implementation services** seemingly increased as the discussion proceeded. *“There’s a synergy between getting the environmental organizations, the willing landowner, and NRCS planning. In one of our watersheds one of our treatments was to fence off about 35 miles of streambank because it was a high dairy area. The conservation district hired this group to do it. They went from farm to farm and showed up with the workers and fencing and said, ‘We would like to put a fence across your farm.’ Every farmer in the valley took them up on it, except one.”* *“There’s a lot of ancillary benefits to having partners involved in technical assistance and helping to deliver these programs. The Central Valley Habitat Joint Venture is a great example of groups coming together under one umbrella, putting together conservation measures that actually assist farmers and provide areas of wildlife habitat.”*

Priorities

- ↑ Emphasize land treatment, not land retirement.
- ↑ Focus technical assistance and financial assistance to Clean Water Act priorities.
- ↑↓↓ Increase road rehabilitation.
- ↓↓ Favor limited resource farmers.
- ↓↓↓ Eliminate payments to large agribusiness firms.
- ↑↑↑ Emphasize land treatment to achieve sustainability, and be pro-active.
- ↑ Provide financial assistance to eligible producers for the cost of meeting regulatory requirements of USDA programs.
- ↑↑ Emphasize biodiversity.

Common Ground

There was fairly strong agreement that conservation programs/payments should strive to promote sustainability and not be distributed by farm size, gross income, or corporate status. *“If we’re really interested in conservation rather than social control, then we shouldn’t care so much about the size of the farm; we should care about the [conservation] accomplishment.”*

Ideas that were not related to specific programs but were priorities that cut across multiple programs or jurisdictions were grouped on one flip chart creating this cluster of ideas. Because these priorities are distinctly different from each other, participants were not allowed to vote for the whole cluster. Therefore, no votes are shown at the top of the flip chart.

Ideas that were not related to specific programs but were principles that cut across multiple programs or jurisdictions were grouped together onto one flip chart creating this cluster of ideas. Because these principles are distinctly different from each other, participants were not allowed to vote for the whole cluster. Therefore, no votes are shown at the top of the flip chart.

Principles

- ↑↑↑ Create regulatory certainty and regulatory assurance among all state and federal conservation programs.
- ↑↑ Regionalize conservation program payments to reflect land values.
- Leverage state funding through matching grant provisions.
- ↑↑↑↑↑↑ Keep people on the land.

Common Ground

There was strong support for using programs in a way that would help keep producers of any size **on the land** -- producing agricultural products, environmental services, and community benefits. *"...[W]e are looking at developing farming systems that provide all of the [conservation] benefits we're talking about...on an actual operation that's still producing a thousand dollars an acre of crops. If we can really do that and keep people on the land and actually look at that sustainable future where the programs are measured, there's something for the community, there's something for the economy, and there's something for the environment; all of a sudden the people become a very important and organic element in the whole watershed."*

Concern

Many thought land retirement programs, such as CRP, actually encourage people to move off the land, to stop producing agricultural products to the detriment of the surrounding community. *"CRP takes people off the land... [T]here's lots of problems with CRP, but I would not change it until I got something better to replace it with."*

Clusters of ideas for incremental change that received no additional discussion

Ideas that described a new program or objectives not included in current USDA programs were grouped together onto one flip chart creating this cluster of ideas. Because these two ideas were distinctly different from each other, participants were not allowed to vote for the cluster.

New Programs

↑↑↑↑↓ Initiate a green commodity program or increase commodity program payments based on environmental performance.

- Decrease the costs of environmentally friendly inputs and technology .

Ideas pertaining to communication or education issues were grouped on one flip chart creating the following cluster of ideas. Again, because these ideas are distinctly different from one another other, participants were not allowed to vote for the cluster.

Communication/Education

↑ Fund NRCS or NAS to document environmental benefits of farming/ranching.

- Demonstrate cost/benefit ratios.
- Communicate economic/environmental benefits of conservation to the agriculture community and the public

Only one idea specific to the Conservation of Private Grazing Land Program was suggested. A flip chart was created for this program with the unfulfilled expectation that other ideas for CPGL might be generated during the workshop. The arrows at the top of the flip chart represent participants' reactions to the single idea on the flip chart.

↑↑

Conservation of Private Grazing Land (CPGL)

- Fully fund private grazing land conservation initiative.

Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)

↑↓ Increase WHIP funding to \$100 million annually.

- Emphasize assistance to small farmers

Forestry Incentive Program (FIP)

↑↑↑↑↓ Increase FIP funding.

- Eliminate FIP and use the money to fund Stewardship Incentive Program at higher level.

Because of time constraints, the following clusters of ideas did not receive additional discussion. The order of discussion was based upon the number of green dots or red dots represented here by arrows pointing up and pointing down, respectively, beginning with clusters with at least five green dots or red dots.

Ideas pertaining to the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program and the Forestry Incentive Program were grouped on individual flip charts, creating these clusters.

Midwest Workshop: Ideas for Incremental Change

Following are re-creations of the actual flip charts from the Midwest Workshop, with narrative highlights relating selected clusters of ideas and individual ideas. Alongside the cluster title at the top of each flip chart are arrows representing participants' opinions for the entire cluster. Arrows pointing up represent green dots placed by participants. Arrows pointing down represent red dots placed by participants. Similarly, arrows are representative of participants' opinions regarding individual ideas within each cluster. Individual ideas that did not receive green dots or red dots are preceded on each flip chart with a bullet or dot.

To get an idea of the relative support, or lack thereof, among clusters of ideas and individual ideas, consider not only the votes received by individual ideas, but the total for the cluster as well. For example, within the Conservation Reserve Program/Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program cluster, the idea to target CRP acres to parts of fields/farms did not receive any votes. However, because the CRP/CREP cluster received two supportive votes and two nonsupportive votes, you should assume two participants favored and two opposed targeting CRP acres to parts of fields/farms.

The clusters and individual ideas within clusters that received several votes, either in support of or in opposition to them, should be seriously considered when thinking about improvements to be made in current conservation policies. Even those with several votes that contradict each other should be considered as ideas that may be controversial but warrant careful thought.

Because of time constraints, not all of the individual ideas were discussed, nor were all of the clusters.



Conservation Compliance

- Enforce conservation compliance for all USDA support programs.

Common Ground

There was broad agreement that efforts to require producers to comply with conservation contracts has lessened in recent years. *“When conservation compliance first came out, producers agreed to and signed contracts basically to meet compliance on HEL ground, and as time has went by, NRCS initially tried to enforce because it was the law, and they caught so much flak and lost trust within the farm community that NRCS backed off from enforcement.”*

Support was equally strong that enforcement should be encouraged because it’s the law and because the lack of enforcement is having **detrimental environmental effects** and may also have detrimental affects on how policymakers view in the future the **accountability** of the existing conservation delivery system. *“Somebody’s got to do the enforcement because compliance has really went downhill seriously. And we are losing a very, very valuable asset, which is the topsoil.”*

“If we get bad [actors] that are [widely known] and we don’t do something about them, that... will be raised up as an issue [when we seek additional] funding”

“[Having an] accountability system in place is real comforting when we go into [something like TMDLs] that’s basically going to hold us accountable. We [can be] set up so that the agricultural community is the one that is actually in charge [and that] makes the whole thing go down a whole lot smoother. If we can be in charge of water quality issues or other issues as they come up, we’ll end up with solutions that we can live with. If we can’t be responsible on things like [compliance now], we’re not going to be in charge of taking care of the other problems that come up later.”

Most participants thought the scope of USDA program payments affected by compliance should be broadened. *“You deny the transition payments, you deny LDP, you deny all the cost share of things that [they’re] involved in.”*

Concerns

Participants were undecided about who should enforce compliance. *“I really don’t think compliance enforcement belongs with the technical assistance [provider]. As soon as you do that, a producer is afraid to invite the technical assistance [provider] onto his farm for fear they will find something that doesn’t fit, and he will be out of compliance, and he will be out of business. I believe that the enforcement of conservation compliance must fall with some other agency. Logically, USDA-Farm Service Agency. It’s there. But they don’t begin to have staff locally to do it either.”*
“But I wonder if USDA couldn’t...contract with an outside party or entity to handle the compliance elements, periodic spot checks, things like that. USDA will set the standards for it, but a neutral party would actually handle it.”

There was some disagreement about whether or not crop insurance should be encompassed by compliance. *“[If] they do buy crop insurance and they aren’t in compliance, then they lose the right to benefit from that. I don’t see any harm from having it coupled.”*

“The disadvantage...if you couple it [a crop insurance] adjustor will come out...to scrutinize the agricultural practices of the landowner and then it becomes an issue: Were you in compliance; did you do what you were supposed to do. It’s a mechanism by which they can withhold the payment to the farm that actually had a legitimate claim [to the insurance].”

“The insurance company is betting that they aren’t going to have to pay [the insurance] and you’re betting they are.”

Only one idea specific to Conservation Compliance was suggested. However, a flip chart was created for this program with the unfulfilled expectation that other ideas for compliance issues might be generated during the workshop. The arrows at the top of the flip chart represent participants’ reactions to the single idea on this flip chart.

Ideas pertaining to the Wetlands Reserve Program were grouped on one flip chart creating the following cluster of ideas. The arrows at the top of the flip chart represent participants' reactions to all ideas on this flip chart.

↑↑↑↑↑↑

Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)

↑↑↓ Increase enrollment in WRP to 250,000 acres/year.

↑↓ Use WRP and EWP in coordinated response to flood damage (goal: 3% of land in wetlands).

- Increase WRP enrollment cap to 10 million acres.

Common Ground

There was strong support for continuation of the WRP. In particular, increases in funding and a higher enrollment cap were strongly supported.

Concerns

Increasing wetland protection nationally without consideration of **landscape position** concerned some participants. A producer viewed tile drainage release of water as similar to the hydrologic functioning of wetlands. *“It absolutely makes no sense to me [to use WRP] as a **flood control measure** for [tile-drained] upland... If you're draining wetlands with a ditch, then you have no hold and slow release capacity, and...the water that falls...immediately goes into the surface water. But in this prairie pothole region...drainage of the wetlands with tile significantly reduces the impact of flood because of the slow release of water.”*

Likewise, the **water quality benefits** of wetlands are also dependent on placement on the landscape. *“An acre or two- acre wetland on the top of a hill basically does nothing for treatment of nitrates. That wetland has to be placed where the water leaves the tile or the surface of the land. [It] has [to have] some kind of residual holding capacity for a period of time for the vegetation in a growing, useful wetland to metabolize the nitrate and the nitrate is consumed and released as nitrogen.”*

↑↑↑↑↑↑
Capacity

↑↑↑ Increase personnel in both the public and private sectors to implement programs.

- Develop a landowner database that is accessible to both NRCS and FSA.

- Make science-based soil mapping available at low cost.

↑↓↓ Streamline wetland mitigation process.

↓↓ Provide TA and FA to NRCS for wetland mitigation banking.

↓ Use the private sector to complement NRCS tech. assistance.

Ideas pertaining to technical capacity, staffing capacity, infrastructure, and technology cutting across programs, regardless of source or agency, were grouped on one flip chart creating this cluster of ideas. The arrows at the top of the flip chart represent participants' reactions to all the ideas within the cluster.

Common Ground

There was broad support for increased personnel levels to implement conservation programs. *"In my state, we are... understaffed at field offices to continue long-term application of conservation programs."*

Concerns

Some participants looked at the use of the private sector to complement NRCS as a temporary fix. *"If we want these programs to last long-term, we've got to be getting money into NRCS for more staff... and if we're talking about bringing in subcontractors or side people, we're not dedicating a labor staff to the long-term existence of the programs."*

Supporters agreed that **fully staffed** NRCS, conservation districts, and county land conservation committees was preferable, but in lieu of that, the private sector was an option. *"We're scrambling to get the staff just to implement the programs we have right now. That's why we work with Ducks Unlimited and other groups. They've hired biologists to move WRP contracts through the system... We need to fully fund staff..., but that doesn't seem to be the way the federal government is going. I hate to turn away DU dollars to protect wetlands in America and send them to Canada."*

"[Use of the private sector] allows a lot of flexibility, identify priorities in the short-term, put conservation on the ground without making large commitments to staff."

Many participants felt that the **wetland mitigation** process takes too much time and that the process should be **streamlined**. *"It takes two and a half, three years to mitigate. It's pointless to choke the system down with that much time requirement between the time that wetland is designated and the time that it's moved... I see the agencies as the problem. Agencies don't get these things up and running and don't get these programs that are initiated and appropriated for into the field."*

"Mitigation is really not working now... Developers are [skipping avoidance minimization] going straight to mitigation, saying tell me how much I've got to pay to build in this wetland."

"As long as we don't walk away from the traditional avoidance minimization and just go straight to mitigation, then I can support the need for streamlining..."

Ideas that described a new program, objectives, or authorities not included in current USDA programs were grouped onto one flip chart creating this cluster of ideas. Because the ideas were often distinctly different from each other, participants were not allowed to vote for the cluster. Therefore, no votes are shown at the top of the flip chart.

New Programs

- Ban MTBE.
- ↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓ Establish a 3- to 5-year set-aside, outside of CRP, to offset loan deficiency payments.
- ↑ Eliminate P.L. 566 small watershed projects.
- ↑↑↑ Support the Fishable Waters Act.
- ↑↑↑ Establish \$300million /year matching grant program for states/districts for program delivery.
- Launch a comprehensive nutrient management program process so CAFOs have a regulatory standard to meet. Provide technical assistance to all other livestock producers to develop nutrient management plans.

Common Ground

There was absolutely no support for a short-term set-aside program to offset the impacts of the loan deficiency program. “[Short-term easements] are absolutely devastating to the economy of rural America and exports and to fragile lands in other parts of the world.”

Principles and Priorities

↑↑↑↑↑↑ Give credit for past accomplishments when determining program eligibility.

↑↑↑ Emphasize grazing land conservation in all programs.

- Target assistance to water quality needs, particularly among small landowners.

↑↑↑↑↑ Develop coordinated resource management plans for each farm/ranch.

↑↑↑↑↑↑ Balance commodity and conservation program spending and thus provide \$10 billion more each year for conservation.

↑↑↑↑ Give program delivery responsibility to state/local/private personnel and make the federal government responsible for training and certification of personnel, and for the development of technical practice standards.

↑↓ Use incentives to reduce urban stormwater impacts on rural land.

- Improve coordination between rural and urban conservation programs.

↑↑↑↑↑ Support science-based BMPs.

↑↓ Increase flexibility!

↑↑ Monitor programs to (a) identify needs and (b) document results.

↑↑↑↑ Give state technical committees flexibility to adjust programs to state needs.

- Plan land treatment based on hydrologic cycle.

↑↓↓↓ Do not pay incentive payments if a manure discharge occurs in AFOs over 1000 animal units.

↑ Use existing programs to address TMDLs and document related landowner actions.

↑↓↓ Allow joint use of USDA and other federal programs to reduce landowner share of practice installation.

- Implement programs on science-based, holistic resource management concepts.

↑↑↑↓ Use TMDLs as opportunity to fund agriculture conservation programs.

↑↑↑ Encourage common standards/specifications among agencies.

Common Ground

There was broad support for improving the balance between commodity and conservation program spending in a way that would allow for increased conservation spending. There was also strong support for the idea that producers who are early adopters of conservation practices should be rewarded for their past accomplishments by being given credit when their eligibility for conservation programs is being determined. *“Everybody’s competing for the same dollars, and the one who scores the highest [based on past conservation accomplishments] is the one who gets the dollars.... [Y]ou’re the first on the list because you’ve done all these other things. If there’s money left over after you get done, the next guy on the list gets money. It goes on down the line until he who’s last usually doesn’t get anything.”*

Concerns

Some participants were concerned about how the funds might be used.

Ideas that were not related to specific programs but were different priorities and principles that cut across multiple programs or jurisdictions were grouped on one flip chart creating this cluster of ideas. Because these principles and priorities were distinctly different from each other, participants were not allowed to vote for the cluster. Therefore, no votes are shown at the top of the flip chart.

“Balance the amount of money spent on conservation, which now is about ten percent of the total farm budget, with the commodity and over production programs that we have, which would add about ten billion dollars in new moneys.”

“I caution that we don’t get so much money in the conservation arena that we are encouraging production on land that really shouldn’t be having production and even with intense conservation practices and ignoring the health of non-HEL Class I land. There’s lots of Class I farmland that needs a level of attention for ...erosion.”

Ideas pertaining to the Conservation Reserve Program and the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, except those related to funding, were grouped on one flip chart creating this cluster of ideas. Note that the arrows at the top of the flip chart represent participants' reactions to all the ideas within the cluster.

*"It's very important that CRP be a conservation program, not a **land retirement** program.... Three years is not a conservation program. History has told us land retirement programs only export production somewhere else."*

- ↑↑↓
- ### Conservation Reserve Program/Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CRP/CREP)
- ↑↑↓ Cap CRP at 36.4 million acres. Allow buffers to push cap to 40 million.
- ↓↓↓↓↓↓ Shorten the duration of contract/easement options in CRP/WRP.
- Increase CRP cap to 45million acres.
- ↑↑↓↓ Pay 100% maintenance costs on an as needed basis.
- Increase cap to 50 million + acres, with greater flexibility in practice implementation and state allocations for CRP, CREP and continuous sign-up.
- ↑↓ Give more emphasis on water quality in EBI.
- Emphasize wildlife in continuous sign-up.
- ↓↓↓↓↓↓ Allow producers to move pasture/hayland to CRP/buffers depending on market conditions.
- Target CRP acres to parts of fields/farms.
- ↑↑ State technical committees to regionalize CRP among states.
- ↑↑↑ Allow permanent easements for riparian areas/buffers.
- Revisit cropping history criterion to prevent breaking out of sensitive areas.
 - Make payment limitations consistent between EQIP/CRP.
- ↑↑↑↑↑↓ Allow sustainable haying/grazing and biomass production on CRP areas.
- Use easements for more than buffers.
 - Eliminate tree-planting requirement in some riparian buffers.
- ↑↓ Allow "well-managed" haying/grazing.
- Increase CRP cap to 60 million acres.
 - Allow conservation districts more flexibility in program development and implementation.
 - De-emphasize land rental rates in enrollment decision between states.
- ↓↓↓↓↓↓ Offer short term CRP (3-5 yrs) as a substitute for loan deficiency payments.
- Include Permanent easements on HEL as an option.
- ↑ Continuous sign up for entire program.
- Increase EBI or rental payment for increased conservation management or uses (e.g. hunting).
 - Eliminate ownership restrictions.

Common Ground

There was broad support for the CRP as a conservation program and not a supply control program or a substitute for support payments.
"[Short term easements] are absolutely devastating to the economy of rural America and exports and to fragile lands in other parts of the world."

There seemed to be agreement that pasture and hayland should not be eligible for CRP regardless of **market conditions**. *“I think allowing existing pasture or hayland to move in and out of the CRP on a market basis takes it out of the conservation program arena...It doesn't belong in CRP.”*

Although there was support for increasing the CRP cap, the support for increasing the emphasis on buffers was stronger. *“I voted for the increase in the cap, but not necessarily on its size, but that the **buffers** be mainly the concentration of the additional acres.”*

“Allowing buffer strips to be a part of that increase is a great idea. Buffer strips have helped us out tremendously in our area.”

*“I don't think the 60 million [acres] is too high at all... We have two and a half million acres that should be in **permanent set-aside** that are being cropped. They are flood-prone areas, they're highly erodible areas, they're areas that you just couldn't put a conservation practices on to make them productive, but we're still trying to farm them. We need to get those out.”*

Concerns

Opinions about how the effects of haying and grazing on wildlife and other producers could be mitigated varied. *“If someone does [hay or graze] CRP, there should be a **reduction** in what they're getting on that land. They shouldn't be able to get all the benefits of the full rental land, plus all the benefits of the haying and grazing, but there should be some type of reduction.”*

*“Haying or mowing, about the best you can say for that in **wildlife** is you can do it in a way to minimize the negative impacts on wildlife. Grazing can be a good management tool, though, and if the grazing were used as a way to maintain the value of the buffer, I'd support it. We've had so many **emergency grazing** openings anyway... we'd be better to manage it rather than doing it on an emergency basis.”*

*“I'm all for emergency haying and grazing as long as we don't put the person that is in the hay business at a disadvantage when he's got an opportunity for a **windfall**.”*

Ideas pertaining to the Environmental Quality Incentives Program were grouped on one flip chart creating the following cluster of ideas. The arrows at the top of the flip chart represent participants' reactions to all the ideas within the cluster.

↑↑↓	Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)
↑↑↓	Increase EQIP funding to \$1.8 billion/year.
↑↓↓↓↓↓	Reduce mandated focus on animal agriculture.
↑↑	Use tax deductions/credits as EQIP incentives.
↑↑↓	Increase EQIP funding 50% and use for incentives for equipment or custom application of nutrients/pesticides.
•	Require enrollment of whole farm.
•	Enhance monitoring/evaluation to measure effectiveness of the program.
•	Allow continuous sign-up.
↑	Give credit for past/existing conservation accomplishments.
↓↓↓↓	Reduce the size of priority areas to increase the likelihood that environmental goals will be met by land treatments. Drive the program locally.

“Typically, there hasn’t been much in the farm programs in the way of cost-share or that kind of support to help livestock producers. And we sorely need it.”

Common Ground

Support to maintain the focus of EQIP on **animal agriculture** was overwhelming. *“Mandated funds for livestock is probably going to help us maintain livestock production in this country.”*

“If TMDLs become more of an issue down the road, I think this could be an excellent program to assist smaller producers...in improving their operations in ways of nutrient management and animal waste management...”

Reducing the size of **priority areas** was not seen as a preferred change in the program. *“It’s the wrong response to having the money spread out too thin. The proper response is to get more money appropriated.”*

“In our state we have really small priority areas, but with really limited funds in each... I don’t want to see the size reduced even more.”

However, those supporting the reduction in size thought it would improve local land treatment. *“Reducing the size of priority areas is a means of keeping land treatment effective and driven locally.”*

Some support was registered for **increased funding** in EQIP by adding various tax incentives to the program.

Concerns

Increased funding for EQIP was not as high a priority to some **wildlife interests** as other conservation programs. *“It [EQIP] is not delivering that much more for wildlife. We’re having a hard time ... integrating wildlife in with EQIP. At the national level [and] ... state level USDA does a good job of including diverse groups in this program. But at the local level, in ... many cases the same interest groups are kind of out of the process so you don’t get that integration of wildlife along with production agriculture and soil and water concerns.”*

One observation suggested that because EQIP was under funded initially it may be hard to generate **political support** for it now. *“If you launch a program at too small of a level to really build a huge base of support out there in the countryside, it’s almost impossible to go back and win -- to grow it in the future. ... [I]t’s easier to invent a whole new stewardship incentive program than to just build on and expand EQIP.”*

Clusters of ideas for incremental change that received no additional discussion

One idea specific to the Conservation on Private Grazing Program was suggested. A flip chart was created for this program with the unfulfilled expectation that other ideas for CPGL might be generated during the workshop. The arrows at the top of the flip chart represent participants' reactions to the single idea on this flip chart.

↑↑↑
Conservation on Private Grazing Land Program (CPGL)
• Fund CPGL at authorized levels.

Likewise, one idea specific to the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program was suggested and a flip chart was created with the expectation that other ideas for WHIP might be generated during the workshop. The arrows at the top of the flip chart represent participants' reactions to the single idea on this flip chart.

↑↑
Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)
• Increase WHIP funding to \$50 million/year.

Only one idea specific to communication or education was suggested. A flip chart was created for this idea with the unfulfilled expectation that other related ideas might be generated during the workshop.

Communication/Education
↑↓ Increase producer awareness of programs, program benefits, and increase participation.

Similarly, only one idea specific to the Conservation Farm Option Program was suggested. A flip chart was created for this program as well, with the expectation that other ideas for CFO might be generated. Note that the participants did not register any reaction to this idea.

Conservation Farm Option Program (CFO)
• Implement Conservation Farm Option.

Because of time constraints, the following clusters of ideas did not receive additional discussion. The order of discussion was based upon the number of green dots or red dots represented here by arrows pointing up and pointing down, respectively, beginning with clusters with at least five green dots or red dots.

Southeast Workshop: Ideas for Incremental Change

Following are re-creations of the flip charts from the Southeast Workshop, with narrative highlights relating to selected clusters of ideas and individual ideas. Alongside the cluster title at the top of each flip chart are arrows representing participants' opinions for the entire cluster. Arrows pointing up represent green dots placed by participants. Arrows pointing down represent red dots placed by participants. Similarly, arrows are representative of participants' opinions for individual ideas within each cluster. Individual ideas that did not receive green dots or red dots are preceded on each flip chart by a black bullet or dot.

To get an idea of the relative support, or lack thereof, among clusters of ideas and individual ideas, consider not only the votes received by each individual idea, but the total for the cluster as well. For example, within the Conservation Reserve Program cluster the idea to improve enforcement on mowing dates did not receive any votes. However, because the CRP/CREP cluster received eight supportive votes, you should assume eight participants favored improvement of the enforcement on mowing dates.

The clusters of ideas and individual ideas within clusters that received several votes, either in support of the ideas or in opposition to them, should be seriously considered when thinking about improvements to be made in current conservation policy. Even those with several votes that contradict each other should be considered as ideas that may be controversial but warrant careful thought.

Because of time constraints, not all of the individual ideas were discussed, nor were all the clusters of ideas.

↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)

↓↓↓↓↓ Shorten CRP contracts to 2-3 yrs. as an option.

↑ Either enforce CRP maintenance requirements or divert funds to another more useful program.

↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑ Expand continuous CRP sign-up and provide greater flexibility in buffer sizing and location.

↑↑↑ Allow naturally occurring revegetation, managed for weeds, as a cover practice option.

• Improve enforcement on mowing dates.

↑↑ Eliminate incentive to break out land as means of gaining eligibility to enroll in CRP.

↓↓ Either increase cost-share levels or help landowners finance their share.

Ideas pertaining to the Conservation Reserve Program, except those related to funding, were grouped on one flip chart creating the following cluster of ideas. Note that the arrows at the top of the flip chart represent participants' reactions to the ideas within the cluster.

Common Ground

Workshop participants strongly supported continuation of the CRP and offered several proposed revisions in the program. In addition, the need for an expanded continuous CRP with flexibility in buffer sizing and location was **undisputed**. *"We need to allow more flexibility for NRCS conservationists to determine setback distances for individual farms."*

There was also strong support for the inclusion of a cover practice that allows managed **natural revegetation**. *"In order to increase the benefits for wildlife, you can change the cover type from fescue to a native cover by applying herbicide to kill the fescue. ... You can, just by eradicating the fescue, release broom sedge and other native legumes, grasses that are sitting there already. So why have the landowner plant, say, native warm-season grasses when you already have a seed bank right there naturally?"*

There was significant support for **blunting incentives** to break out previously uncropped land to make it eligible for enrollment. *"We should eliminate financial incentives to break out fragile land...to make the land eligible for CRP.... [Y]ou have to have two years of cropping history to make it eligible for CRP. So some people bring it out of the cover that it should be in to start with to make it eligible for [CRP]...."*

It was acknowledged that most of the favored changes are relatively minor and could be done **administratively**. *"...[A]ll these items...are...minor changes to CRP... I'm not sure that any of them even needs congressional action. I think just about everything...could be done administratively."*

Concern

Although some participants thought that a two- to three-year **land retirement** program of some sort outside of CRP might be worthwhile, there was general agreement that such short-term contracts would be detrimental to the CRP. *"...[I]t would undermine the benefits that we're getting now from the long-term land retirement under CRP...."*

The concept of simplification was so strong at this workshop that all ideas pertaining to it were grouped on one flip chart creating this cluster of ideas. The arrows at the top of the flip chart represent participants' reactions to all the ideas within the cluster.

↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑

Simplification

↓ Consolidate program administration and delivery.

- Simplify sign-up, ranking procedures, and planning for all programs.

↓↓↓↓↓↓↓ Establish one sign-up period annually for CRP, one for WRP, one for cost-share programs.

↑↑ Make conservation plans readable and understandable for producers.

Common Ground

There was strong support for the simplification of all aspects of existing conservation programs and technical assistance by workshop participants. *"Simplify sign-ups, rankings, and contracts. Many of our landowners are elderly and not well educated. A staff person asked me the other day, 'How do you explain the ranking factor to an 80-year-old with a fourth grade education?'"*

Most participants thought it was very important that conservation plans be improved so they are easily understood and implemented. *"All we need is the paragraph or the four paragraphs or the three pages in clean, clear language that says...what the real plan is. It takes a few words. But the plans that come out of the NRCS computers don't say it in clear language, and they're very difficult to read.... I can't figure out what they say. And I'm trying. A lot of farmers aren't trying"*

Concerns

There was disagreement over whether or not the establishment of single sign-up periods for each conservation program would simplify participation. *"That takes away flexibility, or the option of flexibility,...like is offered by the continuous CRP."*

"It would be really nice for sign-ups...to always be in March...or February, and a farmer could learn that and prepare for that. These random dates that all of a sudden come from Washington for sign-ups with very little notification are very, very ineffective."

"I would be in favor of an open sign-up."

↑↑↑↑↑↓

State Technical Committee

↓↓↓ Ensure fair representation of all interests by designating representatives. At least a majority of the representatives should be from ag groups.

↓↓ Representatives...(a) subject to recall with 5 yr. term (b) establish nutrient mgt. standard if ag. groups comprise the majority, (c) establish local resource needs and criteria.

↑ Make recommendations not just endorse NRCS State Conservation recommendations.

Ideas pertaining to State Technical Committees were grouped on one flip chart creating this cluster of ideas. The arrows at the top of the flip chart represent participants' reactions to all the ideas within the cluster.

Common Ground

There was strong support for the existing function of State Technical Committees, for balance in the representation of various interests, and for the recommended improvements. *"The committee makes recommendations to the state conservationist, but the state conservationist has the final determination about whether or not to accept or implement the recommendations."*

"They [committee members] need to be carefully selected, and it needs to be a technical committee, not a political committee."

Concerns

There was no agreement among participants on how best to strengthen state technical committees. Agricultural interests seemingly wanted a majority of the members to represent agriculture; wildlife and water resources interests favored the inclusion of a greater diversity of members from outside agriculture. *"The intent [of forming State Technical Committees] was to bring a broader array of interests into the policymaking arena at the state level for agricultural programs so that more than just the traditional farm concerns could be addressed and heard."*

"The more you push [for representation] in the direction...of wildlife and the other areas, the more...you're going to lose farmers. They're just going to bow out.... They won't feel the agencies are serving them.... I don't mean that it should go back to all farmers, but I think you need a majority...."

Some participants thought the committees are too much a reflection of the NRCS State Conservationist. *"It's not a problem of how the State Technical Committee is written into the policy, it's more a reflection on the individual management style of the State Conservationist.... Some are good, some aren't.... You've got to have someone that can kind of draw everybody into the conversation...."*

Ideas pertaining to the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, except those related to funding, were grouped on one flip chart creating this cluster of ideas. The arrows at the top of the flip chart represent participants' reactions to all the ideas within the cluster.

↑↑↑↑↑

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

- ↓ Support cover crop and other practices that support tobacco growers.
 - Pay for the development of an alternative water supply as a way to get livestock out of streams.
- ↓ Remove the large confined livestock operation edibility limitation for financial assistance for the construction of an animal waste management facility.
 - Give priority to farmers willing to improve wildlife habitat.
- ↑ Provide additional incentives to convert over a two-year period cool season grasses to natives in pasture.
- ↑ Simplify the application process.
- ↑↑↓↓↓ Eliminate priority areas and award contracts on site-specific basis.
- ↑ Drive funding allocations by environmental benefits, not politics.
 - Either increase funding for the whole program or delete priority areas.
- ↓↓ Revisit need for educational funds.
 - Earmark some funds for whole-farm multiyear plans (rotational grazing plans, soil quality plans).
 - Require comprehensive nutrient management plans for CAFOs to be eligible for EQIP.

*"We see this mess of priority areas not having anything to do, or very little to do, with the real work that needs to be done. But a lot to do with **politics or arbitrary decisions** by...people who don't have enough time to think about it in a whole big, picture."*

Common Ground

There was moderate support for the suggested changes in EQIP.

Concern

Several participants expressed concern that the selection and administration of priority areas needs to be improved. Some thought specific selection criteria should be drafted; others thought State Technical Committee decisions were sometimes too political; and still others questioned if geographic locations or practices should be prioritized. *"I really don't think **priority areas** need to be eliminated. I think states need to do a better job of looking at how they select them and how they're administered."*

*"Prioritize...practices that give you the most benefit..., no matter at what location they are put on the ground. **Prioritize practices and not locations.**"*

"They [priority areas] might not be working as well as they need to, but the concept of having priority areas is a pretty fundamental part of the program."

*"As long as there's **not enough funding** to cover the need, you're going to have somebody who doesn't get funded and who doesn't understand why somebody ranked up above them."*

Concern was expressed that farmers outside priority areas don't receive funds, but are expected to install the same practices as producers in priority areas. *"...[T]hey [farmers outside priority areas] are really ticked ...that they can't get [funding] help, but they're expected to make changes."*

*"There's **not enough money** left over [for statewide concerns] when you've only got 35 percent of your money spread over 85 percent of the state to be effective."*

Funding

↑ Combine **WHIP, FIP, EQIP** and increase total funding 10 percent.

↑↑↑↓ Increase **CRP** cap to 60 million acres.

↑↑↑ Increase **WRP** cap to 5 million acres.

↑↑↑ Increase funding for research on BMP feasibility and effectiveness.

↑↑↑ Increase funding for education and technical assistance.

↑↑↑↑↑↓ Increase NRCS personnel ceiling by a factor of 3 to 4 times (with more biologists).

↑ Increase **EQIP** funding enough to cover the backlog of existing applications with direct link between financial assistance/technical assistance.

↑ Provide sufficient cost-share for expensive conservation measures (fencing, etc.).

- Eliminate cost-share cap; pay what is necessary to solve problems.

↑↓↓↓ Increase funding for water quality monitoring.

↑ Increase funding for emergency conservation work.

- Increase funding for the conservation of private grazing land (**CPGL**) to \$50million/year for cost-share and incentives.

- Increase **EQIP** funding to \$500 million/year.

Ideas pertaining to funding and program cap expansion, regardless of program, were grouped on one flip chart creating the following cluster of ideas. Participants were not allowed to vote for the whole cluster at this workshop therefore, no votes are shown at the top of the flip chart.

Common Ground

Moderate levels of support were registered for several of the funding suggestions. The greatest support was recorded for higher NRCS staffing levels and the added technical assistance those additional personnel would provide.

Concerns

One participant who favored the need for increased technical assistance cautioned proponents of increased staffing that increasing the number of people only would not achieve the desirable increase in quality technical assistance. *“There are a lot of full NRCS offices that I deal with where there’s not a lot of work going on.... It’s not always a lack of people. It’s a lack of capable, energetic, competent people.”*

Some participants felt that lack of sufficient funding for some programs leads to criticism of program structure and performance. *“By the time [EQIP] priority areas are funded and you get to statewide concerns, there’s not enough money to significantly address the largeness of the [state’s] problems. That’s not an EQIP problem. It’s a funding problem.”*

Ideas that described a new program or new objectives or authorities not included in current USDA programs were grouped on one flip chart creating this cluster of ideas. Because the ideas were distinctly different from each other, participants were not allowed to vote for the cluster. Therefore, no votes are shown at the top of this flip chart.

New Programs

↑↑↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓ Eliminate EQIP and substitute an ACP-like program.

↑↑ Give states block grants for financial and technical assistance. These funds could be distributed to the private sector .

↑↑ Establish a land retirement program targeted at high-risk, flood-prone land.

Common Ground

There was little support for replacing EQIP with a program similar to the Agricultural Conservation Program (ACP). *"I think EQIP at least focuses money on areas you can fix...then go to another area that needs fixing. The old ACP was **first-come, first-served**. There is a ranking factor with EQIP...and [in our state] we were able to get wildlife points in mostly every EQIP priority area. With ACP you really didn't have that avenue for wildlife conservation."*

*"I see why an ACP-type program would be attractive because it's simpler. But I don't think you get the bang for your buck and you don't produce the results that are going to solve the problems. I see EQIP as almost an **evolution of ACP**, over a period of several years."*

*"The notion of having a program that simply...filters money down and tries to **blanket the issues** with a little bit of money is contrary to my interests in seeing a program that will achieve something meaningful on the ground, that will actually solve some problems."*

*"I would hate to see EQIP eliminated because I think...the people that run it understand that an integral part of that incentive program is **environmental quality**.... They're starting to earmark...funds toward real environmental quality improvement."*

Principles

↑ Require that comprehensive nutrient management plans be done before completing engineering plan for waste management facilities.

↑↑↑ Reward farmers/ranchers for conservation work they have already done.

↑↑↓↓↓↓ Make NRCS solely responsible for wetland jurisdiction on agricultural land.

↑↑↑↑↓↓↓ Eliminate crop insurance and disaster payments on high-risk flood-prone land.

↑ Empower local leaders to make locally led conservation work.

↑↑ Measure sustainability in economic as well as environmental terms.

Ideas that were not related to specific programs but were principles that cut across multiple programs or jurisdictions were grouped together onto one flip chart creating this cluster of ideas. Because these principles are distinctly different from each other, participants were not allowed to vote for the cluster. Therefore, no votes are shown at the top of the flip chart.

Common Ground

There was no widespread support for any of the ideas on this flip chart.

Concerns

Although there was a great deal of debate, there was no agreement among participants about whether or not crop insurance and disaster payments should be eliminated on high-risk, flood-prone land.

*“There ought to be ways of moving people out of these areas rather than eliminating crop insurance. ...[S]ome transition from farming these flood-prone areas and, hopefully, moving people out of these areas through a **compensatory program like WRP.**”*

Some participants were concerned about the potential arbitrariness of determining what is “high risk.” *“Where that line is drawn...may eliminate my ability to pay for crop insurance at the appropriate premium level for my land—it terrifies me that that’s even an idea on the board. ...[D]on’t eliminate the possibility that farmers can go out and take that business risk and pay a premium for insurance to cover that risk. Because that’s messing with **free enterprise** in sort of a draconian way.”*

Still other participants suggested that government programs encourage farmers to farm flood-prone land in the lower Mississippi Delta, with a promise to protect them from flood damage, and the government must keep that promise, they added. *“Now you may want to compensate them some, but they didn’t come in there necessarily to make a living. They came in there to have a way of life, and now you want to take their way of life from them. ... If the people of the United States make a **promise** to part of the citizens, they’ve got to keep it.”*

Some participants thought giving NRCS sole jurisdiction over wetlands on agricultural land would improve efficiency. *“It’s a **time factor.** We can get an answer from NRCS the same day, but it might take two months to get the Corps of Engineers to tell you what you can do...while you’ve got equipment setting there needing to finish a ditch or make your improvements.”*

*“...[W]e want to be able to go to **one store** and...walk out the door with what we need.”*

However, other participants favored maintaining the status quo. *“Making NRCS solely responsible for it might not save you any time because then they’ve got to jump through **the same hoops** the Corps is jumping through now. You’re still going to end up with delays, and...it would affect every other thing that NRCS would do because they’re spending more time jumping through the same hoops.”*

“We should not encourage farmers to continue farming or expand farming acreage and intensity...on land that is high risk and that...taxpayers...are subsidizing through programs like[federal] crop insurance...and commodity programs that are linked to crop bases and acreage and bushel production. All of those things...encourage people to encroach on land that is better left alone or is better enrolled in WRP and used for recreational leases and timber management or a variety of other uses, but not for subsidized farming.”

Clusters of ideas for incremental change that received no additional discussion

Because of time constraints, the following clusters of ideas did not receive additional discussion. The order of discussion was based on the number of green dots or red dots represented here by arrows pointing up and pointing down, respectively, beginning with clusters with at least five green or five red dots.

Ideas pertaining to technical capacity, staffing capacity, infrastructure, and technology across multiple programs or agencies were grouped on one flip chart creating the following cluster of ideas. The arrows at the top of the flip chart represent participants' reactions to all of the ideas within the cluster.

Ideas pertaining to the Conservation of Private Grazing Land Program and Conservation Compliance were grouped on individual flip charts creating these clusters of ideas. The arrows at the top of the flip charts represent participants' reactions to all the ideas within the clusters.

↑↑↑↑↑
Conservation of Private Grazing Land (CPGL)
 ↓ Add incentives to convert cool season pasture to natives.
 • Increase technical assistance.
 • Add cost-share/incentive component for conversion to natives.
 • Add voluntary easement program.

↑
Conservation Compliance
 ↓↓ Reduce NRCS's regulatory role.
 ↑↓ Extend to all USDA benefits. Tighten program loopholes. Ensure accountability/enforcement.
 ↑↑ Make the amount of benefits denied be proportional to the area out of compliance.
 • Require riparian buffers, but make them eligible for CRP.
 ↓ Remember implications of program payment limitations.
 ↑↑↑↑↓ Credit past conservation work when determining penalties.

↑↑
Capacity
 ↑ Improve the consistency in quality of technical assistance from county to county (more and better staffing, perhaps with specific expertise on multi-county basis).
 ↓ Involve state agency biologists in farm planning on a reimbursable basis.
 ↑↑ District Conservationists set personal performance goals that mesh with state goals.

Ideas that were not related to specific programs but were priorities that cut across multiple programs or jurisdictions were grouped on one flip chart creating the following cluster of ideas. Because these priorities were distinctly different from each other, participants were not allowed to vote for the whole cluster. Therefore, no votes are shown at the top of the flip chart.

Priorities
 ↑↑ Emphasize no-till, minimum till through FA & TA.
 • Increase focus on soil quality.
 ↑ Fund research for comprehensive nutrient management planning and for the development of CNMPs within a state.
 ↑↑↑ Target USDA program funds to 303(d) list.
 ↑↑↑ Reshape conservation provisions to support water quality.
 ↑↑ Undertake proactive educational programs with landowners.
 ↑↑↓ Address ground water conservation and fund the development of alternative water supplies.

Northeast Workshop: Ideas for Incremental Change

Following are re-creations of the actual cluster flip charts from the Northeast Workshop, with narrative highlights relating to selected clusters of ideas and individual ideas. Alongside the cluster title at the top of each flip chart are arrows representing participants' opinions for the entire cluster. Arrows pointing up represent green dots placed by participants. Arrows pointing down represent red dots placed by participants. Similarly, arrows are representative of participants' opinions regarding individual ideas within each cluster. Individual ideas that did not receive green dots or red dots are preceded on each flip chart by a black bullet or dot.

To get an idea of the relative support, or lack thereof, among clusters of ideas and individual ideas, consider not only the votes received by individual ideas, but the total for the cluster as well. For example, within the Conservation Reserve Program/Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program cluster, the idea to pay landowners 70 percent of the market value of land enrolled under 10-year contracts did not receive any votes. However, because the CRP/CREP cluster received four supportive votes, you should assume four participants favored paying landowners 70 percent of the market value of the land.

The clusters of ideas and individual ideas within clusters that received several votes, either in support of the ideas or in opposition to them, should be seriously considered when thinking about improvements to be made in current conservation policies. Even those with several votes that contradict each other should be considered as ideas that may be controversial but warrant careful thought.

Because of time constraints, not all of the individual ideas were discussed, nor were all the clusters of ideas.

Ideas pertaining to technical capacity, staffing capacity, infrastructure, and technology cutting across multiple programs or agencies were grouped on one flip chart creating the following cluster of ideas. The arrows at the top of the flip chart represent participants' reactions to all of the ideas in the cluster.

↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑

Capacity

- Increase field technical staff.
- Increase technical assistance staff enough to eliminate the planning backlog.
- Adequately train technical assistance providers.
- ↑ Find technologies to handle manure adequately.
- Increase coordination between FSA and NRCS.
- ↑ Accelerate the incorporation of new technologies into the field office technical guide.

Common Ground

There was general agreement that the need to sustain a 40 to 50 percent increase in multidisciplinary staffing capacity over time was critical. *“The value of NRCS staff is that they’re going to be there, potentially, for years and years, and you’re going to be able to develop a better **working relationship** than the sort of one-shot deal you might get from a consultant that’s moving from business to business, potentially.”*

*“... You’re going to have to build the **expertise**.”*

*“Don’t you have to build **trust**, too?...[P]ay the people enough so they want to stay in the community and have a sustaining staffing situation.”*

*“With... multitudes of conservation programs available for... diverse interests of landowners, we need more **multidisciplinary** staffing at the place where conservation plans are written.”*

*“We estimate the need for a 40 percent increase in staff in our state. Right now what’s happening [with CREP], we’re telling landowners we’ll **see you in a year and a half** in some counties. That’s not acceptable. We won’t see them again.”*

*“If we include all of these things that we’re asking for [nutrient management planning manure management, water quality enhancement], taking on new types of farms, new types of projects, additional programs, it’s going to be a **major undertaking** and it will probably take at least 40 percent to 50 percent more in staffing to do it.”*

Concern

There was no opposition to the ideas presented for increasing capacity.

↑↑↑↑↑

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

- Make the application process more flexible.
- Make the application process more efficient.
- ↑↑ Make EQIP funds available to all farms mandated to implement practices (e.g. CAFO nutrient mgt.) not just in priority areas.
- ↓↓↓ Fund individual practices with statewide concerns funds.
- ↑ Increase the amount of financial assistance that can be provided to an individual farm.
- ↓↓ Emphasize monitoring.
- Emphasize environmental improvement
- ↓ Fund implementation/construction of structures.
- Give credit for existing practices in EQIP scoring.
- Make incentive payment rates competitive/attractive.

Common Ground

There was fairly strong support for broadening the use of EQIP funds to help producers install practices to meet the regulatory requirements of other programs.

“Our state has recognized that some watersheds are more critical than others. You may have... bad farms in [a] watershed that have to develop a plan, but [they’re] outside of the [EQIP] priority [area], and they’re not getting any assistance.”

Concern

Some participants thought that the existing requirement that EQIP activities be carried out according to a conservation plan should be maintained.

Other participants thought that the requirement for a plan should be waived in some cases as a way of leading a farmer toward the development of a conservation plan. *“Failing in a first or second or third attempt to convince [farmers] that they need a comprehensive plan... let’s try one practice and we’ll see how that works. So, it’s not... the first or primary approach or strategy, but in those instances where comprehensive planning just is not acceptable, let’s try one practice and see if we can gain the entry that way.”*

Still other participants didn’t see a problem because individual practices can be implemented separate from the EQIP plan and without EQIP funding. *“We can revise our conservation plan for the farm, but not necessarily the EQIP plan, and add practices, one-by-one.”*

Participants registered stronger support than was demonstrated in the voting for monitoring to evaluate the effectiveness of EQIP in priority areas. *“Specifically look in those priority watersheds, where we’re implementing all of our EQIP money, and say, ‘Is this really improving water quality?’”*

“Congress is already starting to ask these questions... And right now there’s no monitoring built into the system... [W]e almost have to say we don’t know.”

“We have farmers that have agreed to include water monitoring in their EQIP plans for their self-protection if some day problems are identified downstream.”

However, concerns were expressed about the use of limited funds for monitoring as opposed to needed BMPs. *“You only have so much money, so if you’re going to emphasize monitoring then you’re going to have less money for installation of BMPs.”*

Ideas pertaining to the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, except those related to funding, were grouped on one flip chart creating this cluster of ideas. The arrows at the top of the flip chart represent participants’ reactions to all the ideas in the cluster.

“[O]n the mandated things, assist... equally everybody that has to meet this mandate, as opposed to saying... ‘We only have \$50,000; we’ll spend all \$50,000 in two priority watersheds, and the rest we won’t get to.’ But, somebody [else still] has to do something by law.”

“I think it is a missed opportunity if we don’t try to encourage whole farm planning rather than an individual practice. If we can address the barriers... to engaging farmers into thinking about a more integrated plan, I would prefer that... to eliminating the opportunity to think that way and fund individual practices.”

Ideas pertaining to funding and program cap expansion, regardless of program, were grouped on one flip chart creating this cluster of ideas. The arrows at the top of the flip chart represent participants' reactions to all the ideas in the cluster.

↑↑↑↑↑

Funding

↑↑↓↓ Reduce CRP funding by 50% and direct those funds to water quality programs.

↑↑↓ Increase funding for WHIP to \$100 million/year and use funds for ag and non-ag land.

↑↑↑ Increase EQIP funding for statewide concerns.

↑ Raise EQIP funding to \$325 million.

↓ Increase WHIP funding w/priority to keep open previously farmed land.

- Raise CRP cap to 45 million acres.

↑ Increase funding for FPP.

↑↑ Increase FPP funding to \$100 million and provide 30% to states without programs for program start up, then fund at \$65 million annually thereafter. Consider tax free bonds.

↑ Double authorized budget for GLCI (CPGL).

↑ Increase EQIP funding.

↑↑↑↑↓ Increase Forest Stewardship planning by \$50 million/year and include biologists in planning.

- Increase SIP by \$50 million/year.

↑↓ Double RC&D funding and reverse staff reduction trend.

↑↓ Increase WHIP funding so each state gets at least \$250,000/year.

Common Ground

Support for increased WHIP funding centered around the value of the program on hayland and other noncropland areas that are not covered by CRP. *"You can't hay under CRP, but you can hay and graze [under WHIP] if done at the right time. WHIP can be beneficial to agriculture and fisheries as well."*

There was broad support for increased funding of Forest Stewardship planning. *"In our county, we have a tremendous amount of logging going on... The consequence of that is...our most valuable farmlands...have been terribly, terribly eroded. That's a direct consequence of very, very poor forest stewardship. [Forest Stewardship planning] is very important...to support because it supports ag land, not just forest lands."*

Concern

Support for increased funding was limited by opinions regarding the targeted use of funds and the potential for wildlife benefits through other programs that could use the funds. *"WHIP should be targeted, and in most states it is, toward species that are in decline. We should not...be promoting species that cause agricultural damage."*

"I don't have a problem with a small increase [in WHIP funding], but I have a big problem with the size of the increase we are talking about. There are other programs now that also encourage wildlife."

Support for increased funding of Forest Stewardship planning was tempered by concerns that the expected limited funding might better be spent in other programs. *"[Forest Stewardship] is not a bad program. It's a question of how much money do we have to go around?"*

↑↑↑↑

Conservation Reserve Program

↑↓ Base rental payments in the Northeast on land value, not rental rate.

- Pay landowners 70% of the market value of land for land enrolled in 10-year contracts.

↑↓↓↓ Allow economic use of enrolled acres, with 25% reduction in rental rate.

↑ Allocate CRP acres to states and allow them to determine who gets CRP contracts.

↑ Change EBI to favor buffers in regular sign-ups.

Ideas pertaining to the Conservation Reserve Program, except those related to funding, were grouped on one flip chart creating this cluster of ideas. The arrows at the top of the flip chart represent participants' reactions to all the ideas in the cluster.

Common Ground

There was general agreement among participants that unless significant changes were made in CRP it would never work in the Northeast. *"CRP eats up \$1.7 billion. If we don't fix it, change the way those payments are made, it is never going to work in the Northeast."*

"We score extremely high on EBIs. The problem is the payments are so low no landowners participate. They don't even put in a bid."

Several workshop participants thought a regional or state-by-state allocation would increase interest. *"Compete regionally, budget regionally. And you adjust the dollars up realizing it's going to cost more in the Northeast, but not in terms of total payments. There is potential to make it work, but not without regional flexibility."*

Concern

There was no discussion about the economic use of CRP land at a reduced rental rate, although voting indicated disagreement over the idea.

Ideas pertaining to the Continuous Conservation Reserve Program and the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, except those related to funding, were grouped on one flip chart creating this cluster of ideas. The arrow at the top of the flip chart represents one

↑
Continuous Conservation Reserve Program/Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)

- Separate continuous CRP & CREP from general CRP.
- Increase incentives to make continuous CRP & CREP more attractive.
- Make up-front payments to jump-start new farming operations.
- ↓ Allow economic use of enrolled acres.
- ↑ Change CP-9, shallow water areas for wildlife, to eliminate the one-time enrollment limitation and 15-acre cap.
- Pay the higher CREP incentive payments for all buffer practices under continuous CRP acres in each state.
- ↑↑↑↓ Consider hayland an agricultural commodity for eligibility purposes.

Common Ground

There was general agreement that the continuous CRP and CREP could work better in the Northeast if changes in payment structures were made. *“There is a tremendous interest in the Northeast, if we can make continuous CRP and CREP work. But, if we can’t change the program and it’s reauthorized the way it is now... then it has extremely little value in the Northeast. It’s because of the structure of payments. Imagine the ecological benefits if you had buffers all over the place.”*

“If you don’t give [the producer] a higher rental payment, he can’t afford to take it out and he’s not going to. You can give him all those little incentives—you can give him the 75 percent cost share and all that -- but he can’t afford to do it.”

Participants from states with new CREP programs taking effect are optimistic that it will help. *“It’s going to make a big difference. We’ve got people waiting at the door to get in now on the CREP program because of the increase in the rental rate and the sign-up bonuses.”*

Concern

Although the flexibility of CREP helps generate interest, some suggested additional flexibility is needed for widespread adoption in the Northeast. *“Some of the fundamental national requirements, like two-in-five-year cropping history and what constitutes a commodity crop, might hurt a state like Maine. Those things that are fundamental can’t be changed in CREP, could be the fundamental changes that are needed [to increase interest].”*

Priorities

↑↑↑↓ Set priorities through county committees, not at state level.

↑↑ Distribute funds to counties, not states.

↑↑ Allocate money to counties based on treatable acres.

↓↓ Use USDA programs to help producers meet TMDL requirements.

↓↓↓↓↓↑↑ Make conservation programs neutral when it comes to farm size.

- Fund low-cost projects that make a difference but don't require a conservation plan.

↑↑ Measure success by impact on water quality, habitat, etc., not acres enrolled in program.

↑↑↑ Encourage young people to get into farming.

- Extend NRCS partnerships to urban interests—address urban problems.

↑↑↑↑↑↑↑ Ensure equity among regions when allocating conservation dollars by accounting for all federal dollars supporting agriculture.

Ideas that were not related to specific programs, but were priorities that cut across multiple programs or jurisdictions were grouped on one flip chart creating this cluster of ideas. Because these priorities were distinctly different from each other, participants were not allowed to vote for the whole cluster. Therefore, no votes are shown at the top of the flip chart.

Common Ground

There was strong support for more equitable methods of distributing conservation funds throughout the nation. *“The cost of doing business in certain parts of the country is quite a bit different from doing it in other parts of the country... It costs us three times as much to hire labor in some of our urban areas; some of the work that we have to do on the land costs us more in fuel. And, I know we use flat rates to determine all that [nationally]. Planting the same crop costs you more in one area of the country than another area of the country. Urban farming which is most of the Northeast, we have to do on small acreage; we have to use different types of equipment. It's a lot of difference in cost.”*

Many participants thought conservation funds should be targeted to where the greatest conservation benefits can be achieved, regardless of farm size. *“Get more bang for your buck. A more moderate, less critical conservation program can be done on many, many acres out west, and a small project of a farm in the Northeast could have a very big water quality impact, but may not be funded. Helping the small farmers in the Northeast with costly conservation measures... impacts water quality, recreation, in-stream habitat, private wells, [and] flood control,...and also...the farms' bottom line.... [I]t has a disproportionate impact on the bottom line of the farm being functional than it would on a bigger acreage just getting the CRP.”*

“We've got one grower who grows about 2,000 acres of potatoes, who has always been growing potatoes. The only difference is the land that he's now using was owned by 15 other people at one point. To shift an emphasis from his operation, just because he's large, to a smaller one, I think has an impact on the water quality beyond what the small one may. We're talking about the land. It's not necessarily the farm we're interested in as much as it is the land and the contribution it's making to the water quality problem.”

Concern

Disagreement about tailoring programs to farm size that was apparent in the voting was not expressed by participants and may have been resolved during discussion.

Ideas that were not related to specific programs, but were principles that cut across multiple programs or jurisdictions were grouped on one flip chart creating this cluster of ideas. Because these principles were distinctly different from each other, participants were not allowed to vote for the whole cluster. Therefore, no votes are shown on the top of the flip chart.

Principles

- ↑↑↑↑↑↑ Link all ag support payments to conservation (soil, water, wildlife).
- ↑↑ Make programs accessible to all producers, not just the politically influential (bluecoats).
- ↑ Make FSA responsible for the administration of program funds and NRCS for providing technical assistance.
- Don't lose emphasis on soil conservation as tradeoff for nutrient management, other concerns.
- Limit NRCS role to providing technical assistance, not regulating.
- Simplify program application processes.

Common Ground

Many participants expressed support for coupling conservation compliance to all support payments, including crop insurance. *"If we have non-coupled conservation compliance for direct payments, for commodities, for price supports of any type, and those price supports encourage taking fragile land and putting it into production, landowners are going to do what the government asks them to do, generally. So if the government says, well, we're not going to couple anything to conservation compliance, we're just going to give you the money. And, by the way, the more land you take out, the higher your payments are going to be, then I think we've lost all the conservation benefits of all these other programs combined. We have to make sure there's conservation compliance included as part of the payments."*

Concern

One participant expressed the concern that linking support payments and conservation turns voluntary conservation programs into regulatory programs. *"This is an apparent shift from voluntary conservation... [N]ow we're going to make conservation mandatory and tie it to payments which the federal government has conditioned farmers[to expect]. I don't want to go down [that road], and I can guarantee you that the majority of the growers in our area don't want to go there either."*

Clusters of ideas for incremental change that received no additional discussion

Ideas pertaining to the Farmland Protection Program were grouped on one flip chart creating the following cluster of ideas. The arrow at the top of the flip chart represents one participant's reaction to both of the ideas on this flip chart.

↑
Farmland Protection Program (FPP)

↑ Reduce costs by considering term easements and alternative financing of easements.

↑↑↑ Provide incentives for succession plans.

The two ideas pertaining to State Technical Committees were grouped on one flip chart creating this cluster of ideas. As above, the arrow at the top of the flip chart represents one participant's reaction to both of the ideas in the cluster.

↑
State Technical Committee

- Be comprised of landowners with agency people as resource advisors.
- State conservationist should provide rationale for decisions in writing

Ideas that described a new program or new objective or authorities not included in current USDA programs were grouped on one flip chart creating this cluster of ideas. Because the ideas in the cluster were distinctly different from each other, participants were not allowed to vote for the whole cluster. Therefore, no votes are shown at the top of the flip chart.

New Programs

- Reallocate commodity subsidies to meet rural needs and promote environmental stewardship.
- ↑↑ Distribute all federal ag financial assistance through block grants.
- ↑ Initiate and fund the Conservation Security Program.
- Subsidize alternative sources of:
 - energy
 - hemp
 - recycled manure
- Block grants to RC&D Councils for projects and staffing based on identified needs.

Because of time constraints, the following clusters of ideas did not receive additional discussion. The order of discussion was based upon the number of green dots or red dots, represented here by arrows pointing up and pointing down, respectively, beginning with clusters with at least five green dots or five red dots.

Great Plains Workshop: Clean-slate Agenda

Similar ideas from the clean-slate agendas presented by workshop participants in the Great Plains Workshop have been consolidated into themes that communicate the thrust of the workshop discussion. These themes address the components of a clean-slate conservation agenda that were most important to workshop participants. Some themes describe ideas that garnered broad support among the participants. Other themes describe ideas that stimulated significant disagreement. In all cases, the themes describe issues that should be seriously considered when constructing a clean-slate conservation agenda, based on the intensity with which these issues were proposed and discussed during the workshop.

Theme 1: Program that works for all producers, not just commodity crop producers

A recurring theme in this workshop was that existing conservation programs – and farm support programs in general – favor row-crop producers. The ranching community, in particular, is not well served by existing conservation programs, according to workshop participants. A clean-slate agenda should be consciously designed to attract and work for all agricultural producers.

Proposals for two new programs -- a Riparian Range Reserve and a Grassland Easement Program – reflect this theme. Both ideas garnered broad support among workshop participants. The Riparian Range Reserve would provide technical and financial aid to enhance riparian areas through managed grazing, vegetative restoration, and other measures under long-term agreements or easements that pay for long-term maintenance of riparian areas. Existing, high quality riparian areas would also be eligible for protection and maintenance payments under the reserve. The Grassland Easement Program would provide for long-term protection of existing grassland through easements.

*“I view the riparian area concept as something that would apply to grazing systems and pastures. Whereas we have **CRP**, which is the major program we can apply to cropland, we don't have an analogous program that can work **for grass-based agriculture**, and that's what I view a riparian area system as.”*

*“As technology allows production on more and more sensitive soils, you're seeing the shift in agriculture go westward. What we're trying to do is **preserve the grassland agriculture**. How to do that is to reward individuals who are in grass-based agriculture by providing us some payment back on equity of their land to stay in grazing not to break this land out, but to leave it in a grass-based agriculture and reward them for that practice. If it were a USDA program, there would be a much higher comfort level among producers and livestock grazers for using easements. Once it's broken up into cropland, you've lost the value of native pasture that you can't put back. You can plant the grass, but it will never be the same as when it was a native pasture. And it's much more complicated and costly to do that.”*

*“This might help some farms to **stay in business** multigenerationally and really help retain...open space...that...we're seeing disappear pretty quickly.”*

*“This thing is very, very complex. It's a lot bigger than I'm hearing anybody put the verbiage to. We're talking **millions and millions of acres** of grassland in the country, and how are you going to prioritize who gets it, where it's at? Who's going to determine the need? Who's going to administer the easements?”*

Theme 2: Reward existing as well as new efforts

Rewarding “good actors,” protecting existing high quality habitat, and paying for the long-term maintenance of conservation systems and practices were recurring themes in this workshop. These themes were embedded in most of the individual visions for a clean-slate conservation agenda.

Proponents argued that rewarding existing as well and new conservation efforts was needed to ensure both fairness and effectiveness of conservation programs.

There was a strong sense that early adopters of conservation practices and good stewards are not rewarded for their ongoing stewardship in current conservation programs. Instead, those programs tend to reward producers who have been slow to adopt conservation or have in fact done the “wrong thing.” Preventing degradation of existing high quality habitat and ensuring the maintenance of existing conservation systems was also proposed as a much needed reform to increase the effectiveness and long-term sustainability of progress made through conservation.

“We have producers who have done things right that need an opportunity to have some economic benefits received from what they have done right. And just because it happens to promote water quality and wildlife, those are off-site benefits, but the producer needs the money, and if he did something right, let’s...recognize that.”

*“We, as taxpayers, if we’re interested in that stream, we owe paying the farmer/rancher, not only to do it the first time, but to continue to reward them not to go back and put the land back into production. It’s because this is strictly a voluntary program. We need to **continue to reward** them for doing the right thing. Especially if doing the right thing takes money out of their pocket.”*

*“I don’t feel as strong...about giving someone compensation for doing something in the past. I think...there’s certain maybe **ethics that go with owning land**. And if you’ve been doing something and you have a nice riparian area that you’ve fixed up in the past, I guess I feel like it’s just kind of a baseline of the property..., and if you improve it, there should be incentives for that, but I have a hard time that because when there’s a well-kept stream on a farm, that you should give them compensation.”*

*“Does just **anything and everything** that you’ve done right **get rewarded**? How do you define that? It’s easier for me to understand what to do when somebody is making a change or planning to make a change and take something and reward them for making an additional change than it is to start at a certain point in time, like now, and try to go back and trace out who’s done things right for how long a period of time and figure out a system to reward those. It’s just kind of a mind-boggler.”*

Theme 3: Keep what is working now

Most of the individual visions of a clean-slate conservation agenda kept pieces of the current suite of conservation programs intact. All of the proposals for a new, comprehensive stewardship option (discussed below) kept some or most of the current conservation programs in place. There was strong sentiment that many of these programs were accomplishing important objectives, and participants did not want to “throw the baby out with the bathwater.” A proposal for an “umbrella program” most clearly reflected this theme. In that proposal, all existing conservation program would be retained, but gathered together under an umbrella that would provide additional incentives for producers to participate in multiple programs and achieve more comprehensive conservation on their operations. Participants recognized and discussed the advantages of consolidating existing programs but, again, were concerned that such a consolidation might threaten the progress already made and/or divert attention from the programs’ current focus and priorities.

*“I think what most people who are involved with USDA don’t get is that, when somebody comes out to [a producer’s] place to talk about EQIP, they also get into water rights,... endangered species,... riparian area management,...[and] wildlife issues. And to try and deal with any one of those without incorporating all of them, it’s a waste of your time. As a producer, you need to look at all of those things, and jeppers, if you could do it **under one umbrella**, that would be the approach to take.”*

*“The key is having things in your toolbox, but then having the one-on-one assistance to explain it to people and put it in a usable package for them. So I think **you’ve got the tools**. If you could get the NRCS or the other delivery entities up to where they’re knowledgeable and got enough time to spend with the producers, you can get a lot of really good things done. If you don’t have that, nobody is going to be able to make sense out of it.”*

Theme 4: Comprehensive stewardship option

Creating a comprehensive stewardship option within the new farm bill garnered a great deal of support among participants. The proposed elements of such an option included: (1) reward existing as well as new efforts; (2) all producers eligible; (3) keep selected current conservation programs in place; (4) emphasize land management and treatment rather than taking land out of production; (5) enhanced research and monitoring of the effectiveness of conservation practices and systems; (6) marketing initiatives for products produced in an environmentally sound manner; (7) and use stewardship rewards as a means of supporting and enhancing the economic well-being of agricultural producers.

*“[Provide] ongoing **incentive** payments for people who are currently practicing **good stewardship** or who are adopting new stewardship practices,... Farms of all types would be eligible, including those who raise livestock, vegetables, instead of just people raising program crops.*

*“Support **research of environmentally sound production systems** that emphasize management skills, not capital expenses...things that are appropriate for the government to be researching things that help farmers...properly steward natural resources.”*

*“Another emphasis would be to help develop marketing initiatives for food produced in an environmentally sound manner..., like the **green labeling** program, that might include help with market analysis or development of co-ops, feasibility studies, product development,...[to] help farmers tap into high-value markets that would reward environmentally sound practices.”*

*“We need to put **as much emphasis** on [land management]...as we do on [land retirement programs like] CRP....”*

Theme 5: Blunt perverse incentives in commodity support programs

Workshop participants broadly supported the notion that farm/commodity support programs should not create incentives to do the “wrong thing.” They sharply disagreed, however, on the extent to which existing programs create such perverse incentives and the measures needed to blunt those incentives. Expanding the reach and effectiveness of conservation compliance measures was the primary proposal to blunt perverse incentives in commodity and farm support programs. Participants sharply disagreed over this proposal. Opponents argued that farmers and ranchers are in economic trouble and can’t absorb any more burdens and/or that an expanded compliance program would divert technical and financial resources away from other important conservation efforts.

A similar disagreement occurred over the extent to which existing commodity programs encourage consolidation of agriculture into larger production units.

Proposals to restrict eligibility for conservation assistance to “small and/or family farms” garnered both strong support and opposition.

*“We don’t have enough people to do the right things that need to be done. To emphasize more policing and compliance, I think, right now at a time when we’re so fraught with inability to provide good service is that **it’s the wrong emphasis.**”*

*“The LDP on beans is close to a buck up there, and **they’re breaking it out, planting it to beans. Two years, they come back and try and enroll it in CRP.**”*

*“I think that the approach we should take is to change everything to a conservation program and get away from trying to idealize **what size of farm is a magic family farm.** I think that the size will become evident with the amount of conservation you need to apply. If we put conservation as a priority, the farms will find themselves to that natural equilibrium that is the right size. And by trying to say that there’s a limit to the number of dollars or there’s a limit to the*

size, a family farm could be three generations with six or seven people all making their living, and they might be a fairly sizable operation. But if they're doing it right, we need those people out there. What we need is to get away from the people who are doing it wrong."

*"I look over the last few years where the survivors are people who have tried to enhance their efficiency of scale in their family operations, and then you're going to **discriminate** against them **because they've gotten bigger**? How do you make that determination of small? Where is that artificial description? Because our operations are so different."*

*"There is a problem when we get to the point where we have this 10 percent that's getting these huge [commodity program] payments versus the other ones,.... It seems like some kind of **capping or targeting** would help."*

*"We're artificially and politically **eliminating the family farm** in America."*

*"We've tried to target to small guys for the last 30 or 40 years, and what have we got left? Nothing but big guys. Now, does that tell you **something isn't working**?"*

Theme 6: Priorities and coordination

Who sets priorities and what those priorities ought to be was a major point of discussion and disagreement. This issue was important in both the clean-slate and incremental-change agenda. Proposals ranged from devolving priority setting to counties to tying priorities to national goals. Governors were also proposed as a primary location for priority setting and coordination. No consensus was reached regarding this issue.

*"You have to **empower local people** so that they put it in the context of the particular area that they're in. That's how you make these [conservation and commodity] programs work."*

*"We ought to **regionalize the United States** by major watersheds or drainage areas to maximize the resources each region has to offer. And, also, most of the cropping and management problems are somewhat similar in those areas. Try to allocate problems and solutions in a more regional manner."*

West Workshop: Clean-slate Agenda

Similar ideas from the agendas presented by workshop participants in the West Workshop were consolidated into themes that communicate the thrust of the workshop discussion. These themes address the components of a clean-slate conservation agenda that were most important to the workshop participants. Some themes describe ideas that garnered broad support among the workshop participants. Other themes describe ideas that stimulated significant disagreement. In all cases, the themes describe issues that should be seriously considered when constructing a clean-slate conservation agenda based on the intensity with which these issues were proposed and discussed during the workshop.

*“...we are looking at developing **farming systems** that provide all of the [conservation] benefits we’re talking about...on an actual operation that’s still producing a thousand dollars an acre of crops. If we can really do that and keep people on the land and actually look at that sustainable future where the programs are measured, there’s something for the community, there’s something for the economy, and there’s something for the environment, all of a sudden the people become a very important and organic element in the whole watershed.”*

Theme 1: Keep people on the land

This theme was first addressed while discussing the imbalance in current conservation spending between land management versus land retirement – CRP gets the lion’s share of funding, while programs that enhance the management of land in production are under funded. There was broad support for the notion the a clean-slate conservation agenda ought to be focused on enhancing the management and environmental sustainability of producing lands – not taking more land out of agriculture. Such an agenda would link conservation efforts with other efforts to sustain the viability of agricultural production. Two such links were discussed in particular: (1) support should be directed primarily to support the working farmers, not absentee landlords, and (2) conservation should be integrated into efforts to protect farmland from sprawl and to keep agriculture viable in the urban-rural fringe.

*“I’ve got some CRP ground; we’re making more money on that CRP ground than we did when it was in production. And we’re **absentee** now. We planted that cover crop, we haven’t done anything on that place -- we haven’t touched the land for 15 years. We don’t live in the county. It’s just an absentee, put some good grass in there and if the weeds come, they’re there, too. And it doesn’t help the local county or that local economy in any way.”*

*“CRP takes people **off the land**...and there’s lots of problems with CRP, but I would not change it until I got something better to replace it with.”*

Theme 2: Sustainable Future

Workshop participants supported a broad statement of principle that a clean-slate conservation agenda ought to be designed to achieve. A clean-slate agenda should be: (1) socially just, (2) environmentally sound, and (3) economically viable. There was a sense that we need a new vision of what agriculture policy is designed to achieve, and we need to reevaluate what it is we really want from agriculture.

*“What I would do, if I was God, would be to...make all of the programs **sustainable** [revise them so they would be] socially just, environmental sound, [and] economically viable.”*

Theme 3: Environmental protection through sustainable agriculture

There was broad support among workshop participants for a new, comprehensive stewardship program that would: (1) make all growers of crops and livestock – including tribal lands -- eligible to participate; (2) pay for environmental benefits produced from working farms and ranches; (3) encourage alternative uses of agricultural commodities; (4) emphasize comprehensive, integrated conservation planning; (5) exempt incentive payments from federal taxation; (6) create a process to deal with nonpoint pollution at a watershed scale; (7) emphasize voluntary, community-based watershed planning; and (8) emphasize partnerships. There were

mixed feelings about whether this program would replace or complement existing conservation programs.

“It would be so much better if through existing [USDA, EPA, and state] programs watersheds could develop their own [nonpoint-source pollution control] program that would eliminate the need for a TMDL.... The TMDL is one of those things that goes from a voluntary, cooperative, let’s work together type of thing to what I call a command-and-control confrontation. If we can stay on this voluntary side of the line, I think everybody benefits.... We’ll probably get a much better job out there for everybody.”

Theme 4: Transition from commodity- to conservation-based program

The risk for producers of moving from an agricultural policy based on commodity production to one based on conservation was seriously discussed during the workshop. Producers face much greater risks in the current environment and are highly dependent on commodity support payments. A well thought through transition process would need to be in place to prevent serious disruptions during a move from commodity- to conservation-based programs. In addition, there are lots of unanswered questions about how payments would be calculated and how performance would be assessed. Most participants agreed that a stewardship-based program would best be introduced as an option among other options for farm and ranch support. Producers could choose to take advantage of the new conservation-based option or stay with the more familiar commodity program options. Such an option would be specifically designed and implemented to generate the data and experience needed to expand the reach of the option over time.

*“I don’t know how to **get there from here**. There’s so many farmers depending on this now, we’d have to be real careful because if we didn’t get it right we might put another 10 or 20,000 of them out of business.”*

*“If Congress were to enact this in 2002, that doesn’t negate the current contracts. It would automatically be a **phased program**. We just don’t walk away from 15-year contracts.”*

Theme 5: Regulatory assurance

Sorting out the relationship between a new, USDA-based clean-slate conservation agenda and related federal and state regulatory programs was an important issue for workshop participants. Clarity and certainty about one’s status in regard to regulatory programs could be a powerful incentive for participation in a comprehensive conservation program. The existing safe harbor idea in relation to the Endangered Species Act was raised as a model that could be applied to participation in conservation programs. Safe harbor could work to provide regulatory assurance under ESA, but its application to water and air quality regulations seemed tenuous. Instead, participants emphasized other measures to achieve regulatory assurance, including: (1) achieving common technical standards, guidance, and requirements among local, state, and federal regulatory agencies and programs and (2) stability in regulatory requirements for some designated period of time.

*“If you have a CRP contract and meet the standards and an **endangered species** shows up on your property, you should not fall under [jurisdiction] the Endangered Species Act.... You could take your CRP out even if you had endangered species there because you had that agreement. That’s what we envision [as safe harbor].”*

*“Let’s say I’ve got a 50-foot-wide buffer installed through CREP. We’re not going to have regulatory assurance if I have to **change that buffer** width to 75 feet to be in accordance with some sort of state TMDL plan.”*

“Out of the \$17.5 billion we spend per year [total outlays to producers through CCC and all other USDA programs], make one-stop shopping, evaluate what the farm is doing, give payment, and be done with it. So basically the **holistic benefit of the farm** resulting in direct payment to the grower.”

“One approach... would be to give the farmers the **choice** of going under the existing programs, or to opt for this program here. And then that would give you a chance to develop the program on the ground. The guys that opted for this would say, well, this worked, that didn’t. And then not eliminate any of the safety nets that we have currently. We’re too deep in a real crisis to do that, but I think we need to offer up some revision at the same time for how we’re going to get to the future from here.... We wouldn’t be in a farm crisis right now if all the programs that we have now were really working.”

Midwest Workshop: Clean-slate Agenda

Similar ideas from the agendas presented by workshop participants in the Midwest Workshop have been consolidated into themes that communicate the thrust of the workshop discussion. These themes address the components of a clean-slate conservation agenda that were most important to the workshop participants. Some themes describe ideas that garnered broad support among the workshop participants. Other themes describe ideas that stimulated significant disagreement. In all cases, the themes describe issues that should be seriously considered when constructing a clean-slate conservation agenda based on the intensity with which these issues were proposed and discussed during the workshop.

Theme 1: Goals, Principles, and Priorities

There was substantial consensus in the group around a new, comprehensive stewardship option in USDA. That option would be designed to keep farms healthy, profitable, and protect the environment. The program should reward producers for what they are already doing to protect the environment as well as spur new conservation efforts. The program should emphasize land management, not land retirement, and address all conservation needs on a farm or ranch in a comprehensive manner.

There was substantial disagreement over whether this new stewardship option should be designed to address structural issues in agriculture. This issue was directly engaged through proposals to target assistance to “small, family farmers versus big, corporate farmers.” Such proposals drew opposition from others who argued that conservation needs should be the primary or only factor used to determine eligibility and participation.

*“I don’t think it makes any difference what size the farm is. We’re after **conservation**. Big farm, little farm, doesn’t make any difference. So we shouldn’t target one or the other. We should target the objectives that we’re after.”*

*“Saying we’re going to target small, medium size farms is **denying the trend** of U.S. agriculture. We’re going to larger farms. It’s been that trend for 150 years. It’s not going to stop. In fact, it will probably be expedited more quickly with commodity prices such as they are. Why construct programs that go against that trend?”*

*“When I use the word target,... I don’t mean to exclude everybody else. The way I see this working ideally, would be for an **equitable distribution** of support funds to reach all sizes of farms.... I agree that...farms that are in full-time production, that produce agricultural commodities as their main source of income [are getting bigger], but we’re seeing some big shifts to small farms, too. We’re losing the midsize farms.... Individuals owning those smaller units are still producing some agricultural commodities, but have off-farm jobs as well. I guess some equitable distribution of program services and funds is what I would like to see.”*

*“A number [small farms] are going to go out of production altogether and not be farms anymore, and they’re going to be developed for **urban development**, and there’s wide-spread recognition water quality suffers through urban development far more than if it remains in agriculture. So I think there are a lot of conservation benefits that we can achieve by keeping farms as farms and in production, and if that means helping maintain small farms as farms in some special program ways, I think I would be very supportive of that, though in general treating large and small farms similarly.”*

“I don’t think conservation is the only thing that Americans want from agriculture. Americans really want to have a vital farm economy with a lot of participants structured in a way that can

*support vital and healthy **rural communities**. It's really a foundation of democracy in rural parts of the country. I just don't think that there's going to be support out there for funneling taxpayer support for conservation to help the hugest corporate farms. If there's a consensus that the hugest industrial farms have to clean up the environment, they're going to have to fit into the same regulatory scheme [as industrial point-source polluters]. On the other hand, I think everything under that huge scale, moderate, small, family size, there's all different ways to define it. I think there's a lot of support out there to financially help those farmers and reward them for what they do for the environment, but that support is going to totally disappear when it's going to Tyson- or Perdue- or Cargill-owned operations.*

*"My farming operation epitomizes a **family farm**. It's my father, my brother, and I. There isn't a corporate farm structure per se. There's three of us. We each draw our transition payment. That makes \$120,000. That's a staggering amount of money, but that's absolutely no money whatsoever when you compare our gross income. Am I a big farmer? Would I be excluded from your programs? Would you want me to participate in conservation programs? Do you not want me to participate in stabilization of farm income? If you don't include me, you're lost. You have to have our political clout. I don't think I've done anything wrong simply because I got big. I think, if anything, I did something right. If anybody at this table has advocated for conservation programs, it has probably been me. I push for consolidated resource management on every single solitary farm operation in the U.S. I don't care how big or little it is. Why am I not entitled to the same sources of stabilization that you're entitled to?"*

Theme 2: USDA Stewardship Option

Nearly all workshop participants coalesced in support for constructing a comprehensive stewardship option in USDA designed to achieve the goals, principles, and priorities outlined above. Two significantly different mechanisms for implementing such a program were proposed.

Under the USDA Agricultural Stewardship Option, producers would sign-up for the stewardship option in the same way they sign-up for a conservation or commodity program today. All conservation needs would be integrated into one, multi-year plan. Payments would be tiered on the basis of conservation effort, and penalties for lack of maintenance would be included. The option would complement rather than replace current commodity programs and would be funded at the same level as commodity support programs. Simple – more farmer friendly, just come in and sign up.

*"I think it **simplifies** the process and allows a person to come in and take action, himself or herself, in order to get involved in the program, and it doesn't have extra levels or extra hoops for people to jump through. It puts it on more equal footing as far as the commodity program."*

*"I like it because of its simplicity first and in that it does **reward** [conservation] progress."*

The USDA Stewardship Grant Program would include most of the elements of the USDA Agricultural Stewardship Option, except it would be implemented through a state matching grant program. States would play a major role in setting priorities, and both the public and private sector would be involved in writing plans and providing technical assistance.

Advocates for the grant approach emphasized the benefits of partnerships and leveraging state and local funding. Advocates for the stewardship program option emphasized the simplicity of the approach. They argued producers would find it much easier to work with a single USDA-based program.

*"I [like] the grants option...because...that's the way the **water quality programs work**, and I think they do work.... The thing that could make it work is a set of some fairly tough*

national criteria that all the states have to rise to to make sure that they're making things happen. That's what helps the EPA grants program work."

*"I think if you want to have any folks at all [participating] in wildlife you need to have something **specific allocation** for wildlife."*

*"I'm concerned about having specific dollar allocations to each [natural resource] component when in a given area you might be able to **leverage** a lot of other resources to achieve the goal and then use the resources for other priority elements.... Leaving enough flexibility in it so that we don't end up with 20 different elements that we get specific allocations for can really increase the capability to do real conservation."*

*"Our [CREP] **partnership** came together well and easily functioned among the different state and federal agencies. We had our act together. It took a year and a half of fussing with Washington, whereas I think if these programs were implemented through a partnership that had a stronger voice for the state and local side of things and with the necessary requirements but flexibility and a stronger voice and certainly an expectation of fiscal and other kinds of participation that it will end up being a better program that's more meaningful within the state."*

*"To bring more state and **local resources** to the table to implement a partnership approach...has a lot of advantages above and beyond just bringing money in. It is more likely to get heavier local participation, to be implemented better, and more targeted to problems that are identified through a state-local-federal partnership as to what's most important."*

*"Frankly, I'm just not as enamored of **state control** as a lot of you all are.... There are many states that have done just horrible jobs with managing the environment in any way. I just don't have any faith that the states will always do the right thing with local input. It's got to be balanced, with a lot of national direction and goal-setting"*

Theme 3: Infrastructure

There was broad agreement that substantial increases in technical support will be needed to underpin a comprehensive stewardship program – whether implemented via state matching grants or as an option in USDA farm support programs. Existing technical capacity would be needed to (1) increase on-the-ground technical advisors, both public and private; (2) create multidisciplinary teams for technical assistance; and (3) invest in monitoring and evaluation.

Southeast Workshop: Clean-slate Agenda

Similar ideas from the agendas presented by workshop participants at the Southeast Workshop have been consolidated into themes that communicate the thrust of the workshop discussion. These themes address the components of a clean-slate conservation agenda that were most important to the workshop participants. Some themes describe ideas that garnered broad support among the workshop participants. Other themes describe ideas that stimulated significant disagreement. In all cases, the themes describe issues that should be seriously considered when constructing a clean-slate conservation agenda based on the intensity with which these issues were proposed and discussed during the workshop.

Theme 1: Tax Credits for Conservation

The individual clean-slate agenda that received the most support and interest was a proposal to use tax credits instead of direct incentive or cost-share payments to reward producers for improving the environment. This proposal had several elements: (1) All land retirement programs would be consolidated into an Environmental Reserve, with varying contract lengths, and become part of the clean-slate agenda; (2) tax credits would replace all other existing conservation programs and would focus on compensating for the cost of enhancing land management and treatment; (3) tax credits would be based on a conservation plan; (4) monitoring would be established to create an environmental baseline; and (5) compliance or another regulatory mechanism would be used to deal with bad actors. The simplicity of two basic programs – one land retirement program and one tax credit program for land treatment – was the major appeal of the proposal. There was also a sense the tax credits are a more attractive incentive for producers than direct payments from government.

It was noted that many (some said 50 percent) of farmers don't pay federal income taxes on average. Three ideas were proposed to deal with that problem: (1) Direct cost-share; (2) negative income tax; and (3) allowing producers to sell tax credits. Many participants argued that tax credits alone wouldn't cover all of the measures that need to be taken to meet comprehensive conservation needs on a farm or in a watershed.

"I think tax incentives encourage the farmer better than anything else to go out and do what needs to be done for the environment, and it simplifies the process of doing it. A farmer should annually get a tax credit for the expenses incurred in following...[his/her conservation] plan. If it's for fencing tax credit for the cost of fence. If it's waste containment for a poultry farm or a swine operation, the cost of building it, make it a tax credit. Chemical storage facility. Underground drip irrigation, where flood irrigation is a problem. Other all sorts of possibilities that farmers are going to be told to spend money on, let them take it all from the IRS. It takes it back from the taxpayer, but it eliminates all this collecting the money and then giving the money back in the administration of all of that. Now, the tax code is plenty complex, and this is only adding complexity. But I don't think it's any less complex than collecting the money and distributing it through NRCS."

"If after a certain amount of time no taxes were paid, then there would be cost-share available to those folks so that they could implement the plan."

"If there is additional degradation on the environment from the baseline...then there are enforcement mechanisms that would kick into place. So you wouldn't lose any ground under this plan. You would gain ground. Your only direction to go would be forward environmentally. It may not go forward as quickly as if some regulatory agency forced it, but I suspect you would get a lot done quicker this way than you would trying to force it."

*“If you had a tax credit and you didn't owe any taxes, if it was something that you could sell to another taxpayer that did need the tax credit, then you could **monetize that tax credit.**”*

*“The tax credit would take care of a big part of the problem where we know we have not enough funding to do everything that needs to be done..., as the incentive to get those hard-to-sell things [done].... I saw [tax credits] as **complimentary to the other programs**, rather than a replacement.”*

*“I think any kind of conservation plan needs some type of scientifically based **monitoring** to make the program credible to the public.”*

*“The **Environmental Reserve Program** would be very similar to CRP and WRP. But it would have one title with multiple divisions and types of reserves. And those would be the different levels and links of contacts with different goals. That money would still be payments from the government to the farmer for acreages.”*

*“There would be...tax instruments to **discourage land speculation** and...that would stimulate ownership of lands that are what we call **green lands**, which would be lands that embrace conservation elements or have them implemented.”*

Theme 2: Linking Commodity Support to Conservation

Linking the kind and amount of income support a producer receives for his or her conservation performance was another approach proposed for a clean-slate agenda. There were two basic ways participants proposed doing this: (1) Expanding the reach of existing compliance provisions by applying those provisions to all farmland (not just highly erodible cropland) and by expanding the conservation requirements to include installation of riparian buffers and filter strips and (2) increasing (or decreasing) the level of farm support payments received based on the level of conservation activity on the farm.

These proposals stimulated the most intense discussion of the workshop. Proponents argued that they were trying to accomplish two things: First, to blunt incentives in commodity support-risk management programs to expand or intensify production and, second, to create incentives to do more for conservation. Opponents questioned whether market transition payments, loan deficiency payments, and/or crop insurance actually created incentives to expand production, shift crops, or other production decisions that could create conservation problems. They also argued that tying conservation incentives to commodity support payments that could vary dramatically from year to year would not be a good way to sustain conservation.

*“**Link compliance to all the federal farm benefits**, including for example, crop insurance and disaster payments; tighten the programmatic loopholes; and ensure implementation accountability by USDA agencies.”*

*“Right now, a lot of farmers are signing their **sodbuster and swampbuster provisions** because they want to participate in the other parts of the farm program. And if you **limit their ability to participate** in the farm program economically, you'll eliminate their incentive to do the conservation thoroughly.”*

*“Require adequate **riparian buffers or filter strips** along all pertinent streams to be eligible for commodity program payments.”*

*“If you implement a hundred percent of [planned] **BMPs**, you get **one hundred percent of a block payment** for that farm. In other words, if you implement half of them, you get 50*

percent. If you implement 25 percent of them, you get 25 percent of the total fund. Base the amount of money per farm on its history in production. There are production criteria for that. Also make it **retroactive** to farms that are currently doing good practices for conservation.”

“I don't mind the idea of using the need to comply with a good conservation plan to be eligible for subsidy programs. But **do not tie the two together** because the economic need for the subsidy programs and the money that needs to be spent go up and down separate from conservation. Do not tie the level of payment of a subsidy program to what conservation you've done. A farmer may have a nice flat farm that has no need for conservation, and that doesn't mean they shouldn't be eligible for the other payments. Or a farmer that has drastic needs for conservation but can't pay for it all shouldn't be ineligible or get less payment.”

“**AMTA** [Agricultural Market Transition Act] payments have been decoupled from acres and bushels, production levels. And it's just based on the past history, so it's already set how much money the individual producer is going to get with AMTA. So there's no more incentive under AMTA to keep expanding acreage and keep expanding production. You know what you're going to get. **LDPs** [Loan Deficiency Payments], on the other hand, are still linked to production. The more bushels you produce, the more you stand to get potentially under LDPs. So that is the kind of subsidy program that's still causing me some concern. And what I think I'm going to get out of modifying that approach is removing the perverse incentive that is inherent in a production-linked program where farmers could keep expanding keep producing more, keep intensifying. That leads to many other conservation issues.”

“The land has to be able to raise the crop at a high enough level to pay its own bills, and marginal land doesn't do that with LDPs at today's prices. **It's not bringing the land in** that's not otherwise set up for farming. It is not bringing in the Southeast, new land in. It is sustaining farmers that have good land that, even at good yields, can't make profits at these prices in the Southeast.”

Theme 3: Simplification

Keeping existing programs in place but simplifying and consolidating their direction and management was another vision of a clean-slate agenda that was broadly supported. In this vision: (1) Existing voluntary incentive programs would stay in place; (2) those programs would be managed to create “one-stop shopping” – uniform conservation planning, application, and administrative procedures would apply to all available programs; (3) program sign-ups would be continuous, i.e., eliminate annual sign-up periods and allow a producer to enter a program whenever he/she was interested and eligible; (4) emphasize whole-farm plans on a watershed basis; (5) interagency cooperation would be enhanced; (6) agencies with similar functions would be consolidated; (7) technical standards would be made consistent across geographic boundaries; (8) rewards would be provided to good stewards; (9) monitoring and evaluation of the performance of programs and BMPs would be intensified; and (10) implementation and maintenance of BMPs would be tracked.

Participants took issue with the proposal to make technical standards consistent across geographic boundaries. They described the tension between consistency and flexibility and argued that technical standards had to be adjusted geographically to fit local conditions.

“We want to be able to go to one store and get **everything we need in that one store** and walk out the door with what we need.”

“Across the board, **conservation programs need to be consolidated both in administration and in program delivery so that there's greater efficiency.**”

“It really is the arbitrary nature of these windows of opportunity [to sign up for programs] and the lack of announcement or predictability that should really be improved. That's why I was in favor of an **open sign-up period.**”

*“Although USDA offices have been consolidated, there's not real **consolidation in terms of program administration and delivery**, and it's been very confusing for a lot of farmers. ...[O]ne office doesn't know what the other one is doing. And there's a lot of discrepancy in program delivery.”*

*“You could use the nine-step process that the NRCS uses in the planning process to develop the farm plan that would have an **agreed-to set of BMPs**. You've got to have some things agreed to on the front end so everybody's going to be happy with what you're putting on the ground. But I think it would be a lot less expensive and hopefully more efficient— in terms of red tape and bureaucracy.”*

*“Some things that have been lacking are ways to track...that BMPs are actually put in place on a voluntary basis.... And...that those **BMPs** have actually been effective.”*

*“At some point you've got to **balance standardization with flexibility**. And at some point in order to make, for example, CRP be as effective in the Southeast as it is in the Midwest, you have to have flexibility. While you have some standardized guidelines and practices, you have to be able to fine-tune those practices at a local level to make them work.”*

*“The issue of consistency across boundaries is one of those issues that will **never go away**.... There will be times when folks will say, ‘Well, they do it that way over there; why can't we do it here?’ And the next time you turn around, they could argue just the opposite way. As long as we all live, it's going to cut both ways.”*

Theme 4: Conservation Implications of Land Tenure

Conservation and commodity support payments are currently shared between landlords and tenants. Some participants suggested this created an unfair situation in which absentee landlords reap a significant share of conservation and/or commodity support payments but don't really bear a comparable share of the costs. This reduces the value of the incentives or support intended to affect the working farmer. In some cases, landowners can essentially require production on sensitive acres that an owner-operator would not farm. Conservation and commodity program payments are capitalized into land values and therefore land rents. Producers can see land rents rise even when commodity prices are depressed because of the value of AMTA payments and LDPs. Participants agreed that land tenure will be a major issue in constructing a clean-slate agenda, but did not come to a clear consensus on how this issue should be treated.

*“The good thing about AMTA is it's predictable; you can take it in to your banker as cash flow certainty. The bad thing about it is that I have landlords that are getting AMTA payments, and I have people that are no longer farming that are getting **AMTA payments because it's tied to the land**. The land used to be in cropland. They're just cashing the checks, and it's not going out to the people that are actively involved in farming.”*

*“In share rent situations, AMTA payments are typically shared in the same percentage that you share the income from the land. So that does it in sort of a fair way. AMTA payments do **directly raise rents in cash rent situations**. The [AMTA payment for] cash rent has to go to the farmer. But all the landlord does is raise the rent on the land by that much, and the farmer just has to pay more per acre for the land.”*

*“I think any investment we make in conservation in the future has to be done at least with the **approval -- if not the participation -- of the landlord** to ensure that that investment that the American taxpayer makes stays on that land where it was intended, where the investment was made.”*

Northeast Workshop: Clean-slate Agenda

Similar ideas from the agendas presented by workshop participants in the Northeast Workshop have been consolidated into themes that communicate the thrust of the workshop discussion. These themes address the components of a clean-slate conservation agenda that were most important to the workshop participants. Some themes describe ideas that garnered broad support among the workshop participants. Other themes describe ideas that stimulated significant disagreement. In all cases, the themes describe issues that should be seriously considered when constructing a clean-slate conservation agenda based on the intensity with which these issues were proposed and discussed during the workshop.

Theme 1: Using taxes to foster conservation

Greatest support was registered during the clean-slate discussion for a tax-based program that would further landowners' conservation efforts. The two-pronged approach suggested would (a) eliminate the inheritance tax on all farmland and farm appurtenances and (b) offer tax credits for all conservation measures that produced benefits of one kind or another, including carbon sequestration. The lengthy discussion surrounding the inheritance tax issue touched on the question of just how many rural landowners were affected by inheritance tax laws, but some participants insisted that the issue was real in the Northeast, where land values tend to be higher because of urban-related development pressures. In the end, agreement was reached on exempting only farmland and farm appurtenances from inheritance tax laws. Tax credits were viewed as a more effective means of fostering conservation. This discussion also broached the subject of using tax law to encourage young people to enter or remain in farming.

"Now, in farms all your capital investments add up [for inheritance tax]..., it's up to like \$1.2 million now that [is not taxable]..., and that's not very much in the Northeast. And I think for the Northeast region this probably is more appropriately applied than it might be in some other parts of the country. California would probably be the other area where land prices are high."

"Eliminate inheritance tax on farm, farmland, farm appurtenances."

"Give tax credits for any practice [a farmer] does and that is self-funded."

"Tax credits for conservation. That would include carbon credits...grass farming and permanent covered land."

"Giving young people just starting out...tax credits for doing conservation work would help them get started."

Theme 2: Devolution of conservation program delivery

A number of the clean-slate agendas suggested a devolution of authority for conservation program delivery. Support was registered across several agendas for direct grants to conservation districts to cover the costs of operations, training, and program delivery; stronger partnerships with states that would result in a more seamless program delivery system in the eyes of landowners; block granting of cost-share program funds to states to facilitate a one-plan, state-based conservation program delivery system; and greater emphasis on locally led conservation, which suggests a greater role for local interests in establishing and addressing conservation priorities. Some opposition was registered in both the voting and subsequent discussion to the idea of block granting funds for conservation technical and/or financial assistance to state or local government.

*“Have programs reflect some understanding of our **preferences for a range of farm size and operator structures.** You know, it could be based on economics, it could be income, it could be sales, it could be operator characteristics. We agree that it's **not acreage.**”*

*“What we're really [seeking]...is control and **regional appropriateness and flexibility** [in federal programs].”*

*“Block grant all federal agriculture financial assistance funds to states, then combine those with 319 funds into a **single state program.** The Game Commission [and others could] put money in,...then come up with a simplified cost-share program that would be deliverable at the county level instead of having all these different fragmented programs.”*

*“I don't particularly favor block grants of any of this money other than **direct grants for operation for [conservation] districts,** not the grant block [of financial assistance] for programs. It's for operating training and delivery. Some district supervisors say they have to have bake sales to operate their offices. This is the professional delivery system for a multi-billion dollar industry.... These are the people that are working with the staff, working in the field with the people.”*

*“Provide block grants to **RC&D councils** for projects and staffing.”*

Theme 3: Conservation versus commodity policy

A lengthy, cross-cutting discussion ensued during the workshop about the merits of coupling or decoupling conservation and commodity policies. This discussion was punctuated by comments about the need for keeping agriculture profitable, as a basis for facilitating conservation in part; for managing crop surpluses more effectively and the merits of using land set-aside programs for this purpose; for allowing producers to make land use and management decisions more on the capability of the land than on the economic benefits of government price support programs of one kind or another; for overcoming the false sense of security created by current price support programs, such as loan deficiency payments; for maintaining access to world agricultural markets; and for establishing a circumstance in which consumers could support the true costs of food and fiber production, including environmental costs.

There was discussion of a proposal to invest \$15 billion in agriculture in the next few years and the relative portions of which ought to be devoted to price support versus conservation. While a number of participants thought all of this money could or should go to conservation, some considered it impractical to ignore price support mechanisms, particularly those aimed at managing crop supplies.

This led to further discussion of how conservation and commodity policies might be more mutually supportive, via set-aside programs and conservation compliance, for example; how relevant agricultural price support programs are for certain portions of the agricultural sector in the Northeast, particularly the dairy industry and the poultry industry, which depends upon grain production in certain areas to keep the industry viable; and how irrelevant national agricultural policies often are for farmers in the Northeast who don't grow program crops nearly as extensively as farmers in other regions of the country.

In the end, participants acknowledged the complexity of this policy morass, but reached no consensus on a way out of the dilemma.

*“There's going to be about \$15 billion; how do you want it spent in 2002? I'm saying...let's really **pump up conservation**... [including] other things that aren't on the table now, like the Conservation Security Program, a three-year set-aside program instead of a 10-year CRP,...more like the set-aside that we had during the feed, grain and wheat programs. It was a price support [or production reduction] program, but the fact is farmers had to divert a certain percentage of their*

base to conservation to get the price support. So maybe part of the problem here is we're overproducing prices are too low; we need production flexibility contracts to get it lower. That's part of that \$15 billion. I call that conservation. That has some conservation benefits included in it."

"If the government says, well, we're not going to couple anything to conservation compliance; we're just going to give you the money. And, by the way, **the more land you take out, the higher your payments are going to be**, then I think we've lost all the conservation benefits of all these other programs combined."

"I don't think...crop insurance, LDP payments, and other types of payments are forcing more land into production because in the Northeast we're losing land to development. **Cropland is not increasing.**"

"The problem with the LDP payments that farmers now are getting just the payments, they're getting a **false sense of security** in that they're getting back what they're putting into farming and they're not. They don't understand they've had to lose before they could get them. And that means they can never make up the difference in their cash flow on the farm."

"In my own family, they sit and establish their yearly plans based on what commodity program and funding is being made available.... [W]e should be doing our agriculture **planning on what's economically viable** for our farm from the ground, not from what money we can get from the federal government."

"Here's the importance of those [commodity support] programs to the Northeast, and if you take the...Maryland/Delaware/Virginia peninsula, if we lose that grain growing there, those grain crops are **critical to keeping that poultry industry** on that...peninsula,...that's the whole economy of the region. That's not just the poultry industry, that's the economy of a region, that takes out all the processing people, all the jobs.... [T]he grain commodity prices right now to those people are really critical because they pay a higher tax rate than most of the rest of the country; it costs them more to operate."

Theme 4: Sustaining agriculture through conservation.

Support was expressed for keeping agriculture sustainable and for using stewardship payments as a primary means of achieving that goal. This generated a longer discussion of the Conservation Security Act proposal from Senator Harkin, of the use of land set-aside programs to manage crop supply and influence profits, of the importance of land treatment as opposed to land retirement, of the merits of targeting, and of rewarding the use of past conservation practices. Sentiment was expressed by some for greater emphasis on land treatment, as opposed to land retirement, particularly in this region, where land supplies are limited. There were also questions raised about the conservation benefits of land retirement, depending on the length of time involved. Some contended that short-term set-aside programs often produce few conservation benefits, but concern was also expressed about retiring land for 10 years or more under the Conservation Reserve Program and the limitation such contracts placed on the use of the land for such a long period.

A discussion of targeting occurred within the context of a stewardship payments program and otherwise. Support was expressed for rewarding landowners who had already installed conservation measures on the own and at their own expense, although a number of participants questioned just how that could occur equitably. One suggestion dealt with the idea of supporting in-place practices that required annual maintenance. Others suggested that landowners with conservation measures in place simply be given priority for participation in current programs. Opposition, some strong, was registered to suggestions for making payments based on the acres

treated, targeting payments by farm size, directing payments to individual farmers rather than corporate farmers, and basing payments for conservation on financial need.

*“Maybe farmers are **entitled to get a reward** for something that was installed 10 or 20 or 30 years ago, but maybe not. And the expense is a problem and then how do we reward moving forward rather than just sitting on what's been done.”*

*“When you add it all up with what's going on in the **maintenance** [of practices], an annual payment for certain practices is not a bad idea.”*

*“We're losing farmland [to suburbanization] so fast, that the farmland that's left is intensively used.... So, in some cases, landowners simply don't have the option of going into a **land retirement** program....”*

*“**[Land treatment]** seems to be the unmet need that I keep finding. There aren't a lot of people running around saying ‘Well, gee, help me retire this land.’”*

Theme 5: CRP doesn't work in the Northeast

Interspersed in the discussion of the clean-slate agendas were references to the ineffectiveness of the Conservation Reserve Program in the Northeast. Comments focused principally on the low rental rates paid in the region under the program, the long-term nature of contracts required under the program, and the ambivalent reactions thus far to the use of conservation buffers under the continuous CRP sign-up and Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program. Concern also was expressed about the existing circumstances that encourage landowners to remove existing buffers to gain eligibility for the program.

References were also common to greater effectiveness provided by cost-sharing programs, such as the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program.

*“If we can't change this program [CRP], and it's reauthorized the way it is now,...then it has **extremely little value in the Northeast.**”*

*“We talk about **basing [rental rates] upon land value**, getting the rental rate high enough, maybe having a cap that should be lower than 25 percent. All these are little things you could tweak, but, of course, the national CRP doesn't allow you to tweak it.”*

*“A lot of landowners say, ‘I can't take it out [of production] unless you want me to get out of farming’ So we **have to have other alternatives.** And what are they? Well, WHIP, forest stewardship, EQIP, programs that provide cost share..., but that the landowner can also use under a conservation plan, not permanent removal.”*

Appendix

Summary: Great Plains Workshop Incremental Flip Charts

↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑

Conservation Reserve Program CRP

↓↓↓↓ Allow emergency haying/grazing where there is a 40 percent reduction in forage – or the land is declared a disaster.

- Allow enrollment of larger tracts plus easements.

↑↑↑↑↓↓ Give groundwater contamination a high priority through the Environmental Benefits Index (EBI).

↑↑ Allow more flexibility in planting mixtures for CP4 (establishment of permanent wildlife habitat cover on non-easement land).

- Revise the EBI to favor marginal land.
- Provide flexibility to maintain existing cover on reenrollment without reduction in rental payment.

↑↓↓↓ Eliminate emergency haying and grazing.

↓↓↓↓ Establish a strategic hay reserve by allowing a certain percent of the land within each CRP contract to be hayed each year after the first 2 years of establishment and eliminate emergency haying.

↓↓↓ Assign higher rental rates for irrigated land.

↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑

Funding

↓↓ Increase **Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)** cap to 45 million acres.

↓ Remove the **CRP** cap and set annual enrollment goals.

- Increase **Wetland Reserve Program (WRP)** enrollment to 250,000 acres/year.

↓ Increase **Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program (WHIP)** funding to \$150 million/year and allow 5-year agreements.

↑ Consistently fund **Stewardship Incentive Program (SIP)**, increase funding for sustainable agricultural and education, emphasize training research.

↑ Provide annual funding for **Farmland Protection Program (FPP)**.

↓↓ Increase funding to \$5 billion/year for total conservation.

↑↓ Increase funding for **Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D)**.

↑ Reactivate the small watershed program, and emphasize structure rehabilitation.

↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑

Continuous Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)

↑ Make tree planting requirement in riparian areas more flexible.

↑ Allow larger wellhead protection areas to be eligible.

↑ Make seasonal streams eligible.

- Make CP23, wetland restoration, eligible.
- Lower the state match required in CREP, provide a grant option for CREP.

↓ Transfer administration of continuous CRP from Farm Service Agency (FSA) to Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and do not include acres enrolled in CREP in the general CRP cap limits.

- Allow producers with water bank contracts to roll land over into CRP.

↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑

Wetland Reserve Program (WRP)

↓ Allow wetland creation

↑↑↑↑↑

Capacity

↓ Remove the technical assistance (TA) cap in Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC), establish a mentoring program, and provide assistance through third-party vendors

↑↑↑ Boost NRCS technical assistance staff.

↑↑ Provide TA through state agencies.

↑↑↑ Increase one-on-one assistance.

↑↑↑ Initiate a USDA grant program for partnerships.

↑↑↑↓ Funds for self-assessment and implementing action plan.

New Programs

- ↑↑↑↑↑↑ Establish a range riparian reserve program.
- ↑↑↑↑↑↑ Provide incentives to preserve mature riparian areas.
- ↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑ Improve riparian areas, pay to protect existing areas, and integrate riparian areas with upland management.
- ↑↑↑ Establish an easement program to protect grazing land, including existing land and land coming out of Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).
- ↑↓↓↓↓↓ Reinststate Agricultural Conservation Program (ACP) and Great Plains Conservation Program (GPCP).
- ↑↑↓↓↓↓ Use Federal funds to purchase water rights to protect fisheries
- ↑↓↓↓↓↓ Establish a critical watersheds program that requires all operators to have a water quality plan. Provide 100 percent financial assistance for related capital costs.

Principles and Priorities

- ↑ Target a portion of financial assistance (FA) and technical assistance (TA) to Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) watersheds.
- ↑ Emphasize management practices instead of land retirement.
- ↑ Increase coordination among federal/state conservation programs.
- ↑↑↑↑↑↑↓↓ Provide safe harbor under Endangered Species Act, provide cost-share with a local component to target protection and restoration efforts.
- ↑↑↑ Provide high incentives in priority watersheds.
- ↑ Evaluate sustainability of conservation programs.
- ↑↓↓↓ Develop pollutant based systems/best management practices (BMPs).
- ↑ Encourage multi-agency/multi-jurisdictional efforts.
 - Increase local control of watershed management and let governors develop unified implementation strategies.
- ↑↓↓↓ Empower local governments to impound water and install structural measures.
- ↑ Incorporate conservation in urbanizing areas.
- ↑↓↓↓ Let governors develop unified implementation strategies.

↑↑↑↑↑

Commodity Program Linkages

- ↓↓↓ Target or cap all program payments.
- ↑↑ Strengthen the linkage between commodity programs and conservation.
 - Shape payments to discourage breaking out and farming of environmentally sensitive land.
- ↑↑↑↑ Reduce/eliminate incentives that threaten environmentally sensitive areas.
- ↓↓ Require compliance for all programs.

↑↑↑ Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

- ↑↑ Reserve some EQIP funds for whole farm plans, carbon sequestration, management intensive grazing.
- ↑↑↓ Environmental benefits should outweigh the costs of implementation.
- ↑ Encourage more local input in the development of the state program, use only education assistance to market the program, and dovetail with Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program.
- ↑ Establish a flexible spending formula.
- ↓↓↓ Add incentives to increase instream flows.
- ↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑ Give higher funding priority for irrigated acres.
- ↑ Encourage managed grazing systems as opposed to confined feeding operations. Too much emphasis on priority areas for funding.

Communication/Education

- Increase public support for all conservation programs through public awareness.

State Technical Committee

- ↑↑↓↓ State technical committees should do state natural resource assessment and develop measurable program objectives.

Emergency Watershed Program

- Expedite on-the-ground response.

Summary: West Workshop Incremental Flip Charts

↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

- ↑ \$500 million funding for EQIP.
- ↑↓↓↓ Reinstated annual cost share.
- ↑↓ State technical committee should have more say in funding allocations.
- Reduce the amount of upfront planning that is required to apply for program.
- ↓↓↓ Eliminate the existing application process.
- ↑ Allow carryover of CCC funds for EQIP.
- ↑ Cost-share to keep ground covered.
- ↑↓↓↓↓ Target EQIP funds to federal and regional priorities.
- Fund precision ag technology.
- ↑ Use education funds to quantify environmental benefits.
- ↑ Use EQIP funds across state, tribal and provincial boundaries to address regional problems.
- Deliver producer education at most effective times.
- ↑↓ Raise cap on EQIP payments to \$100,000 with incentives to go higher.

↑↑↑↑↑

Wetland Reserve Program (WRP)

- ↓ Increase WRP cap to 2 million acres.
- ↑↓ Allow the enrollment of 250 million acres in WRP annually.
- ↑↓↓↓ Make seasonal flooding of rice land eligible.

↑↑↑↑↑

Farmland Protection Program (FPP)

- ↑ Dramatically increase funding for FPP.
- ↑↑↑↓ Make rangeland eligible.
- ↑↓↓ Limit agricultural use to benefit species.
- Fund FPP at \$250 million/year.
- ↑ Increase the Federal share of FPP to 75 percent

↑↑↑↑↑

Conservation Reserve Program / Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CRP/CREP)

- Raise CRP cap to 45 million acres emphasizing buffers and grassland and higher rental rates.
- ↓ Include long-term/permanent easements.
- Expand to watershed scale.
- ↑↑ Make grazing land eligible.
- Eliminate whole-farm bids.
- Allow field splitting.
- Facilitate the transition of land coming out of CRP to grazing.
- Make fish/wildlife a primary purpose.
- Make CREP work better for fish habitat.
- Give more emphasis to riparian buffers and wetlands.
- ↓ Increase EBI points for fish and wildlife.
- ↑↑ Provide safe harbor from increased regulation if endangered species populations increase as a result of CRP practices.
- Emphasize restoration of native grassland.
- Increase CREP incentives.
- ↑↓↓ Address what happens when CREP contracts expire.
- ↑↓↓ Give states flexibility in CREP to manage commodity supplies.

↑↑

Conservation of Private Grazing Land (CPGL)

- Fully fund private grazing land conservation initiative.

↑↑

Capacity

- ↑ Increase NRCS staff on tribal lands.
- Increase funding for training.
- Update technical guides and practice standards.
- ↑ Collect resource inventory and assessment data on tribal land.
- Fund watershed groups to initiate and implement programs.
- ↑ Create a private sector conservation implementation service.
- Provide comprehensive nutrient management planning training/certification for private sector.
- ↑↓↓↓↓ Use the nonprofit sector to deliver programs.
- ↑↑↑ Increase NRCS staff.

New Programs

- ↑↑↑↑↓ Initiate a green commodity program and increase commodity program payments based on environmental performance.
- Decrease the costs of environmentally friendly inputs and technology.

Priorities

- ↑ Emphasize land treatment, not land retirement.
- ↑ Focus technical assistance and financial assistance to Clean Water Act priorities.
- ↑↓↓ Increase road rehabilitation.
- ↓↓↓ Favor limited resource farmers.
- ↓↓↓ Eliminate payments to large agribusiness firms.
- ↑↑↑ Emphasize land treatment to achieve sustainability, and be pro-active.
- ↑ Provide financial assistance to eligible producers for the cost of meeting regulatory requirements of USDA programs.
- ↑↑ Emphasize biodiversity.

Principles

- ↑↑↑ Create regulatory certainty and regulatory assurance among all state and federal conservation programs.
- ↑↑ Regionalize conservation program payments to reflect land values.
- Leverage state funding through matching grant provisions.
- ↑↑↑↑↑ Keep people on the land.

Communication/Education

- ↑ Fund NRCS or NAS to document environmental benefits of farming/ranching.
- Demonstrate cost/benefit ratios.
- Communicate economic/environmental benefits of conservation to the agriculture community and the public

Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP)

- ↑↓ Increase WHIP funding to \$100 million annually.
- Emphasize assistance to small farmers

Forestry Incentive Program (FIP)

- ↑↑↑↑↓ Increase FIP funding.
- Eliminate FIP and use the money to fund Stewardship Incentive Program at higher level.

Summary: Midwest Workshop Incremental Flip Charts

↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑

Conservation Compliance

- Enforce conservation compliance for all USDA support programs.

↑↑↑↑↑↑

Wetland Reserve Program (WRP)

- ↑↑↓ Increase enrollment in WRP to 250,000 acres/year.
- ↑↓ Use WRP and EWP in coordinated response to flood damage (goal: 3% of land in wetlands).
- Increase WRP enrollment cap to 10 million acres.

↑↑↑↑↑↑

Capacity

- ↑↑↑ Increase personnel in both the public and private sectors to implement programs.
- Develop a landowner database that is accessible to both NRCS and FSA.
- Make science-based soil mapping available at low cost.
- ↑↓ Streamline wetland mitigation process.
- ↓↓ Provide TA and FA to NRCS for wetland mitigation banking.
- ↓ Use the private sector to complement NRCS tech. assistance.

New Programs

- Ban MTBE.
- ↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓ Establish a 3- to 5-year set-aside, outside of CRP, to offset loan deficiency payments.
- ↑ Eliminate P.L. 566 small watershed projects.
- ↑↑↑ Support the Fishable Waters Act.
- ↑↑↑ Establish \$300million /year matching grant program for states/districts for program delivery.
- Launch a comprehensive nutrient management program process so CAFOs have a regulatory standard to meet. Provide technical assistance to all other livestock producers to develop nutrient management plans.

Principles and Priorities

- ↑↑↑↑↑↑↑ Give credit for past accomplishments when determining program eligibility.
- ↑↑↑ Emphasize grazing land conservation in all programs.
- Target assistance to water quality needs, particularly among small landowners.
- ↑↑↑↑↑ Develop coordinated resource management plans for each farm/ranch.
- ↑↑↑↑↑↑↑ Balance commodity and conservation program spending and thus provide \$10 billion more each year for conservation.
- ↑↑↑↑ Give program delivery responsibility to state/local/private personnel and make the federal government responsible for training and certification of personnel, and for the development of technical practice standards.
- ↑↓ Use incentives to reduce urban stormwater impacts on rural land.
- Improve coordination between rural and urban conservation programs.
- ↑↑↑↑↑↑ Support science-based BMPs.
- ↑↓ Increase flexibility!
- ↑↑ Monitor programs to (a) identify needs and (b) document results.
- ↑↑↑↑ Give state technical committees flexibility to adjust programs to state needs.
- Plan land treatment based on hydrologic cycle.
- ↑↓↓↓↓ Do not pay incentive payments if a manure discharge occurs in AFOs over 1000 animal units.
- ↑ Use existing programs to address TMDLs and document related landowner actions.
- ↑↓↓ Allow joint use of USDA and other federal programs to reduce landowner share of practice installation.
- Implement programs on science-based, holistic resource management concepts.
- ↑↑↑↓ Use TMDLs as opportunity to fund agriculture conservation programs.
- ↑↑↑ Encourage common standards/specifications among agencies.

↑↑↑

Conservation on Private Grazing Land Program (CPGL)

- Fund Grazing Land Conservation Program (CPGL) at authorized levels.

↑↑

Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP)

- Increase WHIP funding to \$50 million/year.

↑↑↓

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

↑↑↓ Increase EQIP funding to \$1.8 billion/year.

↑↓↓↓↓ Reduce mandated focus on animal agriculture.

↑↑ Use tax deductions/credits as EQIP incentives.

↑↑↓ Increase EQIP funding 50% and use for incentives for equipment or custom application of nutrients/pesticides.

- Require enrollment of whole farm.

- Enhance monitoring/evaluation to measure effectiveness of the program.

- Allow continuous sign-up.

↑ Give credit for past/existing conservation accomplishments.

↓↓↓↓ Reduce the size of priority areas to increase the likelihood that environmental goals will be met by land treatments. Drive the program locally.

Communication/Education

↑↓ Increase producer awareness of programs, program benefits, and increase participation.

Conservation Farm Option Program (CFO)

- Implement Conservation Farm Option.

↑↑↓↓

Conservation Reserve Program / Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CRP/CREP)

↑↑↓↓ Cap CRP at 36.4 million acres. Allow buffers to push cap to 40 million.

↓↓↓↓↓ Shorten the duration of contract/easement options in CRP/WRP.

- Increase CRP cap to 45million acres.

↑↑↓↓ Pay 100% maintenance costs on an as needed basis.

- Increase cap to 50 million + acres, with greater flexibility in practice implementation and state allocations for CRP, CREP and continuous sign-up.

↑↓ Give more emphasis on water quality (e.g., source water) in EBI.

- Emphasize wildlife in continuous sign-up.

↓↓↓↓↓ Allow producers to move pasture/hayland to CRP/buffers depending on market conditions.

- Target CRP acres to parts of fields/farms.

↑↑ Use state technical committees to regionalize CRP among states.

↑↑↑ Allow permanent easements for riparian areas/buffers.

- Revisit cropping history criterion to prevent breaking out of sensitive areas.

- Make payment limitations consistent between EQIP and CRP.

↑↑↑↑↑↑↓ Allow sustainable haying/grazing and biomass production on CRP areas.

- Use easements for more than buffers.

- Eliminate tree-planting requirement in certain riparian buffers.

↑↓↓↓ Increase CRP cap to 60 million acres.

↓↓ Allow Well-managed haying/grazing.

- Allow conservation districts more flexibility in program development and implementation.

- De-emphasize land rental rates in enrollment decision between states.

↓↓↓↓ Offer short term CRP (3-5 yrs) as a substitute for loan deficiency payments.

- Include permanent easements on HEL as an option.

↑ Continuous sign up for entire program.

- Increase EBI or rental payment for increased conservation management or uses (e.g. hunting).

↓ Eliminate ownership restrictions.

Summary: Southeast Workshop Incremental Flip Charts

↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)

↓↓↓↓↓↓ Shorten CRP contracts to 2-3 yrs. As an option.

↑ Either enforce CRP maintenance requirements or divert funds to another more useful program.

↑↑↑ ↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑ Expand continuous CRP sign-up and provide greater flexibility in buffer sizing and location.

↑↑↑ Allow naturally occurring revegetation, managed for weeds, as a cover practice option.

- Improve enforcement on mowing dates.

↑↑ Eliminate incentive to break out land as means of gaining eligibility to enroll in CRP.

↓↓ Either increase cost-share levels or help landowners finance their share.

↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑

Simplification

↓ Consolidate program administration and delivery.

- Simplify sign-up, ranking procedures, and planning for all programs.

↓↓↓↓↓↓ Establish one sign-up period annually for CRP, one for WRP, one for cost-share programs.

↑↑ Make conservation plans readable and understandable for producers.

↑↑↑↑↑↑↓

State Technical Committee

↓↓↓ Ensure fair representation of all interests by designating representatives. At least a majority of the representatives should be from ag groups.

↓↓ Representatives ... (a) subject to recall with 5 yr. Term (b) establish nutrient mgt. standard if ag groups comprise the majority, (c) establish local resource needs and criteria.

↑ Make recommendations not just endorse NRCS State Conservation recommendations.

↑↑↑↑

Conservation of Private Grazing Land (CPGL)

↓ Add incentives to convert cool season pasture to natives.

- Increase technical assistance.

- Add cost-share/incentive component for conversion to natives.

- Add voluntary easement program.

↑↑↑↑↑

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

↓ Support cover crop and other practices that support tobacco growers.

- Pay for the development of an alternative water supply as a way to get livestock out of streams.

↓ Remove the large confined livestock operation edibility limitation for financial assistance for the construction of an animal waste management facility.

- Give priority to farmers willing to improve wildlife habitat.

↑ Provide additional incentives to convert over a two year period cool season grasses to natives in pasture.

↑ Simplify the application process.

↑↑↓↓↓ Eliminate priority areas and award contracts on site-specific basis.

↑ Drive funding allocations by environmental benefits,, not politics.

- Either increase funding for the whole program or delete priority areas.

↓↓ Revisit need for educational funds.

- Earmark some funds for whole-farm multiyear plans (rotational grazing plans, soil quality plans).

- Require comprehensive nutrient management plans for CAFOs to be eligible for EQIP.

New Programs

↑↑↓↓↓ Eliminate EQIP and substitute an ACP-lite program.

↑↑ Give states block grants for financial and technical assistance. These funds could be distributed to the private sector .

↑↑ Establish a land retirement program targeted at high-risk, flood-prone land.

↑

Conservation Compliance

- ↓ ↓ Reduce NRCS's regulatory role.
- ↑ ↓ Extend to all USDA benefits. Tighten program loopholes. Ensure accountability/enforcement.
- ↑ ↑ Make the amount of benefits denied be proportional to the area out of compliance.
 - Require riparian buffers, but make them eligible for enrollment in CRP.
- ↓ Remember implications of program payment limitations.
- ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↓ Give credit for past conservation efforts when determining penalties.

Funding

- ↑ Combine WHIP, FIP, EQIP and increase total funding 10 percent.
- ↑ ↑ ↑ ↓ Increase CRP cap to 60 million acres.
- ↑ ↑ ↑ Increase WRP cap to 5 million acres.
- ↑ ↑ ↑ Increase funding for research on BMP feasibility and effectiveness.
- ↑ ↑ ↑ Increase funding for education and technical assistance.
- ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↓ Increase NRCS personnel ceiling by a factor of 3 to 4 times (with more biologists).
- ↑ Increase EQIP funding enough to cover the backlog of existing applications with direct link between financial assistance/technical assistance.
- ↑ Provide sufficient cost-share for expensive conservation measures (fencing, etc.).
 - Eliminate cost-share cap; pay what is necessary to solve problems.
- ↑ ↓ ↓ ↓ Increase funding for water quality monitoring.
- ↑ Increase funding for emergency conservation work.
 - Increase funding for the conservation of private grazing land (CPGL) to \$50million/year for cost-share and incentives.
 - Increase EQIP funding to \$500 million/year.

Priorities

- ↑ ↑ Emphasize no-till, minimum till through FA & TA.
 - Increase focus on soil quality.
- ↑ Fund research for comprehensive nutrient management planning and for the development of CNMPs within a state.
- ↑ ↑ ↑ Target USDA program funds to 303(d) list.
- ↑ ↑ ↑ Reshape conservation provisions to support water quality improvement.
- ↑ ↑ Undertake proactive educational programs with landowners.
- ↑ ↑ ↓ Address ground water conservation and fund the development of alternative water supplies.

Principles

- ↑ Require that comprehensive nutrient management plans be done before completing engineering plan for waste management facilities.
- ↑ ↑ ↑ Reward farmers/ranchers for conservation work they have already done.
- ↑ ↑ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ Make NRCS solely responsible for wetland jurisdiction on agricultural land.
- ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ Eliminate crop insurance and disaster payments on high-risk flood-prone land.
- ↑ Empower local leaders to make locally led conservation work.
- ↑ ↑ Measure sustainability in economic as well as environmental terms.

↑ ↑

Capacity

- ↑ Improve the consistency in quality of technical assistance from county to county (more and better staffing, perhaps with specific expertise on multi-county basis).
- ↓ Involve state agency biologists in farm planning on a reimbursable basis.
- ↑ ↑ District Conservationists set personal performance goals that mesh with state goals.

Summary: Northeast Workshop Incremental Flip Charts

↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑

Capacity

- Increase field technical staff.
- Increase technical assistance staff enough to eliminate the planning backlog.
- Adequately train technical assistance providers.
- ↑ Find technologies to handle manure adequately.
- Increase coordination between FSA and NRCS.
- ↑ Accelerate the incorporation of new technologies into the field office technical guide.

↑↑↑↑↑↑

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

- Make the application process more flexible.
- Make the application process more efficient.
- ↑↑ Make EQIP funds available to all farms mandated to implement practices (e.g. CAFO nutrient mgt.) not just in priority areas.
- ↓↓↓ Fund individual practices with statewide concerns funds.
- ↑ Increase the amount of financial assistance that can be provided to an individual farm.
- ↓↓ Emphasize monitoring.
- Emphasize environmental improvement
- ↓ Fund implementation/construction of structures.
- Give credit for existing practices in EQIP scoring.
- Make incentive payment rates competitive/attractive.

↑↑↑↑↑

Conservation Reserve Program

- ↑↓ Base rental payments in the Northeast on land value, not rental rate.
- Pay landowners 70% of the market value of land for land enrolled in 10-year contracts.
- ↑↓↓↓ Allow economic use of enrolled acres, with 25% reduction in rental rate.
- ↑ Allocate CRP acres to states and allow them to determine who gets CRP contracts.
- ↑ Change EBI to favor buffers in regular sign-ups.

↑↑↑↑↑

Funding

- ↑↑↓↓ Reduce CRP funding by 50% and direct those funds to water quality programs.
- ↑↑↓ Increase funding for WHIP to \$100 million/year and use funds for ag and non-ag land.
- ↑↑↑ Increase EQIP funding for statewide concerns.
- ↑ Raise EQIP funding to \$325 million.
- ↓ Increase WHIP funding w/priority to keep open previously farmed land.
- Raise CRP cap to 45 million acres.
- ↑ Increase funding for FPP.
- ↑↑ Increase FPP funding to \$100 million and provide 30% to states without programs for program start up, then fund at \$65 million annually thereafter. Consider tax free bonds.
- ↑ Double authorized budget for GLCI (CPGL).
- ↑ Increase EQIP funding.
- ↑↑↑↑↓ Increase Forest Stewardship planning by \$50 million/year and include biologists in planning.
- Increase SIP by \$50 million/year.
- ↑↓ Double RC&D funding and reverse staff reduction trend.
- ↑↓ Increase WHIP funding so each state gets at least \$250,000/year.

↑

Continuous Conservation Reserve Program/Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)

- Separate continuous CRP & CREP from general CRP.
- Increase incentives to make continuous CRP & CREP more attractive.
- Make up-front payments to jump-start new farming operations.
- ↓ Allow economic use of enrolled acres.
- ↑ Change CP-9, shallow water areas for wildlife, to eliminate the one-time enrollment limitation and 15-acre cap.
- Pay the higher CREP incentive payments for all buffer practices under continuous CRP acres in each state.
- ↑↑↑↓ Consider hayland an agricultural commodity for eligibility purposes.

↑ **Farmland Protection Program (FPP)**

- ↑ Reduce costs by considering term easements and alternative financing of easements.
- ↑↑↑ Provide incentives for succession plans.

↑ **State Technical Committee**

- Be comprised of landowners with agency people as resource advisors.
- State conservationist should provide rationale for decisions in writing

New Programs

- Reallocate commodity subsidies to meet rural needs and promote environmental stewardship.
- ↑↑ Distribute all federal ag financial assistance through block grants.
- ↑ Initiate and fund the Conservation Security Program.
- Subsidize alternative sources of energy, hemp, and recycled manure
- Block grants to RC&D Councils for projects and staffing based on needs.

Priorities

- ↑↑↑↓ Set priorities through county committees, not at state level.
- ↑↑ Distribute funds to counties, not states.
- ↑↑ Allocate money to counties based on treatable acres.
- ↓↓ Use USDA programs to help producers meet TMDL requirements.
- ↓↓↓↓↓↑↑ Make conservation programs neutral when it comes to farm size.
- Fund low-cost projects that make a difference but don't require a conservation plan.
- ↑↑ Measure success by impact on water quality, habitat, etc., not acres enrolled in program.
- ↑↑↑ Encourage young people to get into farming.
- Extend NRCS partnerships to urban interests—address urban problems.
- ↑↑↑↑↑↑↑ Ensure equity among regions when allocating conservation dollars by accounting for all federal dollars supporting agriculture.

Principles

- ↑↑↑↑↑↑ Link all ag support payments to conservation (soil, water, wildlife).
- ↑↑ Make programs accessible to all producers, not just the politically influential (bluecoats).
- ↑ Make FSA responsible for the administration of program funds and NRCS for providing technical assistance.
- Don't lose emphasis on soil conservation as tradeoff for nutrient management, other concerns.
- Limit NRCS role to providing technical assistance, not regulating.
- Simplify program application processes.

Summary: Great Plains Workshop Clean-slate Flip Charts

↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑

Decoupling Programs

- Keep the existing suite of programs
- ↑ Decouple farm program payments/subsidies from how much farmers produce, redirect funds to:
 - + Support beginning farmers
 - + Family-based ag
 - + Sustainable ag
 - + Conservation/environment
 - + Economically healthy rural communities (e.g., telecommunications)
- Conduct research on best practices that enhance environment and economic opportunities

↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑

Riparian Reserve

- Establish range riparian reserve program
- Incentive to preserve mature riparian areas
- ↑ Improve riparian areas, pay to protect existing areas, integrate with upland management

↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑

Habitat Enhancement

- Retain CRP, WRP, WHIP
- Create disincentives for breaking new ground
- ↑↑ Incentives for maintaining rangelands/grassland/riparian areas. Emphasize endangered species/biodiversity
- ↑↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓ Protect small, family farm

↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑

Stewardship Initiative

- Support research, environmentally sound production systems, emphasize management over capital.
- Marketing initiatives for food produced in environmentally sound manner.
- ↑ Ongoing incentive payments for stewardship
 - + For existing and new practices
 - + All farm/ranch types eligible
- Conduct training for ag professionals
- Retain EQIP, CRP, WRP, and other programs to cost-share practices not covered under the above payments.

↑↑↑↑↑↑↑

Conservation Security

- Keep CRP, WRP, WHIP, and other tools that are working
- ↑↑ Umbrella proposal
 - + Bonuses on top of current programs based on level of conservation effect
 - + Long-term commitment

↑↑↑↑↑↑↑

Wet and Native Program

- Fashion current payments to reward protection of wetlands, native pasture as the highest priorities
- Develop grassland conservation easement program (CRP/WRP) to deal with cropland
- Use tax credits to maintain wetlands/grasslands in priority areas
- ↑ Do whole-farm planning, allowing NGOs to broker TA
- ↑↑↑ Use GIS to identify resource values.
- Pay producers to implement preferred practices (delayed haying, et cetera)

↑↑↑↑↑

Grass Initiative

- Retain CRP and WRP
- Stewardship program rewarding good stewards rather than bad actors
- ↑↑ New programs
 - + Hay Reserve
 - + Grasslands Conservation Reserve
 - + Biofuels incentives in addition to CRP

↑↑↑↑

The Benefits Bill

- Change name of "farm bill" to something broader like something related to social and environmental goals
- ↑↓ Regionalize by watersheds
- ↑↓ Conduct a public relations initiative that emphasizes that everyone gains from conservation

↑↑↑

Tiered Implementation Program

- ↑↑ Don't subsidize bringing marginal and environmentally sensitive land into production
- Create a voluntary program to get marginal and environmentally sensitive land into long-term care.
- ↑↓↓↓↓↓↓ Create a mandatory program to get marginal and environmentally sensitive land into long-term care

↑↑↑

Next

- Encourage next generation to farm

↑↑↑↑↓

Communication/Public Education Program

- Issue a report on the new possibilities for water, soil, environment and sustainable agriculture policy
- ↓ Conduct a study of the agricultural economy
 - + 100-year history
 - + Current situation of agriculture sector
- Establish an expert panel or commission to develop policy recommendations

↑↑↑↓

Agronomic Sustainability

- Provide for agronomic sustainability

↑↑

Locally Driven Conservation

- Farmers/ranchers who know local conditions should design and implement programs. Revisit SCS (now NRCS) track record.
- Keep EQIP that addresses local conditions and treatments
- ↑↑ Increase support to producers who have placed development rights in a land trust (e.g., TA or cost sharing to develop and implement alternative ag systems)

↑↑↑↑↓

Protected Conservation Planning

- ↑ Make whole-farm planning the underlying foundation
- Minimum plan length should be five years, incentives for longer plans
- Give higher incentives for doing more and reward current stewards
- ↓ Conservation districts review plans annually
- Payments made on all-or-nothing basis
- ↓ Hold harmless for nutrient management plans/AFO
- Planning facilitated by conservation districts with federal/state help
- Safe harbor under Endangered Species Act

↑↑↓

Value-added Conservation

- ↑ Connect public demand for environmental values with the costs to produce them
- ↑↓ Farmers can't compete if markets aren't "free" everywhere
- ↑↑↑↑↓ Create premium for "green"-produced commodities
- ↑↓ Include the cost of environmentally sustainable agriculture in market price of goods

↑↑↑↑↓

Land, Water, and Environmental Health Bill

- Tighten compliance
- Incorporate Clean Water Act and Endangered Species Act
- More equitable subsidies and realistic commodity pricing

↑↓

Land and Water Conservation Act

- ↓ Establish national goal
- Environmental plan required on all land by 2027
- Implementation of plans required by 2052
- ↑↓ Make environmental quality commodity payment units (EQCPU) based on:
 - + Wetlands
 - + Native grass
 - + Timber
 - + Permanent tame vegetation
 - + Land managed under conservation plan
 - + States contribute to EQCPU in federal/state partnership and Governors submit plans

↓

The Broader Bill

- Make it an "agricultural bill"

↑↓

Credit for Quality Program

- ↑ Reeducate public on the value of agricultural land what citizens will lose if agriculture moves outside U.S.
- Encourage next generation to stay in agriculture
- Examine how farm bill underpins commodity prices
- ↑↑ Pay producers for the environmental quality they provide the public
- ↑ Provide interest rate or energy (gas/diesel) credits rather than land- or water-based payments

↓

Production Control Program

- ↑↓ Experts make crop estimates for next 5 years.
- ↓ Assign production quotas by hydrologic units (include CRP, WRP land)
- ↑↓ Local experts classify land in hydrologic units according to environmental sensitivity
- ↓ "Nonproduction payments" offered to producers with the most environmentally sensitive land (annual and long term)
- ↓ No loan deficiency payments
- ↑↓ Keep crop insurance/disaster assistance

Summary: West Workshop Clean-slate Flip Chart

↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑
Sustainable Future
 Fund all agriculture programs based on 3 criteria:
 + Socially just
 + Environmentally sound
 + Economically viable

↑↑↑↑↑
Environmental Protection Through Sustainable Agriculture
 ● All growers – crops, livestock—eligible
 ● Pay for environmental benefits produced--\$17.5 billion
 ↓ Replaces all existing conservation/commodity programs (Retain EQIP at \$500M)
 ● Encourage alternative uses of ag production
 ● Incentives for lower risk inputs
 ↓↓ Payments favoring small farmers
 ↓↓ Mortgage subsidies for first-time farm buyers
 ↑ States administer programs

↑↑
A Conservation Planning Future
 ↑ Emphasis on comprehensive, integrated conservation planning, with new funding
 ↑ Use existing programs to fund implementation
 ↑ Coordinate administration to support single planning process
 ● New Programs:
 + Conservation Security Program
 + Grassland easements

↑↑↑↓
An Ecosystem-based Approach
 ● Link conservation programs to agricultural preservation
 ● Expand Ag preservation to include rangeland
 ● Easement options to protect sensitive habitats – grassland easements
 ● Compatible with economic use

↑
Land Stewardship for Economic Health and Environmental Protection
 ● Characteristics of the program are:
 + Voluntary.
 + Locally led.
 + Incentive based.
 + Country wants viable agriculture and environment and will pay for it.
 + Farm Service Agency, Forest Service, and Fish and Wildlife Service private land programs move to NRCS.
 ↑ Expanded management options in CRP.
 ↓↓ Shorter term CRP program.
 ● Intensify promotional of CRP
 ↑ Offer financial bonuses for innovation/achievement in CRP.

↑↓
Habitat Conservation Planning (HCP)
 ↑ Fund technical assistance to prepare HCPs.
 ↑ Emphasize watershed/county/regional scale planning.
 ● Use existing programs to fund implementation
 ↑↑↑↑↑ Integrate farmland preservation and economic viability.
 ↑↑↑↑↑ Safe harbor.

Mega-incentives Program
 ↑↑ Eliminate disincentives to achieving sustainability (wrap all permitting, legal assurances, monitoring into single planning process).
 ↑↑↑↑↑↓ Emphasize voluntary, community-based watershed planning.
 ↓↓↓↓ Use assured supplies of water as new incentive to forego development.

Summary: Midwest Workshop Clean-slate Flip Charts

↑ Agriculture-Environment Connection

- Umbrella cost-share program with national allocations based on state proposals.
- Compensate producers for lost production (1-3yrs) while practices develop.
- Conservation Priority Areas get no more than 50% of entire allocation.
- \$500M annually in funding.
- Immediate entry at specified threshold
- Reimburse landowners for environmental products.
- ↓↓ Target family farms.
 - All land eligible
 - Payments based on field units
- ↑ Determine conservation credits on tiered basis (3 levels).
- ↑↑ Conservation compliance/swampbuster apply.
 - Continue WRP.
 - Establish Prairie reserve.
- ↑ Establish natural feature reserve.
 - Continue CRP/continuous sign-up with improved maintenance provision.
 - Establish forest reserve on family farms until land enters sustainable harvest cycle.
 - Short-term set-aside (3-5 yrs) for conservation/commodity supply control.

USDA Agricultural Stewardship Option

- ↑↑ Integrate all conservation needs into one program.
- Multi-year plans.
- ↑↑↑↑↑ Tiered payments based on conservation effort.
- Complementary option to current commodity programs.
- ↑↑ Penalties for lack of maintenance/management.
- ↑↑↑↓ Fund at same level as commodity programs.
- ↓↓↓↓↓ Fund via food tax.
- \$2 to \$5 billion to launch.
- ↑↑↓↓↓↓↓↓ Tax nutrients/pesticides.

USDA Stewardship Grants

- ↓ Feds establish goals—cost/benefit analysis.
- ↑ States set priority areas/problems.
- ↓ State grants based on need related to federal goals.
 - NRCS develops conservation practice options.
- ↑↑ Farm plans incentive driven, but regulation if needed.
 - Public/private sectors write plans; NRCS certifies.
 - Feds develop policy—locals implement and administer.
 - 5- to 15-year contracts.
 - State matching grants
 - Base/formula grant
 - Competitive grants
 - Transition NRCS to state/local.
 - \$15 B in funding.

Farm Flex

- ↓ Each farmer designs own safety net.
- ↓ Farmer bids into a price support system, with range of prices based on land set-aside levels.
- ↑↑ Coordinated Resource Management (all issues) Plan (CRMP) for each farm, based on land potential, history, etc., prepared by appropriate federal/state agencies.
 - Premise of CRMP is ag sustainability.
 - All landowners must be involved to achieve environmental goals.
- ↓↓ Program must be voluntary.
 - Use land retirement, cost-shares, tax incentives.
 - Two objectives
 - stabilize income
 - attack resources
 - WRP is most functional program—use as framework.

Goals/Purpose

- Market doesn't pay for environmental benefits, so government should.
- Healthy/profitable farms that protect the environment.
- ↑ Achieve production/conservation objectives.
- Build land ethic.
- ↑ Healthy economy—healthy environment.
- ↓ Pay producers for societal benefits, not commodities.
- ↑ Land/water health; conservation investment in ag infrastructure.
- ↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑ Keep farms healthy, profitable and protect environment.

Priorities

- ↑↑↓ Carbon trading.
- ↑↑↑↓ Renewable energy.
- Reduce greenhouse gases.
- ↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑ Treat all conservation needs on a farm/ranch.
- ↓↓↓↓ Take land out of production.
- ↓ Create wetlands for septic systems.
- ↑↑↑ Emphasize native plant species.
- ↑↑ Land retirement only on most sensitive areas, e.g., buffers.
- ↓↓ De-emphasize farmland protection—emphasize environmental benefits.
- ↑ National soil quality policy.
- Focus on prevention.
- ↑↑↓ Focus on total water cycle.
- ↓ Drinking water highest priority.
- ↑↑↓ Buy development rights.
- ↓ Educate producers in sustainable ag.
- Reward food quality.
- ↓ Develop fiber crops.
- ↑↓ Limit funds to watersheds with NRCS plans.
- Use 303(d) list to prioritize watersheds.
- ↑↓ Base practices/payments on watershed plans.
- Target soil erosion via NRI.
- ↓↓ Emphasize terrestrial communities, not watersheds.

Infrastructure

- Digitized soil survey for all.
- FSA-NRCS with joint computer system.
- ↓↓ Minimum staffing per district—6 public or private technical staff.
- Combine federal and state cost share for implementation.
- ↓ Realign federal agencies on common watershed boundaries.
- ↑↑↑ Create/use multidisciplinary teams for technical asst.
- Continuous sign-ups for all programs.
- ↑↑ Invest in monitoring and evaluation.
- More and better training for technical staff.
- ↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑ More money for on the ground technical advisors—public or private.
- ↓ Use good science to identify BMPs.
- Conduct carbon trading study.

Principles

- ↑ Available to producers of all agricultural commodities.
- ↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑ Reward producers for what they are already doing.
- Reward producers for doing new conservation practices.
- ↑↓↓↓ Target small farms.
- ↑↑ Flexibility in practice design.
- Voluntary option.
- ↑↑↑ Eliminate conflicts between commodity payments/conservation programs.
- ↑ Balance land treatment and land retirement.
- ↓ Develop proposal palatable to ag interests in budget process.
- ↑↑↓↓ Target small/medium units; regulate large units, with provisions for good behavior.
- ↓ Simplified program, implemented locally, to build ownership.
- Minimum set of federal criteria with flexibility locally.
- ↑↑↑↓↓ Buy permanent protection through easements; de-emphasize land treatment.
- ↓ Allow federal programs to match each other to reduce landowner costs.
- ↑↑↑ Require conservation plans on farms.
- ↓ Require state/federal land to do as much as private land.
- ↑↑ Base payments on length of time practices are maintained-vesting.
- Spur new technology/research.
- ↑ Regulating program for bad actors or non-cooperators in voluntary programs.
- ↑↑↑ Base payments on environmental considerations, not social engineering.
- ↑↑↑↓ Target people causing problems—large or small.

Summary: Southeast Workshop

Clean-slate Flip Charts

↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑

Investment Tax Credit for Conservation

- Consolidate land retirement programs into Environmental Reserve Program with varying contract lengths (CRP, WRP, etc.) and earn tax credits.
- EPA/NRCS/other services could give landowners a plan to improve effect of farm on surrounding environment.
- ↑↑ Farmer gets tax credit annually for what he/she must do to implement plan.
- ↑ Monitor to establish science-based environmental baseline.
- Use compliance or other regulatory device to deal with bad actors.
- Consider selling tax credits as an option.

↑↑↑↑↑↑

Voluntary Approach with Agency Enhancements

- Voluntary incentive programs
- ↑ User-friendly for producers and administrators.
- ↑↑ One-stop conservation.
- Improve inter-agency cooperation
- ↓↓↓ Make standards consistent across geographic boundaries.
- Consolidate agencies with similar functions.
- ↑ Minimize paperwork.
- Incentive-based rewards for good stewards.

↑↑↑↑↑↑

Simple and Comprehensive

- ↑ Easy to understand.
- Simple application process.
- Sign up year round.
- Whole farm plans on a watershed basis.
- ↑↑ Research BMP effectiveness.
- ↑ Track BMP compliance. implemented? effective?
- Across programs
- Evaluate existing programs

↑↑↑↑↑↑

Commodity/Conservation Union

- ↑↓↓ Base subsidy payments on level of conservation activity (whole-farm plans).
- ↑ Require installment of riparian buffers or filter strips along permanent streams.
- Protect prime farmland (FPP expansion)
- ↓ 3 to 5 year set aside (seed to natives).
- Long-term easements for bottomland, hardwoods, native grassland, wetlands, etc.

↑↑↑↑↑

A Re-Focused Farm Bill

- ↑↑↑↑↑ Farm bill must seek to achieve environmental and economic sustainability.
- ↑ Education needed to get nonfarm public to understand how everyone benefits from healthy agriculture.
- Research, education, technical assistance, financial assistance needed in support of voluntary locally led conservation.
- Consolidate all federal conservation programs in one agency to advance landowner understanding and adoption.

↑↑↑↑

Conservation Performance and Commodity Linkage

- Require minimum practices to receive all federal payments including commodity conservation payments.
- ↓↓ Plan must (should) cover all (majority) land farmed/ranched.
- Encourage crop diversity to improve soils.
- Voluntary, 3-5 year set-aside with a conservation emphasis.
- Extension to promote conservation.
- ↑↓ Increase CRP cap to 60M ac.
- Increase WRP cap to 5M ac.
- Strengthen compliance and expand to all crop and ranch land.
- ↓ Directly couple/link commodity payments to conservation performance.
- ↓↓↓ Protect nesting wildlife on all areas providing such habitat, including set aside.
- Hold USDA accountable to ensure compliance with third-party quality control.
- ↓↓↓ Give state tech. comm. authority to guide commodity programs and ensure stewardship.

↑↑↑↑

Pay Me Program

- ↓ Pay for environmental services rendered (no till, etc.).
- Funding must be increased
- ↑↑↑ Manpower to help put conservation on the ground.
- Program not unlike Harkin bill.
- ↓↓ Commodity programs remain.
- Retain some conservation programs.
- Could be applied also to grassland, forestland, etc.

↑↑↑

Broader than Soil Erosion Control

- Emphasize nutrient, pesticide problems more (water quality).
- ↑↓↓↓↓ Priority ranking system for water quality work using 303(d) list.
- ↑ Increase educational programs – both pre-and post-practice installation.

↑↑↑

Locally Driven Conservation

- ↑↓↓↓↓ Local control by agricultural interests.
- Programs should pass cost-benefit test.
- Voluntary.
- Ag and forestry need to work together.
- Block grant federal funds to counties (NRCS funds) on need basis.
- ↓ Local program administered by existing USDA personnel.

↑↑

Locally Driven District Approach

- ↑↑↓ Set goals at conservation district and producer level.
- Increase technical education at local level.
- Monitor for results.

↑↑↑↓

Do No Harm/Do Good

- ↑↓↓↓↓ End production promotion programs.
- Don't buffer farmers who undertake risky practices.
- ↑↑↓↓↓ End funding for production enhancement water projects.
- ↑↑ Promote soil, water, and wildlife conservation.
- Pick up the slack in land retirement (e.g. WRP).
- ↑ Replace production promotion programs.
- Retain compliance approach.
- ↑ Fill in the gaps with whole farm planning, buffers.
- ↑↓ Move commodity funding to conservation.

↑↑

Green Fees

- Green fees paid to producers for services provided to society.
- Outside contracting to increase staffing for implementation and free up \$.
- ↓↓ Eliminate field engineering staff.
- List of approved private engineers.
- Reevaluate need for DC in all counties.
- ↑↑↑↑ Incentives for wildlife habitat and riparian protection.
- Identify (link) programs to agencies providing tech. and financial assistance.
- Set practice standards at NRCS state office.

↑

Consolidated Program Payments

- Agreed-to set of best management practices (BMPs).
- Tools to address needs (IPM, nutrients).
- ↑ 100% of block payment for implementing 100% of plan, 75 for 75, etc.
- ↓ Base total payment on conservation and/or commodity program payment history (Payments made once or multi-year, depending on practice).
- ↑↑↑↑↑ Reward existing practices.
- 50% cost-share for installation.
- Use 9-step planning process to determine BMP needs.

↑

A Locally Driven Watershed Approach

- ↑↓ Mandated funding to priority areas based on TMDL, 303d, high quality, threat of impairment, threatened species, local interests, etc.
- Driven by local interests who request funds to solve sub-basin problems
- ↑ Voluntary participation-education drives willingness to participate as problem areas roll to next level.
- Use existing program authorities with greater flexibility or fewer constraints.

↑

Sustainable

- ↑↑↑↑ Research, education, stewardship incentives payments.
- Clean organic wastes, soil, air and water quality.
- Increasing ag crop diversity.
- Conservation of genetic base.
- USDA withdraw from Terminator technology.
- Wetlands and wildlife focus.
- Reduce greenhouse gases/sequester C.
- Human health and safety.
- Program payments for all crops.
- ↑ Highest rewards to those achieving highest level of benefit to society.
- Tax encouragement to discourage land speculation and to stimulate green lands.
- Market infrastructure to focus on local ag distribution and entrepreneurship to reduce loss of small/medium sized farms.

A Land-Retirement-Based Program

- ↑↑ Short-term set-aside (3 to 5 years).
 - + simplified application
 - + competitive ranking process
 - + fewer criteria
- 90% cost-share for natives.
- 50% cost-share for cool season plants.
- Maintenance payments based on work done.
- Seed harvest permissible.
- Natural regeneration an acceptable practice.
- Bonus plus rental payment to leave BMPs in place when land reverts to crop production

Summary: Northeast Workshop Clean-slate Flip Charts

↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑

Tax Modifications

- ↑↑ Promote youth involvement in agriculture through conservation.
- ↑↑ Eliminate inheritance tax on farmland and appurtenances.
- ↑↑↑↑ Give tax credits for conservation.

↑↑↑↑↑

Funding

- ↑↑↑↑ Direct grants for operation, training, delivery, to conservation districts.
- ↑ Ensure commodity prices high enough to encourage conservation.
 - Fund NRCS technical assistance at \$330 million increase.

↑↑↑↑

State Run Conservation

- Encourage partnerships with states.
- More flexibility in implementation.
- Reasonable prices for farmers.
- ↓ Keep marginal lands out of production.
- ↑ Fund at \$15 billion.
- ↑↓ Redirect all payments to farmers as conservation payments.
- ↓↓ Conservation payments based on acres treated.
- ↓↓ Combine FSA-NRCS.
- State Technical Committee sets priorities.
- ↑↑↑ Block grants for cost-share programs.
- One-plan for program.

↑↑↑

A Look Back

- Reinstate ACP.
- Use long-term agreements (LTA) LTAs work well in implementing program.

↑↑↑

Locally Led

- ↑↑↑ Locally led conservation.
 - Responsiveness – to changing needs.
 - Assessment – what problems exist.
 - Cost-share component (landowner needs to share).
- ↑ Finances in one agency; TA in another .
- ↓ Conservation compliance not in TA agency.
- Reinstate ACP.

↑↑↑

Goal-Oriented Conservation

- ↓↓↓ Base incentive payments for conservation on financial need.
 - Direct conservation programs at conservation goals, not subsidizing agriculture.
 - Emphasize water quality and wildlife.
 - Target at small watershed scale.
- ↑ Results oriented programming.
- Fund monitoring and assessment
- ↑ Coordinated watershed planning using public and private expertise.
- ↑↑ Emphasize land treatment, not land retirement.
 - Manage to preserve open space.
- ↑↑↑ Fund research for alternatives for waste management.

↑↑↑

National Conservation Budget

- \$5 billion annually
- Farmers/ranchers select from menu of programs.
- ↓ All programs funded from single budget authority.

↑↑

Conservation Security Program

- Decouple from commodity programs (all producers are eligible).
- ↓↓ Target by farm size.
- ↑↑↑↑ Reward existing practices.
 - Rewards for multifaceted approach.
- ↓↓↓ Conservation includes scenic values, animal welfare, recreation, energy, etc.
- Direct programs to new farmers (next generation)

↑↑

No Programming

- ↑↑↑ Consumer supports true cost of food and fiber, including environmental cost.
- ↑↑ Youth involvement in agriculture.
- ↑↑↑ Talk profit, not production.
- ↓ Restructure USDA spending—to farmers, not corporations.
- ↑↑ Restructure USDA processing laws to preserve small, local processes.
 - Processing privately owned.
 - Rendering facilities municipally owned.
 - Current policy degrades communities / environment.

↑

A Watershed Approach

- ↕↕ Block grants to states.
- ↑ View agriculture as regional / landscape / watershed activity.
- ↕↕↕ States allocate funds to regional / landscape / watershed groups / councils, which are key decision-makers and include all stakeholders.

↑

Management Enhancement

- ↑ **Move away from price supports.**
 - + First away from corporate
 - Market a sustainable agriculture approach.
 - Increase interagency cooperation.
- ↑ Streamline middle management in USDA to overcome/eliminate bottlenecks.
- ↑ Audit management performance.
- ↑ Use regional “kitchen cabinets.”

A Water Quality Approach

- ↑ Increase NRCS funding for technical support/training.
- ↑↕↕ Block grant USDA financial assistance programs to states.
- ↑↑↑↑↑↕↕ Create single program—one delivery system.
- State technical committee plus state nonpoint source workgroup sets priorities based on:
 - + nonpoint source mgmt plan
 - + 303(d) list
 - + Unified Watershed Assessment
- ↑↑ Report BMP progress using GIS.
- All partners take credit.

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