



SEEKING
**COMMON
GROUND**
FOR CONSERVATION

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

**HOW DO AMENDMENTS TO
H.R. 2646, THE FARM SECURITY ACT
OF 2001, MEASURE UP?**

The Soil and Water Conservation Society (SWCS) conducted five farm bill workshops over the past year in the Northeast, Southeast, Corn Belt, Great Plains, and West. Participants included representatives from the agricultural, water resources, and fish and wildlife communities who collectively developed ideas for reform of conservation policy and programs in the 2002 farm bill.

Participants sought to accomplish two things through the new farm bill: (1) strengthen existing conservation programs to enhance the environmental performance and commercial viability of farms and ranches, and (2) build a new farm policy that is based on farmers' and ranchers' roles as natural resource stewards and, therefore, a policy that supports all agricultural producers regardless of the commodity they produce.

SWCS developed a set of recommendations—published in the report “Seeking Common Ground for Conservation, A Farm Bill Proposal: Responding to the Grassroots”—that, in the judgment of SWCS staff and advisors, hold the most promise of

achieving workshop participants' goals. In short, SWCS recommended that existing conservation programs be funded at \$5 billion a year—about double current funding. Further, the new \$2.5 billion investment in conservation should be used to strengthen technical services and cost-share programs targeted at improving the management of agricultural land, rather than taking agricultural land out of production. Finally, SWCS recommended that traditional farm subsidies be balanced with a new \$3 billion farm and ranch stewardship option that would help all farmers and ranchers, not just the producers of the eight major subsidized crops.

NEW LEGISLATIVE PROPOSALS: A COMPARISON

Earlier, SWCS compared the conservation provisions in H.R. 2646, The Farm Security Act of 2001, with the 22 recommendations in its “Seeking Common Ground for Conservation” report (see www.swcs.org for a copy of the report). That com-

KEY TO TABLE:

✓ HR 2646, reported by Agriculture Committee (✓) Manager's Amendment to HR 2646 X Boehlert Amendment to HR 2646

SEEKING COMMON GROUND RECOMMENDATIONS	STEP BACK	MISSED OPPORTUNITY	STEP AHEAD
CONSERVATION PROGRAM AND POLICY REFORM			
Funding			
Double funding for technical services	✓	(✓)	X
Triple funding for conservation financial assistance on working land			✓ (✓) X
Increase funding for land retirement by 30 percent			✓ (✓) X
Technical Services Infrastructure			
Ask USDA for action plan and budget for delivering technical assistance to all producers		✓ (✓) X	
Remove cap on use of CCC funds for technical assistance and mandate use of CCC funds for technical and educational assistance in all CCC-funded conservation programs	✓	(✓)	X
Provide training and certification programs to build capacity for delivery of technical assistance by private-sector interests, including producers		✓	(✓) X
Conservation Programs			
<i>Fairness and flexibility</i>			
Expand use of state agreements, like CREP and WHIP, to achieve greater state and local flexibility		✓ (✓)	X
Create a Conservation Partner Fund that allows states to tailor USDA programs to fit state needs and access more funds		✓ (✓)	X
Give producers credit for past conservation efforts in determining program eligibility		✓ (✓) X	
Make all agricultural land eligible for CRP and eliminate cropping history requirement for the continuous CRP sign-up		✓ (✓)	X
Mandate a 5-million-acre goal for buffers and pay higher financial incentives		✓ (✓)	X
<i>Improve priority setting</i>			
Request USDA to provide a plan and budget for ongoing use of the national conservation plan and appraisal process		✓ (✓) X	
Strengthen state technical committees and allow greater flexibility in use of USDA conservation programs at state level		✓ (✓) X	
Reward producers who work collectively on a landscape or watershed basis		✓ (✓) X	
<i>Balance land treatment and retirement</i>			
Allow managed, compatible economic use of CRP acres at reduced rental rates		X	✓ (✓)

parison—"How Does H.R. 2646, The Farm Security Act of 2001, Measure Up?"—acknowledged the increases in funding for existing conservation programs provided by the House Agriculture Committee bill, but it also called attention to other provisions in the measure that threaten to negate much of the benefit of that increased spending. In addition, the comparison showed that H.R. 2646 reinforces the status quo in farm policy generally and takes no steps toward a more universal farm policy based on land stewardship.

In the past week, two legislative amendments to H.R. 2646 have been proposed. The first is a manager's amendment to H.R. 2646, prepared by the committee leadership, that includes several substantive changes, along with minor corrections, in the committee bill. The second is an amendment to H.R. 2646 that will be offered by Representatives Boehlert, Kind, Gilchrest, and Dingell. That amendment, if passed, would replace the conservation title of H.R. 2646 with a new version.*

This report and the table below compare the provisions in

H.R. 2646; the manager's amendment; and the Boehlert, Kind, Gilchrest, Dingell amendment with the recommendations in the "Seeking Common Ground" report. A "step ahead" indicates that the legislative measure includes provisions that make progress toward implementing a recommendation in the SWCS report. A "step back" means the measure includes provisions that take policy or programs in the opposite direction from that recommended in the report. No action in the legislative measure on any recommendation is a "missed opportunity."

The manager's amendment to H.R. 2646 corrects several of the problems noted in our previous report. Both the manager's amendment and the Boehlert, Kind, Gilchrest, Dingell amendment propose changes in policy that are directly related to the recommendations in the "Seeking Common Ground" report. Those policy changes are noted in the table below.

The two amendments diverge most sharply in the level of funding provided for conservation programs (see table on next page). The Boehlert, Kind, Gilchrest, Dingell amendment

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✓ HR 2646, reported by Agriculture Committee	(✓) Manager's Amendment to HR 2646	X Boehlert Amendment to HR 2646

SEEKING COMMON GROUND RECOMMENDATIONS	STEP BACK	MISSED OPPORTUNITY	STEP AHEAD
Require implementation of a comprehensive conservation plan as part of the Farmland Protection Program		✓ (✓) X	
<i>Simplification</i> Emphasize conservation-driven farm and planning and use plan as fast track to financial assistance under all programs		✓ (✓) X	
Provide continuous sign-up for all USDA financial assistance programs or provide coordinated sign-up period for all programs		✓ (✓) X	
Eliminate the bid process in EQIP and rank applications using a conservation index		✓ (✓)	X
Provide automatic EQIP eligibility for key practices and/or priority areas		✓ (✓) X	
<i>Regulatory assurance</i> Encourage states to use a "one-plan" approach to working land conservation and make additional USDA funds available to those that do		✓ (✓) X	
FARM PROGRAM AND POLICY REFORM			
Conservation Compliance Reaffirm the swampbuster policy	✓		(✓) X
Reinstate the super sodbuster provision		✓ (✓) X	
Attach all farm program benefits, including crop insurance, to the compliance provisions		✓ (✓) X	
Extend the soil conservation provisions to non-highly erodible cropland		✓ (✓) X	
New Vision Program Create a new stewardship-based farm and ranch program, with at least \$3 million in annual funding		✓ (✓) X	
State technical committees, conservation districts or other local institutions should determine what conservation practices or systems are needed to earn payments		✓ (✓) X	
Payments should be made to install new practices and maintain existing or new practices		✓ (✓) X	
A minimum set of conservation practices should be required as a condition of eligibility for the stewardship-based program		✓ (✓) X	
The new stewardship-based program should complement and not replace existing USDA conservation programs		✓ (✓) X	

would provide about \$26 billion in CCC funding over the next 10 years for conservation cost-share, incentive, and technical assistance programs, compared to about \$14 billion in CCC funding provided in the manager's amendment. In addition, the Boehlert, Kind, Gilchrest, Dingell amendment authorizes enrollment of 45 million acres in CRP, 2.25 million acres in WRP, and 3 million acres in a new grassland reserve, compared to the 39.2 million acres for CRP, 1.5 million acres for WRP, and 2 million acres for a grassland reserve authorized in the manager's amendment.

The additional conservation spending in the Boehlert, Kind, Gilchrest, Dingell amendment is offset by cutting spending on wheat, feed grains, cotton, rice, and soybean commodity programs by \$1.9 billion each year. The amendment instructs the Secretary of Agriculture to ensure that the cuts in payments are directed at the "10 percent (or, if necessary, such greater percentage as the Secretary may determine) of recipients who would otherwise receive the greatest total payments."

COMPARISON OF CONSERVATION FUNDING

Program	CCC Funding over 10 Years	
	Manager's Amendment to HR 2646	Boehlert Amendment to HR 2646
Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)		
EQIP General Program	\$12,850,000,000	\$9,000,000,000
EQIP-Watershed Program	\$0	\$5,800,000,000
EQIP-Ground and Surface Water Conservation Program	\$555,000,000	\$0
Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)	\$385,000,000	\$3,600,000,000
Farmland Protection Program (FPP)	\$500,000,000	\$4,100,000,000
Conservation of Private Grazing Land (CPGL)	\$0	\$200,000,000
Urban and Community Forestry	\$0	\$500,000,000
Watershed Forestry Initiative	\$0	\$1,100,000,000
Conservation Technical Assistance	\$0	\$2,000,000,000
Conservation Program Performance Review & Evaluation	\$0	\$100,000,000
	\$14,290,000,000	\$26,400,000,000
	Total Acres Authorized	
Program	Manager's Amendment to HR 2646	Boehlert Amendment to HR 2646
Conservation Reserve Program	39,200,000	45,000,000
Wetlands Reserve Program	1,500,000	2,250,000
Grassland Reserve	2,000,000	3,000,000

* Versions of the amendments available when this report was prepared were: (1) manager's amendment September 27, 2001 (7:02 p.m.); (2) Boehlert et al amendment October 1, 2001 (9:54 p.m.).



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