



National Cattlemen's
Beef Association

Conservation & the Farm Bill

NCBA Issue Backgrounder - 2007



NCBA actively supports conservation programs and land stewardship

Cattlemen are true environmentalists. For centuries, we have taken care of our nation's land and resources. Within the Conservation Title of the Farm Bill, NCBA supports working lands programs. Being good stewards of the land not only makes environmental sense, it is fundamental for our industry to remain strong. Conservation of our natural resources is imperative, and we have a vested interest in keeping land healthy and productive, keeping water and air clean, keeping wildlife abundant, and keeping ecosystems diverse.

Farm Bill conservation programs are top priority for cattle producers

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has numerous programs that are currently utilized by cattlemen, and we know that these programs will be a large part of the 2007 Farm Bill. The 2002 Farm Bill provided historic funding for conservation - \$13 billion over six years. For the past few years, programs have been implemented across the country. Cattle producers have made long-term partnerships with the government to conserve our natural resources. The program's goal is to achieve the greatest environmental benefit with the limited resources available.

NCBA 2007 general Farm Bill priorities

Cattle producers support a reduction of the federal deficit while assuring funding for Farm Bill priorities, without agriculture bearing a disproportionate share of the reductions. NCBA believes the Farm Bill should minimize direct federal involvement in agricultural production methods and preserve the individual's right to manage land, water, and resources. Other priorities are providing opportunities for U.S. beef to compete abroad, and support for an equitable farm policy.

Specific 2007 conservation programs

The most popular program among cattlemen is the Environmental Quality Incentive Program, or EQIP. This financial cost-share program rewards and provides incentives to cattle producers for their stewardship. NCBA supports the continuation of the provision that devotes sixty percent of EQIP funds to livestock. NCBA also supports the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP), the Conservation Security Program (CSP), and the Grassland Reserve Program (GRP). GRP has been very successful in helping landowners restore and protect grassland while maintaining the acres for grazing and haying. We support the addition of provisions in the next Farm Bill that will allow more working-lands programs for producers.

KEY PRIORITIES FOR 2007 FARM BILL CONSERVATION PROGRAMS:

- 1** **Increased funding for EQIP, the most popular program for cattlemen.** NCBA supports the continuation of the provision that devotes sixty percent of EQIP funds to livestock. Although popular, EQIP has a few problems we'd like to see addressed in the upcoming Farm Bill. Many ranchers have concerns regarding backlog, time-consuming paperwork, financial penalties, eligibility caps and exclusions. All producers should be afforded equal access to cost share dollars under programs such as EQIP or any other conservation program intended for working lands.
- 2** **Streamlining of Conservation Programs on a larger scale, as well as within the programs.** Right now there are problems of overlapping and a substantial backlog of applications for some conservation programs. Understanding that funding is limited, NCBA supports streamlining on a larger scale, between overlapping programs, as well as within the programs. Streamlined, more user-friendly and efficient programs are key to making the most of taxpayer's dollars. NCBA supports increased funding to provide more producers with financial assistance for conservation practices.
- 3** **Continued funding for the Grassland Reserve Program,** to help conserve our nation's working grasslands. New in the 2002 Farm Bill, GRP proved to be hugely popular. The 2007 Farm Bill should give USDA more flexibility to allow private land trusts to hold and negotiate the terms of GRP easements. Also, we hope the next Farm Bill will allow GRP easements to be transferred to another qualified land trust before it reverts to the government. The interest in conservation from the ranching community is tremendous – we just need more flexibility in current programs to make them workable.

Questions or Comments?

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