



**POSITION  
of the  
WESTERN STATES WATER COUNCIL  
regarding  
FARM BILL CONSERVATION PROGRAMS  
and  
WATER RESOURCES**

**Albuquerque, New Mexico  
October 20, 2017**

**WHEREAS**, water is the lifeblood of the West and this is most apparent in the agricultural sector, which accounts for the predominant share of consumptive water use westwide; and

**WHEREAS**, agriculture sustains many rural economies and provides important employment opportunities both directly and indirectly; and

**WHEREAS**, increasing demands on often scarce water resources and periodic drought threaten the West and its agricultural base and the communities built on that base; and

**WHEREAS**, many agricultural producers in the West rely on irrigation surface water delivery systems that are shared among multiple producers and operated by an irrigation district, canal company, or mutual ditch company, while others rely on overdrafted and/or overallocated groundwater basins; and

**WHEREAS**, maintaining a sustainable agricultural economy in the West requires promoting efficient water use and achieving net water savings, while maximizing production and in some cases assisting in the transition from irrigated to dryland farming; and

**WHEREAS**, U.S. Department of Agriculture conservation programs focus on conservation of ground and surface water resources, as well as reductions in nonpoint source pollution, including nutrients, sediment, pesticides and salinity; and

**WHEREAS**, many agricultural producers in the West voluntarily participate in USDA programs to implement conservation practices that improve water use efficiency, water quality and wildlife habitat; and

**WHEREAS**, the Farm Service Agency (FSA), Rural Development (RD), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and National Water and Climate Center (NWCC) administer many water-related program; and

**WHEREAS**, multiple USDA farm financial assistance programs are particularly important to producers and rural communities, water users and water quality managers, including the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWPP), Environmental Quality Improvement Program (EQIP) and its Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) and Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Program (CRBSCP), and Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), and others such as watershed protection and planning programs; and

**WHEREAS**, special EQIP funding also covers a number of initiatives, including the Drought, Ogallala Aquifer, National Water Quality, Resiliency to Climate Change, and Water Smart Initiatives; and

**WHEREAS**, existing acreage caps and spending and staffing limits are an obstacle to achieving further progress toward food and water supply security and reliability; and

**WHEREAS**, the Western States Water Council (WSWC) supports farm bill funding levels based on need rather than baseline budget targets; and

**WHEREAS**, the WSWC supports collaborative, targeted and voluntary conservation actions to address locally identified farm, range, forest and water resource concerns on private and public lands; and

**WHEREAS**, the WSWC supports actions to address secure water supplies, improved water quality, and drought and wildfire resilience, as well as wildlife habitat conservation and invasive species threats; and

**WHEREAS**, the WSWC supports the role of Conservation Title Programs in providing solutions to resolve water supply reliability, water quality impairments, groundwater recharge, and other water resource concerns facing agricultural water users and agricultural producers; and

**WHEREAS**, the WSWC supports changes to Conservation Title programs that remove existing barriers for western users and producers, and make the Farm Bill's conservation title programs more accessible and relevant and effective in stretching limited water resources; and

**WHEREAS**, the WSWC supports the continued efforts of Rural Development to provide financial assistance for drinking water, wastewater facilities and other services to rural communities.

**NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED**, that the Western States Water Council supports prompt reauthorization of the next Farm Bill (prior to the current bill's 2018 expiration) to provide certainty and stability for farmers, ranchers and water users making long-term decisions that impact not only rural communities, but our Nation's water resources, economy, food security and environment.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the WSWC strongly supports Farm Bill Conservation Programs, raising acreage limitations as appropriate, and providing sufficient funding to address water conservation, flood protection and water quality remediation needs.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the WSWC supports regional cooperative agricultural programs such as EQIP Initiatives, the Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Program, and the Regional Conservation Partnership Program.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that, the WSWC supports the work done by Rural Development to bring clean, safe drinking water and sanitation to rural communities.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the WSWC supports investment in voluntary, incentive-based conservation programs that are implemented in coordination with state and local governmental partners, while providing the maximum flexibility possible and opportunity for innovation to create efficiencies, coordinate funding and achieve real water savings.