



WESTERN STATES WATER COUNCIL

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Web Page: www.westernstateswater.org

August 30, 2018

The Honorable Chairman Mike Conaway
Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives
1301 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Collin Peterson, Ranking Member
Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives
1010 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Pat Roberts, Chairman
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, & Forestry
United States Senate
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC, 20510

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow, Ranking Member
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, & Forestry
United States Senate
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC, 20510

Dear Chairs and Ranking Members:

The Western States Water Council (WSWC) is a government entity created by the governors to advise them on water policy issues. 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. Agriculture sustains many rural economies and communities in the West. Water scarcity and periodic drought impact all water users across the West, but particularly threaten the agricultural sector, which accounts for the predominant share of consumptive water use westwide.

A sustainable agricultural economy requires promoting efficient water use and achieving net water savings, given over drafted groundwater aquifers and increasingly stressed surface streamflows. In some cases, assisting in the transition from irrigated to dryland farming may be necessary, while striving to maximize production. It is also important to address other concerns including non-point source pollution, fish and wildlife habitat, endangered and invasive species, drought and wildfire resilience. Locally-identified concerns should be addressed on a voluntary basis, across public and private lands, in targeted and collaborative ways.

As noted on our attached position, the WSWC supports prompt reauthorization of the 2018 Farm Bill, which contains several key provisions for water conservation, water quality, water supply reliability, and rural assistance for drinking water and wastewater facilities. The National Water and Climate Center's water supply forecasts, snow surveys, soil climate analyses, and other programs are particularly important, and have long been supported by WSWC. The continuation and adequate funding of these programs provides certainty and stability for farmers, ranchers, and water users making long-term decisions that impact rural communities, water resources, the environment, the economy, and food security.

The WSWC strongly supports U.S. Department of Agriculture conservation programs and financial assistance to producers, rural communities, water users, and water quality managers, including: the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and 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. Many agricultural producers in the West voluntarily participate in these programs, benefitting agriculture, the economy, the environment, and the ability of communities to meet increasing demands for adequate supplies of water of suitable quality.

Many of these programs have been reauthorized by both the House and Senate versions of the bills, and overall, the conservation title programs would receive increased funding in the short term. The WSWC supports farm bill funding levels based on need rather than baseline budget targets, and sufficient funding to address water conservation, flood protection and water quality remediation needs.

The WSWC asserts that existing CRP acreage caps, and spending and staffing limits, are an obstacle to achieving further progress toward food and water supply security and reliability. The WSWC supports raising acreage limitations.

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) are important to western states and target financial assistance for important regional initiatives, involving the Colorado River Salinity Control Program (CRBSCP), drought, the Ogallala Aquifer, Water Smart and water quality. We support expanding EQIP to authorize entities with water delivery authority, including states, acequias, water conservancy, irrigation and groundwater management districts and similar entities to deliver EQIP cost share assistance for both on farm and off farm conservation and infrastructure measures.

We also support the Senate modifications to the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act to waive the 250,000-acre limit for regional drought projects, and to waive duplicative watershed planning requirements. This would facilitate use of this program in large watersheds across the West and facilitate water conservation and drought mitigation efforts.

The Council supports financial and technical assistance to producers through the CSP to maintain and improve existing conservation systems and adopt comprehensive conservation activities. Without reauthorization, the current contracts for the enrolled 70 million acres will expire in FY2023.

The Rural Development title includes several provisions for financial and technical assistance. The WSWC supports work to bring clean, safe drinking water and sanitation to rural communities, including funding for the Rural Water and Wastewater Circuit Rider Program, water and wastewater technical assistance, and raising the maximum amount of project financing for water, waste disposal, and wastewater facility grants

The WSWC encourages Congress to ensure sufficient funding for the conservation and rural programs that address water conservation, flood protection, and water quality remediation needs. Again, the WSWC particularly supports investment in voluntary, incentive-based conservation programs that are implemented in coordination with state and local governmental partners. Such programs should provide maximum flexibility and opportunity for innovations to create efficiencies, coordinate funding, and achieve real water savings.

Thank you for your leadership on these issues which are so important to our western states.

Sincerely,



Tony Willardson
Executive Director

Attachment

cc: Farm Bill Conference Committee



**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.