



## THE WESTERN AGRICULTURE AND CONSERVATION COALITION

Throughout the western United States, family farms and ranches have facilitated the conservation and stewardship of the region's natural resources while anchoring the region's rich cultural heritage and identity. It is a landscape and a way of life that works for rural economies and resource conservation. Here, private land stewardship is the key to continued conservation innovation, resource and habitat enhancements, and sustainable working land partnerships. It is a region in which farmers and ranchers have been finding ways to successfully balance resource stewardship and their bottom line, thanks in part to the availability of Farm Bill conservation programs.

Managing water quantity and quality is a key resource concern for the undersigned groups working in the West. The programs and initiatives identified below are key for helping to solve these issues:

### **WACC Farm Bill Priorities**

#### **(1) Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations ("PL-566")**

Modernize the PL-566 program to streamline the review process for Watershed Plans, raise the per-project funding ceiling to \$50 million, increase funding to the program, and prioritize funding for projects that provide multiple benefits to watershed health, rural communities, and agricultural producers, and provide more transparency from NRCS about its administration of the program.

#### **(2) Regional Conservation Partnership Program**

Reduce the administrative burdens and increase the effectiveness of the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) by adopting the granting and contracting processes of the successful Conservation Innovation Grant's On-Farm Conservation Innovation Trials program, simplifying eligibility, and expediting fund delivery to projects. Congress should also prioritize conservation innovation, including projects using outcome-based payments to producers and projects enhancing drought resilience.

#### **(3) Adjusted Gross Income**

Current AGI limitations preclude many family-owned operations from participating in voluntary conservation programs and compromise producers' ability to avail of much-needed disaster

programs. Conservation programs are critical to ensuring the health of our natural environment and access to disaster funding might make the difference for farm survival. We urge Congress to make disaster and federal conservation programs more accessible in the upcoming farm bill by addressing AGI eligibility limitations.

#### **(4) Active Management for Grazing**

Authorize the use of managed grazing as a tool in fine fuels reduction strategies alongside more traditional methods like prescribed burns, mechanical and chemical treatments. Additionally, conservation programs should incentivize and support managed livestock grazing strategies designed to achieve positive ecological outcomes on both private and public land.

#### **(5) Rural Utilities Service Water Programs**

Clarify that loans and grants for water and waste disposal systems can be used to support nature-based solutions to drinking water and wastewater challenges in rural communities.

#### **(6) Fully Fund Core Conservation Programs**

The West's producers rely on Conservation Title funding for a broad range of conservation practices, from modernization of irrigation infrastructure to fencing. The WACC supports full funding for **the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP), PL 566, and RCPP** as particularly important to achieving conservation and rural economic and social goals in the West.

#### **(7) Better, Faster Technical Assistance and Compliance**

Producer demand for technical assistance far outstrips its availability. Contracting, compliance, and reimbursement timelines are too slow. Congress should ensure that an adequate and durable funding source is available for this critical activity. Additionally, improvements to the Technical Service Provider certification process should be considered.

If you have any questions regarding this letter or WACC's activities, please contact Jeff Eisenberg, coalition director, or any of the members of the coalition. Jeff can be reached at [jeffeisenberg@msn.com](mailto:jeffeisenberg@msn.com) or 571.355.3073.