



Memo

To: NACD Officers, Executive Board, Board Members, Presidents and Executive Directors of State/Territory Associations, Members

From: Jeremy Peters, NACD CEO

Date: June 8, 2026

Re: NACD Update on Recent Congressional and Executive Actions

***All NACD updates are accessible on the [members only page](#) of the NACD website. ***

Headlines and Deadlines

- Appropriations
- Farm Bill - history
- USDA Sec. Rollins testifies before the House Ag Committee
- USDA announces \$65 million in Conservation Innovation Grants funding
- USDA announces enrollment period for Assistance for Specialty Crops program
- NRCS announces informational meeting
- BLM proposes Grazing Lands Rule

Action Items:

- Contact your Senators about voting yes on a Farm Bill! *Template included*

Current Events

Appropriations

The House has passed two of the necessary 12 appropriations packages for FY27. Importantly, last week they passed [HR 8646](#), the Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act. This bill eschews parts of the President's budget by continuing to fund important programs like Conservation Technical Assistance and Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations though at slightly lower levels than FY26. Appropriations bills must be reconciled between the House and Senate before they are signed in to law by the President. The Senate Appropriations committee is still hearing testimony related to budget needs and NACD will provide in-depth review of all relevant appropriations decisions as they are passed by the full Congress.

Farm Bill

As the Senate prepares to release language for its version of a Farm Bill, we thought it might be helpful to provide a bit of context on the Conservation Title of the Farm Bill.

The U.S. Farm Bill is a multi-year package of legislation that governs agricultural policy, nutrition programs, conservation, rural development, forestry, research, and energy programs. The modern



National Association of Conservation Districts

Farm Bill traces back to the 1930s, when Congress first responded to the Dust Bowl and Great Depression with programs designed to stabilize farm income and conserve natural resources. Over time, conservation became a central component of the legislation.

Over the past 40 years, Farm Bill conservation programs have evolved from primarily land retirement efforts to a broader system of voluntary, incentive-based conservation on working lands:

- 1985 Farm Bill - Marked a major turning point by creating landmark conservation programs such as the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), Highly Erodible Land Conservation (“Sodbuster”), and Wetland Conservation (“Swampbuster”). These programs significantly reduced soil erosion and protected sensitive lands.
- 1990s Expansion - Conservation efforts broadened to include water quality, wildlife habitat, and watershed protection. Programs increasingly emphasized partnerships with farmers and local conservation districts.
- 2002 & 2008 Farm Bills - Shifted more focus toward “working lands” conservation through programs like the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), helping producers adopt conservation practices while continuing agricultural production.
- 2014 & 2018 Farm Bills - Streamlined conservation programs and expanded support for soil health, forest management, and regional partnerships through programs such as the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP).

Farm Bill conservation programs have had measurable impacts across U.S. agriculture and natural resources:

- Reduced soil erosion by millions of tons annually through conservation tillage, cover crops, buffers, and land retirement.
- Improved water quality by reducing nutrient and sediment runoff into rivers, lakes, and groundwater.
- Restored and protected millions of acres of wetlands, grasslands, and wildlife habitat.
- Increased drought resilience and soil health through improved land management practices.
- Helped producers voluntarily adopt conservation practices while keeping working lands productive.
- Strengthened local conservation delivery through partnerships among USDA NRCS, conservation districts, states, tribes, and producers.
- Expanded agriculture practices that improve water quality, water retention, and long-term farm sustainability.

Today, conservation programs are widely viewed as one of the most successful bipartisan components of the Farm Bill because they combine voluntary participation, local leadership, and practical support for producers while delivering broad public environmental benefits.



Agencies

USDA

USDA Secretary Brooke Rollins appeared before the House Committee on Agriculture to answer questions ranging from changes to SNAP to farm economy and costs to the USDA reorganization. You can watch the hearing [here](#).

NRCS announced \$65 million is now available for grants through the Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) program. For fiscal year 2026, \$50 million will be available for CIG On Farm Trials and the remaining \$15 million for CIG Classic grants. On farm trial priorities are: irrigation water management technologies, nutrient management, grazing lands, and soil health demonstration trials and CIG classic priorities are: water management, conserving ecosystems by managing pest pressure, soil, habitat improvement, and farmer-focused conservation outcomes. The deadline for applications is July 27, 2026.

USDA announced payment rates and the enrollment period for the Assistance for Specialty Crops Farmers (ASCF) program. USDA will issue \$1.625 billion in payments to eligible specialty crop producers in response to elevated input costs and market disruptions resulting from trade practices that impacted specialty crop exports. The enrollment period ends August 7, 2026.

NRCS is holding an [information session](#) on June 29, 2026 for Qualified Individuals interested in learning more about Conservation Evaluation and Monitoring Activity (CEMA) 216 Soil Health Testing which is a requirement of the USDA Regenerative Pilot Program. If you are a Technical Service Provider, Certified Crop Advisor, Certified Professional Agronomist, Certified Professional Soil Scientist, Associate Professional Soil Scientist, or possess an Associate's degree or higher in agriculture or soil science with at least two years of experience collecting soil for laboratory analysis, you may serve as a QI to deliver services to fulfil CEMA 216.

BLM

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has proposed a [Grazing Lands Rule](#) (excluding Alaska) and requests feedback on a number of provisions. The proposed Grazing Lands Rule states two goals - streamlined grazing administration and expanded rangeland health standards. BLM proposes to update definitions, simplify processes and clarify regulatory language. The changes are intended to modernize permitting and management and make it easier for ranchers to respond quickly to changing conditions on the land.

The proposed revisions to BLM's grazing regulations are an attempt to reorganize grazing administration around a land-health framework for public rangelands outside Alaska. The proposed rule includes a section focused on land health¹ and evaluating grazing impacts within the context of

¹ 43 CFR 1700 (proposed rule)



broader landscape-scale conditions, including watershed function, wildlife habitat, riparian health, water quality, drought, wildfire, and invasive species. The proposal seeks to make land-health assessments more systematic and to ensure that grazing management decisions are informed by monitoring data and documented ecological conditions. NACD and BLM recently signed an MOU that BLM and conservation districts will work together to ensure these decisions and ongoing maintenance include local coordination and input.

BLM will host a virtual information session on June 11, 2026, from 5-7 p.m. MT. The comment period for the proposed rule closes on July 13, 2026.

ACTION ITEMS:

Farm Bill:

Contact your congressional representatives in the Senate to voice your support and request theirs for passage of a Farm Bill to ensure producers and other landowners have some certainty in their future. Include a personal anecdote about what Farm Bill programs have meant for you and your local community. The NACD GA Team has developed a [fact sheet and template](#) for your use.