

# **Strengthening Our Investment in Land Stewardship (SOIL Stewardship) Act H.R. 5188**

## **Bill Summary**

The Strengthening our Investment in Land Stewardship (SOIL Stewardship) Act of 2018, introduced by Representative Tim Walz (MN-1), lays out a comprehensive strategy for improving working lands conservation programs that protects natural resources, supports farmers, and enhances the productivity of agricultural lands. This legislation empowers farmers and ranchers to take on high-level conservation activities, and ensures that the 2018 Farm Bill makes impactful investments in our natural resource and the farmers who protect and enhance them.

## **The Importance of Working Lands Conservation**

Privately owned crop, pasture, and rangelands account for nearly half of the landmass in the United States. Given the footprint of agricultural lands, farmers and ranchers understandably have a major role in the management of our shared natural resources. In order to provide producers with the tools they need to protect and enhance the environment, as well as the viability of their own operations, the next farm bill must invest in our two largest working lands conservation programs – the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). Increasing our investment in these programs, as well as making much-needed updates and improvements, will better enable these programs to provide farmers with the tools they need to protect and rebuild soil, improve irrigation management, provide clean water, and enhance wildlife habitat.

The SOIL Stewardship Act will invest in conservation on agricultural lands by:

### **Ensuring working lands conservation programs can support the growing demand for financial and technical conservation assistance:**

- Maintain annual enrollment for CSP at 10 million new acres each year.
- Maintain funding for EQIP at \$1.75 billion per year, and establish a coordinated payment limit for the management components of EQIP and CSP.
- Allow for multiple CSP contract renewals, provided continual conservation improvements.

**Increasing program accessibility by enhancing coordination between programs and encouraging higher levels of stewardship:**

- Establish a clear coordination process through which participants can easily graduate from EQIP to CSP (when eligibility qualifications have been met).
- Provide coordinated application, planning, and enrollment, as well as coordinated initiatives for soil health, wildlife habitat, and organic by streamlining the administration of EQIP and CSP.

**Ensuring payments reflect the farmer investment and conservation benefits resulting from the adoption of key practices and programs:**

- Increase the average CSP payment rate to \$23 per acre to incentivize high-level conservation
- Provide supplemental CSP payments for high level conservation activities – including resource conserving crop rotations and management intensive rotational grazing, as well as payments for comprehensive conservation planning and an incentive for cover crop adoption
- Adjust EQIP payments to provide higher cost share rates for practices that involve active conservation management, lower the payment rate for structural practices
- Codify the CSP minimum payment of \$1,500 to ensure incentive for operations of all sizes

**Increasing conservation support for historically underserved participants:**

- Increase beginning and socially disadvantaged farmer participation by increasing the set-aside from 5 to 15 percent within both EQIP and CSP.
- Simplify the EQIP Advance Payment Option to ensure automatic enrollment for both beginners and socially disadvantaged farmers.

*All Members are encouraged to co-sponsor the Strengthening our Investment in Land Stewardship Act.*

*For more information or to co-sponsor, please contact: Alison Titus at (202) 225-2472 or [Alison.Titus@mail.house.gov](mailto:Alison.Titus@mail.house.gov) or Alyssa Charney at [acharney@sustainableagriculture.net](mailto:acharney@sustainableagriculture.net)*