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FACT SHEET:

Federal Conservation Programs Strengthen America's Farmers, Ranchers, & National Security

From the very beginning, farmers and ranchers have been fundamental to America's prosperity and independence, producing the food, fuel, and fiber that powers our great nation and the world. **The hard work farmers do each day has never been more important – however, our farmers are currently facing a variety of tough challenges that threaten their ability to do their jobs.**

Costs remain high for critical inputs – like the seeds, fertilizer, labor, and machinery that are needed to grow, maintain, and harvest their bounty. At the same time, **prices for key crops like corn, soybeans, and wheat are volatile**, leaving farmers at wits' end as to how they will be able to pay their bills and adequately plan for the future. In addition, **extreme weather has become more and more frequent**, with droughts, floods, wildfires, and heat waves causing devastating losses for farmers. **From 1980–2024, 36 confirmed weather disaster events impacted South Dakota with losses exceeding \$1 billion each.**

Farmers need every tool available to help them withstand and overcome such challenges. To this end, federal conservation programs administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) – such as the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), and Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) are critical to allowing them to do so. **These programs are voluntary, locally led, and empower farmers to invest in smart land management practices that improve productivity, reduce input costs, and make their operations more resilient to droughts, floods, and supply chain shocks.**



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For example:

- Farmers who implement **no-till farming** can **improve soil health while also reducing annual fuel and labor investments.**
- Through **regenerative grazing**, ranchers **can build soil health, reduce nutrient loss, reduce farm inputs, and diversify farm income.**
- **Crop rotation** reduces the need for some chemical inputs **by balancing soil nutrients and limiting pests.**

Conservation is also a matter of national security. A strong, independent food system depends on healthy land and water. **If we want to reduce our reliance on foreign commodities and keep American agriculture competitive, we must protect the natural resources that power it.** For example, a **recent report** by the American Farm Bureau Federation noted that total losses to crops and rangeland from major 2024 weather and fire events exceeded \$20.3 billion. **By making farms and ranches more resilient, conservation practices help mitigate these losses.**

These conservation programs are incredibly popular in rural America. **Thanks to additional funding allocated by Congress in 2022, nearly \$4 billion in conservation assistance was provided that has helped more than 28,500 farmers and ranchers apply conservation practices,** on top of the conservation assistance USDA provides through Farm Bill funding. However, even with the increased funding made available by Congress to allow more farmers to take advantage of these conservation practices, **USDA was not able to fund nearly 64% of the applications received for EQIP, CSP, and ACEP in fiscal year 2024.**

Recent federal legislation that was passed and signed into law included a provision that significantly **boosted long-term federal funding** for conservation programs for American producers. South Dakota producers will have access to additional funding to help them implement transformational conservation practices that cut costs, increase production, bolster the resiliency of their operation to extreme weather and more. However, **South Dakotan producers' access to these critical conservation programs remains in jeopardy.**



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For instance:

- The Trump Administration is proposing a **cut of \$776.5 million to conservation technical assistance** in the President's proposed budget for Fiscal Year (FY) 2026.
- The House Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies is **proposing around a 9% cut in conservation technical assistance.**
- In addition, **staff cuts at the Natural Resources Conservation Service** - which may be exacerbated by USDA's recent **proposed reorganization announcement** - **would further compound threats to the Department's ability to deliver NRCS's critical conservation programs to the American producers who rely on them.**
- **Federal funding freezes** and **conservation contract recissions** create uncertainty for producers who are relying on these resources to strengthen their operations.

It's clear - if America is to continue to support the success, resilience, and vitality of its farmers, strengthen its national security, and remain independent, our leaders must continue to support funding for federal conservation programs.

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