



## Conservation Compliance and Sodsaver

### CONSERVATION COMPLIANCE OVERVIEW

- Since 1985, eligibility for most federal farm programs has been linked to standard soil and wetlands conservation practices.
- Compliance seeks to reduce soil loss on highly erodible lands (HEL) and to protect wetlands for their multiple benefits.
- Farmers can be ineligible for farm programs for planting on former wetlands or draining a wetland to enable crop production without mitigation.
- On HELs, farmers can become ineligible for planting without a conservation plan that maintains conservation practices intended to reduce soil loss
- Between 1982 and 1997, soil erosion in the U.S. declined by more than one-third, roughly 1.1 billion tons per year.

### A CRITICAL LINKAGE

- Farming practices within grasslands, wetlands and HELs have long-term impacts on water quality and flood protection and significantly alter populations of waterfowl, upland game, and other fish and wildlife species dependent upon these natural systems.
- The linkage of conservation compliance and crop insurance, along with a strong Sodsaver program, is critical for the long-term protection of native grasslands, wetlands and highly erodible lands. Without these conservation protections, farmers lack incentives to provide protections for these natural systems, particularly during high crop price cycles.



## AWWG Recommendations

- Retain linkage between compliance and crop insurance.
- Strengthen compliance monitoring, enforcement, and reporting activities.
- Provide sufficient technical assistance funds for NRCS to improve wetland determination quality, accuracy, and timeliness.
- Oppose public subsidizing of private agricultural wetlands drainage.
- Remove barriers within crop insurance for farmers who want to adopt conservation practices, such as cover cropping.

**For more information, please visit [www.trcp.org/farmbill](http://www.trcp.org/farmbill)  
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### **SODSAVER OVERVIEW**

- Established in 2014, Sodsaver protects native grasslands from conversion to agricultural production in 6 states in the Midwest prairie pothole region (IA, MN, MT, NE, ND, SD).
- Reduces federal crop insurance subsidy by 50 percentage points for four years on land converted from native prairie to new cropland.
- Grassland conversion, or 'sodbusting,' is a major threat to upland bird habitat, as well as to sage grouse habitat in Montana and the Dakotas.

### **SODSAVER IMPACT**

- A recent University of Illinois study in the Journal of Agricultural and Resource Economics assessed Sodsaver's effects on grassland protection in 17 counties in South Dakota's prairie potholes region, where waterfowl and other wildlife are abundant and where grassland conversion is a major environmental concern.
- The study estimates Sodsaver can reduce grassland conversion between 0.4% - 6.9% of total grassland area, largely depending on crop prices. With the decline in commodity prices from historical highs in 2008-2011, Sodsaver's current impact may be strong in influencing landowners' conversion decisions, and thus in determining the extent of America's grasslands.

## **AWWG Recommendations: Sodsaver**

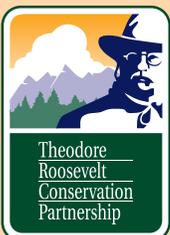
- Expand Sodsaver nationwide, covering native grasslands, rangelands, and prairie
- Close the 'alfalfa loophole'
- Improve NRCS data collection on grasslands loss

### **ALIGNING CROP INSURANCE AND CONSERVATION OVERVIEW**

- Better aligning crop insurance with conservation is a win-win for both farmers and the environment.
- Conservation practices provide farmers with a number of benefits including the ability to reduce yield variability and increase yields over time, providing farmers with an effective risk management strategy.
- Conservation practices also have well-established benefits including improved water quality, soil health and improved fish and wildlife habitat.

## **Additional AWWG Recommendations**

- Create a pilot program or study that incorporates soil type data, measurable soil quality data, and other factors as appropriate into crop insurance risk ratings to assess the correlation between soil type, soil health, and yield risk.
- Direct the Risk Management Agency (RMA) to coordinate with NRCS and other agencies to fully remove barriers within crop insurance for farmers who want to adopt conservation practices such as cover cropping.



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