

## **99-198 - Food Security Act of 1985**

[P.L. 99–198, 99 Stat. 1504, Dec. 23, 1985]

[As Amended Through P.L. 119–21, Enacted July 4, 2025]

【Currency: This publication is a compilation of the text of Public Law 99-198. It was last amended by the public law listed in the As Amended Through note above and below at the bottom of each page of the pdf version and reflects current law through the date of the enactment of the public law listed at <https://www.govinfo.gov/app/collection/comps/>】

【Note: While this publication does not represent an official version of any Federal statute, substantial efforts have been made to ensure the accuracy of its contents. The official version of Federal law is found in the United States Statutes at Large and in the United States Code. The legal effect to be given to the Statutes at Large and the United States Code is established by statute (1 U.S.C. 112, 204).】

### SHORT TITLE

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## TITLE I—DAIRY

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## DOMESTIC CASEIN INDUSTRY

SEC. 105. [7 U.S.C. 1446c–2] (a) The Commodity Credit Corporation shall provide surplus stocks of nonfat dry milk of not less than 1,000,000 pounds annually to individuals or entities on a bid basis.

(b) The Commodity Credit Corporation may accept bids at lower than the resale price otherwise required by law, in order to promote the strengthening of the domestic casein industry.

(c) The Commodity Credit Corporation shall take appropriate action to ensure that the nonfat dry milk sold by the Corporation under this section is used only for the manufacture of casein.

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## TITLE X—GENERAL COMMODITY PROVISIONS

## SEC. 1001. [7 U.S.C. 1308] PAYMENT LIMITATIONS.

(a) DEFINITIONS.—In this section through section 1001F:

(1) COVERED COMMODITY.—The term “covered commodity” has the meaning given that term in section 1111 of the Agricultural Act of 2014 (7 U.S.C. 9011).

(2) FAMILY MEMBER.—The term “family member” means a person to whom a member in the farming operation is related as lineal ancestor, lineal descendant, sibling, first cousin, niece, nephew, spouse, or otherwise by marriage.

(3) LEGAL ENTITY.—The term “legal entity” means an entity that is created under Federal or State law and that—

(A) owns land or an agricultural commodity; or

(B) produces an agricultural commodity.

(4) PERSON.—The term “person” means a natural person, and does not include a legal entity.

(5) QUALIFIED PASS-THROUGH ENTITY.—The term “qualified pass-through entity” means—

(A) a partnership (within the meaning of subchapter K of chapter 1 of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986);

(B) an S corporation (as defined in section 1361 of that Code);

(C) a limited liability company that does not affirmatively elect to be treated as a corporation; and

(D) a joint venture or general partnership.

(6) SECRETARY.—The term “Secretary” means the Secretary of Agriculture.

(b) LIMITATION ON PAYMENTS FOR COVERED COMMODITIES (OTHER THAN PEANUTS).—Subject to subsection (i), the total amount of payments received, directly or indirectly, by a person or legal entity (except a qualified pass-through entity) for any crop year under sections 1116 and 1117 of the Agricultural Act of 2014 (7 U.S.C. 9016, 9017) (other than for peanuts) may not exceed \$155,000.

(c) LIMITATION ON PAYMENTS FOR PEANUTS.—Subject to subsection (i), the total amount of payments received, directly or indirectly, by a person or legal entity (except a qualified pass-through

entity) for any crop year under sections 1116 and 1117 of the Agricultural Act of 2014 (7 U.S.C. 9016, 9017) for peanuts may not exceed \$155,000.

(d) **LIMITATION ON APPLICABILITY.**—Nothing in this section authorizes any limitation on any benefit associated with the forfeiture of a commodity pledged as collateral for a loan made available under title I of the Agricultural Act of 2014.

(e) **ATTRIBUTION OF PAYMENTS.**—

(1) **IN GENERAL.**—In implementing subsections (b) and (c) and a program described in paragraphs (1)(C) and (2)(B) of section 1001D(b), the Secretary shall issue such regulations as are necessary to ensure that the total amount of payments are attributed to a person by taking into account the direct and indirect ownership interests of the person in a legal entity that is eligible to receive the payments.

(2) **PAYMENTS TO A PERSON.**—Each payment made directly to a person shall be combined with the pro rata interest of the person in payments received by a legal entity in which the person has a direct or indirect ownership interest unless the payments of the legal entity have been reduced by the pro rata share of the person.

(3) **PAYMENTS TO A LEGAL ENTITY.**—

(A) **IN GENERAL.**—Each payment made to a legal entity shall be attributed to those persons who have a direct or indirect ownership interest in the legal entity unless the payment to the legal entity has been reduced by the pro rata share of the person.

(B) **ATTRIBUTION OF PAYMENTS.**—

(i) **PAYMENT LIMITS.**—Except as provided in clause (ii), payments made to a legal entity shall not exceed the amounts specified in subsections (b) and (c).

(ii) **EXCEPTION FOR QUALIFIED PASS-THROUGH ENTITIES.**—Payments made to a qualified pass-through entity shall not exceed, for each payment specified in subsections (b) and (c), the amount determined by multiplying the maximum payment amount specified in subsections (b) and (c) by the number of persons and legal entities (other than qualified pass-through entities) that comprise the ownership of the qualified pass-through entity.

(iii) **REDUCTION.**—Payments made to a legal entity shall be reduced proportionately by an amount that represents the direct or indirect ownership in the legal entity by any person or legal entity that has otherwise exceeded the applicable maximum payment limitation.

(4) **4 LEVELS OF ATTRIBUTION FOR EMBEDDED LEGAL ENTITIES.**—

(A) **IN GENERAL.**—Attribution of payments made to legal entities shall be traced through 4 levels of ownership in legal entities.

(B) **FIRST LEVEL.**—Any payments made to a legal entity (a first-tier legal entity) that is owned in whole or in part by a person shall be attributed to the person in an

amount that represents the direct ownership in the first-tier legal entity by the person.

(C) SECOND LEVEL.—

(i) IN GENERAL.—Any payments made to a first-tier legal entity that is owned (in whole or in part) by another legal entity (a second-tier legal entity) shall be attributed to the second-tier legal entity in proportion to the ownership of the second-tier legal entity in the first-tier legal entity.

(ii) OWNERSHIP BY A PERSON.—If the second-tier legal entity is owned (in whole or in part) by a person, the amount of the payment made to the first-tier legal entity shall be attributed to the person in the amount that represents the indirect ownership in the first-tier legal entity by the person.

(D) THIRD AND FOURTH LEVELS.—

(i) IN GENERAL.—Except as provided in clause (ii), the Secretary shall attribute payments at the third and fourth tiers of ownership in the same manner as specified in subparagraph (C).

(ii) FOURTH-TIER OWNERSHIP.—If the fourth-tier of ownership is that of a fourth-tier legal entity and not that of a person, the Secretary shall reduce the amount of the payment to be made to the first-tier legal entity in the amount that represents the indirect ownership in the first-tier legal entity by the fourth-tier legal entity.

(f) SPECIAL RULES.—

(1) MINOR CHILDREN.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—Except as provided in subparagraph (B), payments received by a child under the age of 18 shall be attributed to the parents of the child.

(B) REGULATIONS.—The Secretary shall issue regulations specifying the conditions under which payments received by a child under the age of 18 will not be attributed to the parents of the child.

(2) MARKETING COOPERATIVES.—Subsections (b) and (c) shall not apply to a cooperative association of producers with respect to commodities produced by the members of the association that are marketed by the association on behalf of the members of the association but shall apply to the producers as persons.

(3) TRUSTS AND ESTATES.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—With respect to irrevocable trusts and estates, the Secretary shall administer this section through section 1001F in such manner as the Secretary determines will ensure the fair and equitable treatment of the beneficiaries of the trusts and estates.

(B) IRREVOCABLE TRUST.—

(i) IN GENERAL.—In order for a trust to be considered an irrevocable trust, the terms of the trust agreement shall not—

(I) allow for modification or termination of the trust by the grantor;

(II) allow for the grantor to have any future, contingent, or remainder interest in the corpus of the trust; or

(III) except as provided in clause (ii), provide for the transfer of the corpus of the trust to the remainder beneficiary in less than 20 years beginning on the date the trust is established.

(ii) EXCEPTION.—Clause (i)(III) shall not apply in a case in which the transfer is—

(I) contingent on the remainder beneficiary achieving at least the age of majority; or

(II) contingent on the death of the grantor or income beneficiary.

(C) REVOCABLE TRUST.—For the purposes of this section through section 1001F, a revocable trust shall be considered to be the same person as the grantor of the trust.

(4) CASH RENT TENANTS.—

(A) DEFINITION.—In this paragraph, the term “cash rent tenant” means a person or legal entity that rents land—

(i) for cash; or

(ii) for a crop share guaranteed as to the amount of the commodity to be paid in rent.

(B) RESTRICTION.—A cash rent tenant who makes a significant contribution of active personal management, but not of personal labor, with respect to a farming operation shall be eligible to receive a payment described in subsection (b) or (c) only if the tenant makes a significant contribution of equipment to the farming operation.

(5) FEDERAL AGENCIES.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—Notwithstanding subsection (d), a Federal agency shall not be eligible to receive any payment, benefit, or loan under title I of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008, title I of the Agricultural Act of 2014, or title XII of this Act.

(B) LAND RENTAL.—A lessee of land owned by a Federal agency may receive a payment described in subsection (b), (c), or (d) if the lessee otherwise meets all applicable criteria.

(6) STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—Notwithstanding subsection (d), except as provided in subsection (g), a State or local government, or political subdivision or agency of the government, shall not be eligible to receive any payment, benefit, or loan under title I of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008, title I of the Agricultural Act of 2014, or title XII of this Act.

(B) TENANTS.—A lessee of land owned by a State or local government, or political subdivision or agency of the government, may receive payments described in subsections (b), (c), and (d) if the lessee otherwise meets all applicable criteria.

(7) CHANGES IN FARMING OPERATIONS.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—In the administration of this section through section 1001F, the Secretary may not approve any change in a farming operation that otherwise will increase the number of persons to which the limitations under this section are applied unless the Secretary determines that the change is bona fide and substantive.

(B) FAMILY MEMBERS.—The addition of a family member to a farming operation under the criteria set out in section 1001A shall be considered a bona fide and substantive change in the farming operation.

(8) DEATH OF OWNER.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—If any ownership interest in land or a commodity is transferred as the result of the death of a program participant, the new owner of the land or commodity may, if the person is otherwise eligible to participate in the applicable program, succeed to the contract of the prior owner and receive payments subject to this section without regard to the amount of payments received by the new owner.

(B) LIMITATIONS ON PRIOR OWNER.—Payments made under this paragraph shall not exceed the amount to which the previous owner was entitled to receive under the terms of the contract at the time of the death of the prior owner.

(9) ADMINISTRATION OF REDUCTION.—The Secretary shall apply any order described in section 1614(d)(1) of the Agricultural Act of 2014 (7 U.S.C. 9097(d)(1)) to payments under sections 1116 and 1117 of that Act (7 U.S.C. 9016, 9017) prior to applying payment limitations under this section.

(g) PUBLIC SCHOOLS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Notwithstanding subsection (f)(6)(A), a State or local government, or political subdivision or agency of the government, shall be eligible, subject to the limitation in paragraph (2), to receive a payment described in subsection (b) or (c) for land owned by the State or local government, or political subdivision or agency of the government, that is used to maintain a public school.

(2) LIMITATION.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—For each State, the total amount of payments described in subsections (b) and (c) that are received collectively by the State and local government and all political subdivisions or agencies of those governments shall not exceed \$500,000.

(B) EXCEPTION.—The limitation in subparagraph (A) shall not apply to States with a population of less than 1,500,000.”.

(h) TIME LIMITS; RELIANCE.—Regulations of the Secretary shall establish time limits for the various steps involved with notice, hearing, decision, and the appeals procedure in order to ensure expeditious handling and settlement of payment limitation disputes. Notwithstanding any other provision of law, actions taken by an individual or other entity in good faith on action or advice of an authorized representative of the Secretary may be accepted as meeting the requirement under this section or section 1001A, to the ex-



tent the Secretary deems it desirable in order to provide fair and equitable treatment.

(i) **ADJUSTMENT.**—For the 2025 crop year and each crop year thereafter, the Secretary shall annually adjust the amounts described in subsections (b) and (c) for inflation based on the Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers published by the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the Department of Labor.

**SEC. 1001A. [7 U.S.C. 1308–1] NOTIFICATION OF INTERESTS; PAYMENTS LIMITED TO ACTIVE FARMERS.**

(a) **NOTIFICATION OF INTERESTS.**—To facilitate administration of section 1001 and this section, each person or legal entity receiving payments described in subsections (b) and (c) of section 1001 as a separate person or legal entity shall separately provide to the Secretary, at such times and in such manner as prescribed by the Secretary—

(1) the name and social security number of each person, or the name and taxpayer identification number of each legal entity, that holds or acquires an ownership interest in the separate person or legal entity; and

(2) the name and taxpayer identification number of each legal entity in which the person or legal entity holds an ownership interest.

(b) **ACTIVELY ENGAGED.**—

(1) **IN GENERAL.**—To be eligible to receive a payment described in subsection (b) or (c) of section 1001, a person or legal entity shall be actively engaged in farming with respect to a farming operation as provided in this subsection or subsection (c).

(2) **CLASSES ACTIVELY ENGAGED.**—Except as provided in subsections (c) and (d)—

(A) a person (including a person participating in a farming operation as a partner in a qualified pass-through entity, a grantor of a revocable trust, or a participant in a similar entity, as determined by the Secretary) shall be considered to be actively engaged in farming with respect to a farming operation if—

(i) the person makes a significant contribution (based on the total value of the farming operation) to the farming operation of—

(I) capital, equipment, or land; and

(II) personal labor or active personal management;

(ii) the person's share of the profits or losses from the farming operation is commensurate with the contributions of the person to the farming operation; and

(iii) the contributions of the person are at risk;

(B) a legal entity that is a corporation, joint stock company, association, limited partnership, charitable organization, or other similar entity determined by the Secretary (including any such legal entity participating in the farming operation as a partner in a qualified pass-through entity, a grantor of a revocable trust, or as a participant in a similar legal entity as determined by the Secretary) shall

be considered as actively engaged in farming with respect to a farming operation if—

(i) the legal entity separately makes a significant contribution (based on the total value of the farming operation) of capital, equipment, or land;

(ii) the stockholders or members collectively make a significant contribution of personal labor or active personal management to the operation; and

(iii) the standards provided in clauses (ii) and (iii) of subparagraph (A), as applied to the legal entity, are met by the legal entity;

(C) if a legal entity that is a qualified pass-through entity or a similar entity, as determined by the Secretary, separately makes a significant contribution (based on the total value of the farming operation involved) of capital, equipment, or land, and the standards provided in clauses (ii) and (iii) of subparagraph (A), as applied to the legal entity, are met by the legal entity, the partners or members making a significant contribution of personal labor or active personal management shall be considered to be actively engaged in farming with respect to the farming operation involved; and

(D) in making determinations under this subsection regarding equipment and personal labor, the Secretary shall take into consideration the equipment and personal labor normally and customarily provided by farm operators in the area involved to produce program crops.

(c) SPECIAL CLASSES ACTIVELY ENGAGED.—

(1) LANDOWNER.—A person or legal entity that is a landowner contributing the owned land to a farming operation shall be considered to be actively engaged in farming with respect to the farming operation if—

(A) the landowner receives rent or income for the use of the land based on the production on the land or the operating results of the operation; and

(B) the person or legal entity meets the standards provided in clauses (ii) and (iii) of subsection (b)(2)(A).

(2) ADULT FAMILY MEMBER.—If a majority of the participants in a farming operation are family members, an adult family member shall be considered to be actively engaged in farming with respect to the farming operation if the person—

(A) makes a significant contribution, based on the total value of the farming operation, of active personal management or personal labor; and

(B) with respect to such contribution, meets the standards provided in clauses (ii) and (iii) of subsection (b)(2)(A).

(3) SHARECROPPER.—A sharecropper who makes a significant contribution of personal labor to a farming operation shall be considered to be actively engaged in farming with respect to the farming operation if the contribution meets the standards provided in clauses (ii) and (iii) of subsection (b)(2)(A).

(4) GROWERS OF HYBRID SEED.—In determining whether a person or legal entity growing hybrid seed under contract shall be considered to be actively engaged in farming, the Secretary

shall not take into consideration the existence of a hybrid seed contract.

(5) CUSTOM FARMING SERVICES.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—A person or legal entity receiving custom farming services shall be considered separately eligible for payment limitation purposes if the person or legal entity is actively engaged in farming based on subsection (b)(2) or paragraphs (1) through (4) of this subsection.

(B) PROHIBITION.—No other rules with respect to custom farming shall apply.

(6) SPOUSE.—If 1 spouse (or estate of a deceased spouse) is determined to be actively engaged, the other spouse shall be determined to have met the requirements of subsection (b)(2)(A)(i)(II).

(d) CLASSES NOT ACTIVELY ENGAGED.—

(1) CASH RENT LANDLORD.—A landlord contributing land to a farming operation shall not be considered to be actively engaged in farming with respect to the farming operation if the landlord receives cash rent, or a crop share guaranteed as to the amount of the commodity to be paid in rent, for the use of the land.

(2) OTHER PERSONS AND LEGAL ENTITIES.—Any other person or legal entity that the Secretary determines does not meet the standards described in subsections (b)(2) and (c) shall not be considered to be actively engaged in farming with respect to a farming operation.

**SEC. 1001B. [7 U.S.C. 1308–2] DENIAL OF PROGRAM BENEFITS.**

(a) 2-YEAR DENIAL OF PROGRAM BENEFITS.—A person or legal entity shall be ineligible to receive payments specified in subsections (b) and (c) of section 1001 for the crop year, and the succeeding crop year, in which the Secretary determines that the person or legal entity—

(1) failed to comply with section 1001A(b) and adopted or participated in adopting a scheme or device to evade the application of section 1001, 1001A, or 1001C; or

(2) intentionally concealed the interest of the person or legal entity in any farm or legal entity engaged in farming.

(b) EXTENDED INELIGIBILITY.—If the Secretary determines that a person or legal entity, for the benefit of the person or legal entity or the benefit of any other person or legal entity, has knowingly engaged in, or aided in the creation of a fraudulent document, failed to disclose material information relevant to the administration of sections 1001 through 1001F, or committed other equally serious actions (as identified in regulations issued by the Secretary), the Secretary may for a period not to exceed 5 crop years deny the issuance of payments to the person or legal entity.

(c) PRO RATA DENIAL.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Payments otherwise owed to a person or legal entity described in subsections (a) or (b) shall be denied in a pro rata manner based on the ownership interest of the person or legal entity in a farm.

(2) CASH RENT TENANT.—Payments otherwise payable to a person or legal entity shall be denied in a pro rata manner if

the person or legal entity is a cash rent tenant on a farm owned or under the control of a person or legal entity with respect to which a determination has been made under subsection (a) or (b).

(d) **JOINT AND SEVERAL LIABILITY.**—Any legal entity (including qualified pass-through entities) and any member of any legal entity determined to have knowingly participated in a scheme or device to evade, or that has the purpose of evading, sections 1001, 1001A, or 1001C shall be jointly and severally liable for any amounts that are payable to the Secretary as the result of the scheme or device (including amounts necessary to recover those amounts).

(e) **RELEASE.**—The Secretary may partially or fully release from liability any person or legal entity who cooperates with the Secretary in enforcing sections 1001, 1001A, and 1001C, and this section.

**SEC. 1001C. [7 U.S.C. 1308-3] FOREIGN PERSONS MADE INELIGIBLE FOR PROGRAM BENEFITS.**

Notwithstanding any other provision of law:

(a) **IN GENERAL.**—Any person who is not a citizen of the United States or an alien lawfully admitted into the United States for permanent residence under the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1101 et seq.) shall be ineligible to receive any type of loans or payments made available under title I of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008, title I of the Agricultural Act of 2014, the Agricultural Market Transition Act, the Commodity Credit Corporation Charter Act (15 U.S.C. 714 et seq.), or subtitle D of title XII of the Food Security Act of 1985 (16 U.S.C. 3831 et seq.), or under any contract entered into under title XII, with respect to any commodity produced, or land set aside from production, on a farm that is owned or operated by such person, unless such person is an individual who is providing land, capital, and a substantial amount of personal labor in the production of crops on such farm.

(b) **CORPORATION OR OTHER ENTITIES.**—For purposes of subsection (a), a corporation or other entity shall be considered a person that is ineligible for production adjustment payments, price support program loans, payments, or benefits if more than 10 percent of the beneficial ownership of the entity is held by persons who are not citizens of the United States or aliens lawfully admitted into the United States for permanent residence under the Immigration and Nationality Act, unless such persons provide a substantial amount of personal labor in the production of crops on such farm. Notwithstanding the foregoing provisions of this subsection, with respect to an entity that is determined to be ineligible to receive such payments, loans, or other benefits, the Secretary may make payments, loans, and other benefits in an amount determined by the Secretary to be representative of the percentage interests of the entity that is owned by citizens of the United States and aliens lawfully admitted into the United States for permanent residence under the Immigration and Nationality Act.

(c) **PROSPECTIVE APPLICATION.**—No person shall become ineligible under this section for production adjustment payments, price support program loans, payments or benefits as the result of the production of a crop of an agricultural commodity planted, or com-

modity program or conservation reserve contract entered into, before, the date of the enactment of this section.

**SEC. 1001D. [7 U.S.C. 1308-3a] ADJUSTED GROSS INCOME LIMITATION.**

(a) DEFINITIONS.—

(1) AVERAGE ADJUSTED GROSS INCOME.—In this section, the term “average adjusted gross income”, with respect to a person or legal entity, means the average of the adjusted gross income or comparable measure of the person or legal entity over the 3 taxable years preceding the most immediately preceding complete taxable year, as determined by the Secretary.

(2) SPECIAL RULES FOR CERTAIN PERSONS AND LEGAL ENTITIES.—In the case of a legal entity that is not required to file a Federal income tax return or a person or legal entity that did not have taxable income in 1 or more of the taxable years used to determine the average under paragraph (1), the Secretary shall provide, by regulation, a method for determining the average adjusted gross income of the person or legal entity for purposes of this section.

(3) ALLOCATION OF INCOME.—On the request of any person filing a joint tax return, the Secretary shall provide for the allocation of average adjusted gross income among the persons filing the return if—

(A) the person provides a certified statement by a certified public accountant or attorney that specifies the method by which the average adjusted gross income would have been declared and reported had the persons filed 2 separate returns; and

(B) the Secretary determines that the method described in the statement is consistent with the information supporting the filed joint tax return.

(b) LIMITATIONS ON COMMODITY AND CONSERVATION PROGRAMS.—

(1) LIMITATION.—Notwithstanding any other provision of law, subject to paragraphs (3) and (4), a person or legal entity shall not be eligible to receive any benefit described in paragraph (2) during a crop, fiscal, or program year, as appropriate, if the average adjusted gross income of the person or legal entity exceeds \$900,000.

(2) COVERED BENEFITS.—Paragraph (1) applies with respect to the following:

(A) A payment or benefit under subtitle A or E of title I of the Agricultural Act of 2014.

(B) A marketing loan gain or loan deficiency payment under subtitle B of title I of the Agricultural Act of 2014.

(C) Starting with fiscal year 2015, a payment or benefit under title II of the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018, title II of the Agricultural Act of 2014, title II of the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002, title II of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008, or title XII of the Food Security Act of 1985.

(D) A payment or benefit under section 524(b) of the Federal Crop Insurance Act (7 U.S.C. 1524(b)).

(E) A payment or benefit under section 196 of the Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act of 1996 (7 U.S.C. 7333).

(3) WAIVER.—The Secretary may waive the limitation established by paragraph (1) with respect to a payment pursuant to a covered benefit described in paragraph (2)(C), on a case-by-case basis, if the Secretary determines that environmentally sensitive land of special significance would be protected as a result of such waiver.

(4) EXCEPTION FOR CERTAIN OPERATIONS.—

(A) DEFINITIONS.—In this paragraph:

(i) EXCEPTED PAYMENT OR BENEFIT.—The term “excepted payment or benefit” means—

(I) a payment or benefit under subtitle E of title I of the Agricultural Act of 2014 (7 U.S.C. 9081 et seq.);

(II) a payment or benefit under section 196 of the Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act of 1996 (7 U.S.C. 7333); and

(III) a payment or benefit described in paragraph (2)(C) received on or after October 1, 2024.

(ii) FARMING, RANCHING, OR SILVICULTURE ACTIVITIES.—The term “farming, ranching, or silviculture activities” includes agri-tourism, direct-to-consumer marketing of agricultural products, the sale of agricultural equipment owned by the person or legal entity, and other agriculture-related activities, as determined by the Secretary.

(B) EXCEPTION.—In the case of an excepted payment or benefit, the limitation established by paragraph (1) shall not apply to a person or legal entity during a crop, fiscal, or program year, as appropriate, if greater than or equal to 75 percent of the average gross income of the person or legal entity derives from farming, ranching, or silviculture activities.

(c) ENFORCEMENT.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—To comply with subsection (b), at least once every 3 years a person or legal entity shall provide to the Secretary—

(A) a certification by a certified public accountant or another third party that is acceptable to the Secretary that the average adjusted gross income of the person or legal entity does not exceed the applicable limitation specified in that subsection; or

(B) information and documentation regarding the average adjusted gross income of the person or legal entity through other procedures established by the Secretary.

(2) DENIAL OF PROGRAM BENEFITS.—If the Secretary determines that a person or legal entity has failed to comply with this section, the Secretary shall deny the issuance of applicable payments and benefits specified in subsection (b)(2) to the person or legal entity, under similar terms and conditions as described in section 1001B.

(3) **AUDIT.**—The Secretary shall establish statistically valid procedures under which the Secretary shall conduct targeted audits of such persons or legal entities as the Secretary determines are most likely to exceed the limitations under subsection (b).

(d) **COMMENSURATE REDUCTION.**—In the case of a payment or benefit described in subsection (b)(2) made in a crop, program, or fiscal year, as appropriate, to an entity, the amount of the payment or benefit shall be reduced by an amount that is commensurate with the direct and indirect ownership interest in the entity of each person who has an average adjusted gross income in excess of the applicable limitation specified in subsection (b).

**SEC. 1001E. [7 U.S.C. 1308–4] EDUCATION PROGRAM.**

(a) **IN GENERAL.**—The Secretary shall carry out a payment provisions education program for appropriate personnel of the Department of Agriculture and members and other personnel of county and State committees established under section 8(b) of the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act (16 U.S.C. 590h(b)), for the purpose of fostering more effective and uniform application of the payment limitations and restrictions established under sections 1001 through 1001C.

(b) **TRAINING.**—The education program shall provide training to the personnel in the fair, accurate, and uniform application to individual farming operations of the provisions of law and regulation relating to the payment provisions of sections 1001 through 1001C.

(c) **ADMINISTRATION.**—The State office of the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service shall make the initial determination concerning the application of payment limitations and restrictions established under sections 1001 through 1001C to farm operations consisting of more than 5 persons, subject to review by the Secretary.

(d) **COMMODITY CREDIT CORPORATION.**—The Secretary shall carry out the program provided under this section through the Commodity Credit Corporation.

**SEC. 1001F. [7 U.S.C. 1308–5] TREATMENT OF MULTIYEAR PROGRAM CONTRACT PAYMENTS.**

(a) **IN GENERAL.**—Notwithstanding any other provision of law, in the event of a transfer of ownership of land (or an ownership interest in land) by way of devise or descent, the Secretary of Agriculture may, if the new owner succeeds to the prior owner's contract entered into under title XII, make payments to the new owner under such contract without regard to the amount of payments received by the new owner under any contract entered into under title XII executed prior to such devise or descent.

(b) **LIMITATION.**—Payments made pursuant to this section shall not exceed the amount to which the previous owner was entitled to receive under the terms of the contract at the time of the death of the prior owner.

\* \* \* \* \*

## COST REDUCTION OPTIONS

SEC. 1009. [7 U.S.C. 1308a] (a) Notwithstanding any other provision of law, whenever the Secretary of Agriculture determines that an action authorized under subsection (c), (d), or (e) will reduce the total of the direct and indirect costs to the Federal Government of a commodity program administered by the Secretary without adversely affecting income to small- and medium-sized producers participating in such program, the Secretary shall take such action with respect to the commodity program involved.

(b) In the announcement of the specific provisions of any commodity program administered by the Secretary of Agriculture, the Secretary shall include a statement setting forth which, if any, of the actions are to be initially included in the program, and a statement that the Secretary reserves the right to initiate at a later date any action not previously included but authorized by this section, including the right to reopen and change a contract entered into by a producer under the program if the producer voluntarily agrees to the change.

(c) When a nonrecourse loan program is in effect for a crop of a commodity, the Secretary may enter the commercial market to purchase such commodity if the Secretary determines that the cost of such purchases plus appropriate carrying charges will probably be less than the comparable cost of later acquiring the commodity through defaults on nonrecourse loans under the program.

(d) When the domestic market price of a commodity for which a nonrecourse loan program (including the program authorized by section 110 of the Agricultural Act of 1949 (7 U.S.C. 1445e)) is in effect is insufficient to cover the principal and accumulated interest on a loan made under such program, thereby encouraging default by a producer, the Secretary may provide for settlement of such loan and redemption by the producer of the commodity securing such loan for less than the total of the principal and all interest accumulated thereon if the Secretary determines that such reduction in the settlement price will yield benefits to the Federal Government due to—

(1) receipt by the Federal Government of a portion rather than none of the accumulated interest;

(2) avoidance of default; or

(3) elimination of storage, handling, and carrying charges on the forfeited commodity.

(e) When a production control or loan program is in effect for a crop of a major agricultural commodity, the Secretary may at any time prior to harvest reopen the program to participating producers for the purpose of accepting bids from producers for the conversion of acreage planted to such crop to diverted acres in return for payment in kind from Commodity Credit Corporation surplus stocks of the commodity to which the acreage was planted, if the Secretary determines that (1) changes in domestic or world supply or demand conditions have substantially changed after announcement of the program for that crop, and (2) without action to further adjust production, the Federal Government and producers will be faced with a burdensome and costly surplus. Such payments in kind shall not be included within the payment limitation per person established



under section 1001 of this Act, but shall be limited to a total \$20,000 per year per producer for any one commodity.

(f) The authority provided in this section shall be in addition to, and not in place of, any authority granted to the Secretary under any other provision of law.

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## TITLE XI—TRADE

### Subtitle A—Public Law 480 and Use of Surplus Commodities in International Programs

\* \* \* \* \*

#### FOOD FOR PROGRESS

SEC. 1110. [7 U.S.C. 1736o] (a) This section may be cited as the “Food for Progress Act of 1985”.

(b) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

(1) COOPERATIVE.—The term “cooperative” has the meaning given the term in section 402 of the Food for Peace Act (7 U.S.C. 1732).

(2) CORPORATION.—The term “Corporation” means the Commodity Credit Corporation.

(3) DEVELOPING COUNTRY.—The term “developing country” has the meaning given the term in section 402 of the Food for Peace Act (7 U.S.C. 1732).

(4) ELIGIBLE COMMODITY.—The term “eligible commodity” means an agricultural commodity, or a product of an agricultural commodity, in inventories of the Corporation or acquired by the Secretary or the Corporation for disposition through commercial purchases under a program authorized under this section.

(5) ELIGIBLE ENTITY.—The term “eligible entity” means—

(A) the government of an emerging agricultural country;

(B) an intergovernmental organization;

(C) a private voluntary organization;

(D) a nonprofit agricultural organization or cooperative;

(E) a nongovernmental organization;

(F) a college or university (as such terms are defined in section 1404(4) of the Food and Agriculture Act of 1977 (7 U.S.C. 3103(4)); and

(G) any other private entity.

(6) FOOD SECURITY.—The term “food security” means access by all people at all times to sufficient food and nutrition for a healthy and productive life.

(7) NONGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION.—The term “nongovernmental organization” has the meaning given the term in section 402 of the Food for Peace Act (7 U.S.C. 1732).

(8) PRIVATE VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATION.—The term “private voluntary organization” has the meaning given the term in section 402 of the Food for Peace Act (7 U.S.C. 1732).

(9) PROGRAM.—The term “program” means a food assistance or development initiative proposed by an eligible entity and approved by the Secretary under this section.

(10) RATE OF RETURN.—For purposes of applying subsection (j)(3), the rate of return for an eligible commodity shall be equal to the proportion that—

(A) the proceeds eligible entities generate through monetization of such commodity, bears to

(B) the cost to the Federal Government to procure and ship the commodity to the country where it is monetized.

(11) SECRETARY.—The term “Secretary” means the Secretary of Agriculture.

(c) PROGRAM.—In order to use the food resources of the United States more effectively in support of developing countries, and countries that are emerging democracies that have made commitments to introduce or expand free enterprise elements in their agricultural economies through changes in commodity pricing, marketing, input availability, distribution, and private sector involvement, the Secretary shall enter into agreements with eligible entities to furnish to the countries eligible commodities made available under subsections (e) and (f).

(d) CONSIDERATION FOR AGREEMENTS.—In determining whether to enter into an agreement under this section, the Secretary shall consider whether a potential recipient country is committed to carry out, or is carrying out, policies that promote economic freedom, private, domestic production of eligible commodities for domestic consumption, and the creation and expansion of efficient domestic markets for the purchase and sale of such eligible commodities. Such policies may provide for, among other things—

(1) access, on the part of farmers in the country, to private, competitive markets for their products;

(2) market pricing of eligible commodities to foster adequate private sector incentives to individual farmers to produce food on a regular basis for the country’s domestic needs;

(3) establishment of market-determined foreign exchange rates;

(4) timely availability of production inputs (such as seed, fertilizer, or pesticides) to farmers;

(5) access to technologies appropriate to the level of agricultural development in the country; and

(6) construction of facilities and distribution systems necessary to handle perishable products.

(e) FUNDING OF ELIGIBLE COMMODITIES.—(1) The Corporation shall make available to the Secretary such eligible commodities as the Secretary may request for purposes of furnishing eligible commodities under this section.

(2) Notwithstanding any other provision of law, the Corporation may use funds appropriated to carry out title I of the Food for Peace Act in carrying out this section with respect to eligible commodities made available under that Act, and subsection (g) does not apply to eligible commodities furnished on a grant basis or on credit terms under that title.

(3) The Corporation may finance the sale and exportation of eligible commodities, made available under the Food for Peace Act,

which are furnished under this section. Payment for eligible commodities made available under that Act which are purchased on credit terms under this section shall be on the same basis as the terms provided in section 106 of that Act.

(4) In the case of eligible commodities made available under the Food for Peace Act for purposes of this section, section 406 of that Act shall apply to eligible commodities furnished on a grant basis under this section and sections 402, 403(a), 403(c), and 403(i) of that Act shall apply to all eligible commodities furnished under this section.

(5) NO EFFECT ON DOMESTIC PROGRAMS.—The Secretary shall not make an eligible commodity available for disposition under this section in any amount that will reduce the amount of the eligible commodity that is traditionally made available through donations to domestic feeding programs or agencies, as determined by the Secretary.

(f) PROVISION OF ELIGIBLE COMMODITIES TO DEVELOPING COUNTRIES.—(1) The Corporation may provide for—

(A) grants, or

(B) sales on credit terms,

of eligible commodities made available under section 416(b) of the Agricultural Act of 1949 for use in carrying out this section.

(2) In carrying out section 416(b) of the Agricultural Act of 1949, the Corporation may purchase eligible commodities for use under this section if—

(A) the Corporation does not hold stocks of such eligible commodities; or

(B) Corporation stocks are insufficient to satisfy commitments made in agreements entered into under this section and such eligible commodities are needed to fulfill such commitments.

(3) No funds of the Corporation in excess of \$40,000,000 (exclusive of the cost of eligible commodities) may be used for each of fiscal years 1996 through 2023 to carry out this section with respect to eligible commodities made available under section 416(b) of the Agricultural Act of 1949 unless authorized in advance in appropriation Acts.

(4) The cost of eligible commodities made available under section 416(b) of the Agricultural Act of 1949 which are furnished under this section, and the expenses incurred in connection with furnishing such eligible commodities, shall be in addition to the level of assistance programmed under the Food for Peace Act and may not be considered expenditures for international affairs and finance.

(5) SALE PROCEDURE.—In making sales of eligible commodities under this section, the Secretary shall follow the sale procedure described in section 403(l) of the Food for Peace Act.

(g) MINIMUM TONNAGE.—Subject to subsection (f)(3), not less than 400,000 metric tons of eligible commodities may be provided under this section for the program for each of fiscal years 2002 through 2023.

(h) PROHIBITION ON RESALE OR TRANSSHIPMENT OF ELIGIBLE COMMODITIES.—An agreement entered into under this section shall

prohibit the resale or transshipment of the eligible commodities provided under the agreement to other countries.

(i) **DISPLACEMENT OF UNITED STATES COMMERCIAL SALES.**—In entering into agreements under this section, the Secretary shall take reasonable steps to avoid displacement of any sales of United States commodities that would otherwise be made to such countries.

(j) **MULTICOUNTRY OR MULTIYEAR BASIS.**—

(1) **IN GENERAL.**—In carrying out this section, the Secretary, on request and subject to the availability of eligible commodities, is encouraged to approve agreements that provide for eligible commodities to be made available for distribution or sale by the recipient on a multicountry or multiyear basis if the agreements otherwise meet the requirements of this section.

(2) **DEADLINE FOR PROGRAM ANNOUNCEMENTS.**—Before the beginning of any fiscal year, the Secretary shall, to the maximum extent practicable—

(A) make all determinations concerning program agreements and resource requests for programs under this section; and

(B) announce those determinations.

(3) **REPORT.**—Not later than April 1 of each fiscal year, the Secretary shall submit to the Committee on Agriculture of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry of the Senate—

(A) a list of programs, countries, and eligible commodities, and the total amount of funds for transportation and administrative costs, approved during the prior fiscal year under this section;

(B) a description of the actual rate of return for each commodity made available under this section for the previous fiscal year including—

(i) factors that influenced the rate of return; and

(ii) with respect to the commodity, the costs of bagging or further processing, ocean transportation, inland transportation, storage costs, and any other information that the Secretary determines to be necessary; and

(C) for each instance in which a commodity was made available under this section at a rate of return less than 70 percent, an explanation for the rate of return realized.

(k) **EFFECTIVE AND TERMINATION DATES.**—This section shall be effective during the period beginning October 1, 1985, and ending December 31, 2023.

(l) **ADMINISTRATIVE EXPENSES.**—(1) To enhance the development of private sector agriculture in countries receiving assistance under this section the Secretary may, in each of the fiscal years 1996 through 2023, use in addition to any amounts or eligible commodities otherwise made available under this section for such activities, not to exceed \$15,000,000 (or, in the case of fiscal year 1999, \$12,000,000) of Corporation funds (or eligible commodities of an equal value owned by the Corporation), to provide assistance in the administration, sale, and monitoring of food assistance programs, and to provide technical assistance for monetization pro-

grams, to strengthen private sector agriculture in recipient countries.

(2) To carry out this subsection, the Secretary may provide eligible commodities under agreements entered into under this section in a manner that uses the commodity transaction as a means of developing in the recipient countries a competitive private sector that can provide for the importation, transportation, storage, marketing and distribution of such eligible commodities.

(3) The Secretary may use the assistance provided under this subsection and proceeds derived from the sale of eligible commodities under paragraph (2) to design, monitor, and administer activities undertaken with such assistance, for the purpose of strengthening or creating the capacity of recipient country private enterprises to undertake commercial transactions, with the overall goal of increasing potential markets for United States agricultural eligible commodities.

(4) HUMANITARIAN OR DEVELOPMENT PURPOSES.—The Secretary may authorize the use of proceeds to pay the costs incurred by an eligible entity under this section for—

- (A)(i) programs targeted at hunger and malnutrition;
- or
- (ii) development programs involving food security;
- (B) transportation, storage, and distribution of eligible commodities provided under this section; and
- (C) administration, sales, monitoring, and technical assistance.

(m) SECRETARIAL APPROVAL.—In carrying out this section, the Secretary shall approve, as determined appropriate by the Secretary, agreements with agricultural trade organizations, intergovernmental organizations, private voluntary organizations, and cooperatives that provide for—

- (1) the sale of eligible commodities, including the marketing of these eligible commodities through the private sector; and
- (2) the use of the proceeds generated in the humanitarian and development programs of such agricultural trade organizations, intergovernmental organizations, private voluntary organizations, and cooperatives.

(n) PROGRAM MANAGEMENT.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall ensure, to the maximum extent practicable, that each eligible entity participating in 1 or more programs under this section—

- (A) uses eligible commodities made available under this section—
  - (i) in an effective manner;
  - (ii) in the areas of greatest need; and
  - (iii) in a manner that promotes the purposes of this section;
- (B) in using eligible commodities, assesses and takes into account the needs of recipient countries and the target populations of the recipient countries;
- (C) works with recipient countries, and indigenous institutions or groups in recipient countries, to design and

carry out mutually acceptable programs authorized under this section; and

(D) monitors and reports on the distribution or sale of eligible commodities provided under this section using methods that, as determined by the Secretary, facilitate accurate and timely reporting.

(2) REQUIREMENTS.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 270 days after the date of enactment of this paragraph, the Secretary shall review and, as necessary, make changes in regulations and internal procedures designed to streamline, improve, and clarify the application, approval, and implementation processes pertaining to agreements under this section.

(B) CONSIDERATIONS.—In conducting the review, the Secretary shall consider—

- (i) revising procedures for submitting proposals;
- (ii) developing criteria for program approval that separately address the objectives of the program;
- (iii) pre-screening organizations and proposals to ensure that the minimum qualifications are met;
- (iv) implementing e-government initiatives and otherwise improving the efficiency of the proposal submission and approval processes;
- (v) upgrading information management systems;
- (vi) improving commodity and transportation procurement processes; and
- (vii) ensuring that evaluation and monitoring methods are sufficient.

(C) CONSULTATIONS.—Not later than 1 year after the date of enactment of this paragraph, the Secretary shall consult with the Committee on Agriculture, and the Committee on International Relations, of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry of the Senate on changes made in regulations and procedures.

(3) REPORTS.—Each eligible entity that enters into an agreement under this section shall submit to the Secretary, at such time as the Secretary may request, a report containing such information as the Secretary may request relating to the use of eligible commodities and funds furnished to the eligible entity under this section.

(o) PRIVATE VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATIONS AND OTHER PRIVATE ENTITIES.—In entering into agreements described in subsection (c), the Secretary—

- (1) shall enter into agreements with eligible entities described in subparagraphs (C) and (G) of subsection (b)(5); and
- (2) shall not discriminate against such eligible entities.

(p) PILOT AGREEMENTS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—For each of fiscal years 2019 through 2023, subject to the availability of appropriations pursuant to the authorization in paragraph (3), the Secretary shall enter into 1 or more pilot agreements with 1 or more eligible entities through which the Secretary shall provide financial assistance

to the eligible entities to carry out activities consistent with subsection (1)(4)(A).

(2) REPORT REQUIRED.—In each of fiscal years 2020 through 2024, the Secretary shall submit to the Committee on Agriculture of the House of Representatives and Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry of the Senate a report describing, with respect to the previous fiscal year—

(A) the amount provided to eligible entities under each pilot agreement pursuant to paragraph (1) and how the funds were used;

(B) the activities carried out under each pilot agreement;

(C) the number of direct and indirect beneficiaries of those activities; and

(D) the effectiveness of the pilot agreements, including as applicable the impact on food security and agricultural productivity.

(3) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is authorized to be appropriated to carry out pilot agreements pursuant to this subsection \$10,000,000 for each of fiscal years 2019 through 2023.

#### SPECIAL ASSISTANT FOR AGRICULTURAL TRADE AND FOOD AID

SEC. 1113. [7 U.S.C. 1736–1] (a) The President shall appoint a Special Assistant to the President for Agricultural Trade and Food Assistance (hereinafter in this section referred to as the “Special Assistant”). The President shall appoint the initial Special Assistant not later than May 1, 1986.

(b) The Special Assistant shall serve in the Executive Office of the President.

(c) The Special Assistant shall—

(1) assist and advise the President in order to improve and enhance food assistance programs carried out in the United States and foreign countries;

(2) be available to receive suggestions and complaints concerning the implementation of United States food aid and agricultural export programs anywhere in the United States Government and provide prompt responses thereto, including expediting the program implementation in any instances in which there is unreasonable delay;

(3) make recommendations to the President on means to coordinate and streamline the manner in which food assistance programs are carried out by the Department of Agriculture and the Agency for International Development, in order to improve their overall effectiveness;

(4) make recommendations to the President on measures to be taken to increase use of United States agricultural commodities and the products thereof through food assistance programs;

(5) advise the President on agricultural trade;

(6) advise the President on the Food for Progress Program and expedite its implementation;

(7) serve as a member of the Development Coordination Committee and the Food Aid Subcommittee of such Committee;

(8) advise departments and agencies of the Federal Government on their policy guidelines on basic issues of food assistance policy to the extent necessary to assure the coordination of food assistance programs, consistent with law, and with the advice of such Subcommittee; and

(9) submit a report to the President and Congress each year through 1990 containing—

(A) a global analysis of world food needs and production; and

(B) a detailed plan for using available export and food aid authorities to increase United States agricultural exports to those targeted countries.

(d) Compensation for the Special Assistant shall be fixed by the President at an annual rate of basic pay of not less than the rate applicable to positions in level III of the Executive Schedule.

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#### Subtitle B—Maintenance and Development of Export Markets

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#### TRADE POLICY DECLARATION

SEC. 1121. [7 U.S.C. 1736p] It is hereby declared to be the agricultural trade policy of the United States to—

(1) be the premier supplier of agricultural and food products to world markets and expand exports of high value products;

(2) support the principle of free trade and the promotion of fair trade in agricultural commodities and products;

(3) cooperate fully in all efforts to negotiate with foreign countries further reductions in tariff and nontariff barriers to trade, including sanitary and phytosanitary measures and trade-distorting subsidies;

(4) aggressively counter unfair foreign trade practices as a means of encouraging fairer trade;

(5) remove foreign policy constraints to maximize United States economic interests through agricultural trade; and

(6) provide for consideration of United States agricultural trade interests in the design of national fiscal and monetary policy that may foster continued strength in the value of the dollar.

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#### SEC. 1123. [7 U.S.C. 1736r] TRADE NEGOTIATIONS POLICY.

(a) FINDINGS.—Congress finds that—

(1) on a level playing field, United States producers are the most competitive suppliers of agricultural products in the world;

(2) exports of United States agricultural products accounted for \$54,000,000,000 in 1995, contributing a net \$24,000,000,000 to the merchandise trade balance of the United States and supporting approximately 1,000,000 jobs;

(3) increased agricultural exports are critical to the future of the farm, rural, and overall United States economy, but the



opportunities for increased agricultural exports are limited by the unfair subsidies of the competitors of the United States, and a variety of tariff and nontariff barriers to highly competitive United States agricultural products;

(4) international negotiations can play a key role in breaking down barriers to United States agricultural exports;

(5) the Uruguay Round Agreement on Agriculture made significant progress in the attainment of increased market access opportunities for United States exports of agricultural products, for the first time—

(A) restraining foreign trade-distorting domestic support and export subsidy programs; and

(B) developing common rules for the application of sanitary and phytosanitary restrictions; that should result in increased exports of United States agricultural products, jobs, and income growth in the United States;

(6) the Uruguay Round Agreement on Agriculture did not succeed in completely eliminating trade distorting domestic support and export subsidies by—

(A) allowing the European Union to continue unreasonable levels of spending on export subsidies; and

(B) failing to discipline monopolistic state trading entities, such as the Canadian Wheat Board, that use non-transparent and discriminatory pricing as a hidden de facto export subsidy;

(7) during the period 1996 through 2002, there will be several opportunities for the United States to negotiate fairer trade in agricultural products, including further negotiations under the World Trade Organization, and steps toward possible free trade agreements of the Americas and Asian-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC); and

(8) the United States should aggressively use these opportunities to achieve more open and fair opportunities for trade in agricultural products.

(b) GOALS OF THE UNITED STATES IN AGRICULTURAL TRADE NEGOTIATIONS.—The objectives of the United States with respect to future negotiations on agricultural trade include—

(1) increasing opportunities for United States exports of agricultural products by eliminating tariff and nontariff barriers to trade;

(2) leveling the playing field for United States producers of agricultural products by limiting per unit domestic production supports to levels that are no greater than those available in the United States;

(3) ending the practice of export dumping by eliminating all trade distorting export subsidies and disciplining state trading entities so that they do not (except in cases of bona fide food aid) sell in foreign markets at prices below domestic market prices or prices below their full costs of acquiring and delivering agricultural products to the foreign markets; and

(4) encouraging government policies that avoid price-depressing surpluses.

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#### COOPERATOR MARKET DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

SEC. 1126. [7 U.S.C. 1736u] (a) It is the sense of Congress that the cooperator market development program of the Foreign Agricultural Service should be continued to help develop new markets and expand and maintain existing markets for United States agricultural commodities, using nonprofit agricultural trade organizations to the maximum extent practicable.

(b) The cooperator market development program shall be exempt from the requirements of Circular A 110 issued by the Office of Management and Budget.

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#### Subtitle E—Trade Practices

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#### EXPORT SALES OF DAIRY PRODUCTS

SEC. 1163. [7 U.S.C. 1731 note; Public Law 99–198] (a) In each fiscal year, the Secretary of Agriculture may sell dairy products for export, at such prices as the Secretary determines appropriate, in a quantity and allocated as determined by the Secretary, consistent with the obligations undertaken by the United States set forth in the Uruguay Round Agreements, if the disposition of the commodities will not interfere with the usual marketings of the United States nor disrupt world prices of agricultural commodities and patterns of commercial trade.

(b) Such sales shall be made through the Commodity Credit Corporation under existing authority available to the Secretary or the Commodity Credit Corporation.

(c) Through September 30, 1995, the Secretary shall report semi-annually to the Committee on Agriculture of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry of the Senate on the volume of sales made under this section.

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### TITLE XII—CONSERVATION <sup>2</sup>

#### SUBTITLE A—DEFINITIONS

##### DEFINITIONS

SEC. 1201. [16 U.S.C. 3801] (a) For purposes of subtitles A through I:

<sup>2</sup>Section 2903(a) of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (P.L. 110–246; 122 Stat. 1819) provided: “Except as otherwise provided by an amendment made by this title, the Secretary of Agriculture shall continue to carry out any program or activity covered by title XII of the Food Security Act (16 U.S.C. 3801 et seq.) until September 30, 2008, using the provisions of law applicable to the program or activity as they existed on the day before the date of the enactment of this Act and using funds made available under such title for fiscal year 2008 for the program or activity.”

- (1) The term “agricultural commodity” means—
- (A) any agricultural commodity planted and produced in a State by annual tilling of the soil, including tilling by one-trip planters; or
  - (B) sugarcane planted and produced in a State.
- (2) BEGINNING FARMER OR RANCHER.—The term “beginning farmer or rancher” has the meaning given the term in section 343(a)(8) of the Consolidated Farm and Rural Development Act (7 U.S.C. 1991(a)(8)).
- (3) CONSERVATION PLAN.—The term “conservation plan” means the document that—
- (A) applies to highly erodible cropland;
  - (B) describes the conservation system applicable to the highly erodible cropland and describes the decisions of the person with respect to location, land use, tillage systems, and conservation treatment measures and schedule; and
  - (C) is approved by the local soil conservation district, in consultation with the local committees established under section 8(b)(5) of the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act (16 U.S.C. 590h(b)(5)) and the Secretary, or by the Secretary.
- (4) CONSERVATION SYSTEM.—The term “conservation system” means a combination of 1 or more conservation measures or management practices that—
- (A) are based on local resource conditions, available conservation technology, and the standards and guidelines contained in the Natural Resources Conservation Service field office technical guides; and
  - (B) are designed to achieve, in a cost effective and technically practicable manner, a substantial reduction in soil erosion or a substantial improvement in soil conditions on a field or group of fields containing highly erodible cropland when compared to the level of erosion or soil conditions that existed before the application of the conservation measures and management practices.
- (5) The term “conservation district” means any district or unit of State or local government formed under State or territorial law for the express purpose of developing and carrying out a local soil and water conservation program. Such district or unit of government may be referred to as a “conservation district”, “soil conservation district”, “soil and water conservation district”, “resource conservation district”, “natural resource district”, “land conservation committee”, or a similar name.
- (6) The term “cost sharing payment” means a payment made by the Secretary to an owner or operator of a farm or ranch containing highly erodible cropland under the provisions of section 1234 (b) of this Act.
- (7)(A) The term “converted wetland” means wetland that has been drained, dredged, filled, leveled, or otherwise manipulated (including any activity that results in impairing or reducing the flow, circulation, or reach of water) for the purpose or to have the effect of making the production of an agricultural commodity possible if—

- (i) such production would not have been possible but for such action; and
- (ii) before such action—
  - (I) such land was wetland; and
  - (II) such land was neither highly erodible land nor highly erodible cropland.
- (B) Wetland shall not be considered converted wetland if production of an agricultural commodity on such land during a crop year—
  - (i) is possible as a result of a natural condition, such as drought; and
  - (ii) is not assisted by an action of the producer that destroys natural wetland characteristics.
- (8) FARM.—The term “farm” means a farm that—
  - (A) is under the general control of one operator;
  - (B) has one or more owners;
  - (C) consists of one or more tracts of land, whether or not contiguous;
  - (D) is located within a county or region, as determined by the Secretary; and
  - (E) may contain lands that are incidental to the production of perennial crops, including conserving uses, forestry, and livestock, as determined by the Secretary.
- (9) FIELD.—The term “field” means a part of a farm that is separated from the balance of the farm by permanent boundaries such as fences, roads, permanent waterways, or other similar features. At the option of the owner or operator of the farm, croplines may also be used to delineate a field if farming practices make it probable that the croplines are not subject to change. Any highly erodible land on which an agricultural commodity is produced after December 23, 1985, and that is not exempt under section 1212, shall be considered as part of the field in which the land was included on December 23, 1985, unless the owner and Secretary agree to modification of the boundaries of the field to carry out this title.
- (10) The term “highly erodible cropland” means highly erodible land that is in cropland use, as determined by the Secretary.
- (11)(A) The term “highly erodible land” means land—
  - (i) that is classified by the Soil Conservation Service as class IV, VI, VII, or VIII land under the land capability classification system in effect on the date of the enactment of this Act; or
  - (ii) that has, or that if used to produce an agricultural commodity, would have an excessive average annual rate of erosion in relation to the soil loss tolerance level, as established by the Secretary, and as determined by the Secretary through application of factors from the universal soil loss equation and the wind erosion equation, including factors for climate, soil erodibility, and field slope.
- (B) For purposes of this paragraph, the land capability class or rate of erosion for a field shall be that determined by the Secretary to be the predominant class or rate of erosion under regulations issued by the Secretary.

(C) EQUATIONS.—Not later than 60 days after the date of enactment of this subparagraph, the Secretary shall publish in the Federal Register the universal soil loss equation and wind erosion equation used by the Department of Agriculture as of that date. The Secretary may not change the equations after that date except following notice and comment in a manner consistent with section 553 of title 5, United States Code.

(12) The term “hydric soil” means soil that, in its undrained condition, is saturated, flooded, or ponded long enough during a growing season to develop an anaerobic condition that supports the growth and regeneration of hydrophytic vegetation.

(13) The term “hydrophytic vegetation” means a plant growing in—

(A) water; or

(B) a substrate that is at least periodically deficient in oxygen during a growing season as a result of excessive water content.

(14) INDIAN TRIBE.—The term “Indian tribe” has the meaning given the term in section 4(e) of the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (25 U.S.C. 450b(e)).

(15) The term “in-kind commodities” means commodities that are normally produced on land that is the subject of an agreement entered into under subtitle D.

(16) INTEGRATED PEST MANAGEMENT.—The term “integrated pest management” means a sustainable approach to managing pests by combining biological, cultural, physical, and chemical tools in a way that minimizes economic, health, and environmental risks.

(17) LIVESTOCK.—The term “livestock” means all animals raised on farms, as determined by the Secretary.

(18) NONINDUSTRIAL PRIVATE FOREST LAND.—The term “nonindustrial private forest land” means rural land, as determined by the Secretary, that—

(A) has existing tree cover or is suitable for growing trees; and

(B) is owned by any nonindustrial private individual, group, association, corporation, Indian tribe, or other private legal entity that has definitive decisionmaking authority over the land.

(19) PERSON AND LEGAL ENTITY.—For purposes of applying payment limitations under subtitle D, the terms “person” and “legal entity” have the meanings given those terms in section 1001(a) of this Act (7 U.S.C. 1308(a)).

(20) The term “rental payment” means a payment made by the Secretary to an owner or operator of a farm or ranch containing highly erodible cropland to compensate the owner or operator for retiring such land from crop production and placing such land in the conservation reserve in accordance with subtitle D.

(21) The term “Secretary” means the Secretary of Agriculture.

(22) The term “shelterbelt” means a vegetative barrier with a linear configuration composed of trees, shrubs, and other approved perennial vegetation.

(23) SOCIALLY DISADVANTAGED FARMER OR RANCHER.—The term “socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher” has the meaning given the term in section 2501(e)(2) of the Food, Agriculture, Conservation, and Trade Act of 1990 (7 U.S.C. 2279(e)(2)).

(24) The term “State” means each of the 50 States, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Guam, the Virgin Islands of the United States, American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, or the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands.

(25) TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE.—The term “technical assistance” means technical expertise, information, and tools necessary for the conservation of natural resources on land active in agricultural, forestry, or related uses. The term includes the following:

(A) Technical services provided directly to farmers, ranchers, and other eligible entities, such as conservation planning, technical consultation, and assistance with design and implementation of conservation practices.

(B) Technical infrastructure, including activities, processes, tools, and agency functions needed to support delivery of technical services, such as technical standards, resource inventories, training, data, technology, monitoring, and effects analyses.

(26) The term “vegetative cover” means—

(A) perennial grasses, legumes, forbs, or shrubs with an expected life span of 5 or more years; or

(B) trees.

(27) The term “wetland”, except when such term is part of the term “converted wetland”, means land that—

(A) has a predominance of hydric soils;

(B) is inundated or saturated by surface or groundwater at a frequency and duration sufficient to support a prevalence of hydrophytic vegetation typically adapted for life in saturated soil conditions; and

(C) under normal circumstances does support a prevalence of such vegetation. For purposes of this Act, and any other Act, this term shall not include lands in Alaska identified as having high potential for agricultural development which have a predominance of permafrost soils.

(b) The Secretary shall develop—

(1) criteria for the identification of hydric soils and hydrophytic vegetation; and

(2) lists of such soils and such vegetation.

#### SUBTITLE B—HIGHLY ERODIBLE LAND CONSERVATION

#### SEC. 1211. [16 U.S.C. 3811] PROGRAM INELIGIBILITY.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Except as provided in section 1212, and notwithstanding any other provision of law, any person who in any crop year produces an agricultural commodity on a field on which

highly erodible land is predominant, or designates land on which highly erodible land is predominant to be set aside, diverted, devoted to conservation uses, or otherwise not cultivated under a program administered by the Secretary to reduce production of an agricultural commodity, as determined by the Secretary shall be ineligible for—

(1) as to any commodity produced during that crop year by such person—

(A) contract payments under a production flexibility contract, marketing assistance loans, and any type of price support or payment made available under the Agricultural Market Transition Act, the Commodity Credit Corporation Charter Act (15 U.S.C. 714 et seq.), or any other Act;

(B) a farm storage facility loan made under section 4(h) of the Commodity Credit Corporation Charter Act (15 U.S.C. 714b(h));

(C) a disaster payment;

(D) a loan made, insured, or guaranteed under the Consolidated Farm and Rural Development Act (7 U.S.C. 1921 et seq.) or any other provision of law administered by the Consolidated Farm Service Agency, if the Secretary determines that the proceeds of such loan will be used for a purpose that will contribute to excessive erosion of highly erodible land; or

(E) any portion of the premium paid by the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation for a policy or plan of insurance under the Federal Crop Insurance Act (7 U.S.C. 1501 et seq.), on the condition that if a person is determined to have committed a violation under this subsection during a crop year, ineligibility under this subparagraph shall—

(i) only apply to reinsurance years subsequent to the date of final determination of a violation, including all administrative appeals; and

(ii) not apply to the existing reinsurance year or any reinsurance year prior to the date of final determination;

(2) a payment made under section 4 or 5 of the Commodity Credit Corporation Charter Act (15 U.S.C. 714b or 714c) during such crop year for the storage of an agricultural commodity acquired by the Commodity Credit Corporation; or

(3) during the crop year—

(A) a payment made pursuant to a contract entered into under the environmental quality incentives program under subchapter A of chapter 4 of subtitle D;

(B) a payment under any other provision of subtitle D;

(C) a payment under section 401 or 402 of the Agricultural Credit Act of 1978 (16 U.S.C. 2201 and 2202); or

(D) a payment, loan, or other assistance under section 3 or 8 of the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act (16 U.S.C. 1003 and 1006a).

(b) **HIGHLY ERODIBLE LAND.**—The Secretary shall have, and shall not delegate to any private person or entity, authority to determine whether a person has complied with this subtitle.

## EXEMPTIONS

SEC. 1212. [16 U.S.C. 3812] (a)(1) During the period beginning on the date of the enactment of this Act and ending on the later of January 1, 1990, or the date that is 2 years after the date land on which a crop of an agricultural commodity is produced was mapped by the Soil Conservation Service for purposes of classifying such land under the land capability classification system in effect on the date of enactment of this Act, except as provided in paragraph (2), no person shall become ineligible under section 1211 for program loans, payments, and benefits as the result of the production of a crop of an agricultural commodity on any land that was—

(A) cultivated to produce any of the 1981 through 1985 crops of an agricultural commodity; or

(B) set aside, diverted or otherwise not cultivated under a program administered by the Secretary for any such crops to reduce production of an agricultural commodity.

(2) ELIGIBILITY BASED ON COMPLIANCE WITH CONSERVATION PLAN.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—If, as of January 1, 1990, or 2 years after the Soil Conservation Service has completed a soil survey for the farm, whichever is later, a person is actively applying a conservation plan, such person shall have until January 1, 1995, to comply with the plan without being subject to program ineligibility.

(B) MINIMIZATION OF DOCUMENTATION.—In carrying out this subsection, the Secretary, Soil Conservation Service, and local soil conservation districts shall minimize the quantity of documentation a person must submit to comply with this paragraph.

(C) CROP INSURANCE.—

(i) OPERATIONS NEW TO COMPLIANCE.—Notwithstanding section 1211(a), in the case of a person that is subject to section 1211 for the first time solely due to the amendment made by section 2611(a) of the Agricultural Act of 2014, any person who produces an agricultural commodity on the land that is the basis of the payments described in section 1211(a)(1)(E) shall have 5 reinsurance years after the date on which such payments become subject to section 1211 to develop and comply with an approved conservation plan so as to maintain eligibility for such payments.

(ii) EXISTING OPERATIONS WITH PRIOR VIOLATIONS.—Notwithstanding section 1211(a), in the case of a person that the Secretary determines would have been in violation of section 1211(a) if the person had continued participation in the programs requiring compliance at any time after the date of enactment of the Agricultural Act of 2014 and is currently in violation of section 1211(a), the person shall have 2 reinsurance years after the date on which the payments described in section 1211(a)(1)(E) become subject to section 1211 to develop and comply with an approved



conservation plan, as determined by the Secretary, so as to maintain eligibility for such payments.

(iii) APPLICABLE REINSURANCE YEAR.—Ineligibility for the payment described in section 1211(a)(1)(E) for a violation under this subparagraph during a crop year shall—

(I) only apply to reinsurance years subsequent to the date of a final determination of a violation, including all administrative appeals; and

(II) not apply to the existing reinsurance year or any reinsurance year prior to the date of the final determination.

(3) Any person who owns or operates highly erodible land that was the subject of a contract entered into under subchapter B of chapter 1 of subtitle D shall only be required to apply a conservation plan established under this subtitle. The person shall not be required to meet a higher conservation standard than the standard applied to other highly erodible cropland located within the same area. If the person's conservation plan requires structures to be constructed, the person shall have until 2 years after the expiration of such contract to comply with the conservation plan, or a longer period of time if the Secretary determines compliance is otherwise technically or economically not feasible, or such longer period is otherwise appropriate, before such person will be subject to program ineligibility with respect to such land under section 1211.

(4) On the expiration of a contract entered into under subchapter B of chapter 1 of subtitle D, the provisions of this subtitle shall apply to the acreage that was the subject of such contract.

(b) No person shall become ineligible under section 1211 for program loans, payments, and benefits as the result of the production of a crop of an agricultural commodity—

(1) planted before the date of enactment of this Act; or

(2) planted during any crop year beginning before the date of enactment of this Act.

(c) No person shall become ineligible under section 1211 for program loans, payments, and benefits as the result of the production of a crop of an agricultural commodity or the designation of land to be set aside, diverted, devoted to conservation uses, or otherwise not cultivated under a program administered by the Secretary to reduce production of an agricultural commodity (hereafter in this subsection referred to as "set aside")—

(1) on highly erodible land in an area—

(A) within a conservation district, under a conservation system that has been approved by a conservation district after the district has determined that the conservation system is in conformity with technical standards set forth in the Soil Conservation Service technical guide for such district; or

(B) not within a conservation district, under a conservation system determined by the Secretary to be adequate for the protection of highly erodible land that has been set aside or for the production of such agricultural commodity on any highly erodible land subject to this title; or

(2) on highly erodible land that is planted or set aside in reliance on a determination by the Soil Conservation Service that such land was not highly erodible land, except that this paragraph shall not apply to any agricultural commodity that was planted or set aside on any land after the Soil Conservation Service determines that such land is highly erodible land; or

(3) on highly erodible land planted to alfalfa during each of the 1981 through 1985 crop years as part of a rotation practice approved by the Secretary, if the person has submitted a conservation plan, in which case, such person shall have until June 1, 1988, to comply with the plan without being subject to program ineligibility under section 1211.

(d) Section 1211 shall not apply to a loan described in section 1211 made before the date of enactment of this Act.

(e) If a tenant is determined to be ineligible for payments and other benefits under section 1211, the Secretary may limit such ineligibility only to the farm which is the basis for such ineligibility determination if—

(1) the tenant has established to the satisfaction of the Secretary that—

(A) the tenant has made a good faith effort to meet the requirements of this section, including enlisting the assistance of the Secretary to obtain a reasonable conservation plan for such farm; and

(B) the landlord on the farm refuses to comply with such plan on such farm; and

(2) the Secretary determines that such lack of compliance is not a part of a scheme or device to avoid such compliance. The Secretary shall provide an annual report to the Committee on Agriculture of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry of the Senate concerning the ineligibility determinations limited during the previous 12-month period under this subsection.

(f) GRADUATED PENALTIES.—

(1) INELIGIBILITY.—No person shall become ineligible under section 1211 for program loans, payments, and benefits as a result of the failure of the person to actively apply a conservation plan, if the Secretary determines that the person has acted in good faith and without an intent to violate this subtitle.

(2) ELIGIBLE REVIEWERS.—A determination of the Secretary, or a designee of the Secretary, under paragraph (1) shall be reviewed by the applicable—

(A) State Executive Director, with the technical concurrence of the State Conservationist; or

(B) district director, with the technical concurrence of the area conservationist.

(3) PERIOD FOR IMPLEMENTATION.—A person who meets the requirements of paragraph (1) shall be allowed a reasonable period of time, as determined by the Secretary, but not to exceed 1 year, during which to implement the measures and practices necessary to be considered to be actively applying the conservation plan of the person.

## (4) PENALTIES.—

(A) APPLICATION.—This paragraph applies if the Secretary determines that—

(i) a person has failed to comply with section 1211 with respect to highly erodible cropland, and has acted in good faith and without an intent to violate section 1211; or

(ii) the violation—

(I) is technical and minor in nature; and

(II) has a minimal effect on the erosion control purposes of the conservation plan applicable to the land on which the violation has occurred.

(B) REDUCTION.—If this paragraph applies under subparagraph (A), the Secretary shall, in lieu of applying the ineligibility provisions of section 1211, reduce program benefits described in section 1211 that the producer would otherwise be eligible to receive in a crop year by an amount commensurate with the seriousness of the violation, as determined by the Secretary.

(5) SUBSEQUENT CROP YEARS.—Any person whose benefits are reduced for any crop year under this subsection shall continue to be eligible for all of the benefits described in section 1211 for any subsequent crop year if, prior to the beginning of the subsequent crop year, the Secretary determines that the person is actively applying a conservation plan according to the schedule specified in the plan.

(g) The Secretary, in providing assistance to an individual in the preparation or revision of a conservation plan under this section, shall provide such individual with information—

(1) concerning cost effective and applicable erosion control measures that may be available to such individual to meet the requirements of this section; and

(2) concerning crop flexibility, base adjustment, and conservation assistance options that may be available to such individual to meet the requirements of this section, including the provisions of titles X, XII, and XIII of the Food, Agriculture, Conservation, and Trade Act of 1990 (or the amendments made by such titles).

(h) Section 1211 shall not apply to the noncommercial production of agricultural commodities on a farm if such production is limited to two acres or less and if the Secretary determines that such production is not intended to circumvent the conservation requirements otherwise applicable to lands under this subtitle.

**SEC. 1213. [16 U.S.C. 3812a] DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF CONSERVATION PLANS AND CONSERVATION SYSTEMS.**

(a) TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS.—In connection with the standards and guidelines contained in Natural Resources Conservation Service field office technical guides applicable to the development and use of conservation measures and management practices as part of a conservation system, the Secretary shall ensure that the standards and guidelines permit a person to use a conservation system that—

(1) is technically and economically feasible;

(2) is based on local resource conditions and available conservation technology;

(3) is cost-effective; and

(4) does not cause undue economic hardship on the person applying the conservation system under the person's conservation plan.

(b) MEASUREMENT OF EROSION REDUCTION.—For the purpose of determining whether there is a substantial reduction in soil erosion on a field containing highly erodible cropland, the measurement of erosion reduction achieved by the application of a conservation system under a person's conservation plan shall be based on the estimated annual level of erosion at the time of the measurement compared to the estimated annual level of erosion that existed before the implementation of the conservation measures and management practices provided for in the conservation system.

(c) RESIDUE MEASUREMENT.—

(1) RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE SECRETARY.—For the purpose of measuring the level of residue on a field, the Secretary shall—

(A) take into account any residue incorporated into the top 2 inches of soil, as well as the growing crop, in the measurement;

(B) provide technical guidelines for acceptable residue measurement methods;

(C) provide a certification system for third parties to perform residue measurements; and

(D) provide for the acceptance and use of information and data voluntarily provided by the producer regarding the field.

(2) ACCEPTANCE OF PRODUCER MEASUREMENTS.—Annual residue measurements supplied by a producer (including measurements performed by a certified third party) shall be used by the Secretary if the Secretary determines that the measurements indicate that the residue level for the field meets the level required under the conservation plan.

(d) CERTIFICATION OF COMPLIANCE.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—For the purpose of determining the eligibility of a person for program benefits specified in section 1211 at the time application is made for the benefits, the Secretary shall permit the person to certify that the person is complying with the person's conservation plan.

(2) STATUS REVIEWS.—If a person makes a certification under paragraph (1), the Secretary shall not be required to carry out a review of the status of compliance of the person with the conservation plan under which the conservation system is being applied.

(3) REVISIONS AND MODIFICATIONS.—The Secretary shall permit a person who makes a certification under paragraph (1) with respect to a conservation plan to revise the conservation plan in any manner, if the same level of conservation treatment provided for by the conservation system under the person's conservation plan is maintained. The Secretary may not revise the person's conservation plan without the concurrence of the person.

(4) CROP INSURANCE PREMIUM ASSISTANCE.—For the purpose of determining the eligibility of a person for the payment described in section 1211(a)(1)(E), the Secretary shall apply the procedures described in section 1221(c)(3)(E) and coordinate the certification process so as to avoid duplication or unnecessary paperwork.

(e) TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE.—The Secretary shall, using available resources and consistent with the Secretary's other conservation responsibilities and objectives, provide technical assistance to a person throughout the development, revision, and application of the conservation plan and any conservation system of the person. At the request of the person, the Secretary may provide technical assistance regarding conservation measures and management practices for other lands of the person that do not contain highly erodible cropland.

(f) ENCOURAGEMENT OF ON-FARM RESEARCH.—To encourage on-farm conservation research, the Secretary may allow a person to include in the person's conservation plan or a conservation system under the plan, on a field trial basis, practices that are not currently approved but that the Secretary considers have a reasonable likelihood of success.

#### SOIL SURVEYS

SEC. 1214. [16 U.S.C. 3813] The Secretary shall, as soon as is practicable after the date of enactment of this Act, complete soil surveys on those private lands that do not have a soil survey suitable for use in determining the land capability class for purposes of this subtitle. In carrying out this section, the Secretary shall, insofar as possible, concentrate on those localities where significant amounts of highly erodible land are being converted to the production of agricultural commodities.

#### SEC. 1215. [16 U.S.C. 3814] NOTICE AND INVESTIGATION OF POSSIBLE COMPLIANCE DEFICIENCIES.

(a) IN GENERAL.—An employee of the Department of Agriculture who observes a possible compliance deficiency or other potential violation of a conservation plan or this subtitle while providing on-site technical assistance shall provide to the responsible persons, not later than 45 days after observing the possible violation, information regarding actions needed to comply with the plan and this subtitle. The employee shall provide the information in lieu of reporting the observation as a compliance violation.

(b) CORRECTIVE ACTION.—The responsible persons shall attempt to correct the deficiencies as soon as practicable after receiving the information.

(c) REVIEW.—If the corrective action is not fully implemented not later than 1 year after the responsible persons receive the information, the Secretary may conduct a review of the status of compliance of the persons with the conservation plan and this subtitle.

#### Subtitle C—Wetland Conservation

#### SEC. 1221. [16 U.S.C. 3821] PROGRAM INELIGIBILITY.

(a) PRODUCTION ON CONVERTED WETLAND.—Except as provided in this subtitle and notwithstanding any other provision of law, any

person who in any crop year produces an agricultural commodity on converted wetland, as determined by the Secretary, shall be—

- (1) in violation of this section; and
  - (2) ineligible for loans or payments in an amount determined by the Secretary to be proportionate to the severity of the violation.
- (b) **INELIGIBILITY FOR CERTAIN LOANS AND PAYMENTS.**—If a person is determined to have committed a violation under subsection (a) during a crop year, the Secretary shall determine which of, and the amount of, the following loans and payments for which the person shall be ineligible:

(1) Contract payments under a production flexibility contract, marketing assistance loans, and any type of price support or payment made available under the Agricultural Market Transition Act, the Commodity Credit Corporation Charter Act (15 U.S.C. 714 et seq.), or any other Act.

(2) A loan made or guaranteed under the Consolidated Farm and Rural Development Act (7 U.S.C. 1921 et seq.) or any other provision of law administered by the Consolidated Farm Service Agency, if the Secretary determines that the proceeds of the loan will be used for a purpose that will contribute to conversion of a wetland (other than as provided in this subtitle) to produce an agricultural commodity.

(3) During the crop year:

(A) A payment made pursuant to a contract entered into under the environmental quality incentives program under subchapter A of chapter 4 of subtitle D.

(B) A payment under any other provision of subtitle D.

(C) A payment under section 401 or 402 of the Agricultural Credit Act of 1978 (16 U.S.C. 2201 and 2202).

(D) A payment, loan, or other assistance under section 3 or 8 of the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act (16 U.S.C. 1003 and 1006a).

(c) **INELIGIBILITY FOR CROP INSURANCE PREMIUM ASSISTANCE.**—

(1) **REQUIREMENTS.**—

(A) **IN GENERAL.**—If a person is determined to have committed a violation under subsection (a) or (d) during a crop year, the person shall be ineligible to receive any payment of any portion of premium paid by the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation for a plan or policy of insurance under the Federal Crop Insurance Act (7 U.S.C. 1501 et seq.) pursuant to this subsection.

(B) **APPLICABILITY.**—Ineligibility under this subsection shall—

(i) only apply to reinsurance years subsequent to the date of a final determination of a violation, including all administrative appeals; and

(ii) not apply to the existing reinsurance year or any reinsurance year prior to the date of the final determination.

(2) **CONVERSIONS.**—

(A) IN GENERAL.—Notwithstanding paragraph (1), ineligibility for crop insurance premium assistance shall apply in accordance with this paragraph.

(B) NEW CONVERSIONS.—In the case of a wetland that the Secretary determines was converted after the date of enactment of the Agricultural Act of 2014—

(i) the person shall be ineligible to receive crop insurance premium subsidies in subsequent reinsurance years unless the Secretary determines that an exemption pursuant to section 1222 applies; or

(ii) for any violation that the Secretary determines impacts less than 5 acres of an entire farm, the person may pay a contribution in an amount equal to 150 percent of the cost of mitigation, as determined by the Secretary, to the fund described in section 1241(f) for wetland restoration in lieu of ineligibility to receive crop insurance premium assistance.

(C) PRIOR CONVERSIONS.—In the case of a wetland that the Secretary determines was converted prior to the date of enactment of the Agricultural Act of 2014, ineligibility under this subsection shall not apply.

(D) CONVERSIONS AND NEW POLICIES OR PLANS OF INSURANCE.—In the case of an agricultural commodity for which an individual policy or plan of insurance is available for the first time to the person after the date of enactment of the Agricultural Act of 2014—

(i) ineligibility shall apply only to conversions that take place after the date on which the policy or plan of insurance first becomes available to the person; and

(ii) the person shall take such steps as the Secretary determines appropriate to mitigate any prior conversion in a timely manner but not to exceed 2 reinsurance years.

(3) LIMITATIONS.—

(A) MITIGATION REQUIRED.—Except as otherwise provided in this paragraph, a person subject to a final determination, including all administrative appeals, of a violation described in subsection (d) shall have 1 reinsurance year to initiate a mitigation plan to remedy the violation, as determined by the Secretary, before becoming ineligible under this subsection in the following reinsurance year to receive any payment of any portion of the premium paid by the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation for a policy or plan of insurance under the Federal Crop Insurance Act (7 U.S.C. 1501 et seq.).

(B) PERSONS COVERED FOR THE FIRST TIME.—Notwithstanding the requirements of paragraph (1), in the case of a person that is subject to this subsection for the first time solely due to the amendment made by section 2611(b) of the Agricultural Act of 2014, the person shall have 2 reinsurance years after the reinsurance year in which a final determination is made, including all administrative appeals, of a violation described in this subsection to take such steps as the Secretary determines appropriate to rem-

edy or mitigate the violation in accordance with this subsection.

(C) GOOD FAITH.—If the Secretary determines that a person subject to a final determination, including all administrative appeals, of a violation described in this subsection acted in good faith and without intent to commit a violation described in this subsection as described in section 1222(h), the person shall have 2 reinsurance years to take such steps as the Secretary determines appropriate to remedy or mitigate the violation in accordance with this subsection.

(D) TENANT RELIEF.—

(i) IN GENERAL.—If a tenant is determined to be ineligible for payments and other benefits under this subsection, the Secretary may limit the ineligibility only to the farm that is the basis for the ineligibility determination if the tenant has established, to the satisfaction of the Secretary that—

(I) the tenant has made a good faith effort to meet the requirements of this section, including enlisting the assistance of the Secretary to obtain a reasonable plan for restoration or mitigation for the farm;

(II) the landlord on the farm refuses to comply with the plan on the farm; and

(III) the Secretary determines that the lack of compliance is not a part of a scheme or device to avoid the compliance.

(ii) REPORT.—The Secretary shall submit to the Committee on Agriculture of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry of the Senate an annual report concerning the ineligibility determinations limited during the previous 12-month period under this subparagraph.

(E) CERTIFICATE OF COMPLIANCE.—

(i) IN GENERAL.—Beginning with the first full reinsurance year immediately following the date of enactment of this paragraph, all persons seeking eligibility for the payment of a portion of the premium paid by the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation for a policy or plan of insurance under the Federal Crop Insurance Act (7 U.S.C. 1501 et seq.) shall provide certification of compliance with this section as determined by the Secretary.

(ii) TIMELY EVALUATION.—The Secretary shall evaluate the certification in a timely manner and—

(I) a person who has properly complied with certification shall be held harmless with regard to eligibility during the period of evaluation; and

(II) if the Secretary fails to evaluate the certification in a timely manner and the person is subsequently found to be in violation of this sub-



section, ineligibility shall not apply to the person for that violation.

(iii) **EQUITABLE CONTRIBUTION.**—

(I) **IN GENERAL.**—If a person fails to notify the Secretary as required and is subsequently found to be in violation of this subsection, the Secretary shall—

(aa) determine the amount of an equitable contribution to conservation by the person for the violation; and

(bb) deposit the contribution in the fund described in section 1241(f).

(II) **LIMITATION.**—The contribution shall not exceed the total of the portion of the premium paid by the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation for a policy or plan of insurance for all years the person is determined to have been in violation subsequent to the date on which certification was first required under this subparagraph.

(4) **DUTIES OF THE SECRETARY.**—

(A) **IN GENERAL.**—In carrying out this subsection, the Secretary shall use existing processes and procedures for certifying compliance.

(B) **RESPONSIBILITY.**—The Secretary, acting through the agencies of the Department of Agriculture, shall be solely responsible for determining whether a producer is eligible to receive crop insurance premium subsidies in accordance with this subsection.

(C) **LIMITATION.**—The Secretary shall ensure that no agent, approved insurance provider, or employee or contractor of an agency or approved insurance provider, bears responsibility or liability for the eligibility of an insured producer under this subsection, other than in cases of misrepresentation, fraud, or scheme and device.

(d) **WETLAND CONVERSION.**—

(1) **IN GENERAL.**—Except as provided in section 1222 and notwithstanding any other provision of law, any person who in any crop year beginning after November 28, 1990, converts a wetland by draining, dredging, filling, leveling, or any other means for the purpose, or to have the effect, of making the production of an agricultural commodity possible on such converted wetland shall be ineligible for those payments, loans, or programs specified in subsection (b) for that crop year and all subsequent crop years.

(2) **DUTY OF THE SECRETARY.**—No person shall become ineligible under paragraph (1) if the Secretary determines that an exemption under section 1222(b) applies to that person.

(e) **PRIOR LOANS.**—This section shall not apply to a loan described in subsection (b) made before December 23, 1985.

(f) **WETLAND.**—The Secretary shall have, and shall not delegate to any private person or entity, authority to determine whether a person has complied with this subtitle.

**SEC. 1222. [16 U.S.C. 3822] DELINEATION OF WETLANDS; EXEMPTIONS.****(a) DELINEATION BY THE SECRETARY.—**

(1) **IN GENERAL.**—Subject to subsection (b) and paragraph (6), the Secretary shall delineate, determine, and certify all wetlands located on subject land on a farm.

(2) **WETLAND DELINEATION MAPS.**—The Secretary shall delineate wetlands on wetland delineation maps. On the request of a person, the Secretary shall make a reasonable effort to make an on-site wetland determination prior to delineation.

(3) **CERTIFICATION.**—On providing notice to affected persons, the Secretary shall—

(A) certify whether a map is sufficient for the purpose of making a determination of ineligibility for program benefits under section 1221; and

(B) provide an opportunity to appeal the certification prior to the certification becoming final.

(4) **DURATION OF CERTIFICATION.**—A final certification made under paragraph (3) shall remain valid and in effect as long as the area is devoted to an agricultural use or until such time as the person affected by the certification requests review of the certification by the Secretary.

(5) **REVIEW OF MAPPING ON APPEAL.**—In the case of an appeal of the Secretary's certification, the Secretary shall review and certify the accuracy of the mapping of all land subject to the appeal to ensure that the subject land has been accurately delineated. Prior to rendering a decision on the appeal, the Secretary shall conduct an on-site inspection of the subject land on a farm.

(6) **RELIANCE ON PRIOR CERTIFIED DELINEATION.**—No person shall be adversely affected because of having taken an action based on a previous certified wetland delineation by the Secretary. The delineation shall not be subject to a subsequent wetland certification or delineation by the Secretary, unless requested by the person under paragraph (4).

**(b) EXEMPTIONS.**—No person shall become ineligible under section 1221 for program loans or payments under the following circumstances:

(1) As the result of the production of an agricultural commodity on the following lands:

(A) A converted wetland if the conversion of the wetland was commenced before December 23, 1985.

(B) Land that is a nontidal drainage or irrigation ditch excavated in upland.

(C) A wet area created by a water delivery system, irrigation, irrigation system, or application of water for irrigation.

(D) A wetland on which the owner or operator of a farm or ranch uses normal cropping or ranching practices to produce an agricultural commodity in a manner that is consistent for the area where the production is possible as a result of a natural condition, such as drought, and is without action by the producer that destroys a natural wetland characteristic.

(E) Land that is an artificial lake or pond created by excavating or diking land (that is not a wetland) to collect and retain water and that is used primarily for livestock watering, fish production, irrigation, wildlife, fire control, flood control, cranberry growing, or rice production, or as a settling pond.

(F) A wetland that is temporarily or incidentally created as a result of adjacent development activity.

(G) A converted wetland if the original conversion of the wetland was commenced before December 23, 1985, and the Secretary determines the wetland characteristics returned after that date as a result of—

(i) the lack of maintenance of drainage, dikes, levees, or similar structures;

(ii) a lack of management of the lands containing the wetland; or

(iii) circumstances beyond the control of the person.

(H) A converted wetland, if—

(i) the converted wetland was determined by the Natural Resources Conservation Service to have been manipulated for the production of an agricultural commodity or forage prior to December 23, 1985, and was returned to wetland conditions through a voluntary restoration, enhancement, or creation action subsequent to that determination;

(ii) technical determinations regarding the prior site conditions and the restoration, enhancement, or creation action have been adequately documented by the Natural Resources Conservation Service;

(iii) the proposed conversion action is approved by the Natural Resources Conservation Service prior to implementation; and

(iv) the extent of the proposed conversion is limited so that the conditions will be at least equivalent to the wetland functions and values that existed prior to implementation of the voluntary wetland restoration, enhancement, or creation action.

(2) For the conversion of the following:

(A) An artificial lake or pond created by excavating or diking land that is not a wetland to collect and retain water and that is used primarily for livestock watering, fish production, irrigation, wildlife, fire control, flood control, cranberry growing, rice production, or as a settling pond.

(B) A wetland that is temporarily or incidentally created as a result of adjacent development activity.

(C) A wetland on which the owner or operator of a farm or ranch uses normal cropping or ranching practices to produce an agricultural commodity in a manner that is consistent for the area where the production is possible as a result of a natural condition, such as drought, and is without action by the producer that destroys a natural wetland characteristic.

(D) A wetland previously identified as a converted wetland (if the original conversion of the wetland was commenced before December 23, 1985), but that the Secretary determines returned to wetland status after that date as a result of—

- (i) the lack of maintenance of drainage, dikes, levees, or similar structures;
- (ii) a lack of management of the lands containing the wetland; or
- (iii) circumstances beyond the control of the person.

(E) A wetland, if—

(i) the wetland was determined by the Natural Resources Conservation Service to have been manipulated for the production of an agricultural commodity or forage prior to December 23, 1985, and was returned to wetland conditions through a voluntary restoration, enhancement, or creation action subsequent to that determination;

(ii) technical determinations regarding the prior site conditions and the restoration, enhancement, or creation action have been adequately documented by the Natural Resources Conservation Service;

(iii) the proposed conversion action is approved by the Natural Resources Conservation Service prior to implementation; and

(iv) the extent of the proposed conversion is limited so that the conditions will be at least equivalent to the wetland functions and values that existed prior to implementation of the voluntary wetland restoration, enhancement, or creation action.

(c) ON-SITE INSPECTION REQUIREMENT.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—No program loans, payments, or benefits shall be withheld from a person under this subtitle unless the Secretary has conducted an on-site visit of the subject land, which, except as provided in paragraph (2), shall be conducted in the presence of the affected person.

(2) EXCEPTION.—The Secretary may conduct an on-site visit under paragraph (1) without the affected person present if the Secretary has made a reasonable effort to include the presence of the affected person at the on-site visit.

(d) IDENTIFICATION OF MINIMAL EFFECT EXEMPTIONS.—For purposes of applying the minimal effect exemption under subsection (f)(1), the Secretary shall identify by regulation categorical minimal effect exemptions on a regional basis to assist persons in avoiding a violation of the ineligibility provisions of section 1221. The Secretary shall ensure that employees of the Department of Agriculture who administer this subtitle receive appropriate training to properly apply the minimal effect exemptions determined by the Secretary.

(e) NONWETLANDS.—The Secretary shall exempt from the ineligibility provisions of section 1221 any action by a person upon lands in any case in which the Secretary determines that any one of the following does not apply with respect to such lands:

(1) Such lands have a predominance of hydric soils.

(2) Such lands are inundated or saturated by surface or groundwater at a frequency and duration sufficient to support a prevalence of hydrophytic vegetation typically adapted for life in saturated soil conditions.

(3) Such lands, under normal circumstances, support a prevalence of such vegetation.

(f) MINIMAL EFFECT; MITIGATION.—The Secretary shall exempt a person from the ineligibility provisions of section 1221 for any action associated with the production of an agricultural commodity on a converted wetland, or the conversion of a wetland, if 1 or more of the following conditions apply, as determined by the Secretary:

(1) The action, individually and in connection with all other similar actions authorized by the Secretary in the area, will have a minimal effect on the functional hydrological and biological value of the wetlands in the area, including the value to waterfowl and wildlife.

(2) The wetland and the wetland values, acreage, and functions are mitigated by the person through the restoration of a converted wetland, the enhancement of an existing wetland, or the creation of a new wetland, and the restoration, enhancement, or creation is—

(A) in accordance with a wetland conservation plan;

(B) in advance of, or concurrent with, the action;

(C) not at the expense of the Federal Government;

(D) in the case of enhancement or restoration of wetlands, on not greater than a 1-for-1 acreage basis unless more acreage is needed to provide equivalent functions and values that will be lost as a result of the wetland conversion to be mitigated;

(E) in the case of creation of wetlands, on greater than a 1-for-1 acreage basis if more acreage is needed to provide equivalent functions and values that will be lost as a result of the wetland conversion that is mitigated;

(F) on lands in the same general area of the local watershed as the converted wetland; and

(G) with respect to the restored, enhanced, or created wetland, made subject to an easement that—

(i) is recorded on public land records;

(ii) remains in force for as long as the converted wetland for which the restoration, enhancement, or creation to be mitigated remains in agricultural use or is not returned to its original wetland classification with equivalent functions and values; and

(iii) prohibits making alterations to the restored, enhanced, or created wetland that lower the wetland's functions and values.

(3) The wetland was converted after December 23, 1985, but before November 28, 1990, and the wetland values, acreage, and functions are mitigated by the producer through the requirements of subparagraphs (A), (B), (C), (D), (F), and (G) of paragraph (2).

(4) The action was authorized by a permit issued under section 404 of the Federal Water Pollution Control Act (33

U.S.C. 1344) and the wetland values, acreage, and functions of the converted wetland were adequately mitigated for the purposes of this subtitle.

(g) MITIGATION APPEALS.—A person<sup>3</sup> shall be afforded the right to appeal, under section 1243, the imposition of a mitigation agreement requiring greater than one-to-one acreage mitigation to which the person<sup>3</sup> is subject.

(h) GOOD FAITH EXEMPTION.—

(1) EXEMPTION DESCRIBED.—The Secretary may waive a person's ineligibility under section 1221 for program loans, payments, and benefits as the result of the conversion of a wetland subsequent to November 28, 1990, or the production of an agricultural commodity on a converted wetland, if the Secretary determines that the person has acted in good faith and without intent to violate this subtitle.

(2) ELIGIBLE REVIEWERS.—A determination of the Secretary, or a designee of the Secretary, under paragraph (1) shall be reviewed by the applicable—

(A) State Executive Director, with the technical concurrence of the State Conservationist; or

(B) district director, with the technical concurrence of the area conservationist.

(3) PERIOD FOR COMPLIANCE.—The Secretary shall provide a person who the Secretary determines has acted in good faith and without intent to violate this subtitle with a reasonable period, but not to exceed 1 year, during which to implement the measures and practices necessary to be considered to be actively restoring the subject wetland.

(i) RESTORATION.—Any person who is determined to be ineligible for program benefits under section 1221 for any crop year shall not be ineligible for such program benefits under such section for any subsequent crop year if, prior to the beginning of such subsequent crop year, the person has fully restored the characteristics of the converted wetland to its prior wetland state or has otherwise mitigated for the loss of wetland values, as determined by the Secretary, through the restoration, enhancement, or creation of wetland values in the same general area of the local watershed as the converted wetland.

(j) DETERMINATIONS; RESTORATION AND MITIGATION PLANS; MONITORING ACTIVITIES.—Technical determinations, the development of restoration and mitigation plans, and monitoring activities under this section shall be made by the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

(k) MITIGATION BANKING.—

(1) MITIGATION BANKING PROGRAM.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—Using authorities available to the Secretary, the Secretary shall operate a program or work with third parties to establish mitigation banks to assist persons in complying with the provisions of this section while mitigating any loss of wetland values and functions.

<sup>3</sup>Sec. 322(e) of the Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act of 1996 (P.L. 104-127; 110 Stat. 987; April 4, 1996) amended this subsection by striking "producer" and inserting "person". The amendment was executed to both places where "producer" appeared as the probable intent of Congress.

(B) **AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.**—There is authorized to be appropriated to the Secretary to carry out this paragraph \$5,000,000 for each of fiscal years 2019 through 2023.

(2) **APPLICABILITY.**—Subsection (f)(2)(C) shall not apply to this subsection.

(3) **POLICY AND CRITERIA.**—The Secretary shall develop the appropriate policy and criteria that will allow willing persons to access existing mitigation banks, under this section or any other authority, that will serve the purposes of this section without requiring the Secretary to hold an easement, in whole or in part, in a mitigation bank.

**SEC. 1223. [16 U.S.C. 3823] AFFILIATED PERSONS.**

If a person is affected by a reduction in benefits under section 1221 and the affected person is affiliated with other persons for the purpose of receiving the benefits, the benefits of each affiliated person shall be reduced under section 1221 in proportion to the interest held by the affiliated person.

**SEC. 1224. [16 U.S.C. 3824] FAIRNESS OF COMPLIANCE.**

If the actions of an unrelated person or public entity, outside the control of, and without the prior approval of, the landowner or tenant result in a change in the characteristics of cropland that would cause the land to be determined to be a wetland, the affected land shall not be considered to be wetland for purposes of this subtitle.

Subtitle D—Agricultural Resources Conservation Program

**CHAPTER 1—COMPREHENSIVE CONSERVATION  
ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM**

**Subchapter A—General Provisions**

**[SEC. 1230A. [16 U.S.C. 3830a] GOOD FAITH RELIANCE.<sup>4</sup>]**

**Subchapter B—Conservation Reserve**

**SEC. 1231. [16 U.S.C. 3831] CONSERVATION RESERVE.**

(a) **IN GENERAL.**—Through the 2023 fiscal year, the Secretary shall formulate and carry out a conservation reserve program under which land is enrolled through the use of contracts to assist owners and operators of land specified in subsection (b) to conserve and improve the soil, water, and wildlife resources of such land and to address issues raised by State, regional, and national conservation initiatives.

(b) **ELIGIBLE LAND.**—The Secretary may include in the program established under this subchapter—

(1) highly erodible cropland that—

(A)(i) if permitted to remain untreated could substantially reduce the agricultural production capability for future generations; or

<sup>4</sup> Sec. 2006(c) of the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (P.L. 107–171; 116 Stat. 237; May 13, 2002) repealed former sec. 1230A (related to good faith reliance).

- (ii) cannot be farmed in accordance with a plan that complies with the requirements of subtitle B; and
- (B) the Secretary determines had a cropping history or was considered to be planted for 4 of the 6 years preceding the date of enactment of the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018<sup>5</sup>, on the condition that the Secretary shall consider to be planted cropland enrolled in the conservation reserve program;
- (2) marginal pasture land to be devoted to appropriate vegetation, including trees, in or near riparian areas, or devoted to similar water quality purposes (including marginal pastureland converted to wetland or established as wildlife habitat);
- (3) grasslands that—
  - (A) contain forbs or shrubland (including improved rangeland and pastureland) for which grazing is the predominant use;
  - (B) are located in an area historically dominated by grasslands; and
  - (C) could provide habitat for animal and plant populations of significant ecological value if the land is retained in its current use or restored to a natural condition;
- (4) cropland, marginal pasture land, and grasslands that will have a positive impact on water quality and will be devoted to—
  - (A) a grass sod waterway;
  - (B) a contour grass sod strip;
  - (C) a prairie strip;
  - (D) a filterstrip;
  - (E) a riparian buffer;
  - (F) a wetland or a wetland buffer;
  - (G) a saturated buffer;
  - (H) a bioreactor; or
  - (I) another similar water quality practice, as determined by the Secretary;
- (5) cropland that is otherwise ineligible if the Secretary determines that—
  - (A) if permitted to remain in agricultural production, the land would—
    - (i) contribute to the degradation of soil, water, or air quality; or
    - (ii) pose an on-site or off-site environmental threat to soil, water, or air quality;
  - (B) the land is a—
    - (i) newly-created, permanent grass sod waterway; or
    - (ii) a contour grass sod strip established and maintained as part of an approved conservation plan;
  - (C) the land will be devoted to newly established living snow fences, permanent wildlife habitat, windbreaks, shelterbelts, salt tolerant vegetation, field borders, or prac-

<sup>5</sup> The date of enactment of such Act is December 20, 2018.



tices to benefit State or federally identified wellhead protection areas;

(D) the land poses an off-farm environmental threat, or a threat of continued degradation of productivity due to soil salinity, if permitted to remain in production; or

(E) enrollment of the land would facilitate a net savings in groundwater or surface water resources of the agricultural operation of the producer;

(6) the portion of land in a field not enrolled in the conservation reserve in a case in which—

(A) more than 50 percent of the land in the field is enrolled as a buffer or filterstrip, or more than 75 percent of the land in the field is enrolled as a conservation practice other than as a buffer or filterstrip; and

(B) the remainder of the field is—

(i) infeasible to farm; and

(ii) enrolled at regular rental rates; or

(7) as determined by the Secretary, land—

(A) that was enrolled in the conservation reserve program under a 15-year contract that expired on September 30, 2017, or September 30, 2018;

(B) for which there was no opportunity for additional enrollment in that program; and

(C) on which the conservation practice under the expired contract under subparagraph (A) is maintained.

(c) **PLANTING STATUS OF CERTAIN LAND.**—For purposes of determining the eligibility of land to be placed in the conservation reserve established under this subchapter, land shall be considered to be planted to an agricultural commodity during a crop year if, during the crop year, the land was devoted to a conserving use.

(d) **ENROLLMENT.**—

(1) **MAXIMUM ACREAGE ENROLLED.**—The Secretary may maintain in the conservation reserve at any one time during—

(A) fiscal year 2019, not more than 24,000,000 acres;

(B) fiscal year 2020, not more than 24,500,000 acres;

(C) fiscal year 2021, not more than 25,000,000 acres;

(D) fiscal year 2022, not more than 25,500,000 acres;

and

(E) fiscal year 2023, not more than 27,000,000 acres.

(2) **GRASSLANDS.**—

(A) **LIMITATION.**—For purposes of applying the limitations in paragraph (1)—

(i) the Secretary shall enroll and maintain in the conservation reserve not fewer than 2,000,000 acres of the land described in subsection (b)(3) by September 30, 2023; and

(ii) in carrying out clause (i), to the maximum extent practicable, the Secretary shall maintain in the conservation reserve at any one time during—

(I) fiscal year 2019, 1,000,000 acres;

(II) fiscal year 2020, 1,500,000 acres; and

(III) fiscal years 2021 through 2023, 2,000,000

acres.

(B) PRIORITY.—In enrolling acres under subparagraph (A), the Secretary may give priority to land, as determined by the Secretary—

- (i) with expiring conservation reserve contracts;
- (ii) at risk of conversion or development; or
- (iii) of ecological significance, including land

that—

(I) may assist in the restoration of threatened or endangered species under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq.);

(II) may assist in preventing a species from being listed as a threatened or endangered species under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq.); or

(III) improves or creates wildlife habitat corridors.

(C) METHOD OF ENROLLMENT.—

(i) IN GENERAL.—In enrolling acres under subparagraph (A), the Secretary shall make the program available to owners or operators of eligible land on an annual enrollment basis with one or more ranking periods.

(ii) TIMING OF GRASSLAND RANKING PERIOD.—For purposes of grasslands described in subsection (b)(3), the Secretary shall announce at least 1 ranking period subsequent to the announcement of general enrollment offers.

(D) RESERVATION OF UNENROLLED ACRES.—If the Secretary is unable in a fiscal year to enroll enough acres of land described in subsection (b)(3) to meet the number of acres described in clause (ii) or (iii) of subparagraph (A) for the fiscal year—

(i) the Secretary shall reserve the remaining number of acres for that fiscal year for the enrollment of land described in subsection (b)(3); and

(ii) that number of acres shall not be available for the enrollment of any other type of eligible land.

(3) WATER QUALITY PRACTICES TO FOSTER CLEAN LAKES, ESTUARIES, AND RIVERS (CLEAR INITIATIVE).—

(A) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall give priority within continuous enrollment under paragraph (6) to the enrollment of land described in subsection (b)(4).

(B) SEDIMENT AND NUTRIENT LOADINGS.—In carrying out subparagraph (A), the Secretary shall give priority to the implementation of practices on land that, if enrolled, will help reduce sediment loadings, nutrient loadings, and harmful algal blooms, as determined by the Secretary.

(C) ACREAGE.—

(i) IN GENERAL.—Of the acres maintained in the conservation reserve in accordance with paragraph (1), to the maximum extent practicable, not less than 40 percent of acres enrolled in the conservation reserve using continuous enrollment under paragraph (6) shall be of land described in subsection (b)(4).

(ii) LIMITATION.—The acres described in clause (i) shall not include grasslands described in subsection (b)(3).

(D) REPORT.—The Secretary shall—

(i) in the monthly publication of the Secretary describing conservation reserve program statistics, include a description of enrollments through the priority under this paragraph; and

(ii) publish on the website of the Farm Service Agency an annual report describing a summary of, with respect to the enrollment priority under this paragraph—

(I) new enrollments;

(II) expirations;

(III) geographic distribution; and

(IV) estimated water quality benefits.

(4) STATE ENROLLMENT RATES.—At the beginning of each of fiscal years 2019 through 2023, to the maximum extent practicable, the Secretary shall allocate to the States proportionately 60 percent of the available number of acres each year for enrollment in the conservation reserve, in accordance with historical State enrollment rates, taking into consideration—

(A) the average number of acres of all land enrolled in the conservation reserve in each State during each of fiscal years 2007 through 2016;

(B) the average number of acres of all land enrolled in the conservation reserve nationally during each of fiscal years 2007 through 2016; and

(C) the acres available for enrollment during each of fiscal years 2019 through 2023, excluding acres described in paragraph (2).

(5) FREQUENCY.—In carrying out this subchapter, for contracts that are not available on a continuous enrollment basis, the Secretary shall hold a signup and enrollment not less often than once each year.

(6) CONTINUOUS ENROLLMENT PROCEDURE.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—To the maximum extent practicable, the Secretary shall allow producers to submit applications on a continuous basis for enrollment in—

(i) the conservation reserve of—

(I) marginal pasture land described in subsection (b)(2);

(II) land described in subsection (b)(4); and

(III) cropland described in subsection (b)(5);

and

(ii) the conservation reserve enhancement program under section 1231A.

(B) LIMITATION.—For purposes of applying the limitations in paragraph (1)—

(i) the Secretary shall, to the maximum extent practicable, enroll and maintain not fewer than 8,600,000 acres of land under subparagraph (A) by September 30, 2023; and

(ii) in carrying out clause (i), to the maximum extent practicable, the Secretary shall maintain in the conservation reserve at any one time during—

- (I) fiscal year 2019, 8,000,000 acres;
- (II) fiscal year 2020, 8,250,000 acres;
- (III) fiscal year 2021, 8,500,000 acres; and
- (IV) fiscal years 2022 and 2023, 8,600,000 acres.

(e) DURATION OF CONTRACT.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—For the purpose of carrying out this subchapter, the Secretary shall enter into contracts of not less than 10, nor more than 15, years.

(2) SPECIAL RULE FOR CERTAIN LAND.—In the case of land devoted to hardwood trees, shelterbelts, windbreaks, or wildlife corridors under a contract entered into under this subchapter, the owner or operator of the land may, within the limitations prescribed under paragraph (1), specify the duration of the contract.

(f) CONSERVATION PRIORITY AREAS.—

(1) DESIGNATION.—On application by the appropriate State agency, the Secretary shall designate areas of special environmental sensitivity as conservation priority areas.

(2)<sup>6</sup> ELIGIBLE AREAS.—Areas eligible for designation under this subsection shall include areas with actual and significant adverse water quality or habitat impacts related to agricultural production activities.

(3) EXPIRATION.—Conservation priority area designation under this subsection shall expire after 5 years, subject to redesignation, except that the Secretary may withdraw an area's designation if the Secretary finds that the area no longer contains actual and significant adverse water quality or habitat impacts related to agricultural production activities.

(4) DUTY OF SECRETARY.—In carrying out this subsection, the Secretary shall attempt to maximize water quality and habitat benefits in the watersheds described in paragraph (1) by promoting a significant level of enrollment of land within the watersheds in the program under this subchapter by whatever means the Secretary determines are appropriate and consistent with the purposes of this subchapter.

(g) MULTI-YEAR GRASSES AND LEGUMES.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—For purposes of this subchapter, alfalfa and other multi-year grasses and legumes in a rotation practice, approved by the Secretary, shall be considered agricultural commodities.

(2) CROPPING HISTORY.—Alfalfa, when grown as part of a rotation practice, as determined by the Secretary, is an agricultural commodity subject to the cropping history criteria under subsection (b)(1)(B) for the purpose of determining whether highly erodible cropland has been planted or considered planted for 4 of the 6 years referred to in such subsection.

<sup>6</sup>The amendment made to the heading of paragraph (2), as amended by section 2001(f)(2) of Public Law 113–79, was carried out by striking “watersheds” with a small cap letter “w” and a small cap letter “a” in the word “areas” in the inserted matter in order to reflect the probable intent of Congress.

## (h) ELIGIBILITY FOR CONSIDERATION.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—On the expiration of a contract entered into under this subchapter, the land subject to the contract shall be eligible to be considered for reenrollment in the conservation reserve.

## (2) REENROLLMENT LIMITATION FOR CERTAIN LAND.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—Except as provided in subparagraph (B), land subject to a contract entered into under this subchapter shall be eligible for only one reenrollment in the conservation reserve under paragraph (1) if the land is devoted to hardwood trees.

(B) EXCLUSIONS.—Subparagraph (A) shall not apply to—

- (i) riparian forested buffers;
- (ii) forested wetlands enrolled under subsection (d)(3) or the conservation reserve enhancement program under section 1231A; and
- (iii) shelterbelts.

(i) BALANCE OF NATURAL RESOURCE PURPOSES.—In determining the acceptability of contract offers under this subchapter, the Secretary shall ensure, to the maximum extent practicable, an equitable balance among the conservation purposes of soil erosion, water quality, and wildlife habitat.

**SEC. 1231A. [16 U.S.C. 3831a] CONSERVATION RESERVE ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM.**

## (a) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

(1) CREP.—The term “CREP” means a conservation reserve enhancement program carried out under subsection (b)(1).

(2) ELIGIBLE LAND.—The term “eligible land” means land that is eligible to be included in the program established under this subchapter.

(3) ELIGIBLE PARTNER.—The term “eligible partner” means—

- (A) a State;
- (B) a political subdivision of a State;
- (C) an Indian tribe (as defined in section 4 of the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (25 U.S.C. 5304)); or
- (D) a nongovernmental organization.

(4) MANAGEMENT.—The term “management” means an activity conducted by an owner or operator under a contract entered into under this subchapter after the establishment of a conservation practice on eligible land, to regularly maintain or enhance the vegetative cover established by the conservation practice—

- (A) throughout the term of the contract; and
- (B) consistent with the conservation plan that covers the eligible land.

## (b) AGREEMENTS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary may enter into an agreement with an eligible partner to carry out a conservation reserve enhancement program—

(A) to assist in enrolling eligible land in the program established under this subchapter; and

(B) that the Secretary determines will advance the purposes of this subchapter.

(2) CONTENTS.—An agreement entered into under paragraph (1) shall—

(A) describe—

(i) 1 or more specific State or nationally significant conservation concerns to be addressed by the agreement;

(ii) quantifiable environmental goals for addressing the concerns under clause (i);

(iii) a suitable acreage goal for enrollment of eligible land under the agreement, as determined by the Secretary;

(iv) the location of eligible land to be enrolled in the project area identified under the agreement;

(v) the payments to be offered by the Secretary and eligible partner to an owner or operator; and

(vi) an appropriate list of conservation reserve program conservation practices that are appropriate to meeting the concerns described under clause (i), as determined by the Secretary in consultation with eligible partners;

(B) subject to subparagraph (C), require the eligible partner to provide matching funds—

(i) in an amount determined during a negotiation between the Secretary and 1 or more eligible partners, if the majority of the matching funds to carry out the agreement are provided by 1 or more eligible partners that are not nongovernmental organizations; or

(ii) in an amount not less than 30 percent of the cost required to carry out the conservation measures and practices described in the agreement, if a majority of the matching funds to carry out the agreement are provided by 1 or more nongovernmental organizations; and

(C) include procedures to allow for a temporary waiver of the matching requirements under subparagraph (B), or continued enrollment with a temporary suspension of incentives or eligible partner contributions for new agreements, during a period when an eligible partner loses the authority or ability to provide matching contributions, if the Secretary determines that the temporary waiver or continued enrollment with a temporary suspension will advance the purposes of this subchapter.

(3) EFFECT ON EXISTING AGREEMENTS.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—Subject to subparagraph (B), an agreement under this subsection shall not affect, modify, or interfere with existing agreements under this subchapter.

(B) MODIFICATION OF EXISTING AGREEMENTS.—To implement this section, the signatories to an agreement under this subsection may mutually agree to a modifica-

tion of an agreement entered into before the date of enactment of this section under the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program established by the Secretary under this subchapter.

(c) PAYMENTS.—

(1) MATCHING REQUIREMENT.—Funds provided by an eligible partner may be in cash, in-kind contributions, or technical assistance, as determined by the Secretary.

(2) MARGINAL PASTURELAND COST-SHARE PAYMENTS.—The Secretary shall ensure that cost-share payments to an owner or operator to install stream fencing, crossings, and alternative water development on marginal pastureland under a CREP reflect the fair market value of the cost of installation.

(3) COST-SHARE AND PRACTICE INCENTIVE PAYMENTS.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—On request of an owner or operator, the Secretary shall provide cost-share payments when a major component of a conservation practice is completed under a CREP, as determined by the Secretary.

(B) EXEMPTION.—For purposes of implementing conservation practices on land enrolled under a CREP, the Secretary may waive the contribution limitation described in section 1234(b)(2)(A).

(4) RIPARIAN BUFFER MANAGEMENT PAYMENTS.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—In the case of an agreement under subsection (b)(1) that includes riparian buffers as an eligible practice, the Secretary shall make cost-share payments to encourage the regular management of the riparian buffer throughout the term of the agreement, consistent with the conservation plan that covers the eligible land.

(B) LIMITATION.—The amount of payments received by an owner or operator under subparagraph (A) shall not be greater than 100 percent of the normal and customary projected management cost, as determined by the Secretary, in consultation with the applicable State technical committee established under section 1261(a).

(d) FORESTED RIPARIAN BUFFER PRACTICE.—

(1) FOOD-PRODUCING WOODY PLANTS.—In the case of an agreement under subsection (b)(1) that includes forested riparian buffers as an eligible practice, the Secretary shall allow an owner or operator—

(A) to plant food-producing woody plants in the forested riparian buffers, on the conditions that—

(i) the plants shall contribute to the conservation of soil, water quality, and wildlife habitat; and

(ii) the planting shall be consistent with—

(I) recommendations of the applicable State technical committee established under section 1261(a); and

(II) technical guide standards of the applicable field office of the Natural Resources Conservation Service; and

(B) to harvest from plants described in subparagraph (A), on the conditions that—

(i) the harvesting shall not damage the conserving cover or otherwise have a negative impact on the conservation concerns targeted by the CREP;

(ii) only native plant species appropriate to the region shall be used within 35 feet of the watercourse; and

(iii) the producer shall be subject to a reduction in the rental rate commensurate to the value of the crop harvested.

(2) **TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE.**—For the purpose of enrolling forested riparian buffers in a CREP, the Administrator of the Farm Service Agency shall coordinate with the applicable State forestry agency.

(e) **DROUGHT AND WATER CONSERVATION AGREEMENTS.**—In the case of an agreement under subsection (b)(1) to address regional drought concerns, in accordance with the conservation purposes of the CREP, the Secretary, in consultation with the applicable State technical committee established under section 1261(a), may—

(1) notwithstanding subsection (a)(2), enroll other agricultural land on which the resource concerns identified in the agreement can be addressed if the enrollment of the land is critical to the accomplishment of the purposes of the agreement;

(2) permit dryland agricultural uses with the adoption of best management practices on enrolled land if the agreement involves the significant long-term reduction of consumptive water use and dryland production is compatible with the agreement; and

(3) calculate annual rental payments consistent with existing administrative practice for similar drought and water conservation agreements under this subtitle and ensure regional consistency in those rates.

(f) **STATUS REPORT.**—Not later than 180 days after the end of each fiscal year, the Secretary shall submit to Congress a report that describes, with respect to each agreement entered into under subsection (b)(1)—

(1) the status of the agreement;

(2) the purposes and objectives of the agreement;

(3) the Federal and eligible partner commitments made under the agreement; and

(4) the progress made in fulfilling those commitments.

**SEC. 1231B. [16 U.S.C. 3831b] FARMABLE WETLAND PROGRAM.**

(a) **PROGRAM REQUIRED.**—

(1) **IN GENERAL.**—During the 2008 through 2023 fiscal years, the Secretary shall carry out a farmable wetland program in each State under which the Secretary shall enroll eligible acreage described in subsection (b).

(2) **PARTICIPATION AMONG STATES.**—The Secretary shall ensure, to the maximum extent practicable, that owners and operators in each State have an equitable opportunity to participate in the program established under this section.

(b) **ELIGIBLE ACREAGE.**—



(1) WETLAND AND RELATED LAND.—Subject to subsections (c) and (d), an owner or operator may enroll in the conservation reserve, pursuant to the program established under this section, land—

(A) that is wetland (including a converted wetland described in section 1222(b)(1)(A)) that had a cropping history during at least 3 of the immediately preceding 10 crop years;

(B) on which a constructed wetland is to be developed that will receive surface and subsurface flow from row crop agricultural production and is designed to provide nitrogen removal in addition to other wetland functions;

(C) that was devoted to commercial pond-raised aquaculture in any year during the period of calendar years 2002 through 2007; or

(D) that, after January 1, 1990, and before December 31, 2002, was—

(i) cropped during at least 3 of 10 crop years; and

(ii) subject to the natural overflow of a prairie wetland.

(2) BUFFER ACREAGE.—Subject to subsections (c) and (d), an owner or operator may enroll in the conservation reserve, pursuant to the program established under this section, buffer acreage that—

(A) with respect to land described in subparagraph (A), (B), or (C) of paragraph (1)—

(i) is contiguous to such land;

(ii) is used to protect such land; and

(iii) is of such width as the Secretary determines is necessary to protect such land, taking into consideration and accommodating the farming practices (including the straightening of boundaries to accommodate machinery) used with respect to the cropland that surrounds such land; and

(B) with respect to land described in subparagraph (D) of paragraph (1), enhances a wildlife benefit to the extent practicable in terms of upland to wetland ratios, as determined by the Secretary.

(c) PROGRAM LIMITATIONS.—

(1) ACREAGE LIMITATION.—The Secretary may enroll in the conservation reserve, pursuant to the program established under this section, not more than—

(A) 100,000 acres in any State; and

(B) a total of 750,000 acres.

(2) RELATIONSHIP TO MAXIMUM ENROLLMENT.—Subject to paragraph (3), any acreage enrolled in the conservation reserve under this section shall be considered acres maintained in the conservation reserve.

(3) RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER ENROLLED ACREAGE.—Acreage enrolled in the conservation reserve under this section shall not affect for any fiscal year the quantity of—

(A) acreage enrolled to establish conservation buffers as part of the program announced on March 24, 1998 (63 Fed. Reg. 14109); or

(B) acreage enrolled into the conservation reserve enhancement program announced on May 27, 1998 (63 Fed. Reg. 28965).

(4) REVIEW; POTENTIAL INCREASE IN ENROLLMENT ACREAGE.—The Secretary shall conduct a review of the program established under this section with respect to each State that has enrolled land in the conservation reserve pursuant to the program. As a result of the review, the Secretary may increase the number of acres that may be enrolled in a State under the program to not more than 200,000 acres, notwithstanding paragraph (1)(A).

(d) OWNER OR OPERATOR ENROLLMENT LIMITATIONS.—

(1) WETLAND AND RELATED LAND.—

(A) WETLANDS AND CONSTRUCTED WETLANDS.—The maximum size of any land described in subparagraph (A) or (B) of subsection (b)(1) that an owner or operator may enroll in the conservation reserve, pursuant to the program established under this section, shall be 40 contiguous acres.

(B) FLOODED FARMLAND.—The maximum size of any land described in subparagraph (D) of subsection (b)(1) that an owner or operator may enroll in the conservation reserve, pursuant to the program established under this section, shall be 20 contiguous acres.

(C) COVERAGE.—All acres described in subparagraph (A) or (B), including acres that are ineligible for payment, shall be covered by the conservation contract.

(2) BUFFER ACREAGE.—The maximum size of any buffer acreage described in subsection (b)(2) that an owner or operator may enroll in the conservation reserve under this section shall be determined by the Secretary in consultation with the State Technical Committee.

(3) TRACTS.—Except for land described in subsection (b)(1)(C) and buffer acreage related to such land, the maximum size of any eligible acreage described in subsection (b)(1) in a tract of an owner or operator enrolled in the conservation reserve under this section shall be 40 acres.

(e) DUTIES OF OWNERS AND OPERATORS.—During the term of a contract entered into under the program established under this section, an owner or operator shall agree—

(1) to restore the hydrology of the wetland within the eligible acreage to the maximum extent practicable, as determined by the Secretary;

(2) to establish vegetative cover (which may include emerging vegetation in water and bottomland hardwoods, cypress, and other appropriate tree species) on the eligible acreage, as determined by the Secretary;

(3) to a general prohibition of commercial use of the enrolled land; and

(4) to carry out other duties described in section 1232.

(f) DUTIES OF THE SECRETARY.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Except as provided in paragraphs (2) and (3), in return for a contract entered into under this section, the Secretary shall—

(A) make payments to the owner or operator based on rental rates for cropland; and

(B) provide assistance to the owner or operator in accordance with sections 1233 and 1234.

(2) CONTRACT OFFERS AND PAYMENTS.—The Secretary shall use the method of determination described in section 1234(d) to determine the acceptability of contract offers and the amount of rental payments under this section.

(3) INCENTIVES.—The amounts payable to owners and operators in the form of rental payments under contracts entered into under this section shall reflect incentives that are provided to owners and operators to enroll filterstrips in the conservation reserve under section 1234.

**SEC. 1231C. [16 U.S.C. 3831c] PILOT PROGRAMS.**

(a) CLEAR 30.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—

(A) ENROLLMENT.—The Secretary shall establish a pilot program to enroll land in the conservation reserve program through a 30-year conservation reserve contract (referred to in this subsection as a “CLEAR 30 contract”) in accordance with this subsection.

(B) INCLUSION OF ACREAGE LIMITATION.—For purposes of applying the limitations in section 1231(d)(1), the Secretary shall include acres of land enrolled under this subsection.

(2) EXPIRED CONSERVATION CONTRACT ELECTION.—

(A) DEFINITION OF COVERED CONTRACT.—In this paragraph, the term “covered contract” means a contract entered into under this subchapter that—

(i) expires on or after the date of enactment of the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018; and

(ii) covers land enrolled in the conservation reserve program under the clean lakes, estuaries, and rivers priority described in section 1231(d)(3) (or the predecessor practices that constitute the priority, as determined by the Secretary).

(B) ELECTION.—On the expiration of a covered contract, an owner or operator party to the covered contract shall elect—

(i) not to reenroll the land under the contract;

(ii) to offer to reenroll the land under the contract if the land remains eligible under the terms in effect as of the date of expiration; or

(iii) not to reenroll the land under the contract and to enroll that land through a CLEAR 30 contract under this subsection.

(3) ELIGIBLE LAND.—Only land that is subject to an expired covered contract shall be eligible for enrollment through a CLEAR 30 contract under this subsection.

(4) TERM.—The term of a CLEAR 30 contract shall be 30 years.

(5) AGREEMENTS.—To be eligible to enroll land in the conservation reserve program through a CLEAR 30 contract, the

owner of the land shall enter into an agreement with the Secretary—

(A) to implement a conservation reserve plan developed for the land;

(B) to comply with the terms and conditions of the contract and any related agreements; and

(C) to temporarily suspend the base history for the land covered by the contract.

(6) TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF CLEAR 30 CONTRACTS.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—A CLEAR 30 contract shall include terms and conditions that—

(i) permit—

(I) repairs, improvements, and inspections on the land that are necessary to maintain existing public drainage systems; and

(II) owners to control public access on the land while identifying access routes to be used for restoration activities and management and contract monitoring;

(ii) prohibit—

(I) the alteration of wildlife habitat and other natural features of the land, unless specifically authorized by the Secretary as part of the conservation reserve plan;

(II) the spraying of the land with chemicals or the mowing of the land, except where the spraying or mowing is authorized by the Secretary or is necessary—

(aa) to comply with Federal or State noxious weed control laws;

(bb) to comply with a Federal or State emergency pest treatment program; or

(cc) to meet habitat needs of specific wildlife species;

(III) any activity to be carried out on the land of the owner or successor that is immediately adjacent to, and functionally related to, the land that is subject to the contract if the activity will alter, degrade, or otherwise diminish the functional value of the land; and

(IV) the adoption of any other practice that would tend to defeat the purposes of the conservation reserve program, as determined by the Secretary; and

(iii) include any additional provision that the Secretary determines is appropriate to carry out this section or facilitate the practical administration of this section.

(B) VIOLATION.—On the violation of a term or condition of a CLEAR 30 contract, the Secretary may require the owner to refund all or part of any payments received by the owner under the conservation reserve program, with interest on the payments, as determined appropriate by the Secretary.

(C) COMPATIBLE USES.—Land subject to a CLEAR 30 contract may be used for compatible economic uses, including hunting and fishing, managed timber harvest, or periodic haying or grazing, if the use—

(i) is specifically permitted by the conservation reserve plan developed for the land; and

(ii) is consistent with the long-term protection and enhancement of the conservation resources for which the contract was established.

(7) COMPENSATION.—

(A) AMOUNT OF PAYMENTS.—The Secretary shall provide payment under this subsection to an owner of land enrolled through a CLEAR 30 contract using 30 annual payments in an amount equal to the amount that would be used if the land were to be enrolled in the conservation reserve program under section 1231(d)(3).

(B) FORM OF PAYMENT.—Compensation for a CLEAR 30 contract shall be provided by the Secretary in the form of a cash payment in an amount determined under subparagraph (A).

(C) TIMING.—The Secretary shall provide any annual payment obligation under subparagraph (A) as early as practicable in each fiscal year.

(D) PAYMENTS TO OTHERS.—The Secretary shall make a payment, in accordance with regulations prescribed by the Secretary, in a manner as the Secretary determines is fair and reasonable under the circumstances, if an owner who is entitled to a payment under this section—

(i) dies;

(ii) becomes incompetent;

(iii) is succeeded by another person or entity who renders or completes the required performance; or

(iv) is otherwise unable to receive the payment.

(8) TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall assist owners in complying with the terms and conditions of a CLEAR 30 contract.

(B) CONTRACTS OR AGREEMENTS.—The Secretary may enter into 1 or more contracts with private entities or agreements with a State, nongovernmental organization, or Indian Tribe to carry out necessary maintenance of a CLEAR 30 contract if the Secretary determines that the contract or agreement will advance the purposes of the conservation reserve program.

(9) ADMINISTRATION.—

(A) CONSERVATION RESERVE PLAN.—The Secretary shall develop a conservation reserve plan for any land subject to a CLEAR 30 contract, which shall include practices and activities necessary to maintain, protect, and enhance the conservation value of the enrolled land.

(B) DELEGATION OF CONTRACT ADMINISTRATION.—

(i) FEDERAL, STATE, OR LOCAL GOVERNMENT AGENCIES.—The Secretary may delegate any of the management, monitoring, and enforcement responsibilities of

the Secretary under this subsection to other Federal, State, or local government agencies that have the appropriate authority, expertise, and resources necessary to carry out those delegated responsibilities.

(ii) CONSERVATION ORGANIZATIONS.—The Secretary may delegate any management responsibilities of the Secretary under this subsection to conservation organizations if the Secretary determines the conservation organization has similar expertise and resources.

(b) SOIL HEALTH AND INCOME PROTECTION PILOT PROGRAM.—

(1) DEFINITION OF ELIGIBLE LAND.—In this subsection:

(A) IN GENERAL.—The term “eligible land” means cropland that—

(i) is selected by the owner or operator of the land for proposed enrollment in the pilot program under this subsection; and

(ii) as determined by the Secretary—

(I) is located within 1 or more States that are part of the prairie pothole region, as selected by the Secretary based on consultation with State Committees of the Farm Service Agency and State technical committees established under section 1261(a) from that region;

(II) had a cropping history or was considered to be planted during each of the 3 crop years preceding enrollment; and

(III) is verified to be less-productive land, as compared to other land on the applicable farm.

(B) EXCLUSION.—The term “eligible land” does not include any land that was enrolled in a conservation reserve program contract in any of the 3 crop years preceding enrollment in the pilot program under this subsection.

(2) ESTABLISHMENT.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall establish a voluntary soil health and income protection pilot program under which eligible land is enrolled through the use of contracts to assist owners and operators of eligible land to conserve and improve the soil, water, and wildlife resources of the eligible land.

(B) DEADLINE FOR PARTICIPATION.—Eligible land may be enrolled in the program under this section through December 31, 2020.

(3) CONTRACTS.—

(A) REQUIREMENTS.—A contract described in paragraph (2) shall—

(i) be entered into by the Secretary, the owner of the eligible land, and (if applicable) the operator of the eligible land; and

(ii) provide that, during the term of the contract—

(I) the lowest practicable cost perennial conserving use cover crop for the eligible land, as determined by the applicable State conservationist after considering the advice of the applicable State

technical committee, shall be planted on the eligible land;

(II) except as provided in subparagraph (E), the owner or operator of the eligible land shall pay the cost of planting the conserving use cover crop under subclause (I);

(III) subject to subparagraph (F), the eligible land may be harvested for seed, hayed, or grazed outside the primary nesting season established for the applicable county;

(IV) the eligible land may be eligible for a walk-in access program of the applicable State, if any; and

(V) a nonprofit wildlife organization may provide to the owner or operator of the eligible land a payment in exchange for an agreement by the owner or operator not to harvest the conserving use cover.

(B) PAYMENTS.—Except as provided in subparagraphs (E) and (F)(ii)(II), the annual rental rate for a payment under a contract described in paragraph (2) shall be equal to 50 percent of the average rental rate for the applicable county under section 1234(d), as determined by the Secretary.

(C) LIMITATION ON ENROLLED LAND.—Not more than 15 percent of the eligible land on a farm may be enrolled in the pilot program under this subsection.

(D) TERM.—

(i) IN GENERAL.—Except as provided in clause (ii), each contract described in paragraph (2) shall be for a term of 3, 4, or 5 years, as determined by the parties to the contract.

(ii) EARLY TERMINATION.—

(I) SECRETARY.—The Secretary may terminate a contract described in paragraph (2) before the end of the term described in clause (i) if the Secretary determines that the early termination of the contract is necessary.

(II) OWNERS AND OPERATORS.—An owner and (if applicable) an operator of eligible land enrolled in the pilot program under this subsection may terminate a contract described in paragraph (2) before the end of the term described in clause (i) if the owner and (if applicable) the operator pay to the Secretary an amount equal to the amount of rental payments received under the contract.

(E) BEGINNING, LIMITED RESOURCE, SOCIALLY DISADVANTAGED, OR VETERAN FARMERS AND RANCHERS.—With respect to a beginning, limited resource, socially disadvantaged, or veteran farmer or rancher, as determined by the Secretary—

(i) a contract described in paragraph (2) shall provide that, during the term of the contract, of the ac-

tual cost of establishment of the conserving use cover crop under subparagraph (A)(ii)(I)—

(I) using the funds of the Commodity Credit Corporation, the Secretary shall pay 50 percent; and

(II) the beginning, limited resource, socially disadvantaged, or veteran farmer or rancher shall pay 50 percent; and

(ii) the annual rental rate for a payment under a contract described in paragraph (2) shall be equal to 75 percent of the average rental rate for the applicable county under section 1234(d), as determined by the Secretary.

(F) HARVESTING, HAYING, AND GRAZING OUTSIDE APPLICABLE PERIOD.—The harvesting for seed, haying, or grazing of eligible land under subparagraph (A)(ii)(III) outside of the primary nesting season established for the applicable county shall be subject to the conditions that—

(i) with respect to eligible land that is so hayed or grazed, adequate stubble height shall be maintained to protect the soil on the eligible land, as determined by the applicable State conservationist after considering the advice of the applicable State technical committee; and

(ii) with respect to eligible land that is so harvested for seed—

(I) the eligible land shall not be eligible to be insured or reinsured under the Federal Crop Insurance Act (7 U.S.C. 1501 et seq.); and

(II) the rental payment otherwise applicable to the eligible land under this subsection shall be reduced by 25 percent.

(4) ACREAGE LIMITATION.—Of the number of acres available for enrollment in the conservation reserve under section 1231(d)(1), not more than 50,000 total acres of eligible land may be enrolled under the pilot program under this subsection.

(5) REPORT.—The Secretary shall submit to the Committee on Agriculture of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry of the Senate an annual report describing the eligible land enrolled in the pilot program under this subsection, including—

(A) the estimated conservation value of the land; and

(B) estimated savings from reduced commodity payments, crop insurance indemnities, and crop insurance premium subsidies.

#### **SEC. 1232. [16 U.S.C. 3832] DUTIES OF OWNERS AND OPERATORS.**

(a) IN GENERAL.—Under the terms of a contract entered into under this subchapter, during the term of the contract, an owner or operator of a farm or ranch shall agree—

(1) to implement a plan approved by the local conservation district (or in an area not located within a conservation district, a plan approved by the Secretary) for converting eligible land normally devoted to the production of an agricultural



commodity on the farm or ranch to a less intensive use (as defined by the Secretary), such as pasture, permanent grass, legumes, forbs, shrubs, or trees, substantially in accordance with a schedule outlined in the plan;

(2) to place highly erodible cropland subject to the contract in the conservation reserve established under this subchapter;

(3) not to use the land for agricultural purposes, except as permitted by the Secretary;

(4) to establish approved vegetative cover (which may include emerging vegetation in water), water cover for the enhancement of wildlife, or, where practicable, maintain existing cover on the land, except that—

(A) the water cover shall not include ponds for the purpose of watering livestock, irrigating crops, or raising fish for commercial purposes; and

(B) the Secretary shall not terminate the contract for failure to establish approved vegetative or water cover on the land if—

(i) the failure to plant the cover was due to excessive rainfall or flooding;

(ii) the land subject to the contract that could practicably be planted to the cover is planted to the cover; and

(iii) the land on which the owner or operator was unable to plant the cover is planted to the cover after the wet conditions that prevented the planting subsides;

(5) to undertake management on the land as needed throughout the term of the contract to implement the conservation plan;

(6) on a violation of a term or condition of the contract at any time the owner or operator has control of the land—

(A) to forfeit all rights to receive rental payments and cost sharing payments under the contract and to refund to the Secretary any rental payments and cost sharing payments received by the owner or operator under the contract, together with interest on the payments as determined by the Secretary, if the Secretary, after considering the recommendations of the soil conservation district and the Natural Resources Conservation Service, determines that the violation is of such nature as to warrant termination of the contract; or

(B) to refund to the Secretary, or accept adjustments to, the rental payments and cost sharing payments provided to the owner or operator, as the Secretary considers appropriate, if the Secretary determines that the violation does not warrant termination of the contract;

(7) on the transfer of the right and interest of the owner or operator in land subject to the contract—

(A) to forfeit all rights to rental payments and cost sharing payments under the contract; and

(B) to refund to the United States all rental payments and cost sharing payments received by the owner or operator, or accept such payment adjustments or make such re-

funds as the Secretary considers appropriate and consistent with the objectives of this subchapter; unless the transferee of the land agrees with the Secretary to assume all obligations of the contract, except that no refund of rental payments and cost sharing payments shall be required if the land is purchased by or for the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, or the transferee and the Secretary agree to modifications to the contract, in a case in which the modifications are consistent with the objectives of the program, as determined by the Secretary;

(8) not to conduct any harvesting or grazing, nor otherwise make commercial use of the forage, on land that is subject to the contract, nor adopt any similar practice specified in the contract by the Secretary as a practice that would tend to defeat the purposes of the contract, except as provided in subsection (b) or (c) of section 1233;

(9) not to conduct any planting of trees on land that is subject to the contract unless the contract specifies that the harvesting and commercial sale of trees such as Christmas trees are prohibited, nor otherwise make commercial use of trees on land that is subject to the contract unless it is expressly permitted in the contract, nor adopt any similar practice specified in the contract by the Secretary as a practice that would tend to defeat the purposes of the contract, except that no contract shall prohibit activities consistent with customary forestry practice, such as pruning, thinning, or stand improvement of trees, on land converted to forestry use;

(10) on land devoted to hardwood or other trees, excluding windbreaks and shelterbelts, to carry out proper thinning and other practices—

(A) to enhance the conservation benefits and wildlife habitat resources addressed by the conservation practice under which the land is enrolled; and

(B) to promote forest management;

(11) not to adopt any practice specified by the Secretary in the contract as a practice that would tend to defeat the purposes of this subchapter; and

(12) to comply with such additional provisions as the Secretary determines are desirable and are included in the contract to carry out this subchapter or to facilitate the practical administration of this subchapter.

(b) CONSERVATION PLANS.—The plan referred to in subsection (a)(1) shall set forth—

(1) the conservation measures and practices to be carried out by the owner or operator during the term of the contract; and

(2) the commercial use, if any, to be permitted on the land during the term.

(c) FORECLOSURE.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Notwithstanding any other provision of law, an owner or operator who is a party to a contract entered into under this subchapter may not be required to make repayments to the Secretary of amounts received under the contract if the land that is subject to the contract has been foreclosed

on and the Secretary determines that forgiving the repayments is appropriate in order to provide fair and equitable treatment.

(2) RESUMPTION OF CONTROL.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—This subsection shall not void the responsibilities of an owner or operator under the contract if the owner or operator resumes control over the land that is subject to the contract within the period specified in the contract.

(B) CONTRACT.—On the resumption of the control over the land by the owner or operator, the provisions of the contract in effect on the date of the foreclosure shall apply.

**SEC. 1233. [16 U.S.C. 3833] DUTIES OF THE SECRETARY.**

(a) COST-SHARE AND RENTAL PAYMENTS.—In return for a contract entered into by an owner or operator under the conservation reserve program, the Secretary shall—

(1) share the cost of carrying out the conservation measures and practices set forth in the contract for which the Secretary determines that cost sharing is appropriate and in the public interest, including the cost of fencing and other water distribution practices, if applicable; and

(2) for a period of years not in excess of the term of the contract, pay an annual rental payment, in accordance with section 1234(d), for—

(A) the conversion of highly erodible cropland, marginal pastureland, or other eligible lands normally devoted to the production of an agricultural commodity on a farm or ranch to a less intensive use; or

(B) the development and management of grasslands for multiple natural resource conservation benefits, including to soil, water, air, and wildlife.

(b) SPECIFIED ACTIVITIES PERMITTED.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary, in coordination with the applicable State technical committee established under section 1261(a), shall permit certain activities or commercial uses of established cover on land that is subject to a contract under the conservation reserve program if—

(A) those activities or uses—

(i) are consistent with the conservation of soil, water quality, and wildlife habitat;

(ii) are subject to appropriate restrictions during the primary nesting season for birds in the local area that are economically significant, in significant decline, or conserved in accordance with Federal or State law;

(iii) contribute to the health and vigor of the established cover; and

(iv) are consistent with a site-specific plan, including vegetative management requirements, stocking rates, and frequency and duration of activity, taking into consideration regional differences, such as climate, soil type, and natural resources; and

(B) the Secretary, in coordination with the State technical committee, includes contract modifications—

- (i) without any reduction in the rental rate for—
  - (I) emergency haying, emergency grazing, or other emergency use of the forage in response to a localized or regional drought, flooding, wildfire, or other emergency, on all practices, outside the primary nesting season, when—
    - (aa) the county is designated as D2 (severe drought) or greater according to the United States Drought Monitor;
    - (bb) there is at least a 40 percent loss in forage production in the county; or
    - (cc) the Secretary, in coordination with the State technical committee, determines that the program can assist in the response to a natural disaster event without permanent damage to the established cover;
  - (II) emergency grazing on all practices during the primary nesting season if payments are authorized for a county under the livestock forage disaster program under clause (ii) of section 1501(c)(3)(D) of the Agricultural Act of 2014 (7 U.S.C. 9081(c)(3)(D)), at 50 percent of the normal carrying capacity determined under clause (i) of that section, adjusted to the site-specific plan;
  - (III) emergency haying on certain practices, outside the primary nesting season, if payments are authorized for a county under the livestock forage disaster program under clause (ii) of section 1501(c)(3)(D) of the Agricultural Act of 2014 (7 U.S.C. 9081(c)(3)(D)), on not more than 50 percent of contract acres, as identified in the site-specific plan;
  - (IV) grazing of all practices, outside the primary nesting season, if included as a mid-contract management practice under section 1232(a)(5);
  - (V) the intermittent and seasonal use of vegetative buffer established under paragraphs (4) and (5) of section 1231(b) that are incidental to agricultural production on land adjacent to the buffer such that the permitted use—
    - (aa) does not destroy the permanent vegetative cover; and
    - (bb) retains suitable vegetative structure for wildlife cover and shelter outside the primary nesting season; or
  - (VI) grazing on all practices, outside the primary nesting season, if conducted by a beginning farmer or rancher; or
- (ii) with a 25 percent reduction in the annual rental rate for the acres covered by the authorized activity, including—
  - (I) grazing not more frequently than every other year on the same land, except that during the primary nesting season, grazing shall be sub-

ject to a 50 percent reduction in the stocking rate specified in the site-specific plan;

(II) grazing of all practices during the primary nesting season, with a 50 percent reduction in the stocking rate specified in the site-specific plan;

(III) haying and other commercial use (including the managed harvesting of biomass and excluding the harvesting of vegetative cover), on the condition that the activity—

(aa) is completed outside the primary nesting season;

(bb) occurs not more than once every 3 years; and

(cc) maintains 25 percent of the total contract acres unharvested, in accordance with a site-specific plan that provides for wildlife cover and shelter;

(IV) annual grazing outside the primary nesting season if consistent with a site-specific plan that is authorized for the control of invasive species; and

(V) the installation of wind turbines and associated access, except that in permitting the installation of wind turbines, the Secretary shall determine the number and location of wind turbines that may be installed, taking into account—

(aa) the location, size, and other physical characteristics of the land;

(bb) the extent to which the land contains threatened or endangered wildlife and wildlife habitat; and

(cc) the purposes of the conservation reserve program under this subchapter.

(2) CONDITIONS ON HAYING AND GRAZING.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary may permit haying or grazing in accordance with paragraph (1) on any land or practice subject to a contract under the conservation reserve program.

(B) EXCEPTIONS.—

(i) DAMAGE TO VEGETATIVE COVER.—Haying or grazing described in paragraph (1) shall not be permitted on land subject to a contract under the conservation reserve program, or under a particular practice, if haying or grazing for that year under that practice, as applicable, would cause long-term damage to vegetative cover on that land.

(ii) SPECIAL AGREEMENTS.—

(I) IN GENERAL.—Except as provided in subclause (II), haying or grazing described in paragraph (1) shall not be permitted on—

(aa) land covered by a contract enrolled under the State acres for wildlife enhancement program established by the Secretary; or

(bb) land covered by a contract enrolled under a conservation reserve enhancement program established under section 1231A or the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program established by the Secretary under this subchapter.

(II) EXCEPTION.—Subclause (I) shall not apply to land on which haying or grazing is specifically permitted under the applicable conservation reserve enhancement program agreement or other partnership agreement entered into under this subchapter.

(c) AUTHORIZED ACTIVITIES ON GRASSLANDS.—For eligible land described in section 1231(b)(3), the Secretary shall permit the following activities:

(1) Common grazing practices, including maintenance and necessary cultural practices, on the land in a manner that is consistent with maintaining the viability of grassland, forb, and shrub species appropriate to that locality.

(2) Haying, mowing, or harvesting for seed production, subject to appropriate restrictions during the nesting season for birds in the local area that are economically significant, in significant decline, or conserved in accordance with Federal or State law, as determined by the Secretary in consultation with the State technical committee.

(3) Fire suppression, fire-related rehabilitation, and construction of fire breaks.

(4) Grazing-related activities, such as fencing and livestock watering.

(d) RESOURCE CONSERVING USE.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Beginning on the date that is 1 year before the date of termination of a contract under the program, the Secretary shall allow an owner or operator to make conservation and land improvements for economic use that facilitate maintaining protection of enrolled land after expiration of the contract.

(2) CONSERVATION PLAN.—The Secretary shall require an owner or operator carrying out the activities described in paragraph (1) to develop and implement a conservation plan.

(3) RE-ENROLLMENT PROHIBITED.—Land improved under paragraph (1) may not be re-enrolled in the conservation reserve program for 5 years after the date of termination of the contract.

(4) PAYMENT REDUCTION.—In the case of an activity carried out under paragraph (1), the Secretary shall reduce the payment otherwise payable under the contract by an amount commensurate with the economic value of the activity.

(e) NATURAL DISASTER OR ADVERSE WEATHER AS MID-CONTRACT MANAGEMENT.—In the case of a natural disaster or adverse weather event that has the effect of a management practice consistent with the conservation plan, the Secretary shall not require further management practices pursuant to section 1232(a)(5) that are intended to achieve the same effect.

**SEC. 1234. [16 U.S.C. 3834] PAYMENTS.**

(a) **TIMING.**—The Secretary shall provide payment for obligations incurred by the Secretary under a contract entered into under this subchapter—

(1) with respect to any cost-sharing payment obligation incurred by the Secretary, as soon as practicable after the obligation is incurred; and

(2) with respect to any annual rental payment obligation incurred by the Secretary—

(A) as soon as practicable after October 1 of each calendar year; or

(B) at the option of the Secretary, at any time prior to such date during the year that the obligation is incurred.

(b) **COST SHARING PAYMENTS.**—

(1) **IN GENERAL.**—In making cost sharing payments to an owner or operator under a contract entered into under this subchapter, the Secretary shall pay 50 percent of the cost of establishing water quality and conservation measures and practices required under each contract for which the Secretary determines that cost sharing is appropriate and in the public interest.

(2) **LIMITATIONS.**—

(A) **IN GENERAL.**—The Secretary shall ensure, to the maximum extent practicable, that cost sharing payments to an owner or operator under this subchapter, when combined with the sum of payments from all other funding sources for measures and practices described in paragraph (1), do not exceed 100 percent of the total actual cost of establishing those measures and practices, as determined by the Secretary.

(B) **MID-CONTRACT MANAGEMENT GRAZING.**—The Secretary may not make any cost sharing payment to an owner or operator under this subchapter pursuant to section 1232(a)(5).

(C) **SEED COST.**—In the case of seed costs related to the establishment of cover, cost sharing payments under this subchapter shall not exceed 50 percent of the actual cost of the seed mixture, as determined by the Secretary.

(3) **OTHER FEDERAL COST SHARE ASSISTANCE.**—Except in the case of incentive payments that are related to the cost of the establishment of a practice and received from eligible partners under the conservation reserve enhancement program under section 1231A, an owner or operator shall not be eligible to receive or retain cost share assistance under this subsection if the owner or operator receives any other Federal cost share assistance with respect to the land under any other provision of law.

(4) **PRACTICE INCENTIVES FOR CONTINUOUS PRACTICES.**—In addition to the cost sharing payment described in this subsection, the Secretary shall make an incentive payment to an owner or operator of land enrolled under section 1231(d)(6) in an amount not to exceed 50 percent of the actual cost of establishing all measures and practices described in paragraph (1),

including seed costs related to the establishment of cover, as determined by the Secretary.

(c) FOREST MANAGEMENT INCENTIVE PAYMENTS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Using funds made available under section 1241(a)(1)(A), the Secretary may make incentive payments to an owner or operator of eligible land in an amount sufficient to encourage proper thinning and other practices to improve the condition of resources, promote forest management, or enhance wildlife habitat on the land.

(2) LIMITATION.—A payment described in paragraph (1) may not exceed 100 percent of the total cost of thinning and other practices conducted by the owner or operator.

(d) ANNUAL RENTAL PAYMENTS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—In determining the amount of annual rental payments to be paid to owners and operators for converting highly erodible cropland or other eligible lands normally devoted to the production of an agricultural commodity to less intensive use, the Secretary shall consider—

(A) the amount necessary to encourage owners or operators of highly erodible cropland or other eligible lands to participate in the program established by this subchapter;

(B) the impact on the local farmland rental market;

and  
(C) such other factors as the Secretary determines to be appropriate.

(2) METHODS OF DETERMINATION.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—The amounts payable to owners or operators in the form of rental payments under contracts entered into under this subchapter may be determined through the submission of applications for such contracts by owners and operators in such manner as the Secretary may prescribe.

(B) MULTIPLE ENROLLMENTS.—

(i) IN GENERAL.—Subject to clause (ii), if land subject to a contract entered into under this subchapter is reenrolled under section 1231(h)(1) or has been previously enrolled in the conservation reserve, the annual rental payment shall be in an amount that is not more than 85 percent in the case of general enrollment contracts, or 90 percent in the case of continuous enrollment contracts, of the applicable estimated average county rental rate published pursuant to paragraph (4) for the year in which the reenrollment occurs.

(ii) CONSERVATION RESERVE ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM.—The reduction in annual rental payments under clause (i) may be waived as part of the negotiation between the Secretary and an eligible partner to enter into a conservation reserve enhancement program agreement under section 1231A.

(C) GRASSLANDS.—Notwithstanding subparagraph (A), in the case of eligible land described in section 1231(b)(3), the Secretary shall make annual payments in an amount that is not more than 75 percent of the grazing value of the land covered by the contract.



(D) CONTINUOUS SIGN-UP INCENTIVES.—The Secretary shall make an incentive payment to the owner or operator of land enrolled under section 1231(d)(6) at the time of initial enrollment in an amount equal to 32.5 percent of the amount of the first annual rental payment under subparagraph (A).

(3) ACCEPTANCE OF CONTRACT OFFERS.—

(A) EVALUATION OF OFFERS.—In determining the acceptability of contract offers, the Secretary may take into consideration the extent to which enrollment of the land that is the subject of the contract offer would improve soil resources, water quality, or wildlife habitat or provide other environmental benefits.

(B) ESTABLISHMENT OF DIFFERENT CRITERIA IN VARIOUS STATES AND REGIONS.—The Secretary may establish different criteria for determining the acceptability of contract offers in various States and regions of the United States based on the extent to which water quality or wildlife habitat may be improved or erosion may be abated.

(C) LOCAL PREFERENCE.—In determining the acceptability of contract offers for new enrollments, the Secretary shall accept, to the maximum extent practicable, an offer from an owner or operator that is a resident of the county in which the land is located or of a contiguous county if, as determined by the Secretary, the land would provide at least equivalent conservation benefits to land under competing offers.

(4) RENTAL RATES.—<sup>7</sup>

(A) ANNUAL ESTIMATES.—The Secretary (acting through the National Agricultural Statistics Service) shall annually conduct a survey of per acre estimates of county average market dryland and irrigated cash rental rates for cropland and pastureland in all counties or equivalent subdivisions within each State that have 20,000 acres or more of cropland and pastureland, and shall publish the estimates derived from the survey not later than September 15 of each year.

(B) PUBLIC AVAILABILITY OF ESTIMATES.—The estimates derived from the survey conducted under subparagraph (A) and the average current and previous soil rental rates for each county shall be maintained on a website of the Department of Agriculture for use by the general public.

(C) USE.—The Secretary shall consider the estimates derived from the survey conducted under subparagraph (A) relating to dryland cash rental rates as a factor in determining rental rates under this section in a manner determined appropriate by the Secretary.

<sup>7</sup>Sec. 2110(b)(2) of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (P.L. 110–246; 122 Stat. 1763) provided that “The first survey required by paragraph (5) of section 1234(c) of the Food Security Act of 1985 (16 U.S.C. 3834(c)), as added by subsection (a), shall be conducted not later than 1 year after the date of enactment of this Act.” Paragraph (4) was previously paragraph (5) prior to its redesignation as paragraph (4) by section 2207(c)(4) of P.L. 115–334.

(D) SUBMISSION OF ADDITIONAL INFORMATION BY STATE FSA OFFICES AND CREP PARTNERS.—

(i) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall provide an opportunity for State Committees of the Farm Service Agency or eligible partners (as defined in section 1231A(a)) in conservation reserve enhancement programs under section 1231A to propose an alternative soil rental rate prior to finalizing new rates, on the condition that documentation described in clause (ii) is provided to support the proposed alternative.

(ii) ACCEPTABLE DOCUMENTATION.—Documentation referred to in clause (i) includes—

(I) an average of cash rents from a random sample of lease agreements;

(II) cash rent estimates from a published survey;

(III) neighboring county estimate comparisons from the National Agricultural Statistics Service;

(IV) an average of cash rents from Farm Service Agency farm business plans;

(V) models that estimate cash rents, such as models that use returns to estimate crop production or land value data; or

(VI) other documentation, as determined by the Secretary.

(iii) NOTIFICATION.—Not less than 14 days prior to the announcement of new or revised soil rental rates, the Secretary shall offer a briefing to the Chairman and Ranking Member of the Committee on Agriculture of the House of Representatives and the Chairman and Ranking Member of the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry of the Senate, including information on and the rationale for the alternative rates proposed under clause (i) that were accepted or rejected.

(E) RENTAL RATE LIMITATION.—Notwithstanding forest management incentive payments described in subsection (c), the county average soil rental rate (before any adjustments relating to specific practices, wellhead protection, or soil productivity) shall not exceed—

(i) 85 percent of the estimated rental rate determined under this paragraph for general enrollment; or

(ii) 90 percent of the estimated rental rate determined under this paragraph for continuous enrollment.

(e) PAYMENT SCHEDULE.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Except as otherwise provided in this section, payments under this subchapter shall be made in cash in such amount and on such time schedule as is agreed on and specified in the contract.

(2) ADVANCE PAYMENT.—Payments under this subchapter may be made in advance of determination of performance.

(f) PAYMENTS ON DEATH, DISABILITY, OR SUCCESSION.—If an owner or operator that is entitled to a payment under a contract

entered into under this subchapter dies, becomes incompetent, is otherwise unable to receive the payment, or is succeeded by another person that renders or completes the required performance, the Secretary shall make the payment, in accordance with regulations prescribed by the Secretary and without regard to any other provision of law, in such manner as the Secretary determines is fair and reasonable in light of all of the circumstances.

(g) PAYMENT LIMITATION FOR RENTAL PAYMENTS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Except as provided in paragraph (2), the total amount of rental payments received by a person or legal entity, directly or indirectly, under this subchapter for any fiscal year may not exceed \$50,000.

(2) WELLHEAD PROTECTION.—Paragraph (1) and section 1001D(b) shall not apply to rental payments received by a rural water district or association for land that is enrolled under this subchapter for the purpose of protecting a wellhead.

(h) OTHER STATE OR LOCAL ASSISTANCE.—In addition to any payment under this subchapter, an owner or operator may receive cost share assistance, rental payments, or tax benefits from a State or subdivision thereof for enrolling land in the conservation reserve program.

**SEC. 1235. [16 U.S.C. 3835] CONTRACTS.**

(a) OWNERSHIP OR OPERATION REQUIREMENTS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Except as provided in paragraph (2), no contract shall be entered into under this subchapter concerning land with respect to which the ownership has changed in the 1-year period preceding the first year of the contract period unless—

(A) the new ownership was acquired by will or succession as a result of the death of the previous owner;

(B) the new ownership was acquired before January 1, 1985;

(C) the Secretary determines that the land was acquired under circumstances that give adequate assurance that the land was not acquired for the purpose of placing the land in the program established by this subchapter; or

(D) the ownership change occurred due to foreclosure on the land and the owner of the land immediately before the foreclosure exercises a right of redemption from the mortgage holder in accordance with State law.

(2) EXCEPTIONS.—Paragraph (1) shall not—

(A) prohibit the continuation of an agreement by a new owner after an agreement has been entered into under this subchapter; or

(B) require a person to own the land as a condition of eligibility for entering into the contract if the person—

(i) has operated the land to be covered by a contract under this section for at least 1 year preceding the date of the contract or since January 1, 1985, whichever is later; and

(ii) controls the land for the contract period.

(b) SALES OR TRANSFERS.—If, during the term of a contract entered into under this subchapter, an owner or operator of land sub-

ject to the contract sells or otherwise transfers the ownership or right of occupancy of the land, the new owner or operator of the land may—

(1) continue the contract under the same terms or conditions;

(2) enter into a new contract in accordance with this subchapter; or

(3) elect not to participate in the program established by this subchapter.

(c) MODIFICATIONS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary may modify a contract entered into with an owner or operator under this subchapter if—

(A) the owner or operator agrees to the modification; and

(B) the Secretary determines that the modification is desirable—

(i) to carry out this subchapter;

(ii) to facilitate the practical administration of this subchapter;

(iii) to facilitate a transition of land subject to the contract from a retired or retiring owner or operator to a beginning farmer or rancher or socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher for the purpose of returning some or all of the land into production using sustainable grazing or crop production methods; or

(iv) to achieve such other goals as the Secretary determines are appropriate, consistent with this subchapter.

(2) PRODUCTION OF AGRICULTURAL COMMODITIES.—The Secretary may modify or waive a term or condition of a contract entered into under this subchapter in order to permit all or part of the land subject to such contract to be devoted to the production of an agricultural commodity during a crop year, subject to such conditions as the Secretary determines are appropriate.

(d) TERMINATION.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary may terminate a contract entered into with an owner or operator under this subchapter if—

(A) the owner or operator agrees to the termination; and

(B) the Secretary determines that the termination would be in the public interest.

(2) NOTICE TO CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEES.—At least 90 days before taking any action to terminate under paragraph (1) all conservation reserve contracts entered into under this subchapter, the Secretary shall provide to the Committee on Agriculture of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry of the Senate written notice of the action.

(e) EARLY TERMINATION BY OWNER OR OPERATOR.—

(1) EARLY TERMINATION.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—During fiscal year 2015, the Secretary shall allow a participant that entered into a con-

tract under this subchapter to terminate the contract at any time if the contract has been in effect for at least 5 years.

(B) **LIABILITY FOR CONTRACT VIOLATION.**—The termination shall not relieve the participant of liability for a contract violation occurring before the date of the termination.

(C) **NOTICE TO SECRETARY.**—The participant shall provide the Secretary with reasonable notice of the desire of the participant to terminate the contract.

(2) **CERTAIN LAND EXCEPTED.**—The following land shall not be subject to an early termination of contract under this subsection:

(A) Filterstrips, waterways, strips adjacent to riparian areas, windbreaks, and shelterbelts.

(B) Land with an erodibility index of more than 15.

(C) Land devoted to hardwood trees.

(D) Wildlife habitat, duck nesting habitat, pollinator habitat, upland bird habitat buffer, wildlife food plots, State acres for wildlife enhancement, shallow water areas for wildlife, and rare and declining habitat.

(E) Farmable wetland and restored wetland.

(F) Land that contains diversions, erosion control structures, flood control structures, contour grass strips, living snow fences, salinity reducing vegetation, cross wind trap strips, and sediment retention structures.

(G) Land located within a federally designated well-head protection area.

(H) Land that is covered by an easement under the conservation reserve program.

(I) Land located within an average width, according to the applicable Natural Resources Conservation Service field office technical guide, of a perennial stream or permanent water body.

(J) Land enrolled under the conservation reserve enhancement program.

(3) **EFFECTIVE DATE.**—The contract termination shall become effective upon approval by the Secretary.

(4) **PRORATED RENTAL PAYMENT.**—If a contract entered into under this subchapter is terminated under this subsection before the end of the fiscal year for which a rental payment is due, the Secretary shall provide a prorated rental payment covering the portion of the fiscal year during which the contract was in effect.

(5) **RENEWED ENROLLMENT.**—The termination of a contract entered into under this subchapter shall not affect the ability of the owner or operator that requested the termination to submit a subsequent bid to enroll the land that was subject to the contract into the conservation reserve.

(6) **CONSERVATION REQUIREMENTS.**—If land that was subject to a contract is returned to production of an agricultural commodity, the conservation requirements under subtitles B and C shall apply to the use of the land to the extent that the requirements are similar to those requirements imposed on

other similar land in the area, except that the requirements may not be more onerous than the requirements imposed on other land.

(f) TRANSITION OPTION FOR CERTAIN FARMERS OR RANCHERS.—

(1) TRANSITION TO COVERED FARMER OR RANCHER.—In the case of a contract modification approved in order to facilitate the transfer of land subject to a contract from a contract holder to a beginning farmer or rancher, a veteran farmer or rancher (as defined in section 2501(e) of the Food, Agriculture, Conservation, and Trade Act of 1990 (7 U.S.C. 2279(e))), or a socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher (in this subsection referred to as a “covered farmer or rancher”), the Secretary shall—

(A) beginning on the date that is 2 years before the date of termination of the contract—

(i) allow the covered farmer or rancher, in conjunction with the contract holder, to make conservation and land improvements, including preparing to plant an agricultural crop; and

(ii) allow the covered farmer or rancher to begin the certification process under the Organic Foods Production Act of 1990 (7 U.S.C. 6501 et seq.);

(B) beginning on the date of termination of the contract, require the contract holder to sell or lease (under a long-term lease or a lease with an option to purchase, including a lease with a term of less than 5 years and an option to purchase) to the covered farmer or rancher the land subject to the contract for production purposes;

(C) require the covered farmer or rancher to develop and implement a conservation plan;

(D) provide to the covered farmer or rancher an opportunity to enroll in the conservation stewardship program or the environmental quality incentives program by not later than the date on which the covered farmer or rancher takes possession of the land through ownership or lease;

(E) give priority to the enrollment of the land covered by the contract in—

(i) the environmental quality incentives program established under subchapter A of chapter 4;

(ii) the conservation stewardship program established under subchapter B of chapter 4; or

(iii) the agricultural conservation easement program established under subtitle H; and

(F) continue to make annual payments to the contract holder for not more than an additional 2 years after the date of termination of the contract, if the contract holder is not a family member (as defined in section 1001 of this Act) of the covered farmer or rancher.

(2) REENROLLMENT.—To the extent that the maximum number of acres permitted to be enrolled under the conservation reserve program has not been met, the Secretary shall provide a covered farmer or rancher with the option to reenroll any applicable partial field conservation practice that—

- (A)(i) is carried out on land described in paragraph (4) or (5) of section 1231(b); and
- (ii) is eligible for continuous enrollment under section 1231(d)(6); and
- (B) is part of an approved conservation plan.
- (g) **END OF CONTRACT CONSIDERATIONS.**—The Secretary shall not consider an owner or operator to be in violation of a term or condition of the conservation reserve contract if—
  - (1) during the year prior to expiration of the contract, the owner or operator—
    - (A)(i) enters into a contract under the environmental quality incentives program established under subchapter A of chapter 4; and
    - (ii) begins the establishment of a practice under that contract; or
    - (B)(i) enters into a contract under the conservation stewardship program established under subchapter B of chapter 4; and
    - (ii) begins the establishment of a practice under that contract; or
  - (2) during the 3 years prior to the expiration of the contract, the owner or operator begins the certification process under the Organic Foods Production Act of 1990 (7 U.S.C. 6501 et seq.).
- (h) **LAND ENROLLED IN AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION EASEMENT PROGRAM.**—The Secretary may terminate or modify a contract entered into under this subchapter if eligible land that is subject to such contract is transferred into the agricultural conservation easement program under subtitle H.

【Chapter 2 of subtitle D of title XII was repealed by section 2301(c)(1) of Public Law 115–334. For provisions relating to Conservation Stewardship Program, see subchapter B of chapter 4 of this subtitle beginning with section 1240I.】

## **CHAPTER 4—ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY INCENTIVES PROGRAM AND CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM**

### **Subchapter A—Environmental Quality Incentives Program**

#### **SEC. 1240. [16 U.S.C. 3839aa] PURPOSES.**

The purposes of the environmental quality incentives program established by this subchapter are to promote agricultural production, forest management, and environmental quality as compatible goals, and to optimize environmental benefits, by—

- (1) assisting producers in complying with local, State, and national regulatory requirements concerning—
  - (A) soil, water, and air quality;
  - (B) wildlife habitat; and
  - (C) surface and ground water conservation;
- (2) avoiding, to the maximum extent practicable, the need for resource and regulatory programs by assisting producers in

protecting soil, water, air, and related natural resources and meeting environmental quality criteria established by Federal, State, tribal, and local agencies;

(3) providing flexible assistance to producers to install and maintain conservation practices that sustain food and fiber production while—

(A) enhancing soil, water, and related natural resources, including grazing land, forestland, wetland, and wildlife;

(B) developing and improving wildlife habitat; and

(C) conserving energy; and

(4) assisting producers to make beneficial, cost-effective changes to production systems, including addressing identified, new, or expected resource concerns related to organic production, grazing management, fuels management, forest management, nutrient management associated with crops and livestock, pest management, irrigation management, adapting to, and mitigating against, increasing weather volatility, drought resiliency measures, or other practices on agricultural and forested land.

**SEC. 1240A. [16 U.S.C. 3839aa-1] DEFINITIONS.**

In this subchapter:

(1) **CONSERVATION PLANNING ASSESSMENT.**—The term “conservation planning assessment” means a report, as determined by the Secretary, that—

(A) is developed by—

(i) a State or unit of local government (including a conservation district);

(ii) a Federal agency; or

(iii) a third-party provider certified under section 1242(e) (including a certified rangeland professional);

(B) assesses rangeland or cropland function and describes conservation activities to enhance the economic and ecological management of that land; and

(C) can be incorporated into a comprehensive planning document required by the Secretary for enrollment in a conservation program of the Department of Agriculture.

(2) **ELIGIBLE LAND.**—

(A) **IN GENERAL.**—The term “eligible land” means land on which agricultural commodities, livestock, or forest-related products are produced.

(B) **INCLUSIONS.**—The term “eligible land” includes the following:

(i) Cropland.

(ii) Grassland.

(iii) Rangeland.

(iv) Pasture land.

(v) Nonindustrial private forest land.

(vi) Other agricultural land (including cropped woodland, marshes, environmentally sensitive areas, and agricultural land used for the production of livestock) on which identified or expected resource concerns related to agricultural production could be ad-



dressed through a contract under the program, as determined by the Secretary.

(3) INCENTIVE PRACTICE.—The term “incentive practice” means a practice or set of practices approved by the Secretary that, when implemented and maintained on eligible land, address 1 or more priority resource concerns.

(4) ORGANIC SYSTEM PLAN.—The term “organic system plan” means an organic plan approved under the national organic program established under the Organic Foods Production Act of 1990 (7 U.S.C. 6501 et seq.).

(5) PAYMENT.—The term “payment” means financial assistance provided to a producer for performing practices under this subchapter, including compensation for—

(A) incurred costs associated with planning, design, materials, equipment, installation, labor, management, maintenance, or training; and

(B) income forgone by the producer.

(6) PRACTICE.—The term “practice” means 1 or more improvements and conservation activities that are consistent with the purposes of the program under this subchapter, as determined by the Secretary, including—

(A) improvements to eligible land of the producer, including—

(i) structural practices;

(ii) land management practices;

(iii) vegetative practices;

(iv) forest management;

(v) soil testing;

(vi) soil remediation to be carried out by the producer; and

(vii) other practices that the Secretary determines would further the purposes of the program; and

(B) conservation activities involving the development of plans appropriate for the eligible land of the producer, including—

(i) comprehensive nutrient management planning;

(ii) planning for resource-conserving crop rotations

(as defined in section 1240L(d)(1));

(iii) soil health planning, including increasing soil organic matter and the use of cover crops;

(iv) a conservation planning assessment;

(v) precision conservation management planning;

and

(vi) other plans that the Secretary determines would further the purposes of the program under this subchapter.

(7) PRIORITY RESOURCE CONCERN.—The term “priority resource concern” means a natural resource concern or problem, as determined by the Secretary, that—

(A) is identified at the national, State, or local level as a priority for a particular area of a State; and

(B) represents a significant concern in a State or region.

(8) PROGRAM.—The term “program” means the environmental quality incentives program established by this subchapter.

(9) SOIL REMEDIATION.—The term “soil remediation” means scientifically based practices that—

(A) ensure the safety of producers from contaminants in soil;

(B) limit contaminants in soil from entering agricultural products for human or animal consumption; and

(C) regenerate and sustain the soil.

(10) SOIL TESTING.—The term “soil testing” means the evaluation of soil health, including testing for—

(A) the optimal level of constituents in the soil, such as organic matter, nutrients, and the potential presence of soil contaminants, including heavy metals, volatile organic compounds, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, or other contaminants; and

(B) the biological and physical characteristics indicative of proper soil functioning.

**SEC. 1240B. [16 U.S.C. 3839aa-2] ESTABLISHMENT AND ADMINISTRATION**

(a) ESTABLISHMENT.—During each of the 2002 through 2031 fiscal years, the Secretary shall provide payments to producers that enter into contracts with the Secretary under the program.

(b) PRACTICES AND TERM.—

(1) PRACTICES.—A contract under the program may apply to the performance of one or more practices.

(2) TERM.—A contract under the program shall have a term that does not exceed 10 years.

(c) BIDDING DOWN.—If the Secretary determines that the environmental values of two or more applications for payments are comparable, the Secretary shall not assign a higher priority to the application only because it would present the least cost to the program.

(d) PAYMENTS.—

(1) AVAILABILITY OF PAYMENTS.—Payments are provided to a producer to implement one or more practices under the program.

(2) LIMITATION ON PAYMENT AMOUNTS.—A payment to a producer for performing a practice may not exceed, as determined by the Secretary—

(A) 75 percent of the costs associated with planning, design, materials, equipment, installation, labor, management, maintenance, or training;

(B) 100 percent of income foregone by the producer; or

(C) in the case of a practice consisting of elements covered under subparagraphs (A) and (B)—

(i) 75 percent of the costs incurred for those elements covered under subparagraph (A); and

(ii) 100 percent of income foregone for those elements covered under subparagraph (B).

(3) SPECIAL RULE INVOLVING PAYMENTS FOR FOREGONE INCOME.—In determining the amount and rate of payments under paragraph (2)(B), the Secretary may accord great signifi-

cance to a practice that, as determined by the Secretary, promotes—

- (A) soil health;
- (B) water quality and quantity improvement;
- (C) nutrient management;
- (D) pest management;
- (E) air quality improvement;
- (F) wildlife habitat development, including pollinator habitat; or
- (G) invasive species management.

(4) INCREASED PAYMENTS FOR CERTAIN PRODUCERS.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—Notwithstanding paragraph (2), in the case of a producer that is a limited resource, socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher, a veteran farmer or rancher (as defined in section 2501(e) of the Food, Agriculture, Conservation, and Trade Act of 1990 (7 U.S.C. 2279(e))), or a beginning farmer or rancher, the Secretary shall increase the amount that would otherwise be provided to a producer under this subsection—

(i) to not more than 90 percent of the costs associated with planning, design, materials, equipment, installation, labor, management, maintenance, or training; and

(ii) to not less than 25 percent above the otherwise applicable rate.

(B) ADVANCE PAYMENTS.—

(i) IN GENERAL.—On an election by a producer described in subparagraph (A), the Secretary shall provide at least 50 percent of the amount determined under subparagraph (A) in advance for all costs related to purchasing materials or contracting.

(ii) RETURN OF FUNDS.—If funds provided in advance are not expended during the 90-day period beginning on the date of receipt of the funds, the funds shall be returned within a reasonable timeframe, as determined by the Secretary.

(iii) NOTIFICATION AND DOCUMENTATION.—The Secretary shall—

(I) notify each producer described in subparagraph (A), at the time of enrollment in the program, of the option to receive advance payments under clause (i); and

(II) document the election of each producer described in subparagraph (A) to receive advance payments under clause (i) with respect to each practice that has costs described in that clause.

(5) FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FROM OTHER SOURCES.—Except as provided in paragraph (6), any payments received by a producer from a State or private organization or person for the implementation of one or more practices on eligible land of the producer shall be in addition to the payments provided to the producer under this subsection.

(6) OTHER PAYMENTS.—A producer shall not be eligible for payments for practices on eligible land under the program if

the producer receives payments or other benefits for the same practice on the same land under another program under this subtitle.

(7) INCREASED PAYMENTS FOR HIGH-PRIORITY PRACTICES.—

(A) STATE DETERMINATION.—Each State, in consultation with the State technical committee established under section 1261(a) for the State, may designate not more than 10 practices to be eligible for increased payments under subparagraph (B), on the condition that the practice, as determined by the Secretary—

(i) addresses specific causes of impairment relating to excessive nutrients in groundwater or surface water;

(ii) addresses the conservation of water to advance drought mitigation and declining aquifers;

(iii) meets other environmental priorities and other priority resource concerns identified in habitat or other area restoration plans; or

(iv) is geographically targeted to address a natural resource concern in a specific watershed.

(B) INCREASED PAYMENTS.—Notwithstanding paragraph (2), in the case of a practice designated under subparagraph (A), the Secretary may increase the amount that would otherwise be provided for a practice under this subsection to not more than 90 percent of the costs associated with planning, design, materials, equipment, installation, labor, management, maintenance, or training.

(e) MODIFICATION OR TERMINATION OF CONTRACTS.—

(1) VOLUNTARY MODIFICATION OR TERMINATION.—The Secretary may modify or terminate a contract entered into with a producer under the program if—

(A) the producer agrees to the modification or termination; and

(B) the Secretary determines that the modification or termination is in the public interest.

(2) INVOLUNTARY TERMINATION.—The Secretary may terminate a contract under the program if the Secretary determines that the producer violated the contract.

(f) ALLOCATION OF FUNDING.—

(1) LIVESTOCK.—For each of fiscal years 2019 through 2023, at least 50 percent of the funds made available for payments under the program shall be targeted at practices relating to livestock production, including grazing management practices.

(2) WILDLIFE HABITAT.—

(A) FISCAL YEARS 2014 THROUGH 2018.—For each of fiscal years 2014 through 2018, at least 5 percent of the funds made available for payments under the program shall be targeted at practices benefitting wildlife habitat under subsection (g).

(B) FISCAL YEARS 2019 THROUGH 2031.—For each of fiscal years 2019 through 2031, at least 10 percent of the funds made available for payments under the program

shall be targeted at practices benefitting wildlife habitat under subsection (g).

(g) WILDLIFE HABITAT INCENTIVE PROGRAM.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall provide payments under the environmental quality incentives program for conservation practices that support the restoration, development, protection, and improvement of wildlife habitat on eligible land, including—

- (A) upland wildlife habitat;
- (B) wetland wildlife habitat;
- (C) habitat for threatened and endangered species;
- (D) fish habitat;
- (E) habitat on pivot corners and other irregular areas of a field; and
- (F) other types of wildlife habitat, as determined by the Secretary.

(2) STATE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE.—In determining the practices eligible for payment under paragraph (1) and targeted for funding under subsection (f), the Secretary shall consult with the relevant State technical committee not less often than once each year.

(3) MAXIMUM TERM.—In the case of a contract under the program entered into solely for the establishment of 1 or more annual management practices for the benefit of wildlife as described in paragraph (1), notwithstanding any maximum contract term established by the Secretary, the contract shall have a term that does not exceed 10 years.

(4) INCLUDED PRACTICES.—For the purpose of providing seasonal wetland habitat for waterfowl and migratory birds, a practice that is eligible for payment under paragraph (1) and targeted for funding under subsection (f) may include—

- (A) a practice to carry out postharvest flooding; or
- (B) a practice to maintain the hydrology of temporary and seasonal wetlands of not more than 2 acres to maintain waterfowl and migratory bird habitat on working cropland.

(h) WATER CONSERVATION OR IRRIGATION EFFICIENCY PRACTICE.—

(1) AVAILABILITY OF PAYMENTS.—The Secretary may provide water conservation and system efficiency payments under this subsection to an entity described in paragraph (2) or a producer for—

- (A) water conservation scheduling, water distribution efficiency, soil moisture monitoring, or an appropriate combination thereof;
- (B) irrigation-related structural or other measures that conserve surface water or groundwater, including managed aquifer recovery practices; or
- (C) a transition to water-conserving crops, water-conserving crop rotations, or deficit irrigation.

(2) ELIGIBILITY OF CERTAIN ENTITIES.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—Notwithstanding section 1001(f)(6), the Secretary may enter into a contract under this subsection with a State, irrigation district, groundwater man-

agement district, acequia, land-grant mercedes, or similar entity under a streamlined contracting process to implement water conservation or irrigation practices under a watershed-wide project that will effectively conserve water, provide fish and wildlife habitat, or provide for drought-related environmental mitigation, as determined by the Secretary.

(B) IMPLEMENTATION.—Water conservation or irrigation practices that are the subject of a contract entered into under subparagraph (A) shall be implemented on—

(i) eligible land of a producer; or

(ii) land that is—

(I) under the control of an irrigation district, groundwater management district, acequia, land-grant mercedes, or similar entity; and

(II) adjacent to eligible land described in clause (i), as determined by the Secretary.

(C) WAIVER AUTHORITY.—The Secretary may waive the applicability of the limitations in section 1001D(b) or section 1240G for a payment made under a contract entered into under this paragraph if the Secretary determines that the waiver is necessary to fulfill the objectives of the project.

(D) CONTRACT LIMITATIONS.—If the Secretary grants a waiver under subparagraph (C), the Secretary may impose a separate payment limitation for the contract with respect to which the waiver applies.

(3) PRIORITY.—In providing payments under this subsection for a water conservation or irrigation practice, the Secretary shall give priority to applications in which—

(A) consistent with the law of the State in which the land on which the practices will be implemented is located, there is a reduction in water use in the operation on that land; or

(B) except in the case of an application under paragraph (2), the producer agrees not to use any associated water savings to bring new land, other than incidental land needed for efficient operations, under irrigated production, unless the producer is participating in a watershed-wide project that will effectively conserve water, as determined by the Secretary.

(4) EFFECT.—Nothing in this subsection authorizes the Secretary to modify the process for determining the annual allocation of funding to States under the program.

(i) PAYMENTS FOR CONSERVATION PRACTICES RELATED TO ORGANIC PRODUCTION.—

(1) PAYMENTS AUTHORIZED.—The Secretary shall provide payments under this subsection for conservation practices, on some or all of the operations of a producer, related—

(A) to organic production; and

(B) to the transition to organic production.

(2) ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS.—As a condition for receiving payments under this subsection, a producer shall agree—

(A) to develop and carry out an organic system plan;  
or

(B) to develop and implement conservation practices for certified organic production that are consistent with an organic system plan and the purposes of this subchapter.

(3) PAYMENT LIMITATIONS.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—Payments under this subsection to a person or legal entity, directly or indirectly, may not exceed, in the aggregate—

(i) through fiscal year 2018—

(I) \$20,000 per year; or

(II) \$80,000 during any 6-year period; and

(ii) during the period of fiscal years 2019 through 2023, \$140,000.

(B) TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE.—In applying the limitations under subparagraph (A), the Secretary shall not take into account payments received for technical assistance.

(4) EXCLUSION OF CERTAIN ORGANIC CERTIFICATION COSTS.—Payments may not be made under this subsection to cover the costs associated with organic certification that are eligible for cost-share payments under section 10606 of the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (7 U.S.C. 6523).

(5) TERMINATION OF CONTRACTS.—The Secretary may cancel or otherwise nullify a contract to provide payments under this subsection if the Secretary determines that the producer—

(A) is not pursuing organic certification; or

(B) is not in compliance with the Organic Foods Production Act of 1990 (7 U.S.C. 6501 et seq).

(j) CONSERVATION INCENTIVE CONTRACTS.—

(1) IDENTIFICATION OF ELIGIBLE PRIORITY RESOURCE CONCERNS FOR STATES.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary, in consultation with the applicable State technical committee established under section 1261(a), shall identify watersheds (or other appropriate regions or areas within a State) and the corresponding priority resource concerns for those watersheds or other regions or areas that are eligible to be the subject of an incentive contract under this subsection.

(B) LIMITATION.—For each of the relevant land uses within the watersheds, regions, or other areas identified under subparagraph (A), the Secretary shall identify not more than 3 eligible priority resource concerns.

(2) CONTRACTS.—

(A) AUTHORITY.—

(i) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall enter into contracts with producers under this subsection that require the implementation, adoption, management, and maintenance of incentive practices that effectively address at least 1 eligible priority resource concern identified under paragraph (1) for the term of the contract.

(ii) INCLUSIONS.—Through a contract entered into under clause (i), the Secretary may provide—

(I) funding, through annual payments, for certain incentive practices to attain increased levels of conservation on eligible land; or

(II) assistance, through a practice payment, to implement an incentive practice.

(B) TERM.—A contract under this subsection shall have a term of not less than 5, and not more than 10, years.

(C) PRIORITIZATION.—Notwithstanding section 1240C, the Secretary shall develop criteria for evaluating incentive practice applications that—

(i) give priority to applications that address eligible priority resource concerns identified under paragraph (1); and

(ii) evaluate applications relative to other applications for similar agriculture and forest operations.

(3) INCENTIVE PRACTICE PAYMENTS.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall provide payments to producers through contracts entered into under paragraph (2) for—

(i) adopting and installing incentive practices; and

(ii) managing, maintaining, and improving the incentive practices for the duration of the contract, as determined appropriate by the Secretary.

(B) PAYMENT AMOUNTS.—In determining the amount of payments under subparagraph (A), the Secretary shall consider, to the extent practicable—

(i) the level and extent of the incentive practice to be installed, adopted, completed, maintained, managed, or improved;

(ii) the cost of the installation, adoption, completion, management, maintenance, or improvement of the incentive practice;

(iii) income foregone by the producer, including payments, as appropriate, to address—

(I) increased economic risk;

(II) loss in revenue due to anticipated reductions in yield; and

(III) economic losses during transition to a resource-conserving cropping system or resource-conserving land use; and

(iv) the extent to which compensation would ensure long-term continued maintenance, management, and improvement of the incentive practice.

(C) DELIVERY OF PAYMENTS.—In making payments under subparagraph (A), the Secretary shall, to the extent practicable—

(i) in the case of annual payments under paragraph (2)(A)(ii)(I), make those payments as soon as practicable after October 1 of each fiscal year for which increased levels of conservation are maintained during the term of the contract; and

(ii) in the case of practice payments under paragraph (2)(A)(ii)(II), make those payments as soon as



practicable on the implementation of an incentive practice.

**SEC. 1240C. [16 U.S.C. 3839aa-3] EVALUATION OF APPLICATIONS.**

(a) **EVALUATION CRITERIA.**—The Secretary shall develop criteria for evaluating applications that will ensure that national, State, and local conservation priorities are effectively addressed.

(b) **PRIORITIZATION OF APPLICATIONS.**—In evaluating applications under this subchapter, the Secretary shall prioritize applications—

(1) based on their overall level of cost-effectiveness to ensure that the conservation practices and approaches proposed are the most efficient means of achieving the anticipated conservation benefits of the project;

(2) based on how effectively and comprehensively the project addresses the designated resource concern or resource concerns;

(3) that best fulfill the purposes of the program; and

(4) that improve conservation practices or systems in place on the operation at the time the contract offer is accepted or that will complete a conservation system.

(c) **GROUPING OF APPLICATIONS.**—To the greatest extent practicable, the Secretary shall group applications of similar crop or livestock operations for evaluation purposes or otherwise evaluate applications relative to other applications for similar farming operations.

**SEC. 1240D. [16 U.S.C. 3839aa-4] DUTIES OF PRODUCERS.**

To receive payments under the program, a producer shall agree—

(1) to implement an environmental quality incentives program plan (including a comprehensive nutrient management plan, if applicable) that describes conservation and environmental purposes to be achieved through 1 or more practices that are approved by the Secretary;

(2) not to conduct any practices on the enrolled land that would tend to defeat the purposes of the program;

(3) on the violation of a term or condition of the contract at anytime the producer has control of the land—

(A) if the Secretary determines that the violation warrants termination of the contract—

(i) to forfeit all rights to receive payments under the contract; and

(ii) to refund to the Secretary all or a portion of the payments received by the owner or operator under the contract, including any interest on the payments, as determined by the Secretary; or

(B) if the Secretary determines that the violation does not warrant termination of the contract, to refund to the Secretary, or accept adjustments to, the payments provided to the owner or operator, as the Secretary determines to be appropriate;

(4) on the transfer of the right and interest of the producer in land subject to the contract, unless the transferee of the right and interest agrees with the Secretary to assume all obli-

gations of the contract, to refund all payments received under the program, as determined by the Secretary;

(5) to supply information as required by the Secretary to determine compliance with the program plan and requirements of the program; and

(6) to comply with such additional provisions as the Secretary determines are necessary to carry out the program plan.

**SEC. 1240E. [16 U.S.C. 3839aa-5] ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY INCENTIVES PROGRAM PLAN.**

(a) **PLAN OF OPERATIONS.**—To be eligible to receive payments under the program, a producer shall submit to the Secretary for approval a plan of operations that—

(1) specifies practices covered under the program;

(2) includes such terms and conditions as the Secretary considers necessary to carry out the program, including a description of the purposes to be met by the implementation of the plan;

(3) in the case of a confined livestock feeding operation, provides for development and progressive implementation of a comprehensive nutrient management plan, if applicable; and

(4) in the case of forest land, is consistent with the provisions of a forest management plan that is approved by the Secretary, which may include—

(A) a forest stewardship plan described in section 5 of the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act of 1978 (16 U.S.C. 2103a);

(B) another practice plan approved by the State forester; or

(C) another plan determined appropriate by the Secretary.

(b) **AVOIDANCE OF DUPLICATION.**—The Secretary shall—

(1) consider a plan developed in order to acquire a permit under a water or air quality regulatory program as the equivalent of a plan of operations under subsection (a), if the plan contains elements equivalent to those elements required by a plan of operations; and

(2) to the maximum extent practicable, eliminate duplication of planning activities under the program under this subchapter and comparable conservation programs.

**SEC. 1240F. [16 U.S.C. 3839aa-6] DUTIES OF THE SECRETARY.**

To the extent appropriate, the Secretary shall assist a producer in achieving the conservation and environmental goals of a program plan by—

(1) providing payments for developing and implementing 1 or more practices, as appropriate; and

(2) providing the producer with information and training to aid in implementation of the plan.

**SEC. 1240G. [16 U.S.C. 3839aa-7] LIMITATION ON PAYMENTS.**

Not including payments made under section 1240B(j), a person or legal entity may not receive, directly or indirectly, cost-share or incentive payments under this subchapter that, in aggregate, exceed \$450,000 for all contracts entered into under this subchapter by the person or legal entity during the period of fiscal years 2014

through 2018, or the period of fiscal years 2019 through 2023, regardless of the number of contracts entered into under this subchapter by the person or legal entity.

**SEC. 1240H. [16 U.S.C. 3839aa-8] CONSERVATION INNOVATION GRANTS AND PAYMENTS.**

(a) **COMPETITIVE GRANTS FOR INNOVATIVE CONSERVATION APPROACHES.**—

(1) **GRANTS.**—Out of the funds made available to carry out this subchapter, the Secretary may pay the cost of competitive grants that are intended to stimulate innovative approaches to leveraging the Federal investment in environmental enhancement and protection, in conjunction with agricultural production or forest resource management, through the program.

(2) **USE.**—The Secretary may provide grants under this subsection to governmental and non-governmental organizations and persons, on a competitive basis, to carry out projects that—

(A) involve producers who are eligible for payments or technical assistance under the program or community colleges (as defined in section 1473E(a) of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 (7 U.S.C. 3319e(a))) carrying out demonstration projects on land of the community college;

(B) leverage Federal funds made available to carry out the program under this subchapter with matching funds provided by State and local governments and private organizations to promote environmental enhancement and protection in conjunction with agricultural production;

(C) ensure efficient and effective transfer of innovative technologies and approaches demonstrated through projects that receive funding under this section, such as market systems for pollution reduction and practices for the storage of carbon in soil;

(D) provide environmental and resource conservation benefits through increased participation by producers of specialty crops;

(E) partner with farmers to develop innovative practices for urban, indoor, or other emerging agricultural operations;

(F) utilize edge-of-field and other monitoring practices on farms—

(i) to quantify the impacts of practices implemented under the program; and

(ii) to assist producers in making the best conservation investments for the operations of the producers;

(G) facilitate on-farm conservation research and demonstration activities; and

(H) facilitate pilot testing of new technologies or innovative conservation practices.

(b) **AIR QUALITY CONCERNS FROM AGRICULTURAL OPERATIONS.**—

(1) **IMPLEMENTATION ASSISTANCE.**—The Secretary shall provide payments under this subsection to producers to imple-

ment practices to address air quality concerns from agricultural operations and to meet Federal, State, and local regulatory requirements. The funds shall be made available on the basis of air quality concerns in a State and shall be used to provide payments to producers that are cost effective and reflect innovative technologies.

(2) FUNDING.—Of the funds made available to carry out this subchapter, the Secretary shall carry out this subsection using \$37,500,000 for each of fiscal years 2019 through 2031.

(c) ON-FARM CONSERVATION INNOVATION TRIALS.—

(1) DEFINITIONS.—In this subsection:

(A) ELIGIBLE ENTITY.—The term “eligible entity” means, as determined by the Secretary—

- (i) a third-party private entity the primary business of which is related to agriculture;
- (ii) a nongovernmental organization with experience working with agricultural producers; or
- (iii) a governmental organization.

(B) NEW OR INNOVATIVE CONSERVATION APPROACH.—The term “new or innovative conservation approach” means—

- (i) new or innovative—
  - (I) precision agriculture technologies;
  - (II) enhanced nutrient management plans, nutrient recovery systems, and fertilization systems;
  - (III) soil health management systems, including systems to increase soil carbon levels;
  - (IV) water management systems;
  - (V) resource-conserving crop rotations (as defined in section 1240L(d)(1));
  - (VI) cover crops; and
  - (VII) irrigation systems; and
- (ii) any other conservation approach approved by the Secretary as new or innovative.

(2) TESTING NEW OR INNOVATIVE CONSERVATION APPROACHES.—Using \$25,000,000 of the funds made available to carry out this subchapter for each of fiscal years 2019 through 2031, the Secretary shall carry out on-farm conservation innovation trials, on eligible land of producers, to test new or innovative conservation approaches—

- (A) directly with producers; or
- (B) through eligible entities.

(3) INCENTIVE PAYMENTS.—

(A) AGREEMENTS.—In carrying out paragraph (2), the Secretary shall enter into agreements with producers (either directly or through eligible entities) on whose land an on-farm conservation innovation trial is being carried out to provide payments (including payments to compensate for foregone income, as appropriate to address the increased economic risk potentially associated with new or innovative conservation approaches) to the producers to assist with adopting and evaluating new or innovative conservation approaches to achieve conservation benefits.

(B) ADJUSTED GROSS INCOME REQUIREMENTS.—

(i) IN GENERAL.—Adjusted gross income requirements under section 1001D(b)(1) shall—

(I) apply to producers receiving payments under this subsection; and

(II) be enforced by the Secretary.

(ii) REPORTING.—An eligible entity participating in an on-farm conservation innovation trial under this subsection shall report annually to the Secretary on the amount of payments made to individual farm operations under this subsection.

(C) LIMITATION ON ADMINISTRATIVE EXPENSES.—None of the funds made available to carry out this subsection may be used to pay for the administrative expenses of an eligible entity.

(D) LENGTH OF AGREEMENTS.—An agreement entered into under subparagraph (A) shall be for a period determined by the Secretary that is—

(i) not less than 3 years; and

(ii) if appropriate, more than 3 years, including if such a period is appropriate to support—

(I) adaptive management over multiple crop years; and

(II) adequate data collection and analysis by a producer or eligible entity to report the natural resource and agricultural production benefits of the new or innovative conservation approaches to the Secretary.

(4) FLEXIBLE ADOPTION.—The scale of adoption of a new or innovative conservation approach under an on-farm conservation innovation trial under an agreement under paragraph (2) may include multiple scales on an operation, including whole farm, field-level, or sub-field scales.

(5) TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE.—The Secretary shall provide technical assistance—

(A) to each producer or eligible entity participating in an on-farm conservation innovation trial under paragraph (2) with respect to the design, installation, and management of the new or innovative conservation approaches; and

(B) to each eligible entity participating in an on-farm conservation innovation trial under paragraph (2) with respect to data analyses of the on-farm conservation innovation trial.

(6) GEOGRAPHIC SCOPE.—The Secretary shall identify a diversity of geographic regions of the United States in which to establish on-farm conservation innovation trials under paragraph (2), taking into account factors such as soil type, cropping history, and water availability.

(7) SOIL HEALTH DEMONSTRATION TRIAL.—Using funds made available to carry out this subsection, the Secretary shall carry out a soil health demonstration trial under which the Secretary coordinates with eligible entities—

(A) to provide incentives to producers to implement conservation practices that—

- (i) improve soil health;
    - (ii) increase carbon levels in the soil; or
    - (iii) meet the goals described in clauses (i) and (ii);
  - (B) to establish protocols for measuring carbon levels in the soil and testing carbon levels on land where conservation practices described in subparagraph (A) were applied to evaluate gains in soil health as a result of the practices implemented by the producers in the soil health demonstration trial; and
  - (C)(i) not later than September 30, 2020, to initiate a study regarding changes in soil health and, if feasible, economic outcomes, generated as a result of the conservation practices described in subparagraph (A) that were applied by producers through the soil health demonstration trial; and
  - (ii) to submit to the Committee on Agriculture of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry of the Senate annual reports on the progress and results of the study under clause (i).
- (d) REPORTING AND DATABASE.—
- (1) REPORT REQUIRED.—Not later than September 30, 2019, and every 2 years thereafter, the Secretary shall submit to the Committee on Agriculture of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry of the Senate a report on the status of activities funded under this section, including—
- (A) funding awarded;
  - (B) results of the activities, including, if feasible, economic outcomes;
  - (C) incorporation of findings from the activities, such as new technology and innovative approaches, into the conservation efforts implemented by the Secretary; and
  - (D) on completion of the study required under subsection (c)(7)(C), the findings of the study.
- (2) CONSERVATION PRACTICE DATABASE.—
- (A) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall use the data reported under paragraph (1) to establish and maintain a publicly available conservation practice database that provides—
- (i) a compilation and analysis of effective conservation practices for soil health, nutrient management, and source water protection in varying soil compositions, cropping systems, slopes, and landscapes; and
  - (ii) a list of recommended new and effective conservation practices.
- (B) PRIVACY.—Information provided under subparagraph (A) shall be transformed into a statistical or aggregate form so as to not include any identifiable or personal information of individual producers.

## Subchapter B—Conservation Stewardship Program <sup>8</sup>

### SEC. 1240I. [16 U.S.C. 3839aa–21] DEFINITIONS.

In this subchapter:

(1) **AGRICULTURAL OPERATION.**—The term “agricultural operation” means all eligible land, whether or not contiguous, that is—

(A) under the effective control of a producer at the time the producer enters into a contract under the program; and

(B) operated with equipment, labor, management, and production or cultivation practices that are substantially separate from other agricultural operations, as determined by the Secretary.

(2) **CONSERVATION ACTIVITIES.**—

(A) **IN GENERAL.**—The term “conservation activities” means conservation systems, practices, or management measures.

(B) **INCLUSIONS.**—The term “conservation activities” includes—

(i) structural measures, vegetative measures, and land management measures, including agriculture drainage management systems, as determined by the Secretary;

(ii) planning needed to address a priority resource concern;

(iii) development of a comprehensive conservation plan, as defined in section 1240L(e)(1);

(iv) soil health planning, including planning to increase soil organic matter; and

(v) activities that will assist a producer to adapt to, or mitigate against, increasing weather volatility.

(3) **CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP PLAN.**—The term “conservation stewardship plan” means a plan that—

(A) identifies and inventories priority resource concerns;

(B) establishes benchmark data and conservation objectives;

(C) describes conservation activities to be implemented, managed, or improved; and

(D) includes a schedule and evaluation plan for the planning, installation, and management of the new and existing conservation activities.

(4) **ELIGIBLE LAND.**—

(A) **IN GENERAL.**—The term “eligible land” means—

<sup>8</sup>Subsections (a)(2) and subsection (b) of section 2301 of Public Law 115–334 transfers and redesignates sections 1238D through 1238G as sections 1240I through 1240L, respectively from subchapter B of chapter 2 of subtitle D of this title to subchapter B of chapter 4 of such title. Subsection (c)(1) of such section 2301 provides for the repeal of chapter 2 of subtitle D (as amended by subsection (b)). Subsection (c)(2) of such section 2301 states as follows: “Effective on the date of enactment of this Act, the conservation stewardship program under subchapter B of chapter 2 of subtitle D of title XII of the Food Security Act of 1985 (16 U.S.C. 3838d et seq.) (as in effect on the day before the date of enactment of this Act) shall cease to be effective.” Paragraph (3) of subsection (c) provides for transitional provisions.

(i) private or tribal land on which agricultural commodities, livestock, or forest-related products are produced; and

(ii) lands associated with the land described in clause (i) on which priority resource concerns could be addressed through a contract under the program.

(B) INCLUSIONS.—The term “eligible land” includes—

(i) cropland;

(ii) grassland;

(iii) rangeland;

(iv) pasture land;

(v) nonindustrial private forest land; and

(vi) other land in agricultural areas (including cropped woodland, marshes, and agricultural land used or capable of being used for the production of livestock), as determined by the Secretary.

(5) PRIORITY RESOURCE CONCERN.—The term “priority resource concern” means a natural resource concern or problem, as determined by the Secretary, that—

(A) is identified at the national, State, or local level as a priority for a particular area of a State;

(B) represents a significant concern in a State or region; and

(C) is likely to be addressed successfully through the implementation of conservation activities under this program.

(6) PROGRAM.—The term “program” means the conservation stewardship program established by this subchapter.

(7) STEWARDSHIP THRESHOLD.—The term “stewardship threshold” means the level of management required, as determined by the Secretary, to conserve and improve the quality and condition of a natural resource through the use of—

(A) quality criteria under a resource management system;

(B) predictive analytics tools or models developed or approved by the Natural Resources Conservation Service;

(C) data from past and current enrollment in the program; and

(D) other methods that measure conservation and improvement in priority resource concerns, as determined by the Secretary.

**SEC. 1240J. [16 U.S.C. 3839aa-22] CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM.**

(a) ESTABLISHMENT AND PURPOSE.—During each of fiscal years 2019 through 2031, the Secretary shall carry out a conservation stewardship program to encourage producers to address priority resource concerns and improve and conserve the quality and condition of natural resources in a comprehensive manner—

(1) by undertaking additional conservation activities; and

(2) by improving, maintaining, and managing existing conservation activities.

(b) EXCLUSIONS.—

(1) LAND ENROLLED IN OTHER CONSERVATION PROGRAMS.—Subject to paragraph (2), the following land (even if covered by



the definition of eligible land) is not eligible for enrollment in the program:

(A) Land enrolled in the conservation reserve program, unless—

(i) the conservation reserve contract will expire at the end of the fiscal year in which the land is to be enrolled in the program; and

(ii) conservation reserve program payments for land enrolled in the program cease before the first program payment is made to the applicant under this subchapter.

(B) Land enrolled in a wetland reserve easement through the agricultural conservation easement program.

(2) CONVERSION TO CROPLAND.—Eligible land used for crop production after the date of enactment of Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018, that had not been planted, considered to be planted, or devoted to crop production for at least 4 of the 6 years preceding that date shall not be the basis for any payment under the program, unless the land does not meet such requirement because—

(A) the land had previously been enrolled in the conservation reserve program;

(B) the land has been maintained using long-term crop rotation practices, as determined by the Secretary; or

(C) the land is incidental land needed for efficient operation of the farm or ranch, as determined by the Secretary.

#### **SEC. 1240K. [16 U.S.C. 3839aa-23] STEWARDSHIP CONTRACTS.**

(a) SUBMISSION OF CONTRACT OFFERS.—To be eligible to participate in the conservation stewardship program, a producer shall submit to the Secretary a contract offer for the agricultural operation that—

(1) demonstrates to the satisfaction of the Secretary that the producer, at the time of the contract offer, meets or exceeds the stewardship threshold for at least 2 priority resource concerns; and

(2) would, at a minimum, meet or exceed the stewardship threshold for at least 1 additional priority resource concern by the end of the stewardship contract by—

(A) installing and adopting additional conservation activities; and

(B) improving, maintaining, and managing existing conservation activities across the entire agricultural operation in a manner that increases or extends the conservation benefits in place at the time the contract offer is accepted by the Secretary.

(b) EVALUATION OF CONTRACT OFFERS.—

(1) RANKING OF APPLICATIONS.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—In evaluating contract offers submitted under subsection (a) and contract renewals under subsection (e), the Secretary shall rank applications based on—

(i) the natural resource conservation and environmental benefits that result from the conservation treatment on all applicable priority resource concerns at the time of submission of the application;

(ii) the degree to which the proposed conservation activities increase natural resource conservation and environmental benefits; and

(iii) other consistent criteria, as determined by the Secretary.

(B) ADDITIONAL CRITERION.—If 2 or more applications receive the same ranking under subparagraph (A), the Secretary shall rank those contracts based on the extent to which the actual and anticipated conservation benefits from each contract are provided at the lowest cost relative to other similarly beneficial contract offers.

(2) PROHIBITION.—The Secretary may not assign a higher priority to any application because the applicant is willing to accept a lower payment than the applicant would otherwise be eligible to receive.

(3) ADDITIONAL CRITERIA.—The Secretary may develop and use such additional criteria that the Secretary determines are necessary to ensure that national, State, and local priority resource concerns are effectively addressed.

(c) ENTERING INTO CONTRACTS.—After a determination that a producer is eligible for a contract or contract renewal under this section, and a determination that the contract or contract renewal offer ranks sufficiently high under the evaluation criteria under subsection (b), the Secretary shall enter into a conservation stewardship contract or contract renewal with the producer to enroll the eligible land to be covered by the contract or contract renewal.

(d) CONTRACT PROVISIONS.—

(1) TERM.—A conservation stewardship contract shall be for a term of 5 years.

(2) REQUIRED PROVISIONS.—The conservation stewardship contract of a producer shall—

(A) state the amount of the payment the Secretary agrees to make to the producer for each year of the conservation stewardship contract under section 1240L(c);

(B) require the producer—

(i) to implement a conservation stewardship plan that describes the program purposes to be achieved through 1 or more conservation activities;

(ii) to maintain and supply information as required by the Secretary to determine compliance with the conservation stewardship plan and any other requirements of the program; and

(iii) not to conduct any activities on the agricultural operation that would tend to defeat the purposes of the program;

(C) permit all economic uses of the eligible land that—

(i) maintain the agricultural nature of the land; and

(ii) are consistent with the conservation purposes of the conservation stewardship contract;

(D) include a provision to ensure that a producer shall not be considered in violation of the contract for failure to comply with the contract due to circumstances beyond the control of the producer, including a disaster or related condition, as determined by the Secretary;

(E) include provisions requiring that upon the violation of a term or condition of the contract at any time the producer has control of the land—

(i) if the Secretary determines that the violation warrants termination of the contract—

(I) the producer shall forfeit all rights to receive payments under the contract; and

(II) the producer shall refund all or a portion of the payments received by the producer under the contract, including any interest on the payments, as determined by the Secretary; or

(ii) if the Secretary determines that the violation does not warrant termination of the contract, the producer shall refund or accept adjustments to the payments provided to the producer, as the Secretary determines to be appropriate;

(F) include provisions in accordance with paragraphs (3) and (4); and

(G) include any additional provisions the Secretary determines are necessary to carry out the program.

(3) CHANGE OF INTEREST IN LAND SUBJECT TO A CONTRACT.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—At the time of application, a producer shall have control of the eligible land to be enrolled in the program. Except as provided in subparagraph (B), a change in the interest of a producer in eligible land covered by a contract under the program shall result in the termination of the contract with regard to that land.

(B) TRANSFER OF DUTIES AND RIGHTS.—Subparagraph (A) shall not apply if—

(i) within a reasonable period of time (as determined by the Secretary) after the date of the change in the interest in eligible land covered by a contract under the program, the transferee of the land provides written notice to the Secretary that all duties and rights under the contract have been transferred to, and assumed by, the transferee for the portion of the land transferred;

(ii) the transferee meets the eligibility requirements of the program; and

(iii) the Secretary approves the transfer of all duties and rights under the contract.

(4) MODIFICATION AND TERMINATION OF CONTRACTS.—

(A) VOLUNTARY MODIFICATION OR TERMINATION.—The Secretary may modify or terminate a contract with a producer if—

(i) the producer agrees to the modification or termination; and

- (ii) the Secretary determines that the modification or termination is in the public interest.
  - (B) INVOLUNTARY TERMINATION.—The Secretary may terminate a contract if the Secretary determines that the producer violated the contract.
  - (5) REPAYMENT.—If a contract is terminated, the Secretary may, consistent with the purposes of the program—
    - (A) allow the producer to retain payments already received under the contract; or
    - (B) require repayment, in whole or in part, of payments received and assess liquidated damages.
  - (e) CONTRACT RENEWAL.—The Secretary may provide the producer an opportunity to renew an existing contract in the first half of the fifth year of the contract period if the producer—
    - (1) demonstrates compliance with the terms of the existing contract;
    - (2) agrees to adopt and continue to integrate new or improved conservation activities across the entire agricultural operation, demonstrating continued improvement during the additional 5-year period, as determined by the Secretary; and
    - (3) agrees, by the end of the contract period—
      - (A) to meet the stewardship threshold of at least 2 additional priority resource concerns on the agricultural operation; or
      - (B) to adopt or improve conservation activities, as determined by the Secretary, to achieve higher levels of performance with respect to not less than 2 existing priority resource concerns that are specified by the Secretary in the initial contract.

**SEC. 1240L. [16 U.S.C. 3839aa-24] DUTIES OF THE SECRETARY.**

- (a) IN GENERAL.—To achieve the conservation goals of a contract under the conservation stewardship program, the Secretary shall—
  - (1) make the program available to eligible producers on a continuous enrollment basis with 1 or more ranking periods, 1 of which shall occur in the first quarter of each fiscal year;
  - (2) identify not less than 5 priority resource concerns in a particular watershed or other appropriate region or area within a State; and
  - (3) establish a science-based stewardship threshold for each priority resource concern identified under paragraph (2).
- (b) ALLOCATION TO STATES.—The Secretary shall allocate funding to States for enrollment, based—
  - (1) primarily on each State's proportion of eligible land to the total acreage of eligible land in all States; and
  - (2) also on consideration of—
    - (A) the extent and magnitude of the conservation needs associated with agricultural production in each State;
    - (B) the degree to which implementation of the program in the State is, or will be, effective in helping producers address those needs; and

(C) other considerations to achieve equitable geographic distribution of funds, as determined by the Secretary.

(c) CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP PAYMENTS.—

(1) AVAILABILITY OF PAYMENTS.—The Secretary shall provide annual payments under the program to compensate the producer for—

(A) installing and adopting additional conservation activities; and

(B) improving, maintaining, and managing conservation activities in place at the agricultural operation of the producer at the time the contract offer is accepted by the Secretary.

(2) PAYMENT AMOUNT.—The amount of the annual payment shall be determined by the Secretary and based, to the maximum extent practicable, on the following factors:

(A) Costs incurred by the producer associated with planning, design, materials, installation, labor, management, maintenance, or training.

(B) Income forgone by the producer.

(C) Expected conservation benefits.

(D) The extent to which priority resource concerns will be addressed through the installation and adoption of conservation activities on the agricultural operation.

(E) The level of stewardship in place at the time of application and maintained over the term of the contract.

(F) The degree to which the conservation activities will be integrated across the entire agricultural operation for all applicable priority resource concerns over the term of the contract.

(G) Such other factors as are determined appropriate by the Secretary.

(3) EXCLUSIONS.—A payment to a producer under this subsection shall not be provided for—

(A) the design, construction, or maintenance of animal waste storage or treatment facilities or associated waste transport or transfer devices for animal feeding operations; or

(B) conservation activities for which there is no cost incurred or income forgone to the producer.

(4) DELIVERY OF PAYMENTS.—In making payments under this subsection, the Secretary shall, to the extent practicable—

(A) prorate conservation performance over the term of the contract so as to accommodate, to the extent practicable, producers earning equal annual payments in each fiscal year; and

(B) make such payments as soon as practicable after October 1 of each fiscal year for activities carried out in the previous fiscal year.

(5) PAYMENT FOR COVER CROP ACTIVITIES.—The amount of a payment under this subsection for cover crop activities shall be not less than 125 percent of the annual payment amount determined by the Secretary under paragraph (2).

(d) SUPPLEMENTAL PAYMENTS FOR RESOURCE-CONSERVING CROP ROTATIONS AND ADVANCED GRAZING MANAGEMENT.—

(1) DEFINITIONS.—In this subsection:

(A) ADVANCED GRAZING MANAGEMENT.—The term “advanced grazing management” means the use of a combination of grazing practices (as determined by the Secretary), which may include management-intensive rotational grazing, that provide for—

- (i) improved soil health and carbon sequestration;
- (ii) drought resilience;
- (iii) wildlife habitat;
- (iv) wildfire mitigation;
- (v) control of invasive plants; and
- (vi) water quality improvement.

(B) MANAGEMENT-INTENSIVE ROTATIONAL GRAZING.—The term “management-intensive rotational grazing” means a strategic, adaptively managed multipasture grazing system in which animals are regularly and systematically moved to fresh pasture in a manner that—

- (i) maximizes the quantity and quality of forage growth;
- (ii) improves manure distribution and nutrient cycling;
- (iii) increases carbon sequestration from greater forage harvest;
- (iv) improves the quality and quantity of cover for wildlife;
- (v) provides permanent cover to protect the soil from erosion; and
- (vi) improves water quality.

(C) RESOURCE-CONSERVING CROP ROTATION.—The term “resource-conserving crop rotation” means a crop rotation that—

- (i) includes at least 1 resource-conserving crop (as defined by the Secretary);
- (ii) reduces erosion;
- (iii) improves soil fertility and tilth;
- (iv) interrupts pest cycles;
- (v) builds soil organic matter; and
- (vi) in applicable areas, reduces depletion of soil moisture or otherwise reduces the need for irrigation.

(2) AVAILABILITY OF PAYMENTS.—The Secretary shall provide additional payments to producers that, in participating in the program, agree to adopt or improve, manage, and maintain—

- (A) resource-conserving crop rotations; or
- (B) advanced grazing management.

(3) ELIGIBILITY.—To be eligible to receive a payment described in paragraph (2), a producer shall agree to adopt or improve, manage, and maintain resource-conserving crop rotations or advanced grazing management for the term of the contract.

(4) AMOUNT OF PAYMENT.—An additional payment provided under paragraph (2) shall be not less than 150 percent

of the annual payment amount determined by the Secretary under subsection (c)(2).

(e) PAYMENT FOR COMPREHENSIVE CONSERVATION PLAN.—

(1) DEFINITION OF COMPREHENSIVE CONSERVATION PLAN.—In this subsection, the term “comprehensive conservation plan” means a conservation plan that meets or exceeds the stewardship threshold for each priority resource concern identified by the Secretary under subsection (a)(2).

(2) PAYMENT FOR COMPREHENSIVE CONSERVATION PLAN.—The Secretary shall provide a 1-time payment to a producer that develops a comprehensive conservation plan.

(3) AMOUNT OF PAYMENT.—The Secretary shall determine the amount of payment under paragraph (2) based on—

(A) the number of priority resource concerns addressed in the comprehensive conservation plan; and

(B) the number of types of land uses included in the comprehensive conservation plan.

(f) PAYMENT LIMITATIONS.—A person or legal entity may not receive, directly or indirectly, payments under the program that, in the aggregate, exceed \$200,000 under all contracts entered into during fiscal years 2019 through 2023, excluding funding arrangements with Indian tribes, regardless of the number of contracts entered into under the program by the person or legal entity.

(g) SPECIALTY CROP AND ORGANIC PRODUCERS.—The Secretary shall ensure that outreach and technical assistance are available, and program specifications are appropriate to enable specialty crop and organic producers to participate in the program.

(h) ORGANIC CERTIFICATION.—

(1) COORDINATION.—The Secretary shall establish a transparent means by which producers may initiate organic certification under the Organic Foods Production Act of 1990 (7 U.S.C. 6501 et seq.) while participating in a contract under the program.

(2) ALLOCATION.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—Using funds made available for the program for each of fiscal years 2019 through 2031, the Secretary shall allocate funding to States to support organic production and transition to organic production through paragraph (1).

(B) DETERMINATION.—The Secretary shall determine the allocation to a State under subparagraph (A) based on—

(i) the number of certified and transitioning organic operations within the State; and

(ii) the number of acres of certified and transitioning organic production within the State.

(i) REGULATIONS.—The Secretary shall promulgate regulations that—

(1) prescribe such other rules as the Secretary determines to be necessary to ensure a fair and reasonable application of the limitations established under subsection (f); and

(2) otherwise enable the Secretary to carry out the program.

(j) STREAMLINING AND COORDINATION.—To the maximum extent feasible, the Secretary shall provide for streamlined and coordinated procedures for the program and the environmental quality incentives program under subchapter A, including applications, contracting, conservation planning, conservation practices, and related administrative procedures.

(k) SOIL HEALTH.—To the maximum extent feasible, the Secretary shall manage the program to enhance soil health.

(l) ANNUAL REPORT.—Each fiscal year, the Secretary shall submit to the Committee on Agriculture of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry of the Senate a report describing the payment rates for conservation activities offered to producers under the program and an analysis of whether payment rates can be reduced for the most expensive conservation activities.

**SEC. 1240L-1. [16 U.S.C. 3839aa-25] GRASSLAND CONSERVATION INITIATIVE.**

(a) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

(1) ELIGIBLE LAND.—Notwithstanding sections 1240I(4) and 1240J(b)(2), the term “eligible land” means cropland on a farm for which base acres have been maintained by the Secretary under section 1112(d)(3) of the Agricultural Act of 2014 (7 U.S.C. 9012(d)(3)).

(2) INITIATIVE.—The term “initiative” means the grassland conservation initiative established under subsection (b).

(b) ESTABLISHMENT AND PURPOSE.—The Secretary shall establish within the program a grassland conservation initiative for the purpose of assisting producers in protecting grazing uses, conserving and improving soil, water, and wildlife resources, and achieving related conservation values by conserving eligible land through grassland conservation contracts under subsection (e).

(c) ELECTION.—Beginning in fiscal year 2019, the Secretary shall provide a 1-time election to enroll eligible land in the initiative under a contract described in subsection (e).

(d) METHOD OF ENROLLMENT.—The Secretary shall—

(1) notwithstanding subsection (b) of section 1240K, determine under subsection (c) of that section that eligible land ranks sufficiently high under the evaluation criteria described in subsection (b) of that section; and

(2) enroll the eligible land in the initiative under a contract described in subsection (e).

(e) GRASSLAND CONSERVATION CONTRACT.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Notwithstanding section 1240K(a)(1), to enroll eligible land in the initiative under a grassland conservation contract, a producer shall agree—

(A) to meet or exceed the stewardship threshold for not less than 1 priority resource concern by the date on which the contract expires; and

(B) to comply with the terms and conditions of the contract.

(2) TERMS.—A grassland conservation contract entered into under this section shall—

(A)(i) be for a single 5-year term; and



- (ii) not be subject to renewal or reenrollment under section 1240K(e); and
  - (B) be subject to section 1240K(d).
- (3) **EARLY TERMINATION.**—The Secretary shall allow a producer that enters into a grassland conservation contract under this section—
  - (A) to terminate the contract at any time; and
  - (B) to retain payments already received under the contract.
- (f) **GRASSLAND CONSERVATION PLAN.**—The grassland conservation plan developed for eligible land shall be limited to—
  - (1) eligible land; and
  - (2) resource concerns and activities relating to grassland.
- (g) **PAYMENTS.**—
  - (1) **IN GENERAL.**—Beginning in fiscal year 2019, of the funds made available for this subchapter under section 1241(a)(3)(B), and notwithstanding any payment under title I of the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018, an amendment made by that title, or section 1240L(c), the Secretary shall make annual grassland conservation contract payments to the producer of any eligible land that is the subject of a grassland conservation contract under this section.
  - (2) **PAYMENT NONELIGIBILITY.**—A grassland conservation contract under this section shall not be—
    - (A) eligible for payments under section 1240L(d); or
    - (B) subject to the payment limitations under this subchapter.
  - (3) **LIMITATION.**—The amount of an annual payment under this subsection shall be \$18 per acre, not to exceed the number of base acres on a farm.
- (h) **CONSIDERED PLANTED.**—The Secretary shall consider land enrolled under a grassland conservation contract under this section during a crop year to be planted or considered planted to a covered commodity (as defined in section 1111 of the Agricultural Act of 2014 (7 U.S.C. 9011)) during that crop year.
- (i) **OTHER CONTRACTS.**—A producer with an agricultural operation that contains land eligible under this section and land eligible under section 1240K—
  - (1) may enroll the land eligible under this section through a contract under this section or under section 1240K; and
  - (2) shall not be prohibited from enrolling the land eligible under section 1240K through a contract under section 1240K.

## **CHAPTER 5—OTHER CONSERVATION PROGRAMS**

### **SEC. 1240M. [16 U.S.C. 3839bb] CONSERVATION OF PRIVATE GRAZING LAND.**

- (a) **PURPOSE.**—It is the purpose of this section to authorize the Secretary to provide a coordinated technical, educational, and related assistance program to conserve and enhance private grazing land resources and provide related benefits to all citizens of the United States by—
  - (1) establishing a coordinated and cooperative Federal, State, and local grazing conservation program for management of private grazing land;

(2) strengthening technical, educational, and related assistance programs that provide assistance to owners and managers of private grazing land;

(3) conserving and improving wildlife habitat on private grazing land;

(4) conserving and improving fish habitat and aquatic systems through grazing land conservation treatment;

(5) protecting and improving water quality;

(6) improving the dependability and consistency of water supplies;

(7) identifying and managing weed, noxious weed, and brush encroachment problems on private grazing land; and

(8) integrating conservation planning and management decisions by owners and managers of private grazing land, on a voluntary basis.

(b) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

(1) DEPARTMENT.—The term “Department” means the Department of Agriculture.

(2) PRIVATE GRAZING LAND.—The term “private grazing land” means private, State-owned, tribally-owned, and any other non-federally owned rangeland, pastureland, grazed forest land, and hay land.

(3) SECRETARY.—The term “Secretary” means the Secretary of Agriculture.

(c) PRIVATE GRAZING LAND CONSERVATION ASSISTANCE.—

(1) ASSISTANCE TO GRAZING LANDOWNERS AND OTHERS.—Subject to the availability of appropriations for this section, the Secretary shall establish a voluntary program to provide technical, educational, and related assistance to owners and managers of private grazing land and public agencies, through local conservation districts, to enable the landowners, managers, and public agencies to voluntarily carry out activities that are consistent with this section, including—

(A) maintaining and improving private grazing land and the multiple values and uses that depend on private grazing land;

(B) implementing grazing land management technologies;

(C) managing resources on private grazing land, including—

(i) planning, managing, and treating private grazing land resources;

(ii) ensuring the long-term sustainability of private grazing land resources;

(iii) harvesting, processing, and marketing private grazing land resources; and

(iv) identifying and managing weed, noxious weed, and brush encroachment problems;

(D) protecting and improving the quality and quantity of water yields from private grazing land;

(E) maintaining and improving wildlife and fish habitat on private grazing land;

(F) enhancing recreational opportunities on private grazing land;

(G) maintaining and improving the aesthetic character of private grazing land;

(H) identifying the opportunities and encouraging the diversification of private grazing land enterprises; and

(I) encouraging the use of sustainable grazing systems, such as year-round, rotational, or managed grazing.

(2) PROGRAM ELEMENTS.—

(A) FUNDING.—If funding is provided to carry out this section, it shall be provided through a specific line-item in the annual appropriations for the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

(B) TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND EDUCATION.—Personnel of the Department trained in pasture and range management shall be made available under the program to deliver and coordinate technical assistance and education to owners and managers of private grazing land, at the request of the owners and managers.

(C) PARTNERSHIPS.—In carrying out the program under this section, the Secretary shall provide education and outreach activities through partnerships with—

(i) land-grant colleges and universities (as defined in section 1404 of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 (7 U.S.C. 3103)); and

(ii) nongovernmental organizations.

(d) GRAZING TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE SELF-HELP.—

(1) FINDINGS.—Congress finds that—

(A) there is a severe lack of technical assistance for farmers and ranchers that graze livestock;

(B) Federal budgetary constraints preclude any significant expansion, and may force a reduction of, current levels of technical support; and

(C) farmers and ranchers have a history of cooperatively working together to address common needs in the promotion of their products and in the drainage of wet areas through drainage districts.

(2) ESTABLISHMENT OF GRAZING DEMONSTRATION.—In accordance with paragraph (3), the Secretary may establish 2 grazing management demonstration districts at the recommendation of the grazing land conservation initiative steering committee.

(3) PROCEDURE.—

(A) PROPOSAL.—Within a reasonable time after the submission of a request of an organization of farmers or ranchers engaged in grazing, the Secretary shall propose that a grazing management district be established.

(B) FUNDING.—The terms and conditions of the funding and operation of the grazing management district shall be proposed by the producers.

(C) APPROVAL.—The Secretary shall approve the proposal if the Secretary determines that the proposal—

(i) is reasonable;

(ii) will promote sound grazing practices; and

(iii) contains provisions similar to the provisions contained in the beef promotion and research order issued under section 4 of the Beef Research and Information Act (7 U.S.C. 2903) in effect on April 4, 1996.

(D) AREA INCLUDED.—The area proposed to be included in a grazing management district shall be determined by the Secretary on the basis of an application by farmers or ranchers.

(E) AUTHORIZATION.—The Secretary may use authority under the Agricultural Adjustment Act (7 U.S.C. 601 et seq.), reenacted with amendments by the Agricultural Marketing Agreement Act of 1937, to operate, on a demonstration basis, a grazing management district.

(F) ACTIVITIES.—The activities of a grazing management district shall be scientifically sound activities, as determined by the Secretary in consultation with a technical advisory committee composed of ranchers, farmers, and technical experts.

(e) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is authorized to be appropriated to carry out this section \$60,000,000 for each of fiscal years 2002 through 2023.

【Section 1240N repealed by section 2707(a) of Public Law 113–79.】

**SEC. 12400. [16 U.S.C. 3839bb–2] GRASSROOTS SOURCE WATER PROTECTION PROGRAM.**

(a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall establish a national grassroots water protection program to more effectively use onsite technical assistance capabilities of each State rural water association that, as of the date of enactment of this section, operates a wellhead or groundwater protection program in the State.

(b) FUNDING.—

(1) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is authorized to be appropriated to carry out this section \$20,000,000 for each of fiscal years 2008 through 2031.

(2) AVAILABILITY OF FUNDS.—In addition to funds made available under paragraph (1), of the funds of the Commodity Credit Corporation, the Secretary shall use \$5,000,000, to remain available until expended.

(3) ADDITIONAL FUNDING.—In addition to any other funds made available under this subsection, of the funds of the Commodity Credit Corporation, the Secretary shall use—

(A) \$5,000,000 beginning in fiscal year 2019, to remain available until expended;

(B) \$1,000,000 beginning in fiscal year 2024, to remain available until expended; and

(C) \$1,000,000 beginning in fiscal year 2026, to remain available until expended.

【Sections 1240P and 1240Q repealed by sections 2708 and 2709(a) of Public Law 113–79.】

**SEC. 1240R. [16 U.S.C. 3839bb–5] VOLUNTARY PUBLIC ACCESS AND HABITAT INCENTIVE PROGRAM.**

(a) ESTABLISHMENT.—The Secretary shall establish a voluntary public access program under which States and tribal governments

may apply for funding to encourage owners and operators of privately-held farm, ranch, and forest land to voluntarily make that land available for access by the public for wildlife-dependent recreation, including hunting or fishing under programs administered by the States and tribal governments.

(b) APPLICATIONS.—In submitting applications for funding under the program, a State or tribal government shall describe—

(1) the benefits that the State or tribal government intends to achieve by encouraging public access to private farm and ranch land for—

(A) hunting and fishing; and

(B) to the maximum extent practicable, other recreational purposes; and

(2) the methods that will be used to achieve those benefits.

(c) PRIORITY.—In approving applications and awarding funding under the program, the Secretary shall give priority to States and tribal governments that propose—

(1) to maximize participation by offering a program the terms of which are likely to meet with widespread acceptance among landowners;

(2) to ensure that land enrolled under the State or tribal government program has appropriate wildlife habitat;

(3) to strengthen wildlife habitat improvement efforts on land enrolled in a conservation reserve enhancement program under section 1231A or on land covered by a wetland reserve easement under section 1265C by providing incentives to increase public hunting and other recreational access on that land;

(4) to use additional Federal, State, tribal government, or private resources in carrying out the program; and

(5) to make available to the public the location of land enrolled.

(d) RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER LAWS.—

(1) NO PREEMPTION.—Nothing in this section preempts a State or tribal government law, including any State or tribal government liability law.

(2) EFFECT OF INCONSISTENT OPENING DATES FOR MIGRATORY BIRD HUNTING.—The Secretary shall reduce by 25 percent the amount of funding otherwise determined for a State under the program if the opening dates for migratory bird hunting in the State are not consistent for residents and non-residents.

(e) REGULATIONS.—The Secretary shall promulgate such regulations as are necessary to carry out this section.

(f) FUNDING.—

(1) MANDATORY FUNDING.—Of the funds of the Commodity Credit Corporation, the Secretary shall use to carry out this section, to the maximum extent practicable, \$50,000,000 for the period of fiscal years 2009 through 2012, \$40,000,000 for the period of fiscal years 2014 through 2018, \$50,000,000 for the period of fiscal years 2019 through 2023, \$10,000,000 for fiscal year 2024, and \$70,000,000 for the period of fiscal years 2025 through 2031.

(2) ENHANCED PUBLIC ACCESS TO WETLAND RESERVE EASEMENTS.—To the maximum extent practicable, of the funds

made available under paragraph (1), the Secretary shall use \$3,000,000 for the period of fiscal years 2019 through 2023 to encourage public access to land covered by wetland reserve easements under section 1265C through agreements with States and tribal governments under this section.

(3) **AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.**—There is authorized to be appropriated to carry out this section \$10,000,000 for fiscal year 2013.

## Subtitle E—Funding and Administration

### SEC. 1241. [16 U.S.C. 3841] COMMODITY CREDIT CORPORATION.

(a)<sup>9</sup> **ANNUAL FUNDING.**—For each of fiscal years 2014 through 2031, the Secretary shall use the funds, facilities, and authorities of the Commodity Credit Corporation to carry out the following programs under this title (including the provision of technical assistance):

(1) The conservation reserve program under subchapter B of chapter 1 of subtitle D, including, to the maximum extent practicable—

(A) \$12,000,000 for the period of fiscal years 2019 through 2023 to provide payments under section 1234(c); and

(B) \$50,000,000 for the period of fiscal years 2019 through 2023, including not more than \$5,000,000 to provide outreach and technical assistance, to carry out section 1235(f) to facilitate the transfer of land subject to contracts from contract holders to covered farmers or ranchers, as defined in section 1235(f)(1).

(2) The agricultural conservation easement program under subtitle H using to the maximum extent practicable—

(A) \$625,000,000 for fiscal year 2026;

(B) \$650,000,000 for fiscal year 2027;

(C) \$675,000,000 for fiscal year 2028;

(D) \$700,000,000 for fiscal year 2029;

(E) \$700,000,000 for fiscal year 2030; and

(F) \$700,000,000 for fiscal year 2031.

(3) The programs under chapter 4, using, to the maximum extent practicable—

(A) for the environmental quality incentives program under subchapter A of that chapter—

(i) \$2,655,000,000 for fiscal year 2026;

(ii) \$2,855,000,000 for fiscal year 2027;

(iii) \$3,255,000,000 for fiscal year 2028;

(iv) \$3,255,000,000 for fiscal year 2029;

(v) \$3,255,000,000 for fiscal year 2030; and

(vi) \$3,255,000,000 for fiscal year 2031; and

<sup>9</sup>The matter under the paragraph entitled “CONSERVATION OPERATIONS” under the heading “NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE” of title II of the Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2003 (P.L. 108–7; 117 Stat. 25; Feb. 20, 2003), provides that “None of the funds made available under the paragraph by this or any other appropriations Act may be used to provide technical assistance with respect to programs listed in section 1241(a) of the Food Security Act of 1985 (16 U.S.C. 3841(a)).”

(B) for the conservation stewardship program under subchapter B of that chapter—

- (i) \$1,300,000,000 for fiscal year 2026;
- (ii) \$1,325,000,000 for fiscal year 2027;
- (iii) \$1,350,000,000 for fiscal year 2028;
- (iv) \$1,375,000,000 for fiscal year 2029;
- (v) \$1,375,000,000 for fiscal year 2030; and
- (vi) \$1,375,000,000 for fiscal year 2031.

(4) The conservation stewardship program under subchapter B of chapter 2 of subtitle D (as in effect on the day before the date of enactment of the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018), using such sums as are necessary to administer contracts entered into before that date of enactment.

(b) AVAILABILITY OF FUNDS.—Amounts made available by subsection (a) for fiscal years 2014 through 2031 shall be used by the Secretary to carry out the programs specified in such subsection and shall remain available until expended.

(c) TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE.—

(1) AVAILABILITY.—Commodity Credit Corporation funds made available for a fiscal year for each of the programs specified in subsection (a)—

(A) shall be available for the provision of technical assistance for the programs for which funds are made available as necessary to implement the programs effectively;

(B) except for technical assistance for the conservation reserve program under subchapter B of chapter 1 of subtitle D, shall be apportioned for the provision of technical assistance in the amount determined by the Secretary, at the sole discretion of the Secretary; and

(C) shall not be available for the provision of technical assistance for conservation programs specified in subsection (a) other than the program for which the funds were made available.

(2) PRIORITY.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—In the delivery of technical assistance under the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act (16 U.S.C. 590a et seq.), the Secretary shall give priority to producers who request technical assistance from the Secretary in order to comply for the first time with the requirements of subtitle B and subtitle C of this title as a result of the amendments made by section 2611 of the Agricultural Act of 2014.

(B) REPORT.—Not later than 270 days after the date of enactment of the Agricultural Act of 2014, the Secretary shall submit to the Committee on Agriculture of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry of the Senate a report regarding the extent to which the conservation compliance requirements contained in the amendments made by section 2611 of the Agricultural Act of 2014 apply to and impact specialty crop growers, including national analysis and surveys to determine the extent of specialty crop acreage that includes highly erodible land and wetlands.

(3) REPORT.—Not later than December 31, 2014, the Secretary shall submit (and update as necessary in subsequent years) to the Committee on Agriculture of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry of the Senate a report—

(A) detailing the amount of technical assistance funds requested and apportioned in each program specified in subsection (a) during the preceding fiscal year; and

(B) any other data relating to this provision that would be helpful to such Committees.

(4) COMPLIANCE REPORT.—Not later than November 1 of each year, the Secretary shall submit to the Committee on Agriculture of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry of the Senate a report that includes—

(A) a description of the extent to which the requests for highly erodible land conservation and wetland compliance determinations are being addressed in a timely manner;

(B) the total number of requests completed in the previous fiscal year;

(C) the incomplete determinations on record; and

(D) the number of requests that are still outstanding more than 1 year since the date on which the requests were received from the producer.

(d) RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER LAW.—The use of Commodity Credit Corporation funds under subsection (c) to provide technical assistance shall not be considered an allotment or fund transfer from the Commodity Credit Corporation for purposes of the limit on expenditures for technical assistance imposed by section 11 of the Commodity Credit Corporation Charter Act (15 U.S.C. 714i).

(e) REGIONAL EQUITY.—

(1) EQUITABLE DISTRIBUTION.—When determining funding allocations each fiscal year, the Secretary shall, after considering available funding and program demand in each State, provide a distribution of funds for conservation programs under subtitle D (excluding the conservation reserve program under subchapter B of chapter 1), subtitle H, and subtitle I to ensure equitable program participation proportional to historical funding allocations and usage by all States.

(2) MINIMUM PERCENTAGE.—In determining the specific funding allocations under paragraph (1), the Secretary shall—

(A) ensure that during the first quarter of each fiscal year each State has the opportunity to establish that the State can use an aggregate allocation amount of at least 0.6 percent of the funds made available for those conservation programs; and

(B) for each State that can so establish, provide an aggregate amount of at least 0.6 percent of the funds made available for those conservation programs.

(f) ACCEPTANCE AND USE OF CONTRIBUTIONS FOR PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS.—

(1) ESTABLISHMENT OF PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP CONTRIBUTIONS ACCOUNTS.—The Secretary shall establish the nec-



essary accounts and process to accept contributions of private funds for the purposes of addressing the changing climate, sequestering carbon, improving wildlife habitat, protecting sources of drinking water, and addressing other natural resource priorities identified by the Secretary.

(2) DEPOSIT AND USE OF CONTRIBUTIONS.—Contributions of non-Federal funds received for a covered program shall be deposited into the account established under this subsection for the program and shall be available to the Secretary, without further appropriation and until expended, to carry out the program.

(3) SECRETARIAL AUTHORITY.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary may accept under this subsection contributions of such funds as the Secretary determines appropriate, taking into consideration—

- (i) the source of the funds to be contributed;
- (ii) the natural resource concerns to be addressed through the use of the funds;
- (iii) the amount of funds to be contributed;
- (iv) whether the activities proposed to be carried out using the funds are consistent with the priorities of the Secretary; and
- (v) any other factors the Secretary determines to be relevant.

(B) DETERMINATION.—A determination of whether to accept private funds under this subsection shall be at the sole discretion of the Secretary.

(4) MATCH OF CONTRIBUTED FUNDS.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—Subject to subparagraph (B), the Secretary may provide matching Federal funds, and determine the level of such match, which shall not exceed 75 percent, for the private funds contributed under this subsection, subject to the availability of funding for the applicable covered program.

(B) DISTRIBUTION OF FEDERAL FUNDING FOR STATES.—The Secretary may not provide any matching Federal funds pursuant to subparagraph (A) in a manner that would result in a substantial reduction in the historical distribution of Federal funding to any State for any covered program.

(C) LIMITATION.—No funds made available pursuant to Public Law 117–169 may be used to provide matching Federal funds pursuant to subparagraph (A).

(5) ROLE OF CONTRIBUTING ENTITY.—An entity contributing funds under this subsection may—

- (A) designate the covered program for which the contributed funds are intended to be used;
- (B) specify the geographic area in which the contributed funds are intended to be used;
- (C) identify a natural resource concern the contributed funds are intended to be used to address;
- (D) with respect to an activity funded pursuant to this subsection that may result in environmental services benefits to be sold through an environmental services market,

subject to the approval of the Secretary, prescribe the terms for ownership of the entity's share of such environmental services benefits resulting from such activity; and

(E) work with the Secretary to promote the activities funded pursuant to this subsection.

(6) PRODUCER PARTICIPATION.—

(A) NOTIFICATION.—The Secretary shall establish a process to provide notice to producers—

(i) of activities that may be carried out, through a covered program, pursuant to this section; and

(ii) any terms prescribed by the contributing entity under paragraph (5)(D) with respect to such activities.

(B) RETENTION OF ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES BENEFITS.—The Secretary shall not claim or impede any action of a producer with respect to the environmental services benefits they accrue through activities funded pursuant to this subsection.

(7) CONSISTENCY WITH PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—Except as provided in subparagraph (B), the Secretary shall ensure that the terms and conditions of activities carried out using funds contributed under this subsection are consistent with the requirements of the applicable covered program.

(B) ADJUSTMENTS.—

(i) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary may, if the Secretary determines necessary, adjust a regulatory requirement of a covered program, or related guidance, as it applies to an activity carried out using funds contributed under this subsection—

(I) to provide a simplified process; or

(II) to better reflect unique local circumstances and to address a specific priority of the contributing entity.

(ii) LIMITATION.—The Secretary shall not adjust the application of statutory requirements for a covered program, including requirements governing appeals, payment limits, and conservation compliance.

(8) REPORT.—Not later than December 31, 2024, and each year thereafter through December 31, 2031, the Secretary shall submit to the Committee on Agriculture of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry of the Senate a report that contains—

(A) the name and a description of each entity contributing private funds under this subsection that took an action under paragraph (5), and a description of each such action;

(B) the name and a description of each entity contributing private funds under this subsection for which the Secretary has provided matching Federal funds, and the level of that match, including the amount of such matching Federal funds; and

(C) the total amounts of—

- (i) private funds contributed under this subsection; and
  - (ii) matching Federal funds provided by the Secretary under paragraph (4).
- (9) COVERED PROGRAM DEFINED.—In this subsection, the term “covered program” means a program carried out by the Secretary under—
  - (A) subtitle D (except for subchapter B of such subtitle), subtitle H, or subtitle I;
  - (B) section 403 of the Agricultural Credit Act of 1978 (16 U.S.C. 2203);
  - (C) title V of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003 (16 U.S.C. 6571 et seq.); or
  - (D) the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act (16 U.S.C. 1001 et seq.), except for any program established by the Secretary to carry out section 14 of such Act (16 U.S.C. 1012).
- (10) DURATION OF AUTHORITY.—The authority of the Secretary under this subsection shall expire, with respect to each covered program, on the date on which the authority of the covered program expires.
- (g) ALLOCATIONS REVIEW AND UPDATE.—
  - (1) REVIEW.—Not later than 1 year after the date of enactment of the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018, the Secretary, acting through the Chief of the Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Administrator of the Farm Service Agency, shall conduct a review of conservation programs and authorities under this title that utilize annual allocation formulas to determine the sufficiency of the formulas in accounting for relevant data on local natural resource concerns, resource inventories, evaluations and reports, recommendations from State technical committees established under section 1261(a), State-level economic factors, level of agricultural infrastructure, or related factors that affect conservation program costs.
  - (2) UPDATE.—The Secretary shall improve conservation program allocation formulas as necessary to ensure that—
    - (A) the formulas adequately reflect the costs of carrying out the conservation programs;
    - (B) to the maximum extent practicable, local natural resource concerns are considered a leading factor in determining annual funding allocation to States;
    - (C) the process used at the national level to evaluate State budget proposals and to allocate funds is reviewed annually to assess the effect of allocations in addressing identified natural resource priorities and objectives; and
    - (D) the allocation of funds to States addresses priority natural resource concerns and objectives.
- (h) ASSISTANCE TO CERTAIN FARMERS OR RANCHERS FOR CONSERVATION ACCESS.—
  - (1) ASSISTANCE.—
    - (A) FISCAL YEARS 2009 THROUGH 2018.—Of the funds made available for each of fiscal years 2009 through 2018 to carry out the environmental quality incentives program

and the acres made available for each of such fiscal years to carry out the conservation stewardship program, the Secretary shall use, to the maximum extent practicable—

(i) 5 percent to assist beginning farmers or ranchers; and

(ii) 5 percent to assist socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers.

(B) FISCAL YEARS 2019 THROUGH 2031.—Of the funds made available for each of fiscal years 2019 through 2031 to carry out the environmental quality incentives program under subchapter A of chapter 4 of subtitle D and the conservation stewardship program under subchapter B of chapter 4 of subtitle D, the Secretary shall use, to the maximum extent practicable—

(i) 5 percent to assist beginning farmers or ranchers; and

(ii) 5 percent to assist socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers.

(2) REPOOLING OF FUNDS.—In any fiscal year, amounts not obligated under paragraph (1) by a date determined by the Secretary shall be available for payments and technical assistance to all persons eligible for payments or technical assistance in that fiscal year under the environmental quality incentives program and, in the case of fiscal years 2019 through 2031, under the conservation stewardship program under subchapter B of chapter 4 of subtitle D.

(3) REPOOLING OF ACRES.—In any fiscal year through fiscal year 2018, acres not obligated under paragraph (1)(A) by a date determined by the Secretary shall be available for use in that fiscal year under the conservation stewardship program.

(4) PREFERENCE.—In providing assistance under paragraph (1), the Secretary shall give preference to a veteran farmer or rancher (as defined in section 2501(e) of the Food, Agriculture, Conservation, and Trade Act of 1990 (7 U.S.C. 2279(e))) that qualifies under, as applicable, clause (i) or (ii) of paragraph (1)(A) or clause (i) or (ii) of paragraph (1)(B).

(i) REPORT ON PROGRAM ENROLLMENTS AND ASSISTANCE.—Not later than December 15 of each of calendar years 2019 through 2023, the Secretary shall submit to the Committee on Agriculture of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry of the Senate an annual report containing statistics by State related to enrollments in conservation programs under this title, as follows:

(1) The annual and current cumulative activity reflecting active agreement and contract enrollment statistics.

(2) Secretarial exceptions, waivers, and significant payments, including—

(A) payments made under the agricultural conservation easement program for easements valued at \$250,000 or greater;

(B) payments made under the regional conservation partnership program subject to the waiver of adjusted gross income limitations pursuant to section 1271C(c)(3);

(C) waivers granted by the Secretary under section 1001D(b)(3);

(D) exceptions and activity associated with section 1240B(h)(2); and

(E) exceptions provided by the Secretary under section 1265B(b)(2)(B)(ii).

(j) CONSERVATION STANDARDS AND REQUIREMENTS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Subject to the requirements of this title, the Natural Resources Conservation Service shall serve as the lead agency in developing and establishing technical standards and requirements for conservation programs carried out under this title, including—

(A) standards for conservation practices under this title;

(B) technical guidelines for implementing conservation practices under this title, including the location of the conservation practices; and

(C) standards for conservation plans.

(2) CONSISTENCY OF FARM SERVICE AGENCY TECHNICAL STANDARDS AND PAYMENT RATES.—The Administrator of the Farm Service Agency shall ensure that—

(A) technical standards of programs administered by the Farm Service Agency are consistent with the technical standards established by the Natural Resources Conservation Service under paragraph (1); and

(B) payment rates, to the extent practicable, are consistent between the Farm Service Agency and the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

**SEC. 1242. [16 U.S.C. 3842] DELIVERY OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE.**

(a) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

(1) ELIGIBLE PARTICIPANT.—The term “eligible participant” means a producer, landowner, or entity that is participating in, or seeking to participate in, programs in which the producer, landowner, or entity is otherwise eligible to participate under this title or the agricultural management assistance program under section 524(b) of the Federal Crop Insurance Act (7 U.S.C. 1524(b)).

(2) THIRD-PARTY PROVIDER.—The term “third-party provider” means a commercial entity (including a farmer cooperative, agriculture retailer, or other commercial entity (as defined by the Secretary)), a nonprofit entity, a State or local government (including a conservation district), or a Federal agency, that has expertise in the technical aspect of conservation planning, including nutrient management planning, watershed planning, or environmental engineering.

(b) PURPOSE OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE.—The purpose of technical assistance authorized by this section is to provide eligible participants with consistent, science-based, site-specific practices designed to achieve conservation objectives on land active in agricultural, forestry, or related uses.

(c) PROVISION OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE.—The Secretary shall provide technical assistance under this title to an eligible participant—

(1) directly;  
 (2) through an agreement with a third-party provider; or  
 (3) at the option of the eligible participant, through a payment, as determined by the Secretary, to the eligible participant for an approved third-party provider, if available.  
 (d) NON-FEDERAL ASSISTANCE.—The Secretary may request the services of, and enter into cooperative agreements or contracts with, other agencies within the Department or non-Federal entities to assist the Secretary in providing technical assistance necessary to assist in implementing conservation programs under this title.

(e) CERTIFICATION OF THIRD-PARTY PROVIDERS.—

(1) PURPOSE.—The purpose of the third-party provider program is to increase the availability and range of technical expertise available to eligible participants to plan and implement conservation measures.

(2) REGULATIONS.—Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008, the Secretary shall promulgate such regulations as are necessary to carry out this section.

(3) EXPERTISE.—In promulgating such regulations, the Secretary, to the maximum extent practicable, shall—

(A) ensure that persons with expertise in the technical aspects of conservation planning, watershed planning, and environmental engineering, including commercial entities, nonprofit entities, State or local governments or agencies, and other Federal agencies, are eligible to become approved providers of the technical assistance;

(B) provide national criteria for the certification of third-party providers; and

(C) approve any unique certification standards established at the State level.

(4) CERTIFICATION PROCESS.—The Secretary shall certify a third-party provider through—

(A) a certification process administered by the Secretary, acting through the Chief of the Natural Resources Conservation Service; or

(B) a non-Federal entity approved by the Secretary to perform the certification.

(5) STREAMLINED CERTIFICATION.—The Secretary shall provide a streamlined certification process for a third-party provider that has an appropriate specialty certification, including a sustainability certification.

(f) ADMINISTRATION.—

(1) FUNDING.—Effective for fiscal year 2008 and each subsequent fiscal year, funds of the Commodity Credit Corporation made available to carry out technical assistance for each of the programs specified in section 1241 shall be available for the provision of technical assistance from third-party providers under this section.

(2) TERM OF AGREEMENT.—An agreement with a third-party provider under this section shall have a term that—

(A) at a minimum, is equal to the period beginning on the date on which the agreement is entered into and ending on the date that is 1 year after the date on which all

activities performed pursuant to the agreement have been completed;

(B) does not exceed 3 years; and

(C) can be renewed, as determined by the Secretary.

(3) REVIEW OF CERTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS.—Not later than 1 year after the date of enactment of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008, the Secretary shall—

(A) review certification requirements for third-party providers; and

(B) make any adjustments considered necessary by the Secretary to improve participation.

(4) ELIGIBLE ACTIVITIES.—

(A) INCLUSION OF ACTIVITIES.—The Secretary may include as activities eligible for payments to a third-party provider—

(i) technical services provided directly to eligible participants, such as conservation planning, education and outreach, and assistance with design and implementation of conservation practices; and

(ii) related technical assistance services that accelerate conservation program delivery.

(B) EXCLUSIONS.—The Secretary shall not designate as an activity eligible for payments to a third-party provider any service that is provided by a business, or equivalent, in connection with conducting business and that is customarily provided at no cost.

(5) PAYMENT AMOUNTS.—The Secretary shall establish fair and reasonable amounts of payments for technical services provided by third-party providers.

(g) AVAILABILITY OF TECHNICAL SERVICES.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—In carrying out the programs under this title and the agricultural management assistance program under section 524 of the Federal Crop Insurance Act (7 U.S.C. 1524), the Secretary shall make technical services available to all eligible participants who are installing an eligible practice.

(2) TECHNICAL SERVICE CONTRACTS.—In any case in which financial assistance is not provided under a program referred to in paragraph (1), the Secretary may enter into a technical service contract with the eligible participant for the purposes of assisting in the planning, design, or installation of an eligible practice.

(h) REVIEW OF CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARDS.—

(1) REVIEW REQUIRED.—The Secretary shall—

(A) not later than 1 year after the date of enactment of the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018, complete a review of each conservation practice standard, including engineering design specifications, in effect on the day before the date of enactment of that Act;

(B) ensure, to the maximum extent practicable, the completeness and relevance of the standards to local agricultural, forestry, and natural resource needs, including specialty crops, native and managed pollinators, bioenergy crop production, forestry, and such other needs as are determined by the Secretary;

(C) ensure that the standards provide for the optimal balance between meeting site-specific conservation needs and minimizing risks of design failure and associated costs of construction and installation; and

(D) evaluate opportunities to increase flexibility in conservation practice standards in a manner that ensures equivalent natural resource benefits.

(2) CONSULTATION.—In conducting the review under paragraph (1), the Secretary shall consult with eligible participants, State technical committees established under section 1261(a), crop consultants, cooperative extension and land grant universities, nongovernmental organizations, and other qualified entities.

(3) EXPEDITED REVISION OF STANDARDS.—Not later than 1 year after the date of enactment of the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018, the Secretary shall develop for the programs under this title an administrative process for—

(A) expediting the establishment and revision of conservation practice standards;

(B) considering conservation innovations and scientific and technological advancements with respect to any establishment or revision under subparagraph (A);

(C) allowing local flexibility in the creation of—

(i) interim practice standards and supplements to existing practice standards to address the considerations described in subparagraph (B); and

(ii) partnership-led proposals for new and innovative techniques to facilitate implementing agreements and grants under this title; and

(D) soliciting regular input from State technical committees established under section 1261(a) for recommendations that identify innovations or advancements described in subparagraph (B).

(4) REPORT.—Not later than 2 years after the date of enactment of the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018, and every 2 years thereafter, the Secretary shall submit to Congress a report on—

(A) the administrative process developed under paragraph (3);

(B) conservation practice standards that were established or revised under that process; and

(C) conservation innovations that were considered under that process.

(i) ADDRESSING CONCERNS OF SPECIALTY CROP, ORGANIC, AND PRECISION AGRICULTURE PRODUCERS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall—

(A) to the maximum extent practicable, fully incorporate specialty crop production, organic crop production, and precision agriculture into the conservation practice standards; and

(B) provide for the appropriate range of conservation practices and resource mitigation measures available to producers involved with organic or specialty crop production or precision agriculture.



## (2) AVAILABILITY OF ADEQUATE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall ensure that adequate technical assistance is available for the implementation of conservation practices by producers involved with organic, specialty crop production, or precision agriculture through Federal conservation programs.

(B) REQUIREMENTS.—In carrying out subparagraph

(A), the Secretary shall develop—

(i) programs that meet specific needs of producers involved with organic, specialty crop production or precision agriculture through cooperative agreements with other agencies and nongovernmental organizations; and

(ii) program specifications that allow for innovative approaches to engage local resources in providing technical assistance for planning and implementation of conservation practices.

**SEC. 1244. [16 U.S.C. 3844] ADMINISTRATIVE REQUIREMENTS FOR CONSERVATION PROGRAMS.**

(a) INCENTIVES FOR CERTAIN FARMERS AND RANCHERS AND INDIAN TRIBES.—

(1) INCENTIVES AUTHORIZED.—In carrying out any conservation program administered by the Secretary, the Secretary may provide to a person or entity specified in paragraph

(2) incentives to participate in the conservation program—

(A) to foster new farming and ranching opportunities; and

(B) to enhance long-term environmental goals.

(2) COVERED PERSONS.—Incentives authorized by paragraph (1) may be provided to the following:

(A) Beginning farmers or ranchers.

(B) Socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers.

(C) Limited resource farmers or ranchers.

(D) Indian tribes.

(E) Veteran farmers or ranchers (as defined in section 2501(e) of the Food, Agriculture, Conservation, and Trade Act of 1990 (7 U.S.C. 2279(e))).

(b) PRIVACY OF PERSONAL INFORMATION RELATING TO NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION PROGRAMS.—

(1) INFORMATION RECEIVED FOR TECHNICAL AND FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—In accordance with section 552(b)(3) of title 5, United States Code, except as provided in subparagraph (C) and paragraph (2), information described in subparagraph (B)—

(i) shall not be considered to be public information; and

(ii) shall not be released to any person or Federal, State, local agency or Indian tribe (as defined by the Secretary) outside the Department of Agriculture.

(B) INFORMATION.—The information referred to in subparagraph (A) is information—

(i) provided to the Secretary or a contractor of the Secretary (including information provided under sub-

title D) for the purpose of providing technical or financial assistance to an owner, operator, or producer with respect to any natural resources conservation program administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service or the Farm Service Agency; and

(ii) that is proprietary (within the meaning of section 552(b)(4) of title 5, United States Code) to the agricultural operation or land that is a part of an agricultural operation of the owner, operator, or producer.

(C) EXCEPTION.—Nothing in this section affects the availability of payment information (including payment amounts and the names and addresses of recipients of payments) under section 552 of title 5, United States Code.

(2) EXCEPTIONS.—

(A) RELEASE AND DISCLOSURE FOR ENFORCEMENT.—The Secretary may release or disclose to the Attorney General information covered by paragraph (1) to the extent necessary to enforce the natural resources conservation programs referred to in paragraph (1)(B)(i).

(B) DISCLOSURE TO COOPERATING PERSONS AND AGENCIES.—

(i) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary may release or disclose information covered by paragraph (1) to a person or Federal, State, local, or tribal agency working in cooperation with the Secretary in providing technical and financial assistance described in paragraph (1)(B)(i) or collecting information from data gathering sites.

(ii) USE OF INFORMATION.—The person or Federal, State, local, or tribal agency that receives information described in clause (i) may release the information only for the purpose of assisting the Secretary—

(I) in providing the requested technical or financial assistance; or

(II) in collecting information from data gathering sites.

(C) STATISTICAL AND AGGREGATE INFORMATION.—Information covered by paragraph (1) may be disclosed to the public if the information has been transformed into a statistical or aggregate form without naming any—

(i) individual owner, operator, or producer; or

(ii) specific data gathering site.

(D) CONSENT OF OWNER, OPERATOR, OR PRODUCER.—

(i) IN GENERAL.—An owner, operator, or producer may consent to the disclosure of information described in paragraph (1).

(ii) CONDITION OF OTHER PROGRAMS.—The participation of the owner, operator, or producer in, and the receipt of any benefit by the owner, operator, or producer under, this title or any other program administered by the Secretary may not be conditioned on the owner, operator, or producer providing consent under this paragraph.

(3) VIOLATIONS; PENALTIES.—Section 1770(c) shall apply with respect to the release of information collected in any manner or for any purpose prohibited by this subsection.

(4) DATA COLLECTION, DISCLOSURE, AND REVIEW.—Nothing in this subsection—

(A) affects any procedure for data collection or disclosure through the National Resources Inventory; or

(B) limits the authority of Congress or the Government Accountability Office to review information collected or disclosed under this subsection.

(c) PLANS.—The Secretary shall, to the extent practicable, avoid duplication in—

(1) the conservation plans required for—

(A) highly erodible land conservation under subtitle B; and

(B) the conservation reserve program established under subchapter B of chapter 1 of subtitle D;

(2) the agricultural conservation easement program established under subtitle H; and

(3) the environmental quality incentives program established under subchapter A of chapter 4 of subtitle D.

(d) TENANT PROTECTION.—Except for a person who is a tenant on land that is subject to a conservation reserve contract that has been extended by the Secretary, the Secretary shall provide adequate safeguards to protect the interests of tenants and sharecroppers, including provision for sharing, on a fair and equitable basis, in payments under the programs established under subtitles B through D, H, and I.

(e) PROVISION OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE BY OTHER SOURCES.—In the preparation and application of a conservation compliance plan under subtitle B or similar plan required as a condition for assistance from the Department of Agriculture, the Secretary shall permit persons to secure technical assistance from approved sources, as determined by the Secretary, other than the Natural Resources Conservation Service. If the Secretary rejects a technical determination made by such a source, the basis of the Secretary's determination must be supported by documented evidence.

(f) ACREAGE LIMITATIONS.—

(1) LIMITATIONS.—

(A) ENROLLMENTS.—The Secretary shall not enroll more than 25 percent of the cropland in any county in the conservation reserve program established under subchapter B of chapter 1 of subtitle D and wetland reserve easements under section 1265C.

(B) EASEMENTS.—Not more than 15 percent of the cropland in a county may be subject to a wetland reserve easement under section 1265C.

(2) EXCEPTIONS.—The Secretary may exceed the limitation in paragraph (1)(A), if the Secretary determines that—

(A) the action would not adversely affect the local economy of a county; and

(B) operators in the county are having difficulties complying with conservation plans implemented under section 1212.

(3) **WAIVER TO EXCLUDE CERTAIN ACREAGE.**—The Secretary may grant a waiver to exclude acreage enrolled under section 1231A from the limitations in paragraph (1)(A) with the concurrence of the county government of the county involved.

(4) **EXCLUSIONS.**—

(A) **SHELTERBELTS AND WINDBREAKS.**—The limitations established under paragraph (1) shall not apply to cropland that is subject to an easement under subchapter B of chapter 1 of subtitle D that is used for the establishment of shelterbelts and windbreaks.

(B) **WET AND SATURATED SOILS.**—For the purposes of enrolling land in a wetland reserve easement under section 1265C, the limitations established under paragraph (1) shall not apply to cropland designated by the Secretary with subclass w in the land capability classes IV through VIII because of severe use limitations due to soil saturation or inundation.

(5) **CALCULATION.**—In calculating the percentages described in paragraph (1), the Secretary shall include any acreage that was included in calculations of percentages made under such paragraph, as in effect on the day before the date of enactment of the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018, and that remains enrolled when the calculation is made after that date under paragraph (1).

(g) **COMPLIANCE AND PERFORMANCE.**—For each conservation program under subtitle D, the Secretary shall develop procedures—

- (1) to monitor compliance with program requirements;
- (2) to measure program performance;
- (3) to demonstrate whether the long-term conservation benefits of the program are being achieved;
- (4) to track participation by crop and livestock types; and
- (5) to coordinate activities described in this subsection with the national conservation program authorized under section 5 of the Soil and Water Resources Conservation Act of 1977 (16 U.S.C. 2004).

(h) **ENCOURAGEMENT OF POLLINATOR HABITAT DEVELOPMENT AND PROTECTION.**—In carrying out any conservation program administered by the Secretary, the Secretary may, as appropriate, encourage—

- (1) the development of habitat for native and managed pollinators; and
- (2) the use of conservation practices that benefit native and managed pollinators, including, to the extent practicable, practices that maximize benefits for honey bees.

(i) **STREAMLINED APPLICATION PROCESS.**—

(1) **IN GENERAL.**—In carrying out each conservation program under this title, the Secretary shall ensure that the application process used by producers and landowners is streamlined to minimize complexity and eliminate redundancy.

(2) **REVIEW AND STREAMLINING.**—

(A) REVIEW.—The Secretary shall carry out a review of the application forms and processes for each conservation program covered by this subsection.

(B) STREAMLINING.—On completion of the review the Secretary shall revise application forms and processes, as necessary, to ensure that—

(i) all required application information is essential for the efficient, effective, and accountable implementation of conservation programs;

(ii) conservation program applicants are not required to provide information that is readily available to the Secretary through existing information systems of the Department of Agriculture;

(iii) information provided by the applicant is managed and delivered efficiently for use in all stages of the application process, or for multiple applications; and

(iv) information technology is used effectively to minimize data and information input requirements.

(3) IMPLEMENTATION AND NOTIFICATION.—Not later than 1 year after the date of enactment of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008, the Secretary shall submit to Congress a written notification of completion of the requirements of this subsection.

(j) REVIEW AND GUIDANCE FOR PRACTICE COSTS AND PAYMENT RATES.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 1 year after the date of enactment of the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018, and not later than October 1 of each year thereafter, the Secretary shall—

(A) review the estimates for practice costs and rates of payments made to producers for practices on eligible land under this title; and

(B) evaluate whether those costs and rates reflect a payment that—

(i) encourages participation in a conservation program administered by the Secretary;

(ii) encourages implementation of the most effective practices to address local natural resource concerns on eligible land; and

(iii) accounts for regional, State, and local variability relating to the complexity, implementation, and adoption of practices on eligible land.

(2) GUIDANCE; REVIEW.—The Secretary shall—

(A) issue guidance to States to annually review and adjust the estimates for practice costs and rates of payments made to producers to reflect the evaluation factors described in paragraph (1)(B); and

(B) determine the appropriate practice costs and rates of payments for each State by—

(i) annually reviewing each conservation program payment schedule and payment rate used in the State; and

(ii) consulting with the State technical committee established under section 1261(a) in that State.

(k) IMPROVED ADMINISTRATIVE EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS.—In administering a conservation program under this title, the Secretary shall, to the maximum extent practicable—

(1) seek to reduce administrative burdens and costs to producers by streamlining conservation planning and program resources; and

(2) take advantage of new technologies to enhance efficiency and effectiveness.

(l) RELATION TO OTHER PAYMENTS.—Any payment received by an owner or operator under this title, including an easement payment or rental payment, shall be in addition to, and not affect, the total amount of payments that the owner or operator is otherwise eligible to receive under any of the following:

(1) This Act.

(2) The Agricultural Act of 1949 (7 U.S.C. 1421 et seq.).

(3) The Agricultural Act of 2014.

(4) Any law that succeeds a law specified in paragraph (1), (2), or (3).

(m) FUNDING FOR INDIAN TRIBES.—In carrying out the conservation stewardship program under subchapter B of chapter 4 of subtitle D and the environmental quality incentives program under subchapter A of chapter 4 of subtitle D, the Secretary shall enter into alternative funding arrangements with Indian tribes if the Secretary determines that—

(1) the goals and objectives of the programs will be met by such arrangements;

(2) a sufficient number of eligible participants will be aggregated under the alternative funding arrangement to accomplish the underlying purposes and objectives of the applicable program; and

(3) statutory limitations regarding contracts with individual producers will not be exceeded by any tribal member, except that the Secretary may approve a waiver if the Secretary is authorized to approve a waiver under the statutory authority of the applicable program.

(n) SOURCE WATER PROTECTION THROUGH TARGETING OF AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—In carrying out any conservation program administered by the Secretary, the Secretary shall encourage practices that relate to water quality and water quantity that protect source water for drinking water (including protecting against public health threats) while also benefitting agricultural producers.

(2) COLLABORATION WITH WATER SYSTEMS AND INCREASED INCENTIVES.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—In encouraging practices under paragraph (1), the Secretary shall—

(i) work collaboratively with community water systems and State technical committees established under section 1261(a) to identify, in each State, local priority areas for the protection of source waters for drinking water; and

(ii) subject to subparagraph (B), for practices described in paragraph (1), offer to producers increased incentives and higher payment rates than are otherwise statutorily authorized by the applicable conservation program administered by the Secretary.

(B) LIMITATION.—An increased payment under subparagraph (A)(ii) shall not exceed 90 percent of practice costs associated with planning, design, materials, equipment, installation, labor, management, maintenance, or training.

(3) RESERVATION OF FUNDS.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—In each of fiscal years 2019 through 2031, the Secretary shall use to carry out this subsection not less than 10 percent of any funds available for conservation programs administered by the Secretary under this title (other than the conservation reserve program established under subchapter B of chapter 1 of subtitle D).

(B) LIMITATION.—Funds available for a specific conservation program shall not be transferred to fund a different conservation program under this title.

(o) ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES MARKET.—The Secretary may not prohibit, through a contract, easement, or agreement under this title, a participant in a conservation program administered by the Secretary under this title from participating in, and receiving compensation from, an environmental services market if 1 of the purposes of the market is the facilitation of additional conservation benefits that are consistent with the purposes of the conservation program administered by the Secretary.

(p) REGULATORY CERTAINTY.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—In addition to technical and programmatic information that the Secretary is otherwise authorized to provide, on request of a Federal agency, a State, an Indian tribe, or a unit of local government, the Secretary may provide technical and programmatic information—

(A) subject to paragraph (2), to the Federal agency, State, Indian tribe, or unit of local government to support specifically the development of mechanisms that would provide regulatory certainty, regulatory predictability, safe harbor protection, or other similar regulatory assurances to a farmer, rancher, or private nonindustrial forest landowner under a regulatory requirement—

(i) that relates to soil, water, or wildlife; and

(ii) over which that Federal agency, State, Indian tribe, or unit of local government has authority; and

(B) relating to conservation practices or activities that could be implemented by a farmer, rancher, or private nonindustrial forest landowner to address a targeted soil, water, or wildlife resource concern that is the direct subject of a regulatory requirement enforced by that Federal agency, State, Indian tribe, or unit of local government, as applicable.

(2) MECHANISMS.—The Secretary shall only provide additional technical and programmatic information under paragraph (1) if the mechanisms to be developed by the Federal

agency, State, Indian tribe, or unit of local government, as applicable, under paragraph (1)(A) are anticipated to include, at a minimum—

(A) the implementation of 1 or more conservation practices or activities that effectively addresses the soil, water, or wildlife resource concern identified under paragraph (1);

(B) the on-site confirmation that the applicable conservation practices or activities identified under subparagraph (A) have been implemented;

(C) a plan for a periodic audit, as appropriate, of the continued implementation or maintenance of each of the conservation practices or activities identified under subparagraph (A); and

(D) notification to a farmer, rancher, or private non-industrial forest landowner of, and an opportunity to correct, any noncompliance with a requirement to obtain regulatory certainty, regulatory predictability, safe harbor protection, or other similar regulatory assurance.

(3) CONTINUING CURRENT COLLABORATION ON SOIL, WATER, OR WILDLIFE CONSERVATION PRACTICES.—The Secretary shall—

(A) continue collaboration with Federal agencies, States, Indian tribes, or local units of government on existing regulatory certainty, regulatory predictability, safe harbor protection, or other similar regulatory assurances in accordance with paragraph (2); and

(B) continue collaboration with the Secretary of the Interior on consultation under section 7(a)(2) of the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (16 U.S.C. 1536(a)(2)) or conference under section 7(a)(4) of that Act (16 U.S.C. 1536(a)(4)), as applicable, for wildlife conservation efforts, including the Working Lands for Wildlife model of conservation on working landscapes, as implemented on the day before the date of enactment of the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018, in accordance with—

(i) the document entitled “Partnership Agreement Between the United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service and the United States Department of the Interior Fish and Wildlife Service”, numbered A-3A75-16-937, and formalized by the Chief of the Natural Resources Conservation Service on September 15, 2016, and by the Director of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service on August 4, 2016, as in effect on September 15, 2016; and

(ii) United States Fish and Wildlife Service Director’s Order No. 217, dated August 9, 2016, as in effect on August 9, 2016.

(4) SAVINGS CLAUSE.—Nothing in this subsection—

(A) preempts, displaces, or supplants any authority or right of a Federal agency, a State, an Indian tribe, or a unit of local government;

(B) modifies or otherwise affects, preempts, or displaces—

(i) any cause of action; or



(ii) a provision of Federal or State law establishing a remedy for a civil or criminal cause of action;  
or

(C) applies to a case in which the Department of Agriculture is the originating agency requesting a consultation or other technical and programmatic information or assistance from another Federal agency in assisting farmers, ranchers, or nonindustrial private forest landowners participating in a conservation program administered by the Secretary.

**SEC. 1245. [16 U.S.C. 3845] ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES MARKETS.**

(a) **TECHNICAL GUIDELINES REQUIRED.**—The Secretary shall establish technical guidelines that outline science-based methods to measure the environmental services benefits from conservation and land management activities in order to facilitate the participation of farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners in emerging environmental services markets. The Secretary shall give priority to the establishment of guidelines related to farmer, rancher, and forest landowner participation in carbon markets.

(b) **ESTABLISHMENT.**—The Secretary shall establish guidelines under subsection (a) for use in developing the following:

(1) A procedure to measure environmental services benefits.

(2) A protocol to report environmental services benefits.

(3) A registry to collect, record and maintain the benefits measured.

(c) **VERIFICATION REQUIREMENTS.**—

(1) **VERIFICATION OF REPORTS.**—The Secretary shall establish guidelines for a process to verify that a farmer, rancher, or forest landowner who reports an environmental services benefit pursuant to the protocol required by paragraph (2) of subsection (b) for inclusion in the registry required by paragraph (3) of such subsection has implemented the conservation or land management activity covered by the report.

(2) **ROLE OF THIRD PARTIES.**—In establishing the verification guidelines required by paragraph (1), the Secretary shall consider the role of third-parties in conducting independent verification of benefits produced for environmental services markets and other functions, as determined by the Secretary.

(d) **USE OF EXISTING INFORMATION.**—In carrying out subsection (b), the Secretary shall build on activities or information in existence on the date of the enactment of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 regarding environmental services markets.

(e) **CONSULTATION.**—In carrying out this section, the Secretary shall consult with the following:

(1) Federal and State government agencies.

(2) Nongovernmental interests including—

(A) farm, ranch, and forestry producers;

(B) financial institutions involved in environmental services trading;

(C) institutions of higher education with relevant expertise or experience;

(D) nongovernmental organizations with relevant expertise or experience; and

(E) private sector representatives with relevant expertise or experience.

(3) Other interested persons, as determined by the Secretary.

**SEC. 1246. [16 U.S.C. 3846] REGULATIONS.**

(a) **IN GENERAL.**—The Secretary shall promulgate such regulations as are necessary to implement programs under this title, including such regulations as the Secretary determines to be necessary to ensure a fair and reasonable application of the limitations established under section 1244(f).

(b) **RULEMAKING PROCEDURE.**—The promulgation of regulations and administration of programs under this title—

(1) shall be carried out without regard to chapter 35 of title 44, United States Code (commonly known as the Paperwork Reduction Act); and

(2) shall be made as an interim rule effective on publication with an opportunity for notice and comment.

(c) **CONGRESSIONAL REVIEW OF AGENCY RULEMAKING.**—In promulgating regulations under this section, the Secretary shall use the authority provided under section 808 of title 5, United States Code.

**SEC. 1247. [16 U.S.C. 3847] DATA ON CONSERVATION PRACTICES.**

(a) **DATA ON CONSERVATION PRACTICES.**—The Secretary shall identify available data sets within the Department of Agriculture regarding the use of conservation practices and the effect of such practices on farm and ranch profitability (including such effects relating to crop yields, soil health, and other risk-related factors).

(b) **REPORT.**—Not later than 1 year after the date of enactment of the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018, the Secretary shall submit to the Committee on Agriculture of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry of the Senate a report that includes—

(1) a summary of the data sets identified under subsection (a);

(2) a summary of the steps the Secretary would have to take to provide access to such data sets by university researchers, including taking into account any technical, privacy, or administrative considerations;

(3) a summary of safeguards the Secretary employs when providing access to data to university researchers;

(4) a summary of appropriate procedures to maximize the potential for research benefits while preventing any violations of privacy or confidentiality; and

(5) recommendations for any necessary authorizations or clarifications of Federal law to allow access to such data sets to maximize the potential for research benefits.

Subtitle F—Other Conservation Provisions <sup>10</sup>**SEC. 1252. [16 U.S.C. 3851] EXPERIENCED SERVICES PROGRAM.**<sup>11</sup>

(a) ESTABLISHMENT AND PURPOSE.—The Secretary shall establish an experienced services program (referred to in this section as the “program”) for the purpose of utilizing the talents of individuals who are age 55 or older, but who are not employees of the Department of Agriculture or a State agriculture department, to provide—

(1) technical services in support of the conservation-related programs and authorities carried out by the Secretary, including conservation planning assistance, technical consultation, and assistance with design and implementation of conservation practices; and

(2) technical, professional, and administrative services to support the research, education, and economics mission area of the Department of Agriculture (including the Agricultural Research Service, the Economic Research Service, the National Agricultural Library, the National Agricultural Statistics Service, the Office of the Chief Scientist, and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture), including—

(A) supporting agricultural research and information;

(B) advancing scientific knowledge relating to agriculture;

(C) enhancing access to agricultural information;

(D) providing statistical information and research results to farmers, ranchers, agribusiness, and public officials; and

(E) assisting research, education, and extension programs in land-grant colleges and universities (as defined in section 1404 of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 (7 U.S.C. 3103)).

(b) PROGRAM AGREEMENTS.—

(1) RELATION TO OLDER AMERICAN COMMUNITY SERVICE EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM.—Notwithstanding any other provision of law relating to Federal grants, cooperative agreements, or contracts, to carry out the program during a fiscal year, the Secretary may enter into agreements with nonprofit private agencies and organizations eligible to receive grants for that fiscal year under the Community Service Senior Opportunities Act (42 U.S.C. 3056 et seq.) to secure participants for the program who will provide technical, professional, or administrative services, as applicable, under the program.

(2) REQUIRED DETERMINATION.—Before entering into an agreement under paragraph (1), the Secretary shall ensure that the agreement would not—

(A) result in the displacement of individuals employed by the Department, including partial displacement through reduction of non-overtime hours, wages, or employment benefits;

<sup>10</sup> Subtitle F repealed by sec. 336 of P.L. 104–127, 110 Stat. 1007, April 4, 1996.

<sup>11</sup> Sec. 2710 of P.L. 110–246, 122 Stat. 1810, June 18, 2008, amended “Subtitle F” of title XII of this Act by inserting sec. 1252 after “section 1251”. Sec. 1252 is inserted at this location to effectuate the probable intent of Congress.

(B) result in the use of an individual under the program for a job or function in a case in which a Federal employee is in a layoff status from the same or a substantially-equivalent job or function with the Department; or

(C) affect existing contracts for services.

(c) FUNDING SOURCE.—

(1) CONSERVATION TECHNICAL SERVICES.—Except as provided in paragraph (2), with respect to subsection (a)(1), the Secretary may carry out the program using funds made available to carry out each program under this title.

(2) EXCLUSION.—Funds made available to carry out the conservation reserve program may not be used to carry out the program.

(3) RESEARCH, EDUCATION, AND ECONOMICS SERVICES.—With respect to services referred to in subsection (a)(2), the Secretary may carry out the program under the mission area referred to in such subsection to the extent that funds are specifically appropriated to provide such services under such mission area.

(d) LIABILITY.—An individual providing technical, professional, or administrative services, as applicable, under the program is deemed to be an employee of the United States Government for purposes of chapter 171 of title 28, United States Code, if the individual—

(1) is providing technical, professional, or administrative services, as applicable, pursuant to an agreement entered into under subsection (b); and

(2) is acting within the scope of the agreement.

## Subtitle G—State Technical Committees

### SEC. 1261. [16 U.S.C. 3861] ESTABLISHMENT OF STATE TECHNICAL COMMITTEES.

(a) ESTABLISHMENT.—The Secretary shall establish a technical committee in each State to assist the Secretary in the considerations relating to implementation and technical aspects of the conservation programs under this title.

(b) STANDARDS.—The Secretary shall review and update as necessary—

(1) standard operating procedures to standardize the operations of State technical committees; and

(2) standards to be used by State technical committees in the development of technical guidelines for the implementation of the conservation provisions of this title.

(c) COMPOSITION.—Each State technical committee shall be composed of agricultural producers and other professionals that represent a variety of disciplines in the soil, water, wetland, and wildlife sciences. The technical committee for a State shall include representatives from among the following:

(1) The Natural Resources Conservation Service.

(2) The Farm Service Agency.

(3) The Forest Service.

(4) The National Institute of Food and Agriculture.

- (5) The State fish and wildlife agency.
- (6) The State forester or equivalent State official.
- (7) The State water resources agency.
- (8) The State department of agriculture.
- (9) The State association of soil and water conservation districts.
- (10) Agricultural producers representing the variety of crops and livestock or poultry raised within the State.
- (11) Owners of nonindustrial private forest land.
- (12) Nonprofit organizations within the meaning of section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 with demonstrable conservation expertise and experience working with agriculture producers in the State.
- (13) Agribusiness.
- (14) The State Cooperative Extension Service and land grant university in the State.

**SEC. 1262. [16 U.S.C. 3862] RESPONSIBILITIES.**

(a) **IN GENERAL.**—Each State technical committee established under section 1261 shall meet regularly to provide information, analysis, and recommendations to appropriate officials of the Department of Agriculture who are charged with implementing the conservation provisions of this title.

(b) **PUBLIC NOTICE AND ATTENDANCE.**—Each State technical committee shall provide public notice of, and permit public attendance at, meetings considering issues of concern related to carrying out this title.

(c) **ROLE.**—

(1) **IN GENERAL.**—The role of State technical committees is advisory in nature, and such committees shall have no implementation or enforcement authority. However, the Secretary shall give strong consideration to the recommendations of such committees in administering the programs under this title.

(2) **ADVISORY ROLE IN ESTABLISHING PROGRAM PRIORITIES AND CRITERIA.**—Each State technical committee shall advise the Secretary in establishing priorities and criteria for the programs in this title, including the review of whether local working groups are addressing those priorities.

(d) **REQUIREMENTS OF CHAPTER 10 OF TITLE 5, UNITED STATES CODE.**—

(1) **EXEMPTION.**—Each State technical committee shall be exempt from chapter 10 of title 5, United States Code.

(2) **LOCAL WORKING GROUPS.**—For purposes of chapter 10 of title 5, United States Code, any local working group established under this subtitle shall be considered to be a subcommittee of the applicable State technical committee.

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## Subtitle H—Agricultural Conservation Easement Program

### SEC. 1265. [16 U.S.C. 3865] ESTABLISHMENT AND PURPOSES.

(a) **ESTABLISHMENT.**—The Secretary shall establish an agricultural conservation easement program for the conservation of eligible land and natural resources through easements or other interests in land.

(b) **PURPOSES.**—The purposes of the program are to—

(1) combine the purposes and coordinate the functions of the wetlands reserve program established under section 1237, the grassland reserve program established under section 1238N, and the farmland protection program established under section 1238I, as such sections were in effect on the day before the date of enactment of the Agricultural Act of 2014;

(2) restore, protect, and enhance wetlands on eligible land;

(3) protect the agricultural use and future viability, and related conservation values, of eligible land by limiting non-agricultural uses of that land that negatively affect the agricultural uses and conservation values; and

(4) protect grazing uses and related conservation values by restoring or conserving eligible land.

### SEC. 1265A. [16 U.S.C. 3865a] DEFINITIONS.

In this subtitle:

(1) **AGRICULTURAL LAND EASEMENT.**—The term “agricultural land easement” means an easement or other interest in eligible land that—

(A) is conveyed for the purpose of protecting natural resources and the agricultural nature of the land; and

(B) permits the landowner the right to continue agricultural production and related uses.

(2) **BUY-PROTECT-SELL TRANSACTION.**—

(A) **IN GENERAL.**—The term “buy-protect-sell transaction” means a legal arrangement—

(i) between an eligible entity and the Secretary relating to land that an eligible entity owns or is going to purchase prior to acquisition of an agricultural land easement;

(ii) under which the eligible entity certifies to the Secretary that the eligible entity shall—

(I)(aa) hold an agricultural land easement on that land, but transfer ownership of the land to a farmer or rancher that is not an eligible entity prior to or on acquisition of the agricultural land easement; or

(bb) hold an agricultural land easement on that land, but transfer ownership of the land to a farmer or rancher that is not an eligible entity in a timely manner and, subject to subparagraph (B), not later than 3 years after the date of acquisition of the agricultural land easement; and

(II) make an initial sale of the land subject to the agricultural land easement to a farmer or rancher at not more than agricultural value, plus any reasonable holding and transaction costs incurred by the eligible entity, as determined by the Secretary; and

(iii) under which the Secretary shall be reimbursed for the entirety of the Federal share of the cost of the agricultural land easement by the eligible entity if the eligible entity fails to transfer ownership under item (aa) or (bb), as applicable, of clause (ii)(I).

(B) TIME EXTENSION.—Under subparagraph (A)(ii)(I)(bb), an eligible entity may transfer land later than 3 years after the date of acquisition of the agricultural land easement if the Secretary determines an extension of time is justified.

(3) ELIGIBLE ENTITY.—The term “eligible entity” means—

(A) an agency of State or local government or an Indian tribe (including a farmland protection board or land resource council established under State law); or

(B) an organization that is—

(i) organized for, and at all times since the formation of the organization has been operated principally for, 1 or more of the conservation purposes specified in clause (i), (ii), (iii), or (iv) of section 170(h)(4)(A) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986;

(ii) an organization described in section 501(c)(3) of that Code that is exempt from taxation under section 501(a) of that Code; or

(iii) described in—

(I) paragraph (1) or (2) of section 509(a) of that Code; or

(II) section 509(a)(3) of that Code and is controlled by an organization described in section 509(a)(2) of that Code.

(4) ELIGIBLE LAND.—The term “eligible land” means private or tribal land that is—

(A) in the case of an agricultural land easement, agricultural land, including land on a farm or ranch—

(i) that is subject to—

(I) a pending offer for purchase of an agricultural land easement from an eligible entity; or

(II) a buy-protect-sell transaction;

(ii)(I) that has prime, unique, or other productive soil;

(II) that contains historical or archaeological resources;

(III) the enrollment of which would protect grazing uses and related conservation values by restoring and conserving land; or

(IV) the protection of which will further a State or local policy consistent with the purposes of the program; and

(iii) that is—

- (I) cropland;
  - (II) rangeland;
  - (III) grassland or land that contains forbs, or shrubland for which grazing is the predominant use;
  - (IV) located in an area that has been historically dominated by grassland, forbs, or shrubs and could provide habitat for animal or plant populations of significant ecological value;
  - (V) pastureland; or
  - (VI) nonindustrial private forest land that contributes to the economic viability of an offered parcel or serves as a buffer to protect such land from development;
  - (B) in the case of a wetland reserve easement, a wetland or related area, including—
    - (i) farmed or converted wetlands, together with adjacent land that is functionally dependent on that land, if the Secretary determines it—
      - (I) is likely to be successfully restored in a cost-effective manner; and
      - (II) will maximize the wildlife benefits and wetland functions and values;
    - (ii) cropland or grassland that was used for agricultural production prior to flooding from the natural overflow of—
      - (I) a closed basin lake and adjacent land that is functionally dependent upon it, if the State or other entity is willing to provide 50 percent share of the cost of an easement; or
      - (II) a pothole and adjacent land that is functionally dependent on it;
    - (iii) farmed wetlands and adjoining lands that—
      - (I) are enrolled in the conservation reserve program;
      - (II) have the highest wetland functions and values, as determined by the Secretary; and
      - (III) are likely to return to production after they leave the conservation reserve program;
    - (iv) riparian areas that link wetlands that are protected by easements or some other device that achieves the same purpose as an easement; or
    - (v) other wetlands of an owner that would not otherwise be eligible, if the Secretary determines that the inclusion of such wetlands in a wetland reserve easement would significantly add to the functional value of the easement; or
  - (C) in the case of either an agricultural land easement or a wetland reserve easement, other land that is incidental to land described in subparagraph (A) or (B), if the Secretary determines that it is necessary for the efficient administration of an easement under the program.
- (5) MONITORING REPORT.—The term “monitoring report” means a report, the contents of which are formulated and pre-



pared by the holder of an agricultural land easement, that accurately documents whether the land subject to the agricultural land easement is in compliance with the terms and conditions of the agricultural land easement.

(6) PROGRAM.—The term “program” means the agricultural conservation easement program established by this subtitle.

(7) WETLAND RESERVE EASEMENT.—The term “wetland reserve easement” means a reserved interest in eligible land that—

(A) is defined and delineated in a deed; and

(B) stipulates—

(i) the rights, title, and interests in land conveyed to the Secretary; and

(ii) the rights, title, and interests in land that are reserved to the landowner.

**SEC. 1265B. [16 U.S.C. 3865b] AGRICULTURAL LAND EASEMENTS.**

(a) AVAILABILITY OF ASSISTANCE.—The Secretary shall facilitate and provide funding for—

(1) the purchase by eligible entities of agricultural land easements in eligible land;

(2) technical assistance to implement the program, including technical assistance for the development of a conservation plan under subsection (b)(4)(C)(iv); and

(3) buy-protect-sell transactions.

(b) COST-SHARE ASSISTANCE.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall protect the agricultural use, including grazing, and related conservation values of eligible land through cost-share assistance to eligible entities for purchasing agricultural land easements.

(2) SCOPE OF ASSISTANCE AVAILABLE.—

(A) FEDERAL SHARE.—An agreement described in paragraph (4) shall provide for a Federal share determined by the Secretary of an amount not to exceed 50 percent of the fair market value of the agricultural land easement, as determined by the Secretary using—

(i) the Uniform Standards of Professional Appraisal Practice;

(ii) an areawide market analysis or survey; or

(iii) another industry-approved method.

(B) NON-FEDERAL SHARE.—

(i) IN GENERAL.—Under the agreement, the eligible entity shall provide a share that is at least equivalent to that provided by the Secretary.

(ii) GRASSLANDS EXCEPTION.—In the case of grassland of special environmental significance, as determined by the Secretary, the Secretary may provide an amount not to exceed 75 percent of the fair market value of the agricultural land easement.

(iii) PERMISSIBLE FORMS.—The non-Federal share provided by an eligible entity under this subparagraph may comprise—

(I) cash resources;

(II) a charitable donation or qualified conservation contribution (as defined in section 170(h) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986) from the private landowner from which the agricultural land easement will be purchased;

(III) costs associated with securing a deed to the agricultural land easement, including the cost of appraisal, survey, inspection, and title; and

(IV) other costs, as determined by the Secretary.

(3) EVALUATION AND RANKING OF APPLICATIONS.—

(A) CRITERIA.—The Secretary shall establish evaluation and ranking criteria to maximize the benefit of Federal investment under the program.

(B) CONSIDERATIONS.—In establishing the criteria, the Secretary shall emphasize support for—

(i) protecting agricultural uses and related conservation values of the land; and

(ii) maximizing the protection of areas devoted to agricultural use.

(C) ACCOUNTING FOR GEOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES.—The Secretary may adjust the criteria established under subparagraph (A) to account for geographic differences, if the adjustments—

(i) meet the purposes of the program; and

(ii) continue to maximize the benefit of the Federal investment under the program.

(D) PRIORITY.—In evaluating applications under the program, the Secretary may give priority to an application for the purchase of an agricultural land easement that, as determined by the Secretary, maintains agricultural viability.

(E) BIDDING DOWN.—If the Secretary determines that 2 or more applications for cost-share assistance are comparable in achieving the purpose of the program, the Secretary shall not assign a higher priority to any of those applications solely on the basis of lesser cost to the program.

(4) AGREEMENTS WITH ELIGIBLE ENTITIES.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall enter into agreements with eligible entities to stipulate the terms and conditions under which the eligible entity is permitted to use cost-share assistance provided under this section.

(B) LENGTH OF AGREEMENTS.—An agreement shall be for a term that is—

(i) in the case of an eligible entity certified under the process described in paragraph (5), a minimum of five years; and

(ii) for all other eligible entities, at least three, but not more than five years.

(C) MINIMUM TERMS AND CONDITIONS.—An eligible entity shall be authorized to use its own terms and conditions for agricultural land easements so long as the Secretary determines such terms and conditions—

(i) are consistent with the purposes of the program;

(ii) permit effective enforcement of the conservation purposes of such easements;

(iii) include a right of enforcement for the Secretary that—

(I) may be used only if the terms and conditions of the easement are not enforced by the eligible entity; and

(II) does not extend to a right of inspection unless—

(aa)(AA) the holder of the easement fails to provide monitoring reports in a timely manner; or

(BB) the Secretary has a reasonable and articulable belief that the terms and conditions of the easement have been violated; and

(bb) prior to the inspection, the Secretary notifies the eligible entity and the landowner of the inspection and provides a reasonable opportunity for the eligible entity and the landowner to participate in the inspection;

(iv) include a conservation plan only for any portion of the land subject to the agricultural land easement that is highly erodible cropland; and

(v) include a limit on the impervious surfaces to be allowed that is consistent with the agricultural activities to be conducted.

(D) ADDITIONAL PERMITTED TERMS AND CONDITIONS.—An eligible entity may include terms and conditions for an agricultural land easement that—

(i) are intended to keep the land subject to the agricultural land easement under the ownership of a farmer or rancher, as determined by the Secretary;

(ii) allow subsurface mineral development on the land subject to the agricultural land easement and in accordance with applicable State law if, as determined by the Secretary—

(I) the subsurface mineral development—

(aa) has a limited and localized impact;

(bb) does not harm the agricultural use and conservation values of the land subject to the easement;

(cc) does not materially alter or affect the existing topography;

(dd) shall comply with a subsurface mineral development plan that—

(AA) includes a plan for the remediation of impacts to the agricultural use and conservation values of the land subject to the easement; and

(BB) is approved by the Secretary prior to the initiation of mineral development activity;

(ee) is not accomplished by any surface mining method;

(ff) is within the impervious surface limits of the easement under subparagraph (C)(v); and

(gg) uses practices and technologies that minimize the duration and intensity of impacts to the agricultural use and conservation values of the land subject to the easement; and

(II) each area impacted by the subsurface mineral development shall be reclaimed and restored by the holder of the mineral rights at cessation of operation; and

(iii) include other relevant activities relating to the agricultural land easement, as determined by the Secretary.

(E) SUBSTITUTION OF QUALIFIED PROJECTS.—An agreement shall allow, upon mutual agreement of the parties, substitution of qualified projects that are identified at the time of the proposed substitution.

(F) EFFECT OF VIOLATION.—If a violation occurs of a term or condition of an agreement under this subsection—

(i) the Secretary may terminate the agreement; and

(ii) the Secretary may require the eligible entity to refund all or part of any payments received by the entity under the program, with interest on the payments as determined appropriate by the Secretary.

(5) CERTIFICATION OF ELIGIBLE ENTITIES.—

(A) CERTIFICATION PROCESS.—The Secretary shall establish a process under which the Secretary may—

(i) directly certify eligible entities that meet established criteria;

(ii) enter into long-term agreements with certified eligible entities;

(iii) accept proposals for cost-share assistance for the purchase of agricultural land easements throughout the duration of such agreements; and

(iv) allow a certified eligible entity to use its own terms and conditions, notwithstanding paragraph (4)(C), as long as the terms and conditions are consistent with the purposes of the program.

(B) CERTIFICATION CRITERIA.—In order to be certified, an eligible entity shall demonstrate to the Secretary that the eligible entity—

(i) will maintain, at a minimum, for the duration of the agreement—

(I) a plan for administering easements that is consistent with the purpose of the program;

(II) the capacity and resources to monitor and enforce agricultural land easements; and

(III) policies and procedures to ensure—

(aa) the long-term integrity of agricultural land easements on eligible land;

(bb) timely completion of acquisitions of such easements; and

(cc) timely and complete evaluation and reporting to the Secretary on the use of funds provided under the program;

(ii) has—

(I) been accredited by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission, or by an equivalent accrediting body, as determined by the Secretary;

(II) acquired not fewer than 10 agricultural land easements under the program or any predecessor program; and

(III) successfully met the responsibilities of the eligible entity under the applicable agreements with the Secretary, as determined by the Secretary, relating to agricultural land easements that the eligible entity has acquired under the program or any predecessor program; or

(iii) is a State department of agriculture or other State agency with statutory authority for farm and ranchland protection that has—

(I) acquired not fewer than 10 agricultural land easements under the program or any predecessor program; and

(II) successfully met the responsibilities of the eligible entity under the applicable agreements with the Secretary, as determined by the Secretary, relating to agricultural land easements that the eligible entity has acquired under the program or any predecessor program.

(C) REVIEW AND REVISION.—

(i) REVIEW.—The Secretary shall conduct a review of eligible entities certified under subparagraph (A) every three years to ensure that such entities are meeting the criteria established under subparagraph (B).

(ii) REVOCATION.—If the Secretary finds that a certified eligible entity no longer meets the criteria established under subparagraph (B), the Secretary may—

(I) allow the certified eligible entity a specified period of time, at a minimum 180 days, in which to take such actions as may be necessary to meet the criteria; and

(II) revoke the certification of the eligible entity, if, after the specified period of time, the certified eligible entity does not meet such criteria.

(c) METHOD OF ENROLLMENT.—The Secretary shall enroll eligible land under this section through the use of—

(1) permanent easements; or

(2) easements for the maximum duration allowed under applicable State laws.

(d) TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE.—The Secretary may provide technical assistance, if requested, to assist in compliance with the terms and conditions of easements.

**SEC. 1265C. [16 U.S.C. 3865c] WETLAND RESERVE EASEMENTS.**

(a) AVAILABILITY OF ASSISTANCE.—The Secretary shall provide assistance to owners of eligible land to restore, protect, and enhance wetlands through—

- (1) wetland reserve easements and related wetland reserve easement plans; and
- (2) technical assistance.

(b) EASEMENTS.—

(1) METHOD OF ENROLLMENT.—The Secretary shall enroll eligible land under this section through the use of—

- (A) 30-year easements;
- (B) permanent easements;
- (C) easements for the maximum duration allowed under applicable State laws; or
- (D) as an option for Indian tribes only, 30-year contracts.

(2) LIMITATIONS.—

(A) INELIGIBLE LAND.—The Secretary may not acquire easements on—

(i) land established to trees under the conservation reserve program, except in cases where the Secretary determines it would further the purposes of this section; and

(ii) farmed wetlands or converted wetlands where the conversion was not commenced prior to December 23, 1985.

(B) CHANGES IN OWNERSHIP.—No wetland reserve easement shall be created on land that has changed ownership during the preceding 24-month period unless—

(i) the new ownership was acquired by will or succession as a result of the death of the previous owner;

(ii)(I) the ownership change occurred because of foreclosure on the land; and

(II) immediately before the foreclosure, the owner of the land exercises a right of redemption from the mortgage holder in accordance with State law; or

(iii) the Secretary determines that the land was acquired under circumstances that give adequate assurances that such land was not acquired for the purposes of placing it in the program.

(3) EVALUATION AND RANKING OF OFFERS.—

(A) CRITERIA.—The Secretary shall establish evaluation and ranking criteria for offers from landowners under this section to maximize the benefit of Federal investment under the program.

(B) CONSIDERATIONS.—When evaluating offers from landowners, the Secretary may consider—

(i) the conservation benefits of obtaining a wetland reserve easement, including the potential envi-

ronmental benefits if the land was removed from agricultural production;

(ii) the cost effectiveness of each wetland reserve easement, so as to maximize the environmental benefits per dollar expended;

(iii) whether the landowner or another person is offering to contribute financially to the cost of the wetland reserve easement to leverage Federal funds; and

(iv) such other factors as the Secretary determines are necessary to carry out the purposes of the program.

(C) PRIORITY.—The Secretary shall give priority to acquiring wetland reserve easements based on the value of the wetland reserve easement for protecting and enhancing habitat for migratory birds and other wildlife or improving water quality.

(4) AGREEMENT.—To be eligible to place eligible land into the program through a wetland reserve easement, the owner of such land shall enter into an agreement with the Secretary to—

(A) grant an easement on such land to the Secretary;

(B) authorize the implementation of a wetland reserve easement plan developed for the eligible land under subsection (f);

(C) create and record an appropriate deed restriction in accordance with applicable State law to reflect the easement agreed to;

(D) provide a written statement of consent to such easement signed by those holding a security interest in the land;

(E) comply with the terms and conditions of the easement and any related agreements; and

(F) permanently retire any existing base history for the land on which the easement has been obtained.

(5) TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF EASEMENT.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—A wetland reserve easement shall include terms and conditions that—

(i) permit—

(I) repairs, improvements, and inspections on the land that are necessary to maintain existing public drainage systems; and

(II) owners to control public access on the easement areas while identifying access routes to be used for restoration activities and management and easement monitoring;

(ii) prohibit—

(I) the alteration of wildlife habitat and other natural features of such land, unless specifically authorized by the Secretary;

(II) the spraying of such land with chemicals or the mowing of such land, except where such spraying or mowing is authorized by the Secretary or is necessary—

(aa) to comply with Federal or State noxious weed control laws;

(bb) to comply with a Federal or State emergency pest treatment program; or

(cc) to meet habitat needs of specific wildlife species;

(III) any activities to be carried out on the owner's or successor's land that is immediately adjacent to, and functionally related to, the land that is subject to the easement if such activities will alter, degrade, or otherwise diminish the functional value of the eligible land; and

(IV) the adoption of any other practice that would tend to defeat the purposes of the program, as determined by the Secretary;

(iii) provide for the efficient and effective establishment of wetland functions and values; and

(iv) include such additional provisions as the Secretary determines are desirable to carry out the program or facilitate the practical administration thereof.

(B) VIOLATION.—On the violation of a term or condition of a wetland reserve easement, the wetland reserve easement shall remain in force and the Secretary may require the owner to refund all or part of any payments received by the owner under the program, with interest on the payments as determined appropriate by the Secretary.

(C) COMPATIBLE USES.—

(i) IN GENERAL.—Land subject to a wetland reserve easement may be used for compatible economic uses, including such activities as hunting and fishing, managed timber harvest, water management, or periodic haying or grazing, if such use is specifically permitted by the wetland reserve easement plan developed for the land under subsection (f) and is consistent with the long-term protection and enhancement of the wetland resources for which the easement was established.

(ii) COMPATIBLE USE AUTHORIZATION.—In evaluating and authorizing a compatible economic use under clause (i), the Secretary shall—

(I) request and consider the advice of the applicable State technical committee established under section 1261(a) about the 1 or more types of uses that may be authorized to be conducted on land subject to a wetland reserve easement, including the frequency, timing, and intensity of those uses;

(II) consider the ability of an authorized use to facilitate the practical administration and management of that land; and

(III) ensure that an authorized use furthers the functions and values for which the wetland reserve easement was established.



(D) RESERVATION OF GRAZING RIGHTS.—The Secretary may include in the terms and conditions of a wetland reserve easement a provision under which the owner reserves grazing rights if—

(i) the Secretary determines that the reservation and use of the grazing rights—

(I) is compatible with the land subject to the easement;

(II) is consistent with the historical natural uses of the land and the long-term protection and enhancement goals for which the easement was established; and

(III) complies with the wetland reserve easement plan developed for the land under subsection (f) or a grazing management plan that is consistent with the wetland reserve easement plan and has been reviewed, and modified as necessary, at least every 5 years; and

(ii) the agreement provides for a commensurate reduction in the easement payment to account for the grazing value, as determined by the Secretary.

(6) COMPENSATION.—

(A) DETERMINATION.—

(i) PERMANENT EASEMENTS.—The Secretary shall pay as compensation for a permanent wetland reserve easement acquired under the program an amount necessary to encourage enrollment in the program, based on the lowest of—

(I) the fair market value of the land, as determined by the Secretary, using the Uniform Standards of Professional Appraisal Practice or an areawide market analysis or survey;

(II) the amount corresponding to a geographical cap, as determined by the Secretary in regulations; or

(III) the offer made by the landowner.

(ii) OTHER.—Compensation for a 30-year contract or 30-year wetland reserve easement shall be not less than 50 percent, but not more than 75 percent, of the compensation that would be paid for a permanent wetland reserve easement.

(B) FORM OF PAYMENT.—Compensation for a wetland reserve easement shall be provided by the Secretary in the form of a cash payment, in an amount determined under subparagraph (A).

(C) PAYMENT SCHEDULE.—

(i) EASEMENTS VALUED AT \$500,000 OR LESS.—For wetland reserve easements valued at \$500,000 or less, the Secretary may provide payments in not more than 10 annual payments.

(ii) EASEMENTS VALUED AT MORE THAN \$500,000.—For wetland reserve easements valued at more than \$500,000, the Secretary may provide payments in at least 5, but not more than 10 annual payments, except

that, if the Secretary determines it would further the purposes of the program, the Secretary may make a lump-sum payment for such an easement.

(c) EASEMENT RESTORATION.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall provide financial assistance to owners of eligible land to carry out the establishment of conservation measures and practices and protect wetland functions and values, including necessary maintenance activities, as set forth in a wetland reserve easement plan developed for the eligible land under subsection (f).

(2) PAYMENTS.—The Secretary shall—

(A) in the case of a permanent wetland reserve easement, pay an amount that is not less than 75 percent, but not more than 100 percent, of the eligible costs, as determined by the Secretary; and

(B) in the case of a 30-year contract or 30-year wetland reserve easement, pay an amount that is not less than 50 percent, but not more than 75 percent, of the eligible costs, as determined by the Secretary.

(d) TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall assist owners in complying with the terms and conditions of a wetland reserve easement.

(2) CONTRACTS OR AGREEMENTS.—The Secretary may enter into 1 or more contracts with private entities or agreements with a State, nongovernmental organization, or Indian tribe to carry out necessary restoration, enhancement, or maintenance of a wetland reserve easement if the Secretary determines that the contract or agreement will advance the purposes of the program.

(e) WETLAND RESERVE ENHANCEMENT OPTION.—The Secretary may enter into 1 or more agreements with a State (including a political subdivision or agency of a State), nongovernmental organization, or Indian tribe to carry out a special wetland reserve enhancement option that the Secretary determines would advance the purposes of program.

(f) ADMINISTRATION.—

(1) WETLAND RESERVE EASEMENT PLAN.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall develop a wetland reserve easement plan—

(i) for any eligible land subject to a wetland reserve easement; and

(ii) that restores, protects, enhances, manages, maintains, and monitors the eligible land subject to the wetland reserve easements acquired under this section.

(B) PRACTICES AND ACTIVITIES.—A wetland reserve easement plan under subparagraph (A) shall include practices and activities, including repair or replacement, that are necessary to restore and maintain the enrolled land and the functions and values of the wetland subject to a wetland reserve easement.

(2) ALTERNATIVE PLANT COMMUNITIES.—The Secretary, in coordination with State technical committees established under

section 1261(a) and pursuant to State-specific criteria and guidelines, may authorize the establishment or restoration of a hydrologically appropriate native community or alternative naturalized vegetative community as part of a wetland reserve easement plan on land subject to a wetland reserve easement if that hydrologically appropriate native or alternative naturalized vegetative community shall—

(A) substantially support or benefit migratory waterfowl or other wetland wildlife; or

(B) meet local resource concerns or needs (including as an element of a regional, State, or local wildlife initiative or plan).

(3) DELEGATION OF EASEMENT ADMINISTRATION.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary may delegate any of the management, monitoring, and enforcement responsibilities of the Secretary under this section to other Federal or State agencies that have the appropriate authority, expertise, and resources necessary to carry out such delegated responsibilities, or to conservation organizations if the Secretary determines the organization has similar expertise and resources.

(B) LIMITATION.—The Secretary shall not delegate any of the monitoring or enforcement responsibilities under this section to conservation organizations.

(4) PAYMENTS.—

(A) TIMING OF PAYMENTS.—The Secretary shall provide payment for obligations incurred by the Secretary under this section—

(i) with respect to any easement restoration obligation under subsection (c), as soon as possible after the obligation is incurred; and

(ii) with respect to any annual easement payment obligation incurred by the Secretary, as soon as possible after October 1 of each calendar year.

(B) PAYMENTS TO OTHERS.—If an owner who is entitled to a payment under this section dies, becomes incompetent, is otherwise unable to receive such payment, or is succeeded by another person or entity who renders or completes the required performance, the Secretary shall make such payment, in accordance with regulations prescribed by the Secretary and without regard to any other provision of law, in such manner as the Secretary determines is fair and reasonable in light of all of the circumstances.

(g) APPLICATION.—The relevant provisions of this section shall also apply to a 30-year contract.

#### **SEC. 1265D. [16 U.S.C. 3865d] ADMINISTRATION.**

(a) INELIGIBLE LAND.—The Secretary may not use program funds for the purposes of acquiring an easement on—

(1) lands owned by an agency of the United States, other than land held in trust for Indian tribes;

(2) lands owned in fee title by a State, including an agency or a subdivision of a State, or a unit of local government;

(3) land subject to an easement or deed restriction which, as determined by the Secretary, provides similar protection as would be provided by enrollment in the program; or

(4) lands where the purposes of the program would be undermined due to on-site or off-site conditions, such as risk of hazardous substances, permitted or existing rights of way, infrastructure development, or adjacent land uses.

(b) PRIORITY.—In evaluating applications under the program, the Secretary may give priority to land that is currently enrolled in the conservation reserve program in a contract that is set to expire within 1 year and—

(1) in the case of an agricultural land easement, is grassland that would benefit from protection under a long-term easement; and

(2) in the case of a wetland reserve easement, is a wetland or related area with the highest wetland functions and value and is likely to return to production after the land leaves the conservation reserve program.

(c) SUBORDINATION, EXCHANGE, MODIFICATION, AND TERMINATION.—

(1) SUBORDINATION.—The Secretary may subordinate any interest in land, or portion of such interest, administered by the Secretary (including for the purposes of utilities and energy transmission services) either directly or on behalf of the Commodity Credit Corporation under the program if the Secretary determines that the subordination—

(A) increases conservation values or has a limited negative effect on conservation values;

(B) minimally affects the acreage subject to the interest in land; and

(C) is in the public interest or furthers the practical administration of the program.

(2) MODIFICATION AND EXCHANGE.—

(A) AUTHORITY.—The Secretary may approve a modification or exchange of any interest in land, or portion of such interest, administered by the Secretary, either directly or on behalf of the Commodity Credit Corporation under the program if the Secretary determines that—

(i) no reasonable alternative exists and the effect on the interest in land is avoided or minimized to the extent practicable; and

(ii) the modification or exchange—

(I) results in equal or increased conservation values;

(II) results in equal or greater economic value to the United States;

(III) is consistent with the original intent of the easement;

(IV) is consistent with the purposes of the program; and

(V) is in the public interest or furthers the practical administration of the program.

(B) LIMITATION.—In modifying or exchanging an interest in land, or portion of such interest, under this para-

graph, the Secretary may not increase any payment to an eligible entity.

(3) **TERMINATION.**—The Secretary may approve a termination of any interest in land, or portion of such interest, administered by the Secretary, directly or on behalf of the Commodity Credit Corporation under the program if the Secretary determines that—

(A) termination is in the interest of the Federal Government;

(B) the United States will be fully compensated for—  
 (i) the fair market value of the interest in land;  
 (ii) any costs relating to the termination; and  
 (iii) any damages determined appropriate by the Secretary; and

(C) the termination will—

(i) address a compelling public need for which there is no practicable alternative even with avoidance and minimization; and

(ii) further the practical administration of the program.

(4) **CONSENT.**—The Secretary shall obtain consent from the landowner and eligible entity, if applicable, for any subordination, exchange, modification, or termination of interest in land, or portion of such interest, under this subsection.

(5) **NOTICE.**—At least 90 days before taking any termination action described in paragraph (3), the Secretary shall provide written notice of such action to the Committee on Agriculture of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry of the Senate.

(d) **LAND ENROLLED IN OTHER PROGRAMS.**—

(1) **CONSERVATION RESERVE PROGRAM.**—The Secretary may terminate or modify a contract entered into under section 1231(a) if eligible land that is subject to such contract is enrolled in an easement under section 1265C(b).

(2) **OTHER.**—In accordance with the provisions of subtitle H of title II of the Agricultural Act of 2014, land enrolled in the wetlands reserve program, grassland reserve program, or farmland protection program on the day before the date of enactment of the Agricultural Act of 2014 shall be considered enrolled in the program.

(3) **AGRICULTURAL LAND EASEMENTS.**—A farmer or rancher who owns eligible land subject to an agricultural land easement may enter into a contract under subchapter B of chapter 1 of subtitle D.

(e) **COMPLIANCE WITH CERTAIN REQUIREMENTS.**—The Secretary may not provide assistance under this subtitle to an eligible entity or owner of eligible land unless the eligible entity or owner agrees, during the crop year for which the assistance is provided—

(1) to comply with applicable conservation requirements under subtitle B; and

(2) to comply with applicable wetland protection requirements under subtitle C.

## Subtitle I—Regional Conservation Partnership Program

### SEC. 1271. [16 U.S.C. 3871] ESTABLISHMENT AND PURPOSES.

(a) ESTABLISHMENT.—The Secretary shall establish a regional conservation partnership program to implement eligible activities on eligible land through—

(1) partnership agreements, including partnership agreements funded through alternative funding arrangements or grant agreements under section 1271C(d), with eligible partners; and

(2) program contracts with producers.

(b) PURPOSES.—The purposes of the program are as follows:

(1) To carry out eligible activities to accomplish purposes and functions similar to those of the following programs, as in effect on the day before the date of enactment of the Agricultural Act of 2014:

(A) The agricultural water enhancement program established under section 1240I.

(B) The Chesapeake Bay watershed program established under section 1240Q.

(C) The cooperative conservation partnership initiative established under section 1243.

(D) The Great Lakes basin program for soil erosion and sediment control established under section 1240P.

(2) To further the conservation, protection, restoration, and sustainable use of soil, water (including sources of drinking water and groundwater), wildlife, agricultural land, and related natural resources on eligible land on a regional or watershed scale.

(3) To encourage eligible partners to cooperate with producers in—

(A) meeting or avoiding the need for national, State, and local natural resource regulatory requirements related to production on eligible land, including through alignment of partnership projects with other national, State, and local agencies and programs addressing similar natural resource or environmental concerns; and

(B) implementing projects that will result in the adoption, installation, and maintenance of eligible activities that affect multiple agricultural or nonindustrial private forest operations on a local, regional, State, or multistate basis.

(4) To encourage the flexible and streamlined delivery of conservation assistance to producers through partnership agreements.

(5) To engage producers and eligible partners in conservation projects to achieve greater conservation outcomes and benefits for producers than would otherwise be achieved.

### SEC. 1271A. [16 U.S.C. 3871a] DEFINITIONS.

In this subtitle:

(1) COVERED PROGRAM.—The term “covered program” means the following:

- (A) The agricultural conservation easement program.
- (B) The environmental quality incentives program.
- (C) The conservation stewardship program, not including the grassland conservation initiative under section 1240L–1.
- (D) The healthy forests reserve program established under section 501 of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003 (16 U.S.C. 6571).
- (E) The conservation reserve program established under subchapter B of chapter 1 of subtitle D.
- (F) The programs established by the Secretary to carry out the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act (16 U.S.C. 1001 et seq.), except for any program established by the Secretary to carry out section 14 (16 U.S.C. 1012) of that Act.

(2) ELIGIBLE ACTIVITY.—The term “eligible activity” means a practice, activity, agreement, easement, or related conservation measure that is available under the statutory authority for a covered program.

(3) ELIGIBLE LAND.—The term “eligible land” means any agricultural or nonindustrial private forest land or associated land on which the Secretary determines an eligible activity would help achieve conservation benefits.

(4) ELIGIBLE PARTNER.—The term “eligible partner” means any of the following:

- (A) An agricultural or silvicultural producer association or other group of producers.
- (B) A State or unit of local government.
- (C) An Indian tribe.
- (D) A farmer cooperative.
- (E) A water district, irrigation district, acequia, rural water district or association, or other organization with specific water delivery authority to producers on agricultural land.
- (F) A municipal water or wastewater treatment entity.
- (G) An institution of higher education.
- (H) An organization or entity with an established history of working cooperatively with producers on agricultural land, as determined by the Secretary, to address—
  - (i) local conservation priorities related to agricultural production, wildlife habitat development, or nonindustrial private forest land management; or
  - (ii) critical watershed-scale soil erosion, water quality, sediment reduction, or other natural resource issues.
- (I) An organization described in section 1265A(3)(B).
- (J) A conservation district.

(5) PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT.—The term “partnership agreement” means the programmatic agreement entered into between the Secretary and an eligible partner, subject to the terms and conditions under section 1271B.

(6) PROGRAM.—The term “program” means the regional conservation partnership program established by this subtitle.

(7) PROGRAM CONTRACT.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—The term “program contract” means the contract between the Secretary and a producer entered into under this subtitle.

(B) EXCLUSION.—The term “program contract” does not include a contract under a covered program.

**SEC. 1271B. [16 U.S.C. 3871b] REGIONAL CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIPS.**

(a) PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENTS AUTHORIZED.—The Secretary may enter into a partnership agreement with an eligible partner to implement a project that will assist producers with installing and maintaining an eligible activity on eligible land.

(b) LENGTH.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—A partnership agreement shall be—

(A) for a period not to exceed 5 years; or

(B) for a period that is longer than 5 years, if the longer period is necessary to meet the objectives of the program, as determined by the Secretary.

(2) RENEWAL.—A partnership agreement may be renewed under subsection (e)(5) for a period not to exceed 5 years.

(3) EXTENSION.—A partnership agreement, or any renewal of a partnership agreement, may each be extended 1 time for a period not longer than 12 months, as determined by the Secretary.

(c) DUTIES OF PARTNERS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Under a partnership agreement, the eligible partner shall—

(A) define the scope of a project, including—

(i) 1 or more conservation benefits that the project shall achieve;

(ii) the eligible activities on eligible land to be conducted under the project to achieve conservation benefits;

(iii) the implementation timeline for carrying out the project, including any interim milestones;

(iv) the local, State, multistate, or other geographic area covered; and

(v) the planning, outreach, implementation, and assessment to be conducted;

(B) conduct outreach and education to producers for potential participation in the project;

(C) at the request of a producer, act on behalf of a producer participating in the project in applying for assistance under section 1271C;

(D) leverage financial or technical assistance provided by the Secretary with additional contributions to help achieve the project objectives;

(E) conduct an assessment of—

(i) the progress made by the project in achieving each conservation benefit defined in the partnership agreement, including in a quantified form to the extent practicable; and



(ii) as appropriate, other outcomes of the project; and

(F) at the conclusion of the project, report to the Secretary on its results and funds leveraged.

(2) CONTRIBUTION.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—An eligible partner shall provide a significant portion of the overall costs of the scope of the project that is the subject of the agreement entered into under subsection (a), as determined by the Secretary.

(B) FORM.—A contribution of an eligible partner under this paragraph may be in the form of—

(i) direct funding;

(ii) in-kind support; or

(iii) a combination of direct funding and in-kind support.

(C) TREATMENT.—Any amounts expended during the period beginning on the date on which the Secretary announces the approval of an application under subsection (e) and ending on the day before the effective date of the partnership agreement by an eligible partner for staff salaries or development of the partnership agreement may be considered to be a part of the contribution of the eligible partner under this paragraph.

(d) DUTIES OF SECRETARY.—The Secretary shall—

(1) establish a timeline for carrying out the duties of the Secretary under a partnership agreement, including—

(A) entering into program contracts with producers;

(B) providing financial assistance to producers; and

(C) in the case of a partnership agreement that is funded through an alternative funding arrangement or grant agreement under section 1271C(d), providing the payments to the eligible partner for carrying out eligible activities;

(2) identify in each State a program coordinator for the State, who shall be responsible for providing assistance to eligible partners under the program;

(3) establish guidance to assist eligible partners with carrying out the assessment required under subsection (c)(1)(E);

(4) provide to each eligible partner that has entered into a partnership agreement that is not funded through an alternative funding arrangement or grant agreement under section 1271C(d)—

(A) a semiannual report describing the status of each pending and obligated contract under the project of the eligible partner; and

(B) an annual report describing how the Secretary used amounts reserved by the Secretary for that year for technical assistance under section 1271D(f); and

(5) ensure that any eligible activity effectively achieves the conservation benefits identified in the partnership agreement under subsection (c)(1)(A)(i).

(e) APPLICATIONS.—

(1) COMPETITIVE PROCESS.—The Secretary shall conduct a simplified competitive process to select applications for part-

nership agreements and may assess and rank applications with similar conservation purposes as a group.

(2) CRITERIA USED.—In carrying out the process described in paragraph (1), the Secretary shall make public the criteria used in evaluating applications.

(3) CONTENTS.—The Secretary shall develop a simplified application that includes a description of—

(A) the scope of the project, as described in subsection (c)(1)(A);

(B) the plan for monitoring, evaluating, and reporting on progress made toward achieving the project's objectives;

(C) the program resources requested for the project and estimated funding needed from the Secretary;

(D) each eligible partner collaborating to achieve project objectives, including their roles, responsibilities, capabilities, and contribution; and

(E) any other elements the Secretary considers necessary to adequately evaluate and competitively select applications for funding under the program.

(4) PRIORITY TO CERTAIN APPLICATIONS.—The Secretary may give a higher priority to applications that—

(A) assist producers in meeting or avoiding the need for a natural resource regulatory requirement;

(B) have a high percentage of producers in the area to be covered by the agreement;

(C) significantly leverage non-Federal financial and technical resources and coordinate with other local, State, or national efforts;

(D) build new partnerships with local, State, and private entities to include a diversity of stakeholders in the project;

(E) deliver a high percentage of applied conservation—

(i) to achieve conservation benefits; or

(ii) in the case of a project in a critical conservation area under section 1271F, to address the priority resource concern for that critical conservation area;

(F) implement the project consistent with existing watershed, habitat, or other area restoration plans;

(G) provide innovation in conservation methods and delivery, including outcome-based performance measures and methods; or

(H) meet other factors that are important for achieving the purposes of the program, as determined by the Secretary.

(5) RENEWALS.—If the Secretary determines that a project that is the subject of a partnership agreement has met or exceeded the objectives of the project, the Secretary may renew the partnership agreement through an expedited noncompetitive process if the 1 or more eligible partners that are parties to the partnership agreement request the renewal in order—

(A) to continue to implement the project under a renewal of the partnership agreement; or

(B) to expand the scope of the project under a renewal of the partnership agreement, as long as the expansion is

within the objectives and purposes of the original partnership agreement.

(f) **NONAPPLICABILITY OF ADJUSTED GROSS INCOME LIMITATION.**—The adjusted gross income limitation described in section 1001D(b)(1) shall not apply to an eligible partner under the program.

**SEC. 1271C. [16 U.S.C. 3871c] ASSISTANCE TO PRODUCERS.**

(a) **IN GENERAL.**—A producer may receive financial or technical assistance to conduct eligible activities on eligible land through a program contract entered into with the Secretary.

(b) **PROGRAM CONTRACTS.**—

(1) **IN GENERAL.**—The Secretary shall establish a program contract to be entered into with a producer to conduct eligible activities on eligible land, subject to such terms and conditions as the Secretary may establish.

(2) **APPLICATION BUNDLES.**—

(A) **IN GENERAL.**—An eligible partner may submit to the Secretary, on behalf of producers, a bundle of applications for assistance under the program through program contracts to address a substantial portion of the conservation benefits to be achieved by the project, as defined in the partnership agreement.

(B) **PRIORITY.**—The Secretary may give priority to applications described in subparagraph (A).

(c) **PAYMENTS.**—

(1) **IN GENERAL.**—Subject to section 1271D, the Secretary may make payments to a producer in an amount determined by the Secretary to be necessary to achieve the purposes of the program.

(2) **PAYMENTS TO CERTAIN PRODUCERS.**—The Secretary may provide payments for a period of 5 years—

(A) to producers participating in a project that addresses water quantity concerns and in an amount sufficient to encourage conversion from irrigated to dryland farming; and

(B) to producers participating in a project that addresses water quality concerns and in an amount sufficient to encourage adoption of conservation practices and systems that improve nutrient management.

(3) **WAIVER AUTHORITY.**—To assist in the implementation of the program, the Secretary may waive the applicability of the limitation in section 1001D(b)(2) of this Act for producers if the Secretary determines that the waiver is necessary to fulfill the objectives of the program.

(d) **FUNDING THROUGH ALTERNATIVE FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS OR GRANT AGREEMENTS.**—

(1) **IN GENERAL.**—A partnership agreement entered into with an eligible partner may be funded through an alternative funding arrangement or grant in accordance with this subsection.

(2) **DUTIES OF THE SECRETARY.**—The Secretary shall—

(A) under a funding agreement under paragraph (1)—

(i) use funding made available to carry out this subtitle to provide funding directly to the eligible partner; and

(ii) provide technical and administrative assistance, as mutually agreed by the parties; and

(B) enter into not more than 15 alternative funding arrangements or grant agreements with 1 or more eligible partners each fiscal year.

(3) DUTIES OF ELIGIBLE PARTNERS.—Under a funding agreement under paragraph (1), the eligible partner shall—

(A) carry out eligible activities on eligible land in agreement with producers to achieve conservation benefits on a regional or watershed scale, such as—

(i) infrastructure investments relating to agricultural or nonindustrial private forest production that would—

(I) benefit multiple producers; and

(II) address natural resource concerns such as drought, wildfire, or water quality impairment on the land covered by the project;

(ii) projects addressing natural resources concerns in coordination with producers, including the development and implementation of watershed, habitat, or other area restoration plans;

(iii) projects that use innovative approaches to leveraging the Federal investment in conservation with private financial mechanisms, in conjunction with agricultural production or forest resource management, such as—

(I) the provision of performance-based payments to producers; and

(II) support for an environmental market; or

(iv) other projects for which the Secretary determines that the goals and objectives of the program would be easier to achieve through the funding agreement under paragraph (1); and

(B) submit to the Secretary, in addition to any information that the Secretary requires to prepare the report under section 1271E(b), an annual report that describes the status of the project, including a description of—

(i) the use of the funds awarded under paragraph (1);

(ii) any subcontracts awarded;

(iii) the producers receiving funding through the funding agreement under paragraph (1);

(iv)(I) the progress made by the project in addressing each natural resource concern defined in the funding agreement under paragraph (1), including in a quantified form to the extent practicable; and

(II) as appropriate, other outcomes of the project; and

(v) any other reporting data the Secretary determines are necessary to ensure compliance with the program rules.

**SEC. 1271D. [16 U.S.C. 3871d] FUNDING.**

(a) **AVAILABILITY OF FUNDING.**—Of the funds of the Commodity Credit Corporation, the Secretary shall use to carry out the program, to the maximum extent practicable—

- (1) \$425,000,000 for fiscal year 2026;
- (2) \$450,000,000 for fiscal year 2027;
- (3) \$450,000,000 for fiscal year 2028;
- (4) \$450,000,000 for fiscal year 2029;
- (5) \$450,000,000 for fiscal year 2030; and
- (6) \$450,000,000 for fiscal year 2031.

(b) **DURATION OF AVAILABILITY.**—Funds made available under subsection (a) shall remain available until expended.

(c) **ALLOCATION OF FUNDING.**—Of the funds made available for the program under subsection (a), the Secretary shall allocate—

(1) 50 percent of the funds to projects based on a State or multistate competitive process administered by the Secretary at the local level with the advice of the applicable State technical committees established under subtitle G; and

(2) 50 percent of the funds to projects for critical conservation areas designated under section 1271F.

(d) **LIMITATION ON ADMINISTRATIVE EXPENSES.**—

(1) **IN GENERAL.**—Except as provided in paragraph (2), none of the funds made available for the program, including for a partnership agreement funded through an alternative funding arrangement or grant agreement under section 1271C(d), may be used to pay for the administrative expenses of eligible partners.

(2) **PROJECT DEVELOPMENT AND OUTREACH.**—Under a partnership agreement that is not funded through an alternative funding arrangement or grant agreement under section 1271C(d), the Secretary may advance reasonable amounts of funding for not longer than 90 days for technical assistance to eligible partners to conduct project development and outreach activities in a project area, including—

(A) providing outreach and education to producers for potential participation in the project;

(B) establishing baseline metrics to support the development of the assessment required under section 1271B(c)(1)(E); or

(C) providing technical assistance to producers.

(e) **TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE.**—

(1) **IN GENERAL.**—At the time of project selection, the Secretary shall identify and make publicly available the amount that the Secretary shall use to provide technical assistance under the terms of the partnership agreement.

(2) **LIMITATION.**—The Secretary shall limit costs of the Secretary for technical assistance to costs specific and necessary to carry out the objectives of the program.

(3) **THIRD-PARTY PROVIDERS.**—The Secretary shall develop and implement strategies to encourage third-party technical service providers to provide technical assistance to eligible partners pursuant to a partnership agreement.

**SEC. 1271E. [16 U.S.C. 3871e] ADMINISTRATION.**

(a) **DISCLOSURE.**—In addition to the criteria used in evaluating applications as described in section 1271B(e)(2), the Secretary shall make publicly available information on projects selected through the competitive process described in section 1271B(e)(1).

(b) **REPORTING.**—Not later than December 31, 2019, and every two years thereafter, the Secretary shall submit to the Committee on Agriculture of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry of the Senate a report on the status of projects funded under the program, including—

- (1) a summary of—
  - (A) the progress made towards achieving the conservation benefits defined for the projects; and
  - (B) any other related outcomes of the projects;
- (2) the number and types of eligible partners and producers participating in the partnership agreements selected;
- (3) the number of producers receiving assistance;
- (4) total funding committed to projects, including from Federal and non-Federal resources;
- (5) a description of how the funds under section 1271C(d) are being administered, including—
  - (A) any oversight mechanisms that the Secretary has implemented;
  - (B) the process through which the Secretary is resolving appeals by program participants; and
  - (C) the means by which the Secretary is tracking adherence to any applicable provisions for payment eligibility; and
- (6) in the case of a project within a critical conservation area under section 1271F, the status of each priority resource concern for each designated critical conservation area, including—
  - (A) the priority resource concerns for which each critical conservation area is designated;
  - (B) conservation goals and outcomes sufficient to demonstrate that progress is being made to address the priority resource concerns;
  - (C) the partnership agreements selected to address each conservation goal and outcome; and
  - (D) the extent to which each conservation goal and outcome is being addressed by the partnership agreements.

(c) **COMPLIANCE WITH CERTAIN REQUIREMENTS.**—The Secretary may not provide assistance under the program to a producer unless the producer agrees, during the program year for which the assistance is provided—

- (1) to comply with applicable conservation requirements under subtitle B; and
- (2) to comply with applicable wetland protection requirements under subtitle C.

(d) **HISTORICALLY UNDERSERVED PRODUCERS.**—To the maximum extent practicable, in carrying out the program, the Secretary and eligible partners shall conduct outreach to beginning farmers and ranchers, veteran farmers and ranchers, socially dis-

advantaged farmers and ranchers, and limited resource farmers and ranchers to encourage participation by those producers in a project subject to a partnership agreement or funding agreement under 1271C(d).

(e) REGULATIONS.—The Secretary shall issue regulations to carry out the program.

**SEC. 1271F. [16 U.S.C. 3871f] CRITICAL CONSERVATION AREAS.**

(a) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

(1) CRITICAL CONSERVATION AREA.—The term “critical conservation area” means a geographical area that contains a critical conservation condition that can be addressed through the program.

(2) PRIORITY RESOURCE CONCERN.—The term “priority resource concern” means a natural resource concern located in a critical conservation area that can be addressed through—

(A) water quality improvement, including through reducing erosion, promoting sediment control, and addressing nutrient management activities affecting large bodies of water of regional, national, or international significance;

(B) water quantity improvement, including improvement relating to—

(i) drought;

(ii) groundwater, surface water, aquifer, or other water sources; or

(iii) water retention and flood prevention;

(C) wildlife habitat restoration to address species of concern at a Federal, State, or local level; and

(D) other natural resource improvements, as determined by the Secretary, within the critical conservation area.

(b) APPLICATIONS.—In administering funds under section 1271D(d)(2), the Secretary shall select applications for partnership agreements and program contracts within critical conservation areas designated under this section that address 1 or more priority resource concerns for which the critical conservation area is designated.

(c) CRITICAL CONSERVATION AREA DESIGNATIONS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall identify 1 or more priority resource concerns that apply to each critical conservation area designated under this section after the date of enactment of the Agricultural Act of 2014 (Public Law 113–79; 128 Stat. 649), including the conservation goals and outcomes sufficient to demonstrate that progress is being made to address the priority resource concern.

(2) PRIORITY.—In designating critical conservation areas under this section, the Secretary shall give priority to geographical areas based on the degree to which the geographical area—

(A) includes multiple States with significant agricultural production;

(B) is covered by an existing regional, State, binational, or multistate agreement or plan that has estab-

lished objectives, goals, and work plans and is adopted by a Federal, State, or regional authority;

(C) contains 1 or more priority resource concerns; or

(D) contains producers that need assistance in meeting or avoiding the need for a natural resource regulatory requirement that could have a negative impact on the economic scope of the agricultural operations within the area.

(3) REVIEW AND WITHDRAWAL.—The Secretary may—

(A) review designations of critical conservation areas under this section not more frequently than once every 5 years; and

(B) withdraw designation of a critical conservation area only if the Secretary determines that the area is no longer a critical conservation area.

(4) LIMITATION.—The Secretary may not designate more than 8 geographical areas as critical conservation areas under this section.

(d) OUTREACH TO ELIGIBLE PARTNERS AND PRODUCERS.—The Secretary shall provide outreach and education to eligible partners and producers in critical conservation areas designated under this section to encourage the development of projects to address each priority resource concern identified by the Secretary for that critical conservation area.

(e) ADMINISTRATION.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Except as provided in paragraph (2), the Secretary shall administer any partnership agreement or program contract under this section in a manner that is consistent with the terms of the program.

(2) RELATIONSHIP TO EXISTING ACTIVITY.—The Secretary shall, to the maximum extent practicable, ensure that eligible activities carried out in critical conservation areas designated under this section complement and are consistent with other Federal and State programs and water quality and quantity strategies.

#### TITLE XIV—AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH, EXTENSION, AND TEACHING

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#### AUTHORIZATION FOR APPROPRIATIONS FOR FEDERAL AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH FACILITIES

SEC. 1431. There are authorized to be appropriated for each of the fiscal years 1991 through 2023, such sums as may be necessary for the planning, construction, acquisition, alternation, and repair of buildings and other public improvements, including the cost of acquiring or obtaining rights to use land, of or used by the Agricultural Research Service, except that—

(1) the cost of planning any one facility shall not exceed \$500,000; and

(2) the total cost of any one facility shall not exceed \$5,000,000.

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## TITLE XVI—MARKETING

\* \* \* \* \*

## Subtitle B—Pork Promotion, Research, and Consumer Information

## SHORT TITLE

SEC. 1611. [7 U.S.C. 4801 note] This subtitle may be cited as the “Pork Promotion, Research, and Consumer Information Act of 1985”.

## FINDINGS AND DECLARATION OF PURPOSE

SEC. 1612. [7 U.S.C. 4801] (a) Congress finds that—

(1) pork and pork products are basic foods that are a valuable and healthy part of the human diet;

(2) the production of pork and pork products plays a significant role in the economy of the United States because pork and pork products are—

(A) produced by thousands of producers, including many small- and medium-sized producers; and

(B) consumed by millions of people throughout the United States on a daily basis;

(3) pork and pork products must be available readily and marketed efficiently to ensure that the people of the United States receive adequate nourishment;

(4) the maintenance and expansion of existing markets, and development of new markets, for pork and pork products are vital to—

(A) the welfare of pork producers and persons concerned with producing and marketing pork and pork products; and

(B) the general economy of the United States;

(5) pork and pork products move in interstate and foreign commerce;

(6) pork and pork products that do not move in such channels of commerce directly burden or affect interstate commerce in pork and pork products; and

(7) in recent years, increasing quantities of low-cost, imported pork and pork products have been brought into the United States and replaced domestic pork and pork products in normal channels of trade.

(b)(1) It is the purpose of this subtitle to authorize the establishment of an orderly procedure for financing, through adequate assessments, and carrying out an effective and coordinated program of promotion, research, and consumer information designed to—

(A) strengthen the position of the pork industry in the marketplace; and

(B) maintain, develop, and expand markets for pork and pork products.

(2) Such procedure shall be implemented, and such program shall be conducted, at no cost to the Federal Government.

(3) Nothing in this subtitle may be construed to—

- (A) permit or require the imposition of quality standards for pork or pork products;
- (B) provide for control of the production of pork or pork products; or
- (C) otherwise limit the right of an individual pork producer to produce pork and pork products.

## DEFINITIONS

SEC. 1613. [7 U.S.C. 4802] For purposes of this subtitle:

- (1) The term “Board” means the National Pork Board established under section 1619.
- (2) The term “consumer information” means an activity intended to broaden the understanding of sound nutritional attributes of pork or pork products, including the role of pork or pork products in a balanced, healthy diet.
- (3) The term “Delegate Body” means the National Pork Producers Delegate Body established under section 1617.
- (4) The term “imported” means entered, or withdrawn from a warehouse for consumption, in the customs territory of the United States.
- (5) The term “importer” means a person who imports porcine animals, pork, or pork products into the United States.
- (6) The term “order” means a pork and pork products promotion, research, and consumer information order issued under section 1614.
- (7) The term “person” means an individual, group of individuals, partnership, corporation, association, organization, cooperative, or other entity.
- (8) The term “porcine animal” means a swine raised for—
  - (A) feeder pigs;
  - (B) seedstock; or
  - (C) slaughter.
- (9) The term “pork” means the flesh of a porcine animal.
- (10) The term “pork product” means a product produced or processed in whole or in part from pork.
- (11) The term “producer” means a person who produces porcine animals in the United States for sale in commerce.
- (12) The term “promotion” means an action, including paid advertising, taken to present a favorable image for porcine animals, pork, or pork products to the public with the intent of improving the competitive position and stimulating sales of porcine animals, pork, or pork products.
- (13) The term “research” means—
  - (A) research designed to advance, expand, or improve the image, desirability, nutritional value, usage, marketability, production, or quality of porcine animals, pork, or pork products; or
  - (B) dissemination to a person of the results of such research.
- (14) The term “Secretary” means the Secretary of Agriculture.
- (15) The term “State” means each of the 50 States.
- (16) The term “State association” means—

(A) the single organization of pork producers in a State that is—

(i) organized under the laws of the State in which such association operates; and

(ii) recognized by the chief executive officer of such State as representing the pork producers of such State; or

(B) if such organization does not exist on the effective date of this subtitle, an organization that represents not fewer than 50 pork producers who market annually, in the aggregate, not less than 10 percent of the volume (measured in pounds) of porcine animals marketed in such State.

(17) The term “to market” means to sell or to otherwise dispose of a porcine animal, pork, or pork product in commerce.

#### PORK AND PORK PRODUCT ORDERS

SEC. 1614. [7 U.S.C. 4803] (a) To carry out this subtitle, the Secretary shall, in accordance with this subtitle, issue and, from time to time, amend orders applicable to persons engaged in—

(1) the production and sale of porcine animals, pork, and pork products in the United States; and

(2) the importation of porcine animals, pork, or pork products into the United States.

(b) The Secretary may issue such regulations as are necessary to carry out this subtitle.

#### NOTICE AND HEARING

SEC. 1615. [7 U.S.C. 4804] During the period beginning on the effective date of this subtitle and ending 30 days after receipt of a proposal for an initial order submitted by any person affected by this subtitle, the Secretary shall—

(1) publish such proposed order; and

(2) give due notice of and opportunity for public comment on such proposed order.

#### FINDINGS AND ISSUANCE OF ORDERS

SEC. 1616. [7 U.S.C. 4805] (a) After notice and opportunity for public comment have been provided in accordance with section 1615, the Secretary shall issue and publish an order if the Secretary finds, and sets forth in such order, that the issuance of such order and all terms and conditions thereof will assist in carrying out this subtitle.

(b) Not more than one order may be in effect at a time.

(c) An order shall become effective on a date that is not more than 90 days following the publication of such order.

(d) An order shall contain such terms and conditions as are required in sections 1617 through 1620 and, except as provided in section 1621, no others.

## NATIONAL PORK PRODUCERS DELEGATE BODY

SEC. 1617. [7 U.S.C. 4806] (a) The order shall provide for the establishment and appointment by the Secretary, not later than 60 days after the effective date of such order, of a National Pork Producers Delegate Body.

(b)(1) The Delegate Body shall consist of—

(A) producers, as appointed by the Secretary in accordance with paragraph (2), from nominees submitted as follows:

(i) in the case of the initial Delegate Body appointed by each State in accordance with section 1618.

(ii) in the case of each succeeding Delegate Body, each State association shall submit nominations selected by such association pursuant to a selection process that—

(I) is approved by the Secretary;

(II) requires public notice of the process to be given at least one week in advance by publication in a newspaper or newspaper of general circulation in such State and in pork production and agriculture trade publications; and

(III) that provides complete and equal access to the nominating process to every producer who has paid all assessments due under section 1620 and not demanded a refund under section 1624,

or pursuant to an election of nominees conducted in accordance with section 1618.

(iii) In the case of a State that has a State association that does not submit nominations or that does not have a State association, such State shall submit nominations in a manner prescribed by the Secretary; and

(B) importers, as appointed by the Secretary in accordance with paragraph (3).

(2) The number of producer members appointed to the Delegate Body from each State shall equal at least two members, and additional members, allocated as follows:

(A) Shares shall be assigned to each State—

(i) for the 1986 calendar year, on the basis of one share for each \$400,000 of farm market value of porcine animals marketed from such State (as determined by the Secretary based on the annual average of farm market value in the most recent 3 calendar years preceding such year), rounded to the nearest \$400,000; and

(ii) for each calendar year thereafter, on the basis of one share for each \$1,000 of the aggregate amount of assessments collected (minus refunds under section 1624) in such State from persons described in section 1620(a)(1) (A) and (B), rounded to the nearest \$1,000.

(B) If during a calendar year the number of such shares of a State is—

(i) less than 301, the State shall receive a total of two producer members;

(ii) more than 300 but less than 601, the State shall receive a total of three producer members;

- (iii) more than 600 but less than 1,001, the State shall receive a total of four producer members; and
  - (iv) more than 1,000, the State shall receive four producer members, plus one additional member for each 300 additional shares in excess of 1,000 shares, rounded to the nearest 300.
- (3) The number of importer members appointed to the Delegate Body shall be determined as follows:
  - (A) Shares shall be assigned to importers—
    - (i) for the 1986 calendar year, on the basis of one share for each \$575,000 of market value of marketed porcine animals, pork, or pork products (as determined by the Secretary based on the annual average of imports in the most recent 3 calendar years preceding such year), rounded to the nearest \$575,000; and
    - (ii) for each calendar year thereafter, on the basis of one share for each \$1,000 of the aggregate amount of assessments collected (minus refunds under section 1624) from importers, rounded to the nearest \$1,000.
  - (B) The number of importer members appointed to the Delegate Body shall equal a total of—
    - (i) three members for the first 1,000 such shares; and
    - (ii) one additional member for each 300 additional shares in excess of 1,000 shares, rounded to the nearest 300.
- (c)(1) A producer member of the Delegate Body may, in a vote conducted by the Delegate Body for which the member is present, cast a number of votes equal to—
  - (A) the number of shares attributable to the State of the member; divided by
  - (B) the number of producer members from such State.
- (2) An importer member of the Delegate Body may, in a vote conducted by the Delegate Body for which the member is present, cast a number of votes equal to—
  - (A) the number of shares allocated to importers; divided by
  - (B) the number of importer members.
- (3) Members entitled to cast a majority of the votes (including fractions thereof) on the Delegate Body shall constitute a quorum.
- (4) A majority of the votes (including fractions thereof) cast at a meeting at which a quorum is present shall be decisive of a motion or election presented to the Delegate Body for a vote.
- (d) A member of the Delegate Body shall serve for a term of 1 year, except that the term of a member of the Delegate Body shall continue until the successor of such member, if any, is appointed in accordance with subsection (b)(1).
- (e)(1) At the first annual meeting, the Delegate Body shall select a Chairman by a majority vote.
- (2) At each annual meeting thereafter, the President of the Board shall serve as the Chairman of the Delegate Body.
- (f) A member of the Delegate Body shall serve without compensation, but may be reimbursed by the Board from assessments collected under section 1620 for transportation expenses incurred in performing duties as a member of the Delegate Body.
- (g)(1) The Delegate Body shall—

- (A) nominate—
  - (i) not less than 23 persons for appointment to the Board, for the first year for which nominations are made; and
  - (ii) not less than 1½ persons (rounded up to the nearest person) for each vacancy in the Board that requires nominations thereafter; and
- (B) submit such nominations to the Secretary.
- (2) The Delegate Body shall meet annually to make such nominations.
- (3) A majority of the Delegate Body shall vote in person in order to nominate members to the Board.
- (h) The Delegate Body shall—
  - (1) recommend the rate of assessment prescribed by the initial order and any increase in such rate pursuant to section 1620(5); and
  - (2) determine the percentage of the aggregate amount of assessments collected in a State that each State association shall receive under section 1620(c)(1).

## SELECTION OF DELEGATE BODY

SEC. 1618. [7 U.S.C. 4807] (a)(1) Not later than 30 days after the effective date of the order, the Secretary shall call for the nomination within each State of candidates for appointment as producer members of the initial Delegate Body.

(2) Each State association may nominate producers who are residents of such State to serve as such candidates.

(3)(A) Additional producers who are residents of a State may be nominated as candidates of such State by written petition signed by 100 producers or 5 percent of the pork producers in such State, whichever is less. The Secretary shall establish and publicize the procedures governing the time and place for filing petitions.

(b)(1) After the Secretary has received the nominations required under subsection (a) and not later than 45 days after the effective date of the order, the Secretary shall call for an election within each State of persons for appointment as producer members of the initial Delegate Body.

(2) To be eligible to vote in an election held in a State, a person must be a producer who is a resident of such State.

(3)(A) Notice of each such election shall be given by the Secretary—

- (i) by publication in a newspaper or newspapers of general circulation in each State, and in pork production and agriculture trade publications, at least 1 week prior to the election; and

- (ii) in any other reasonable manner determined by the Secretary.

(B) The notice shall set forth the period of time and places for voting and such other information as the Secretary considers necessary.

(4) Each State shall nominate to the Delegate Body the number of producer members required under section 1617(b)(2)(B).

(5) The producers who receive the highest number of votes in each State shall be nominated for appointment as members of the Delegate Body from such State.

(c)(1) Except as provided in paragraph (3), after the election of the producer members of the initial Delegate Body, the Board shall administer all subsequent nominations and elections of the producer members to be nominated for appointment as members of the Delegate Body, with the assistance of the Secretary and in accordance with subsections (a)(3) and (b).

(2) The Board shall determine the timing of an election referred to in paragraph (1).

(3) To be eligible to vote in such an election in a State, a person must—

(A) be a producer who is a resident of such State;

(B) have paid all assessments due under section 1620; and

(C) not demanded a refund of an assessment under section 1624.

(d)(1) Prior to the expiration of the term of any producer member of the Delegate Body, the Board shall appoint a nominating committee of producers who are residents of the State represented by such member.

(2) Such committee shall nominate producers of such State as candidates to fill the position for which an election is to be held.

(3) Additional producers who are residents of a State may be nominated to fill such positions in accordance with subsection (a)(3).

#### NATIONAL PORK BOARD

SEC. 1619. [7 U.S.C. 4808] (a)(1) The order shall provide for the establishment and appointment by the Secretary of a 15-member National Pork Board.

(2) The Board shall consist of producers representing at least 12 States and importers appointed by the Secretary from nominations submitted under section 1617(g).

(2) The Board shall consist of producers or importers appointed by the Secretary from nominations submitted under section 1617(g).

(3) A member of the Board shall serve for a 3-year term, with no such member serving more than two consecutive 3-year terms, except that initial appointments to the Board shall be staggered with an equal number of members appointed, to the maximum extent possible, to 1-year, 2-year, and 3-year terms, except that the term of a member of the Board shall continue until the successor of such member, if any, is appointed in accordance with paragraph (2).

(4) The Board shall select its President by a majority vote.

(5)(A) A majority of the members of the Board shall constitute a quorum at a meeting of the Board.

(B) A majority of votes cast at a meeting at which a quorum is present shall determine a motion or election.

(6) A member of the Board shall serve without compensation, but shall be reimbursed by the Board from assessments collected

under section 1620 for reasonable expenses incurred in performing duties as a member of the Board.

(b)(1) The Board shall—

(A) develop, at the initiative of the Board or other person, proposals for promotion, research, and consumer information plans and projects;

(B) submit such plans and projects to the Secretary for approval;

(C) administer the order, in accordance with the order and this subtitle;

(D) prescribe such rules as are necessary to carry out such order;

(E) receive, investigate, and report to the Secretary complaints of violations of such order;

(F) make recommendations to the Secretary with respect to amendments to such order; and

(G) employ a staff and conduct routine business.

(2) The Board shall prepare and submit to the Secretary, for the approval of the Secretary, a budget for each fiscal year of anticipated expenses and disbursements of the Board in the administration of the order, including the projected cost of—

(A) any promotion, research or consumer information plan or project to be conducted by the Board directly or by way of contract or agreement; and

(B) the budgets, plans, or projects for which State associations are to receive funds pursuant to section 1620(c)(1).

(3) No plan, project, or budget referred to in paragraph (1) or

(2) may become effective unless approved by the Secretary.

(4)(A) The Board, with the approval of the Secretary, may enter into contracts or agreements with a person for—

(i) the development and conduct of activities authorized under an order; and

(ii) the payment of the cost thereof with funds collected through assessments under such order.

(B) Such contract or agreement shall require that—

(i) the contracting party develop and submit to the Board a plan or project, together with a budget or budgets that include the estimated cost to be incurred under such plan or project;

(ii) such plan or project become effective on the approval of the Secretary; and

(iii) the contracting party—

(I) keep accurate records of all relevant transactions of the party;

(II) make periodic reports to the Board of—

(aa) relevant activities the party has conducted; and

(bb) an accounting for funds received and expended under such contract; and

(III) make such other reports as the Secretary or Board may require.



## ASSESSMENTS

SEC. 1620. [7 U.S.C. 4809] (a)(1) The order shall provide that, not later than 30 days after the effective date of the order under section 1616(c) an assessment shall be paid, in the manner prescribed in the order. Upon the appointment of the Board, the assessments held in escrow shall be distributed to the Board. Except as provided in paragraph (3), assessments shall be payable by—

(A) each producer for each porcine animal described in subparagraph (A) or (C) of section 1613(8) produced in the United States that is sold or slaughtered for sale;

(B) each producer for each porcine animal described in subsection 1613(8)(B) that is sold; and

(C) each importer for each porcine animal, pork, or pork product that is imported into the United States.

(2) Such assessment shall be collected and remitted to the Board once it is appointed pursuant to section 1619, but, until that time, to the Secretary, who shall promptly proceed to distribute the funds received by him in accordance with the provisions of subsection (c), except that the Secretary shall retain the funds to be received by the Board until such time as the Board is appointed pursuant to section 1619, by—

(A) in the case of subparagraph (A) of paragraph (1), the purchaser of the porcine animal referred to in such subparagraph;

(B) in the case of subparagraph (B) of paragraph (1), the producer of the porcine animal referred to in such subparagraph; and

(C) in the case of subparagraph (C) of paragraph (1), the importer referred to in such subparagraph.

(3) A person is not required to pay an assessment for a porcine animal, pork, or pork product under paragraph (1) if such person proves to the Board that an assessment was paid previously under such paragraph by a person for such porcine animal (of the same category described in subparagraph (A), (B), or (C) of section 1613(8)), pork, or pork product.

(b)(1) Except as provided in paragraph (2), the rate of assessment prescribed by the initial order shall be the lesser of—

(A) 0.25 percent of the market value of the porcine animal, pork, or pork product sold or imported; or

(B) an amount established by the Secretary based on a recommendation of the Delegate Body.

(2) Except as provided in paragraph (3), the rate of assessment in the initial order may be increased by not more than 0.1 percent per year on recommendation of the Delegate Body.

(3) The rate of assessment may not exceed 0.50 percent of such market value unless—

(A) after the initial referendum required under section 1622(a), the Delegate Body recommends an increase in such rate above 0.50 percent; and

(B) such increase is approved in a referendum conducted under section 1622(b).

(4)(A) Pork or pork products imported into the United States shall be assessed based on the equivalent value of the live porcine

animal from which such pork or pork products were produced, as determined by the Secretary.

(B) The Secretary may waive the collection of assessments on a type of such imported pork or pork products if the Secretary determines that such collection is not practicable.

(c) Funds collected by the Board from assessments collected under this section shall be distributed and used in the following manner:

(1)(A) Each State association, shall receive an amount of funds equal to the product obtained by multiplying—

(i) the aggregate amount of assessments attributable to porcine animals produced in such State by persons described in subsection (a)(1) (A) and (B) minus that State's share of refunds determined pursuant to paragraph (4) by such persons pursuant to section 1624; and

(ii) a percentage applicable to such State association determined by the Delegate Body, but in no event less than sixteen and one-half percent, or

(B) in the case of a State association that was conducting a pork promotion program in the period from July 1, 1984, to June 30, 1985, if greater than (A) an amount of funds equal to the amount of funds that would have been collected in such State pursuant to the pork promotion program in existence in such State from July 1, 1984, to June 30, 1985, had the porcine animals, subject to assessment and to which no refund was received in such State in each year following the enactment of this Act, been produced from July 1, 1984, to June 30, 1985, and been subject to the rates of assessments then in effect and the rate of return then in effect from each State to the Council described in paragraph (2)(A), and other national entities involved in pork promotion, research and consumer information.

(C) A State association shall use such funds and any proceeds from the investment of such funds for financing—

(i) promotion, research, and consumer information plans and projects, and

(ii) administrative expenses incurred in connection with such plans and projects.

(2)(A) The National Pork Producers Council, a nonprofit corporation of the type described in section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1954 and incorporated in the State of Iowa, shall receive an amount of funds equal to—

(i) 37½ percent of the aggregate amount of assessments collected under this section throughout the United States from the date assessment commences pursuant to subsection (a)(1) until the first day of the month following the month in which the Board is appointed pursuant to section 1619.

(ii) 35 percent thereafter until the referendum is conducted pursuant to section 1622,

(iii) 25 percent until twelve months after the referendum is conducted, and

(iv) no funds thereafter except in so far as it obtains such funds from the Board pursuant to sections 1619 or 1620, each of which amounts determined under (i), (ii), and

- (iii) shall be less the Council's share of refunds determined pursuant to paragraph (4).
- (B) The Council shall use such funds and proceeds from the investment of such funds for financing—
  - (i) promotion, research, and consumer information plans and projects, and
  - (ii) administrative expenses of the Council.
- (3)(A) The Board shall receive the amount of funds that remain after the distribution required under paragraphs (1) and (2).
- (B) The Board shall use such funds and any proceeds from the investment of such funds pursuant to subsection (g) for—
  - (i) financing promotion, research, and consumer information plans and projects in accordance with this title;
  - (ii) such expenses for the administration, maintenance, and functioning of the Board as may be authorized by the Secretary;
  - (iii) accumulation of a reasonable reserve to permit an effective promotion, research, and consumer information program to continue in years when the amount of assessments may be reduced; and
  - (iv) administrative costs incurred by the Secretary to carry out this title, including any expenses incurred for the conduct of a referendum under this title.
- (4)(A) Each State's share of refunds shall be determined by multiplying the aggregate amount of refunds received by producers in such State by the percentage applicable to such State pursuant to paragraph (1)(A)(ii).
- (B) The National Pork Producers Council's share of refunds shall be determined by multiplying its applicable percent of the aggregate amount of assessments by the product of—
  - (i) subtracting from the aggregate amount of refunds received by all producers the aggregate amount of State share or refunds in every State determined pursuant to subparagraph (A), and
  - (ii) adding to that sum the aggregate amount of refunds received by importers.
- (d) No promotion funded with assessments collected under this subtitle may make—
  - (1) a false or misleading claim on behalf of pork or a pork product; or
  - (2) a false or misleading statement with respect to an attribute or use of a competing product.
- (e) No funds collected through assessments authorized by this section may, in any manner, be used for the purpose of influencing legislation, as defined in section 4911 (d) and (e)(2) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1954.
- (f) The Board shall—
  - (1) maintain such books and records, and prepare and submit to the Secretary such reports from time to time, as may be required by the Secretary for appropriate accounting of the receipt and disbursement of funds entrusted to the Board or a State association, as the case may be; and

(2) cause a complete audit report to be submitted to the Secretary at the end of each fiscal year.

(g) The Board, with the approval of the Secretary, may invest funds collected through assessments authorized under this section, pending disbursement for a plan or project, only in—

(1) an obligation of the United States, or of a State or political subdivision thereof;

(2) an interest-bearing account or certificate of deposit of a bank that is a member of the Federal Reserve System; or

(3) an obligation fully guaranteed as to principal and interest by the United States.

#### PERMISSIVE PROVISIONS

SEC. 1621. [7 U.S.C. 4810] (a) On the recommendation of the Board, and with the approval of the Secretary, an order may contain one or more of the following provisions:

(1) Each person purchasing a porcine animal from a producer for commercial use, and each importer, shall—

(A) maintain and make available for inspection such books and records as may be required by the order; and

(B) file reports at the time, in the manner, and having the content prescribed by the order, including documentation of the State of origin of a purchased porcine animal or the place of origin of an imported porcine animal, pork, or pork product.

(2) A term or condition—

(A) incidental to, and not inconsistent with, the terms and conditions specified in this subtitle; and

(B) necessary to effectuate the other provisions of such order.

(b)(1) Information referred to in subsection (a)(1) shall be made available to the Secretary and the Board as is appropriate or necessary for the effectuation, administration, or enforcement of this subtitle or an order.

(2)(A) Except as provided in subparagraphs (B) and (C), information obtained under subsection (a)(1) shall be kept confidential by officers or employees of the Department of Agriculture or the Board.

(B) Such information may be disclosed only—

(i) in a suit or administrative hearing involving the order with respect to which the information was furnished or acquired—

(I) brought at the direction or on the request of the Secretary; or

(II) to which the Secretary or an officer of the United States is a party; and

(ii) if the Secretary considers such information to be relevant to such suit or hearing.

(C) Nothing in this section prohibits—

(i) the issuance of a general statement based on the reports of a number of persons subject to an order, or statistical data collected therefrom, if such statement or data does not identify the information furnished by any person; or

(ii) the publication, by direction of the Secretary, of the name of a person violating an order, together with a statement of the particular provisions of the order violated by such person.

(c) A person who willfully violates subsection (a)(1) or (b) shall, on conviction, be—

(1) subject to a fine of not more than \$1,000 or imprisoned for not more than 1 year, or both; and

(2) if such person is an employee of the Department of Agriculture or the Board, removed from office.

#### REFERENDUM

SEC. 1622. [7 U.S.C. 4811] (a) For the purpose of determining whether an order then effect shall be continued during the period beginning not earlier than 24 months after the issuance of the order and ending not later than 30 months after the issuance of the order, the Secretary shall conduct a referendum among persons who have been pork producers and importers during a representative period, as determined by the Secretary.

(b)(1) Such order shall be continued only if the Secretary determines that such order has been approved by not less than a majority of the producers and importers voting in the referendum.

(2) If the continuation of such order is not approved by a majority of the producers and importers voting in the referendum, the Secretary shall terminate—

(A) collection of assessments under the order not later than 6 months after the date of such determination; and

(B) the order in an orderly manner as soon as practicable after the date of such determination.

(c) The Secretary shall be reimbursed from assessments collected by the Board for any expenses incurred in connection with a referendum conducted under this section or section 1623.

(d) A referendum shall be conducted in such manner as prescribed by the Secretary.

(e) A referendum to amend the initial order shall be conducted pursuant to this section.

#### SUSPENSION AND TERMINATION OF ORDERS

SEC. 1623. [7 U.S.C. 4812] (a) If after the initial referendum provided for in section 1622(a) the Secretary determines that an order, or a provision of the order, obstructs or does not tend to effectuate the declared policy of this subtitle, the Secretary shall terminate or suspend the operation of such order or provision.

(b)(1)(A) Except as provided in paragraph (2), after the initial referendum provided for in section 1622(a), on the request of a number of persons equal to at least 15 percent of persons who have been producers and importers during a representative period, as determined by the Secretary, the Secretary shall conduct a referendum to determine whether the producers and importers favor the termination or suspension of the order.

(B) The Secretary shall—

(i) suspend or terminate collection of assessments under the order not later than 6 months after the date the Secretary

determines that suspension or termination of the order is favored by a majority of the producers and importers voting in the referendum; and

(ii) terminate the order in an orderly manner as soon as practicable after the date of such determination.

(2) Except with respect to a referendum required to be conducted under section 1622, the Secretary shall not be required by paragraph (1) to conduct more than one referendum under this subtitle in a 2-year period.

(c) The termination or suspension of an order, or a provision of an order, shall not be considered an order within the meaning of this subtitle.

#### REFUNDS

SEC. 1624. [7 U.S.C. 4813] (a) Notwithstanding any other provision of this subtitle, prior to the approval of the continuation of an order pursuant to the referendum required under section 1622(a), any person shall have the right to demand and receive from the Board a refund of an assessment collected under section 1620 if such person—

(1) is responsible for paying such assessment; and

(2) does not support the program established under this subtitle.

(b) Such demand shall be made in accordance with regulations, on a form, and within a time period prescribed by the Board and approved by the Secretary, but not later than 30 days after the end of the month in which the assessment was paid.

(c) Such refund shall be made not later than 30 days after demand is received therefore on submission of proof satisfactory to the Board that the producer, person, or importer—

(1) paid the assessment for which refund is sought; and

(2) did not collect such assessment from another producer, person, or importer.

#### PETITION AND REVIEW

SEC. 1625. [7 U.S.C. 4814] (a)(1) A person subject to an order may file with the Secretary a petition—

(A) stating that such order, a provision of such order, or an obligation imposed in connection with such order is not in accordance with law; and

(B) requesting a modification of such order or an exemption from such order.

(2) Such person shall be given an opportunity for a hearing on the petition, in accordance with regulations issued by the Secretary.

(3) After such hearing, the Secretary shall make a determination granting or denying such petition.

(b)(1) A district court of the United States in the district in which such person resides or does business shall have jurisdiction to review such determination if a complaint for such purpose is filed not later than 20 days after the date such person receives notice of such determination.

(2) Service of process in such proceeding may be made on the Secretary by delivering a copy of the complaint to the Secretary.

(3) If a court determines that such determination is not in accordance with law, the court shall remand such proceedings to the Secretary with directions to—

(A) make such ruling as the court shall determine to be in accordance with law; or

(B) take such further proceedings as, in the opinion of the court, the law requires.

#### ENFORCEMENT

SEC. 1626. [7 U.S.C. 4815] (a)(1) A district court of the United States shall have jurisdiction specifically to enforce, and to prevent and restrain a person from violating an order, rule, or regulation issued under this subtitle.

(2) A civil action authorized to be brought under this subsection shall be referred to the Attorney General for appropriate action, except that the Secretary is not required to refer to the Attorney General a violation of this subtitle if the Secretary believes that the administration and enforcement of this subtitle would be adequately served by providing a suitable written notice or warning to a person who committed such violation or by administrative action under subsection (b).

(b)(1)(A) A person who willfully violates an order, rule, or regulation issued by the Secretary under this subtitle may be assessed—

(i) a civil penalty by the Secretary of not more than \$1,000 for each such violation; and

(ii) in the case of a willful failure to pay, collect, or remit an assessment as required by an order, an additional penalty equal to the amount of such assessment.

(B) Each such violation shall be a separate offense.

(C) In addition to or in lieu of such civil penalty, the Secretary may issue an order requiring such person to cease and desist from violating such order, rule, or regulation.

(D) No penalty may be assessed or cease-and-desist order issued unless the Secretary gives such person notice and opportunity for a hearing on the record with respect to such violation.

(E) An order issued under this paragraph by the Secretary shall be final and conclusive unless such person files an appeal from such order with the appropriate United States court of appeals not later than 30 days after such person receives notice of such order.

(2)(A) A person against whom an order is issued under paragraph (1) may obtain review of such order in the court of appeals of the United States for the circuit in which such person resides or does business, or in the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, by—

(i) filing a notice of appeal in such court not later than 30 days after the date of such order; and

(ii) simultaneously sending a copy of such notice by certified mail to the Secretary.

(B) The Secretary shall file promptly in such court a certified copy of the record on which such violation was found.

(C) A finding of the Secretary shall be set aside only if the finding is found to be unsupported by substantial evidence.

(3)(A) A person who fails to obey a valid cease-and-desist order issued under paragraph (1) by the Secretary, after an opportunity for a hearing, shall be subject to a civil penalty assessed by the Secretary of not more than \$500 for each offense.

(B) Each day during which such failure continues shall be considered a separate violation of such order.

(4)(A) If a person fails to pay a valid civil penalty imposed under this subsection by the Secretary, the Secretary shall refer the matter to the Attorney General for recovery of the amount assessed in an appropriate district court of the United States.

(B) In such action, the validity and appropriateness of the order imposing such civil penalty shall not be subject to review.

(c) The remedies provided in subsections (a) and (b) shall be in addition to, and not exclusive of, other remedies that may be available.

#### INVESTIGATIONS

SEC. 1627. [7 U.S.C. 4816] (a) The Secretary may make such investigations as the Secretary considers necessary—

(1) for the effective administration of this subtitle; or

(2) to determine whether a person subject to this subtitle has engaged, or is about to engage, in an act that constitutes, or will constitute, a violation of this subtitle or an order, rule, or regulation issued under this subtitle.

(b)(1) For the purpose of such investigation, the Secretary may administer oaths and affirmations, subpoena witnesses, compel their attendance, take evidence, and require the production of any records that are relevant to the inquiry.

(2) Such attendance of witnesses and the production of such records may be required from any place in the United States.

(c)(1) In the case of contumacy, or refusal to obey a subpoena, by a person, the Secretary may invoke the aid of a court of the United States with jurisdiction over such investigation or proceeding, or where such person resides or does business, in requiring the attendance and testimony of such person and the production of such records.

(2) The court may issue an order requiring such person to appear before the Secretary to produce records or to give testimony touching the matter under investigation.

(3) A failure to obey an order issued under this section by the court may be punished by the court as a contempt thereof.

(4) Process in such case may be served in the judicial district in which such person is an inhabitant or wherever such person may be found.

#### PREEMPTION

SEC. 1628. [7 U.S.C. 4817] (a) This subtitle is intended to occupy the field of—



(1) promotion and consumer education involving pork and pork products; and

(2) obtaining funds therefor from pork producers.

(b) The regulation of such activity (other than a regulation or requirement relating to a matter of public health or the provision of State or local funds for such activity) that is in addition to or different from this subtitle may not be imposed by a State.

(c) This section shall apply only during a period beginning on the date of the commencement of the collection of assessments under section 1620 and ending on the date of the termination of the collection of assessments under section 1622(a)(3) or 1622(b)(1)(B).

#### ADMINISTRATIVE PROVISION

SEC. 1629. [7 U.S.C. 4818] The provisions of this subtitle applicable to orders shall be applicable to amendments to orders.

#### AUTHORIZATION FOR APPROPRIATIONS

SEC. 1630. [7 U.S.C. 4819] (a) There are authorized to be appropriated such sums as may be necessary for the Secretary to carry out this subtitle, subject to reimbursement from the Board under section 1620(c)(3)(B)(iv).

(b) Sums appropriated to carry out this subtitle shall not be available for payment of an expense or expenditure incurred by the Board in administering an order.

#### EFFECTIVE DATE

SEC. 1631. [7 U.S.C. 4801 note] This subtitle shall become effective on January 1, 1986.

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### TITLE XVII—RELATED AND MISCELLANEOUS MATTERS

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#### Subtitle G—Miscellaneous

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#### WEATHER AND CLIMATE INFORMATION IN AGRICULTURE

SEC. 1762. [15 U.S.C. 8521] (a) FINDINGS.—Congress finds that—

(1) agricultural and silvicultural operations are vulnerable to damage from atmospheric conditions that accurate and timely reporting of weather information can help prevent;

(2) the maintenance of current weather and climate analysis and information dissemination systems, and Federal, State, and private efforts to improve these systems, is essential if agriculture and silviculture are to mitigate damage from atmospheric conditions;

(3) agricultural and silvicultural weather services at the Federal level should be maintained with joint planning be-

tween the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the Department of Agriculture; and

(4) efforts should be made, involving user groups, weather and climate information providers, and Federal and State governments, to expand the use of weather and climate information in agriculture and silviculture.

(b) **POLICY.**—It, therefore, is declared to be the policy of Congress that it is in the public interest to maintain an active Federal involvement in providing agricultural and silvicultural weather and climate information and that efforts should be made, among users of this information and among private providers of this information, to improve use of this information.

(c) **FUNCTIONS.**—The Under Secretary, acting through the Director of the National Weather Service and the heads of such other programs of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration as the Under Secretary considers appropriate, shall—

(1) collect and utilize information in order to make usable, reliable, and timely foundational forecasts of subseasonal and seasonal temperature and precipitation;

(2) leverage existing research and models from the weather enterprise to improve the forecasts under paragraph (1);

(3) determine and provide information on how the forecasted conditions under paragraph (1) may impact—

(A) the number and severity of droughts, fires, tornadoes, hurricanes, floods, heat waves, coastal inundation, winter storms, high impact weather, or other relevant natural disasters;

(B) snowpack; and

(C) sea ice conditions; and

(4) develop an Internet clearinghouse to provide the forecasts under paragraph (1) and the information under paragraphs (1) and (3) on both national and regional levels.

(d) **COMMUNICATION.**—The Director of the National Weather Service shall provide the forecasts under paragraph (1) of subsection (c) and the information on their impacts under paragraph (3) of such subsection to the public, including public and private entities engaged in planning and preparedness, such as National Weather Service Core partners at the Federal, regional, State, tribal, and local levels of government.

(e) **COOPERATION.**—The Under Secretary shall build upon existing forecasting and assessment programs and partnerships, including—

(1) by designating research and monitoring activities related to subseasonal and seasonal forecasts as a priority in one or more solicitations of the Cooperative Institutes of the Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research;

(2) by contributing to the interagency Earth System Prediction Capability; and

(3) by consulting with the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of Homeland Security to determine the highest priority subseasonal and seasonal forecast needs to enhance national security.

(f) **FORECAST COMMUNICATION COORDINATORS.**—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The Under Secretary shall foster effective communication, understanding, and use of the forecasts by the intended users of the information described in subsection (d). This shall include assistance to States for forecast communication coordinators to enable local interpretation and planning based on the information.

(2) REQUIREMENTS.—For each State that requests assistance under this subsection, the Under Secretary may—

(A) provide funds to support an individual in that State—

(i) to serve as a liaison among the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, other Federal departments and agencies, the weather enterprise, the State, and relevant interests within that State; and

(ii) to receive the forecasts and information under subsection (c) and disseminate the forecasts and information throughout the State, including to county and tribal governments; and

(B) require matching funds of at least 50 percent, from the State, a university, a nongovernmental organization, a trade association, or the private sector.

(3) LIMITATION.—Assistance to an individual State under this subsection shall not exceed \$100,000 in a fiscal year.

(g) COOPERATION FROM OTHER FEDERAL AGENCIES.—Each Federal department and agency shall cooperate as appropriate with the Under Secretary in carrying out this section.

(h) REPORTS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 18 months after the date of the enactment of the Weather Research and Forecasting Innovation Act of 2017, the Under Secretary shall submit to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation of the Senate and the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology of the House of Representatives a report, including—

(A) an analysis of the how information from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration on subseasonal and seasonal forecasts, as provided under subsection (c), is utilized in public planning and preparedness;

(B) specific plans and goals for the continued development of the subseasonal and seasonal forecasts and related products described in subsection (c); and

(C) an identification of research, monitoring, observing, and forecasting requirements to meet the goals described in subparagraph (B).

(2) CONSULTATION.—In developing the report under paragraph (1), the Under Secretary shall consult with relevant Federal, regional, State, tribal, and local government agencies, research institutions, and the private sector.

(i) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

(1) FOUNDATIONAL FORECAST.—The term “foundational forecast” means basic weather observation and forecast data, largely in raw form, before further processing is applied.

(2) NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE CORE PARTNERS.—The term “National Weather Service core partners” means government and nongovernment entities which are directly involved

in the preparation or dissemination of, or discussions involving, hazardous weather or other emergency information put out by the National Weather Service.

(3) SEASONAL.—The term “seasonal” means the time range between 3 months and 2 years.

(4) STATE.—The term “State” means a State, a territory, or possession of the United States, including a Commonwealth, or the District of Columbia.

(5) SUBSEASONAL.—The term “subseasonal” means the time range between 2 weeks and 3 months.

(6) UNDER SECRETARY.—The term “Under Secretary” means the Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere.

(7) WEATHER INDUSTRY AND WEATHER ENTERPRISE.—The terms “weather industry” and “weather enterprise” are interchangeable in this section and include individuals and organizations from public, private, and academic sectors that contribute to the research, development, and production of weather forecast products, and primary consumers of these weather forecast products.

(j) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There are authorized to be appropriated to carry out the activities under this section—

- (1) \$26,500,000 for fiscal year 2019;
- (2) \$27,000,000 for fiscal year 2020;
- (3) \$27,500,000 for fiscal year 2021;
- (4) \$28,000,000 for fiscal year 2022; and
- (5) \$28,500,000 for fiscal year 2023.

(k) DERIVATION OF FUNDS.—Amounts made available to carry out this section shall be derived from amounts appropriated or otherwise made available to the National Weather Service.

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#### CONFIDENTIALITY OF INFORMATION

##### SEC. 1770. [7 U.S.C. 2276]

(a) IN GENERAL.—In the case of information furnished under a provision of law referred to in subsection (d), neither the Secretary of Agriculture, any other officer or employee of the Department of Agriculture or agency thereof, nor any other person may—

(1) use such information for a purpose other than the development or reporting of aggregate data in a manner such that the identity of the person who supplied such information is not discernible and is not material to the intended uses of such information;

(2) disclose such information to the public, unless such information has been transformed into a statistical or aggregate form that does not allow the identification of the person who supplied particular information; or

(3) in the case of information collected under the authority described in paragraph (12) or (13) of subsection (d), disclose the information to any person or any Federal, State, local, or tribal agency outside the Department of Agriculture, unless the information has been converted into a statistical or aggregate

form that does not allow the identification of the person that supplied particular information.

(b)(1) In carrying out a provision of law referred to in subsection (d), no department, agency, officer, or employee of the Federal Government, other than the Secretary of Agriculture, shall require a person to furnish a copy of statistical information provided to the Department of Agriculture.

(2) A copy of such information—

(A) shall be immune from mandatory disclosure of any type, including legal process; and

(B) shall not, without the consent of such person, be admitted as evidence or used for any purpose in any action, suit, or other judicial or administrative proceeding.

(c) Any person who shall publish, cause to be published, or otherwise publicly release information collected pursuant to a provision of law referred to in subsection (d), in any manner or for any purpose prohibited in section (a), shall be fined not more than \$10,000 or imprisoned for not more than 1 year, or both.

(d) PROVISIONS OF LAW REFERENCES.—For purposes of this section, a provision of law referred to in this subsection means—

(1) \* \* \*

(11) section 2 of the Census of Agriculture Act of 1997;

(12) section 302 of the Rural Development Act of 1972 (7 U.S.C. 1010a) regarding the authority to collect data for the National Resources Inventory; or

(13) section 10109 of the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018.

(e) INFORMATION PROVIDED TO SECRETARY OF COMMERCE.—This section shall not prohibit the release of information under section 2(f)(2) of the Census of Agriculture Act of 1997.

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