

At a Glance:

Conservation Opportunities for:

-Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers

-Beginning Farmers and Ranchers

-Limited Resource Farmers and Ranchers

May 2008

Overview

The Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (2008 Farm Bill) continues to address the unique circumstances and concerns of socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers, as well as beginning and limited resource farmers and ranchers. It provides for voluntary participation, offers incentives, and focuses on equity in accessing U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) programs and services. Enhancements include streamlined delivery of technical and financial assistance; improved programs and services; and flexibility in decision making (with most decisions made at the Tribal, State, or local level).

Legislative Changes

The 2008 Farm Bill authorizes the Secretary of Agriculture to set aside:

- 5 percent of available Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) funds to assist beginning farmers or ranchers and 5 percent to assist socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers; and
- 5 percent of available Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) acres to assist beginning farmers or ranchers and 5 percent to assist socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers.

The Secretary is authorized to “repool” unused funds and acres set aside for these groups and make them available to all applicants.

The 2008 Farm Bill also authorizes the Secretary of Agriculture to provide up to 90 percent of the costs associated with planning and implementing conservation measures for socially disadvantaged and beginning farmers or ranchers. In addition, up to 30 percent of such payments may be provided in advance for purchasing materials or contracting.

Title II of the 2008 Farm Bill defines a socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher as “a member of a socially disadvantaged group whose members have been subjected to racial or ethnic prejudice because of their identity as members of the group without regard to their individual qualities.” This is a change from the definition used by USDA under the Consolidated Farm and Rural Development Act, which also includes gender in the definition.

More Information

For more information about these and other Farm Bill topics, please refer to the U.S. Department of Agriculture Web site <http://www.usda.gov/farmbill> or the Natural Resources Conservation Service Web site <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs>.

