



## Recommendations

July 6, 2005

Conservation Agriculture (CA) will conclude on Dec. 31, 2005. The lessons learned need to be carried forward, both to strengthen the relationship between production agriculture and conservation interests and to positively impact future farm legislation and policies. It is essential that the project's successes and challenges be shared with public policy makers, farm program administrators, elected officials and others in organizations and agencies involved in conservation, sustainable land use and other farm-related issues. CA has pointed to several actions that can be taken at the local, state and national levels. The following are based on the many intertwined experiences and results of the project. For more detail on these recommendations, please refer to the "Final Report on Conservation Agriculture."

### Local

- Locally led USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) boards can deliver effective conservation if given the right tools and opportunities. The NRCS should consider the following at the local, state, regional and national levels.
  - To keep a focus on the needs of farmers, board composition should include more local farmers than agency representatives.
  - The board needs to have real authority.
  - All agencies engaged in conservation delivery should be represented at the table.
  - Officers need to be elected, Robert's Rules of Order must be followed, and meetings should be held regularly.
  - Farmers on the board must be compensated for their time and travel similar to the agency representatives.
- Federal agencies with regulatory power over land, air, and water should have locally led boards with the interest and authority to resolve issues farmers face as result of the regulations.
- Soil Conservation Districts should be encouraged to broaden the scope of their interests, initiate education programs and endorse existing education programs by providing grants and scholarships.
- A follow-up study of CA should be conducted in three to five years to document the lasting impacts of the project.

## **State**

- North Dakota should develop and adequately fund conservation programs that encourage conservation practices that benefit farmers, their families, rural communities and the environment.
- The North Dakota Legislature should fully fund the state Waterbank Program and Adult Farm Management.
- The North Dakota Legislature should pass legislation that complements a new federal Farm Bill program. It should provide for Resource Analysis Teams to any farmer interested in the whole farm planning concept, especially beginning and young farmers.
- An Internet Technology program should be created with the NDSU Extension Service to provide technology advice and training to farm families.
- A program should be created within the NDSU Extension Service that offers a holistic approach to farm management and goal setting, such as the Quality of Life goal setting, evaluation and monitoring used in CA.
- Agencies that offer conservation programs should set incentive payment rates at levels that allow farmers to increase their conservation activities while maintaining or increasing their profits on enrolled acres.
- The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's new "Working Lands Program" should be strongly supported and appropriately funded.
- A feasibility study related to the development of a sequestered carbon marketing cooperative should be initiated.

## **Federal**

- Conservation programs that farmers like and use, such as the federal Waterbank Program, should be reinstated.
- The Conservation Security Program (CSP) should be properly implemented. CSP was instituted with the 2002 Farm Security and Rural Development Farm Bill, but the interim final rules that guide the program fall short of the legislation's intent.
- Farmers, conservationists and other interested parties should submit comments regarding the interim final rules for CSP that include lessons learned through CA whenever possible.