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Legislative Update

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House Farm Bill-Sec.12204 Natural Resource Conservation Service

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By David Wayne

The House Committee on Agriculture advanced H.R.8467, the Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2024 on May 23, 2024. Sec.12204 deletes a specific prohibition of delegation of authority included in the Department of Agriculture Reorganization Act of 1994. The 1994 Act included a prohibition on shifting the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) from FSA to the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). If enacted, Sec. 12204 would turn back 30 years of proven farm policy that balanced both production agriculture and conservation stakeholders.

It is important to highlight that the 1994 Act also prohibited the Environmental Quality Incentive Program from shifting from the NRCS to FSA. Sec. 12204 continues to protect the 1994 Act's prohibition on shifting the EQIP program.

Although the removal of the language does not automatically shift CRP from FSA to NRCS, it does empower the Secretary of Agriculture to determine the administrative fate of CRP. CRP is the most successful conservation program over the past 30 years. Its success can be attributed to being administered by FSA and the technical assistance being provided by NRCS. FSA retaining the administration of CRP would ensure its continued success.

Any shift of the administration of CRP away from FSA would eliminate input from locally elected FSA County Committees when determining CRP Rental Rates. During FSA's administration of CRP, the rights of the farm operators have been protected while landowners are determining the fate of agricultural land. FSA administration of CRP ensures that locally elected County Committee have a seat at the table to prevent rental rates increasing to levels that negatively impact the availability of farmland used for crop or livestock production. FSA has a proven track record in the administration of the highly successful CRP program with the resources and tools already in place.

Although H. R. 8467 has passed the House Agriculture Committee, it has yet to be considered by the full House of Representatives. In addition, the Farm Bill provisions have yet to be considered by the Senate Agriculture Committee for advancement to the Senate. The Legislative Team is continuing to monitor the removal of the language in Sec.12204 that prohibited the shifting of CRP away from FSA.

The Legislative Team encourages our members to continue to educate stakeholders on the vital role that FSA plays in the administration of CRP.

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