

## Prioritizing Resources to Meet Water Quality Goals

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The agricultural industry is challenged with meeting the increased production demand for food, fiber, and feed while reducing the environmental impact on water quality. This national assessment highlights five focus areas critical to achieving water quality goals through the advancement of agricultural conservation.

### **Encourage collaborative-based, conservation initiatives that engage private industry and address broader societal benefits to gain wide-scale momentum and sustain long-term impact.**

- Conservation adoption often competes with other regional-based agricultural priorities, such as profitability.
- Water quality programs must engage private industry organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other supply chain companies, while considering incentives for downstream ecological enhancement.

### **Develop rural and urban partnerships to advance conservation while building unity and an understanding that water resources are connected and shared within a watershed community.**

- Water quality improvement rests on conservation programs that are cost-effective in achieving benefits for the expenditures, whether publicly or privately funded.
- Nutrient trades between regulated downstream point source entities and private landowners implementing conservation practices with public benefits, creates economic incentives to improve water quality.
- Ecological services could be provided by those who traditionally made their living on the land; which will demand the creation of new institutions that can bring sellers and buyers together, reduce transaction costs, overcome barriers, and navigate the regulatory regime.



### **Support shared-access to multidisciplinary data spanning environments, timescales, treatments, and management to encourage proper scaling the effectiveness and impact of conservation practices and systems.**

- Water quality practice effectiveness data are region-specific, variable within and across location and year, crop dependent, and influenced by study scale.
- Critical research questions around agriculture, climate, and sustainability, have become increasingly complex and require a coordinated, multifaceted approach for developing new knowledge and understanding.

### **Build regional and local technical assistance capacity to ensure that federal and state conservation programs and initiatives are successful and that implemented practices are properly sited, designed, installed, and maintained.**

- Adequate and consistent funding to support NRCS field staff and build local capacity of soil and water conservation professionals is critical to the successful advancement and long-term effectiveness of conservation implementation.
- Public-private partnerships for providing technical service and outreach can be an efficient way to promote the use of conservation programs and practices, improving the turnaround times from program enrollment to project implementation.

### **Establish farmer-led groups and opportunities for farmers to get to know their regional conservation representatives to increase awareness of relevant environmental issues, share experience on conservation management, and build trusted relationships.**

- Water quality program success is dependent upon willing landowners to implement conservation or nutrient management.
- Farmer familiarity of regional water quality program goals and efforts has the largest impact on conservation adoption.
- Non-operating landowners (NOLs, own approximately 40% of US farmland) are often unaware of conservation practice incentives and benefits; these properties have lower adoption of conservation than owner-operated properties.

To view the complete report text, visit <https://sandcountyfoundation.org/news/publications>.  
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