



2018 Farm Bill Policy Recommendations

WALT supports the national Land Trust Alliance's **Farm Bill Policy Recommendations**. The following three are a priority for Washington state:

Authorize Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) at \$500 million/year

ACEP funding decreased sharply in the 2014 Farm Bill, leaving Washington with significantly higher demand for funds than is available for working agricultural land protection and threatening state and local match for projects. Average annual funding for the three programs that combined to create ACEP (Wetlands Reserve Program, Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program, and Grassland Reserve Program) was around \$732 million from 2009-2012. Yet since 2014, average ACEP funding is only \$405 million – a **32% decrease**. Even more alarming, ACEP funding will drop to \$250 million in FY18 -- 66% less than the previous average. It is critically important that ACEP is authorized at least \$500 million per year.

Help new and beginning farmers access land through use of "Buy-Protect-Sell"

The high cost of purchasing land is a significant problem for new and beginning farmers. The "buy-protect-sell" model is a useful tool being used help these farmers access land. It allows a participating entity to buy agricultural land; protect it with a permanent easement so it cannot be developed; and then sell the land for ag value to a farmer. Currently, participating entities are not allowed to use the "buy-protect-sell" concept using ACEP-Agricultural Land Easement (ALE) dollars. Participating entities should be able to apply for ACEP-ALE funding for lands under the "buy-protect-sell" concept, with the clarification that an entity cannot hold an easement on land it owns in fee.

Remove ALE Plan as part of the minimum deed terms

The ALE program needs to be streamlined to ease administrative burdens and provide flexibility for producers, land trusts, and NRCS. The result would save the federal government significant time and money, while making the process easier and timelier. It often takes over a year to complete this easement process.

One of the more onerous burdens for Washington is the inclusion of an ALE plan in the easement. Prior to the 2014 Farm Bill, an ALE plan was only required in certain cases, including for highly erodible lands and grassland management. Now, NRCS requires the development of a robust and comprehensive ALE plan, such as a plan at the NRCS Resource Management System (RMS) planning level, which could include both required and recommended practices. ALE plans should be removed from part of the actual easement (by removing section 1265B(b)(4)(C)(iv) of the ACEP rule).