



**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE
U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE
FIELD HEARING IN WICHITA, KANSAS
AUGUST 25, 2011**

**Ronald Brown, President
Kansas Association of Conservation Districts**

I am Ronald Brown, Board President of the Kansas Association of Conservation Districts, and I am pleased to have the opportunity to provide testimony on the 2012 Farm Bill on behalf of our organization.

Kansas is currently facing a significant drought in 66 of our 105 counties, with the southwest part of the state being ranked as an "exceptional drought area" by the U.S. Drought Monitor, the highest ranking on the scale. Kansas farmers and ranchers now faced with the worst conditions in decades understand all too well the frustration and sense of futility that their predecessors felt when the lack of rainfall in the thirties turned the Great Plains into a giant Dust Bowl.

But the key difference between the Dirty Thirties and today is the improved farming and soil conservation practices that prevent wind erosion and keep the Great Plains from experiencing the dust storms that plagued the area back then.

It is critically important not only to the state's economy but also to our quality of life that effective farming and soil conservation practices remain a high priority. Partnerships on the local, state and federal level are essential for coordinating and streamlining these efforts.

The 2012 Farm Bill should be developed to ensure those partnerships and coordination of effort. To that end, KACD urges consideration of the following:

- Encourage landowners and operators to apply conservation practices appropriate for their operations that will permit them to maintain economic viability, while maintaining and improving their natural resources. Farm Bill conservation programs should be resource-driven and locally led with sufficient flexibility to allow funding to be directed to local priorities and concerns.
- Provide technical assistance funding to generate a broad range of soil, water, air, and habitat benefits. The Conservation Technical Assistance Program and each of the Farm Bill conservation programs are necessary to implement conservation practices that achieve proper land and water management. CTA funding allows NRCS to provide the local assistance and planning efforts conservation districts need to promote conservation to their local producers.
- Fully fund NRCS to meet the growing need for technical assistance to deliver Farm Bill conservation programs, coordinating with conservation districts, technical service providers, and other partners.

- Fund the 2012 Farm Bill conservation programs at or above 2008 Farm Bill levels and identify opportunities to streamline and improve efficiency within the program options.
- Ensure that the delivery system for conservation programs is easily accessible for conservation program customers. The signup process must be simple, easy to understand, completed with reasonable effort, and reach a broad customer audience. We support continuous signup for USDA conservation programs as well as consolidating NRCS Farm Bill conservation programs to improve efficiency, simplify the application process, and better utilize available program funding.
- Conservation programs must provide a balance of support for both those that set land aside for conservation priorities and those that provide incentives and cost share for working lands. Given the projected increase in world population, programs must provide assistance to implement or maintain conservation practices on working lands that produce much-needed food, feed, fuel, and fiber.
- Farm Bill Conservation Title funds should supplement conservation district efforts to provide education and outreach to landowners, producers, and the general public. Again, CTA funding is critical to allowing NRCS to provide locally targeted and needed assistance.
- Reducing on-farm energy consumption and developing renewable energy production is critically important for American agriculture and forestry.

Technologies such as wind, solar, anaerobic digestion, biomass, cellulosic biofuels, ethanol, biodiesel, and other yet-to-be developed technologies are key features of sustainable agriculture and forestry. Incentives should be provided to encourage implementation of new and sustainable energy production.

- Much work remains to be done to complete PL-566 small watershed district projects. Fund all phases of the program to plan, install, and rehabilitate structures that protect our fragile farm lands. This is not the time to ignore the devastating impacts of floods and the associated costs to our nation's agricultural economy.

In closing, we would urge Congress to, at a minimum, maintain the mandatory conservation funding levels as agreed to in the 2008 Farm Bill so that conservation programs aimed at providing critical assistance to farmers, ranchers, and other landowners to address local resource issues will continue to benefit us all with improved air and water quality and soil health. Let's honor the memory of our past to build a better future. Thank you for your time.