



## NSAC Advocacy in Support of Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers

The National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC) is an alliance of grassroots organizations that advocates for federal policy reform to advance the sustainability of agriculture, food systems, natural resources, and rural communities. NSAC works on an array of programs and projects that benefit society as a whole, including minorities and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers. NSAC's work focusing specifically on supporting these communities includes the following programs, projects, and campaigns.

### *2008 Farm Bill Programs Advocated by NSAC*

**Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP)** – NSAC developed the legislative proposal that created BFRDP, including the funding set-aside, in the 2002 Farm Bill. This competitive grant program administered by USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture funds education, extension, outreach, and technical assistance. BFRDP reserves 25 percent of its annual funding for projects serving limited-resource and socially disadvantaged groups, including minority, immigrant, and women farmers and ranchers. NSAC led the charge to fund the program in the 2008 Farm Bill. BFRDP totals \$75 million in mandatory funding for 2009-12.

**Outreach & Assistance for Socially Disadvantaged Farmers & Ranchers Program** – NSAC supports this program, also known as "Section 2501" Program, and has often included it in our annual agricultural appropriations campaign. It provides grants to a variety of institutions and organizations that work with minority farmers to successfully acquire, own, operate, and retain farms and ranches. The program is administered by USDA's Office of Advocacy and Outreach, a new office designed to enhance the viability and profitability of small farms and ranches, beginning farmers or ranchers, and socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers. OASDFR totals \$75 million in mandatory funding for 2009-12.

**Value-Added Producer Grants Program (VAPG)** – NSAC helped to create VAPG in 2000 and developed successful legislative campaigns to improve the program in 2002 and 2008. VAPG provides competitive grants designed to start value-added producer-owned businesses. Our successful advocacy included the addition in the 2008 Farm Bill of priority status for projects that increase opportunities for socially disadvantaged agricultural producers. In addition to the priority status, there is a ten percent funding set-aside for projects benefiting beginning or socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers. NSAC frequently champions the program in our agricultural appropriations campaign. The program currently receives about \$20 million in annual appropriations.

**Conservation Set Asides** – In the 2008 Farm Bill, NSAC successfully advocated for set asides, which reserves certain amounts of funding for socially disadvantaged farmers, in both the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP).

**EQIP:** The conservation set aside mandates that five percent of the \$7.325 billion in EQIP funding for the 2008 Farm Bill cycle be reserved for socially disadvantaged farmers, totaling \$366 million if fully utilized.

**CSP:** Of the 13 million acres enrolled in CSP each year, the conservation set aside program requires that five percent be made available for socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers. This totals approximately \$58 million per year, or about 3.25 million acres of sustainably-managed lands over the life of the farm bill. CSP also guarantees a minimum payment of \$1,000 to socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers in any fiscal year that a contract's payment amount total is less than \$1,000.

**Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)** – NSAC successfully supported EQIP's cost-share and advance payment provision. EQIP is a voluntary conservation program administered by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service that offers financial cost-share and technical assistance to farmers or ranchers who implement conservation practices on agricultural working land. EQIP provides increased cost-share assistance to beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers; cost-share rates are 25 percent above the applicable rate that otherwise applies, up to 90 percent of the practice costs. In addition, these groups are eligible to receive up to 30 percent of their payment in advance to help pay for upfront costs for materials and contracting.

**Conservation Reserve Program – Transition Incentives Program (CRP-TIP)** – NSAC developed this program option and helped steer it through the legislative and regulatory process. CRP-TIP offers a special incentive of two years of extra CRP rental payments to owners of land that is currently in the CRP but returning to production who rent or sell to beginning or socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers who will use sustainable grazing practices, resource-conserving cropping systems, or transition to organic production.

**Conservation Loan Program** – NSAC developed the original language for the Conservation Loan program back in 1990 and helped push the socially disadvantaged farmer priority language during consideration of the 2008 renewal of the program. The program provides loans for the costs of establishing conservation practices, including conservation buffers, planting trees, or building hoop houses. The 2008 amendment treats socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers as well as beginning farmers and ranchers as priority applicants for these loans.

**Loan Fund Set-Asides** – NSAC championed loan fund target rates for beginning farmers, while also playing a supporting role in target participation rates for socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers. Loan Fund Set-Asides work to raise the participation rates of socially disadvantaged, minority, and women farmers and ranchers in the direct and guaranteed farm ownership and operating loan programs. The Loan Fund Set-Asides also give priority to socially disadvantaged farmers to purchase land acquired by the government through foreclosures, also known as “inventory”: eligible farmers and ranchers are given first priority to purchase these properties at their appraised market value during the first 135 days the land is on the market.

**Down Payment Loans** – NSAC developed and successfully advocated for beginning farmer down payment loans in the early 1990s to assist with first time farmland purchases. In the 2008 Farm Bill, we supported a variety of improvements to the program as well as expansion to include socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers whether beginners or not.

#### *Other NSAC Activities and Campaigns*

**Pigford II Discrimination Suit Settlement** – NSAC supports the ongoing efforts of African-American farmers to secure the Pigford II Settlement, a \$1.25 billion settlement for a class-action lawsuit brought against USDA for outstanding discrimination claims. NSAC has signed on to letters to Congress supporting funding and a speedy resolution of this on-going lawsuit, and has engaged in separate direct advocacy on the matter during consideration of the 2008 Farm Bill and on a continuous basis since then.

**Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE)** – NSAC has made supporting SARE and seeking funding for the program a priority since it was created in 1988. At the national level, SARE offers resources of relevance to socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers. Each of SARE’s four regions maintains individual projects and programs of relevance for socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers. For example, North Central SARE hosts a “Circle of Sustainability” committee which calls for and manages grant work exclusively with Native Americans; Southern SARE provides for sustainable community innovation grants that have helped minority communities, institutions and producers create new economic opportunities; and Western SARE has extensive indigenous agriculture outreach and programming in the Pacific Islands.

**Farm to School Program** – NSAC’s advocacy also benefits consumers, nutrition, and public health. This includes on-going support of the national Farm to School Program, which connects K-12 schools with local farms in order to improve school lunches, and gives priority to grants to school districts with higher free and reduced price lunch populations. In alliance with the Community Food Security Coalition and other supporters, we developed the revised language for the authorization of Farm to School, including the priority for low-income schools, during consideration of the Child Nutrition Act reauthorization in 2010, and launched the campaign to secure mandatory funding for the program.

**Grassroots Guide to the 2008 Farm Bill** – NSAC offers excerpts of its Grassroots Guide to the 2008 Farm Bill in Spanish (<http://sustainableagriculture.net/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/NSAC-Advocacy-Summary-Socially-Disadvantaged-Farmers-and-Ranchers-10-22-10.pdf>), in an effort to improve accessibility and enable Spanish-speaking farmers and ranchers to take increased advantage of Farm Bill programs.