



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 15, 2018

Contact: Leigh
Claffey
Press@Ernst.Senate.Gov

Senators Introduce Bipartisan Bill to Protect Rural Economies Through Conservation Reform

Bipartisan bill refocuses conservation spending on marginal land, ensures greater access to beginning young farmers and ranchers

WASHINGTON, D.C. — U.S. Senator Joni Ernst (R-IA), along with fellow members of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry, including Senators Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Chuck Grassley (R-IA), and Bob Casey (D-PA), today introduced the Give Our Resources the Opportunity to Work (GROW) Act of 2018. This bipartisan legislation refocuses conservation spending on marginal cropland to benefit soil health, water quality and wildlife habitat, while protecting rural economies and ensuring greater farmland access for beginning young farmers and ranchers.

“As I travel across Iowa each year, I hear concerns from producers about how the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) has strayed from its congressional intent of targeting and removing environmentally sensitive land from agricultural production,” said Senator Ernst. “Rather, large parcels, sometimes whole farms, of productive farmland are being enrolled into CRP as a result of low commodity prices and high yearly rental payments. As a result, many beginning young farmers are having difficulty accessing farmable acres, which is hampering our efforts to engage the next generation. By revising and strengthening the current provisions of CRP, the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the GROW Act will restore the intent of these programs while helping farmers and ranchers protect soil and water resources.”

“This bipartisan bill is good for farmers, it’s good for taxpayers, and it’s good for water quality and the environment,” said Senator Brown.

“Conservation of America’s natural resources is critical for successful farming operations, increased agricultural productivity and quality food and energy production,” said Senator Grassley. “Healthier farmland equals a healthier America. The next Farm Bill must address preserving our soil and water and ensure that farm programs accomplish the goals we give them. I’m happy to join this effort by Senator Ernst to make

sure we spend our conservation dollars in the most efficient way to maximize the goals of programs like CRP while minimizing distortions in land markets.”

“The next Farm Bill must focus our limited conservation dollars on the most environmentally sensitive lands, help farmers and ranchers achieve better soil health and water quality and improve access to land and USDA resources for young and beginning farmers,” **said Senator Casey**. “This bill does just that. I’m pleased to join with my colleagues from Iowa and Ohio on a bipartisan bill that will strengthen the farm economy while improving the health of the environment.”

Specifically, the GROW Act:

- Makes most prime farmland and class I, II, III land ineligible for CRP enrollment
- Maintains CRP right-sized at 24 million acres and precludes whole farm enrollment into the program.
- Levels the playing field for beginning farmers looking to access farmland by limiting general sign-up CRP rental rates.
- Protects rural economies by reforming how much county cropland can be enrolled in CRP.
- Establishes a new CLEAR (Clean Lakes, Estuaries, and Rivers) option within continuous CRP (CCRP) to better promote water quality.
- Maintains annual enrollment for CSP and funding for EQIP.
- Directs USDA to submit a report on land access, tenure and transition.

The full text of the GROW Act can be found [here](#).

###