



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.

*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, and 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 and will be advocating to increase mandatory funding for this program in the upcoming farm bill.

Outreach & Assistance for Socially Disadvantaged Farmers & Ranchers Program (OASDFR) – 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, and NSAC will be advocating for reauthorizing this program in the upcoming farm bill.

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, and gives priority to projects that increase opportunities for socially disadvantaged agricultural producers. NSAC frequently champions the program in our agricultural appropriations campaign, and currently VAPG receives about \$20 million in annual appropriations. NSAC is currently advocating to retain the priority and set aside for projects benefitting socially disadvantaged farmers and to establish increased mandatory funding for the program.

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). 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. In the upcoming farm bill, NSAC is advocating to increase these conservation set-asides for socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers from five percent of EQIP funding and 5 percent of CSP acres, to ten percent for each program.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) – NSAC successfully supported EQIP's cost-share and advance payment provision in the 2008 Farm Bill. 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 and an advance payment option to beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers to pay for upfront costs for materials and contracting. NSAC is advocating for continuing both of these options, increasing the limit on advance payments for socially disadvantaged farmers, and including socially disadvantaged farmers in Conservation Innovation Grant projects.

Conservation Reserve Program – Transition Incentives Program (CRP-TIP) – NSAC developed this program option and helped steer it through the legislative and regulatory process in the 2008 Farm Bill. 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 production practices. NSAC is advocating for continuing and strengthening this program in the upcoming farm bill.

* For more information, see *Local Farms, Food, and Jobs Act (S. 1773, H.R. 3286)* and *Beginning Farmer and Rancher Opportunity Act (H.R. 3236)*

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, and gives priority to socially disadvantaged farmer and rancher loan applicants. NSAC is advocating for reauthorizing this program in the upcoming farm bill, raising the guarantee amount for socially disadvantaged applicants, and tightening farm size requirements.

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 administered by USDA’s Farm Service Agency. NSAC is advocating that these target rates be continued in the upcoming farm bill. These set asides also give priority to socially disadvantaged farmers to purchase land acquired by the government through foreclosures, by giving them first priority to purchase these properties at their appraised market value during the first 135 days the land is on the market, and NSAC supports renewing this priority.

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. In the upcoming farm bill, NSAC will be advocating to increase the limit on the size of the land value that can be financed under this program to help beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers afford to purchase land in areas with high real estate values.

Specialty Crop Block Grant Program – NSAC is currently advocating that this program specify that State plans be balanced and ensure an equitable distribution of grants across the full array of specialty crop agriculture, including production by socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers. We are also encouraging the Secretary of Agriculture to consider expanding the program to include traditional foods of federally recognized Indian tribes and other minority communities.

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 ongoing lawsuit, has engaged in separate direct advocacy on the matter during consideration of the 2008 Farm Bill, and applauds the recent court decision to approve the settlement which will allow as many as 68,000 African-American farmers to apply for monetary relief who previously filed discrimination claims.

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, and each of SARE’s four regions maintains individual projects and programs targeted at 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 ongoing 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, National Farm to School Network, and other supporters, NSAC 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, which will be scheduled to begin with the start of Fiscal Year 2013 (October 1, 2012).

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.