



## SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE COALITION

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### **Statement on General Accounting Office Conservation Compliance Report**

The U.S. General Accounting Office late yesterday released a report entitled "Agricultural Conservation: USDA Needs to Better Ensure Protection of Highly Erodible Cropland and Wetlands" that found inconsistent implementation, weak oversight, and rampant waivers of penalties with respect to USDA's efforts to enforce the 1985 farm bill's conservation measures to protect highly erodible cropland and agricultural wetlands

"The GAO report documents the failure of USDA to enforce the social contract established by the past four farm bills," said Ferd Hoefner, Washington Representative for the Sustainable Agriculture Coalition. "This contract conditions receipt of federal farm benefits on attainment of minimal standards for erosion control and wetland preservation. While substantial progress has been made since 1985 on decreasing erosion and slowing wetland loss, it is sad commentary that 18 years later nearly half of NRCS field offices do not fully implement the requirements and a majority of FSA county committee waivers are not adequately documented and justified. More importantly, that 27 percent of land subject to conservation compliance continues to erode at the unacceptably high average rate of 24 tons per acre is a direct threat to our long-term food security."

The GAO report recommends a variety of steps for NRCS and FSA to increase oversight, improve training, enhance monitoring, and better consistency of enforcement.

"The new GAO report helpfully details the enormous discrepancies in enforcement activity from state to state and county to county," said Hoefner. "It is unfair to farmers in states and counties which pay attention to the law that other areas look the other way. It is also unfair to the majority of farmers who are upholding their end of the social contract that those who do not are unlikely to suffer any consequences. This report should serve as a wake up call to USDA. The culture of increasing indifference to conservation compliance, which has been building since 1996, needs to be reversed."

The Coalition represents farm, rural, and conservation organizations that advocate public policies supporting the long-term economic and environmental sustainability of agriculture, natural resources and rural communities.

The US GAO report may be found at [www.gao.gov](http://www.gao.gov)