

New 2008 Farm Bill Opportunities for Family Forest Owners Get Involved at the Local and State Level

The 2008 Farm Bill, passed by Congress in June 2008, gives the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), an agency of U.S. Department of Agriculture, new and improved programs to help family forest owners conserve and manage their forests. Through these new programs, qualifying landowners can receive both technical and financial assistance to deal with forest management concerns like wildfire, insects and disease, and wildlife management.

To make sure these new programs actually work on the ground, **FOREST OWNERS NEED TO PARTICIPATE AND SPEAK UP** at local working group and state committee meetings. These meetings will help decide how the Farm Bill programs are implemented.

For a summary of the Farm Bill and to learn more about the new and improved programs for family forest owners visit www.treefarmssystem.org/actionalerts.

HOW NRCS PROGRAMS ARE IMPLEMENTED

Landowners can influence the process by attending and participating in local work groups and State Technical Committees - two bodies that advise NRCS State Conservationists on the implementation of certain NRCS programs in the state. NRCS State Conservationists are the federal agency employees in charge of NRCS programs in each state.

State Technical Committees and local work groups influence many programs that are important to forest owners. These programs include: the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, the Conservation Stewardship Program, the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program, and the Healthy Forests Reserve Program.

Because of changes in the 2008 Farm Bill, each State's Technical Committee must include spokespersons for family forest owners. This is an important opportunity for people like you to serve on your state committee and influence program implementation.

State Technical Committees and local work groups advise NRCS State Conservationists on conservation issues in the state, help set state priorities for conservation program funding, and make conservation program policy recommendations. With forest owner involvement, forest issues can be brought to the table for funding and program consideration.

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

Local Work Groups: To participate at the local level, contact your local Soil and Water Conservation District Office, likely located at your local USDA service center. You can find your local USDA Service Center by visiting <http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app>.

State Technical Committees: To participate in your State Technical Committee take the following steps to get involved.

1. Contact your NRCS State Conservationist and ask whether they now have representation of family forest owners on the Committee. You can find a listing of the State Conservationists and more information about joining your State Technical Committee at www.treefarmssystem.org/actionalerts.
2. If there is an opening for family forest owner representation on your State's Technical Committee, coordinate with the leadership of your State Tree Farm Committee to get a family forest owner representative on the Committee. To find the contact information for your State Tree Farm Committee visit www.treefarmssystem.org/stateleaders.
3. Even if you are not appointed as an official member of your State Technical Committee, you can still attend Committee meetings, which are open to the public.

STAY INVOLVED

Want to stay involved in Farm Bill activities or other policy issues affecting family forest owners?

Join our Grassroots Action Network!!

Why should I join the Grassroots Action Network?

- Stay on top of the latest public policy issues impacting family forests
- Get timely alerts so you can influence public policy when the time is right
- Get training, tools, and tips on effective advocacy

How do I join? It's simple, just go to www.treefarmssystem.org/grassrootsnetwork and enter your contact information.

Please direct your questions to:

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The American Forest Foundation (AFF) is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) conservation and education organization that strives to ensure the sustainability of America's family forests for present and future generations. Our vision is to create a future where North American forests are sustained by the public which understands and values the social, economic, and environmental benefits they provide to our communities, our nation, and our world.

The American Tree Farm System is a program of the American Forest Foundation.