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U.S. SENATOR *for* COLORADO

The Small Farm Conservation Act

U.S. Senator Michael Bennet (D-Colo.)

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In addition to providing our nation's food supply, farmers and ranchers are important managers of our natural resources. The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is a voluntary conservation program that offers farmers and ranchers financial cost-share and technical assistance to implement conservation practices on working agricultural lands. EQIP assistance is available through a general pool, and also through special initiatives.

Producers managing small farms or ranches find it difficult to access federal conservation programs and face discrepancies because payment rates are based on acreage, while much larger agricultural operations receive greater financial resources. Today, small farmers who wish to undertake soil health practices have to dedicate the same time and effort as larger farms to access EQIP while only receiving a fraction of the benefit.

The **Small Farm Conservation Act** modifies EQIP to create a new subprogram dedicated to helping small farmers and ranchers access and receive adequate financial and technical assistance. A small farmer is defined as having a farm or herd smaller than the median farm or herd size in the State. In Colorado, the median farm size is 67 acres.

Specifically, the **Small Farm Conservation Act** would:

- Create a subprogram within EQIP tailored to support small farms and ranches;
- Establish a National subprogram Coordinator and one in each State;
- Streamline the application and approval processes for small farmers and ranches;
- Create a bonus payment for farmers under 50 acres employing soil health practices;
- Allow small farmers to enroll on a continuous basis instead of waiting for the annual ranking period; and
- Require the Natural Resources Conservation Service to train field staff on conservation tailored for small-scale agriculture and to conduct outreach to small-scale farmers and ranchers.