

# ASTA Supports Protecting the Environment

The land and our environment play critical roles in the success of America's farmers. They depend on nature for their livelihood and realize it must be protected. The right seeds in the right location are an important part of any conservation plan. The American Seed Trade Association supports efforts through a variety of different tools and programs in order to leave the land even better for the next generation.

## Strong Conservation Programs

ASTA advocates for investments in locally-driven, flexible and efficient conservation programs that provide producers the financial and technical assistance needed to conserve our nation's most precious resource. Our members recognize the need to save money. However, the reductions to conservation program funding in the 2014 Farm Bill are a concern.

### RECOMMENDED ACTION:

- ❖ Continue to invest in effective conservation programs.

## Expanding Adoption of Cover Crops

Working lands conservation is an important element for sustainable growth of agriculture in order to feed an increasing global population. Significant use of cover crops in production agriculture is one of the most promising practices to address both the stewardship of our soils and nutrient reduction in our environment. A current estimate is that roughly 1.5 million acres of cover crops were grown in the Mississippi River Basin between 2011-2012.

Commitments, such as that of USDA's Natural Resource Conservation Service's Soil Health Initiative, will help expand the acreage of farm land using cover crops.

### RECOMMENDED ACTION:

- ❖ Support greater coordination between USDA's NRCS and Risk Management Agency to ensure insurance regulations do not undermine broader adoption of cover crops.
- ❖ USDA should facilitate education and outreach for growers on the importance of cover crops.

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## ASTA Supports Protecting the Environment (continued)

### Funding for the USDA-NRCS Plant Material Centers

The network of 25 Plant Material Centers across the country seek out and test plants and plant technologies that restore and sustain healthy natural regional ecosystems. A key function of the centers is to evaluate plants for conservation traits and make these materials available to commercial growers who provide plant materials to the public.

The Plant Material Centers can play a key role in expanding the availability of new cover crop solutions by evaluating both existing conservation and new species and varieties to determine the best adapted ones in different areas of the country and with different cropping systems. Current funding is \$9.4 million.

#### RECOMMENDED ACTION:

- ❖ ASTA recommends that the USDA-NRCS Plant Material Centers be fully-funded at \$14.5 million.

### Rational Seed Procurement Policies for the Bureau of Land Management

ASTA members specialize in supplying native seeds to the Bureau of Land Management in post fire reclamation projects. However, we recommend changes be made to BLM procurement policies. Changes could include: more proactive planning and purchasing of seed by BLM, allowing known introduced species to be used in fire reclamation and permitting USDA's ARS and NRCS to continue being the lead on long-term studies to determine appropriate varieties through the Plant Material Centers.

#### RECOMMENDED ACTION:

- ❖ ASTA recommends changes be made to BLM procurement policies in order to save taxpayer funds without jeopardizing fragile ecologies.

#### **ASTA suggests the following language be included in the FY2015 Interior Appropriations bill:**

*Seed Procurement Procedures.—The Committee is concerned that seed procurement procedures and priorities are duplicative and add unnecessary costs to Bureau programs. The Committee instructs the Bureau to establish a system to publicly communicate its yearly estimated seed needs by variety. The Committee also recommends the Bureau give a higher priority to the most cost-effective and readily available seed varieties in its purchasing decisions where appropriate. The Bureau is encouraged to coordinate with the Plant Material Centers at the Natural Resources Conservation Service and Agricultural Research Service in making such determinations.*