



## Western Governors' Association Policy Resolution 2017-09

### *Western Agriculture*

#### A. BACKGROUND

1. Agriculture and forestry in the western states and territories are significantly different than in other regions of the country. We have greater variations in soil, climate, terrain, commodities and production practices, and water availability.
2. Farms, forests, and rangelands are important contributors to the economies and quality of life of western states. Among other important values, western agricultural and forest lands are primary sources of open space, wildlife habitat, water supplies, and diverse rural economic opportunities in the recreation, food, fiber, energy and bio-based product industries.
3. Trade promotion plays an important role in ensuring that western agricultural products and food have an opportunity to compete with products produced and subsidized internationally.
4. Western states have seen some of the most significant increases in per-capita veteran populations since 2000, including surges in returning veterans under the age of 25. It is estimated that nearly 25 percent of all veterans live in rural areas. These veterans have slightly lower rates of employment compared to veterans living in urban areas and to their non-veteran rural colleagues.
5. Responsible management of federal lands is a significant concern for Western Governors. Western states include more than 75 percent of our national forest and rangeland ecosystems. These public lands serve as critical economic drivers, and they provide numerous conservation benefits, water supply, and recreational opportunities for Western communities and the nation.
6. The West's network of land-grant universities and colleges, including Cooperative Extension Service programs, continue to provide national leadership in research to develop more resilient seeds and crops, manage soil health, advance technology deployment in the bio-based economy and conduct on-farm research experiments that help farmers and ranchers be more effective and efficient.
7. Western Governors recognize that nutrition assistance programs can meet the needs of children and the most vulnerable, while creating economic opportunity across the

agriculture supply-chain from the store where food is purchased, all the way back to the farm. Western Governors acknowledge recent efforts to reduce rates of nutrition program fraud and abuse, deliver programs under budget, and improve program effectiveness.

8. Many agricultural producers in the West rely on irrigation water delivery systems that are shared among multiple producers and operated by an irrigation district, canal company, or mutual ditch company.

## **B. GOVERNORS' POLICY STATEMENT**

1. Western Governors support funding for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Market Access and Foreign Market Development Programs to promote opportunities for western producers to increase export revenues and encourage trade agreements that maximize benefits for the West's farmers, ranchers and forest landowners.
2. Western Governors support adequate funding for the USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBGP) that provides critical research, education, and promotion tools to the fruit and vegetable producers.
3. Western States have experienced sharp declines in farm income and farm prices since 2013. Western Governors support a farm safety net that recognizes past deficit reduction contributions of the agricultural sector and maintains funding for other key commodity, conservation, crop insurance, research, energy, and export promotion programs. In particular, Western Governors note that the Conservation title of the 2014 Farm Bill contributed to deficit reduction, saving taxpayers \$6 billion by consolidating 23 programs into 13, streamlining and targeting delivery to farmers, ranchers, and foresters. Western Governors support farm bill funding levels based on need rather than baseline budget targets.
4. Western Governors encourage the expansion of programs that can meet the unique educational, training, technical and financial needs of new, beginning and veteran farmers and ranchers and other USDA programming that can help returning veterans develop and expand business opportunities in rural communities.
5. Western Governors continue to support collaborative, targeted and voluntary conservation to address locally identified natural resource issues for farm, range, and forest resource concerns on private and public lands, such as soil health, air and water quality, drought and wildfire resilience, wildlife habitat conservation and invasive species. Western Governors support the role of conservation title programs in providing voluntary solutions to threatened and endangered species, water quality impairments, groundwater recharge, and other regulatory concerns potentially facing producers.

6. Western Governors support an increase in the role that state and local governments have in managing public lands for multiple uses, including agriculture.
7. Western Governors continue to urge Congress to provide a comprehensive solution for the current approach to budgeting for wildland fire for the Departments of Interior and Agriculture. Any fire budget solution must address the chronic problem of the rising costs of wildfire and the complicating problem of mid-season budget transfers when appropriated funding becomes insufficient. A comprehensive fix is needed to address capacity constraints and allow for a predictable program of work for agencies to fulfill their management responsibilities.
8. Western Governors acknowledge significant progress toward achieving forest restoration goals by using authorities granted in the 2014 Farm Bill. Western Governors support permanent authorization of the Insect and Disease designation provisions of section 602 of the 2014 Farm Bill and the elimination of project constraints from section 603 for condition class or fire regimes outside of the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI). Western Governors also support creating additional flexibility to Good Neighbor Authority to address conflicting language on road construction and reconstruction and the uses of program income. The lack of flexibility restricts opportunities for states to partner in shared stewardship work across boundaries.
9. Within the context of comprehensive wildland fire budget reform, existing law and forest plans, Western Governors support the use of new tools to streamline environmental analysis to increase the pace and scale of restoration activities. Specifically, Western Governors support creation of a new pilot program to prioritize landscape-scale environmental analysis for restoration projects envisioned over geographies greater than 100,000 acres. This pilot program should allow for predictable project-scale implementation and adaptive management. Western Governors believe federal agencies should develop guidance to build consistency in environmental analysis and bring agency practice in conducting environmental assessments (EAs) more in line with the administrative policy intent of streamlined, summary documents. Western Governors affirm that Congress should resolve outstanding issues with potential requirements to reinstate endangered species consultations following the adoption, amendment or revision of an appropriate management plan.
10. Western Governors support Congress establishing a restoration categorical exclusion (CE) based on a record of analysis from the past five years of projects where agency analysis and a decision recognized a finding of no significant environmental impact. Western Governors support allowing federal agencies to analyze only the action and no-action alternatives when a project is collaboratively developed, unless a third alternative is proposed during scoping and meets the purpose and need of the project. Western Governors also support rewarding successful implementation of collaborative projects

through funding, retained-receipt authority, or other capacity to pursue subsequent projects.

11. Western Governors support efforts to expand research funding to address drought, a changing climate and extreme weather risks facing western producers.
12. Western Governors encourage the effective use of extension and other partnerships to deliver practical tools, technologies and information to farmers, ranchers and forest landowners.
13. Nutrition assistance programs should continue to allow flexibility for states to respond to unique economic conditions, serve all eligible participants without drastically reducing benefits, and encourage continued pursuit of transparency and accountability in program administration.
14. Western Governors support changes to Conservation Title programs that remove existing contracting barriers for western producers, and make the Farm Bill's conservation title programs more accessible and relevant to western producers and their associations.
15. Western Governors support coordinated state and federal action to expand markets for wood products that can achieve forest and rangeland restoration objectives and foster rural employment and income opportunities. Western Governors support coordinated financing and grant support from USDA Rural Development programs and the USDA Forest Service to advance wood product business development, infrastructure, and demonstration products in the areas of mass timber construction and biomass energy.
16. Western Governors support the USDA, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) and Agriculture Research Service (ARS). APHIS works in partnership with state departments of agriculture to monitor, prevent and control infestations of invasive pests and diseases and curtail or minimize wildlife conflicts, which can cause widespread environmental and economic damage and safety hazards. APHIS works in cooperation with other federal agencies, states, territories, counties and private entities to implement management programs. ARS conducts research to develop and transfer solutions to agricultural problems of high national priority, and shares information to ensure high quality, safe food and other agricultural products. ARS research helps sustain a competitive economy; enhance the natural resource base and the environment; provide economic opportunities for rural communities and society as a whole, and; provide the necessary infrastructure to create and maintain a diverse workplace.
17. Western Governors support the continued efforts of the Rural Utilities Service to provide financial assistance for drinking water, wastewater facilities and broadband connectivity in rural and remote areas, particularly in communities that have minimal or

no such infrastructure. Expanding broadband access to rural America will allow citizens to compete in a global market and have access to IT health care, education and public safety resources.

18. Western Governors support the recommendations identified over the course of the WGA National Forest and Rangeland Management Initiative, and incorporate those recommendations related to the reauthorization of the Agricultural Act into this resolution by reference.

**C. GOVERNORS' MANAGEMENT DIRECTIVE**

1. The Governors direct WGA staff to work with Congressional committees of jurisdiction, the Executive Branch, and other entities, where appropriate, to achieve the objectives of this resolution.
2. Furthermore, the Governors direct WGA staff to consult with the Staff Advisory Council regarding its efforts to realize the objectives of this resolution and to keep the Governors apprised of its progress in this regard.

*Western Governors enact new policy resolutions and amend existing resolutions on a bi-annual basis. Please consult [www.westgov.org/resolutions](http://www.westgov.org/resolutions) for the most current copy of a resolution and a list of all current WGA policy resolutions.*