



United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary
Washington, D.C. 20250

JAN 30 2015

Mr. Dan Wogsland
Executive Director
North Dakota Grain Growers Association
2401 46th Ave SE., Suite 204
Mandan, North Dakota 58554

Dear Mr. Wogsland:

Thank you for your letter, cosigned by your partners, regarding your concerns about the Ducks Unlimited (DU) agreement with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and NRCS often seek to leverage resources and increase our effectiveness by partnering with non-governmental organizations (NGO), as well as with local, State, and Federal agencies. We seek partnerships with entities sharing our goals of voluntary, incentive-based conservation and land stewardship.

The North Dakota NRCS contribution agreement with DU leverages Federal funds with partner funds to increase conservation technical assistance for the agriculture producers in North Dakota who want to voluntarily participate in USDA's conservation programs. Staff members, who are trained and supervised by NRCS staff, were added through this partnership. They are required to follow all of the same ethical and security protocols that are required of NRCS employees, such as protection of personal information and ethical behavior. In addition, conservation planning and assistance in field offices has strong oversight and quality assurance processes in place through daily supervision by NRCS, spot checking of technical practices, and quality assurance reviews of contracts and programs. DU partner staff has been in place for many years with no concerns being expressed by those assisted or identified by NRCS supervisors.

DU partner employees provide technical assistance in the delivery of USDA programs, such as the Conservation Reserve Program and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, assisting producers with voluntary conservation efforts. DU employees have no involvement in the Conservation Compliance provisions of the Farm Bill, such as wetland determinations or other compliance activities.

Over the past few years, NRCS in North Dakota has obligated \$90 million dollars per year to benefit agriculture producers through an array of voluntary programs, and there continues to be a backlog of requests. NRCS uses agreements like the one with DU to meet this demand for conservation assistance delivery. USDA and NRCS closely monitor all of our agreements to ensure that we meet our objectives. I believe that partnerships with a diverse group of voices can be beneficial to the long-term sustainability of natural resources and agriculture.

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Again, thank you for writing and expressing your concerns about this issue. We value our partnership with the North Dakota Grain Growers Association and other NGOs, and we take your concerns seriously. We want to ensure that our work is meeting North Dakota's agricultural conservation objectives. An identical letter will be sent to your partners.

Sincerely,



Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary