

April 7, 2026

Mr. Garrett Unger  
Policy Advisor  
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Washington, DC 20250  
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Submitted via email

Subject: Agricultural Group Comments Regarding Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Revised Conservation Practice Standards (CPS)

Dear Mr. Unger:

The undersigned state and national agricultural organizations appreciate the opportunity to provide comments to the NRCS on several proposed revisions to CPS available for early review as noted in the March 18, 2026 meeting NRCS held on the topic and as detailed on the NRCS website at <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/getting-assistance/conservation-practices>.

The undersigned organizations are members of the Agricultural Nutrient Policy Council (ANPC), which is a coalition of over 50 state and national agricultural trade associations and agribusinesses focused on water quality. The undersigned, or their members, own and operate farming or ranching operations, organizations or businesses that support and service these operations. In doing so, they help farmers and ranchers produce and bring to market row crops, specialty crops, livestock and poultry, and help ensure that safe and affordable food, fiber and fuel is provided to Americans across the United States. The undersigned organizations appreciate NRCS giving stakeholders an early opportunity to review and provide comment on these specified CPS. In general, we support the suggested revisions, but we do offer the following comments and considerations:

### **1. General**

It is our hope that, in evaluating proposed CPS changes, NRCS will endeavor to evaluate any and all opportunities to increase flexibility of the CPS, while at the same time ensuring equivalent natural resource benefits. Increased flexibility will allow for site-specific conservation planning, additional farmer and rancher innovation, and economic feasibility at the farm gate. Further, we welcome NRCS improvements to the CPS that clarify intent and function of practices and preserve professional engineering and technical judgment in design criteria, but we caution NRCS to avoid expanding unnecessarily prescriptive design requirements. Maintaining practical, achievable requirements for manure, waste, and nutrient-related practices should be a high priority for NRCS in this set of revisions. Finally, we encourage NRCS to clearly distinguish between mandatory CPS criteria and programmatic, regulatory, or guidance-level provisions.

## **2. Composting Facility (CPS 317)**

ANPC supports revisions that clarify operating expectations for composting facilities but recommends several adjustments to improve practicality and adoption.

- The requirement for “all weather access” should be removed from mandatory criteria and retained only as a consideration. In many cases, farmers and ranchers can responsibly operate composting facilities without constructing permanent access roads, and this requirement may unnecessarily increase costs.
- Language related to moisture management should be softened to reflect site-specific conditions (e.g., using “may need” rather than “must”).
- Timber-related requirements are more appropriately addressed under roof and cover standards and should be removed from this CPS.

ANPC acknowledges that increasing separation distances from 50 to 100 feet aligns with many state manure storage requirements. While this change may enhance water protection, NRCS should acknowledge regional variation and ensure this requirement does not unintentionally limit composting adoption where equivalent protection can be demonstrated through site-specific design.

## **3. The Conservation Crop Rotation (CPS 328)**

The revised Conservation Crop Rotation standard largely maintains continuity with the prior version while providing additional flexibility. ANPC supports allowing multi-species cover crops to count toward crop diversity requirements, particularly where rotations are designed to increase soil organic matter. Additionally, the suggested changes may encourage broader adoption of diversified systems and emerging harvested crops, including third crops that do not fit neatly within existing CPS categories.

ANPC also notes that allowances for summer fallow under certain objectives remain unchanged and appropriate given climatic and regional constraints.

## **4. Energy Related Practices (CPS 372, 374, 670)**

ANPC strongly recommends reconsidering requirements that mandate destruction of replaced engines or equipment. While preventing double dipping is a valid concern, mandatory destruction is wasteful and may discourage participation.

ANPC suggests alternative approaches, such as reduced payment rates where replaced equipment is reused or resold, which would preserve program integrity while avoiding unnecessary material disposal.

## **5. Waste Treatment Lagoon (CPS 359)**

ANPC supports removal of the cover requirement for Waste Treatment Lagoons and encourages NRCS to explicitly reinforce this change as a positive update.

ANPC recommends revising the definition and explanatory language to more clearly distinguish treatment lagoons from waste storage facilities, emphasizing biological treatment functions and performance considerations (e.g., BOD reduction, nutrient stabilization, odor control). Clear differentiation supports better design decisions and program understanding.

## **6. Cultural Resources Language (Multiple CPS)**

ANPC does not support inclusion of detailed cultural resource evaluation language within individual Conservation Practice Standards. Compliance with federal, state, tribal, and local laws is already addressed through the conservation planning and programmatic review process. Embedding these requirements within CPS text risks creating confusion and inconsistency without providing additional protection.

## **7. Alley Cropping (CPS 311)**

The Alley Cropping standard provides broad discretion regarding species selection and row spacing, which ANPC supports. However, adoption of this practice may be limited by requirements that functionally localize design parameters better addressed through guidance or state-specific specifications rather than the national standard.

ANPC also recommends clarifying harvest allowances. The standard references coppicing for periodic harvest but does not provide clear guidance on whether or how trees may otherwise be harvested. Explicitly recognizing harvest as an allowable management objective would improve adoption and economic feasibility while remaining consistent with conservation goals.

## **8. Herbaceous Weed Treatment (CPS 315)**

ANPC finds the qualifying criteria for herbaceous weed treatment insufficiently defined. The standard would benefit from clearer thresholds or descriptors regarding weed presence or impact that warrant treatment. Greater clarity would improve consistency in application and reduce uncertainty for producers and planners.

## **9. On-Farm Secondary Containment (CPS 319)**

ANPC recommends several revisions to improve feasibility and environmental effectiveness:

- Requiring pipe connections to be located exclusively at the top of tanks is unnecessarily restrictive and unrelated to secondary containment performance. Many tanks are designed for gravity flow or require accessible connections for maintenance.
- Detailed calculations related to seasonal high-water tables should be removed from mandatory criteria. Foundation design should instead be described as site-specific and soil dependent.
- A three-foot separation between tanks should be included as a consideration rather than a fixed design requirement.
- Requirements related to impermeable barriers beneath piping should be replaced with language requiring liquid tight pipes and connections, which better reflects functional risk control.

#### **10. Combustion System Improvement (CPS 372)**

ANPC opposes requirements mandating destruction of replaced power plants. While preventing double payment is appropriate, mandatory destruction is wasteful and discourages participation.

NRCS should consider reduced payment rates or documentation safeguards for reused equipment rather than requiring destruction of serviceable assets.

#### **11. Energy Efficient Operation (CPS 374)**

Similar to CPS 372, ANPC recommends eliminating requirements that replaced equipment be destroyed. Alternative compliance approaches would maintain program integrity while avoiding unnecessary material waste.

#### **12. Controlled Traffic Farming (CPS 334)**

The considerations section includes language implying significant equipment reconfiguration that may exceed what is necessary to address soil compaction concerns. ANPC recommends streamlining this language to focus on the establishment and maintenance of traffic lanes.

Additionally, restrictions on tillage depth following lane establishment should specify duration (e.g., life of the practice or defined timeframe) to avoid ambiguity.

#### **13. Well Decommissioning (CPS 351)**

The standard should clarify whether a licensed well driller is required in all decommissioning scenarios or only when contamination is suspected. As currently written, the standard contains conflicting statements that could hinder implementation.

#### **14. Field Border (CPS 386)**

ANPC believes adoption may be limited by language encouraging field borders around the entire field perimeter. Conservation objectives related to erosion, sediment, and nutrients can often be achieved by targeting borders to specific field edges or sensitive areas.

Additionally, while grazing is now conditionally allowed, potential financial disincentives may still limit use. Regional variation in widths and plant species should continue to be addressed through state guidance rather than national standards.

#### **15. Silvopasture (CPS 381)**

The revised standard now focuses primarily on shade and shelter objectives. ANPC notes that broader ecological functions, such as windbreak or wildlife habitat, may be addressed under other standards.

As with Alley Cropping, adoption may be limited by highly localized spacing and species requirements better managed through guidance rather than national criteria.

### **16. Irrigation Canal or Lateral (CPS 320)**

ANPC does not offer comments on this standard, as it is outside the organization's primary focus on nutrient and water quality outcomes.

### **17. Monitoring Well (CPS 353)**

ANPC shares concerns that requiring installation exclusively by licensed well drillers may create participation barriers in states with less stringent well codes. NRCS should clarify whether this requirement is driven by regulatory necessity or documentation preferences.

### **18. Short Term Storage of Animal Waste (CPS 318)**

ANPC supports ongoing clarification efforts for this standard but recommends the following:

- Replace “cannot be land applied” with “cannot be readily agronomically utilized due to weather or cropping conditions.”
- Reconsider solids content thresholds for stacking or provide graduated design criteria based on percent solids and demonstrated stackability.
- Revise site selection criteria that assume conservative baseline stacking dimensions, allowing design ranges tied to material characteristics.

ANPC also recommends restoring language recognizing cropping conditions (in addition to weather) as valid constraints on daily land application.

### **19. Irrigation Ditch Lining (CPS 428)**

ANPC questions inclusion of energy reduction documentation requirements within this standard, particularly when categorized as “additional criteria.” Such documentation is more appropriately addressed in guidance or statements of work for energy focused programs.

### **20. Irrigation Water Management (CPS 449)**

Additional criteria related to soil health objectives introduce expectations that may be difficult to quantify or verify within the standard itself. ANPC recommends relocating such requirements to guidance documents or program specific scopes of work to preserve clarity.

### **21. Mulching (CPS 484)**

The added consideration regarding competitive non-target plants is acceptable as advisory language. ANPC supports allowing professional judgment in assessing these risks without mandating prescriptive responses.

### **22. Stripcropping (CPS 585)**

ANPC recommends clarifying whether the requirement for “two strips” refers to individual strips or strip sets, as interpretations may conflict with modern equipment widths and field dimensions. Additionally, the standard should clarify whether all strips must be the same width.

### **23. Pest Management for Conservation Systems (CPS 595)**

ANPC recommends reconsidering use of mitigation point tables tied exclusively to implementation of other NRCS standards. Utilizing performance-based metrics similar to those in supporting technical notes may better reflect actual benefit and preserve flexibility.

### **24. Annual Forages for Grazing Systems (CPS 513)**

Annual soil testing requirements appear more restrictive than in comparable standards. Additionally, criteria requiring adherence to a grazing management plan should clarify whether an approved plan is mandatory or whether the practice may be implemented as part of a grazing system more generally.

### **25. Livestock Pipeline (CPS 516)**

Stricter velocity, sediment, and pressure requirements may reduce design flexibility without clear justification. ANPC recommends allowing discretion by qualified engineers, including Professional Engineers, to determine appropriate specifications.

### **26. Pumping Plant (CPS 533)**

Energy efficiency criteria included under this standard may be more appropriately addressed under energy specific conservation practices. ANPC recommends reevaluating placement to maintain clarity of purpose.

### **27. Spring Development (CPS 574)**

ANPC notes expanded language on minimizing wetland impacts but maintains that wetland compliance requirements are already addressed through planning and regulatory processes. Standards should avoid duplicating programmatic compliance obligations.

### **28. Saturated Buffer (CPS 604)**

Achieving a minimum 5% drainage capacity may be impractical in many settings. ANPC recommends allowing alternative evaluation methods, such as published design approaches, where the threshold cannot be achieved.

### **29. Water Well (CPS 642)**

ANPC recommends including procedures or guidance for situations in which all planning steps are followed but a dry or insufficient well results to provide clarity for participants and planners.

### **30. Waste Treatment (CPS 629)**

Operating cost analyses and monitoring requirements are more appropriately addressed as considerations rather than mandatory criteria. These determinations should remain at the discretion of the producer and designer.

### **31. Waste Separation Facility (CPS 632)**

ANPC recommends retaining design language clarifying that settling basins should not be used for scraped manure storage while allowing liquid management flexibility. This language improves clarity without reducing adaptability.

### **32. Waste Recycling (CPS 633)**

ANPC supports expanded testing provisions in principle but notes that accepted and feasible testing methods for certain contaminants (e.g., microplastics) may not currently exist. NRCS should reference validated methodologies where required.

ANPC also recommends revising language related to wildlife attractants to avoid attempting to infer producer intent, which may be impractical to demonstrate.

### **33. Energy Efficient Lighting (CPS 670)**

ANPC does not support requirements mandating destruction of removed equipment and recommends alternative compliance approaches consistent with other energy standards.

### **34. Energy Efficient Building Envelope (CPS 672)**

The minimum R value requirement for livestock housing curtains is too restrictive given commercially available products. ANPC recommends allowing a lower R value threshold or an energy analysis alternative to balance feasibility and performance.

### **35. Amendments for Treatment of Agricultural Waste (CPS 591)**

ANPC recommends:

- Including “Ecological Information” as a required Safety Data Sheet component.
- Revising approval language to clarify that products must be approved by the NRCS State Conservation Engineer, not NRCS as a manufacturer.
- Clarifying performance comparison requirements by specifying pollutant concentration or volume metrics.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide these early comments. We would welcome the opportunity to answer any questions you might have about these comments or if further clarification is needed. If you should have any questions, please contact Lauren Lurkins, Senior Advisor to the ANPC at [lauren@lurkinsstrategies.com](mailto:lauren@lurkinsstrategies.com) or (309) 530-0398.

Sincerely,

American Farm Bureau Federation  
American Horse Council  
American Soybean Association  
Illinois Corn Growers Association  
Illinois Farm Bureau  
Iowa Farm Bureau  
Michigan Farm Bureau  
Minnesota Agricultural Water Resource Center  
Missouri Farm Bureau Federation  
National Cattlemen’s Beef Association  
National Corn Growers Association  
National Council of Farmer Cooperatives  
National Pork Producers Council

North Carolina Farm Bureau Federation  
Ohio AgriBusiness Association  
Ohio Corn & Wheat Growers Association  
The Fertilizer Institute  
U.S. Poultry & Egg Association  
United Egg Producers