

1 An Act

2 Relating to the United States Department of Agriculture for the  
3 purposes of implementation of production-scale best management  
4 practices in the agricultural sector which will result in water  
5 conservation and/or improvements in water quality, water  
6 resources, ~~reductions in ground water withdrawals and~~  
7 improvements in water quality, water resources, and ecology. The  
8 initiative is to provide block grant funding to State  
9 Departments of Agriculture that provide funding incentives to  
10 agricultural landowners for the implementation of best  
11 management practices or similar certifications as defined as,  
12 Agricultural best management practices are actions that  
13 agricultural producers can take to conserve water and maintain  
14 or improve water quality. These practices are based on sound  
15 science, are technically feasible, and economically viable. The  
16 initiative shall be implemented by the Natural Resources  
17 Conservation Service through the Environmental Quality  
18 Incentives Program Sec. 2207 Conservation innovation grants and  
19 payments. Each State Department of Agriculture will be  
20 responsible for the oversight and implementation ~~quantifying and~~  
21 ~~regulating the effectiveness~~ of best management practices and  
22 associated programs as adopted within their respective state.  
23 Agricultural landowners adopting State Departments of  
24 Agriculture approved best management practices or similar  
25 certifications designed to reduce water use and improve water  
26 quality, water resources, and ecology shall be deemed in  
27 compliance with federal regulatory authority and exempt from  
28 further federal regulation where these measures or practices  
29 have been adopted by rule within the state receiving federal  
30 block grants. The State Departments of Agriculture shall ensure  
31 through written notification to the Secretary of the United  
32 States Department of Agriculture as to whether the proposed

33 activity qualifies for the exemption. This exemption does not  
34 expand the jurisdiction of any federal agency, does not allow  
35 for additional federal rules or monitoring requirements and is a  
36 voluntary program for all agricultural landowners, it ~~and~~ does  
37 not apply to activities that discharge dredged or fill material  
38 into waters of the United States, including wetlands, subject to  
39 federal jurisdiction under s. 404 of the federal Clean Water  
40 Act, 33 U.S.C. s. 1344. The purpose of the initiative is to  
41 expedite the implementation of production-scale, best management  
42 practices or similar certifications through precision  
43 agriculture within the agricultural sector which will result in  
44 reductions in ground water withdrawals and improvements in water  
45 quality, water resources, and ecology. The initiative shall be  
46 implemented by the Natural Resources Conservation Service in  
47 cooperation with all State Departments of Agriculture. The  
48 United States Department of Agriculture through the Natural  
49 Resources Conservation Service will delegate this authority to  
50 States where these measures or practices have been adopted by  
51 rule within the state receiving federal block grants. Each State  
52 Departments of Agriculture will be encouraged to promote and  
53 expanded conservation practices, such as soil and moisture  
54 sensors and other irrigation improvements, water-saving  
55 equipment, best management practices to include third party  
56 certifications which meet or exceed current government best  
57 management practices, if in place, and software technologies  
58 that can achieve verifiable water conservation and water quality  
59 improvement by providing this data through report(s) or online  
60 resources. Beginning in the 2019 fiscal year, Congress shall  
61 annually provide revenue through the Environmental Quality  
62 Incentives Program for block grants to all State Departments of  
63 Agriculture for the purposes of providing revenue assistance for  
64 the development of alternative water supplies, conservation

65 projects, and best management practices and certifications in  
66 precision agriculture that result in quantifiable water savings  
67 and water quality Improvement. At the beginning of each fiscal  
68 year, beginning with the 2019 fiscal year, such revenues shall  
69 be distributed by the Natural Resources Conservation Service  
70 into trust fund accounts for the purpose of the implementation  
71 of production-scale, best management practices and  
72 certifications in precision agriculture. Not later than December  
73 31, 2020, and every two years thereafter, the Secretary shall  
74 submit to the Committee on Agriculture of the Senate and the  
75 Committee on Agriculture of the House of Representatives a  
76 report on the status of projects funded under this section,  
77 including—(1) funding awarded; (2) project results; and (3)  
78 incorporation of project findings, such as new technology and  
79 innovative approaches, into the conservation efforts implemented  
80 by the Secretary. The amendments made by this subtitle shall not  
81 affect the validity or terms of any contract previously entered  
82 into by the Secretary of Agriculture.