



# A Call to Action: How to Use \$4 Billion for Source Water Protection

A farmer and a drinking water utility manager are strolling down a country road, and they stumble upon what appears to be a genie bottle. The utility manager pops the cork from the bottle, and sure enough, a genie appears. The genie, grateful for his freedom, says he will grant two wishes—one for the farmer and one for the utility manager.

The farmer does not hesitate: “I wish for a productive agricultural operation, so I can feed our community and provide for my family.”

Then the genie turns toward the utility manager, who says, “I, too, want to provide for our community. But I want to provide safe drinking water, so—” he pauses and then says, “I wish that my source water supplies would be higher in quality and free from the nutrient runoff that comes from those productive agricultural operations.”

Perplexed, the genie paces back and forth, and finally declares, “I’ve determined that I can grant both your wishes. But we will need two things—first, a spirit of collaboration between you, and second, \$4 billion from the US Department of Agriculture.”

Okay, maybe it did not happen exactly like that. But this much is true: Water utilities have an unheard-of opportunity to partner with the agricultural community to protect source water supplies, and the USDA is providing \$4 billion of funding over the next 10 years toward this effort.

We all know how excess nutrients, sediments, and chemicals can become part of runoff and negatively affect the quality of drinking water sources. This concern motivated AWWA to advocate for a farm bill that emphasizes collaboration between farmers and utilities and directs significant dollars to partnerships that protect drinking water supplies. The Agriculture Improvement Act (a.k.a. the Farm Bill) does both of these things.

To take advantage of this golden opportunity, utilities need to engage with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), which is part of the USDA. The first step utilities should take is to contact their state conservationist to explain their interest in source water protection and to ask what the agency is doing for source water protection in the area. State conservationists’ contact information can be found at the NRCS website ([www.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov)).

Nationally, NRCS has 3,100 field offices, covering all 50 states and most US territories. That means there are dedicated professionals working with the agricultural community in and around your watershed. By connecting with these professionals, you can begin the process of seeking opportunities to protect your source water through this new collaboration.

This is a historic moment for source water protection. This new funding creates an extraordinary opportunity for farmers, utilities, and their customers.

AWWA began to engage in the Farm Bill process over two years ago. We asked Congress to recognize the intimate relationship between smart farming practices and high-quality drinking water. It was a long conversation, with hundreds of meetings between AWWA utilities, staff, and elected leaders. Ultimately, Congress passed a bill with all of AWWA’s requests intact.

Now it is our turn to act. Our call to action—and the best way to thank Congress and the USDA for enacting the new source water protection measures—is to protect source water by leveraging every penny of the \$4 billion over the next 10 years. And the call to action starts with a call to your state conservationists. Make that call. That is my wish.

<https://doi.org/10.1002/awwa.1264>

## Resources

- Listing of NRCS contacts by state: [www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/contact/states/](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/contact/states/)
- A utility guide to USDA tools to support source water protection: [www.awwa.org/Portals/0/AWWA/Government/USDASWPreport.pdf?ver=2018-06-27-110553-577](http://www.awwa.org/Portals/0/AWWA/Government/USDASWPreport.pdf?ver=2018-06-27-110553-577)
- A whiteboard animation video describing nutrient runoff and the Farm Bill: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=kPEdoWgc4Gg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kPEdoWgc4Gg)
- AWWA contact: Adam Carpenter, [acarpenter@awwa.org](mailto:acarpenter@awwa.org)