

Nagle blasts Bush administration on conservation

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By **SCOTT GRAU**
Courier Staff Writer

Rep. Dave Nagle lashed out at the Bush administration last week for failing to seek adequate funding for conservation programs.

"This may well be our last, best attempt to preserve the concept of voluntary conservation programs," Nagle, a Democrat and member of the U.S. House Agriculture Committee, said at a breakfast meeting of the Cedar Valley Ag Leaders in Waterloo.

Nagle warned that failure to fund voluntary conservation efforts might increase the pressure for mandatory environmental protection when the current Farm Bill expires in 1995. He said farm groups should take the lead in pushing the administration to fund such programs.

His warnings echoed comments he had made before the U.S. House Agriculture Committee's subcom-

mittee on Wheat, Soybeans and Feed Grains, when Nagle charged that the administration had ignored Congressional intent by failing to seek enough funds and watering down rules and regulations.

"It almost appears, Mr. Chairman, that the USDA is intentionally trying to make the programs ineffective and almost impossible to participate in, so that they can phase them out," Nagle told the subcommittee last month.

Nagle told the Waterloo breakfast group that the U.S. Department of Agriculture had requested funds to enroll just 5 percent of the 10 million acres that Congress had intended for the Water Quality Incentive Program; just half of the 1 million acres Congress intended in the Wetlands Reserve Program and just 20 percent of the 15 million to 20 million acres that Congress wanted under the Integrated Farm Manage-

ment Program Option.

By failing to seek enough funds to make those programs work, the administration is undermining the incentive approach to conservation and environmental protection, Nagle said.

He warned that the USDA's "tepid implementation" of the voluntary soil and water conservation programs "threatens to unravel a historic compromise" reached by farmers and environmentalists during the drafting of the 1990 Farm Bill.

Nagle pointed out that environmental groups had wanted mandatory farm conservation and had proposed a complete ban on farming wetlands, even in dry years.

Other mandatory proposals had included a licensing requirement before using pesticides, immediate loss of farm program eligibility for any violation of conservation rules, and more federal supervision of

conservation compliance.

"The compromise in the 1990 Farm Bill established an agreement between all those concerned, those who make their livelihood from the land and those who are concerned about the quality of the environment," Nagle said.

If the administration doesn't want to fund voluntary incentive programs, farmers won't participate, "and those with legitimate concerns about the environment will demand mandatory programs when the next farm bill is drafted," he said. "Those of us who fought to secure voluntary incentive-based programs now have an obligation to insist that they be given a fair chance to work."

Nagle said he will ask the House Appropriations Committee next week to fully fund the 1990 Farm Bill soil and water conservation programs at the levels intended by Congress.