**AGRICULTURE DATA ACT OF 2018 (ADA)**

**Senator John Thune**

**2018 Farm Bill Program Designed to Enable Conservation Data Access and Analyses**

**Background**

For several decades farm bills have authorized conservation programs, including the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and multiple others that have incentivized farmers to utilize or install conservation practices on their land.

These conservation practices include planting cover crops, no-till and minimum-till farming activities, and multi-year plantings of permanent vegetative cover, and incentives to use precision agriculture equipment which allows specific and accurate placement of fertilizer and chemicals. Many practices also result in improved wildlife habitat for species of economic significance such as the Chinese ringneck pheasant and other upland game birds.

**Issue**

Farmers and researchers agree that using any of the broad spectrum of conservation practices almost always enhances and protects water quality, increases crop yields and improves soil health. However, little has been done to collect and link the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) gathered data that would quantify the increased crop yields, improved profitability and risk reduction resulting directly from implementing conservation practices on farms and ranches.

**Solution**

The Agriculture Data Act of 2018 (AD) would:

* Direct the USDA Secretary to collect data from producers and other sources, collate, integrate and link data relating to the impacts of covered conservation practices on enhancing crop yields, improving soil health, reducing risk and improving profitability.
* Grant the USDA Secretary the authority to establish a secure conservation and farm productivity data warehouse.
* Require the USDA Secretary to establish procedures to protect the integrity and confidentiality of proprietary producer data.
* Require USDA to report annually to Senate and House Agriculture Committees on data collected.
* Allow USDA to widely disseminate the research, analyzed data and other information that demonstrates the impacts of covered conservation practices on increasing crop yields and improving soil health, and reducing risk, in a manner that makes it easy for producers and other stakeholders to utilize this information.

**Potential Benefits from ADA**

Potential savings could result from ADA through accurate assessment of conservation benefits, which, for example, could be used to reduce crop insurance premium costs due to reduced indemnities on land which covered conservation practices were applied.