Not to sound like a broken record (or a poorly streaming download for our younger professionals!), but I am always impressed when I look at the efforts of AWWA’s Government Affairs Office in Washington, D.C., and our own FSAWWA Water Utility Council (WUC) in representing us with our elected officials and regulatory agencies. They both have a great track record when it comes to advocating for legislation that will benefit our industry. One great example is the Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act, through which five Florida utility agencies were selected in 2018 to apply for significant federal loans.

I’m very happy to report that their efforts have produced another big win for our industry, and you may be able to take advantage of it! The recently approved Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018, also known as the farm bill, recognizes the link between smart, efficient farming practices and safe drinking water, and will provide $4 billion in funding over the next 10 years to fund farm and grove improvement projects that will benefit water utilities.

We all know that excess nutrients, sediments, and chemicals can become part of runoff from farms and groves, and can negatively affect the quality of drinking water sources. For utilities whose source water may be at risk, or even for utilities whose source water is in good shape but could potentially be affected, this farm bill provides significant funding for projects or actions to reduce, or improve the quality of, this runoff.

To take advantage of this golden opportunity in Florida, the WUC is assembling a team of interested members to further pursue beneficial opportunities. If you are interested, please contact Lisa Wilson-Davis, WUC chair, at lwilsondavis@myboca.us.

The following are other resources relevant to this topic:

- AWWA’s YouTube whiteboard animation that defines the issue of drinking water protection and AWWA’s legislative priorities prior to the farm bill’s passage.
- Working with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) on source water protection, a two-page guide on getting involved to benefit source waters has been developed.
- U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) report, “Tools to Support Source Water Protection,” which goes into more detail on the opportunities for water systems to leverage USDA conservation programs to expand the effectiveness of community partnerships and protect drinking water sources.
- AWWA’s G300 standard, which lays the foundation for source water protection programs.

Please feel free to contact Peggy Guingona, FSAWWA executive director, at peggy@fsawwa.org for copies of this material.

The AWWA has worked very hard to turn this campaign into a reality and become a true benefit for our utility members. Both Congress and the USDA stepped up—now it’s our turn to act. Contact the WUC today and explore how this new funding can help you protect your source water.