



Food and Farm Security: Recommendations for the 2023 Farm Bill

WORLD WILDLIFE FUND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONGRESS



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The Farm Bill is among the most significant federal policies providing direct support to the US agriculture sector and affecting conservation of the nation's soil, land, and water resources. Noted for its decades of bipartisan support, the Farm Bill governs influential food and agriculture programs—from production support to risk management, to consumption, including federally funded safety net and nutrition programs. It has become the largest investment in private lands conservation and agriculture research and innovation. The Farm Bill provides a unique opportunity to clearly articulate and align around a shared vision for US agriculture, delivering safe, healthy, and accessible nutrition for all; supporting thriving rural families and communities; advancing climate change mitigation and adaptation; and restoring and conserving biodiversity and nature to ensure America's food and nutrition security for generations to come. The Farm Bill provides farmers and ranchers with the tools they need to voluntarily advance local and national sustainability goals; plays a vital role in the livelihoods of producers and rural communities; and is essential to addressing nutrition, hunger, and food loss and waste objectives. With the 2023 Farm Bill, Congress has a timely opportunity to invest in critical solutions to challenges that cannot be avoided and for which delay is not an option.

[According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture \(USDA\)](#), at current emissions trends, extreme weather will drive an increase of 22% in insurance payouts for crops by 2080. World Wildlife Fund's (WWF) [Living](#)

[Planet Report 2022](#) showed species populations declined 69%, on average, since 1970. WWF's recent [Plowprint report](#) documented a loss of 1.8 million acres of grassland habitat in the Great Plains in 2020 and 10 million acres since 2016—acres plowed up primarily for row crop agriculture. This extensive land conversion has led to the precipitous decline of [grassland birds](#) and other wildlife species, the release of immense amounts of sequestered carbon, and the loss of water quality and quantity benefits provided by intact grasslands. Current conservation efforts are only meeting a fraction of the need and demand for voluntary conservation on the landscape. Only one third of applicants, on average, are able to enroll in some of USDA's most popular conservation programs. Urgent action is required if we are to reverse nature loss and create the resilient and sustainable agricultural system we all need and want. **Congress should seize this opportunity to invest in American farmers, ranchers, and forest-owners to make agriculture net zero by 2040, end habitat conversion, and reverse species decline while supporting the viability of US producers.**

In the following pages, we offer pragmatic approaches to incentivize, assist, and support the nation's diverse farmers, ranchers, and forest-owners to mitigate and adapt to climate change, sustain biodiversity and nature, and become more resilient in ways that benefit their communities and economies.



WWF Priorities for the 2023 Farm Bill

Farm Bill conservation programs have benefited from decades of bipartisan support from Congress and successive administrations, which has provided a critical down payment on the long-term success and competitiveness of American farmers and ranchers. Despite this investment, these programs are consistently oversubscribed and underfunded, resulting in unmet demand for conservation on millions of acres nationwide. **One of the most immediate actions Congress should take to address emissions trends, extreme weather, and biodiversity loss is to protect and build upon the \$20 billion investment in agricultural conservation and conservation technical assistance included in the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA).**¹ The unprecedented investment from the

IRA in USDA conservation programs provides the best opportunity in decades to meet producer demands for programs and initiatives that enable farmers, ranchers, and forest-owners to become more resilient and sustainable, which is essential to their own viability and that of our food system and ecosystems. In addition to protecting the investment from the IRA, Congress should support and sustain funding for conservation title programs. WWF's top priorities are listed below with detailed recommendations on the following pages.

¹ WWF's recommendations to the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) on how the agency can optimize outcomes from IRA funding are an important complement to our Farm Bill recommendations and can be found [here](#).

1 Conserve and restore native and natural ecosystems
strengthening the role and benefits provided by the Grassland Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).

2 Eliminate deforestation and conversion in agricultural supply chains
by ensuring that Farm Bill policies and programs do not intentionally or unintentionally drive expansion of agricultural activities, especially where they are not environmentally suitable or sustainable, such as grassland conversion in the Central Grasslands.

3 Scale regenerative and resilient practices, programs, and policies that drive systemic change and deliver significant co-benefits for climate, nature, and people
by enhancing co-benefit targeting of resources in working lands conservation programs, bolstering conservation technical assistance staff capacity and training, and increasing use of Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge in conservation programs.

4 Support innovation and system-level solutions
by funding and maintaining a significantly more robust data collection, management, and analysis program for climate and biodiversity, including tracking conversion of natural ecosystems, and significantly improving technology transfer at USDA.

5 Address food loss and waste to deliver social, economic, and environmental benefits
by providing grants to support proven state and local policies that reduce food waste that ends up in landfills or incinerators, incentivizing diversion of food waste into animal feed where appropriate, and providing funding to K-12 schools to incorporate food waste prevention practices in their programs.

6 Promote conservation and improved management of freshwater resources
and ecosystems, including groundwater, via new incentives and innovative approaches within the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and CRP and collaborative engagement of irrigation districts.

7 Support transition to a clean energy economy
with a rigorous approach to bioenergy and advanced fuels that provides documentable greenhouse gas emissions reduction benefits and effective biodiversity safeguards.

8 Increase equity in and access to USDA conservation related programs and services
to enable historically underserved and marginalized communities to fully leverage conservation programs to scale climate, biodiversity, and resilience outcomes.

9 Connect healthy people, resilient agriculture, and environmental sustainability
by improving support for diversified, regenerative agriculture in farm programs and by incorporating sustainability and agrobiodiversity considerations into dietary guidelines. Key to the transition to a more resilient food system will be encouraging diversification and implementing true cost accounting, which is a powerful tool for evaluating policy and resource allocation options.



Detailed Recommendations

1 Conserve and restore native and natural ecosystems

Intact native and natural habitats are vital to our agricultural economy and our landscapes' ability to store vast amounts of carbon and support biodiverse, resilient ecosystems. A critical example is the Central Grasslands, which spans more than 600 million acres of North America and is home to diverse ecosystems and equally diverse rural communities. This short- and mixed-grass prairie, home to one of only four remaining intact temperate grasslands in the world, is [being plowed up at an alarming rate](#) of almost two million acres a year, largely for row crop agriculture. This large-scale habitat loss is a major contributor to the precipitous decline of [grassland birds](#), North America's fastest-declining group of birds, with populations of chestnut-collared longspur, lark bunting, thick-billed longspur, and Sprague's pipit declining by as much as 80% since the 1960s, as well as other wildlife species throughout the Great Plains. Intact grasslands are critical for protecting the major amounts of carbon stored in their soils, roots, and vegetation and for ensuring resilience of ecosystems and communities, especially in the face of climate change. Healthy grasslands have been shown to improve water quality and increase water quantity and storage for downstream communities and water users in the Missouri River Basin, reduce downstream flooding events by regulating runoff, and ensure high-quality water supplies for future generations.

With the below recommendations, Congress can make Farm Bill investments to conserve natural lands and support their sustainable management, support vitally important rural and indigenous communities and grass- and forest-based economies, and deliver significant co-benefits for biodiversity, wildlife habitat, and freshwater resources.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Grassland Conservation Reserve Program

(CRP): CRP is a land conservation program that pays farmers to remove environmentally sensitive land from agricultural production and plant species that will improve environmental health and quality. Grassland CRP, a subprogram of CRP,

helps landowners and operators protect grassland, including rangeland, and pastureland, and certain other lands, while maintaining the areas as grazing lands. The program emphasizes support for grazing operations, plant and animal biodiversity, and grassland and land containing shrubs and forbs

under the greatest threat of conversion. Congress should expand and enhance Grassland CRP to optimize outcomes for grasslands, ranchers, climate, and biodiversity.

- a. Direct the Farm Service Agency (FSA) to expand Grassland CRP to include an option for 30-year contracts that would extend climate, biodiversity, and water benefits and strengthen protections against conversion. The 30-year contract should require rotational grazing and rest periods under a managed grazing plan.
- b. Direct the FSA to establish “core” and “vulnerable” areas of the Central Grasslands as a Central Grassland Priority Zone under the Grassland CRP National Priority Zones. Offers within Grassland CRP National Priority Zones receive an additional 15 ranking points and \$5/acre. Core areas are where data show intact grasslands critical to maintain and protect, both ecologically and in terms of the viability of grass-based economies. Vulnerable areas are where data show risk of and need to protect lands from conversion to cropland and/or woody species/ invasive encroachment. The Central Grasslands Roadmap [Assessment Map](#) is a useful resource. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) supports and contributes to the Central Grasslands Roadmap via its [Framework for Conservation Action in the Great Plains Grasslands Biome](#).

- c. Direct FSA to prioritize sustaining CRP and Grassland CRP lands as grasslands by:
 - i. providing cost-share for the establishment of grazing infrastructure—including fencing and water distribution—on all CRP and Grassland CRP contracts if rotational grazing and rest are included in the approved conservation plan,
 - ii. ending the practice of requiring CRP contract holders to take a small payment reduction if they include grazing in their CRP conservation plan, provided they have a grazing plan that includes rotational grazing and rest periods, and
 - iii. supporting the transition of expiring CRP and Grassland CRP acres to working grasslands by providing extended post-contract incentive payments of 5-10 years if the landowner agrees to maintain rotational grazing and rest periods in their management plan on those acres.
- d. Direct USDA to conduct a focused evaluation of the benefits of grazing to grassland health. Use the evaluation to update Grassland CRP guidance to increase the role of sustainable, rotational grazing, including development and use of regionally tailored grazing plans, so that the program can more fully recognize and utilize the role of ruminants to stimulate the soil and support healthy grasslands, which will also benefit ranchers’ economic outcomes.



2 Eliminate deforestation and conversion in agricultural supply chains

We must act now to halt conversion of native habitat and deforestation in our food, fuel, materials, cosmetics, and clothing commodity supply chains. For decades, WWF and others have collaborated to call on companies to halt the conversion of forests, grasslands, and other natural ecosystems for their raw material supply chains and improve transparency and sourcing of sustainably managed commodities. Yet voluntary measures are insufficient, and conversion of critical landscapes continues at alarming rates. Companies are making bold commitments for greenhouse gas (GHG) reductions through the [Science Based Targets initiative](#), and more should be done to protect nature and biodiversity. Major markets such as the European Union and United Kingdom are taking steps to level the playing field for responsible producers. The United States should take note and do its part to enact and enforce measures to stop further conversion of critical habitats due to agriculture at home and abroad.

With the following recommendations, Congress can leverage the Farm Bill to take much needed steps to curtail policies that are inadvertently fueling conversion of critical ecosystems, support producers who sustainably manage grasslands and forests, and strengthen protections for grass- and forest-based economies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Sodsaver:** Sodsaver is a provision that protects native prairies by reducing federal premium subsidies for crop insurance on land where native sod has been plowed for row crop planting. Currently, the provision applies in six states: IA, MN, MT, NE, ND, and SD, reducing crop insurance premium subsidies by 50% for 4 years. To better protect native grasslands, Congress should expand and strengthen Sodsaver with the following improvements:
 - a. Make any native sod acreage converted after February 7, 2014, ineligible for any crop insurance premium subsidies for 10 years.
 - b. Expand Sodsaver native grassland protections nationwide.
- 2. Conversion data:** Require USDA to report native sod conversion data to Congress and the public annually via a data infrastructure or public/private data warehouse that tracks land conversion and soil carbon loss to enable analysis of the effect of Sodsaver and other policies on native grassland and what more may be needed, including further investment to improve conversion tracking.
- 3. Conservation Compliance:** In exchange for receiving certain farm program benefits, farmers must agree to basic soil and wetland conservation provisions. Congress should ensure the 2023 Farm bill maintains conservation compliance provisions in their current form so that farmers who drain wetlands or who farm highly erodible lands without a conservation plan do not qualify for farm bill subsidies or crop insurance benefits, as stipulated under the 2014 and 2018 Farm Bills. In addition, direct USDA to strengthen soil and wetland protections by increasing and improving enforcement of conservation compliance provisions and consequences for non-compliance.
- 4. Forest Conservation & Heirs' Property:** Heirs' property refers to land passed down informally from generation to generation and split between heirs, often with no formal transfer title. Without clear ownership, the land can easily be lost to developers, unsustainable timber harvesters, or forced sales, often leading to forest fragmentation and significant wealth diminution for landowners. USDA has called heirs' property "a leading cause of Black involuntary land loss." Securing heirs' property helps families build generational wealth and promotes productive, sustainably managed forests in watersheds dependent on forest cover. Direct USDA to invest further in local partners that provide vital services and education in legal, financial, and forestry assistance to help resolve land title issues, safeguard family and forest resources, and remove barriers to accessing Farm Bill programs for heirs' property landowners.



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5. Halt Illegal Timber Imports and Enforce the Lacey Act Amendments: Illegal logging threatens some of the world's most biologically diverse and vulnerable forests, undermines the legal forest products trade by significantly depressing world timber prices, and contributes to climate change. Illegal logging and associated trade ranked third-largest global transnational crime after counterfeiting and drug trafficking, generating between US\$52–157 billion per year. In 2008, the United States, the world's largest consumer of forest products, became the first country to ban trafficking of products containing illegally sourced wood. The Lacey Act Amendments in the 2008 Farm Bill have contributed to significant reductions of illegally sourced wood products, yet USDA action is required to overcome implementation delays and sporadic enforcement.²

- a. Direct the Secretary of Agriculture and the heads of implementing agencies to prioritize compliance and enforcement of the Lacey Act Amendments of 2008.
- b. Direct the USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) to finalize Lacey Act plant import declaration phase-in immediately. USDA APHIS should immediately publish a detailed schedule for the phase-in of the plant declaration requirement for all outstanding plant and wood product categories — including wood furniture, pulp and paper, particleboard, and fiberboard.
- c. Direct necessary funding for Lacey Act Amendments staffing, training, and technology, including expedited deployment of technology to analyze declarations and validate declared species, and coordinate enforcement across agencies. Agencies should routinely flag suspect shipments for greater scrutiny, generating action leading to enforcement and improved due care practices.

² <https://www.worldwildlife.org/pages/joint-recommendations-to-halt-the-illegal-timber-trade-utilize-the-lacey-act-amendments-of-2008>

6. Curb Commodity-Driven Global Deforestation.

Global forest loss and degradation in places such as the Amazon, Congo Basin, and Southeast Asia are among the biggest contributors to climate change and biodiversity decline and are a root cause of zoonotic disease spillover events. A major driver of global deforestation is forest clearing for agricultural commodities like beef, soy, and palm oil. We need government leadership and regulatory frameworks to increase transparency and level the playing field for businesses at home and abroad trying to operate responsibly. As a major global producer and consumer of agricultural commodities, the United States can play a significant role in setting standards for trade and finance that promote good governance and protect people and the ecological integrity of the world's remaining forests. New policy measures are required to support a global trend towards achieving a zero-deforestation standard and for the U.S. government to effectively address commodity-driven deforestation. The Farm Bill's trade title should include measures to:

- a. Prohibit agricultural commodities produced on illegally deforested land from entering the U.S. market;
- b. Require companies to carry out and report on risk-based due diligence, including supply chain traceability, on imports of commodities linked to deforestation;
- c. Increase U.S. engagement with and support for countries taking meaningful steps to improve governance and reduce deforestation;
- d. Strengthen tools to tackle deforestation-related corruption and financial crime; and
- e. Establish a federal government procurement preference for zero-deforestation products.³

³ For more information see the bipartisan FOREST (Fostering Overseas Rule of Law and Environmentally Sound Trade) Act: <https://www.worldwildlife.org/press-releases/wwf-statement-on-the-introduction-of-the-forest-act>

3 **Scale regenerative and resilient practices, programs, and policies that drive systemic change and deliver significant co-benefits for climate, nature, and people**



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Given the urgency and limited resources to address pressing resource concerns, Congress must ensure that Farm Bill programs prioritize practices, systems, and initiatives that reduce climate impacts and have co-benefits for biodiversity, water, and soil health. Scaled adoption of regenerative farming systems offers significant opportunities for progress in this arena. WWF defines regenerative agriculture as a holistic and place-based approach to agriculture that increases biodiversity, protects water ecosystems, builds soil health, mitigates, and adapts to climate change, while also supporting producers and communities to thrive, and producing nutritious food. In defining regenerative agriculture, WWF acknowledges and honors that over thousands of years, Indigenous People have developed, evolved, and continue to advance regenerative agriculture.

Congress should leverage the Farm Bill to direct USDA to reduce barriers to and increase funding for the adoption of multi-benefit practices and systems, including diversified cropping systems, ecologically appropriate agro-forestry, precision nutrient management, advanced grazing management, and reduction of loss and waste throughout the agricultural system. These approaches also make sense for the business bottom line of producers. Prioritizing climate mitigation and adaptation as an explicit goal of these programs can help these payments support practices with the largest impact on climate and overall system resilience, while also promoting co-benefits to water quality, water quantity, and biodiversity.

With the below recommendations, Congress can make Farm Bill investments to support farmer, rancher, and forest owner viability while making agriculture net zero by 2040, with a particular focus on the role of sustainable ranching and feeding of livestock in achieving that goal, as well as reversing species decline. These investments will also accelerate the shift to more diversified cropping systems, a critical component of an agricultural landscape and Farm Bill that connects sustainability and health. A key aspect of realizing these goals is effective technical assistance, both in terms of capacity and ensuring effective engagement of the nation's diverse agricultural communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP):

EQIP provides financial and technical assistance to farmers and ranchers to address natural resource concerns and provide environmental benefits, including benefits to water and air quality, soil conservation, carbon sequestration, biodiversity, and water conservation. CSP helps producers maintain and improve conservation systems and adopt additional conservation activities to address priority resource concerns. CSP focuses on rewarding conservation performance. Congress should strengthen co-benefit outcomes from EQIP and CSP by directing NRCS to:

- a. Expand the funding pools for priority wildlife initiatives and prioritize wildlife practices and enhancements in EQIP and CSP that benefit federally protected, candidate, state-listed, culturally significant, and other priority species identified in existing wildlife conservation plans, such as State Wildlife Action Plans and the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. Direct NRCS to create extended (5+ years) and facilitated secondary application options for threatened and endangered (T&E), candidate, and culturally significant species, especially species involved in priority initiatives and projects that create corridors or otherwise enable wildlife migration

through agricultural systems. Finally, direct NRCS to ensure needed updates and adaptations are made to practice standards to achieve the objectives of T&E, culturally significant, and priority species.

- b. Increase incentives and technical support for advancing diversity in crop selection generally and for developing alternative, more diverse feed grains for livestock and poultry that are drought tolerant, require less inputs, and have a lower overall environmental footprint. The incentives should include support for sustainably producing these diverse crops and on-farm storage by livestock and poultry operations which use them as feed.
- c. Within the 50% of total EQIP funding set aside for livestock operations at the national level, increase attention to and outcomes for climate, water quality, water quantity, and biodiversity by directing NRCS to:
 - i. Prioritize ranking and technical support for adoption of advanced grazing management in EQIP and CSP, create extended contract options (5+ years), and facilitate re-enrollment to sustain this valuable practice for extended periods. Advanced grazing management means the use of a combination of grazing practices, which may include management-intensive rotational grazing, that provide for improved soil health and carbon sequestration, drought resilience, wildlife habitat, wildfire mitigation, control of invasive plants, and water quality improvement.

- ii. Develop and advance a new Feed Management standard for methane reduction in livestock and direct USDA to provide outreach and education for the new standard and prioritize its use. This new standard would help producers utilize proven feed additives that can reduce methane emissions from cattle in both confinement and grazing systems. Outreach and education are needed to support understanding of the new standard and increase adoption.

2. Healthy Forests Reserve Program: The Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP) helps landowners restore, enhance and protect forestland resources on private and tribal lands through easements and financial assistance. Congress should restore mandatory funding for the HFRP to ensure this important program for species conservation and carbon sequestration has reliable, predictable funding available each year.

3. Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA): CTA provides our nation's farmers, ranchers and forestland owners with the knowledge and tools they need to conserve, maintain and restore the natural resources on their lands and improve the health of their operations for the future. To enhance this critical resource, Congress should:

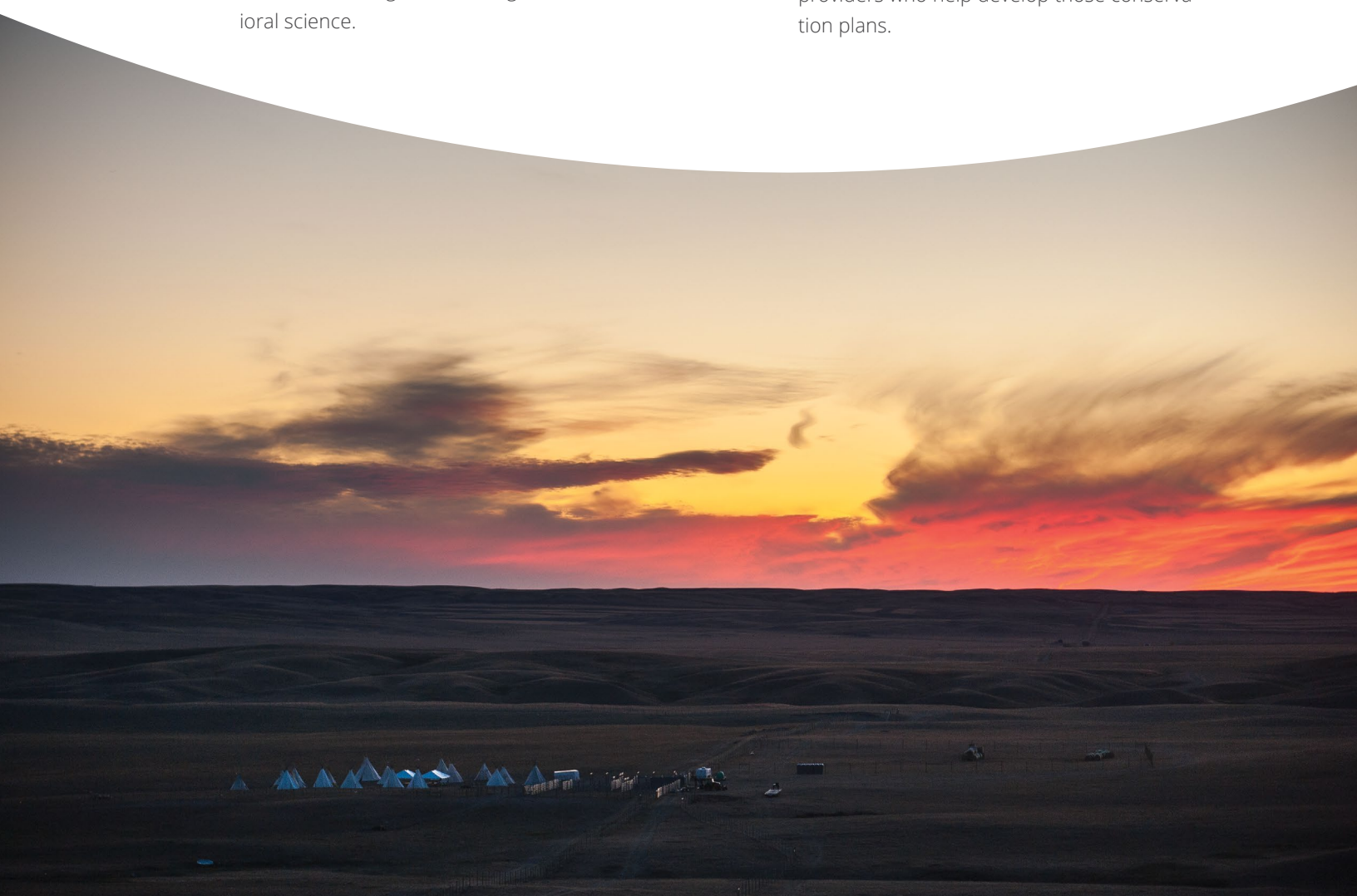
- a. As recommended by the [Native Farm Bill Coalition](#), direct USDA to explicitly allow a Tribe or a group of Tribes within a state or region to develop traditional, ecological, knowledge-based (TEK) technical standards that will control the implementation of conservation projects allowed under the Farm Bill. Direct USDA to codify current NRCS practices that encourage TEK-based conservation and recognize the value of traditional practices to improve conservation project implementation, environmental conditions, habitats, and agricultural outcomes. These TEK-based standards have established scientific basis and are acknowledged by various federal research organizations and agencies. USDA committed to recognizing TEK



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in the [Department's 2022 Equity Action Plan](#) and it is supported by the recent [Indigenous Knowledge Guidance for Federal Agencies](#), [OSTP-CEQ Indigenous Knowledge Guidance](#), and [Implementation Guidance for Federal Agencies](#).

- b. Significantly increase funding for CTA so that NRCS can hire more staff and build capacity to meet the needs of today's increasingly diverse farming and ranching populations and the conservation challenges they face.
- c. Direct USDA to make substantial updates and improvements to how the agency delivers technical assistance. Direct USDA to:
 - i. Update staff training to optimize technical assistance delivery effectiveness by incorporating advances in science, technology, cultural competency, cross-cultural communication, traditional ecological knowledge, and behavioral science.
 - ii. Improve agency outreach and communications to diverse and underserved populations like Native and historically underserved producers, especially given difficulties meeting short enrollment deadlines, lack of access to information by historically underserved producers, and misalignment between Native land leases and NRCS enrollment periods.
 - iii. Bolster resources and staff to increase availability and access of technical service providers for Native Nations, heirs' property owners, and other underserved producers, such as through dedicated funding for Tribal conservation districts and legal services and landowner survey support for heirs' property owners. CSP and EQIP require producers to have conservation plans prior to enrollment, yet most Native Nations lack access to technical service providers who help develop those conservation plans.



4 Support innovation and system-level solutions that drive food system transformation

To achieve USDA conservation objectives and enable farmers, ranchers, forest landowners, and other stakeholders in the US agricultural system to be recognized and rewarded for ecosystem benefits alongside crop production, we must have a significantly more advanced and comprehensive system for collection, management, analysis, and interpretation of field level data and ability to connect this data within a watershed context. This is key to ensuring Farm Bill investments deliver on the goals of making agriculture net zero by 2040, ending native and natural land conversion, and reversing species decline while supporting the viability of US producers. This data also would enable significantly improved measurement of outcomes of USDA conservation practices and programs overall. We need a consistent, reliable, and scalable data infrastructure for farmers and ranchers to gain trust in market systems and to better enable agriculture to be the driver for Scope 3 emissions reductions and improved co-benefits across the value chain. Maintaining privacy of farmer and rancher personally identifiable information and data ownership by producers must be a priority for the system to succeed.

In addition to this urgent need for better and more comprehensive data infrastructure, the promise of technology transfer from significant investment in innovation initiatives has yet to materialize. NRCS and USDA have invested considerable resources over the past two decades, with significant new funding because of the Inflation Reduction Act and Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, in research and grant programs dedicated to developing and advancing innovative approaches to agricultural conservation efforts. Despite ongoing effort, we have yet to see meaningful transition of innovations out of these programs into widespread programmatic implementation.

Finally, infrastructure must follow innovation to enable growth, value add and market access for regenerative agriculture. This requires increased and sustained funding, technical assistance, and access to business planning.

With the below recommendations, Congress can make Farm Bill investments to ensure we have the data and measurement foundation, utilization of innovations, and infrastructure resources to make agriculture net zero by 2040, reverse habitat loss and land conversion, and reverse species decline. These investments will also give farmers and ranchers the tools they need to succeed in new market and value chain opportunities and accelerate the shift to more diversified cropping systems that can deliver significant benefits across landscape sustainability and human health.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Data and monitoring network:** Direct USDA to create and fund a National Agricultural Soil Carbon Plus Nature Monitoring Network that builds upon and integrates the best available science into next-generation information systems. The network will enable improved understanding, measurement, and tracking of outcomes for climate and biodiversity, including tracking conversion of natural ecosystems and impacts of that conversion on climate and biodiversity goals, as well as quantifying outcomes of USDA conservation programs. The Network should leverage data collection and infrastructure investments from the IRA; be informed by and contribute data to the Conservation Effects and Assessment Program (CEAP), the Climate Hubs, and other relevant USDA initiatives; and continually seek out and connect to relevant data networks that meet criteria for data quality and consistency.
- 2. Technology and systems learning transfer and adoption:** To address the technology transfer gap, direct USDA to create a dedicated program to support systematic transfer and adoption of innovations that improve outcomes for climate, biodiversity, protection of sensitive ecosystems, and water quality and quantity from innovation programs into mainstream programming. This new dedicated team

should focus on systematic and ongoing identification, transfer, and scaled adoption of effective innovations and approaches that improve outcomes for climate, biodiversity, protection of sensitive ecosystems, and water quality and quantity and create a clearinghouse of these innovations. The clearinghouse would provide a resource of innovations for entrepreneurs and for USDA for improvements and advancements to incorporate into programs. The program should prioritize technology transfer and adoption from Conservation Innovation Grants, Partnerships for Climate Smart Commodities, Agricultural Research Service, universities, traditional ecological knowledge experts, partners, and others, incorporating those learnings into programs, technical assistance, educational approaches, technical standards, and conservation planning. The technology transfer team should convene an expert advisory group and deliver regular reports on progress incorporating innovations into NRCS and FSA programming, standards, and routine business.

3. Regenerative agriculture infrastructure

support: Provide significant funding to support Regional Food Business Innovation Centers, which support producers by providing localized assistance to access local and regional supply chains, including linking producers to wholesalers and distributors, and provide technical assistance to access new markets, with a focus on young and underserved farmers, ranchers, and food businesses.

4. Crop Insurance: The federal crop insurance program is the primary safety net available for farmers. Whole Farm Revenue Protection (WFRP) provides a risk management safety net for all commodities on the farm under one insurance policy and is available nationwide. WFRP is available for any farm with up to \$17 million in insured revenue, including those with specialty or organic commodities (crops and livestock), or those marketing to local, regional, farm-identity preserved, specialty, or direct markets. Congress should direct the Risk Management Agency (RMA) to make strategic improvements to WFRP to simplify, streamline, and improve access to this unique, crop-neutral revenue insurance policy designed to protect the revenue of a farmer's entire operation, not just one commodity. In 2022, RMA announced key improvements that go into effect in 2023, including elimination of previous expense report requirements and renewed agency outreach and promotion. To make further progress, direct RMA to:

- a. Prohibit the adjustment of price and production expectations at the time of a loss claim, which compromises farmers' confidence in the product, and strengthen the diversification incentive by raising the eligible commodity floor from two to three commodities; and
- b. Incentivize crop insurance agents to write full farm policies by ensuring compensation rates incorporate and reward the time and complexity required to write WFRP plans.





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5 Address food loss and waste to deliver social, economic, and environmental benefits

The United States produces and imports an abundance of food each year, but approximately 35% of it [goes unsold or uneaten](#). Annually, 80 million tons of surplus food are not consumed. Farmers, manufacturers, households, and other businesses in the United States spend [\\$408 billion each year](#) to grow, process, transport, and dispose of food that is never eaten. This waste carries with it enormous economic, environmental, and social costs, but also represents great opportunity.

With the below recommendations, Congress can leverage the Farm Bill to help achieve the 2015 goal announced by USDA and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to cut food waste in the United States by [50% by 2030](#). Congress can build upon the successful pilot programs launched in the 2018 Farm Bill. [Opportunities to Reduce Food Waste in the 2023 Farm Bill](#) provides more detailed recommendations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. State, local, and tribal government policies:

Provide significant funding for ten years for state, local, and tribal governments to plan or implement proven policies that reduce food waste in landfills. Doing so helps reduce the environmental justice implications of waste and advances more circular food systems in which surplus food is treated as an asset before it becomes waste. This includes organic waste bans, mandatory recycling laws, landfill taxes, Pay-As-You-Throw laws, and other measures to make it more cost effective to avoid sending food to landfills or incinerators. Direct USDA, in collaboration with EPA, to maintain a database of successful state and local food waste reduction policies and data on their impacts. This program should be established within the Miscellaneous Title or a dedicated Food Waste Reduction Title.

2. Waste to animal feed:

Require the USDA to write guidance encouraging states to update their laws around [food scrap feeding to animals](#) to build on the growing interest from the private sector in circular solutions and maximize the potential for food scraps diversion to animal feed. Food scrap feeding refers to feeding livestock animals food scraps or food residuals. When done in accordance with the federal laws, food scrap feeding is safe for animals and realizes all the same environmental benefits associated with diverting food waste from landfills. Food scrap-derived animal feed is a [more environmentally friendly option](#) than conventional feed on a range of environmental factors. This guidance should provide clear recommendations on ways to streamline state-level laws and make the case why states should remove any unnecessary restrictions that do not exist within the federal-level animal feed laws. Implement these changes as part of the Miscellaneous Title or a dedicated Food Waste Reduction Title.

3. School food waste reduction: Create a new grant program at \$10-20 million/year to help schools reduce their food waste ([shown to be an estimated](#) 1.9 million metric tons of GHGs and over 20.9 billion gallons of embedded water) and change their cafeteria practices to ensure more food is eaten and not wasted. The program can build upon the School Food Waste Reduction Grant Program proposed in the bipartisan School Food Recovery Act of 2021. The support would help schools to gather data on the types and quantity of food thrown away in school cafeterias and better understand the potential of food waste to reduce the impacts of the food system and climate change. Additionally reauthorize the Food and Agriculture Service Learning Program ([FASLP](#)) and the [Farm to School](#) programs—expanding the latter and modifying authorizing language for both to direct USDA to give priority to applications from schools that include a food waste reduction or food donation plan as part of their application. These changes should be made through the Nutrition Title.

4. Standardize and Clarify Date Labels: There is no federal regulation for date labels used on food. Instead, each state decides whether and how to regulate date labels, leading to a patchwork of inconsistent regulations and myriad date labeling terms such as “sell by,” “best by,” “expires on,” and “use by.” Manufacturers have broad discretion over what dates to affix to their food products, often using dates that typically reflect food quality rather than food safety. Yet businesses, individuals, and even state regulators frequently misunderstand date labels and interpret them to be indicators of safety, leading to the unnecessary waste of wholesome food. In order to reduce consumer confusion and the resulting food waste, the 2023 Farm Bill should standardize date labels through the Miscellaneous Title or a new Food Waste Reduction Title. Language could be taken from the bicameral, bipartisan Food Date Labeling Act of 2021.



6 Promote conservation and improved management of freshwater resources and ecosystems, including groundwater

Given the ever more severe water crises faced by producers and communities in a growing number of water basins around the nation, but especially in the West and Southwest, it is critical that Congress leverage the Farm Bill to advance both efficient use of water to grow crops and use of appropriate lands to replenish groundwater when major precipitation events occur. This includes on-farm recharge, recharge basins, wetlands, floodplains, and riparian corridors that can infiltrate excess precipitation.

With these recommendations, Congress can make Farm Bill investments to enable agriculture to be a partner in ensuring critical water flows for nature and people in water stressed regions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Environmental Quality Incentives Program:

The EQIP [Conservation Incentives Contract](#) (CIC) program offers producers financial assistance to adopt conservation management practices on working landscapes. Through CIC, producers may use incentive contracts to achieve sustainable stewardship on their entire operation. CIC is available nationwide and helps producers address priority resource concerns, like sequestering carbon and improving water quality in high-priority areas, including providing conservation evaluation and monitoring activities to help report outcomes of practices. Congress should direct USDA to create a new Measure to Manage priority initiative under the program focused on fostering group contracting through irrigation districts or other water managers for water conservation outcomes. The Measure to Manage CIC group contracts would provide incentive payments for rotational/temporary land repurposing for a 5-year period as well as follow-up incentive payments for 5 additional years that help producers sustain management and outcomes for water conservation. Voluntary partners and participants would include irrigation districts, water managers, and producers who would work with USDA Economic Research Service (ERS) to develop covered rotational fallow plans, modeled after the [Middle Rio Grande Environmental Water Leasing Program](#). Participants must use an approved, transparent methodology to verify water savings, such as [OpenET](#). The CIC supports conservation practices to address specific priority resource concerns within designated watersheds and allows contracts of 5-10 years.

2. Conservation Reserve Program:

Direct USDA to develop a CRP sub-program focused on water conservation to pay producers annually to reduce water consumption through temporary land repurposing during the first half of the CRP contract (5-7 years), followed by a switch to less water intensive crops during the second half of the CRP enrollment (next 5-7 years). Farmers could also receive additional incentive payments to switch to less water intensive crops on additional acres near/adjacent to the enrolled acres not included in the CRP contract to generate additional water quantity benefits. Land repurposing would be conducted as part of a coordinated, regional process or plan. This program would reward producers for the ecological benefits of water conservation and help compensate for foregone income resulting from water conservation measures.



7 Support transition to a clean energy economy with a rigorous approach to bioenergy and advanced fuels

Biofuels have an important role in the transition to a clean energy economy, particularly in sectors with limited alternatives to fossil fuels (e.g., aviation, maritime, industrial thermal). Relying on first-generation, food-based biofuels to develop such fuel markets is counterproductive, as highlighted by the existing Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS). Congress's General Accounting Office [found in 2019](#) that the RFS provided little to no greenhouse gas emissions benefit and failed to promote advanced biofuels made from cellulosic wastes. More [recent research](#) concluded that the RFS increased crop prices and led to a net *increase* in GHG emissions as total cropland expanded by 2.1 million hectares.

With the below recommendations, Congress can ensure the Farm Bill's energy programs implement proper safeguards and effectively prioritize more advanced fuels to avoid undermining climate, food, and biodiversity efforts or hindering US industry in emerging international markets for low-carbon fuels.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Biorefinery Assistance Program.** Additional biorefinery capacity is needed in the transition to a net zero economy, including a projected 400 biorefineries to meet [US targets for alternative aviation fuel](#). To scale beyond first-generation to advanced biofuel, we need to develop and grow new advanced technologies and fuel pathways. Congress should limit support under the Biorefinery Assistance Program to the production of fuels that achieve at least a 50% reduction in life-cycle GHG emissions (inclusive of direct and indirect land use change), are certified sustainable under an established sustainability certification program such as the [sustainable aviation fuel requirements](#) under the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), give explicit preference to non-food crop feedstocks, and prioritize advanced conversion technologies with low rates of market penetration at commercial scale. The Biorefinery Assistance Program provides loan guarantees to eligible applicants for the "development, construction, and retrofitting of commercial-scale biorefineries using eligible technology [requirements](#) under the ICAO, and give explicit preference to feedstocks that are not derived from food crops, and to biofuel derived from waste material.
- 2. Bioenergy Program for Advanced Fuels.** The [Bioenergy Program for Advanced Fuels](#) supports and ensures expanding production of advanced biofuels by paying advanced biofuel producers for finished advanced biofuel products. Feedstocks subsidized under this program should demonstrate at least a 50% reduction in life-cycle GHG emissions (inclusive of direct and indirect land use change), be certified sustainable under an established sustainability certification program such as the [sustainable aviation fuel requirements](#) under the ICAO, and explicitly exclude feedstocks based on food crops.
- 3. Biomass Crop Assistance Program.** The Biomass Crop Assistance Program (BCAP) provides financial assistance to owners and operators of agricultural and non-industrial private forest land who wish to establish, produce, and deliver biomass feedstocks. Congress should authorize funding of incentives for farms to grow advanced bioenergy feedstocks that are certified sustainable under an established sustainability certification program such as the [sustainable aviation fuel requirements](#) under the ICAO, and explicitly exclude feedstocks based on food crops.
- 4. Rural Energy for America Program (REAP).** REAP provides guaranteed loan financing and grant funding to agricultural producers and rural small businesses for renewable energy systems or to make energy efficiency improvements. Agricultural producers may also apply for new energy efficient equipment and new system loans for agricultural production and processing. Additional anaerobic digesters, which generate biomethane (renewable natural gas), can help achieve the [US's industrial decarbonization goals of 85% emissions reductions by 2035](#). Direct USDA to prioritize digester funding from REAP to regions with concentrated high-heat industrial facilities to enable the program to deploy more anaerobic digesters to these areas.

8 Equity and Inclusion

While much progress has been made in increasing equitable access to USDA programs for underserved and marginalized communities, significantly more is needed. For example, USDA continues to face a critical gap in effectively reaching and engaging Tribes and Native Nations. Native Nations are a leading force in American agriculture, with more than 80,000 individual Native producers contributing [\\$3.5 billion to the U.S. economy](#). Yet, the unique needs of Tribal Nations and Native producers have been historically overlooked. [Native Farm Bill Coalition \(NFBC\)](#) members and stakeholders identified continued and increased funding for conservation programs as a critical priority to serve Tribal lands and keep up with both Tribal and national conservation needs.

With the below recommendations, Congress can seize the opportunity of this Farm Bill to ensure USDA consults, empowers, and improves access to programs for communities that have faced historical and systematic marginalization and discrimination.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Increase designated funding within EQIP and CSP for beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers to 20 percent.
2. Apply “638” self-determination contract opportunities to Conservation Title programs, which would enable Tribal governments to directly administer Conservation Title programs to eligible Tribal producers. This would acknowledge Tribal sovereignty and make program access easier for Native producers.
3. Improve access to USDA conservation programs by ensuring that sections in the Conservation Title related to eligibility determinations specifically allow participation in Conservation Title programs for reservation lands controlled and farmed/ranched by groups of individuals. Direct USDA to enact special provisions to ensure that any Tribal government-allowed entity can access conservation programs and technical assistance on tribal lands as the recognized conservation program participant, not just individual producers. Examples include Federally Chartered Indian Organizations, Tribally recognized entities, Tribal Economic Development Corporations and Community Development Corporations, and inter-tribal organizations.
4. Tribes face significant challenges meeting federal match requirements, given the degree to which Tribal funding is federal and so ineligible as match. Reduce or waive match and cost share requirements on Tribes in USDA conservation programs to increase access to and participation by Tribal interests in these priority programs.
5. To ensure more equitable access to Heirs’ Property Relending Program funds, direct USDA to include new grant and loan forgiveness options within the program. Program funding should be directed to local non-profit partners and community-based organizations to provide legal services.



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9 Connect healthy people, resilient agriculture, and environmental sustainability

Support diversified, regenerative agriculture and incorporate sustainability and agrobiodiversity considerations into dietary guidelines.

We cannot have healthy people without sustainable agricultural systems, and we cannot have sustainable agriculture without a [resilient, sustainable planet](#). More than [1 million](#) Americans die from diet-related diseases each year, and an estimated [38 million individuals](#) lived in food insecure households in 2020. We must ensure we produce food in a way that supports the health of people and the planet by significantly increasing Farm Bill support for regenerative agriculture and [agrobiodiversity](#). [Crop diversity can reduce the risk of poor harvests](#) and provide an important “insurance policy” against threats to global food security intensified by environmental degradation and climate change.

Thoughtfully designed food and agricultural policies and programs can encourage more diversified crops on more diversified farms, including integrated crop-livestock operations, to help bring more affordable, nutritious food options to the table. With the below recommendations, Congress can leverage the Farm Bill to advance regenerative agriculture, healthy communities, and resilient landscapes⁴:

⁴ These recommendations highlight several included in “Considerations for the White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health,” a [public memo](#) developed by the Meridian Institute; Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future; Bread for the World; World Wildlife Fund; Farm, Food, Environment Policy Consulting; and National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Commodity Title: The Commodity Title provides support for major commodity crops, as well as disaster assistance. Congress should direct USDA to undertake two important steps to diversify farm support. First, direct USDA to implement a pilot program to introduce more diversity to the Agriculture Risk (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC) programs, which provide financial protections to farmers from substantial drops in crop prices or revenues. These income support programs provide a strong driver for farmers to grow only the [22 covered commodities](#), because ARC/PLC payments are tied to historical average crop production of those crops on the farm’s base acreage. If a farmer does not keep producing those crops on all his or her acres, those acres will no longer be counted for the program and payments drop. Congress should increase better flexibility, diversity, and farmer choice into the program by creating a pilot in which farmers can choose from an additional 10 crops—crops selected specifically for being drought tolerant,

requiring less inputs, and being more environmentally resilient and sustainable. Farmers participating in the pilot would be able to get a one-time upfront payment instead of annual payments in order to cover any investments associated with crop changes. The payment would be based on their existing planting history. Second, Congress should direct USDA to conduct a thorough review of how commodity programs are implemented. Today’s crop-by-crop approach creates clear, if inadvertent, pressure to maximize production of a limited number of commodity crops. Much more beneficial for producers, human health and nutrition, and environmental resilience would be a landscape, place-based approach focused on agrobiodiversity outcomes – supporting and enabling production of diverse crops on diversified operations by the full diversity of the nation’s farmers and ranchers. This approach would give producers meaningful choice in what they grow, enable resilience, and provide the crop and protein diversity needed for healthy communities.



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2. Nutrition and health: Congress can advance the health-food-environmental sustainability connection by directing USDA to incorporate sustainability and agrobiodiversity into dietary guidelines. Congress should also invest in strategic research to advance solutions that harness agricultural biodiversity and sustainably transform food systems to improve people's lives in a climate crisis, such as the [agro-biodiversity index](#) developed by the [Alliance of Biodiversity International and CIAT](#) that is collecting data on biodiversity across the domains of nutrition, agriculture, and genetic resources.

3. True Cost Accounting: Achieving sustainable production at scale to support healthy diets for up to ten million people by 2050 necessitates a focus on diversity in production and consumption, which can reduce divisiveness in discourse around food, increase respect for cultural traditions and diversity, and promote more equitable food system outcomes. Congress should direct USDA to utilize [true cost accounting](#), a powerful tool for evaluating policy and resource allocation options to support producers, communities, and thriving markets in this critical transition connecting human health, food, agriculture, and environmental resilience.





together possible

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