

Food and Farm Security

Summary of Recommendations for the 2023 Farm Bill

The Farm Bill is among the most significant federal policies providing direct support to the US agriculture sector and affecting the conservation of the nation's soil, land, and water resources. Noted for its decades of bipartisan support, the Farm Bill governs many of the United States' most influential food, agriculture, and conservation programs. **World Wildlife Fund (WWF) urges Congress to pass a 2023 Farm Bill that addresses the increasing challenges facing rural communities and the landscapes and natural resources they depend upon. We need a Farm Bill that invests in farmers, ranchers, and forest owners to end habitat conversion, reverse species decline and make agriculture net zero by 2040 while supporting the viability of US producers.**

The first steps Congress should take to address emissions trends, extreme weather, and biodiversity loss is to protect the \$20 billion investment in agricultural conservation and conservation technical assistance included in the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and sustain funding for critical conservation programs. Ensuring adequate funding for the Farm Bill's popular conservation programs is one of the most practical and effective ways to ensure the long-term viability of farmer, rancher, and forest owner operations through effective stewardship of land and resources.

We offer pragmatic approaches to support the nation's diverse farmers, ranchers, and forest owners to sustain biodiversity and nature, mitigate climate change, and become more resilient in ways that benefit their communities and economies.

Top Priorities for the 2023 Farm Bill

1. **Conserve and restore native and natural ecosystems.** Intact native and natural habitats are vital to our agricultural economy and landscapes' ability to store vast amounts of carbon and support biodiverse, resilient ecosystems.

Congress should significantly improve the role one of the largest private-lands conservation programs – the Conservation Reserve Program – in conserving grasslands with longer contracts, enhanced targeting of acres to vulnerable and critical intact areas, and improved support for sustainable grazing in Grasslands CRP.

2. **Eliminate deforestation and conversion in agricultural supply chains.** We must act now to halt conversion of native habitat and deforestation in our commodity supply chains. Illegal logging, for instance, 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.

Congress should eliminate Farm Bill policies that incentivize conversion of critical habitats, particularly on lands marginal for agriculture, such as the Central Grasslands; eliminate crop insurance subsidies nationwide on newly converted grasslands and improve tracking of grassland conversion; and strengthen action to halt illegal timber

imports and include measures in the Farm Bill's trade title to curb commodity-driven deforestation.

- 3. Improve the ability of conservation programs to advance regenerative agriculture and its myriad benefits for climate, nature, and people.** 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.

Congress should improve how the largest working lands conservation programs prioritize and provide support for the most at-risk and culturally significant species; help increase crop diversity and incentivize improvements in feeding and grazing to reduce the climate and nature impacts of animal agriculture; significantly increase funding for Conservation Technical Assistance; and improve capacity to provide technical assistance to farmers and ranchers by increasing staff and use of Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge in conservation programs.

- 4. Support innovation and system-level solutions.** To achieve conservation objectives and enable US farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners to be recognized and rewarded for certain management practices, a more advanced and comprehensive system for collection, management, analysis, and interpretation of field level data is required.

Congress should fund and maintain a significantly more robust data collection, management, and analysis program for climate and biodiversity, including tracking conversion of natural ecosystems, and significantly improve how USDA moves innovative ideas from pilot to general programming.

- 5. Address food loss and waste to deliver social, economic, and environmental benefits.** The US produces and imports an abundance of food each year but approximately 35% of it [goes unsold or uneaten](#). When we waste food, we waste all of the underlying resources used to grow, process, transport, and dispose of it.

Congress should provide grants to support proven state and local policies that reduce food waste that ends up in landfills or incinerators; incentivize diversion of food waste into animal feed where appropriate; provide funding to K-12 schools to incorporate food waste prevention practices in their programs; and standardize and clarify date labels to reduce consumer confusion.

- 6. Promote conservation and improved management of freshwater resources and ecosystems, including groundwater.** Producers and communities around the nation are facing increasingly severe water crises, especially in the West and Southwest. It is critical that Congress leverage the Farm Bill to advance water conservation.

Congress should provide new incentives and innovative approaches within key conservation programs by leveraging longer contract times, temporary land repurposing, and effective deployment of systems to track outcomes for water systems, with significant emphasis on 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.** These 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, and industrial thermal).

8. **Increase equity in and access to USDA conservation-related programs and services** to address ongoing challenges, enabling historically underserved and marginalized communities to leverage conservation programs to scale biodiversity, climate, and resilience outcomes.
9. **Connect healthy people, resilient agriculture, and environmental sustainability.** 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](#).

Congress should bring greater diversity to key crop support programs and evaluate shifting farm support from a crop-based approach to a regional scale approach focused on whole farm outcomes – both production and ecosystem; incorporate sustainability and agrobiodiversity considerations into dietary guidelines; and leverage true cost accounting, a powerful tool for evaluating policy and resource allocation options.

WWF's full recommendations for the 2023 Farm Bill are available by visiting worldwildlife.org/FarmBill23.

Contact: Renee Albrecht, Senior Policy Advocate, Renee.Albrecht@wwfus.org
Suzy Friedman, Senior Director of Food Policy, Suzy.Friedman@wwfus.org