



Environmental
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A farm bill that delivers for farmers, ranchers and the planet

The 2023 farm bill is a historic opportunity for Congress to build on bipartisan efforts to help U.S. agriculture become more competitive, more resilient, and a global leader in conservation and climate solutions. With a focus on research, data, finance and innovation, these recommendations can shape a farm bill that equips farmers and ranchers to increase productivity, better withstand changing weather and create rural jobs.

Congress should prioritize help for beginning farmers, Black farmers and other historically underserved producers who face structural barriers to accessing farm bill assistance and benefits. A clear focus on equity in federal farm spending can help bolster the farm economy and secure our food supply. This year's bill should also increase the delivery of conservation technical assistance and data to better support on-the-ground, producer-lead efforts to boost conservation and climate stewardship.

1. REDUCE AGRICULTURAL CLIMATE EMISSIONS THROUGH STRONG INCENTIVES

Why

We can't slow climate change without reducing greenhouse gas emissions, including from agriculture. The next farm bill must enable more farmers and ranchers to help stabilize the climate and benefit from their contributions. Reducing methane and nitrous oxide emissions are two particularly impactful climate opportunities for U.S. agriculture.

How

- **Protect the historic investment in rural climate solutions:** The nearly \$20 billion in new funding for agricultural climate mitigation provided by the recently enacted Inflation Reduction Act will expand over-subscribed conservation programs and help more producers contribute to climate solutions. The nearly \$14 billion provided for farms and rural electric coops to transition to clean energy and \$2 billion for rural development will create much-needed jobs in rural America.

- **Promote manure methane solutions:** Reducing methane emissions by equipping more livestock farms to improve manure collection, storage and treatment is a low-hanging climate opportunity. Congress should empower more producers to make operational changes by reducing costs and increasing technical assistance. The farm bill must also invest in a suite of solutions that make economic sense for different farm sizes, as well as require the federal government to prioritize solutions or additive technologies that address local pollution.
- **Invest in enteric methane innovation:** Enteric methane emissions, or cow burps, are the top source of U.S. livestock methane emissions, but few solutions are commercially available. The farm bill must invest in research and development for a robust set of solutions for ranchers and dairy farmers. Congress should streamline regulatory pathways for technologies that are proven to be effective for the climate and safe for people and animals, and it should ensure that conservation programs are primed to help producers adopt new solutions as soon as they become commercially available.

- **Optimize fertilizer use:** Using technical assistance, incentives and targeted research, the U.S. Department of Agriculture can help improve nitrogen balance, a measure of how much applied nitrogen is used by crops and how much may be lost to the environment. This saves farmers money, reduces potent nitrous oxide climate emissions, and protects water and air quality.

2. BUILD AGRICULTURAL RESILIENCE TO UNAVOIDABLE CLIMATE IMPACTS

Why

Farmers and ranchers are on the frontlines of climate change, from changing rainfall patterns to higher temperatures. The farm bill must invest in adaptation so that farms and ranches can continue to feed a growing population and support rural economies for generations to come, even in the face of new challenges posed by climate change.

How

- **Enhance crop insurance to reward climate resilience:** Crop insurance can reduce the financial risk of trying new climate-smart practices and reward improved resilience. Offering risk reduction discounts and covering temporary yield declines while introducing a new conservation practice will go a long way toward incentivizing producers to integrate climate-smart practices.
- **Improve financial literacy about conservation and risk:** The farm bill should form a new Center for Conservation Economics that would partner with land-grant universities to provide climate-informed financial assistance to producers so that they can build and maintain resilient businesses.
- **Prioritize watershed and regional solutions:** The farm bill should prioritize technical and financial support for crop diversification and innovative conservation strategies. This builds resilience to climate and economic shocks on farms and across watersheds, and it can also reduce reliance on stressed water sources.
- **Optimize land easement programs:** Conservation easements protect agricultural lands from development. Congress should consider how to target these easements to ensure high-priority

resource needs are met, and consider efficiencies that will put dollars into farm-level action sooner.

3. INVEST IN INNOVATION, DATA AND MEASUREMENT

Why

Both agricultural emissions and climate risks to production continue to increase. Commercializing and scaling scientifically proven technologies and management changes will be essential to reverse those trends. Improved data and measurement will ensure that progress is being made.

How

- **Build a robust conservation database:** Consolidated and anonymized data from research sites and farms can illuminate links between management changes, productivity and environmental outcomes. This will improve producers' confidence in adopting new farming strategies and give policymakers and companies better feedback on practice and program efficacy.
- **Improve measurement and verification systems:** The farm bill should prioritize the scientific integrity of private and public efforts to mitigate agricultural emissions and sequester carbon. For example, USDA can build data and evidence on a regional basis for the best soil carbon management strategies that preserve existing carbon stores, increase carbon over the long term, and avoid releasing carbon if farming practices change.
- **Deploy developing science and best practices efficiently:** As scientists build a stronger foundation of research about climate-smart agriculture, the farm bill must enable scientists to share knowledge with each other and with producers who can benefit from it. These advancements must be integrated into conservation programs as well because rigid programs built on the science of yesterday will not support the full potential of what is possible.

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