

# CHAMPIONING CONSERVATION IN THE 2023 FARM BILL

Agricultural experts and producers alike recognize the critical role of conservation in supporting the long-term viability of agriculture in the United States. Conservation practices can reduce the amount of natural resources expended to grow our food and the level of greenhouse gas emissions associated with agriculture, while supporting the economic livelihoods of American producers. Congress must support American producers on their conservation journey by aligning existing funding and programming with long-term climate goals.



## ISSUE



## SOLUTION

### CONSERVATION AND EXISTING USDA PROGRAMS

USDA's working lands programs, as well as the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), subsidize land and livestock management practices that exacerbate climate change. However, modifications to these programs have the potential to ease producers' shift towards climate-friendly farming and ranching.

Congress should align the objectives of existing USDA programs with climate stewardship goals by:

- Endorsing the Conservation Stewardship Program's (CSP) whole-farm approach to conservation by streamlining the program to exclusively fund USDA-recognized climate change mitigation practices, increasing the program's mandatory funding, and increasing the producer contract monetary cap.
- Prioritizing Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) applications based on carbon sequestration benefits and reducing EQIP subsidies for Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations.
- Directing USDA to consult with experts and identify perennial practices that should be eligible for EQIP and CSP funding.
- Transitioning CRP towards permanent, rather than temporary, conservation easements, and modifying current program requirements to better support agroforestry (i.e., by allowing producers to harvest from trees and enabling silvopasture on CRP lands).

### CARBON SEQUESTRATION AND FORESTRY

Forests play a critical role in reliably and cost-effectively sequestering carbon but are threatened by wildfires and poor forest management.

Congress should incentivize private forest carbon sequestration by:

- Updating the Forest Legacy Program (FLP) to prioritize projects that sequester carbon and are in areas threatened by forest conversion, and to require sequestration measurement.
- Developing wood products and wood energy markets by expanding funding for the Wood Innovations Grant Program and creating a tax credit for use of low-carbon materials.
- Increasing the resilience of forests against wildfires by increasing funding for fuel reduction (i.e., removing the buildup of dead trees and reducing tree density).



For full recommendations and supporting background information, please visit [FarmBillLaw.org/2023FarmBill/](https://FarmBillLaw.org/2023FarmBill/) or [click here](#) for the full-length **Climate and Conservation** report.

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## ISSUE



## SOLUTION

### CARBON SEQUESTRATION AND AGRICULTURE

Perennial agriculture systems offer significant environmental and climate change mitigation benefits compared to annual crop systems. However, existing farm bill programs are geared to support annual crops, which creates an incentive structure for farmers that does not align with the long-term climate goals to mitigate climate change and reduce the emissions associated with agriculture.

Congress should prompt a system-level shift towards perennial agriculture across the United States by:

- Directing the USDA to develop a department-wide strategy to support perennial agriculture across existing USDA programs and through new pilot programs.
- Prioritizing perennial agriculture research within the Economic Research Service and through the USDA's external grant offerings, as well as the Foundation for Food and Agriculture Research.
- Directing USDA's Risk Management Agency, through the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation, to recommend changes to crop insurance policies to better account for the losses perennial producers experience but are not covered for under existing crop insurance policies.
- Continuing to enable biome balance by providing increased financial compensation for livestock loss due to predator attacks through the Livestock Indemnity Program.

### CONSERVATION COMPLIANCE ENHANCEMENT

Existing financial supports in the farm bill, such as premium subsidies for crop insurance, are tied to producer's compliance with certain "conservation compliance" requirements. Despite environmental conservation intentions, these requirements do not apply to enough producers and fail to capture current conservation science.

To ensure federal dollars are invested in the long-term future of American agriculture, Congress should:

- Provide funding to producers for planting cover crops and applying compost to their lands.
- Upgrade whole-farm insurance policies through Whole-Farm Revenue Protection (WFRP) by expanding production diversification incentives, reducing recordkeeping requirements, and updating the compensation structure available to Approved Insurance Providers that issue WFRP policies.
- Require all farms participating in USDA programs to comply with conservation compliance requirements and re-vamp those requirements to align with conservation science (i.e., by reforming the highly erodible land standards and increasing wetland mitigation standards).

To enhance the effects and benefits of the above recommendations, Congress should:

- Provide robust, baseline mandatory funding for technical assistance to increase the agency's expertise in conservation practices and on the best ways to provide culturally competent outreach and service.
- Authorize and provide mandatory funding for the USDA Climate Hubs.
- Provide technical support to farmers and producers on how to participate in voluntary carbon markets.
- Improve Conservation Compliance Enforcement by increasing enforcement staffing, targeting areas with high non-compliance, and requiring conservation compliance data reporting.