



2023 Farm Bill Platform

Climate Land Leaders steward 25,000+ acres of farm and forestland in the Midwest. These farmers and landowners are committed to alleviating climate change through land stewardship and conservation. Climate Land Leaders have three goals: To reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in their agricultural operations, to sequester carbon in soils and biomass, and to ensure that our lands and farms are resilient in the face of a rapidly changing climate. Achieving these goals will improve soil health, reduce soil erosion, clean and protect waters, increase biodiversity and help farms and communities – full of the diversity that is America – thrive.

Climate Land Leaders recognize and champion the interconnections between climate resilience, land tenure and farm viability for young, beginning, and Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) farmers, regional food systems, and ending hunger and food insecurity in our country. Climate Land Leaders support other Farm Bill platforms from like-minded sustainable agriculture and nutrition and food access organizations that prioritize investments in these.

With a focus on the role of land stewardship and conservation in alleviating climate change, Climate Land Leaders* have developed the following Farm Bill recommendations. These recommendations are numbered for ease of reference with no rank order implied.

The 2023 Farm Bill should prioritize the climate emergency

Agriculture is key for reducing GHG emissions, providing long-term carbon sequestration and building climate resilience. The next Farm Bill must expand incentives and reduce barriers for farmers and farmland owners to establish and maintain conservation practices, with priority on permanent soil cover, protecting conservation in perpetuity and equitable compensation for practices that have the greatest long-term ecosystem and climate benefits. Our recommendations for the next Farm Bill include:

1. Congress should require the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to determine and prioritize those Conservation Practice Standards with the highest combined contributions to GHG mitigation, carbon sequestration and the improvement of on-farm resilience.
2. Require a minimum of on-farm conservation practices (such as buffers, no/low till) to receive crop insurance and other subsidies for agricultural commodities, and include incentives within the crop insurance program to implement on-farm practices that significantly reduce GHG emissions and improve soil health (such as reducing use of fossil fuel-derived synthetic nitrogen fertilizers and pesticides and mined fertilizers, employing cover cropping and multiple crop rotations)
3. Cost share rates for establishing perennials (trees/shrubs, prairie, wetlands, silvopasture, riparian buffers, hedgerows, etc.) in the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) should be provided at 100%, one-third up front each year (rather than reimbursable) over three years as establishment success is achieved.



4. The focus of CRP should be shifted from “paying farmers not to farm” to paying farmers to establish and maintain practices that provide long-term ecological benefit and extend this taxpayer investment:
 - o Add a permanent easement option for land that has been enrolled in CRP at least twice.
 - o Provide subsidies to maintain and enhance perennial grasslands or woodlands management to offset the income loss when CRP contracts expire.
 - o Prioritize expiring CRP contracts for EQIP funding to add infrastructure (fencing, watering systems, etc.) for conversion to working lands.
 - o Redesign CRP requirements to eliminate the incentive to destroy perennial land, wetland and woodland in order to qualify.
5. The minimum enrollment of grasslands in CRP should be at least 10 million acres and mandatory funding of \$50 million per year over the life of the Farm Bill.
6. Congress should set a minimum amount of CRP acres that must be devoted to agroforestry, the most climate-friendly practice.
7. Permanent baseline funding of \$1 billion per year should be provided for the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) to permanently protect grasslands, wetlands and other land uses that store significant amounts of carbon.
8. Agricultural carbon markets with USDA backing must prioritize agricultural practices that sequester carbon for the longest term, including grass-based livestock systems and tree and shrub plantings.

The 2023 Farm Bill should ensure that all who qualify can participate in USDA conservation programs, receive robust compensation and experience streamlined, flexible program administration

The demand for programs like EQIP, CRP and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) far outweighs the available funding (even with the influx of funds from the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act). In addition, participants in these programs often report delays and inflexible program requirements that inhibit farmers and farmland owners from transforming their land to perennial systems. Our recommendations for the next Farm Bill include:

1. \$2 billion per year should be provided to EQIP and \$4 billion per year to CSP for new contracts over the life of the Farm Bill.
2. EQIP cost share rates should be increased for perennial practices to align with actual implementation and labor costs.
3. Rental rates for continuous CRP should be raised to be competitive with land rental rates.
4. Cost share for mid-contract CRP management practices should be reinstated, and NRCS should account for inflation and the rising cost of materials to ensure both organic and conventional producers receive appropriate cost share.
5. Farmers should be able to graze CRP outside of the nesting season without paying back rent, not only for buffers but for pollinator habitat, prairie strips, etc.
6. EQIP and CSP should be flexible enough to accommodate needed schedules for planting perennial crops, which are not always the calendar year.
7. NRCS and Farm Service Agency (FSA) staff should be increased and invested in to effectively serve farmers and farmland owners implementing conservation programs, including increasing starting salaries to increase quality and quantity of candidates and prioritizing multilingual skills to better serve multilingual farmers.



The 2023 Farm Bill should invest robustly in healthy, equitable communities

Congress must fully commit to righting past wrongs for BIPOC farmers and ranchers and prioritize land tenure and support for those producers. The next Farm Bill must also invest in all of the next generation of farmers and ranchers seeking to establish climate-resilient operations, and it should prioritize funding for local and regional food systems, which will prove the most resilient as climate change disruptions increase. The next Farm Bill should:

1. Recognize traditional, ecological, knowledge-based conservation to allow a Tribe or a group of Tribes within a state or region to develop traditional, ecological, knowledge-based technical standards that will control the implementation of all conservation projects allowed under the Farm Bill (per the Native Farm Bill Coalition recommendations).
2. Establish a minimum payment amount in EQIP to support small, diversified producers.
3. Provide up-front EQIP cost-share of 100% for BIPOC producers.
4. Provide EQIP to Confined Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) only for implementation of solid bedded manure and composting systems.
5. Create a new livestock set aside in CRP for advanced grazing management practices and those structural practices that facilitate a transition to sustainable grazing systems in CRP.
6. Make modifications to the Whole-Farm Revenue Protection (WFRP) program that simplify, streamline and increase access to the product in order to support farmers who use diversification to reduce risk and combat decreasing agricultural productivity.
7. Prioritize Agricultural Land Easement (ALE) projects in the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) that maintain agricultural farm viability and include affordability protections, such as an option to purchase at agricultural value.
8. Provide clear instruction to NRCS to prioritize ACEP projects supporting beginning and historically underserved farmers.
9. Bolster access to capital for beginning and underserved producers with limited assets, including streamlining the FSA loan approval process and creating a pre-approval mechanism for Direct Farm Ownership Loans.
10. Promote the Conservation Contract Program (formerly called the Debt For Nature Program), which reduces FSA indebtedness in exchange for a conservation contract, and expand the terms to allow advanced grazing management practices on conservation lands.

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