



Additional Farm Bill Talking Points:

Since the very first Farm Bill in the 1930's, the legislation has had three primary goals: making healthy, affordable food available for all Americans; ensuring the financial viability of farmers; and protecting our soil and other natural resources. Putting soil health at the center of agriculture policy will promote all three.

Building a better Farm Bill 2023 with soil health as the focus, utilizing climate-smart agricultural practices and increasing funding for technical assistance is the reform needed.

The 2023 Farm Bill represents a tremendous opportunity to support farmers who are at the forefront of climate change. Agriculture has a role to play in reducing carbon emissions and mitigating the impacts of the changing climate for us all.

Farm Bill conservation programs have a proven record of success. They are so successful that demand by farmers and ranchers have outstripped dollars available. Between 2010 and 2020 just 31% of farmers who applied for Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) funds and 42% of farmers who applied for Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) funds were awarded contracts.

The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) of 2022 provided nearly 19.5 billion dollars in funding that will help reduce the backlog of demand for these USDA conservation programs. These dollars need to remain in the budget and should not be reallocated to the Farm Bill. Additional money from the Farm Bill should be allocated on top of this 19.5 billion to make up for the underfunded programs and growing demand by farmers.

Congress should require that the USDA focus its attention on funding soil health agricultural practices. Research has shown that healthy soil is good for both natural resources and net farm income. Healthy soil is rich in organic matter and microbes feed on that organic matter. Microbes help bind soil together creating soil structure that absorbs water like a sponge. Rain and snow soak in instead of turning into dangerous runoff that can contain fertilizers, pesticides, soil, and manure.

Producers and economists agree that restoring healthy soils can help farmers cut their fuel use and radically reduce their reliance on expensive inputs. When soils are healthy they feed the plants, so farmers can reduce their fertilizer bill. Healthy plants – fed by healthy soil – are resistant to pests and disease, so farmers need fewer pesticides.

Land Conservation Programs can have a great impact on our waterways and yet only account for about \$30 billion dollars or 7% of the Farm Bill. Water quality and water quantity has become a critical issue and safe drinking water needs to be safeguarded.

Increased funding for Farm Bill conservation programs represents the best opportunity in decades to meet producer demand for conservation programs, climate-smart agriculture, and associated conservation technical assistance. These programs will supplement existing Farm Bill conservation title funding, and keep the ball rolling throughout the five-year period of the Act. Farmers rely on these Farm Bill's Conservation programs to help them make their farms more resilient and productive. But these programs can only help farmers if they are funded.



USDA's ability to deliver conservation programs to farmers and ranchers depends heavily on on-the-ground technical assistance. Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) provides landowners with the site-specific solutions needed to implement conservation practices on their lands, while providing accountability to ensure maximum return on the public investment. Inadequate technical assistance would reduce the effectiveness of conservation practices on the land. We must not hamstring our investment in conservation by under-funding technical assistance.

Congress should require that USDA better measure, assess, and report on the natural resource impacts of Farm Bill conservation programs. It should fund creation of an information warehouse where USDA data would be readily available to researchers and the public in ways that protect the privacy of individual farmers.

Congress should increase funding for the Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education (SARE) program which funds on-farm research to develop and test best farming practices.

The U.S. Congress typically renews the Farm Bill every five years, often with strong bipartisan cooperation. Conservation practices supported by the Farm Bill result in cleaner water, increased carbon sequestration, healthier soils, enhanced wildlife habitat, more outdoor recreation opportunities, increased flood control and increased drought resistance. Strong conservation measures in the 2023 Farm Bill will result in more resilient farms, stronger rural communities, and cleaner water.