



# 2023 Farm Bill Platform

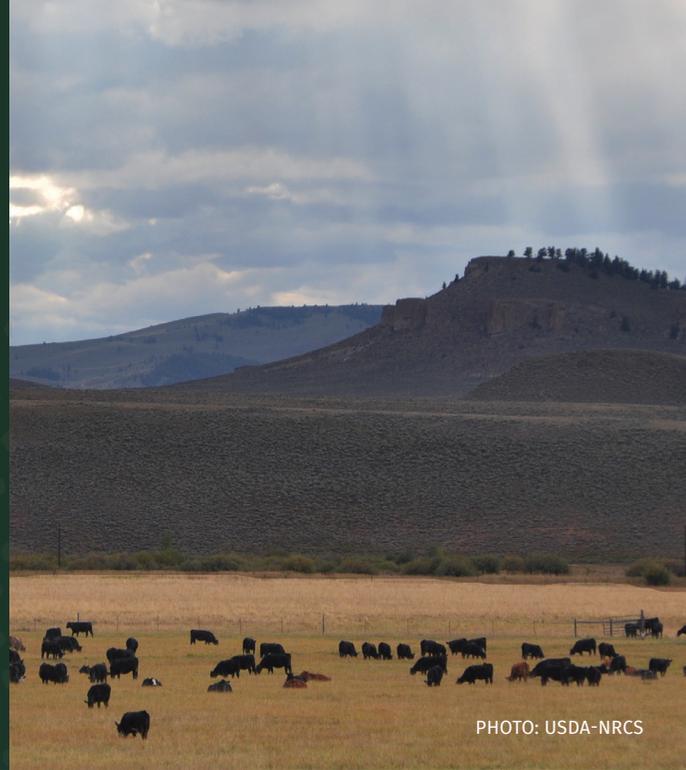


PHOTO: USDA-NRCS

**National Wildlife Federation urges Congress to pass a 2023 Farm Bill with strong agricultural conservation provisions for resilient communities, healthy soils, clean water, and thriving wildlife.**

The Farm Bill is America's largest investment in conservation on private and working lands and therefore the best opportunity to support farmers and ranchers to better steward the resources that support our nation's food supply, reverse natural habitat destruction, and improve resiliency. In 2021, Farm Bill-funded conservation programs touched over 45 million acres, an area larger than the entire state of Oklahoma. Working with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, farmers, ranchers, foresters, and private landowners are able to conserve, protect, and restore wildlife and pollinator habitat, sensitive grasslands and wetlands, adapt and mitigate the effects of climate change, improve soil health, increase the quality and quantity of water, and create more resilient communities. It is critically important for the 2023 Farm Bill to build on past successes with robust conservation funding to address the unprecedented challenges facing our ecosystems, wildlife, and people.

PHOTO: PRESTON KERES, USDA-FPAC

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## THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION'S

# Top Priorities for the 2023 Farm Bill

## 1 Increase Conservation Title Baseline Funding To Meet Producer Demand And Protect And Build On Conservation Funding Provided In The Inflation Reduction Act.

With Farm Bill conservation programs greatly over-subscribed, the funding provided in the Inflation Reduction Act is critical for meeting demand from farmers and ranchers. This funding must stay in conservation and climate-smart agriculture in order to address increasing demand for climate-smart conservation practices and long-term outcomes needed for a resilient agricultural economy.

## 2 Prevent Conversion Of Native Grasslands Through A Nationwide Sodsaver Provision.

Sodsaver correctly aligns the market risk of putting never-before-cropped grasslands into production by reducing federal premium subsidies for crop insurance on newly cropped, former grassland areas. Although currently active in six states, Sodsaver should be expanded nationwide to level the playing field and reduce taxpayer subsidization of risky production to help protect this endangered ecosystem.

## 3 Better Align Crop Insurance With Conservation Practices That Reduce Risk And Save Money.

Remove barriers to, and provide incentives for, adopting risk-reducing conservation practices within the crop insurance program to lower crop insurance costs and increase on-farm resilience.

## 4 Improve Equity In The Delivery Of Conservation Program Funds And Technical Assistance.

Addressing historic inequities in agriculture conservation programs will profoundly boost the ability of farmers, ranchers, forest owners, and communities across the country to build resilience, while enhancing soil health, water quality, wildlife habitat and livelihoods.

## 5 Maintain The Linkage Between Conservation Compliance And Crop Insurance Premium Subsidies And Improve Enforcement Of These Provisions.

In exchange for receiving certain farm program benefits, farmers must agree to fundamental soil and wetland conservation provisions to protect wetlands and reduce soil erosion. These provisions must be maintained and properly enforced.



**6 Improve The Conservation Reserve Program.** Restore incentive payments, remove rental rate caps, and restore reasonable limits to emergency haying and grazing within the Conservation Reserve Program to allow the program to better meet the needs of producers while providing benefits to soil, water, wildlife, and climate.

**7 Maximize Conservation Program Benefits To Wildlife, Climate, And Water And Support For Public Access Programs.** Increase opportunities and remove barriers for producers to adopt resilient and diversified cropping systems and advanced grazing practices. Require conservation plans for Agricultural Land Easements. Better incentivize climate and wildlife practices within working lands and partnership programs. Continue and enhance popular existing programs that enable public access to private lands for hunting, fishing, and other recreational activities.

**8 Optimize Carbon Sequestration In Ecologically Appropriate Ways And Create Climate-Smart Forestry Opportunities.** Incentivize producers to adopt conservation practices that sequester carbon and reduce emissions and have multiple benefits for soil, water, and wildlife. Ensure that carbon sequestration efforts do not have unintended consequences for biodiversity. Expand opportunities for, and research on, carbon sequestration and forest resilience through climate smart forestry.

**9 Improve Wildlife Connectivity And Movement.** Utilize existing programs to provide resources and incentives to private landowners to help increase habitat connectivity and allow for wildlife movement and resilience in key migration corridors.

**10 Enhance USDA's Data Collection, Measurement, And Analysis Systems.** Ensuring that U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) improves its data collection, research, analysis, and dissemination to enable farmers and ranchers to better understand which conservation practices help reduce risk, increase profitability and allow for more efficient, targeted investments.

PHOTO: BEVERLY MOSELEY, USDA-NRCS



# Detailed Policy Recommendations

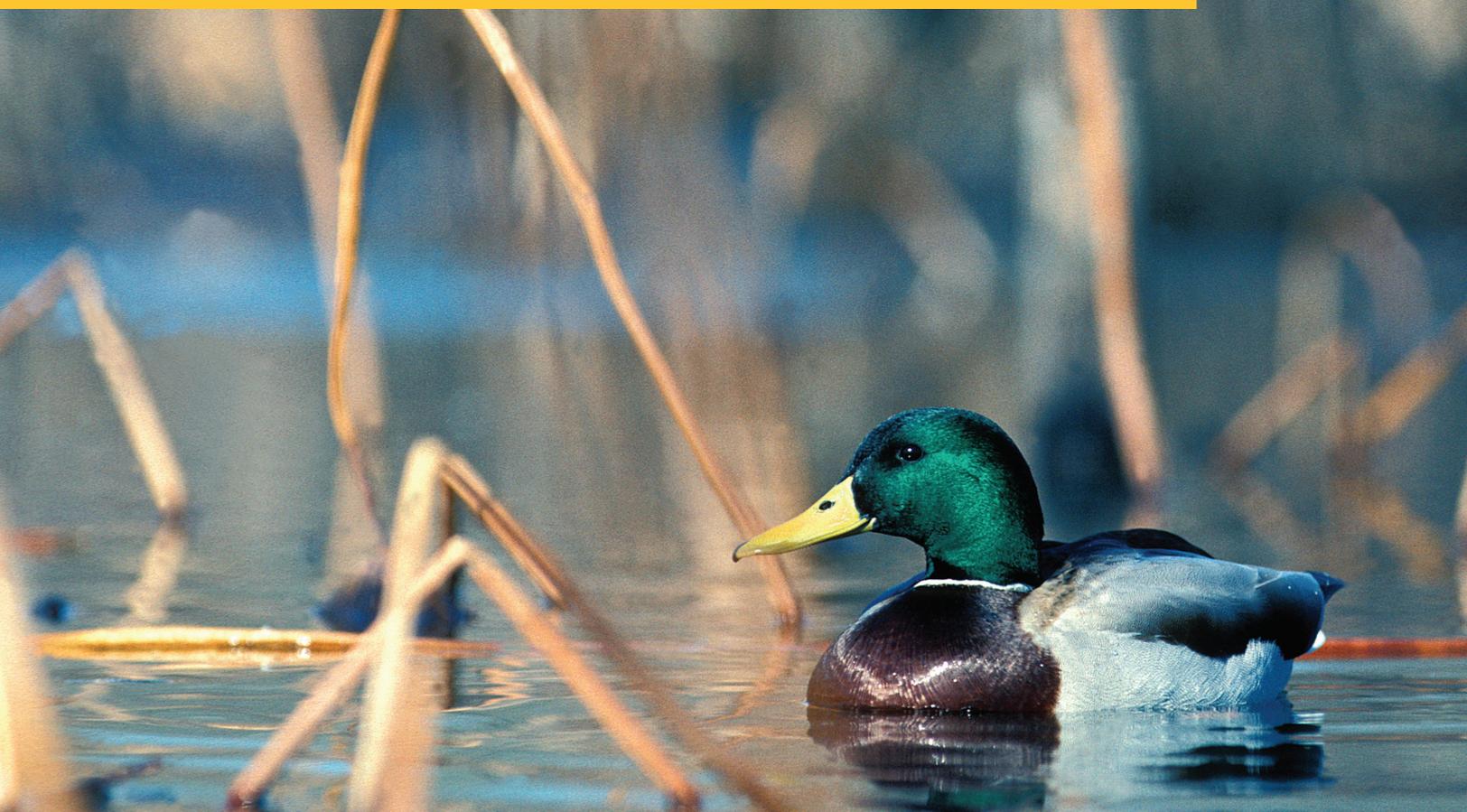


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## Conservation Funding

Farm Bill conservation programs provide technical and financial assistance to enable farmers, ranchers, and foresters to adopt practices that build soil health, improve water quality and quantity, sequester carbon, and enhance and protect habitat for wildlife. However, due to high demand, these programs are often oversubscribed, with more applicants than funding available. There is a need for increased support for these programs to ensure that producers have the resources they need to adopt conservation practices on working lands.

**The 2023 Farm Bill should increase overall funding for the Farm Bill conservation title and ensure that the climate-smart agriculture and conservation funding provided by the Inflation Reduction Act stays in climate-smart agriculture and Farm Bill conservation programs. This funding will help address demand from farmers and ranchers to adopt conservation practices and to be a part of the solution to climate change.**

## Agriculture Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)

Conservation easements provide critical habitat for wildlife, help to improve water quality, reduce flooding, recharge groundwater, and protect open space. ACEP provides financial and technical assistance to help restore, maintain and protect agricultural lands, grasslands, and wetlands and their related benefits through grassland, wetland, and agricultural land easements.

- Increase overall funding for ACEP.
- Require conservation plans for all agricultural and forest land easements, including those that do not have highly erodible lands. Plans should be separate from minimum deed terms and address all identified resource concerns as well as plans for reducing emissions and sequestering carbon in the soil, in addition to addressing the purposes for which the easement was established.
- Wetland easements:
  - Ensure that there is adequate funding available for restoration and stewardship of wetland reserve easements (WRE).
  - Exempt lands enrolled in WRE that are in active agricultural production from the 25% county cropland limitation.
- Grassland Easements:
  - Provide the option for USDA to hold easements for “Grasslands of Special Environmental Significance” to provide easement opportunities for landowners in areas with few or no eligible easement-holding entities.
  - Allow ACEP funding to be used for restoration and management activities of grasslands, prioritizing grasslands of special significance.
- Direct USDA to target non-grassland Agricultural Land Easements (ALE) easements to areas at risk of development and lands with high carbon sequestration potential, and to prioritize historically underserved producers.
- Support creation of a new forest conservation easement program, contingent on the following requirements:
  - Funding for the new program does not come from existing Farm Bill conservation programs.
  - All easements must have forest management or conservation plans.
  - There must be a prohibition on clearcutting an easement.
  - The program should place a priority on rare and declining forest types.



## Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)

CRP is one of our nation's most important wildlife conservation programs on private lands. The program is designed to address three co-equal purposes: soil, water, and wildlife habitat. The following recommendations will strengthen the CRP program and maximize benefits for producers and rural economies as well as for soil, water, and wildlife:

- Increase CRP acreage, ramping up over a five-year period towards historic acreage levels.
- Formally recognize in statute the State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) program and ensure that it stays within continuous CRP. SAFE is a popular and effective program that creates and restores high quality habitat for at-risk, threatened, and endangered species and has successfully helped to keep ecologically and economically important species like sage grouse and sharp-tailed grouse off of the Endangered Species List.
- Cost share and incentive recommendations:
  - Change Practice Incentive Payments to “at least” 50% of the cost of practice implementation to encourage participation and recognize the costs of establishing practices.
  - Reinstate cost-share for mid-contract management for all practices except for haying and grazing, and better ensure that producers follow through with required mid-contract management activities. Mid-contract management is a critical tool for ensuring high quality conservation cover for wildlife and can improve soil health, water quality, and carbon sequestration. Mid-contract management should be improved to ensure that wildlife habitat goals are met.
  - Authorize cost-share for fencing and water infrastructure on grass-based CRP practices to encourage more grazing and to provide the infrastructure necessary to support the long-term transition to grass-based agricultural production.
  - Remove the cost-share payment limit for seed costs. With many pollinator species in decline, CRP provides a proactive, voluntary, collaborative approach to pollinator and monarch conservation, which can help provided needed habitat and nectar for species and prevent the need for listing under the Endangered Species Act.
- Remove rental rate caps on both continuous and general signups to enable Farm Service Agency (FSA) to fairly compensate producers. The 2018 Farm Bill reduced rental rates to find budget savings to pay for an increase in program acreage. Unfortunately, the rate reduction reduced interest in the program because the rates were no longer competitive, and decreased the environmental benefits of land entering the program. The 2023 Farm Bill should eliminate the rental rate limits put in place in the 2018 Farm Bill.
- Haying and Grazing recommendations:
  - Restore historic limits on emergency haying to no more than 50% of CRP contract acres and limit emergency grazing to 75% of contracts acres or 75% of the stocking rate on contract acres. This previously longstanding practice of the FSA struck an equitable balance between providing emergency relief to producers during droughts while safeguarding the soil, water, and wildlife benefits of the program. Unfortunately, changes in the 2018 Farm Bill inadvertently led to the removal of this limitation and as a result, whole fields and entire contract acres have been hayed during times of emergency, destroying critical habitat for wildlife and threatening the availability of forage the following year.
  - Emergency use should “reset” the clock for routine grazing and managed haying, and emergency haying and grazing should be restricted to no more than once every two years on any given parcel.
  - Restrict non-emergency, managed haying to no more than once every 3 years.
  - Maintain the prohibition on haying during the primary nesting season
  - Build on the success of the CLEAR30 pilot that was created in the 2018 Farm Bill by making it a permanent feature of CRP, opening up the eligibility beyond expiring CRP acres, clarifying that it should be offered nationwide, and expanding the program's focus from water quality to also include wildlife habitat and water quantity.



PHOTO: CHIP CARROON, BLM

- Exempt working CRP lands, including Grassland CRP and CRP acres with non-emergency haying and grazing, from the 25 percent county acreage cap and provide the Secretary with county cropland limitation waiver authority for all CRP signup types, not just continuous and the Conservation Reserve Easement Program (CREP).
- Southern pine tree practices:
  - Require management of southern pine tree contract acres to meet wildlife habitat objectives. Only re-enroll pine forests that have implemented management practices and continue to limit re-enrollments of pine tree practices to one re-enrollment.
  - Continue to provide incentive payments for thinning and prescribed burning of existing pine forests and increase the Forest Management Incentive payment level to 150% to increase adoption of these practices.
  - Restore continual re-enrollment eligibility for hardwood trees practices, including longleaf pine, which is treated as a hardwood in current policy.
  - Continue to restrict pine straw harvest in CRP longleaf stands.
- Provide priority enrollments and increased incentives for beginning farmers and ranchers to enroll in CRP.
- Increase the limit on annual rental payments from \$50k to \$125k. The payment limit hasn't been changed since the program began in 1985, and it needs to be updated to account for economic factors such as increases in land rental rates.



PHOTO: STEVE SINTON RANCH, NRCS



PHOTO: USDA-NRCS

## Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

The CSP program uses a whole farm approach to provide conservation assistance for producers to maintain and improve their conservation systems and adopt additional activities. More acres are enrolled in CSP than any other conservation program.

- Better prioritize climate activities by including climate mitigation and resilience as priority resource concerns and by directing NRCS to create regionally-specific climate-smart bundles.
- Move the Soil Health and Income Protection Program (SHIPP) from CRP to CSP and expand the program nationwide, creating a bundle for precision agriculture and conservation cover enhancements.
- Create a “do no harm” savings clause within CSP to ensure that CSP funding is not going towards practices or enhancements that have negative environmental or environmental justice impacts. Enhancements should not promote or encourage expanded or improved agricultural drainage or conversion of non-cropland to cropland.
- Cap payment rates for tree planting intended for high carbon sequestration rate and limit to land that was recently cultivated.
- Prioritize enrollment of producers with expiring CRP contracts.

### Soil as a Natural Climate Solution

One of the best ways for agriculture to contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation is through improved soil health. Soils contain five times more carbon than above ground biomass, like trees. Healthy soils sequester more carbon, filter floods faster, hold more water during drought, and contribute to higher crop yields than degraded soils. Agriculture practices that sequester carbon in soil include cover crops, prescribed grazing management, and buffer strips, among many other popular and effective practices. Improving soil health is a popular, proven way to address climate change, improve water quality and quantity, increase farmers’ bottom lines, and create more resilient communities.

## Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

EQIP provides technical assistance and cost share for producers to adopt conservation practices on working lands to address natural resource concerns and deliver environmental benefits.

- Increase funding for EQIP to meet demand from producers.
- Maintain the requirement that least 10 percent of EQIP funds be used for wildlife habitat conservation practices annually and:
  - Ensure that EQIP wildlife funds are going towards high quality wildlife habitat practices that benefit priority fish and wildlife species, including Species of Greatest Conservation Need as identified in State Wildlife Action Plans, and that there is state input in the choice of wildlife practices.
  - Direct USDA to ensure that each state has a 10% minimum for wildlife habitat and that state wildlife funding pools are created at the beginning of the year, with state technical committees committing the 10% wildlife set aside in initial planning rather than through post-hoc spending reviews.
- Livestock set-aside:
  - Prioritize the amount of livestock funding targeted at grazing practices within EQIP, particularly prescribed grazing, and practices that sequester carbon or reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.
  - No EQIP funding should go to new or expanded Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs).
  - CAFOs receiving EQIP funds must develop and implement plans to reduce negative impacts to frontline communities.
- Make prairie strips and virtual fencing allowable conservation practices in EQIP.
- Create a “do no harm” savings clause within EQIP to ensure that EQIP funding is not going towards practices that have negative environmental or environmental justice impacts.
- Address water quantity concerns while ensuring that irrigation efficiency practices improve in stream flows:
  - Require that EQIP payments used for irrigation efficiency improvements result in real savings to in-stream flows, ensuring a conservation benefit to such funding. Additionally, ensure that any savings through irrigation efficiency are not used to bring additional land into irrigated production, or to convert land to more intensive uses.
  - Provide higher cost-share rates for irrigation efficiency projects that provide higher water conservation benefits and which result in the conserved water increasing stream flows.
  - Ensure that any project receiving a payment limit waiver provide multiple conservation benefits.
- Add carbon sequestration and greenhouse gas reduction as a national priority for EQIP.
- Better target high priority practices that receive higher cost share:
  - Add carbon sequestration, wildlife habitat restoration, and wildlife connectivity practices to the criteria for the high priority practices for which states can choose to provide higher cost share.
  - Direct Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to create a list of “allowable” practices that states can choose from. Practices should be currently underutilized with high potential to provide significant benefits for climate, wildlife, and water.

PHOTO: LANCE CHEUNG, TN-USDA



PHOTO: MIKE McDONALD, USDA-NRCS

## Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

Created in the 2014 Farm Bill, the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) uses an innovative partner-led model to deliver conservation assistance to producers in order to address regional and watershed-level resource concerns.

- Increase funding for the Regional Conservation Partnership Program.
- Further streamline and simplify the application process and contract requirements to enable smooth implementation, reduced burdens on partner groups, and greater participation in the program.
- Add wildlife corridors and connectivity as a priority resource concern for critical conservation areas.
- Direct NRCS to review practice standard flexibility for “innovative” practices to ensure adequate flexibility for practices with promising conservation value.
- Continue to allow RCPP easements to be held by both eligible entities and USDA.
- Add carbon sequestration and climate resilience as a priority resource concern.
- Increase participation from historically underserved producers, including through lowered or waived match requirements, funding set asides, and clear guidance on in kind contributions.

## Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP)

The VPA-HIP funds efforts by states and tribal agencies to enhance public access to private lands for hunting, fishing, and other recreation activities. Typically, these grants boost existing state programs that fund recreational access and habitat improvement on private lands.

- Reauthorize VPA-HIP at \$150 million over five years and re-affirm the program priority of hunting, fishing, and other wildlife-compatible recreational activities.
- Direct USDA to offer five-year grant awards to encourage greater continuity.

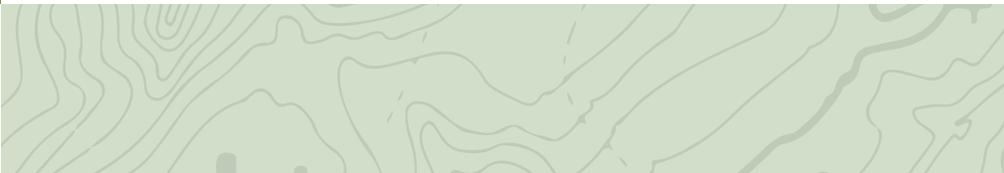




PHOTO: RYAN MOEHRING, USFWS

## Nationwide Sodsaver

The Sodsaver provision saves taxpayer dollars by reducing federal premium subsidies for crop insurance on land where native sod has been plowed for row crop planting. This transfers the risk of conversion of largely marginal native grasslands to producers and helps to disincentivize conversion of marginal grasslands. Currently, the provision only applies to six states: Iowa, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota.

- The 2023 Farm Bill should extend Sodsaver nationwide. By doing so, taxpayers would not bear the risk of bringing new, unproven land into production. Sodsaver disincentivizes the destruction of remaining native prairies, reducing carbon emissions, and saving tens of millions of taxpayer dollars.
- Direct USDA to track grassland conversion at the state and county levels and make the results publicly available on an annual basis.

## Crop Insurance

The Federal Crop Insurance Program is the primary safety net available for agricultural producers. The program's actuarial soundness should be enhanced by incorporating risk-reducing conservation practices, which can improve conservation benefits on the landscape while still providing the support needed to keep farming viable and help manage the escalating cost of crop insurance programs.

- Direct the Risk Management Agency (RMA) to offer premium discounts for voluntary adoption of practices that increase resilience and reduce risk. The Pandemic Cover Crop Program provided a small discount on premium subsidies to producers who planted cover crops. This program roughly tripled the number of reported cover crop acres to a new high of 12.2 million acres. Practices like cover crops can help to reduce the chance of crop failure in extreme weather events because they enable the soil to hold more water.
- Incentivize producers to plant cover crops on prevent plant acres.
- Incentivize the removal of the most marginal, low yielding areas from production through allowing accelerated Actual Production History (APH) adjustments. These areas are typically the most prone to erosion and returning them to grass or other habitat would sequester significant amounts of carbon. Allowing for rapid APH adjustments could be one way to incentivize the removal of these lands.
- Prohibit or reduce premium subsidies on land capability classes designated as unsuitable for crops, with the exception of pasture, forage, and rangeland. Taxpayers should not be shouldering the risk for insuring land that isn't suitable for row crop production.
- Direct USDA to undertake a review of the Whole Farm Revenue Protection (WFRP) policy to address barriers to participation in order to ensure that program can be expanded to meet the needs of diversified farmers. The WFRP program provides coverage to producers with mixed operations and diversified cropping systems, which single commodity insurance policies generally do not cover.
- Pilot a new crop insurance option to protect producers against short term losses to APH during the transition to adopting new conservation practices. While adopting new conservation practices rarely leads to significant loss of yield, this pilot would help address perceived concerns about yield drag.
- Remove barriers within crop insurance that impede the adoption of conservation practices.
- Make all NRCS conservation practices count as good farming practices according to RMA without any requirement that the producer prove the practice won't impact yield.
- Direct RMA to work with NRCS to do a study of existing barriers within crop insurance that prevent farmers from adopting conservation practices, such as overly prescriptive insurance guidelines around inter-seeding and prohibitions on commercializing cover crops.
- Shorten the APH adjustment period for farmers adding new crops to rotations, similar to the North Dakota Personal Transition Yield Program. This allows farmers to build their APH faster while rotating multiple crops using personal data, which is more representative of their actual production capability than county or area data.
- Use crop insurance to remove barriers to, and incentivize the adoption of, risk-reducing diverse crop rotations, which help address herbicide resistance and are more effective at building soil carbon than single-crop monocultures. Effective incentives could include premium discounts, innovative crop insurance products, favorable payment rates, or other means. RMA should pilot a multi-year insurance policy for farmers transitioning to diversified cropping systems.





PHOTO: BOB WICK

## Conservation Compliance

**In exchange for receiving certain farm program benefits, farmers must agree to basic soil and wetland conservation provisions to protect wetlands and reduce soil erosion. Conservation compliance prevents 295 million tons of soil from eroding every year into our rivers, lakes, and streams. The 2023 Farm Bill should reaffirm this critical conservation compact between producers and taxpayers through the following recommendations:**

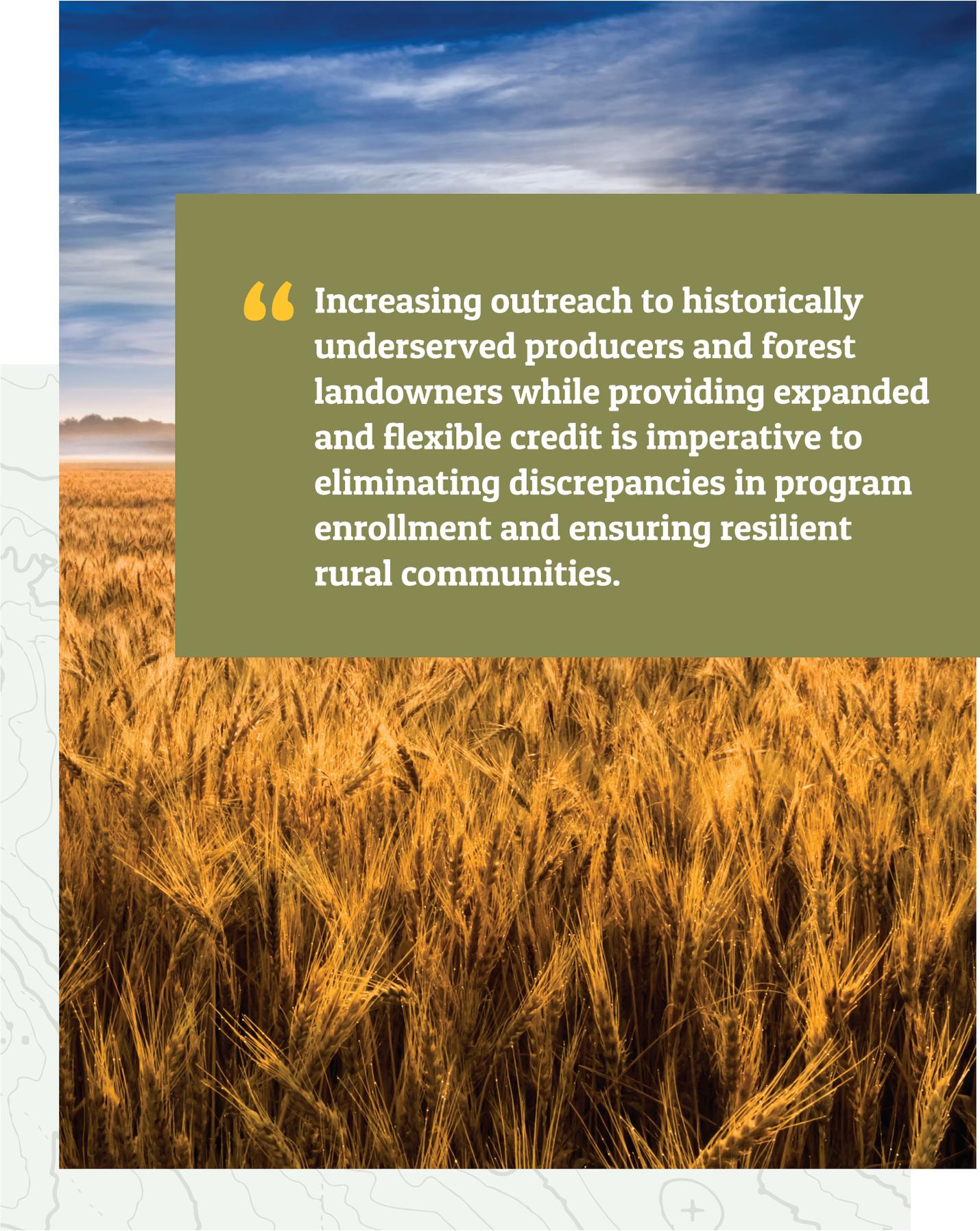
- Maintain the linkage between conservation compliance provisions, crop insurance premium subsidies, and other farm benefits.
- Oppose all efforts to weaken Swampbuster, including by limiting the types of wetlands covered, reducing penalties for non-compliance, setting unrealistic deadlines on NRCS to accomplish wetland determinations, or removing retroactive penalties for non-compliance.
- Ensure conservation compliance is equally enforced across all states. Direct NRCS to conduct spot checks on five percent of producers in each state. The current five percent compliance spot check rate is a national average and some states have had very few, if any spot checks. NRCS should also improve their process for monitoring and enforcement in states with no violations multiple years in a row.
- Improve conservation compliance monitoring, enforcement, and reporting activities in order to fully meet the wetland and soil conservation goals of the program.
- Direct NRCS to conduct a study to evaluate the effectiveness and accuracy of State Off-Site Methods for Wetland Determinations and make the results of the study publicly available. State Off-site Methods for Wetland Determinations have been implemented for nearly a decade without adequate review of their efficacy.
- Direct NRCS to use technically defensible means for conducting wetland determinations and ensure that NRCS is overseeing state offices' quality control reviews of wetland determinations.
- Direct NRCS to ensure that Highly Erodible Land (HEL) conservation plans are adequately reducing erosion and addressing ephemeral gullies.
- Direct NRCS to strengthen requirements for what constitutes adequate justification and documentation for decisions to grant good-faith waivers.
- Provide mandatory funding for compliance implementation and enforcement.

## Equity

Despite recent progress made on equity in delivery of USDA programs, there continues to be a major need for improvements to ensure that all producers, regardless of race, gender, experience, or scale have equitable access to agriculture conservation tools. Increasing outreach to historically underserved producers and forest landowners by providing expanded and flexible credit is imperative to eliminating discrepancies in program enrollment and ensuring resilient rural communities.

- Formalize the role of USDA's Equity Commission and provide funding for its mission. Direct the Equity Commission to identify and reduce barriers that historically underserved groups face in accessing conservation programs.
- Streamline conservation program application processes, particularly for socially disadvantaged and small- and mid-sized operations.
- Consider increasing options for up-front financial assistance and minimum payments for historically underserved producers to succeed in conservation uptake. Improve flexibility of various form of agricultural credit to help all producers stabilize land tenure and build viable and resilient operations.
- Expand USDA's considerations and flexibility with heirs' property rights and invest in technical assistance to help such producers access loans and develop succession plans. Additionally, Congress should increase funding for the Heirs Property Relending Program.
- Ensure that the Farming Opportunities Training and Outreach Program maintains an equal balance between the Outreach and Assistance to Socially Disadvantaged and Veteran Farmers and Ranchers Program and the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program while increasing funding for both.
- Increase funding for the Office of Civil Rights to allow for sufficient staffing to address complaints in a timely manner to correct a history of documented inadequacies. Additionally, incorporating regular audits and oversight capacity will improve transparency and trust in USDA's mission and equitable program delivery.
- Require representation of Tribes in advisory groups and planning or implementation bodies at local, state, and federal level held by USDA and U.S. Forest Service.
- Allow greater flexibility, waivers, and self-determination opportunities for tribal entities to successfully access and implement conservation programs.





**“ Increasing outreach to historically underserved producers and forest landowners while providing expanded and flexible credit is imperative to eliminating discrepancies in program enrollment and ensuring resilient rural communities.**

## Data, Measuring, Monitoring, and Assessment

There is a need for more accessible data and analysis that quantifies the effectiveness as well as the risk reduction benefits of conservation practices. Improving USDA's data systems and ensuring that USDA improves its data research, analysis, and dissemination will strengthen the crop insurance and conservation programs and allow for more targeted investments.

- Direct NRCS to publish a report annually on the unmet demand for each conservation program by state.
- Authorize and provide funding for monitoring, evaluation, and reporting of Farm Bill conservation program outcomes.
- Direct the Secretary of Agriculture to collect, collate, integrate, and analyze data relating to the impacts of conservation practices on enhancing crop yields, soil health, and otherwise reducing risk and improving farm and ranch profitability.
- Give the Secretary of Agriculture the authority to establish a secure data warehouse to keep and analyze data on conservation and farm productivity while still preserving producer privacy.
- Allow qualified, trusted researchers to access anonymized and aggregated data and analyze relationships between conservation practices, crop yields, soil health, and risk.



PHOTO: PRESTON KERES, USDA-FPAC

## Research

- Provide mandatory funding for USDA Climate Hubs for each state. The Climate Hubs should play a primary role in coordinating USDA-wide efforts to address climate change and resilience and can serve as central information, education, and messaging resources for USDA efforts related to climate smart agricultural practices and resilience.
- Increase the following types of research:
  - Increase research on effective conservation outreach at NRCS and FSA, including methods, communication approaches, and messengers that result in increased farmer adoption and maintenance of climate-smart practices.
  - Direct NRCS and the Agricultural Research Service (ARS) to research benefits of traditional ecological knowledge and indigenous agricultural practices to understand and apply associated conservation outcomes. Emphasize participatory research approaches that include indigenous communities and Tribal entities as full partners.
  - Increase research into wildlife connectivity on working lands, including research into virtual fencing and fence modifications for wildlife.
  - Increase research into effective wildlife conflict reduction and non-lethal predator deterrence strategies.
  - Increase ARS and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) research on strategies to avoid weed resistant pesticide and herbicide cycles.
  - Direct USDA to expand data collection on diversified cropping systems at the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), FSA and the Economic Research Service (ERS) to better understand the economic, environmental, and sociological benefits of various agricultural systems.
- Increased funding for research, education, and extension at Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Tribal Colleges, and other institutions that prioritize underserved communities.
- Increase mandatory funding for the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative's integrated research program and add conservation and land restoration projects to the program's priorities.
- Add climate sequestration and resilience to the purposes of the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program.
- Reauthorize and provide adequate funding for key research title programs related to sustainable agriculture.

## Forestry

- Expand research on carbon sequestration, storage, and cycling in the Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) program, to inform rigorous emissions estimates climate models, product evaluation, and private carbon market verification efforts.
- Ensure that the Wood Innovation Grant Program truly drives innovation and climate-smart product development. Require research on the full lifecycle greenhouse gas implications of mass timber, biochar, and other innovative wood products before endorsing these as climate-smart forest products.
- Create a new program managed by the Forest Service to provide loan guarantees and grants to develop and expand nurseries and seed collection facilities with a priority to historically underserved applicants.
- Support continued and expanded conservation of forests for community, climate, and wildlife benefits.



PHOTO: NRCS

## PFAS

Known as forever chemicals, PFAS chemicals are prevalent, long-lasting chemicals that are widespread and persistent in the environment and pose threats to clean water, agricultural lands, wildlife habitat, and human health. In agriculture, PFAS chemicals have been found in biosolids that are applied to fields, leading to particularly harmful impacts to dairy producers as cows graze infected fields and PFAS levels bioaccumulate. We recommend the following ways for Congress to address PFAS in the Farm Bill:

- Expand research on PFAS contamination on agricultural lands, including research on soil monitoring, agricultural and ecosystem effects, and remediation strategies through ARS, Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS), and other related agencies.
- Create a state block grant program to aid producers who are experiencing hardship from PFAS-contamination on their lands, prioritizing beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers.

## Credit Title

- Amend the FSA Conservation Loan and Loan Guarantee Program to include Soil Health Transition Plans to provide more flexibility for producers who adopt cover crops, crop rotations, advanced grazing management, and other soil health practices by providing loans that do not require payment or accrue interest for 3 years.
- Expand FSA loan guarantees to ensure they are available and accessible to parties interested in developing public or private tree nursery and seed collection capacity.

## Rural Development Title

- Increase funding for water and wastewater disposal grants for eligible entities where residents face significant health risks as a result of inadequate water systems, and ensure that tribes can access the funding, including through eliminating matching requirements for tribes.
- Expand forest tree nursery capacity to support climate-smart reforestation and restoration efforts, with resilience to climate expectations in mind.



## Energy Title

- Provide increased mandatory funding for the Rural Energy for America Program (REAP) while ensuring that expansion of renewable energy does not harm ecosystems, wildlife, and agricultural productivity and efficiency. To achieve that, REAP should:
  - Ensure projects do not harm any at-risk wildlife populations.
  - Result in a net-GHG emission reduction.
  - Continue to prohibit ethanol infrastructure and blending.
- Farm Bill bioenergy and renewable energy programs should have greenhouse gas emission reduction benefits and should not work at cross-purposes with conservation programs and provisions. The planting of species that are invasive or potentially invasive as bioenergy crops should be prohibited.

## Miscellaneous Recommendations

- Encourage USDA to continue to build out landscape-scale migration corridor initiatives, building on the Big Game Conservation Partnership in Wyoming, that targets EQIP, ACEP, and CRP Grasslands funding towards maintaining and improving wildlife habitat along migration routes and increasing habitat connectivity for at-risk species. Focusing on wildlife habitat connectivity across a patchwork of private and public lands will allow for multispecies migration and help wildlife adapt to the impacts of climate change.
- Direct USDA to adopt a native vegetation standard that promotes and prioritizes the use of ecologically appropriate and diverse stands of native vegetation for all agricultural conservation practices and programs wherever possible, allowing for exceptions for situations in which non-native introduced vegetation is more suitable for meeting resource needs.
- Continue the Feral Swine Eradication Program to reduce threats posed by feral swine to agriculture and wildlife.
- Authorize and increase funding for monitoring and surveillance of chronic wasting disease.
- Provide mandatory funding for the Grazing Land Conservation Initiative while maintaining authorization of appropriations.
- Expand technical assistance and financial assistance support for wildlife/livestock conflict reduction.



# The National Wildlife Federation is America's largest conservation organization, uniting all Americans to ensure wildlife and people thrive in a rapidly changing world.

Over the past eight decades, the Federation has emerged as the nation's premier grassroots conservation organization with seven million members and supporters, 52 state-level and territorial affiliate organizations, eleven regional offices, and a National Advocacy Center in Washington, D.C. The National Wildlife Federation has worked to connect people with nature, to protect wildlife and wild places, to inspire children through Ranger Rick magazine, and to help parents, educators, and youth group leaders find new ways to engage children with the wonders of wildlife. To learn more, visit [www.NWF.org](http://www.NWF.org)



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