

A FARM BILL FOR THE FUTURE

Working Together to Restore the Environment, Enhance Food Production, and Combat Climate Change

The Farm Bill is the nation's largest investment in the voluntary and successful conservation, restoration, and management of America's private lands.



Rancher riding in late afternoon light in Montana. © Ami Vitale

The Farm Bill is the most important legislation for conserving private lands in the United States.

It provides farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners with the tools to protect and preserve their land and way of life while addressing climate change.

Conservation practices supported by the Farm Bill result in cleaner water, increased carbon sequestration, healthier soils, enhanced wildlife habitat, more outdoor recreation opportunities, and increased flood control.

The country's forests are a vital natural resource, and a strong Farm Bill ensures national and private forests remain healthy and productive.

Forest lands—whether federal, state, or private—are huge economic drivers in many communities. Everyone benefits from healthy forests and the clean air and water, habitat, recreation, timber, and forest products they provide.

Expanding and preserving renewable energy investments is critical to providing clean, low-impact power.

A robust Farm Bill guarantees rural America a say in renewable energy deployment by funding infrastructure investments facilitating farmer, rancher, and landowner participation in the clean energy economy while maintaining and enhancing their lands for grazing, crop production, and other uses.

Institutional and structural barriers prevent socially disadvantaged farmers, ranchers, foresters, and underserved communities from accessing Farm Bill programs.

The Farm Bill presents a significant opportunity to center equity in conservation and climate mitigation by increasing and improving access to Farm Bill programs and funding, facilitating access to markets, and improving research and data collection and access.

ENGAGING ON THE FARM BILL

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) has a long history of working with producers, landowners, and other stakeholders across America to create opportunities that conserve natural areas and build more resilient working lands and communities. As owners, operators, and managers of agriculture and forest lands, TNC engages with and advocates for Farm Bill policies and priorities from an on-the-ground, in-field perspective.



Tree planting at TNC's LaPlatte River Marsh Natural Area in Vermont. © Mark Godfrey



Rice is harvested at Evans Farms in Symonds, Miss. © Rory Doyle

TNC'S TOP FARM BILL PRIORITIES

Bolster Regenerative Agriculture Rewards and Incentives.

Incentivize regenerative agriculture practices by maximizing investments and creating pathways for more efficient conservation program delivery. This includes modifying Technical Service Provider requirements to encourage greater private-sector technical assistance and creating a crop insurance discount for climate-smart agricultural practices. TNC also encourages improving the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) administration and increasing allocations to regenerative agriculture practices by prioritizing applications within Environmental Quality Incentive Program state rankings that result in soil health, carbon sequestration, and resilience outcomes.

Encourage the Conservation of Significant and Sensitive Habitats. Emphasize permanent protection of sensitive habitats and land with significant climate and biodiversity benefits. This includes modernizing conservation compliance with particular emphasis placed on removing incentives to convert native prairie and grasslands to cropland, organic production, or for renewable energy purposes, as well as loss of Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) enrollments. TNC also encourages improvements to the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program and CRP by adjusting the cost-share ratio, expanding the definition of development pressure, and allowing amendments to benefit ecological improvements.

Improve Water Quality and Supply. Farming, ranching, and forestry are key drivers of water use and management decisions on private land in the United States. TNC supports agricultural easements for floodplain reconnection projects and encourages enhancing the applicability of conservation programs, particularly RCPP and PL 566, to drought resilience. TNC also urges increasing support for nature-based solutions, expanding conservation funding via the Rural Development Title, and enhancing conservation technical assistance to fill capacity and expertise gaps.

Accelerate a Clean, Green, and Equitable Energy Transition in Rural America.

Appreciating the need to rapidly scale climate solutions like clean energy, the Farm Bill provides an opportunity to influence how and where this energy development occurs. TNC encourages robust funding for the Energy Title and programs like the Rural Energy for America Program (REAP), as well as modifications to REAP to allow for efficient funding deployment. TNC also supports incentivizing agrivoltaics and dual-use renewable energy projects to maximize benefits for conservation, agricultural communities, and climate.

Maintain Healthy and Resilient Forests. Increase the long-term protection of forest resources and their climate benefits from threats such as catastrophic wildfires, insects, and diseases, and promote fire as an essential forest management tool. TNC advocates for sustaining and growing Farm Bill programs for private forests and watershed-level conservation across relevant federal agencies and promoting ecologically beneficial forest management policies. TNC also supports advancing climate resilience initiatives and investments for forests, protecting the integrity of bedrock environmental laws that govern the management of national forests, and reducing commodity-driven deforestation globally by giving American farmers and ranchers the ability to compete fairly on the global market.

Promote Equity and Inclusion Throughout USDA Programs.

TNC supports facilitating better access to Farm Bill programs for traditionally underserved producers, landowners, and communities. This includes increasing the funding for Socially Disadvantaged groups, increasing credit availability, and improving program accessibility. TNC also supports ensuring that federal research and grants facilitate fair, just, and collaboratively determined initiatives. Finally, TNC supports developing and facilitating market access for socially disadvantaged farmers, ranchers, and foresters.

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