

REGENERATIVE CROP SYSTEMS AND THE FARM BILL

Working Together to Expand the Voluntary Adoption of Regenerative Agricultural Practices



© Harlon Persinger

Agriculture is on the frontlines of climate change as farmers and ranchers endure increasingly frequent and extreme weather events that threaten their livelihoods and our food supply.



Soybeans growing in cover crop residue in Nebraska. © Ron Nichols/USDA

New innovations, enhanced flexibility, and increased technical support in the Farm Bill are needed to help farmers, ranchers, and landowners meet the challenges of the climate crisis, uncertain markets, and increased production pressures.

Guided by science, The Nature Conservancy is collaborating throughout the food and agriculture sector to build a more resilient food system that supports the well-being of a diversity of farms, ranches, and communities.

The reauthorization of the Farm Bill presents an opportunity to enhance existing programs for the betterment of people and nature.

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.

TNC'S SOIL HEALTH RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FARM BILL

Conservation Technical Assistance

- Modify Technical Service Provider (TSP) requirements to encourage greater private sector technical assistance by:
 - Allowing private crop consultants with a Certified Crop Advisor (CCA) 4R Specialty Certification to operate as a TSP.
 - Expanding opportunity for Soil Health Conservation plans for CCAs with a soil health specialty certification.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

- Increase allocations to regenerative agricultural by prioritizing applications within EQIP state rankings that result in soil health, greenhouse gas mitigation, and resilience outcomes.
- Incentivize longer contract options (10-15 years) along with higher priority practice payments for repetition of priority practices.
- Authorize seasonal habitat/short-term contracts to provide habitat on land that remains in production, either during the growing season, or outside the growing season on a 10-year renewable basis.
- Identify a list of conservation practices like precision nutrient management, cover crops, strip till, and no-till that are eligible for an expedited and streamlined enrollment and planning process.
- Identify a list of practices that have minimal to no benefit to the farm as a business, but a high return on investment to the environment and pay 100% cost share on them.

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

- Adopt the adjusted federal cost-share ratios (75% federal-25% partner/landowner) and no cost share for grasslands of special significance.
- Improve program administration, reduce administrative burdens for implementation, and increase funding for CTA to local Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) offices impacted by RCPP.

Research

- Direct the Agriculture Secretary to study the persistence of practice adoption from EQIP and Conservation Stewardship Program contracts to inform opportunities for improved program effectiveness.
- Strengthen research and extension by making funding for National Institute of Food and Agriculture mandatory at a minimum of \$1.5 billion annually.

- Authorize the Agricultural Research Service's Long-Term Agroecological Research (LTAR) Network to improve research innovation and productivity of agriculture communities.
- Develop protocols, science-based practices, and new technologies for mitigating, adapting, and cultivating resilience to climate change within the agricultural sector.
- Support the role of U.S. Department of Agriculture's Climate Hubs as facilitators and coordinators of research and outreach.
- Add the Foundation for Food and Agriculture Research to the baseline of the Farm Bill and fund it at \$75 million per year.

Conservation Compliance

- Modernize and standardize the soil, weather, and other data as well as the processes used, in the determination of Tolerable Soil Loss and Erodibility Index values for Highly Erodible Land to account for climate change, various forms of soil erosion, and water quality impacts.
- Consider the role of technology to automate conservation compliance processes where feasible.
- Require an updated Office of Inspector General audit of Farm Service Agency and NRCS conservation compliance enforcement performance.

Crop Insurance

- Create a crop insurance discount for climate-smart agriculture practices.
 - Differentiate cover crop payment rates to encourage new adopters, expand acres, support Historically Underserved farmers, and encourage use of multi-species cover crops.
 - Initiate an evaluation of program effectiveness.
- Improve the process of establishing Actual Production History or create insurance endorsements to de-risk the adoption of conservation practices in the Federal Crop Insurance Program.