



Farm Action Fund



Farm Action

FOOD, NOT FEED

How can the farm bill foster resilience in our food system?

Organic and regenerative farming practices promote the responsible management, preservation, and restoration of our natural resources. Improvements in soil health can build a farm's resilience so it can better withstand extreme weather events.

The farm bill could incentivize more farmers to implement these beneficial practices, improving our food system's resilience and saving money for taxpayers and farmers alike.

U.S. FARM POLICIES INCENTIVIZE HARMFUL INDUSTRIAL PRACTICES

Our current industrial farm policies incentivize the production of cheap animal feed to the detriment of family farmers, our rural communities, and our environment. Farmers trying to stay in business receive the most government assistance when they produce large scale quantities of animal feed, like corn or soybeans, or raise livestock on an industrial scale — thanks to the Federal Crop Insurance Program (FCIP), Agricultural Risk Coverage (ARC), Price Loss Coverage (PLC), and even the farm bill's conservation programs.

On the flip side, farmers who deploy regenerative production methods to grow a diverse array of crops — such as fruits and vegetables for families in their communities — do not benefit from the same level of resources and even face barriers to accessing these programs. One consequence of this imbalance is that we are incentivizing practices that have severe environmental impacts, including water and air pollution, soil depletion and degradation, and high greenhouse gas emissions.



Organic and regenerative farming practices promote the responsible management, preservation, and restoration of our natural resources, but their benefits for farmers, communities, and taxpayers go far beyond that. Improvements in soil health can build a farm's resilience, allowing it to better withstand droughts and other extreme weather events. Not only do regenerative practices save taxpayers the expense of cleaning up and preserving our finite natural resources, they can save farmers money and even improve their bottom lines.



However, the current farm bill does not make conservation or regenerative farming practices the easy choice. Many of the programs under the Conservation title direct a disproportionate amount of resources towards the wrong kinds of production practices. Other programs, like FCIP, have disastrous and unintended consequences, such as driving farmland consolidation, and create real barriers for farmers trying to incorporate more regenerative practices.



The farm bill could incentivize more farmers to implement these beneficial practices and reward the farmers already using them. All policymakers have to do is shift resources away from industrialized farming models and direct them towards more diverse, regenerative operations.

Policy recommendations to support a Fair Farm Bill:

- ✓ Fully fund voluntary programs that incentivize farmers to meet basic conservation practice requirements, specifically via the Conservation Opportunity and Voluntary Environment Resilience Program (COVER) Act. Explore the effect of requiring any farmer, rancher, or producer to meet those requirements in order to receive any federal subsidies.
- ✓ Include S.658, the EQIP Improvement Act of 2023, which will allow more producers to receive critical conservation funding through this heavily oversubscribed program and remove the 50% livestock set-aside.
- ✓ Increase and improve access to risk management tools for diverse, organic, specialty crop, limited-resource, and non-conventional producers by improving the Whole Farm Revenue Protection (WFRP) and Micro Farm programs. Further incentivize the advantage in WFRP for producers to diversify; incentivize agents to sell more WFRP and Micro Farm policies by altering the payment structure to reward more complex policies; and prohibit the practice of including indemnity payments, previously removed from WFRP historic baseline determining calculations, when calculating a farmer's payment during a claims process. Codify the recent changes USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA) has made to WFRP and Micro Farm program, which include increasing the maximum insurable revenue under WFRP to \$34 million, raising the Micro Farm revenue cap to \$350,000, and reducing the application and operational paperwork burden for WFRP.
- ✓ Include S.557, the Opportunities for Fairness in Farming (OFF) Act, which would restrict checkoff funding from flowing to lobbying organizations who represent industrialized agriculture and actively lobby against crucial environmental measures, such as Waters of the United States.
- ✓ Increase funding to grant programs, like the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) and the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) programs, that assist farmers transitioning to organic and/or regenerative food production models. Specifically, we recommend the approach taken in the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Opportunity Act.

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FAIR-FARM-BILL**

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THE FARM BILL COULD YIELD A MORE RESILIENT AND ENVIRONMENTALLY RESPONSIBLE FARM SYSTEM

The next farm bill must take a holistic approach: one that acknowledges the manifold benefits of regenerative agriculture and supports it broadly throughout the legislation.

To accomplish this, farm supports such as FCIP and programs in the Commodities title should include conservation standards. If properly and broadly deployed across the U.S. farm system, conservation and regenerative practices would reduce the overall need for federal assistance.

Legislation such as the COVER Act, which provides an insurance premium subsidy for acres planted with cover crops, unites these programs and acknowledges soil health's contribution to a farm's risk management policy.

At the same time, measures must be put into place to ensure federal conservation investments are actually supporting the practices they were intended for. Conservation programs are historically oversubscribed, with upwards of two-thirds of applicants rejected annually. False solutions, such as biodigesters, are absorbing disproportionately high levels of funding.

These programs must be strengthened and protected so that they can incentivize the farming practices that will have long term, wide-reaching conservation benefits.