



FAMILY FARMING and CONSERVATION 2024 SPECIAL ORDER OF BUSINESS

Robust USDA conservation programs are essential for family farmers and ranchers as they work to mitigate the harmful effects of human-caused climate disruption, operate viable businesses, and participate in a climate-smart future through voluntary, incentive-based measures.

In recent years, family farmers and ranchers have faced increasingly erratic weather and dramatic changes to the water cycle including drought, floods, decreased surface flows, declining aquifers, and water contamination. While unique challenges vary across and within regions, those most affected are often farmers and ranchers. Drought and flood risks are as much symptoms of a loss of soil fertility as they are a product of weather variations. While farmers and ranchers are most likely to be negatively impacted by these challenges, they are also the group with the most power to positively affect water cycles and improve soil health for the benefit of their own operations, the environment, and society.

It is critical that Congress protect funding for conservation, agricultural water, and renewable energy programs allocated in the Inflation Reduction Act and produce a farm bill that compliments these investments while reforming current programs to meet the needs of family farmers and ranchers.

To these ends, National Farmers Union supports:

- Incentivizing the implementation of healthy soil principles that build on-farm resilience and reduce emissions by sequestering carbon and providing essential ecosystem services.
- Protecting farmer and rancher data as they adopt climate-smart practices.
- Prioritizing funding for education programs and technical assistance that support agricultural producers to adapt to a changing climate.
- Providing crop insurance discounts to farmers who utilize conservation practices that increase resiliency or decrease risk.
- Building on programs that support biofuels infrastructure development.
- Taking advantage of clean energy opportunities while building additional enterprises and reducing costs for producers by maintaining the Rural Energy for America Program (REAP).
- Maintaining a strong Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) while meeting desired regional outcomes.
- Improving and expanding the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP).
- Ensuring that the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) and Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) receive adequate funding to meet demand.
- Establishing a tiered EQIP funding mechanism specifically designed for small-scale producers.
- Increasing efficiencies in irrigation systems and expanding the availability and cost share percentage of EQIP grants for irrigation efficiency improvements.

- Broadening conservation programming to serve range and pasture-based production including the Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI) and implementing the strategies identified in the USDA's Western Water and Working Lands Framework for Conservation Action.
- Improving voluntary based incentives for the System Conservation Pilot Program (SCPP) by streamlining the application process with clear standards for eligibility and compensation.
- Building effective regionally based solutions including Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) and USDA Regional Climate Hubs.
- Growing incentive programs to permanently protect agricultural groundwater while providing pathways for owners to receive compensation to reduce pumping through a voluntary agreement.
- Building clear accounting systems for surface and groundwater use as well as systems for measuring evapotranspiration and transit loss.
- Building markets for alternative and less water-intensive crops.
- Creating flexibility within the Agriculture Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) to allow for future amendments that support family-scale agriculture.
- Improving the functionality of the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP).