

# THE 2023 FARM BILL



**Supporting family farms through conserving our natural resources and promoting the agricultural economy**

## What's happening in the Northeast?

The Northeastern United States — New England plus New York, Pennsylvania and New Jersey — is home to 56 million people and contains an extraordinary network of family farms that are on the cutting edge of sustainability and market innovation. In 2017, the region's 430,350 agricultural producers contributed an estimated \$78 billion in economic activity to the nation's agricultural industry.

With proper support, Northeastern farms are positioned to make investments to meet an ever-growing demand for safe, nutritious, local food while adapting their management practices to respond to changing environmental conditions and risks. The Inflation Reduction Act is positioned to enable these efforts by providing \$19.5 billion for agricultural conservation programs that assist farmers. This support is much needed — programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) that deliver resources directly to farms and farmers at all levels and stages of production have long been oversubscribed.

To realize the benefits of a strong food and land system at both regional and national levels, Congress can take steps to address current needs and jumpstart innovation. A wide range of programs in the Farm Bill and the Conservation Title can deliver technical support and targeted funding to farmers to achieve this forward-looking vision.

## Principles to Guide the 2023 Farm Bill

- Achieving soil health goals on working farmland is integral to promoting environmental and economic sustainability.
- New and beginning farmers, under-represented producers and economically distressed farmers require greater and enhanced access to USDA programs to unlock their environmental and economic potential.
- Science-based research and technical support is essential to provide practical, cost-saving solutions to producers to help them respond to emerging management issues while maintaining and / or increasing production.
- Forest protection, agroforestry, urban farms and community gardens are important contributors to the future of natural-resource based industries and the food economy.
- Delivery of technical assistance and support is strongest when conducted in partnership with state governments, not-for-profit organizations and academic institutions.



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## Recommended Strategies for Supporting Climate-resilient Agriculture

### STRATEGY 1:

**Payment for Practices.** Farmers can effectively advance federal policy objectives through their management of farm soils, but require government-backed incentives, as few if any private market mechanisms exist. This work will promote early adoption of new and innovative practices, with an eye on ensuring these practices are successfully incorporated into family farm business models.

### STRATEGY 2:

**Packaging and Accessibility of Targeted Technical and Financial Assistance.** While funding is critical to incentivize best-practice management of farmland, forests and natural resources, it is strongest when accompanied by expert knowledge, delivered by extension services, soil and water conservation district employees, and organizations familiar with, and responsive to, the local culture and economy.

### STRATEGY 3:

**Local Networks and Demonstration Projects.** Research proves again and again that farmers learn best from other farmers, and when having the opportunity to witness firsthand the success of their peers.

### STRATEGY 4:

**Cultivation of the Next Generation.** Nationwide, the number of farms is decreasing, while the average age of farmers is increasing. A critical mass of younger and more diverse farmers is needed to ensure the Northeast and the nation stay engaged in production agriculture.

## 3 Policy Priorities for the 2023 Farm Bill

### Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP):

**Status:** In 2016, only 26% of applicants received EQIP contracts; CSP experienced a similar trend, according to the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition. The Inflation Reduction Act is helping to address demand. Of the allocation to the Conservation Title, EQIP will receive \$8.45 billion, and CSP will receive \$3.25 billion.

**Goal:** Maintain funding to ensure that NRCS can continue to meet the demand for payments to producers related to soil health. Congress should provide direction to the USDA to ensure that payment rates are responsive to the scale and economic realities of new and beginning farmers and underrepresented producers and consider higher payment rates for these producers. To accomplish this, statute should be amended to provide minimum payments to smaller farms of 180 acres or less.

### Urban Agriculture Innovative Production Grants (UAIP)

**Status:** The Northeast is home to the most populated areas in the country, and urban agriculture plays a significant role in providing nutritious food and other community benefits. The UAIP recently invested \$14.2 million in 52 grants that support urban agriculture and innovative production. This investment, which includes American Rescue Plan Act funds, builds on \$26.3 million in projects funded since 2020 and is expanding food access and generating economic benefits, yet more needs to be done to support urban farmers and gardeners in reducing risk to their businesses.

**Goal:** Maintain funding while increasing the delivery of technical support to local communities and organizations who operate community gardens and urban farms to retain and expand their presence. Congress should provide direction to the USDA to ensure that funding and support for urban farms and community gardens serving underserved communities can be used to hire staff and cover organizational costs and addresses the relatively-high cost of labor and project mobilization in urban settings.

While the above programs are essential to sustain agriculture in the Northeast as well as the region, it is also important to consider new approaches to complement the above efforts.

### Regional Technical Assistance Capacity Building Program

**Goal:** Create a set-aside within USDA's Conservation Technical Assistance Program to augment existing networks that are expanding awareness and increasing adoption of soil health practices. The program would allow NRCS to make grants to eligible entities, including regional non-profit organizations and Soil and Water Conservation Districts, to convene capacity building networks that grow the skill sets and knowledge of farmers and researchers to advance soil health outcomes. Entities receiving grants would be responsible for convening stakeholders to achieve the goals of the contractual partnership with NRCS, including farmer outreach and education, coordination of scientific research and local policies with on-farm practices, facilitating training, re-granting funds for the above purposes and providing stipends to farmers, urban gardeners and underserved populations to attend trainings and educational events.

Recommended amount: \$45 million