



# News Release

## 2018 Farm Bill Helps Rural America Become More Resilient

### Rural Economies Crucial to Combating Climate Change

December 12, 2018—[The Environmental and Energy Study Institute](http://www.eesi.org) (EESI) commends the Farm Bill conferees and the House and Senate Agriculture Committees for their tireless commitment to produce a Farm Bill, the [Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018](https://www.congress.gov/bills/115/2272), this year. In a year when farmers, ranchers, and rural communities are struggling, and the **agricultural economy is down nearly 50 percent compared to 2014**, finalizing the Farm Bill is more important than ever.

2018 Farm Bill programs – including **conservation, energy and rural lending** programs – are already helping rural America become **more resilient to a changing climate**. Reauthorizing important programs for energy efficiency, renewable energy, and bio-based alternatives to petroleum-based products helps create stability for rural communities and producers as well as offering important climate solutions. New areas included in the 2018 Farm Bill, such as industrial hemp cultivation and soil health pilot programs, will continue to help diversify and create greater resilience in rural communities.

However, **we are missing opportunities to improve resilience in rural communities**, farms, and forests. According to EESI Policy Associate Jessie Stolark, “Whether it’s producing a greater variety of renewable and bio-based products from forestry residues and agricultural resources, helping farmers and rural communities adapt to climate, or further supporting energy efficiency programs that help rural residents save energy and money, **the Farm Bill could be doing even more to deliver economic development, climate adaptation and mitigation tools to rural America**. We only get a chance to pass a Farm Bill every four years. The last four have shown us that climate change impacts are ‘here and now.’ Agriculture and forestry can be a critical part of the solution.”

Just last month, the Trump Administration released the **4<sup>th</sup> National Climate Assessment**, which warns that “climate change presents numerous challenges to sustaining and enhancing crop productivity, livestock health, and the economic vitality of rural communities.” The report contains the strongest warnings about the impacts of climate change ever pronounced by the U.S. federal government, and suggests urgent action is needed.

In the 2018 Farm Bill, the **Energy Title (IX)** continues mandatory funding for a number of important programs that help diversify the agricultural and forestry economies and grow the number of commercially viable bio-based alternatives to petroleum-based fuels, chemicals, plastics, and other products. The bill contains significant mandatory funding for the **Renewable Energy for America Program (REAP)**, an incredibly popular program that helps install renewable energy and energy efficiency technologies on farms, ranches and in rural businesses, and which is always oversubscribed.

EESI is disappointed at the elimination of mandatory funding for the **Biomass Crop Assistance Program** (BCAP) and the **Biomass Research and Development Program** (BRDI). Both programs are crucial to diversifying and growing the bio-based economy, and should be expanded.

EESI was pleased to see the inclusion of the **Timber Innovation Act**, which will help drive markets for [mass timber](#), a sustainable long-lived wood building material that could turn our building sector from a carbon source to a carbon sink—and provide numerous other benefits as well.

The bill also reauthorizes the **Rural Energy Savings Program (RESP)**, providing funding at \$75 million per year over five years. RESP provides zero-percent loans to rural electric cooperatives and other rural electric utilities for the purpose of relending the funds to utility members/customers for energy improvements. These can include energy efficiency upgrades, beneficial electrification projects, customer-owned renewable energy, energy storage, and other measures that are projected to lower the participating member-customer's costs over time. RESP supports "on-bill financing" programs, in which the energy upgrade loans are repaid through the beneficiary's electric bills. EESI's [On-Bill Financing Project](#) provides technical assistance to co-ops and public utilities seeking to tap into RESP funds for on-bill financing initiatives.

EESI looks forward to working with the new Congress and stakeholders to continue improving the resilience of rural economies in the United States. According to Stolark, "The Farm Bill is our best vehicle for addressing climate change in these sectors, and we should look forward to further incorporating climate adaptation, resilience, and mitigation throughout, whether it's through research and development, the conservation title, or even a climate title."

**Source:**

[Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018](#) (Farm Bill)

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