CONGRESSIONAL BRIEFING
Pathways to Regenerative Agriculture
Farm Policy for the 21st Century

Thursday, June 16, 2022
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Non-partisan Educational Resources for Policymakers
A bipartisan Congressional caucus founded EESI in 1984 to provide non-partisan information on environmental, energy, and climate policies.

Direct Assistance for Equitable and Inclusive Financing Program
In addition to a full portfolio of federal policy work, EESI provides direct assistance to utilities to develop “on-bill financing” programs.

Commitment to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice
We recognize that systemic barriers impede fair environmental, energy, and climate policies and limit the full participation of Black, Indigenous, people of color, and legacy and frontline communities in decision-making.

Sustainable Solutions
Our mission is to advance science-based solutions for climate change, energy, and environmental challenges in order to achieve our vision of a sustainable, resilient, and equitable world.
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Active engagement on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and YouTube
Regenerative Agriculture: Farm Policy for the 21st Century

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Regenerative Agriculture is Rooted in Indigenous Wisdom
Regenerative Agriculture is Rooted in Indigenous Wisdom

Land Management Philosophy of Growing in Harmony with Nature
Principles of Regenerative Agriculture

- Nurture Relationships On & Around the Land
- Understand Social & Environmental Context
- Prioritize Soil Health
- Reduce Reliance on Synthetic Inputs
- Nurture Off-Farm Relationships
Regenerative Agriculture Practices
4 Pathways for Regenerative Agriculture

Level Federal Investment Playing Field & Invest in Regenerative Agriculture

Invest in Decentralized Food Systems Infrastructure

Support Farmers & Ranchers

Fund Regenerative Agriculture Research and Extension
# Summary of Farm Bill Recommendations

**Summary of NRDC Policy Recommendations for the Farm Bill, from our 2022 report, Regenerative Agriculture: Farm Policy for the 21st Century**

## Level the Federal Investment Playing Field and Incentivize Regenerative Stewardship

**Priority:** Make permanent a crop insurance incentive for cover crops. (Congress)

**Priority:** Direct the USDA to act on its existing authority to provide a performance-based crop insurance discount to adjust insurance rates for practices proven to reduce risk of crop failure. (Congress)

**Priority:** Coordinate agnostic capability across USDA. Support farmers and ranchers with integrating trees on land as a way to transition more acres to regenerative stewardship. (Congress)

- Increase staff training and resources for Whole-Farms Revenue Protection under existing authority. (USDA)
- Reform Federal Crop Insurance Program by eliminating yield-per-acre provisions, reducing subsidies that don’t promote conservation efforts, applying/conservation credits for eligibility, and expanding conservation compliance provisions. (Congress)
- Amend USDA Disaster Assistance Programs to reward farmers and ranchers who participate in conservation programs that build soil health. (Congress)
- Authorize an increased level of baseline funding for federal conservation programs. Appropriations for conservation spending on authorized level through annual appropriations. (Congress)
- Increase leverage and authorized funding for Conservation Reserve Program and fully fund through annual appropriations process. (Congress)

## Invest in More Decentralized and Diverse Food Systems Infrastructure

- Reduce federal spending on CAFO/GU by removing Farm Bill language requiring 90 percent of ECP funding to go to livestock. (Congress)
- Increase funding for Value-Added Processor Grant (VAPG) program through annual appropriations. (Congress)
- Set aside at least 10 percent of VAPG program funding for underserved producers and create an additional set-aside for tribal applicants. (Congress)

## Support Regenerative Farmers and Ranchers

**Priority:** Create a transition program to fund comprehensive investments in regeneration and certified organic agriculture. Transition programs can be funded by re-directing or using existing USDA resources. Alternatively, Congress can create a mechanism to one crop insurance surcharge from risk-reducing practices to help fund transitions to regenerative agriculture. (Congress)

- Increase funding for Rural Cooperative Development Grant Program and make the step for socially disadvantaged groups viable. (Congress)
- Fund robust support for socially disadvantaged and beginning farmers and ranchers in Farming Openness Training and Outreach (FOTO) Program, and include soil health education and measurements in FOTO grants. (Congress)
- Increase funding to Farm Mentorship program and recruit more IFBDG mentors and mentors. Compensate mentors and mentees for their time through existing funding. (USDA)
- Revise Natural Resource Conservation Services (NRCS) priority standards to be more inclusive of practices used by Indigenous farmers and ranchers. (USDA NRCS)
- Appoint a committee to work with Indigenous producers to ensure that ranking systems and priority standards are inclusive. (USDA NRCS)
- Allocate at least 10 percent of all Federal Farm Bill conservation program funding to socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers. (Congress)
- Include language that recognizes tribal outcomes and practices and increase overall funding for Indigenous farmers and ranchers and tribal land throughout Farm Bill programs. (Congress)
- Include tribal groups and organizations in Farm Bill program design and implementation. (USDA)

**Priority:** Authorize $100 million in annual funds for the Soil Health Demonstrations. (Congress)

**Priority:** Authorize $14 billion for conservation technical assistance to provide consistent, stable, and adequate funding for conservation districts. (Congress)

- Fully fund USDA's Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program at the $50 million level that has already been authorized. (Congress)
PATHWAYS TO REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE: FARM POLICY FOR THE 21ST CENTURY
SAVING THE LAND THAT SUSTAINS US

- Protecting farm and ranch land
- Promoting sound farming practices
- Keeping farmers on the land

www.starfreetool.com
Cover Crops on the Farm!
Co-benefits of Cover Crops & No-till

- Soil temperature and moisture regulation
- Winter and early season weed suppression
- Improved soil structure
- Reduced soil loss from wind and water
- Increased diversity of soil biological communities
- Nutrient capture and availability
# Illinois Fall Covers for Spring Savings

## 2020
- **Fall Covers for Spring Savings**
- **Cover Crop Premium Discount Program**
- **500+ Contracts Requested**
- **113,000 Requested Acres**
- **90% Total Participation from IL SWCD's**
- **12 days 50,000 Acres Allocated**

## 2021
- **Fall Covers for Spring Savings**
- **Cover Crop Premium Discount Program**
- **768 Contracts Requested**
- **185,050 Requested Acres**
- **90% Total Participation from IL SWCD's**
- **<24 hrs 50,000 Acres Allocated**
Crop Insurance Premium Discount Program

Leveraging State, Federal and Private funding

Innovative, efficient approach to accelerating cover crops on a big scale

IF COVER CROPS WERE PLANTED ON 25% OF ROWCROP ACRES IN ILLINOIS, IT WOULD BE EQUAL TO REMOVING 633,323 PASSENGER VEHICLES FROM THE ROAD FOR A YEAR
Federal Crop Insurance Program (FCIP)

Managed by USDA’s Risk Management Agency (RMA)

Market-based risk management tool to strengthen the economic stability of ag producers and rural communities.

In 2019, covered 380 million acres of cropland

Farmers use indemnities to pay off short-term operating loans

Maintains agriculture financial services industry

Farms enrolled in crop insurance survive 7 years longer
FCIP Risks

Value of insured crop is a major factor in determining value of premium subsidy and indemnity payment.

Farmers incentivized to increase yield and revenue

Unintentional deprioritizing of risk-mitigating actions

Mitigates short-term financial risk at the expense of long-term production risk
Active Risk Management

- Understanding how human management systems interact with natural systems
- Reduce potential for disasters
Future Climate-Scenario

- NASA – 24% corn yield reduction in next 10 years
- EPA – Lower yields for all major commodities
- Increase in commodity prices
- Increase in FCIP costs
Stronger Pathways

- Climate-smart practices protect farm incomes and increase on-farm resilience
- Inter-Agency cooperation within USDA
- Additional premium discounts
Climate-Smart Conservation Practice Expansion

- Current conservation practice adoption low
  - 1/3 of cropland acres using no-till or strip-till
  - Less than 5% using cover crops
- Need for more assistance from state and federal government agencies
- Reduce risk by stabilizing yields and lowering input costs
Pandemic Cover Crop Program (PCCP)

- Offered by USDA in 2021 and 2022
- 12.2 million acres enrolled in 2021
- Cost of $59.4 million
- $5 per acre discount on crop insurance
COVER Act

- Extends $5 per acre premium
- Voluntary
- Compliments existing USDA programs
- TA for outreach efforts
- Creates Soil Health Pilot Program
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Indigenous Regenerative Agriculture

By Michael Kotutwa Johnson, PhD
Assistant Specialist, University of Arizona
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Indigenous Regenerative Agriculture (IRA)

“IRA is the process of incorporating place-based ways of knowing supported by culture, belief systems, and environmentally derived survival schemes over millennia.”

Kotutwa, 2022
Indigenous Biodiversity

• Indigenous Peoples protect 80% of global biodiversity on a mere 25% of the planet's land with less than 5% of the world’s population.

Schuster, et al., 2019 & IPBES, 2018
Climate Adapted Crops
Human Well-Being
Recommendations (Legislative and Financial)

• Enforce existing legislation-American Indian Agriculture Resource Management act of 1993 (DOI) and Alternative Funding Arrangements 2018 Farm Bill (USDA-NRCS).

• Create funding mechanisms through legislations to support locally led small farms and regenerative agriculture initiatives.


• Support adequate funding for the Federally Recognized Tribal Extension Program through an act of Congress. FRTEP_IndianCountryExtensionCommissionRecs_Summary_Final.pdf

• Aid in the development of permanently funded regionally based or nationally based Native American policy and technical centers in the United States. https://environment.arizona.edu/irc

• Use the word “tribes” in federal legislation in the area of natural resource legislation.
Go Roam Free
A rancher-owned regenerative meat company that sources direct from US farmers and ranchers restoring American grasslands and raising animals humanely.
Extractive industrial agriculture is responsible for depleting 24B metric tonnes of topsoil each year and releasing carbon into the atmosphere at an alarming rate.

America depends on fertile topsoil to feed and fuel the world. If we do nothing, it is estimated to be gone by 2100.

This is the greatest challenge facing mankind. We MUST change.
The solution is regenerative agriculture
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