



Farm Bill Conservation Programs

Samantha Levy, Conservation and Climate Policy Manager

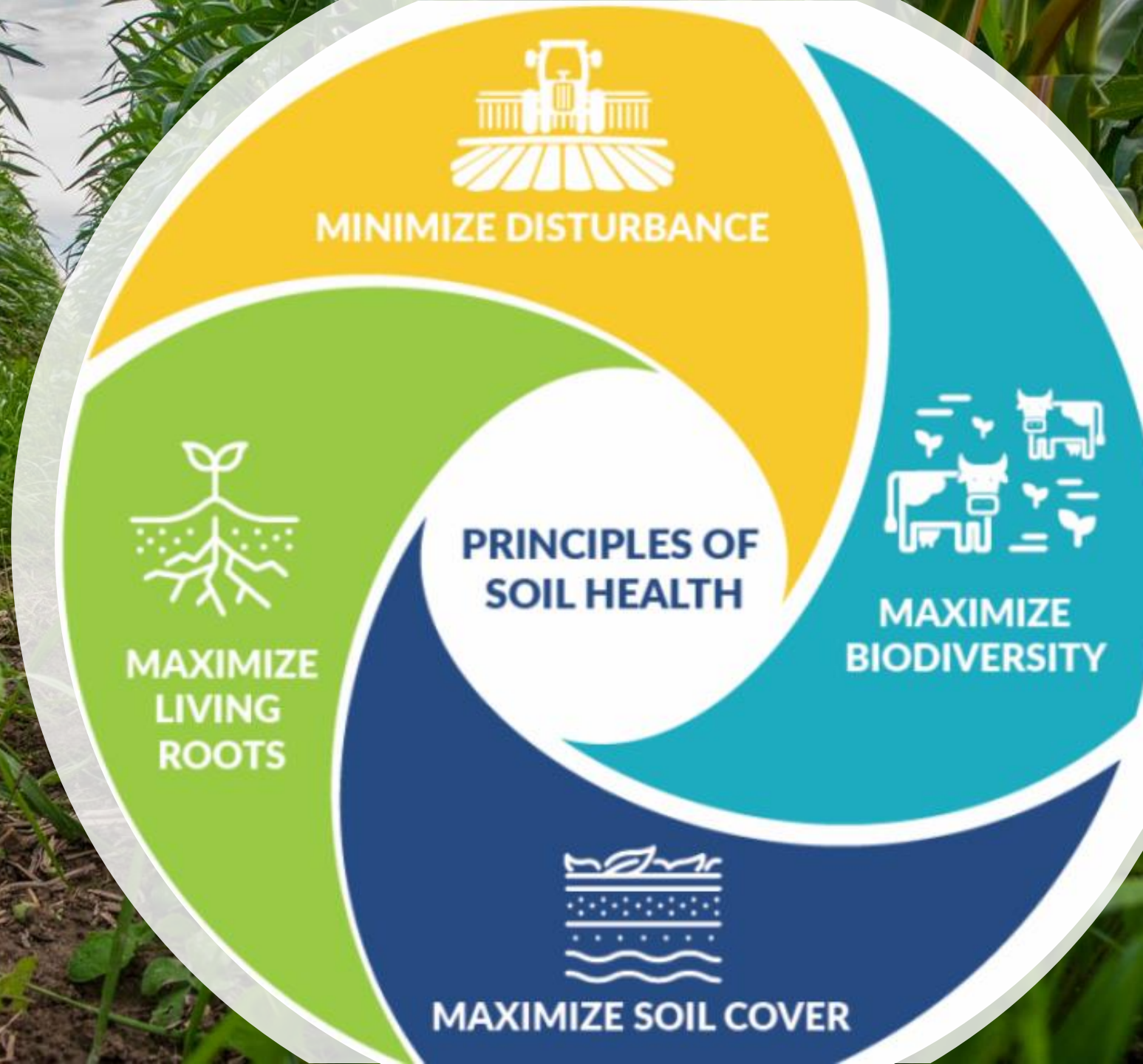
EESI Briefing, Russell 188

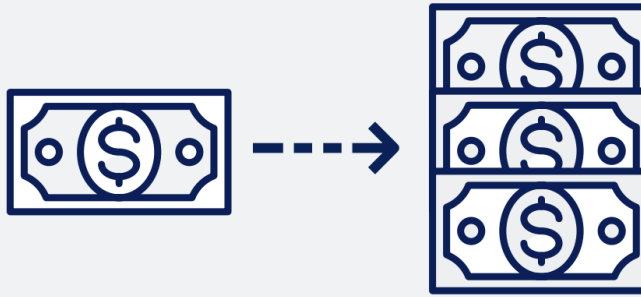
June 21st, 2023, 1:30pm

American Farmland Trust's Mission: to Save the Land that Sustains us



Soil health is the ability of soil to function as a living ecosystem that supports plants, animals, and humans.





ADOPTING SOIL HEALTH PRACTICES CAN INCREASE YIELD AND REDUCE INPUT COSTS, LEADING TO A RETURN ON INVESTMENT OF

\$3 for every \$1 spent



UNDER SEVERE DROUGHT CONDITIONS

1% increase

IN SOIL ORGANIC MATTER



BOOSTS YIELDS BY



BUSHEL PER ACRE

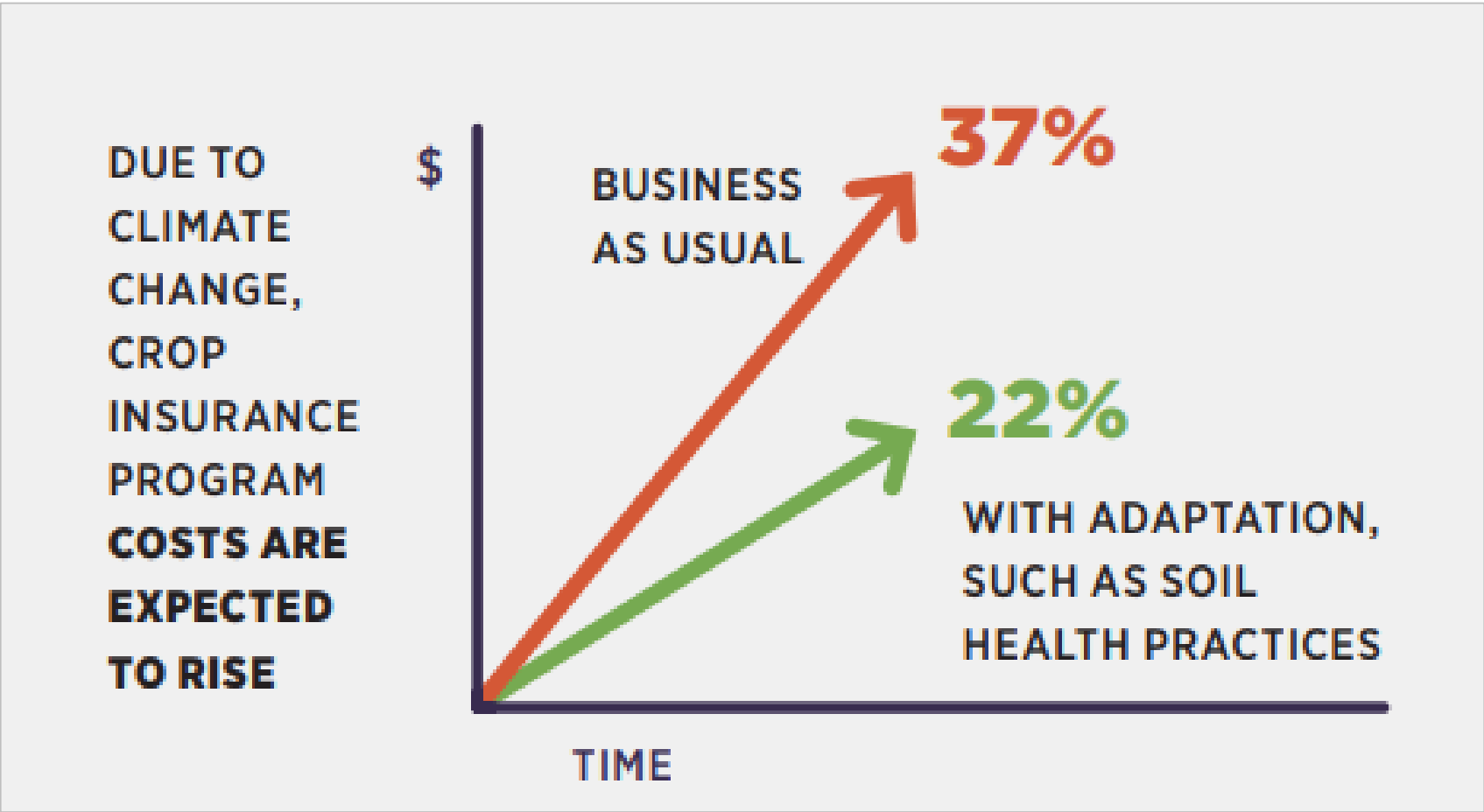


Sources: AFT [Soil Health Case Studies](#) and D.A. Kane et al, "[Soil organic matter protects US maize yields and lowers crop insurance payouts under drought](#)," 2021.



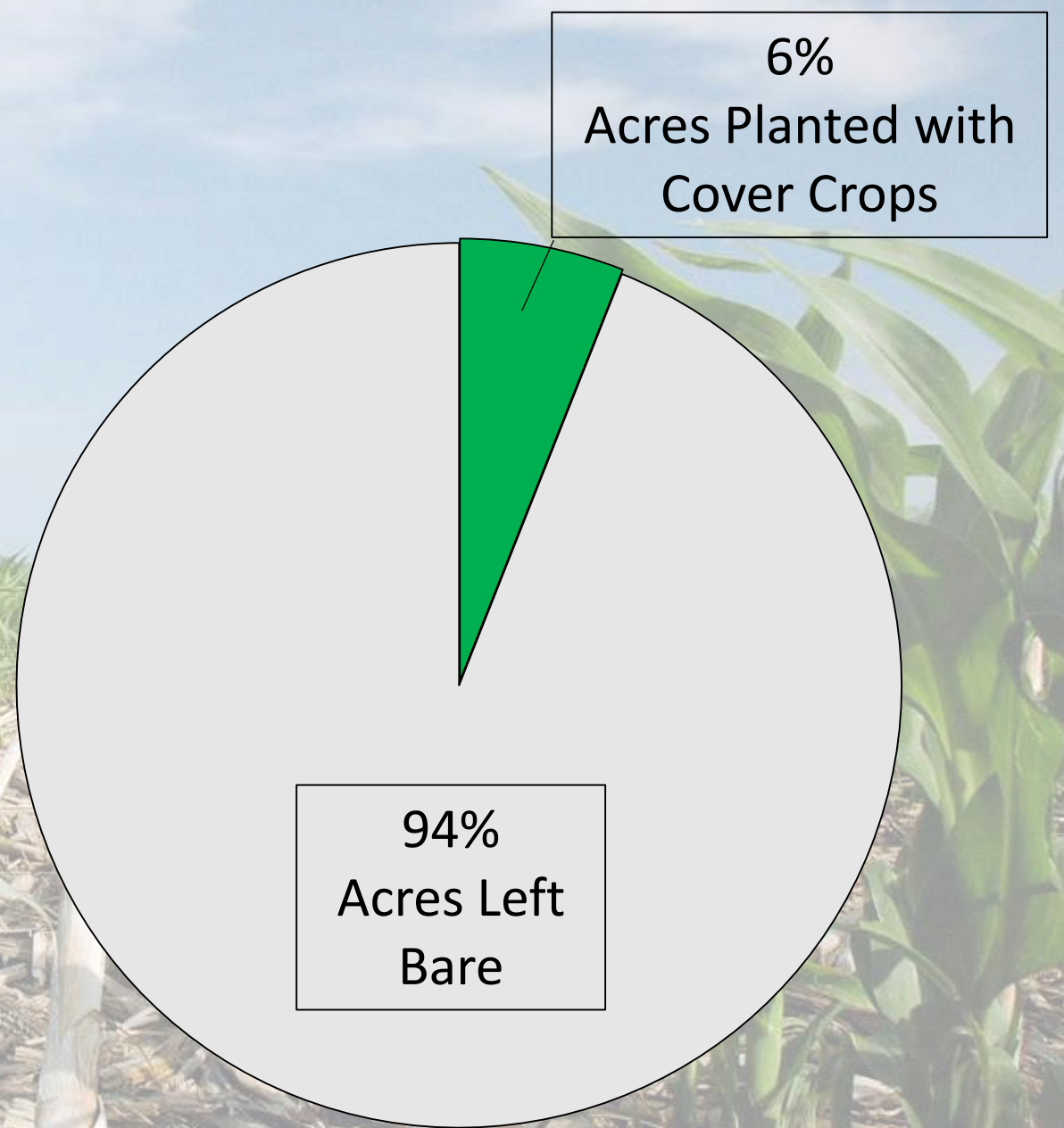
Photo Credit: USDA-NRCS

Improved Soil Health Will Save Taxpayer Dollars



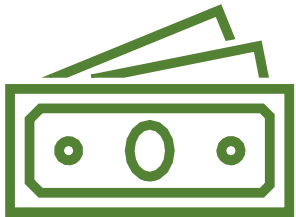
Source: A. Crane-Droesch, et al. [“Climate Change and Agricultural Risk Management Into the 21st Century.”](#) USDA Economic Research Service. July 2019.

Only 6% of Eligible Acres were Planted with Cover Crops in 2017



Source: USDA 2017 Census of Agriculture

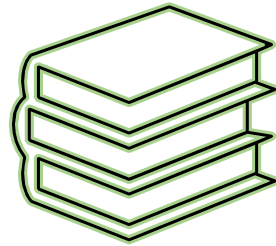
Barriers to Adopting Conservation Practices



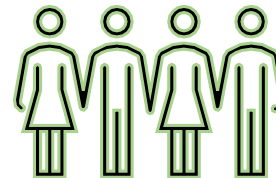
Cost



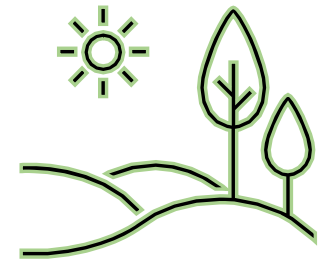
Risk



Information



Cultural



Land Tenure



Photo Credit: Rebecca Drobis



Conservation Programs Provide a Solid Foundation to Build on



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Natural Resources Conservation Service



Title II: The "Big Five" Conservation Programs

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) – Rental payments for temporarily taking land out of production

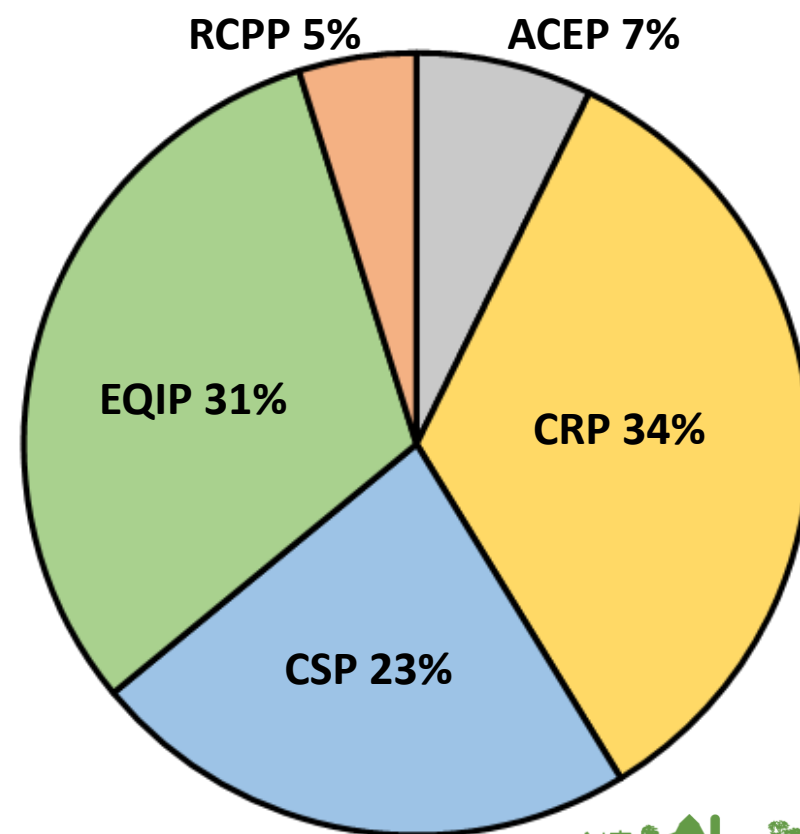
Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) – Generally 1 to 3-year contracts to implement conservation practices

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) – Up to 5-year contracts to maintain whole-farm conservation practices

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) – Permanent conservation easements to protect farms and wetlands from development

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) – Conservation projects on a watershed or regional scale

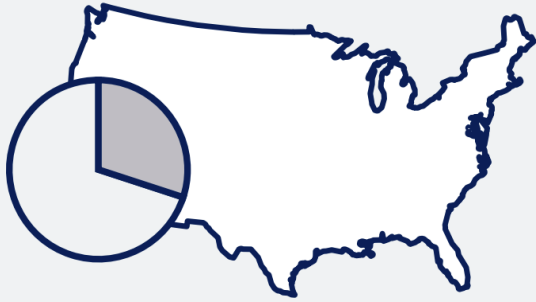
Relative Funding for 10-year Baseline



Strengths and Areas for Improvement

Locally-implemented with
well-vetted science-based
standards

Highly oversubscribed, lengthy
application processes, gaps in
support, equity challenges,
limited room for innovation



FROM 2010-2020, EQIP WAS ONLY ABLE TO FUND

30% of applications

FROM 2009 TO 2018, PRACTICES WITH THE GREATEST POTENTIAL TO IMPROVE SOIL HEALTH ONLY RECEIVED

17% to 27%

OF EQIP FUNDING



C. Day and M. Happ, "Closed Out: How U.S. Farmers are Denied Access to Conservation Programs." 2021.

A. Basche et al, "Evaluating the Untapped Potential of U.S. Conservation Investments to Improve Soil and Environmental Health." 2020.



AFT's Conservation Goals for the Farm Bill

**Increase Long-Term Adoption of Soil
Health and Climate Smart Practices**

Make NRCS Programs more Accessible

**Bolster Farmer to Farmer Learning
Networks**

Photo Credit: Carlos Valery Jr.



- Provide Sustainably Increased Funding to meet Farmer Demand for Conservation Financial and Technical Assistance
- Streamline Program Implementation

Increase Support for Farmer-to-Farmer Learning

**THE
MISSING
PIECE**



Create a Farm Bill Program that Provides Match to Build up State and Tribal Soil Health Programs



Create an Office of Small Farms at USDA



Building Resilience in a Changing World

AFT'S 2023 FARM BILL RECOMMENDATIONS

American Farmland Trust (AFT) has a **vision for the future of agriculture**: our best agricultural land remains available for production; farmers and ranchers operate thriving businesses that support vibrant rural communities; our food system is resilient to shocks and produces abundant, healthy, affordable food; agriculture reflects the diversity of our nation, with greater numbers of young, beginning, and historically marginalized farmers; and producers are recognized and rewarded not just for the food, feed, fiber, and fuel they produce, but also for the environmental benefits they provide. This future is possible, but there are many challenges to overcome.

Farmland loss threatens the future of American agriculture. From 2001–2016, 11 million acres of agricultural land were paved over, fragmented, or converted to uses that jeopardize agriculture. New AFT research indicates that the U.S. is projected to lose an additional 18.4 million acres by 2040. Once this finite resource is developed, it never returns to farming.



2,000 acres
OF AGRICULTURAL LAND
ARE CONVERTED EVERY DAY



Over 40%
OF FARMLAND IS EXPECTED TO
CHANGE HANDS BY 2035

With agricultural land at record prices—and steep competition from developers, investors, and established farmers—many young, beginning, and historically marginalized producers struggle with **land access**, whether purchased or rented. At the same time, many senior farmers and farmland owners have no successor. Some may need to sell land to finance their retirement; others will pass land to heirs who are not interested in farming in order to avoid tax liabilities. With the current generation of farmers nearing

retirement, our food system depends upon a new generation taking the reins.

Many farms and ranches, especially small and mid-sized, struggle with **profitability**. With thin margins, supply chain and pandemic-related disruptions, and other issues, farmers must continually fine-tune their business models to develop resilient operations.

Climate change is bringing higher temperatures, unpredictable seasons, flooding, drought, and wildfires, and is causing farmland loss due to sea level rise and other factors. This is making the weather-dependent business of farming more difficult, and is expected to worsen without immediate action to reduce emissions and sequester carbon. Currently, the conservation practices needed to address climate change, while also improving water quality and soil health, are only used on a small portion of farms. For example, only 5% of cropland acres were planted with cover crops in 2017.



IN 2020 ALONE, WEATHER AND CLIMATE-RELATED DISASTERS COST PRODUCERS
\$3.6 billion
IN CROP AND RANGELAND LOSSES

The 2023 Farm Bill is our best chance to help more farmers and ranchers permanently protect their land, establish secure land tenure, create viable businesses, and adopt climate-smart practices. AFT

has four decades of experience shaping federal policy, and the following Farm Bill recommendations—developed with input from over 300 farmers, ranchers, non-profit leaders, and other stakeholders through 16 workshops held across the nation—will help us realize the vision of a resilient, just, and sustainable future.

Keep in Touch!

Samantha Levy

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www.farmland.org/2023-Farm-Bill