

Creating a Federal Match for State and Tribal Soil Health Programs in the Next Farm Bill

Summary

Soil health is a key strategy to support farm viability, increase resilience to extreme weather, promote food security, and address environmental concerns. **Creating a program to provide federal matching grants for state and Tribal soil health programs in the next Farm Bill would be a bold yet achievable way to help more producers adopt soil health practices.** This approach would leverage federal funding, build on local leadership and innovation, and incentivize the creation of new state and Tribal programs that fit local soils, climate, and farming system needs. This idea already has bipartisan support—congressional representatives on both sides of the aisle introduced marker bills in the last Congress to create this program in the next Farm Bill. It also has broad support from across the country—this memo was signed by 5 state agencies; 9 conservation district associations; and stakeholders from across sectors in 29 states, including the farm, food, environment, conservation, public health, research, education, and environmental justice sectors. The Food and Agriculture Climate Alliance (FACA) also supported this policy in their [2023 Farm Bill Recommendations](#).

Background

Soil health practices can reduce losses from droughts, floods, and other extreme weather while also benefiting farm profitability, food security, water quality, and helping to mitigate climate change. Additionally:

- According to American Farmland Trust's 2019 [soil health case studies](#), eight out of the ten row crop farmers profiled attributed yield increases to soil health practices, with all ten experiencing positive returns on investment of between 7% and 343%.
- A [2021 study](#) revealed that under severe drought, a 1% increase in soil organic matter significantly boosted yields and reduced crop insurance payouts by up to 40%. A [2019 USDA-ERS report](#) also predicted that adopting climate adaptation practices, such as those that improve soil health, could reduce expected cost increases of the crop insurance program by 7-15% this century.

Unfortunately, soil health practice adoption is still not sufficiently widespread—for example, as of 2017, cover crops were only planted on 6% of eligible acres. NRCS programs are the main form of support to help producers successfully adopt soil health practices, but these popular programs:

- Are oversubscribed—between 2010 and 2020, EQIP was only able to fund 31% of applications,
- Address a wide range of resource concerns beyond soil health—for example a [2020 analysis](#) found that between 2007 and 2018, only 17-27% of EQIP funding went to soil health practices, and they
- Leave out flexible, tailored, and innovative approaches, and do not address critical on-the-ground needs, such as supporting equipment purchases.

Since the 2018 Farm Bill, states have been creating soil health programs to fill these gaps and more flexibly help producers voluntarily adopt soil health practices in locally-tailored ways. Currently, ten states have programs that support soil health while benefitting water quality and the climate. But state funding for new programs is modest—many begin with appropriations of less than \$2 million. With limited state budgets, they struggle to keep pace with producer demand for help. Creating a new federal program to match state and Tribal funding would help augment existing soil health programs and incentivize others to create programs of their own.

Recommendation

There is an urgent need to build on and fill NRCS program gaps to help producers overcome cost, risk, and knowledge barriers to voluntarily adopting soil health practices. **We urge Congress to create and fund a state and Tribal soil health match program in the next Farm Bill.** Extreme weather, heat, and drought are costing farmers and ranchers time and money. A soil health match program would build on and fill gaps in NRCS programs, enabling states and Tribes to lead in helping their farmers and ranchers adopt soil health systems that flexibly meet their needs.



Washington State Department of Agriculture



National Organizations

American Farmland Trust
American Seed Trade Association
Carbon Cycle Institute
Danone North America
Earth Justice
FACT
Green America
Healthcare Without Harm
Izaak Walton League of America
Kiss the Ground
National Young Farmers Coalition
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
Pesticide Action Network
Soil Science Society of America
STAR Initiative
Wild Farm Alliance

State Agencies

Illinois Department of Agriculture
Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture
Pennsylvania Soil Conservation Commission
Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food, and Markets
Washington State Department of Agriculture

Soil and Water Conservation Districts

California Association of Resource Conservation Districts
Cheshire County Conservation District (NH)
Connecticut Resource Conservation and Development
Massachusetts Association of Conservation Districts
Northern Rhode Island Conservation District
Oregon Association of Conservation Districts
Soil and Water Conservation Society
Thurston Conservation District (WA)
Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts

Northeast Organizations and Businesses

Atlas Farm (MA)
Berkshire Agricultural Ventures (MA)
Coastal Enterprises, Inc (ME)

Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture (MA)

CowPots, LLC (CT)
Dirt Rich Farm (NY)
Farm Sanctuary (NY)
Farm to Institution New England
Fridgeport (CT)
Genesee Land Trust (NY)
Green Village Initiative (CT)
Grow Food Northhampton (MA)
GrowSmart Maine
Hanover Co-op Food Stores and Auto Service Centers of NH and VT
HaR Go Farms (NY)
Jones Family Farm (CT)
Big Dream Farm (NY)
Land for Good
Laughing Earth Farm (NY)
Maine Farmland Trust
Massachusetts Food Systems Collaborative
New CT Farmer Alliance
New York Corn and Soybean Growers Association
New York Farm Bureau
Northeast Farmers of Color Land Trust
Northeast Organic Farming Association of NY
Northeast Organic Farming Association of MA
Northeast Organic Farming Association of VT
Orinoco Cattle Products & Farms (NY)
PASA Sustainable Agriculture (PA)
Pennsylvania Farm Bureau
Red Fire Farm (MA)
Rockland Farm Alliance (NY)
Seeds of Solidarity (MA)
The Evangelical Environmental Network (PA)
The Hickories (MA)
The Trustees of Reservations (MA)

Midwest Organizations and Businesses

Chicago Food Policy Action Council
Illinois Land Improvement Contractors Association
Illinois Soybean Association
Illinois Stewardship Alliance

Land Stewardship Project (MN)
Michael Fields Agricultural Institute (WI)
Michigan Agriculture Advancement
Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association
Practical Farmers of Iowa
Prairie State Conservation Coalition (IL)
Sand County Foundation (WI)

Mid-Atlantic Organizations and Businesses

7 Directions of Service
Chesapeake Bay Foundation
Cultivate Charlottesville (VA)
Down East Coal Ash Environmental and Social
Justice Coalition (NC)
Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future (MD)
Lakota Ranch (VA)
Sustainable Chesapeake
Toxic Free NC
Virginia Association for Biological Farming
Virginia Free Farm
Waterkeepers Chesapeake-Fair Farms Initiative

Southeast Organizations and Businesses

Black Family Land Trust, Inc
Community Farm Alliance (KY)
Georgia Organics
Home Place Pastures (MS)
Missouri Coalition for the Environment
Red Devon USA (GA)
Sprout NOLA (LA)
Tennessee Cattlemen's Association

West Organizations and Businesses

350 Seattle
Berkeley Student Farms
BT Loftus Ranches, Inc. (WA)
Bullseye Farms, LLC (CA)
California Climate & Agriculture Network
California Nurses for Environmental Health and
Justice
California Tomato Research Institute
First Light Farm and Learning Center (WA)
Harmony Fields (WA)
Hawaii Farmers Union United

Helsing Junction Farm (WA)
Living Soil and Sustainable Gardening Service
(MT)
Matheson Farms, LLC (WA)
New Mexico Healthy Soil Working Group
Northern Plains Resource Council (MO)
Northwest Agriculture Business Center (WA)
Oregon Climate & Agriculture Network
Oregon Organic Coalition
Oregon Tilth
Organic Farming Research Foundation (CA)
Othering and Belonging Institute, UC Berkeley
Roots of Change (CA)
Serrano Farms (CA)
Sierra Orchards (CA)
Ten Rivers Food Web (OR)
Tilth Alliance (WA)
Washington Red Raspberry Commission
Washington State Potato Commission