

Regenerative Agriculture Recommendations Memo

A broad coalition of stakeholders collaborated through the [Regenerative Agriculture and Justice Working Group](#) to develop the following memo calling for investment in a more resilient, regenerative, and just food and agricultural economy in the American Jobs Plan Act. The recommendations in the memo will help advance regenerative agriculture practices that will be good for farmers, the environment, and businesses while ensuring more resilient supply chains equitable and just support for small-scale, young and beginning, and people of color farmers and ranchers.

Regenerative agriculture is an approach to farming that uses a combination of contextually established practices including use of multi-species cover crops, crop rotation, no or low tillage, use of compost, and managed grazing to regenerate and sustain soil health and ecosystem functioning to agricultural lands, providing various benefits for the farmer, the environment, and businesses. By reducing input costs, reducing crop loss to extreme weather, and creating new revenue streams, studies have shown these approaches can also improve farmer's profits per acre.¹²³ Research has shown that regenerative agriculture and similar methods⁴ can maintain current food production levels and potentially increase overall productivity if adequately supported by public programs.⁵ Scientists have increasingly come to understand that advancing approaches like regenerative agriculture that improve soil health and biodiversity will be necessary to maintain food system resilience and farmer economic viability in the face of changing climate.⁶

Businesses support regenerative agriculture to improve supply chain resilience; essential against the growing threats of climate change, disease, and other business-disrupting crises. A growing number of agriculture related businesses are interested in regenerative methods of agriculture as a way to diversify and build more resilient supply chains while meeting increasing consumer demand for sustainably produced products. Many farmers are interested in practices like soil health and regenerative agriculture, but the transition can be difficult without assistance.

¹ LaCanne CE, Lundgren JG. 2018. Regenerative agriculture: merging farming and natural resource conservation profitably. *PeerJ* 6:e4428 <https://doi.org/10.7717/peerj.4428>

² Reganold, J., Wachter, J. Organic agriculture in the twenty-first century. *Nature Plants* 2, 15221 (2016). <https://doi.org/10.1038/nplants.2015.221>

³ See various case studies proving the economic benefit to farmers here: <https://farmland.org/project/quantifying-economic-and-environmental-benefits-of-soil-health/> and <https://www.nacdnet.org/soil-health-research/>

⁴ Such as agroecology and some forms of organic agriculture

⁵ Olivier De Schutter, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, 2010. Report on Agroecology. <https://foe.org/resources/farming-for-the-future-organic-and-agroecological-solutions-to-feed-the-world/#:~:text=Key%20findings%3A%20%E2%80%9CAgroecology%2C%20if,focus%20on%20small%2Dscale%20farmers%2C>

⁶ Altieri, M.A., Nicholls, C.I., Henao, A. *et al.* Agroecology and the design of climate change-resilient farming systems. *Agron. Sustain. Dev.* 35, 869–890 (2015). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13593-015-0285-2>

Soil health and Conservation

Existing USDA conservation programs provide an infrastructure for conducting outreach, training, and payment of incentives to both support farmers in the transition to regenerative agriculture and reward farmers that have already made the transition. However, these programs remain significantly underfunded and demand will continue to be greater than availability until program funding is increased.

To advance soil health and more resilient and regenerative agriculture, we support the same funding requests made by the Climate Stewardship Act, introduced by Senator Booker and Representative Spanberger. Some of those requests include the following:

- Environmental Quality Incentives Program - Increase mandatory funding for EQIP from \$1.75 billion in 2019 to \$7 B per year by 2024 with new funding limited to practices that improve and maintain soil health and biodiversity. Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) should be prohibited from accessing this new funding. To make the best use of these programs, limited funding needs to focus on supporting practices that most effectively build soil health, foster ecological regeneration, and promote resilience for small-scale and marginalized farmers. Currently, a significant percent of EQIP funding goes towards highly destructive CAFOs. Instead, the USDA should focus on moving animals out of CAFOs and towards regenerative systems that practice managed grazing and reincorporation of livestock in cropping systems.
- Conservation Stewardship Program - Increase mandatory funding for CSP from \$700 million in 2019 to \$7 Billion per year by 2024
- Set aside 5% of the additional CSP and EQIP funding for socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers.
- Sets aside 5% of the additional CSP and EQIP funding for new and beginning farmers and ranchers.
- Regional Conservation Partnership Program - \$1 billion a year
- Conservation Technical Assistance - Triple funding to \$2,100,000, for each of fiscal years 2021 through 2030 and ensure property to socially disadvantaged farmers and ranching

Infrastructure and Market Development for Resilient Supply Chains

Covid-19 has exposed what many already knew. Relying on a handful of large intermediary corporations to process and provide most of our food and fiber makes our farmers, businesses, and communities susceptible to market disruptions. To support a food and agricultural economy that is more resilient in the face of severe weather and other shocks, there needs to be significant investment made in small and medium-scale local and regional processing infrastructure and

value chain coordination. These investments will also support the nation's 270,000 small-scale farmers, many of which struggled in the face of Covid-19 supply chain disruptions who operate on thin margins without sufficient risk management protection. Further these investments will help advance the spread of more resilient and environmentally sound production methods like regenerative agriculture, soil health practices, and organic farming.

Funding requests for existing programs:

- Local Agriculture Marketing Program - Increase mandatory funding to \$500 million .
- Increased funding for USDA Value Added Producers Grant and other rural development programs that make investments to bolster local and regional markets and improve market access for small and medium-scale organic and diversified farmers.
 - Organic needs to be flagged as a priority for funding as the current USDA scoring system does not consider organic to be a priority for investment.
- Increase mandatory funding for Whole Farm Revenue Program

New Program Recommendations:

- Cold Storage/Fresh and Nutritious Food Program For Food Banks - \$20 million
 - food purchased from Small Farmers by USDA, preference to Small Farmers from Ethnic Communities; would expand markets for small farmers from ethnic communities, while providing fresh nutritious fruits, vegetables, poultry, and meats to underserved food insecure communities where there is food insecurity and food deserts.
- Compost infrastructure grant program
 - See Food Recovery Act [HB 5841](#) Section 504 for a \$100M grant proposal includes grants for compost infrastructure
- Create a new tax incentive program that will facilitate the transfer land to young and beginning farmers interested in organic agriculture

Advancing Justice: Supporting small-scale and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers

Current agricultural policy and market structures favor large-scale industrial producers, which are mostly white males. Meanwhile, non-white male producers have faced discrimination in accessing government farming programs and markets and, for the most part, still do not have equal access. (See [this recent publication](#) for case study on how the ongoing and inadequately redressed effects of historical discrimination hinders the USDA NRCS's conservation efforts). Many of these farmers and their ancestors practiced regenerative agriculture for centuries before the term existed. Farmers who are more economically secure have a longer-term horizon for planning and land management and are therefore better able to adopt practices that conserve and rebuild soil and ecological health. These practices are often more labor-intensive

and require highly specialized knowledge of local soils and ecologies. Thus, more workers/farmers on the land may be needed to help facilitate more widespread adoption of regenerative methods.

The following funding recommendations will help ensure a more equitable, just, and thriving farming economy.

- Farmer Opportunities Training and Outreach (FOTO) program - increase mandatory funding to \$100 million annually
- Pass small-farmer debt relief to help with Covid-19 related economic stresses
 - The Relief for America's Small Farmers Act (reintroduction planned soon by Senator Gillibrand and Representative Delgado) would provide direct debt relief for small farmers⁷ around the country by providing a one-time loan forgiveness of up to \$250,000 across three types of USDA FSA loans: Direct Operating, Direct Farm Ownership, and Emergency Loans.⁸
- Farm and Stress Assistance Network - Increase to \$10 million annually of mandatory funding
- Programs for addressing heirs' property issues
 - Approximately one-third of all black-owned land in the south is held as heirs' property. This insecure form of land tenure has been the cause of a large portion of black land dispossession and has prevented landowners from accessing USDA conservation program funding
 - Mandatory funding increase for Heirs Property Relending Program
 - \$3 million dollars for Farmland Ownership Data Collection Initiative that will help to better understand, and thus address, the heirs' property issue

⁷ Defined as having an adjusted gross income of less than \$300,000

⁸ See this [letter](#) for more information on the importance of small-farmer debt relief