



Testimony for the record
by the Environmental Working Group
Submitted to the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, & Forestry
“Farm Bill 2023: Conservation and Forestry Programs”
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Agriculture is a significant [source](#) of greenhouse gas emissions. [Nitrous oxide](#) emissions from fertilizing crops and animal feed, and [methane](#) emissions from livestock and their manure, are the primary sources of these emissions. Unless we reduce agricultural emissions of nitrous oxide, carbon dioxide and methane, we will fail to achieve the greenhouse gas reductions [needed to](#) avoid the worst impacts of the climate crisis. Even if emissions from agriculture remain [steady](#) – and emissions from [other sectors](#) fall as much as expected – agriculture’s share of U.S. emissions could top 30 percent, according to [climate models](#).

U.S. agriculture accounts for at least [11 percent](#) of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions. When we factor in emissions from fertilizer production, as well as emissions from land clearing and plowing, agriculture’s share of U.S. emissions is even higher.

Voluntary conservation programs administered by the Department of Agriculture could play a significant role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and help ensure farms are better able to withstand the extreme weather caused by climate change. Conservation practices that reduce greenhouse gas emissions can also improve air and water quality and provide habitat for wildlife.



USDA currently [turns away](#) two out of every three farmers seeking conservation assistance designed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions or meet other conservation goals. More importantly, most of the funding provided to farms that do receive USDA conservation assistance through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) or the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) does little to reduce greenhouse emissions.

For example:

- Just [23 percent of EQIP funding](#) supports practices that reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and some EQIP funding supports practices that *increase* emissions. Most EQIP funding flows to structural practices, like irrigation infrastructure, that do not reduce emissions.
- Although methane is a significant source of emissions, between 2017 and 2020, just \$54,000 flowed to EQIP practices designed to improve feed management.
- Just [15 states](#) chose to provide EQIP bonus payments for practices that reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and 14 states provided bonus payments to practices that *increase* emissions.
- Almost 40 percent of [CSP practices offered](#) between 2017 and 2022 scored poorly for reducing greenhouse gas emissions.
- Many common CSP practices – including [the one](#) receiving the most CSP funding – do not reduce greenhouse emissions. By contrast, many of the CSP practices that score well for reducing emissions, such as no-till to reduce soil erosion, receive very little funding.



- Most CRP acres are returned to production after contracts expire, [releasing soil carbon](#) into the atmosphere, and the number of acres enrolled in long-term CREP agreements is falling.
- Farmers who protect farmland from development through enrollment in ACEP are not required to take steps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The historic funding included in the Inflation Reduction Act for conservation practices could help reduce the backlog of farmers offering to cut emissions. But Congress must also reform these programs to fulfill the promise of IRA funding and ensure it flows to greenhouse-gas-reducing practices.

To make climate change the focus of USDA conservation programs, Congress must:

- **Reform CSP.** Congress [should reform the CSP](#) so the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions is its primary purpose. Congress should reward “early adopters” by linking CSP eligibility to past climate stewardship; focusing funding on practices that reduce emissions; prioritizing contracts to reward those that include multiple emissions-reduction practices; and prohibiting CSP spending on practices that increase greenhouse gas emissions.
- **Reform EQIP.** Congress should expand and reform [EQIP](#) to make climate the [primary purpose of EQIP incentive contracts](#); provide 90 percent cost-share for EQIP practices that reduce greenhouse gas emissions; reduce federal cost-sharing for structural practices that provide few or no environmental benefits; create a methane emissions demonstration project; and prohibit EQIP spending on practices that increase greenhouse gas emissions.



- **Reform CRP.** Congress should [expand and reform](#) the CRP by increasing program funding and focusing CRP enrollment on marginal, environmentally sensitive land through [long-term and permanent](#) easements. In general, 80 percent of CRP acres should be enrolled through CLEAR-30, Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program agreements, or continuous enrollment categories.
- **Reform ACEP.** Reform the ACEP by increasing funding for wetland reserve easements; making past and future climate stewardship a condition for enrollment in Agricultural Land Easements (ALE); and prohibiting these easements on farmland that increase greenhouse gas emissions.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony for the record.