



INVEST IN OUR LAND

Federal Conservation Programs Strengthen America's Farms, *If We Protect Them and USDA Can Deliver Them*

America's farmers and ranchers produce the food, fuel and fiber that power our nation, and a country that can feed itself is a more secure one. But the work has never been harder. Farmers face persistently [high input costs](#), [volatile commodity markets](#), and [recurring weather disasters](#) that can wipe out years of investment in a single season. In 2024 alone, weather and wildfire caused [more than \\$20 billion](#) in agricultural losses, according to the American Farm Bureau Federation.

Conservation programs help farmers stay productive and in business

Programs delivered by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), including the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), are **voluntary, locally led and farmer driven**. They help producers cut input costs, build healthier soil, protect yields through drought and flood, and protect the land and water that American agriculture depends on.

Farmer demand far outstrips available funding

- **More applications, fewer contracts.** EQIP drew 118,377 applications in fiscal year 2025, up 11 percent, but [only 24 percent resulted in a contract](#), down from 43 percent the year before. CSP's award rate fell from 54 percent to 37 percent.
- **USDA's own new program is oversubscribed.** USDA [expanded its Regenerative Pilot Program to \\$1 billion](#) for FY2027 after the first round drew [roughly 15,000 applications](#), about three times what it could fund.
- **Farmers support the investment.** In an Invest in Our Land [poll](#) of farmers in Arkansas, Iowa, Louisiana, Minnesota, Pennsylvania and South Dakota, 72 percent supported the increase in conservation funding provided by Congress.

Cuts to EQIP in the Farm Bill

Conservation has long been bipartisan. In 2025, led by Chairmen Thompson and Boozman, Congress [moved historic conservation funding into the long-term Farm Bill baseline](#), so farmers could plan around it through 2031. That commitment is now at risk:

- The Farm Bill [approved by the Senate Agriculture Committee](#) on September 16 would [cut EQIP by nearly \\$2 billion](#) over FY2027 to FY2030 to pay for other priorities. By the University of Illinois' estimate, that [could leave more than 56,500 valid farmer applications unfunded](#).
- The House-passed bill would [move roughly \\$1 billion out of EQIP](#) in the near term.

New and expanded programs deserve support, but they should not be funded by drawing down the program farmers are already asking for by name.

The people who deliver these programs are disappearing



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NRCS staff are the soil conservationists, planners and engineers in county offices who walk the field, write the plan and get the contract signed. Funding on paper means little without them.

- NRCS [lost 23 percent of its staff](#) between January 2025 and January 2026, including 711 soil conservationists and 283 soil conservation technicians. 141 counties lost every NRCS employee they had.
- Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA), the funding that pays for staff to work directly with farmers, took a [\\$75 million cut](#) in the last funding package, and the [FY2027 budget request](#) would eliminate discretionary CTA funding altogether.

Where things stand

The 2018 Farm Bill extension [expired on September 30](#), pausing new Conservation Reserve Program contracts. EQIP and CSP continue on last year's baseline funding. Congress returns after the November elections facing a December 11 government funding deadline, and the decisions made this winter will shape what farmers can count on for years.

What farmers need Washington to do

1. **Protect core conservation programs.** Restore EQIP to the levels Congress set in 2025.
2. **Make sure USDA can deliver.** Rebuild NRCS staffing in county offices and fully fund Conservation Technical Assistance.
3. **Meet farmer demand.** Grow key federal conservation programs over the life of the Farm Bill so more of the farmers who apply can participate.