



The Honorable Debbie Stabenow  
Chair  
Senate Agriculture Committee

The Honorable Glenn "GT" Thompson  
Chair  
House Agriculture Committee

The Honorable John Boozman  
Ranking Member  
Senate Agriculture Committee

The Honorable David Scott  
Ranking Member  
House Agriculture Committee

February 21, 2023

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow, Ranking Member Boozman, Chairman Thompson, and Ranking Member Scott:

We write to you in our capacity as co-chairs of the [Bipartisan Policy Center's Farm & Forest Carbon Solutions Task Force](#), a diverse coalition that has developed [consensus-based, practical ideas](#) for advancing economic and environmental outcomes for American farmers, ranchers and forest landowners. The Task Force recognizes the remarkable efficacy of existing Farm Bill programs and aims to build on this foundation by advancing recommendations that address gaps in, or complement conservation, forestry, and innovative programs. We want to work with you to build the consensus necessary to usher a bipartisan Farm Bill through the legislative process and see it signed into law this year.

Specifically, we see the upcoming 2023 Farm Bill as a key opportunity to authorize and implement strategic changes at USDA that enable more farmers and forest landowners to engage in conservation and resilience solutions without replacing core Farm Bill programs. This letter outlines the Task Force's priorities for four titles of the 2023 Farm Bill that are designed to ensure practical and lasting impacts in support of the long-term productivity of farm and forest lands and the prosperity of rural communities.

### **Conservation (Title II)**

American farmers and forest landowners underpin our national economy, providing food, fuel, and fiber. Producers and forest landowners are long-time leaders of environmental stewardship and rural economic development. Existing conservation programs are (i) popular, (ii) oversubscribed, and (iii) support farmers of diverse production types. We therefore strongly support investments in American agriculture, conservation, and resilience. Furthermore, bolstering these sectors is essential to ensuring American agriculture remains globally competitive. Therefore, we recommend:

1. *Maintaining conservation funding and core Title II program structure as locally driven, voluntary, and incentive based.*
2. *Modernizing and streamlining the following key processes at the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to improve program delivery and efficiency:*
  - i. *Certification of third-party technical service providers.*
  - ii. *Conservation practice approvals.*

3. *Directing NRCS to develop and implement cross-boundary rangeland conservation and restoration partnerships through authorization and expansion of the current Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership to pair NRCS' Environmental Quality Incentives Program with federal land management agency appropriations.*

### **Research, Extension, and Related Matters (Title VII)**

We recommend leveraging our nation's incredible education assets—land-grant universities, historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), minority-serving institutions (MSIs), tribal colleges and universities (TCUs)—to train the next generation of American producers and forest land managers. Enhanced research, education, and extension programs will improve the sustainability and long-term resilience of U.S. agriculture. Targeted agriculture research and innovation will spur productivity growth and generate economic and environmental benefits. To this end, we recommend:

4. *Bolstering the National Institute of Food and Agriculture's (NIFA) support to land-grant universities in the following priority investment areas using an integrative research-education-extension approach:*
  - i. *Tree seed and seedlings supply chain, including construction and improvement of agricultural research and nurseries infrastructure.*
  - ii. *Agricultural supply chain sustainability, including quantification, monitoring, reporting, and verification of greenhouse gas benefits.*
5. *Creating a NIFA pilot partnership program to facilitate expanded Cooperative Extension System engagement with the private sector, including agricultural retailers, cooperatives, seed and feed companies, forest landowners, forestry consultants, procurement foresters, and nonprofits.*
6. *Designating at least one of the 1890 Centers of Excellence as an institution focused on building sustainable and climate-smart agricultural supply chains. Modifying programs supporting 1994 institutions such as the New Beginnings for Tribal Students Program to incorporate climate, sustainable agriculture, and traditional ecological knowledge.*

### **Forestry (Title VIII)**

Task Force members support investments to enhance the resilience of our natural and working lands in the face of increasing threats from wildfires, droughts, floods, and other extreme weather, as well as threats from pests and invasive species. The investments made to date enable management approaches that protect public health and safety, safeguard vulnerable landscapes, foster job creation, and bolster economic growth. We endorse investments and improvements in the forestry title of the farm bill to address these challenges in our public and private forests, while also stimulating rural economic growth. To this end, we recommend:

7. *Authorizing USDA's Forest Service to provide loan and loan guarantee financing for nursery infrastructure, seed collection and storage, as well as technical assistance to state and tribal nurseries.*
8. *Providing greater funding flexibility to better enable cross-jurisdictional hazardous fuels projects by:*
  - i. *Authorizing a mix of appropriated funding sources to enter into cost share agreements.*
  - ii. *Increasing the hazardous fuels program authorization level.*
9. *Modifying the USFS Wood Innovations Grants Program to authorize USDA to provide low interest loans and loan guarantees, streamline match requirements, and fund higher education programs focused on innovative wood products.*

### **Miscellaneous (Title XII)**

Innovation in agriculture and forestry is critical to meet the evolving economic and environmental challenges faced by these sectors and is also needed to expand the range of tools available to monitor, quantify, and verify environmental and economic outcomes. Increasing access to precision agriculture technologies enables more efficient management of land, water, fuel, fertilizer, and pesticide resources, driving down costs and lowering emissions. These tools provide the accurate measurements needed to advance predictive models. Data generated by these resources further catalyze greater integrity and transparency in voluntary carbon markets and to reduce the administrative and technical burdens faced by potential participants in federal conservation programs, supply chain sustainability programs, and voluntary carbon markets. We advise:

10. *Modernizing USDA's data collection, security, storage, and access. Improving data on conservation practices and farm productivity—including through data review and analysis, technical assistance, and support for precision agriculture data and technology solutions—while also maintaining producer confidentiality.*

### **Other BPC Energy Program Priorities**

Although outside the scope of our Farm and Forest Carbon Solutions Task Force, the BPC Energy Program recommends the following policy priorities to advance American innovation in the bioeconomy:

11. *Modifying the Biobased Market (Biopreferred) Program (Energy Title IX) to authorize improved product labeling with environmental considerations in addition to biobased, provide incentives for high-quality product procurement, and improve data and reporting systems to better support the growing bioeconomy.*
12. *Strengthening USDA research, innovation, and commercialization programs (Research Title VII) by investing in:*
  - i. *Advanced research into agricultural technologies, research tools, and products to address long-term and high-risk challenges for food and agriculture.*
  - ii. *Develop regional biochar research networks to investigate the beneficial end-uses of biochar, including research on carbon sequestration, water and nutrient retention as soil additive, and reduction of methane emissions as feed additive.*

Looking toward the next Farm Bill, we see an unmatched and widely supported opportunity for a suite of policies to improve access to federal government programs and private market opportunities for producers and landowners of all types and sizes. We strongly believe this can be accomplished without taking away from core Farm Bill programs and instead drawing on policymakers' decades of experience supporting and implementing voluntary and incentive-driven conservation solutions for America's farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners. We, along with the members of the Task Force, look forward to a productive dialogue and partnership to help advance a bipartisan Farm bill that supports America's farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners and their efforts to conserve, and sustain our vital natural resources.

Sincerely,



Senator Heidi Heitkamp  
Co-chair



Senator Saxby Chambliss  
Co-chair