

FACT SHEET

2023 FARM BILL PRIORITIES

The 2023 Farm Bill presents opportunities for targeted investments and reforms that scale up climate-smart agriculture and forestry practices, mitigate climate and biodiversity challenges, and equitably help farmers and underserved communities navigate problems whose solutions also maximize public health, ecosystem, and economic benefits.¹ The Farm Bill should double down on the historic investments made in the 117th Congress and continue to center resilience as a key tool to promote a greener and more equitable future for farmers.

REDUCING BARRIERS TO ORGANIC AGRICULTURE: Organic farming systems offer sweeping economic, environmental, and health benefits.² Organic foods are produced without most synthetic inputs, which lowers costs for producers, promotes healthier soils, and protects health and nature. *The 2023 Farm Bill should build on the USDA's Organic Transition Initiative by providing flexible assistance for organic and transitioning farmers and ranchers.*³

- **NRDC supports the Opportunities in Organic Act**, which reduces barriers to organic agriculture by leveraging relationships among farmers, ranchers, and nongovernmental organizations. The bill updates the existing organic certification cost-share program, provides funding to NGOs and producers to support the transition process, and improves technical assistance resources.

REDUCING FOOD WASTE ACROSS THE FOOD SYSTEM: Each year, farmers, manufacturers, households, and businesses spend \$444 billion to grow, process, transport, and dispose of food that is never eaten. Addressing food waste carries economic, environmental, and public health benefits. To meet the U.S. goal of reducing food waste and loss by 50 percent by 2030, we need a comprehensive approach that targets prevention, recovery, and recycling, supported by federal coordination, research, infrastructure, and funding.⁴ *The 2023 Farm Bill should invest in efforts and resources that address the biggest drivers of food waste.*

- **NRDC supports the Food Date Labeling Act**, a bipartisan bill that standardizes and clarifies date labels used on food, requires supporting education, and allows donation of food past the quality date. There is currently no federal regulation for food date labels, and nearly 10 percent of wasted food in the United States is due to confusion around date labels.⁵

INCENTIVIZING COVER CROPS TO BOOST HEALTHY SOILS: Cover crops offer farmers an opportunity to maintain productivity and improve soil resiliency in the face of climate change.⁶ Cover crops prevent erosion, reduce water pollution, feed soil microbes, improve plant growth, lead to more efficient water use, and add carbon to soil. *The 2023 Farm Bill presents an opportunity to strengthen the federal crop insurance program by offering voluntary financial incentives to farms that use this risk-reducing practice.*⁷

- **NRDC supports the COVER Act**, which builds on successes from existing federal and state programs to provide farmers who plant cover crops a savings of \$5 per acre on their crop insurance bills. The legislation also creates a pilot program under which other soil-building practices receive similar incentives.

EXTENDING AND EXPANDING SUPPORT FOR HEALTHY SOIL PRACTICES: Farmers face economic and technical barriers to adopting healthy soil practices that can lower emissions, improve crop resilience, reduce inputs, and increase soil water retention, among other benefits. To address this, the 2018 Farm Bill established the Soil Health Demonstration Trial, a pilot program providing technical and financial support to farmers using these practices on a trial basis.⁸ It has shown promising results. *The 2023 Farm bill is an opportunity to continue and grow financial support for these healthy soil incentives.*

- **NRDC supports the Healthy Soils Healthy Climate Act**, which preserves and expands funding available in the Inflation Reduction Act for the Soil Health Demonstration program and creates a permanent soil health program within the USDA's Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). It also promotes more research into soil health practices more broadly.

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EXPANDING ACCESS TO CLEAN ENERGY FOR FARMERS AND RURAL BUSINESSES: The Rural Energy for America Program (REAP) drives renewable energy and energy efficiency investments benefiting farmers, ranchers, and rural small businesses in every state and across agricultural sectors. Since its inception, this voluntary financial assistance program has helped more than 20,000 farmers, ranchers, and rural small businesses produce clean energy, cut energy costs, and boost rural economic development. *The 2023 Farm Bill should build on REAP's bipartisan support to improve the program.*

- **NRDC supports improvements to REAP** that maximize climate benefits, improve equity, and increase the efficiency of the program, like those made in the Agricultural Resilience Act.

PROVIDING SUPPORT FOR EFFECTIVE RURAL SANITATION: Many low-wealth households in rural communities live beyond the reach of sanitary sewers and lack the financial resources to obtain functioning on-site sanitation systems for their homes.⁹ *The 2023 Farm Bill can tackle this inequity by investing more resources in USDA programs to deliver effective and reliable on-site sanitation systems to rural households.*

- **NRDC supports increased access and protections for rural on-site sanitation** by specifically boosting USDA funding for programs that fund rural wastewater treatment systems, requiring these systems to meet basic standards and be covered by a 10-year warranty, and expanding eligibility criteria so that additional underserved rural households will benefit from USDA's programs.

BUILDING REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEMS AND ADVANCING EQUITY: Investments that support small and underserved food producers improve supply chain resilience, increase local food security, and promote innovation while preserving tradition. *The 2023 Farm Bill should improve access to existing programs and direct more resources to underserved producers, in alignment with the shared vision of more than 150 organizations for a transformative Farm Bill.*¹⁰

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Defending against policy riders and attacks that undermine protections for public health and the environment and make it harder for farmers and families to put food on the table: In past years, the Farm Bill has seen efforts to include anti-environmental provisions that threaten our air, water, lands, and wildlife.¹¹ These provisions have attacked bedrock environmental safeguards including the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, the Endangered Species Act, the National Environmental Policy Act, the Roadless Area Conservation Rule, and the Pesticide Registration Improvement Enhancement Act. *The 2023 Farm Bill should avoid anti-environmental and anti-public health provisions.*

NRDC also strongly opposes any provisions that threaten to slash critical investments made in the 117th Congress dedicated to supporting climate-smart agricultural policies that will help protect the livelihoods of farmers and producers and secure a safe, reliable food supply in the face of a changing climate. *The 2023 Farm Bill should not cut investments that provide essential support for conservation practices, expand clean energy deployment, promote agroforestry, develop carbon management tools on farms, and bolster resources for underserved and at-risk farmers.*

ENDNOTES

- 1 NRDC, "Advancing a Transformative Farm Bill," accessed April 12, 2023, <https://www.nrdc.org/resources/advancing-transformative-farm-bill>; Valerie Baron and Matthew Kaplan, "Opportunities to Bolster the 2023 Farm Bill," NRDC Expert Blog, May 10, 2022, <https://www.nrdc.org/experts/valerie-baron/opportunities-bolster-2023-farm-bill>.
- 2 Lena Brook and Allison Johnson, "New Report: Unlocking the Potential of Organic Agriculture," NRDC Expert Blog, October 27, 2022, <https://www.nrdc.org/bio/lena-brook/new-report-unlocking-potential-organic-agriculture>.
- 3 Allison Johnson, "Organic Transition Programs Can Transform Food Systems," NRDC Expert Blog August 22, 2022, <https://www.nrdc.org/experts/allison-johnson/organic-transition-programs-can-transform-food-systems>.
- 4 U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Resource Conservation and Recovery, "United States 2030 Food Loss and Waste Reduction Goal," last updated April 4, 2023, <https://www.epa.gov/sustainable-management-food/united-states-2030-food-loss-and-waste-reduction-goal>; Emily Broad Leib et al., *Opportunities to Reduce Food Waste in the 2023 Farm Bill*, Harvard Law School Food Law and Policy Clinic, NRDC, ReFED, and WWF, April 2022, <https://www.nrdc.org/sites/default/files/reduce-food-waste-2023-farm-bill-es-202204.pdf>; ReFED, "Food Waste Problem," accessed April 28, 2023, <https://refed.org/food-waste/the-problem..>
- 5 ReFED, "Food Waste Monitor" accessed April 20, 2023, https://insights-engine.refed.org/food-waste-monitor?break_by=cause&indicator=us-dollars-surplus&view=detail&year=2021.
- 6 Center for Regenerative Agriculture, "Cover Crops," University of Missouri, accessed April 11, 2023, <https://cra.missouri.edu/topics/cover-crops/#:~:text=The%20cover%20crops%20are%20like,nutrients%2C%20and%20increasing%20water%20quality>.
- 7 Lara Bryant, "5 Ways New Crop Insurance Bill Advances Soil Health," NRDC Expert Blog, July 27, 2022, <https://www.nrdc.org/experts/lara-bryant/5-ways-new-crop-insurance-bill-advances-soil-health>.
- 8 Nicole Lederer, "New Farm Bill Promotes Healthy Soils and a Healthier Climate," E2 (Environmental Entrepreneurs), December 12, 2018, <https://medium.com/e2org/new-farm-bill-promotes-healthy-soils-and-a-healthier-climate-4cc19c8098af>.
- 9 Bill Whitaker, *60 Minutes Investigates: Americans Fighting for Access to Sewage Disposal*, CBS News, December 19, 2021, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/alabama-sewage-disposal-60-minutes-2021-12-19/>.
- 10 Allison Johnson and Valerie Baron, "150 Organizations Unite for a Transformative Farm Bill," NRDC Expert Blog, September 13, 2022, <https://www.nrdc.org/experts/allison-johnson/150-organizations-unite-transformative-farm-bill>.
- 11 Erik Olson and Mae Wu, "The Hyper-Partisan House Farm Bill Should Be Plowed Under," NRDC Expert Blog, April 18, 2018, <https://www.nrdc.org/experts/mae-wu/hyper-partisan-house-farm-bill-should-be-plowed-under>.