



Testimony for the Record
by the Environmental Working Group
Submitted to the House Agriculture Committee
Soil Health Practices and Programs that Support Regenerative Agriculture
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Agriculture is a significant and growing [source](#) of greenhouse emissions. In particular, [nitrous oxide](#) emissions from fertilizing crops and animal feed, and [methane](#) emissions from livestock and their manure, are growing sources of greenhouse gas 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.

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.

But, because of its misplaced spending priorities, USDA [turns away](#) two out of every three farmers seeking conservation assistance designed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. . The historic funding included in the Inflation Reduction Act for conservation practices could help reduce this backlog and reduce emissions. But Congress must reform these programs to fulfill the promise of the IRA funding and ensure it flows to greenhouse gas reducing practices.



To accomplish this goal, Congress must:

- **Reform CSP.** Congress [should reform the Conservation Stewardship Program \(CSP\)](#) to make the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions 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 the [Environmental Quality Incentives Program \(EQIP\)](#) 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 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 Conservation Reserve Program (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 Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (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 ALE easements on farmland that increase greenhouse gas emissions.



[Practices that reduce greenhouse gas emissions](#) are not getting enough support from USDA conservation funding. For example,

- Just [20 percent of EQIP funding](#) supports practices that reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and some EQIP funding supports those practices that increases emissions.
- Almost 40 percent of [CSP practices offered](#) between 2017 and 2022 scored poorly for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, according to USDA.
- 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 enrolled in ALE are not required to take steps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Congress should also take steps to prohibit misleading claims about the benefits of conservation practices, including “regenerative agriculture” claims. Unlike [organic claims](#), which must meet [federal standards](#) and are subject to [audits](#), assertions that foods regenerate soil are not tied to federal standards and do not require third-party verification. Some private and nonprofit regenerative [standards and auditors](#) have emerged, but there is not yet a [widely accepted](#) definition of the term “regenerative,” and farmers and food companies do not have to seek third-party audits when making these claims. As a result, many food companies make [misleading “regenerative” claims](#) that have created significant consumer confusion.

Congress should also support efforts to scale up the production of plant-based or vegetarian options. USDA has provided [\\$50 billion in subsidies](#) to livestock operations



since 1995 but just \$30 million to plant-based or vegetarian operations. By investing in plant-based or vegetarian alternatives, Congress would support not only consumer choices that reduce greenhouse gas emissions but also farmers' growing soybeans, wheat, mushrooms, and pulse crops, and [more than 50,000](#) jobs.

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