

## Federal Ag Policy

# Day One Demands for USDA Leaders

## LSP Members Advocate for Climate Smart Ag Policy Proposals

By Jessica Kochick

During the Biden Administration's first 100 days in office, the Land Stewardship Project was busy on the federal policy front. The role of agriculture in mitigating the climate crisis has been one focus of both the Administration and the new Congress. Over 500 LSP members and supporters signed on to our public comment on climate policy ([www.landstewardship-project.org/usdaclimateaction](http://www.landstewardship-project.org/usdaclimateaction)) that was submitted to USDA, and LSP organized a series of virtual fly-ins to advocate for our priorities with members of Congress.

### Federal Virtual Fly-in

For two weeks in April, 19 Land Stewardship Project farmer-members participated in a series of virtual fly-ins with all five members of the Minnesota Congressional delegation who serve on Agriculture Committees: U.S. Senators Amy Klobuchar and Tina Smith, and U.S. Representatives Angie Craig, Michelle Fischbach, and Jim Hagedorn. LSP coordinated this effort with coalition partners across the Midwest and country, including the Campaign for Family Farms and the Environment (CFFE) and the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC).

Given the federal focus on climate and infrastructure policy, LSP members advocated for our Agriculture Committee members to be champions in bringing climate funding to our farmers and rural communities. As the quotes highlighted on these two pages show, these farmers had a clear, consistent message: status quo agriculture policy isn't working for small to mid-scale farmers or the climate, but we have an opportunity here to invest in what does work. It makes sense for public money to go toward the public good, investing in a farm and food system that builds soil health while strengthening local economies.

Consolidation in agriculture has led to disinvestment of rural communities, as well as supply chain breakdowns during a global pandemic. Climate policy must not continue that trend. We reject false solutions to the climate crisis that prop up a failing system, and instead advocate for local, resilient food systems that create more land access for beginning farmers, build local economies and food security, and protect air, water, and climate for future generations.

### Climate Policy We Need

Small to mid-scale farmers employing regenerative practices can mitigate the worst climate change impacts through practices like no-till and cover cropping, and can sequester carbon via perennial crops and managed rotational grazing systems. In order to make this possible at landscape scale, we must improve and expand access to USDA conservation programs like the Conserva-

tion Stewardship Program (CSP) and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). Currently, two-thirds of CSP and EQIP applicants in Minnesota are turned away each year due to lack of funds. Beginning farmers and

farmers of color are at the forefront of employing regenerative farming practices, but may lack the capital to get started. Investing in regenerative food systems is smart policy.

That's why LSP supports the Agriculture Resilience Act, a bill recently introduced by U.S. Representative Chellie Pingree (Maine) and U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich (New Mexico). This bill:

- Expands investment in conservation programs like CSP and EQIP.
- Provides soil health grants to states.
- Includes set-asides for beginning farmers and farmers and ranchers of color.
- Promotes a transition to managed rotational grazing.

*“We need to stop investing in systems that don't work and start investing in the ones that do, if we want to make a difference in soil health, climate change, and improved rural economies.”*

— Jon Jovaag,  
livestock & crop farmer,  
Austin, Minn.

*“We need to pull back the curtain and see carbon markets for what they are: a false game that allows companies to continue to pollute. Instead, ag leaders should support and increase participation in the CSP program. This spring, we were told we cannot sign up for a contract for two years due to lack of funding. Expanding a proven program like CSP would benefit farmers and society.”*

— Bonnie Haugen,  
dairy farmer, Canton, Minn.

- Expands local animal processing.
- Invests in developing local markets to support products that improve soil health.

LSP members asked all five Agriculture Committee members from the Minnesota Congressional delegation to co-sponsor the Agriculture Resilience Act and to champion the bill's inclusion in the American Jobs Plan. Healthy soil, local processing capacity, and local markets are crucial aspects of rural infrastructure.

Since then, Minnesota U.S. Representative Betty McCollum, who serves on the Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee, has co-sponsored the Agriculture Resilience Act, and we thank her for her leadership.

### Climate Policy We Do Not Need

Factory farms are a cause of climate change, and they should not be considered part of the solution. They require huge quantities of feed, water, and chemical inputs, as well as energy, and they manage manure in a way that increases greenhouse gas emissions. Methane digesters are an expensive, dangerous, and inefficient way to hang on to a failed system. Public initiatives like EQIP should not be used to prop up factory farms and make it harder for small to mid-scale farmers doing right by the environment and their communities to compete.

Private carbon markets have also created a buzz, yet they are just another way to suck money out of rural communities and put it into the hands of brokers and big business. The industrial food system will never be a carbon sink, and should not act as an offset market for fossil fuel polluters. Historically, carbon markets have failed to offer a stable price to farmers and can be difficult for smaller operations to access, creating more inequities. The climate crisis demands transformational action, and this is not it.

**Climate Policy, see page 13...**

During the fly-ins, LSP members advocated for payment limits in federal programs to prevent further consolidation. They shared their opposition to investing in factory farms and made it clear carbon markets are the wrong direction for climate policy.

Since then, U.S. Senators Klobuchar and Smith have co-sponsored the Growing Climate Solutions Act, a bill that creates a framework for USDA involvement in certifying third parties to verify carbon credits. LSP opposes this approach because it is bad for the climate, bad for small to mid-scale farmers, and bad for communities where concentrated pollution continues to harm public health. Government should regulate polluters, not provide a loophole for ongoing climate destruction.

### Climate Policy & Infrastructure

The next major legislation to come out of Congress will be an infrastructure bill, currently being referred to as the American Jobs Plan. Given the breakdown in the food system resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, it is crucial that this infrastructure bill addresses the needs of farm and food system supply chains. Components of the Agriculture Resilience Act referenced earlier address farm-to-table infrastructure, from building soil health to local processing and market development.

In addition, LSP supports the Strengthening Local Processing Act, introduced by Representative Pingree and U.S. Senator John Thune (South Dakota). This bill:

→ Helps small meat plants meet state and

federal guidelines.

- Creates a new grant program for small plants, including new plants, to expand processing capacity.
- Creates animal processing training program grants.

Rural investment must be prioritized in the American Jobs Plan. Corporate control of wealth has created an untenable situation for farmers

### Take Action

Let your members of Congress know that you want them to champion the Agriculture Resilience Act, the complementary Climate Stewardship Act, and the Strengthening Local Processing Act, and that we need to see these rural investments now in the American Jobs Plan.

After receiving hundreds of e-mails from Land Stewardship Project members and supporters, Minnesota U.S. Senator Tina Smith recently signed on to a letter circulated by colleagues in support of putting \$200 billion of agriculture funding in the American Jobs Plan Act (AJPA), focused on conservation programs, local foods infrastructure, renewable energy, and more. This is a first step toward winning these key priorities.

Let's keep the pressure on: contact your members of Congress at [www.govtrack.us/congress/members](http://www.govtrack.us/congress/members) or send them an e-mail message by going to [www.landstewardship-project.org/advocacy#121](http://www.landstewardship-project.org/advocacy#121).

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*“Farmers are caretakers and entrepreneurs who mitigate a staggering array of risks, choosing carefully where to invest our limited resources. Without processors nearby to take livestock from our farm on to consumers, right-sized operations like ours can’t provide healthy food for our communities.”*

— Dana Seifert, livestock & crop farmer, Jordan, Minn.

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and other rural community members for too long. What is good for the climate and the environment is also good for local economies and community food security. It is time for our legislators to enact policy that benefits us, not corporate ag.

LSP members thanked Senator Smith and Representative Craig for co-sponsoring the Strengthening Local Processing Act. All other Agriculture Committee members from the Minnesota Congressional delegation were asked to join their colleagues in supporting this bill.

LSP members also advocated for the inclusion of both the Agriculture Resilience Act and the Strengthening Local Processing Act in any forthcoming infrastructure bill, such as the American Jobs Plan.

Contact me for updates on federal policy, details on action taken by our Agriculture Committee members, and more ways for you to get involved. ☐

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## LSP’s Core Values: Stewardship, Justice, Democracy, Health & Community

**V**ision for the Future: 2019-2024 is the Land Stewardship Project’s long range plan for working toward our goals of creating a sustainable, just, farm and food system. The plan opens by presenting LSP’s core values:

→ **Stewardship** is the value of living in right relationship with the land and all that is connected to it: the soil, the water, the air, the plants, microorganisms, animals, and our climate.

→ **Justice** means there is economic, racial, and gender equity for farmers, workers, and all those who are engaged in the food and agriculture system.

→ **Democracy** means a society in which the people hold the power to govern, in which those people directly impacted by issues name solutions, set priorities, and win change.

→ **Health** is the value of nourishing the beauty, function, and vitality of an ecosystem made up of people, landscapes, plants, animals, soil, and water.

→ **Community** is the value of understanding our interdependence and caring for

the relationships that sustain each of us. ☐

*The plan is available at [www.landstewardshipproject.org/about/longrangeplan](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/about/longrangeplan). Free paper copies are available by calling 612-722-6377.*

### Sign-up for the Land Stewardship Action Fund Hotlist

Interested in learning more about how the Land Stewardship Project and its members are harnessing collective political power to elect candidates who will be champions for our vision of a just food and farming system? Then check out LSP’s sister political advocacy organization, the Land Stewardship Action Fund (LSAF).

Getting on the LSAF hotlist provides a chance to stay up-to-date on this work and to get involved. You can register at the LSAF website: [www.landstewardshipaction.org/take-action/sign-up](http://www.landstewardshipaction.org/take-action/sign-up).

