

LSP FARM BILL PLATFORM

RELEASED AUGUST 2022
UPDATED JANUARY 2024



LAND
STEWARDSHIP
PROJECT

[LANDSTEWARDSHIPPROJECT.ORG/FARMBILL2023](https://landstewardshipproject.org/farmbill2023)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

LANDSTEWARDSHIPPROJECT.ORG/FARMBILL2023

The Farm Bill, which is reauthorized approximately every five years, has a significant impact on what's grown on the landscape and who grows it. The Farm Bill also has lasting implications for soil health and water quality, has critical racial equity and climate resiliency impacts, and is tied to the economic health of rural communities. The Farm Bill that's currently being debated in Congress,* offers a critical opportunity to create agricultural policy that is good for the land, people, rural communities, and our food and farming system. Based on a three-state survey and eight listening sessions, the Land Stewardship Project (LSP) has developed a platform of policy priorities for the next Farm Bill.

The Survey

Over 700 farmers and food system workers from Minnesota, Iowa, and Wisconsin responded to the survey. They answered questions related to the challenges imposed by consolidation, a changing climate, and a lack of consistent markets, as well as limited access to land, financing, and government programs. The survey also gathered information about the unique challenges faced by young, beginning, and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, people of color) farmers.

Listening Sessions

The eight listening sessions were held during the winter and spring of 2022 and involved LSP members and allies from across the Upper Midwest. During these sessions, participants provided input on how agricultural policy impacts their lives and communities, and what changes they would like to see in the Farm Bill.

** The current Farm Bill was due to expire in fall 2023. However, Congress has extended the current law until September 30, 2024.*



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The Platform

LSP's Farm Bill Platform calls for change in five specific areas:

1) Consolidation:

- Restore competition to the marketplace and level the playing field for small farmers and ranchers.
- Break up monopolies and enforce antitrust laws.
- Reduce funding supporting farms that are not taking care of their soil and communities.

2) Conservation & Climate:

- Create funding streams for new and innovative sustainable practices, and eliminate funding for practices that harm rural communities and the environment.
- Allocate fewer or no subsidies to the largest/industrial cropping operations, and stop providing public funds to large Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) seeking to install manure management and methane digesters.
- Direct programs like the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) toward operations that are implementing regenerative practices like managed rotational grazing, agroforestry, and perennial crops, and ensure funding is accessible to farmers with small-scale conservation projects.
- Provide additional targeted outreach and education for conservation programs such as CSP and EQIP.
- Make CSP an easier program to use and apply for, especially for organic producers, and limit funding that goes toward factory farm-style production.

3) Crop Insurance Reform:

- Put payment caps on crop insurance subsidies that the largest, industrial farms receive.
- Incentivize climate-resilient practices through crop insurance programs.
- Target crop insurance programs to support beginning farmers.
- Reduce crop insurance premium costs for farmers implementing soil health and conservation practices.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The Platform Continued...

4) Young, Beginning, and BIPOC Farmers:

- Reduce the turnaround time for USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) loan approval to meet the market pace for land sales and create a pre-approval mechanism for FSA Direct Farm Ownership Loans.
- Address concerns around realities that often the FSA loan process cannot compete with standard real estate transactions.
- Support programs that encourage and incentivize transitions to young/beginning/BIPOC farmers. This includes programs that support farmland preservation and easements to reduce development of productive agricultural land and facilitate land access.
- Create pathways to support land transition, apprenticeships and mentorships, as well as legacy planning work.
- Provide additional and culturally-appropriate technical assistance services (including in multiple languages) so that beginning farmers can access USDA programs.
- Provide direct financial support for land ownership by creating grant initiatives such as direct assistance provided in the Minnesota Down Payment Assistance Program.
- Support incubator and cooperative farms through additional funding (including for personnel and operations) to increase access to tools, infrastructure, equipment, and training for young/beginning/BIPOC farmers.

5) Regional Food Systems:

- Facilitate market access through outreach, additional funding, and technical assistance programs.
- Allow for the development of infrastructure that connects producers to consumers and builds strong and resilient regional food systems.
- Increase funding and support for farmers' markets, including programs that enable customers to purchase produce from local farmers.
- Protect critical investments in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) at a time of rising food prices and food insecurity.

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For more information on the Land Stewardship Project's federal policy work, see:
landstewardshipproject.org/federal-policy or contact
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LSP'S FARM BILL VALUES

- ♦ Use public resources for the public good.
 - ♦ Invest in people to build local communities vital for economic resilience.
 - ♦ Uphold the interdependence of urban and rural communities.
 - ♦ Acknowledge and address the history and legacy of inequities in the food system.
 - ♦ Encourage land stewardship and regional food systems.
- ♦ Reward crop diversity and soil health as essential for our future.
 - ♦ Recognize the contributions of and institute protections for food system workers, including farm and meat processing workers.
 - ♦ Acknowledge that farmers are on the front lines of the climate crisis, and this challenge demands bold solutions.



INTRODUCTION

Approximately every five years, Congress drafts a new federal Farm Bill, which has significant impact on what's grown on the landscape and who grows it, as well as the environmental impact of production systems, the safety of our food, and the economic health of rural communities. During the summer of 2022, Congress had already begun debating the structure of the 2023 Farm Bill,* and this document, the *Land Stewardship Project Farm Bill Platform*, identifies key issues and policy proposals that LSP and its members feel need to be addressed during the Farm Bill reauthorization process.

In the winter and spring of 2022, LSP, working with the National Young Farmers Coalition and Midwest Farmers of Color Collective, undertook a survey of farmers and food system workers in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Iowa. This survey, officially a subset of data from the National Young Farmer Survey, will be called the **Farm Bill Survey** for the remainder of this report. The Farm Bill Survey focused on how current agricultural policy impacts issues such as industry consolidation and competition, access to markets and regional food systems, climate change and protection from weather disasters, and access to government programs for Black, Indigenous, people of color (BIPOC) and beginning farmers. The survey results, along with information gathered during eight listening sessions LSP held in the region during the winter and spring of 2022, is being used as the basis for LSP's Farm Bill Platform.

**The current Farm Bill was due to expire in fall 2023. However, Congress has extended the current law until September 30, 2024.*



FARM BILL SURVEY OVERVIEW

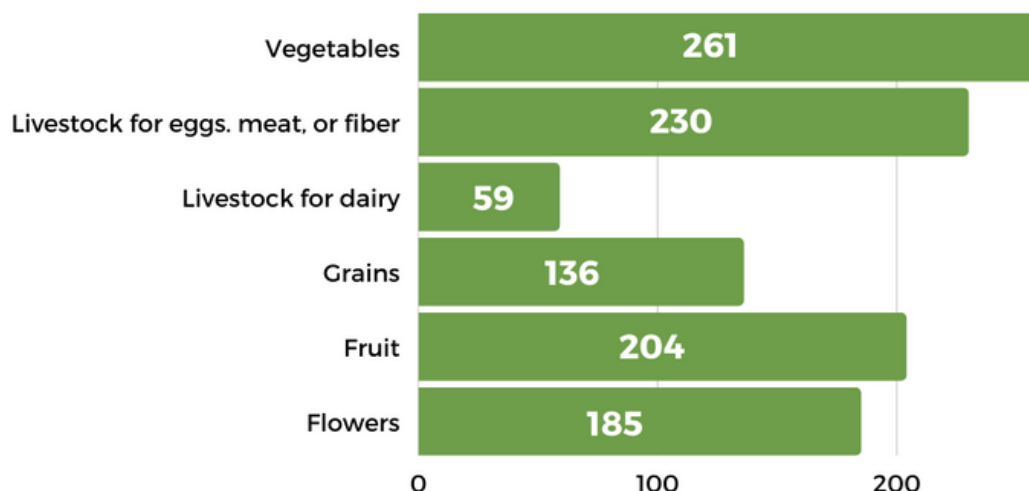
700+ SURVEYS FROM FARMERS IN MN, IA, WI

In the winter and spring of 2022, LSP, working in partnership with the National Young Farmers Coalition, Midwest Farmers of Color Collective, along with other partners, surveyed farmers and food system workers in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Iowa about how agriculture policy affects them. The responses from this survey helped drive the development of the policy priorities in LSP's Farm Bill Platform and will be referenced throughout this document. The responses from this survey, officially a subset of data from the National Young Farmers Coalition's National Young Farmer Survey, helped drive the development of the policy priorities in LSP's Farm Bill Platform and will be referenced throughout this document.

RESULTS OVERVIEW

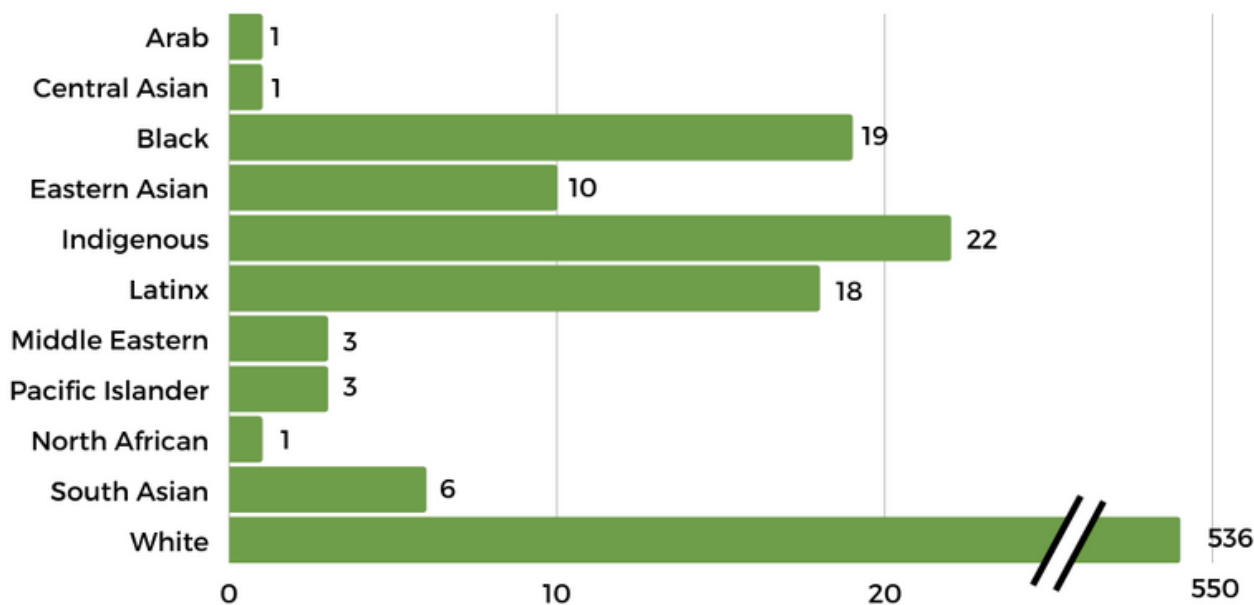
Over 700 farmers and food system workers responded to the survey (52% from Minnesota, 30% from Wisconsin, and 18% from Iowa). Of the respondents, 60% currently farm for income (of those, 74% are farm or ranch owners), 13% currently farm but not for income, and 7% used to farm. Many respondents grew vegetables (261), livestock for eggs, meat or fiber (230), fruit (204), flowers (185), grains (136).

WHAT DO YOU GROW?



FARM BILL SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

DEMOGRAPHIC BREAKDOWN



FARMING LOCATIONS



Of all survey respondents, 245 stated that they were first-generation farmers, meaning that their families had not farmed. The majority of respondents also live in rural areas. Approximately 85% of respondents identified as of white/European descent, and 15% identified as Black (19), Indigenous (22), Latinx (18), Eastern Asian (10), and South Asian (6). A few individual respondents identified as multi-racial, and for the purposes of this analysis, they are included in both selected racial groups in the chart above, and as part of the BIPOC response group for the analysis conducted in the "Land Access Inequities" section of this report.

CONSOLIDATION

LAY OF THE LAND

- Consolidation of farms leads to consolidation of all food businesses and the decline of once vibrant rural communities. These impacts also extend to food system workers, consumers, and the overall resiliency of our food supply.
- It is becoming more challenging to have democratic decision-making in local communities as power becomes more centralized in the hands of fewer and fewer large-scale agricultural operations.
- There is an urgent and stark crisis in meat, poultry, and dairy production and processing, and it's impacting wide swaths of our society.
- Federal investment in food supply chain resilience/new infrastructure will be most effective when combined with a commitment to enforce laws to level the playing field for small and independent producers.

IMPACTS ON FARMERS

Market concentration, especially in the meat and poultry sectors, is unprecedented. In 1977, the largest four beef packers controlled 25% of the market. By 2018, the largest four packers dominated 85% of the market. Many LSP members and supporters (both producers and consumers) report experiencing significant negative impacts and unfair market competition as a result of corporate consolidation. At the same time, many rural communities are experiencing direct, negative impacts from the proliferation of large concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs).



CONSOLIDATION

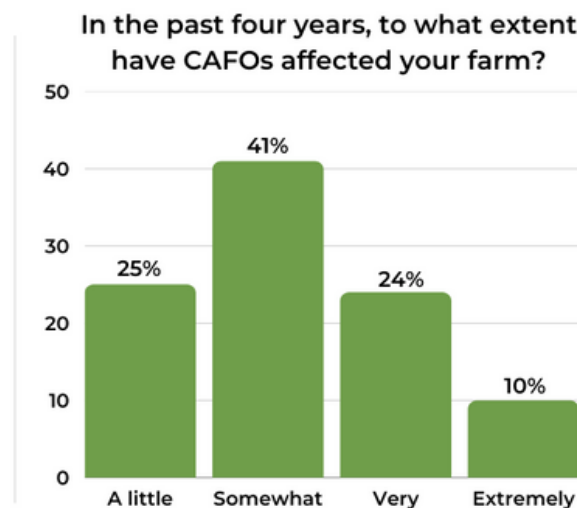
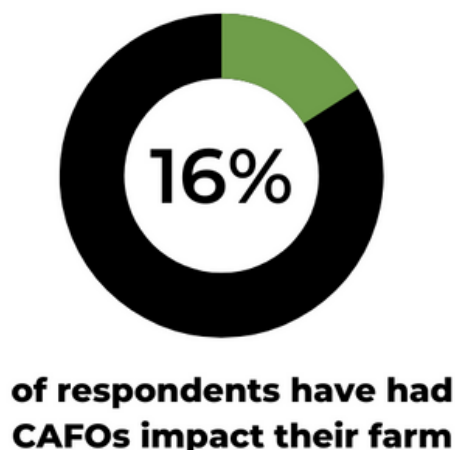
IMPACTS ON FARMERS CONTINUED...

Of all the categories of respondents surveyed — “currently farm,” “used to farm,” and “would like to farm” — 50% or higher found maintaining consistent access to slaughter facilities “somewhat”, “very”, or “extremely” difficult.

Percent of respondents who found maintaining access to slaughter facilities difficult



Of the Farm Bill Survey respondents, 16% reported that CAFOs had impacted their farm in a negative manner. Of that group, 34% said that over the past four years, CAFOs had affected them negatively on a “very” high level or “extremely” high level.



CONSOLIDATION

WE WOULD LIKE TO SEE THE FARM BILL:

- Restore competition to the marketplace and level the playing field for small farmers and ranchers.
- Break up monopolies and enforce antitrust laws.
- Reduce funding supporting farms that are not taking care of their soil and communities.

SOME SPECIFIC POLICIES WE SUPPORT:

- Merger moratorium bills:
 - Prohibiting Anticompetitive Mergers Act of 2022
 - Food and Agribusiness Merger Moratorium and Antitrust Review Act of 2022
- Packers and Stockyards Act (PSA) Rule development (Congress should not interfere with the USDA process of updating the rules for enforcing the PSA)
- Eliminate EQIP funding for CAFOs
- Strengthening Local Processing Act
- Meatpacking Special Investigator Act
- American Beef Labeling Act and other efforts to pass mandatory Country of Origin Labeling (COOL) legislation
- Farm System Reform Act
- Protecting America's Meatpacking Workers Act of 2021:
 - Decreasing line speeds in meat processing plants



CONSERVATION & CLIMATE

LAY OF THE LAND

- Farmers are on the front lines of the climate crisis, which impacts not only our environment but also the ability of small and mid-sized farms to succeed.
- The resources needed to deal with climate change are not adequate to meet the requirements of small and mid-sized farmers.
- LSP farmers need funding streams that support new and innovative sustainable practices; funds should be eliminated for practices that harm rural communities and the environment.
- LSP farmers need better alignment of approved practices with what we already know about healthy native grasslands and grazing. Grazing rules in conservation programs should align with best practices, backed-up by research.

IMPACTS ON FARMERS

Farmers understand firsthand the impacts of climate change. Farmers care deeply about taking care of the land for the future, but currently the Farm Bill programs that meet this need are underfunded. In the past five years, of Farm Bill Survey respondents:

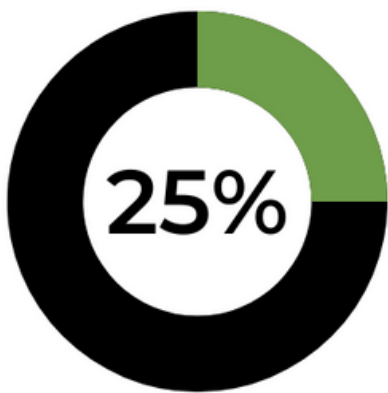
- **90%** have experienced **more severe weather events**
- **86%** have experienced **rising average temperatures**
- **91%** have experienced **extreme temperature swings**
- **84%** believe these effects are due to **climate change**



CONSERVATION & CLIMATE

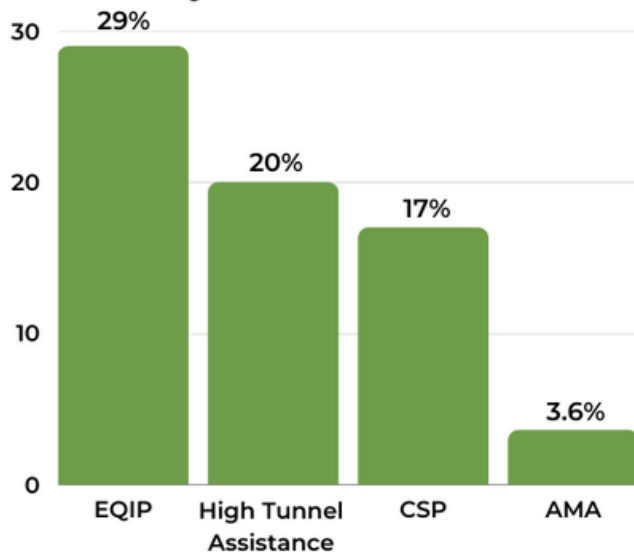
IMPACTS ON FARMERS CONTINUED...

Approximately one-fourth of survey respondents who farm have enrolled some of their acres in conservation programs through agencies such as the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The most common program used by survey respondents was the agency's Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), with almost 30% of respondents utilizing this initiative. Other initiatives widely utilized by respondents include the High Tunnel Assistance Program and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), both administered by the NRCS. A few respondents utilized the Agricultural Management Assistance Program (AMA). With only a quarter of respondents utilizing conservation programs, these results indicate that there are barriers to conservation program access that should be addressed in the next Farm Bill.



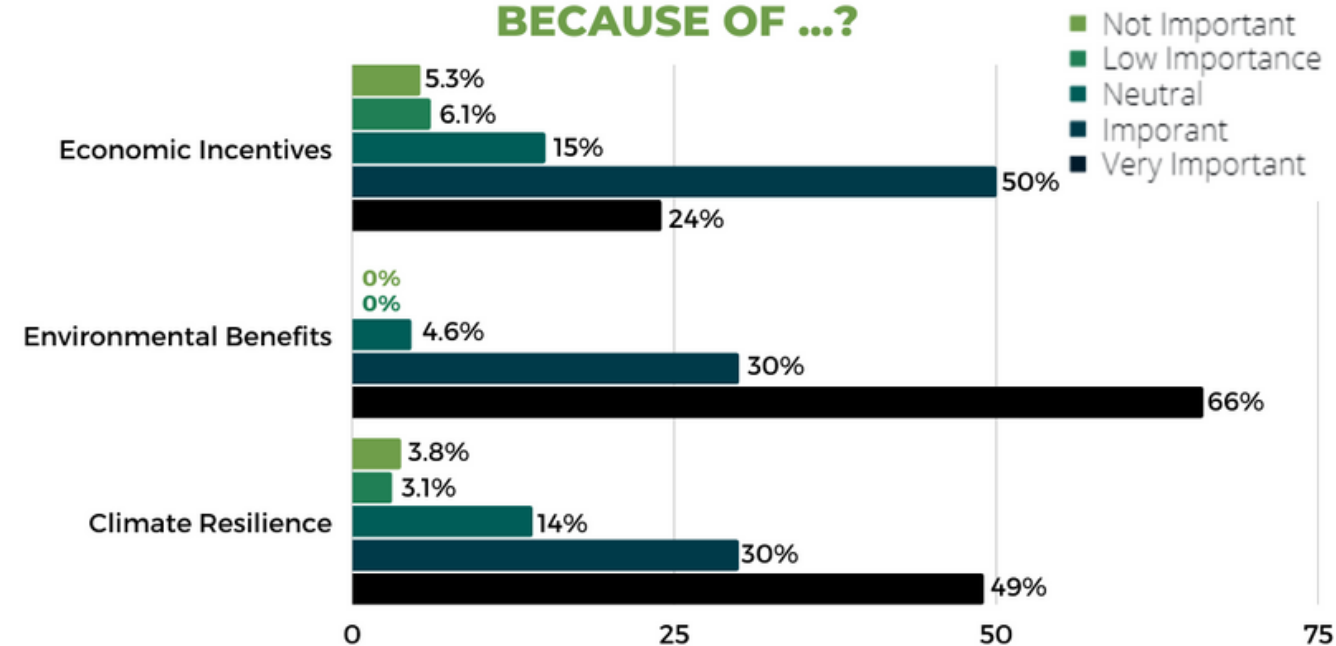
**of respondents have had
acres enrolled in a
conservation program**

Which NRCS programs have you used on your farm or ranch?



CONSERVATION & CLIMATE

DID YOU ENROLL IN CONSERVATION PRACTICES BECAUSE OF ...?



**Economic
Incentives**



**Environmental
Benefits**



**Climate
Resilience**

**WERE AN "IMPORTANT"
OR "VERY IMPORTANT"
FACTOR FOR
RESPONDENTS**

The majority of farmers enrolled their land in conservation programs because of environmental benefits (96%), climate resilience outcomes (79%), and economic incentives (74%).

CONSERVATION & CLIMATE

WE WOULD LIKE TO SEE THE FARM BILL:

- Allocate fewer or no subsidies to the largest/industrial cropping operations, and stop providing public funds to large CAFOs seeking to install manure management systems and methane digesters.
- Direct programs like CSP and EQIP toward operations that are implementing regenerative practices such as managed rotational grazing, no-till, cover crops, agroforestry, and perennial crops, and ensure funding is accessible to farmers with small-scale conservation projects.
- Provide additional targeted outreach and education for conservation programs such as CSP and EQIP.
- Ensure EQIP funding is accessible to farmers with cooperative business structures.
- Create incentives for farmers to maintain conservation practices.
 - For example, currently many Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acres are tilled after CRP contracts expire.
- Create opportunities for conservation program participants that also have acres enrolled in short-term contracts, whether it's through CSP or EQIP, to move those acres into longer-term contracts without destroying the currently established habitat.
- Make CSP an easier program to use and apply for, especially for organic producers, and limit funding that goes toward factory farm-style production.
- Provide more access to CRP lands for grazing after bird nesting periods (excluding highly erodible lands).
 - If CRP lands are open to grazing, grazing practices should be in alignment with management practices that have been proven to regenerate, and not degrade, soil and water quality, as well as animal habitat.
- Pay farmers for practices we know have climate benefits (as opposed to speculative carbon payment programs).



CONSERVATION & CLIMATE

SOME SPECIFIC POLICIES WE SUPPORT:

- Agriculture Resilience Act
- Climate Stewardship Act
- Eliminate EQIP and REAP (Resource Enhancement and Protection) funding for CAFOs, and stop attempts to fund factory farms via CSP.
- EQIP Livestock set-asides should be reduced and should incentivize pasture-based production methods.

CROP INSURANCE REFORM

LAY OF THE LAND

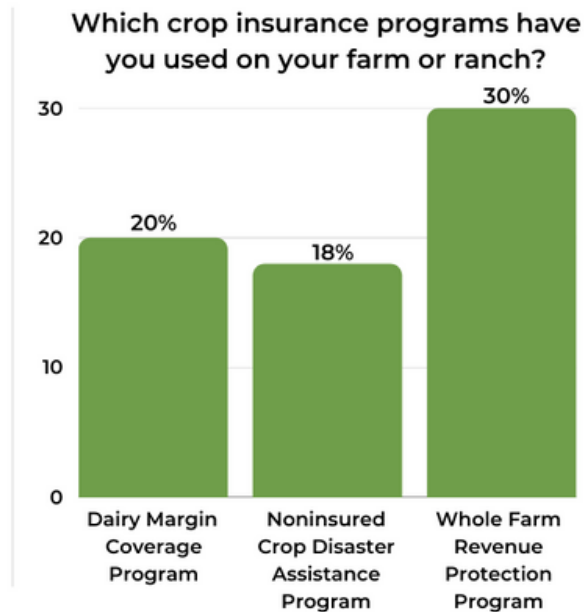
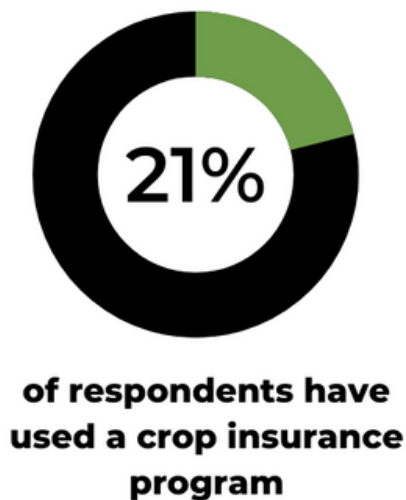
- Crop insurance is an engine that drives farmers' land use and cropping decisions, and those decisions often perpetuate consolidation in the agriculture sector.
- Over the past 15 to 20 years, federally subsidized crop insurance has artificially reduced risk, enabling the largest operations to expand their acreage (and putting the financial burden on taxpayers), which increases land access challenges for small and medium-sized farms. Common-sense limits on crop insurance premium subsidies for the largest operations should be put in place.
- Farms that are not properly taking care of their soil should not receive incentives for their production practices via limitless publicly funded crop insurance premium subsidies.



CROP INSURANCE REFORM

IMPACTS ON FARMERS

Only 21% of Farm Bill Survey respondents reported using crop insurance programs. (At the same time, approximately 10% of farms nationwide receive 60% of total farm subsidies.) Of the surveyed farmers that use crop insurance, many used one of three programs: the Dairy Margin Coverage Program, the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program, or the Whole Farm Revenue Protection Program. According to a recent National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition report, instituting common-sense payment caps on the crop insurance program could save billions of dollars over the next decade and would impact on average less than 3% of farmers.



CROP INSURANCE REFORM

WE WOULD LIKE TO SEE THE FARM BILL:

- Put payment caps on crop insurance subsidies that the largest, industrial farms receive.
- Incentivize climate-resilient practices through crop insurance programs.
- Target crop insurance programs to support beginning farmers.
 - This could be achieved by capping how much the biggest farms receive in crop insurance subsidies as subsidies to the largest farms contribute to heightened land and rent prices. Beginning farmers are currently in a deep struggle for land access, and implementing payment caps should reduce land prices and thus make it easier for beginning farmers to access land.
 - Provide more crop insurance options for specialty crop, diverse, and organic growers.
 - Provide more technical assistance for crop insurance coverage.
 - Recognize beginning farmers as those with less than 10 years of experience, in-line with other Farm Bill programs.
- Reduce crop insurance premiums for farmers implementing soil health and conservation practices. There should be a streamlined process so that farms enrolled in working lands conservation programs can easily verify practices to qualify for lower insurance premium payments.



CROP INSURANCE REFORM

SOME SPECIFIC POLICIES WE SUPPORT:

- Crop insurance payment limits for the largest farms.
- Good Farming Practices: Require that the Risk Management Agency (RMA) recognize any farming and ranching conservation practices supported by NRCS as "Good Farming Practices" without any requirement that the farmer prove the practice will have zero yield impact.
- Whole Farm Revenue: Improve, simplify, and promote the Whole Farm Revenue Protection (WFRP) program. Provide fair compensation for crop insurance agents to sell this policy and remove existing disincentives. Expand “micro-farm” requirements to include all small and mid-sized farms.



YOUNG, BEGINNING, AND BIPOC FARMERS

LAY OF THE LAND

- Inflated land prices especially impact young, beginning, and BIPOC farmers.
- When it comes to access to funds and programs for BIPOC producers, there is not a consistently equitable system.
- The most urgent and important use of USDA funding is supporting our young, beginning, and BIPOC farmers.

IMPACTS ON FARMERS

In the Farm Bill Survey, of respondents who would like to farm, 56% stated that housing, land, and water were their biggest challenges over the past 12 months. In addition, over half of respondents in all three categories — "currently farm", "used to farm", or "would like to farm" — found purchasing affordable land "somewhat", "very", or "extremely" difficult.

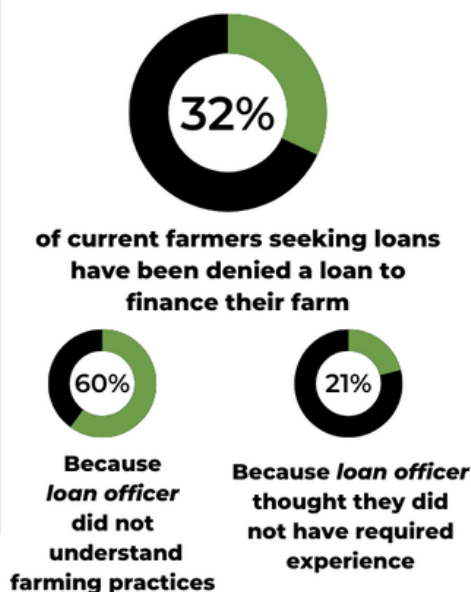
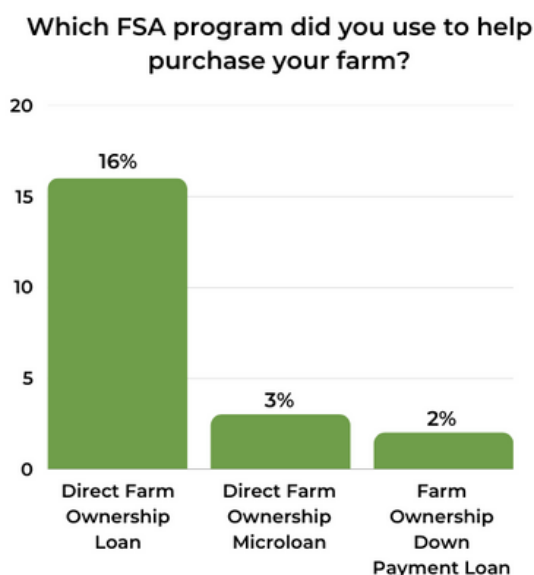
**Percent of respondents who
found finding affordable land to
buy difficult**



YOUNG, BEGINNING, AND BIPOC FARMERS

IMPACTS ON FARMERS CONTINUED...

Of respondents who used government financing to purchase their farm, 16% utilized the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) Direct Farm Ownership Loan. Of current farmers who have sought out loans to finance their farm or ranch business, 32% reported having been denied a loan. And the 60% of those rejected believe they were unsuccessful in obtaining a loan because the loan officer did not understand their farming practices or business model, while 21% were rejected because the loan officer thought they did not have the required farming experience.



LAND ACCESS INEQUITIES

50% of BIPOC respondents who stopped farming named discrimination as the barrier that had the biggest impact on their decision to stop farming

BIPOC respondents were...

1.6 times less likely
to purchase land with
government financing
available through agencies
like FSA

60% more likely
to never have received a
communication from USDA
about programs

2.4 times more likely
to have USDA staff act
unwelcoming based on their
operation or practices "very
often" or "extremely often"

1.8 times more likely
to be ignored "very often" or
"extremely often" by USDA
staff



YOUNG, BEGINNING, AND BIPOC FARMERS

WE WOULD LIKE TO SEE THE FARM BILL:

- Reduce the turnaround time for FSA loan approval to meet the market pace for land sales and create a pre-approval mechanism for FSA Direct Farm Ownership Loans.
- Provide training for FSA loan officers on soil health and direct marketing practices so that they are better positioned to support farmers utilizing these practices.
- Make FSA loan financing a viable option for farmers refinancing their operations.
- Allow anyone with a registered tax-paying farm business to be eligible for FSA and USDA programs.
- Support programs that encourage and incentivize transitions to young/beginning/BIPOC farmers. This includes programs that support farmland preservation and easements to reduce development of productive agricultural land and facilitate land access.
- Create pathways to support land transition, apprenticeship/mentorship, and legacy planning work.
- Provide more and culturally-appropriate technical assistance services (including in multiple languages) so that beginning farmers can access USDA programs.
 - Minnesota has a dedicated staff for emerging farmers in its state Department of Agriculture – we would like more advocates like this at the federal level.
- Provide direct financial support for land ownership by creating grant initiatives such as the direct assistance provided in the Minnesota Down Payment Assistance Program.
- Support incubator and cooperative farms through additional funding (including for personnel and operations) to increase access to tools, infrastructure, equipment, and training for young/beginning/BIPOC farmers.

SOME SPECIFIC POLICIES WE SUPPORT:

- Provisions included in the Justice for Black Farmers Act, including:
 - Increase transparency and accountability in USDA oversight.
 - Invest in socially disadvantaged farmers by improving credit access, credit assistance, and succession planning.
- Policies serving BIPOC farmers that are grounded, directed, and developed by BIPOC-led and BIPOC-serving organizations.
- Secure FSA debt relief for farmers of color.

REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEMS

LAY OF THE LAND

- LSP members are calling for healthy, community-based food systems. There is a need for more community-based infrastructure, business opportunities, and connections between farmers and consumers.
- Local and regional processors and distributors need support.
- The Farm Bill is also a major food security bill, and LSP understands how important and interconnected agricultural policy and nutrition programs are in facilitating access to fresh, healthy, affordable, and culturally-appropriate foods.



WE WOULD LIKE TO SEE THE FARM BILL:

IMPACTS ON FARMERS

In the Farm Bill Survey:

- Around **50%** of respondents had **trouble maintaining access to a viable market.**
 - Around **70%** of respondents find that **the cost of production is higher than the price they receive for their goods.**
 - Around **40%** of respondents had **difficulty accessing broadband internet on their farm**, which limits their ability to participate in regional food marketing systems.
- Facilitate market access through outreach, additional funding, and technical assistance programs.
 - Allow for the development of infrastructure that connects producers to consumers and builds strong and resilient regional food systems.
 - Increase funding and support for farmers' markets, including programs that enable customers to purchase produce from local farmers.
 - Protect critical investments in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) at a time of rising food prices and food insecurity.

THANK YOU TO OUR EXTERNAL PLATFORM REVIEWERS

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This platform is available online at
landstewardshipproject.org/farmbill2023



LAND
STEWARDSHIP
PROJECT

The Land Stewardship Project (LSP) is a private, nonprofit organization founded in 1982 to foster an ethic of stewardship for farmland, to promote sustainable agriculture, and to develop healthy communities.