

Farm Bill Conservation Program Funding for Clean Water

Nutrient pollution is the most widespread stressor affecting America's waterways today, and agriculture is one of the largest contributors. Addressing the scale of this problem requires us to pursue cost-effective and scalable solutions that reward farmers who help the environment. Farm Bill conservation programs pay for practices that reduce soil erosion, reduce nitrogen and phosphorus pollution to waterways, and improve water efficiency in dry climates, as well as providing co-benefits for climate mitigation, climate resilience, soil health, and wildlife habitat. Farm Bill conservation programs are the largest source of conservation funding on private lands, yet demand for conservation on 13.8 million acres goes unmet each year because of inadequate funding. For major working lands programs like the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), this means up to 75% of applications have gone unfunded in recent years. To meet this need, the next Farm Bill should double conservation funding to improve water quality and support these producers who are eager to be a part of the solution.

The Need: Where funding is coming up short

Qualified applicants to conservation programs are being rejected due to a lack of funds; for example, in FY2020 USDA funded only:

- 27% of eligible program applications received for EQIP,
- 35% for CSP,
- and 43% for Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA)

CSP is the largest conservation program in the United States, supporting operation-wide conservation efforts, yet funding for the program has decreased in every Farm Bill since it was first authorized in 2008.

Compounding this problem, staffing levels at NRCS declined by 24 percent between 2004-2019. According to a January 2022 Farm Bill Primer released by Congressional Research Service, an increase in funding and staff could bolster conservation efforts across agricultural lands.

Examples of state percentages of CSP and EQIP applications funded in 2020:

Arkansas - 14%	Michigan - 49%
California - 36%	Pennsylvania - 21%
Georgia - 24%	Virginia - 30%
Iowa - 21%	

Congress can address the funding shortfalls by increasing conservation program funding and authorizing and appropriating more money for conservation technical assistance at NRCS to reduce the backlog of applications.

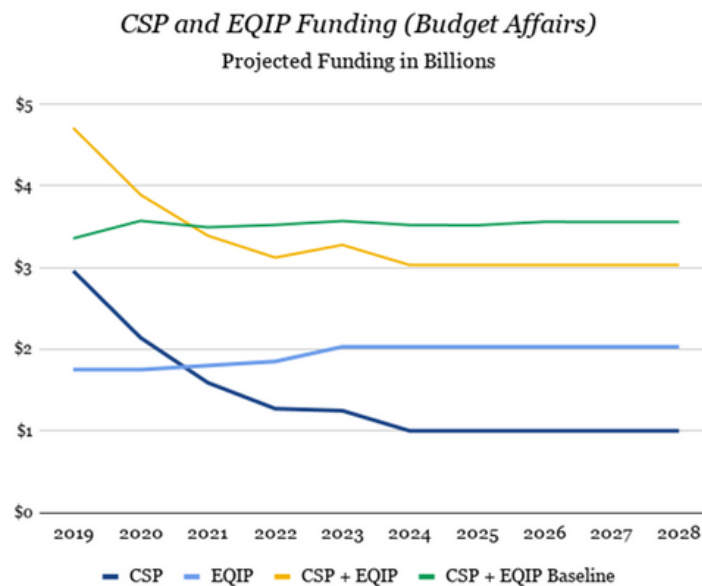
Benefits of Increased Conservation Funding

The benefits of increasing conservation funding are substantial, especially as we also urge you to consider incorporating water quality outcomes within conservation programs.

If Congress doubled the capacity of working lands conservation programs, it would lead to:

- Improved grasslands through new prescribed grazing practices on over 18 million acres of land each year,
- Reduced pesticide use through Integrated Pest Management on nearly 7 million acres of land each year,
- Increased cover crop plantings on 5 million acres of cropland each year.

Farm conservation practices have the potential to drastically reduce nutrient and sediment losses into waterways while also reducing fertilizer and pesticide costs for farmers. Filtering runoff removes chemicals, sediment, and waste to improve downstream water quality. In the Western U.S. where chronic drought and growing human populations threaten water quantity, conservation practices can help farmers and ranchers increase efficiency, enhance resiliency, and conserve water. Doubling conservation funding in the next Farm Bill will help meet the demand and need for agricultural producers to act now to improve water quality.



This graph by the [National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition](#) shows how the 2018 Farm Bill shifted funding away from CSP and toward EQIP. The long-term loss in funding is roughly \$500 million.

The Clean Water for All Coalition brings together advocates with diverse backgrounds and interests at local, regional, and national levels, to promote and conserve clean water for everyone. This factsheet was produced by Clean Water for All to advance the principles of the coalition; however, unless endorsement by an organization is specifically stated, statements and positions in this document should not be interpreted as endorsement by all of our members.

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