

Regenerative Agriculture and Justice Priorities for the 2023 Farm Bill

ASBN has convened the [Regenerative Agriculture and Justice Working Group](#), a cross-sector business and investor initiative working in cooperation with farmers and ranchers and other stakeholders from all aspects of the agricultural supply chain to develop priorities for the 2023 Farm Bill.¹ ASBN especially recognizes small and mid-scale farmers as key stakeholders in building a vibrant, resilient and sustainable economy. Farmers, ranchers, and businesses all are crucial for healthy supply chains and their business models are reliant on supportive public policy in order to ensure markets remain equitable, accessible and profitable.

Businesses from across sectors, farmers and ranchers, conservationists, and other stakeholders increasingly support regenerative agriculture, an approach to farming that prioritizes building soil health, minimizing inputs, and enhancing biodiversity through a combination of context and place-based practices. Regenerative agriculture and other similar approaches are vital for rebuilding the health of our natural systems, restoring clean water, repairing hydrological cycles to reduce flooding and drought, and allowing wildlife to flourish. Notably, soil under regenerative management can sequester a significant amount of CO₂. Regenerating soil health will be pivotal in the fight against the climate crisis. Supporting regenerative agriculture in the Farm Bill will not only be good for the environment but will also benefit farmers and ranchers, and build a more resilient economy and food system as a whole.

Why Regenerative Agriculture

1. *Regenerative agriculture benefits farmers.*

Regenerating and improving soil health [can increase crop yields and prevent loss to extreme weather events](#) like drought or flooding, while also reducing [input costs](#) such as nitrogen fertilizers. This comes at a critical time as synthetic fertilizer prices have more than [doubled since 2021](#) due to the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, [both major global producers](#), and the rising fuel prices. Transitioning towards regenerative agriculture can also improve farmer incomes by providing access to new revenue streams from businesses and consumers demanding transparency, quality, and responsible approaches to agriculture.

2. *Regenerative agriculture is good for businesses and the U.S. economy.*

Companies are increasingly becoming interested in regenerative agriculture to meet [growing consumer demand](#) for agricultural goods that advance environmental, climate, and social justice goals. However, domestic farmland under regenerative production is minimal, and companies often look abroad to fulfill demand. Companies are also diversifying their supply chains toward regenerative as a way to [increase their supply chain resilience](#) in the face of extreme weather events, disease, and other crises. While private capital investments in regenerative farming have proven positive long-term returns and market demand continues to exceed supply, the lack of government policy and programmatic support for the transition hinders its adoption to the detriment of U.S. farm families and rural communities.

¹ Please visit the following webpage to learn more about the working group:
<https://www.asbnetwork.org/post/regenerative-agriculture-justice-working-group>

2023 Farm Bill Priorities

The following priorities were established through careful deliberation by the stakeholder experts of the [Regenerative Agriculture and Justice Working Group](#) as priorities for the 2023 Farm Bill. A central part of all our policy priorities is 1) equitable program access and 2) increased funding for discriminated-against people of color farmer and rancher groups and other underserved farmers and ranchers.

SUPPORT

Current agricultural policy and market structures favor large-scale producers and there is a long history of discrimination and exclusion at the USDA. Public policy must reflect that small-scale and discriminated-against people of color farmers have been practicing and refining regenerative agriculture and traditional ecological knowledge at the margins of society for centuries, and that farmers who are more economically secure have a longer-term horizon for planning and land management.

Priorities

1. Land access and support for beginning farmers and ranchers, especially for small-scale farmers, discriminated against groups, and regenerative producers
2. Debt relief for underserved and discriminated against farmers
3. Farmworker support, including housing and nutritional support program eligibility for undocumented workers

Priorities

4. Investment in market development, processing, and infrastructure for regenerative, organic, and local and regional farmers
5. Development of USDA-approved meat processing capacity to provide access to markets for local and regional farmers and ranchers

INVEST

Access to markets is constrained for independent farmers and ranchers due to the lack of processing infrastructure, which is particularly acute in the meat and dairy markets. The centralization of processing capacity requires the transportation of crops and animals across long distances, increasing their carbon footprint. It also hinders the ability of local/regional regenerative producers to access markets.

Priorities

6. Incentives, training, outreach, credit/finance, and payments for regenerative practices, including organic and indigenous/traditional ecological practices
7. Federal crop insurance updates to reward the adoption of de-risking practices (like cover cropping, increased diversity, and reduced tillage), rather than penalizing them
8. Redirect USDA incentives away from destructive concentrated feeding operations and towards regenerative systems using managed grazing and reincorporation of livestock in cropping systems

INCENTIVIZE

Transitioning from conventional agriculture to a more regenerative system takes time, effort, and resources. Farmers can improve yields and save money on inputs in the long run by adopting regenerative agriculture, but there can be a period of reduced yields during the transition. Both federal and industry incentives can help make the decision for farmers to take the regenerative journey easier.

These recommendations have been endorsed by the following businesses, farmers, and organizations: