



Advancing soil health policies & programs  
that create value for farmers, businesses,  
and communities

**FISCAL YEAR 2025 AGRICULTURE APPROPRIATIONS REQUEST**

April 19, 2024

The Honorable Martin Heinrich  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development,  
FDA, & Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John Hoeven  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural  
Development, FDA, & Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Andy Harris  
Chairman  
House Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture,  
Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration,  
and Related Agencies  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Sanford Bishop, Jr.  
Ranking Member  
House Appropriations Subcommittee on  
Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug  
Administration, and Related Agencies  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Heinrich, Ranking Member Hoeven, Chairman Harris, and Ranking Member Bishop:

Thank you for the opportunity to present our FY 2025 appropriations priorities. Land Core is a nonprofit with a mission to advance soil health policies and programs that create value for farmers, businesses, and communities. We focus on building the missing infrastructure and market-based incentives that will make the rapid adoption and scalability of soil health possible. Responsible and strategic investments from the U.S. government play a critical role in catalyzing sustained soil health outcomes.

By supporting voluntary financial incentives that complement existing conservation programs, farmers can be encouraged to adopt practices that prioritize soil health and long-term sustainability. These incentives serve as a vital lifeline for farmers facing economic uncertainty in the upcoming growing season, providing not only immediate financial relief but also fostering a more resilient agricultural system capable of weathering future challenges. Investing in soil health not only bolsters the profitability and viability of individual farms but also contributes to broader environmental conservation efforts, safeguarding our nation's agricultural system for generations to come.

We urge Congress to prioritize the following report language and program requests for the U.S. Department of Agriculture in FY25:

### **Report Language Request**

Without a proper understanding of the risk-reducing benefits of soil health practices like cover crops, reduced tillage, complex crop rotations, and livestock grazing, farmers cannot receive the “good soil health discounts” that they might very well be entitled to.

We urge Congress to direct RMA to conduct a study on the risk-reducing benefits of soil health practices and make recommendations for appropriate discounts or other policies based on the findings.

**Agency:** Risk Management Agency (RMA)

#### **Suggested Language:**

*The Committee recognizes that soil health practices, such as cover crops, crop rotations, reduced tillage, and rotational grazing, show promise as practices that reduce indemnities for crop insurance over time. The Risk Management Agency (RMA), coordinating with the Office of the Chief Economist (OCE), Economic Research Service (ERS), and other agencies who may make relevant data available, as appropriate, is directed to provide a report to the committee on the actuarial soundness and risk reduction of discounts or incentives for these practices, over 3-5 year timeframes after practice adoption, for all relevant commodity crop insurance policies.*

### **Program Requests**

The below requests for the Department of Agriculture will help to expand vital education, technical service provision and implementation assistance for producers adopting soil health practices; advance critical research priorities; and support local and regional infrastructure and markets to increase access to healthy, regionally sourced food.

We would like to see the following programs funded at the following levels:

#### **Program: Conservation Operations**

Agency: Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

Funding: \$1.2 billion, including:

- \$1.1 billion for Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA)
- \$30 million dedicated to the Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI)

#### **Program: Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI)**

Agency: National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)

Funding: \$475 million (to support critical research on soil health and on-farm resilience)

#### **Program: Agricultural Research Service (ARS)**

Agency: Agricultural Research Service

Funding: \$1.95 billion (to support critical research on soil health and on-farm resilience)

#### **Program: Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE)**

Agency: National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)

Funding: \$60 million (to support applied soil health research, on-farm demonstrations, and education)

#### **Program: Local Agriculture Market Program (LAMP)**

Agencies: Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) and Rural Development (RD)

Funding: \$20 million (to support the Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Programs and Value-Added Producer Grants)

**Program: Direct and Guaranteed Farm Ownership and Operating Loans**

Agency: Farm Service Agency (FSA)

Funding: Full funding based on identified need (to provide cash flow flexibility to ensure that farmers can prioritize economic viability and long-term sustainability on their farms)

Supporting America's farmers and ranchers in building soil health is critical, not only to avert imminent food supply issues, but also to reverse soil loss, safeguard food security, improve farm profitability and productivity, revive rural communities, and mitigate the on-farm impacts of severe weather.

We stand ready to assist you in ensuring that these resources achieve the goals outlined above, and are available to discuss our requests further.

Sincerely,



Aria McLauchlan  
Executive Director, Land Core

[Land Core](http://www.landcore.org) is a 501(c)3 organization with a mission to advance soil health policies and programs that create value for farmers, businesses and communities.

## **FY25 APPROPRIATIONS REPORT LANGUAGE REQUEST**

The Committee recognizes the risk-reducing benefit of common soil health practices over time, and directs the Risk Management Agency (RMA) to carry out research and deliver a report regarding the impact of cover crops, crop rotations, reduced tillage, and rotational grazing on commodity crop yields and insurance risk, particularly during periods of severe weather, and make recommendations for appropriate discounts or incentives for all relevant insurance policies.

The Committee recognizes that soil health practices, such as cover crops, crop rotations, reduced tillage, and rotational grazing, show promise as practices that reduce indemnities for crop insurance over time. The Risk Management Agency (RMA), coordinating with the Office of the Chief Economist (OCE), Economic Research Service (ERS), and other agencies who may make relevant data available, as appropriate, is directed to provide a report to the committee on the actuarial soundness and risk reduction of a discount or incentive for these practices, over 3-5 year timeframes after practice adoption, for all relevant commodity crop insurance policies.

## **FY25 APPROPRIATIONS REQUEST**

Specific agency: **Dept. of Agriculture, Risk Management Agency (RMA)**

Appropriations program:

### **Explanatory Statement:**

Given the importance of CIG's On-Farm Innovation Trials, and the Soil Health Demonstration Trials, the Committee understands the need for clear, consistent data and measurement protocols in order to ensure the goals of the program are being achieved, and the effectiveness of specific "innovative" conservation practices can be determined. The proposed amendment would create a deadline for NRCS to adopt standards for soil health, lab calibration and in-field sampling methodology (on a minimum viable set of indicators), in order to ensure that accurate and consistent data is collected as a baseline against which all new innovations can be measured. NRCS would have the discretion to select existing standards, collaborate with outside groups to develop suitable standards, or develop the standards internally. The standards would be a part of the data analysis protocol that NRCS develops to review the results of the

Soil Health Demonstration Trial and other relevant On-Farm Innovation Trials (as determined by the secretary). Once the NRCS has implemented the new standards, producers participating in the Soil Health Demonstration Trial would be required to use these standards as a baseline against which the agency can assess the efficacy of new testing innovations. The amendment would also authorize the use of existing funding to be used for the development and implementation of the new standards.

**Proposed Language:**

(a) Soil Health Demonstration Trials.--Section 1240H (2) (c) (7) of the Food Security Act of 1985 (16 U.S.C. 3839aa-8 (2) (c) (7)) is amended

(1) in subparagraph (B) by striking “establish protocols for” and inserting the following:

“implement a [soil sampling and lab calibration methodology] not later than [DATE], and incorporate this [methodology] into protocols for”

(2) by redesignating subparagraph (C) as subparagraph (E)

(3) by inserting after subparagraph (B) the following:

“(C) The Secretary shall require that, as a condition of participating in the trial described in subparagraph (7)(A), producers shall submit to the Secretary, [at least once at the onset of the trial and once at it’s conclusion], the results of a soil test in compliance with the [soil sampling and lab calibration methodology],

(D) Of the funds made available to carry out this subsection, the Secretary [shall/may] use [at least \$250,000/not more than \$\$\$(X%)/sufficient funds] to implement a [soil sampling and lab calibration methodology],”