

Working Lands Lead the Way: Policy Priorities for Regenerative Agriculture

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About the Report

The Midwest Row Crop Collaborative (MRCC) worked with Monument Advocacy to assess the landscape of potential policy solutions for agricultural systems change through the lenses of its various members and their programs on the ground. Insights from the Monument Advocacy-led analysis serve as the basis for this report as a guide for future MRCC policy-related activities.

This report aims to show the programs and policy considerations primed for change in the next farm bill and to highlight opportunities for public-private collaboration that leverages insights from on-the-ground supply chain programs. The next farm bill is expected in 2023, with U.S. Senate and House of Representatives hearings underway.

MRCC's members are committed to working towards a food and agricultural system that increases productivity while ensuring soil health, protecting water, addressing the factors contributing to climate change, and supporting farm families. As one of numerous multi-stakeholder initiatives working to create change in the U.S. agriculture system, MRCC invites the partnership and insights of conservation-minded advocates and leaders who share this ambition.

"Climate-smart," "soil health," "sustainable," and "regenerative" are all terms used to describe the practices associated with the agricultural system that MRCC members seek to promote. Although these terms are not interchangeable, the authors of this report chose to use the term "regenerative" in describing the practices, outcomes, and system that MRCC aims to advance.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Midwest represents a globally unique resource and economically vital landscape that covers more than 125 million acres of agricultural land. With corn and soybean production representing three quarters of agricultural acreage in the states of Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, and Wisconsin, row crop production is a driving force across the Midwest landscape.ⁱ

Today, the region faces growing environmental impacts from pressures on the landscape due to unsustainable practices—deteriorating soil health, soil loss, nutrient loading into waterways, contamination and depletion of groundwater resources, declining water quality and biodiversity, and climate impacts through loss of soil carbon and associated greenhouse gas emissions. Iowa, for instance, has already lost half of its topsoil, a resource that takes centuries to build.ⁱⁱ Midwestern agriculture's environmental effects extend well beyond the region. Unsustainable agriculture practices in the region threaten the health and vitality of communities that depend on the waters of the Ogallala Aquifer and the Mississippi River. These practices also ultimately contribute to the growing dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico. To help address these challenges, the Midwest Row Crop Collaborative was established.

A regenerative agriculture initiative of leading food and agriculture companies and non profits, MRCC tests and demonstrates solutions that promote the widespread adoption of regenerative, science-based approaches which benefit the environment, and shares learnings that support scaled adoption across the supply chain. MRCC members are committed to working toward a food and agricultural system that increases productivity while ensuring soil health, protecting water, addressing the factors contributing to climate change, and supporting farm families.

The private sector must play a significant role in addressing these urgent issues and MRCC's members are committed to testing and scaling approaches to help transition row crop production toward a regenerative system, supported by the dramatic expansion of regenerative agriculture. However, while supply chain projects led by these companies and organizations operate at a significant size, their direct impact and influence alone is insufficient to drive landscape-level change. MRCC members and the public depend on policies set at the federal, state, and local levels to help improve the harmful impacts associated with agriculture.

This is a defining moment for positive policy that invests in agriculture as a climate solution. The upcoming farm bill is the last policy opportunity for Congress to significantly influence the agricultural system ahead of the deadline for companies to meet their 2030 science-based targets. Additionally, for companies, farmers, consumers, and communities to experience the benefits of a more resilient food and agriculture system, there is a dire need for increased focus and resources for climate and the environment beyond the conservation title alone.

The upcoming farm bill is the last policy opportunity for Congress to significantly influence the agricultural system ahead of the deadline for companies to meet their 2030 science-based targets.

ⁱ Agriculture in the Midwest, Midwest Climate Hub, U.S. Department of Agriculture: <https://www.climatehubs.usda.gov/hubs/midwest/topic/agriculture-midwest>

ⁱⁱ Thaler et al., Rates of historical anthropogenic soil erosion in the Midwestern United States, Earth's Future: <https://agupubs.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1029/2021EF002396>

Through the development of this report, the Midwest Row Crop Collaborative has identified avenues for greater impact by more effectively leveraging public and private resources. Paired with insights gained from operating on-the-ground supply chain projects in the Midwest, this report highlights important opportunities for systems change that maintains economic and environmental viability for all in the value chain. Contributions from each member of MRCC inform the following priorities, and the recommendations contained in this document are not reflective of any single member's perspective and should not be interpreted as an endorsement of each recommendation by individual members, but instead are intended to represent policy needs from various viewpoints across the value chain.

Highlights from our recommendations

- Accelerate the impact of conservation programs through increased investment and ongoing improvements to program delivery to maximize the benefits of public-private collaboration.
- Prioritize the staffing and funding of social infrastructure needed to deploy technical assistance, including Natural Resource Conservation Service, Cooperative Extension Service, conservation districts, and more community-based technical assistance models that support underserved producer networks.
- Support the improvement of robust measurement, monitoring, reporting and verification tools (e.g., COMET-Planner, Fieldprint Platform, Cool Farm Tool, DNDC model, and similar) to maximize credibility, compatibility, and usability.
- Explore innovation that incorporates environmental risk data into crop insurance programs. Examples of this may include changes to premium discounts, which have been successfully piloted in the states of Iowa, Illinois, and Indiana to increase the adoption of cover crops.
- Learning from USDA's Organic Transitions Program, develop a model that identifies and provides resources for farm transition assistance (e.g. financial, technical, and social) toward regenerative agriculture.
- Establish or codify a regenerative value chain coordinator at USDA that gathers private sector, NGO, and farmer input on best practices for regenerative agriculture practices, advising the Secretary on scaling regenerative agriculture programs and expanding the reach of existing programs.
- Ensure that farmers—including historically underserved farmers—are engaged in the design, implementation, and evaluation of these programs and that programs are designed to remove historical barriers to access and participation.

The Midwest Row Crop Collaborative

In 2016, a group of leading non-governmental organizations and food and agriculture companies were driven to shared action in addressing impending existential threats to U.S. agriculture: an existing system of row crop production that contributed to deteriorating soils and water supplies, declining water quality for communities in the Mississippi River basin, and increasingly unpredictable economics for farmers. In response, Midwest Row Crop Collaborative founding members sought a partnership-oriented approach to catalyze systems change by developing solutions to agricultural challenges. In the years since its inception, MRCC has convened its members—representing various points along the U.S. row crop value chain—to test innovative approaches to address key systemic barriers, distributing risk and openly learning from the process to inform and accelerate the design of future supply chain programs.

In 2021, MRCC articulated a new vision for its shared impact, releasing a set of ambitious goals for the committed membership to realize.

By the end of 2030, the Midwest Row Crop Collaborative will:

1. Ensure that 30 million acres in the Midwest will employ practices that support improved outcomes for soil health, greenhouse gases, water quality and use, biodiversity, and farmer livelihoods. At least 7 million of these acres will demonstrate multiple measurable regenerative outcomes.
2. Reduce net on-farm greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in the Midwest row crop supply chain by 7 million metric tons.
3. Directly support at least 30,000 Midwestern farm operations in the transition to regenerative agriculture.

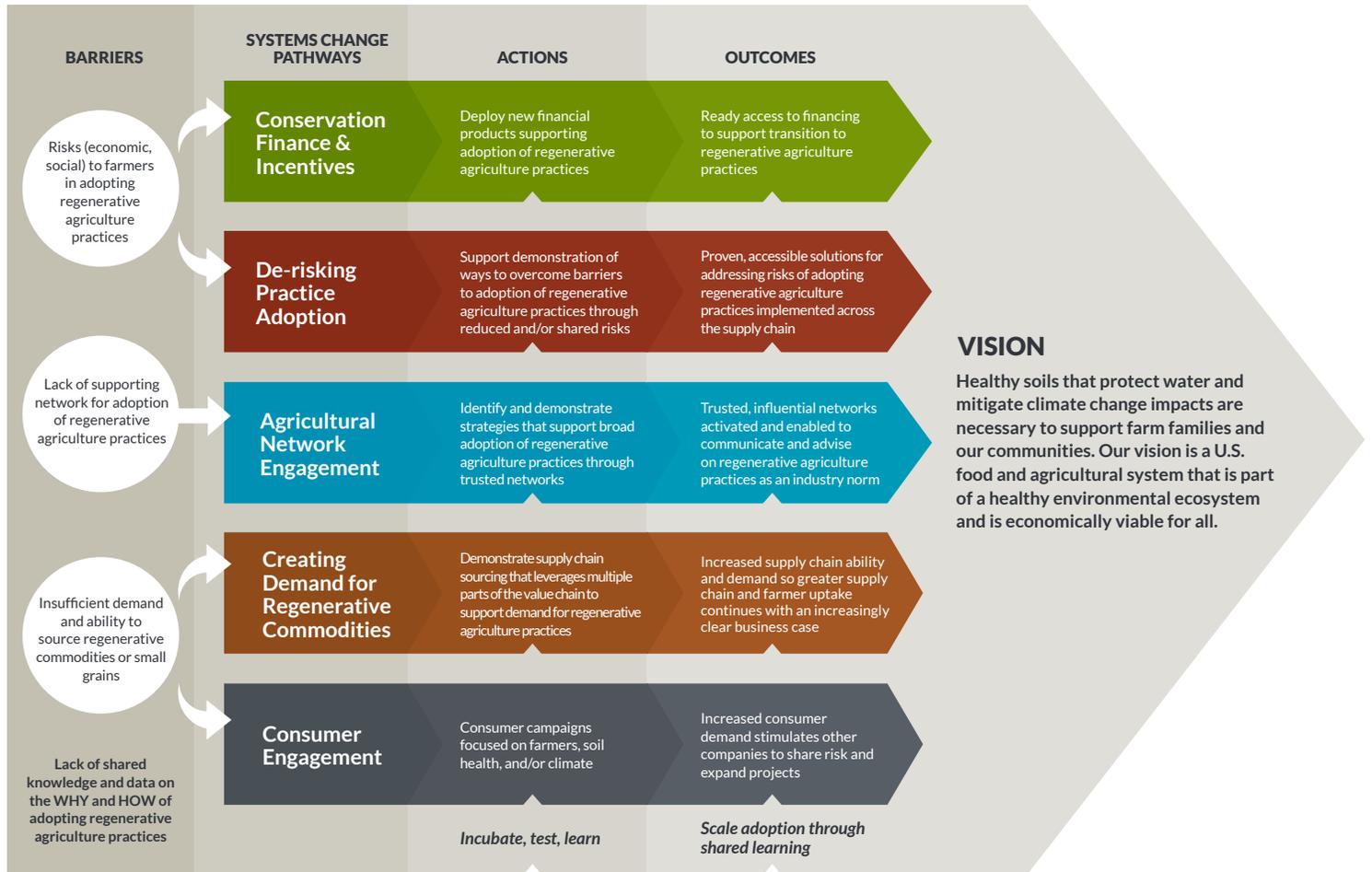
To achieve these goals, MRCC works with its developed Theory of Change to address three barriers that members view as both central to systems change and within the scope of its members:

- Risks (economic, social) to farmers in adopting regenerative agriculture
- Lack of supporting network for the adoption of regenerative agriculture
- Insufficient demand and ability to source sustainably produced commodities or small grains

MIDWEST ROW CROP COLLABORATIVE

THEORY OF CHANGE

Core Purpose: Incubate and Test Solutions for Removing Barriers to Adoption of Regenerative Agriculture Practices and Catalyze Scaled Adoption through Shared Learning



Structuring MRCC activities

Beyond these five core areas of activity, each member actively contributes to a policy-centered work group, focused primarily on issues at the federal level. Members of the MRCC policy work group integrate insights from supply chain sustainability programs to inform policy discussion and shared learning by bringing various experiences with conservation title programs, agency operations, and Congressional offices. Through partnership, members seek to bring regenerative agriculture to scale by supporting public policy that makes our agricultural system and landscapes more resilient, healthy, and productive.



Policy Principles

To support greater consistency and clarity in determining areas of agreement, MRCC members established a set of shared policy principles. These are informed by the values central to participation in MRCC, as well as topics of significant and growing importance in the agricultural system.

1. Support healthy ecosystems and farm resilience through place-based practices

Farms are complicated ecosystems of soil, plants, water, and livestock. Managing for the health and productivity of soils using location-specific practices is integral to improved water quality and use, reduced GHG emissions and increased soil carbon sequestration, and strengthened farm resilience.

MRCC supports policy that provides incentives and removes barriers to the widespread adoption of farming practices that build soil health in row crop systems, including incentive structures that move beyond cost-sharing for regenerative agriculture. Regenerative farm management should be rewarded, meaning that public incentives are designed with flexibility for farmers to choose the practices that work best for their operations and local ecosystem.

2. Agriculture is employed as a solution for climate change

Climate change is a significant and growing threat to the economic and environmental health of agricultural systems.

MRCC supports policy that helps farmers achieve resilience through the adoption of regenerative agriculture, including market-based approaches such as value chain partnerships and mechanisms that encourage carbon sequestration and/or greenhouse gas mitigation through agricultural practices.

3. Systems change requires collaborative approaches

Public and private resources are best suited to distinct functions in developing and scaling solutions, and sector-wide shifts rely on the strategic use of both.

MRCC supports policy that scales proven programs at the landscape level and targets funding to aspects of the agricultural system which are complementary to corporate supply chain projects, including basic and applied research and the conservation of acres providing habitat and ecosystem services.

4. Equity and economic viability for all in the value chain, especially farm families and historically underserved farmers

The future of our agricultural system is bound to the well-being of the communities who make its function possible, and policy should reflect that reality.

MRCC supports policy that encourages a beneficial economic system for farmers and rural communities, building long-term economic stability, supporting a wide diversity of crops and farming operations, enhancing the quality of life for farm families and rural communities, and creating opportunity for historically underserved farmers, agricultural workers, and community members.

5. Promoting regenerative outcomes

Regeneration is the outcome of a holistic approach, rather than individual practices.

MRCC supports policy that promotes the aforementioned principles and pushes beyond practice adoption to verifiable regenerative outcomes on the landscape.

A defining moment for positive policy

Facing dramatic current and projected environmental crises driven by climate change, companies are under increasing pressure to set and reach science-based targets to meet the GHG reduction goals outlined by the Paris Climate Agreement and other environmental goals. With deadlines quickly approaching for companies to reach intermediate targets like “30 by 30” goals (i.e., 30% GHG emission reductions over baseline by 2030), investors, consumers, and businesses are looking carefully at how companies can advance these outcomes in their own supply chains. In addition to activities spurred by corporate commitments, consumer demand for sustainably produced products is growing and, to meet the moment, bold action and innovation is urgently needed. While companies can and must push to transform their own operations, reaching such substantial goals in a narrow window of time requires engaging all the levers of change including the development of positive public policy.

The opportunity: regenerative agriculture

For companies in the food and agriculture industry, a potent opportunity to meet corporate goals is found in pursuing the adoption of regenerative agriculture practices on working lands, especially in areas of high agricultural productivity. Federal policy plays an essential role in advancing long-term, effective, and sustainable steps to scale regenerative agriculture on farms. Policy change will be required to incentivize soil health, improve water quality and use, and increase biodiversity. The time to address the critical policies that impact water and lands has arrived, with opportunities for meaningful engagement over the coming months as part of the farm bill reauthorization.

Regenerative agriculture is gaining visibility and acceptance by mainstream companies and organizations, but credit for its development and associated practices is owed to Indigenous cultures and innovators in other communities of color. While companies and organizations vary in their definition of “regenerative agriculture,” MRCC refers to the following philosophy, principles, and practices to characterize its meaning.

Regenerative agriculture:

- Generates positive environmental and social impacts through adoption of agricultural conservation practices, including soil health, water quality and use, climate benefits, biodiversity, and farm profitability.
- Enables local communities to protect and improve their environment, health, and wellbeing.
- Builds resilience through diversity of plant species, businesses, people, and culture.
- Promotes equity and economic viability for all in the farming system, especially farm families and underserved farmers.
- Produces crops with sufficient yield and nutritional quality to meet existing and future needs, while keeping the impact of resource inputs as low as possible.



Farm bill development

Every five years, agriculture committees in Congress consider agriculture, conservation, and nutrition legislation that is collectively referred to as the “farm bill,” which serves as both a major driver of policy change for food and agriculture, as well as a platform for modifying existing food and agriculture programs.ⁱⁱⁱ Within the elements of the bill focused on agricultural production, voluntary, incentive-based programs have been central to the farm bill’s approach and historic success. Since the Great Depression, agriculture policy has primarily been driven by these farm bills. Policy changes have, in recent years, seldom come from outside of the farm bill and annual funding decisions made by the appropriations committees in the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives. Several major provisions of the current farm bill are due to expire at the end of FY2023. The process of exploring what programs work well and determining which programs should be reconsidered in the upcoming farm bill has already begun, with committee hearings held on each title.

The ambition of the upcoming farm bill (e.g., the expansion of existing programs or the creation of new initiatives) will be impacted by other key legislation under consideration in the coming months, as well as the funding that policy makes available.

Additional policy proposals and programs that could impact the regenerative agriculture landscape

- *American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (passed)*
- *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021 (passed)*
- *Growing Climate Solutions Act*
- *Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities (USDA initiative)*

ⁱⁱⁱ Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018, United States Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, & Forestry: [https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/2](https://www.congress.gov/bills/115th-congress/house-bill/2).

Who else is working on regenerative agriculture?

MRCC is not alone in adopting a collaborative approach to policy efforts at the intersection of agriculture and environment. Other collaborative initiatives are listed below, with the greatest distinctions between them primarily driven by varied membership and focal areas.

- [AGree Economic and Environmental Risk Coalition](#)
- [AGree Climate, Food, and Ag Dialogue](#)
- [American Sustainable Business Network \(ASBN\)](#)
- [Food and Agriculture Climate Alliance \(FACA\)](#)
- [Sustainable Food Policy Alliance](#)
- [U.S. Farmers and Ranchers Alliance](#)

Beyond the previously listed coalitions that consider or pursue policy at the intersection of agriculture and environment, several partnership-oriented entities are leading on issues related to equity and justice in regenerative agriculture. Active organizations in this area include:

- [American Farmland Trust](#)
- [Indigenous Food and Agriculture Initiative](#)
- [National Black Farmers Association](#)
- [National Latino Farmers and Ranchers](#)
- [National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition](#)
- [National Young Farmers Coalition](#)
- [Rural Coalition](#)

The upcoming farm bill offers a pivotal opportunity to support farmers and ranchers as they face the enormity of the challenges brought on by climate change and recover from an unprecedented public health and economic disruption. Purposeful leadership is needed from both the public and private sectors, and MRCC members look to engage broad support for programs and tools that build demand and incentives for regenerative agriculture. These actions can both increase farm and system-level resilience in the face of a changing climate, as well as serve as effective tools with which to reward farmers for their on-farm investments and stewardship.

This report lays out policy priorities which are aligned with the MRCC Theory of Change. Contributions from each member of MRCC inform the following priorities, and the recommendations contained in this document are not reflective of any single member's perspective and should not be interpreted as an endorsement of each recommendation by individual members, but instead are intended to represent policy needs from various viewpoints across the value chain.

Conservation finance and incentives

Theory of Change: Deploying new financial products supporting adoption of regenerative agriculture practices and access to financing that will allow for the transition to regenerative agriculture.

In recent years, the U.S. has seen an increase in calls for federal funding spent in support of farm-related subsidies (such as crop insurance) to be linked with environmental co-benefits like clean water and soil health. This accelerating pressure on public funding aligns with a growing desire articulated by some within the financial sector to acknowledge the impacts of climate change on the food and agriculture system, including increased risk of crop loss and damage due to extreme weather events.

MRCC members have been working with financial solution providers to develop and test products like new loan or warranty structures that help farmers address expenses that come with new practice adoption. While testing these projects, members are increasingly aware of the powerful role federal policy and programs play in scaling regenerative agriculture.





Regarding conservation finance and incentives, the Midwest Row Crop Collaborative views the following as priorities to advance the scaling of regenerative agriculture.

- Encourage farmer adoption of regenerative agriculture practices through existing financial mechanisms.
 - » Explore innovation that incorporates environmental risk data into crop insurance programs. Examples of this may include changes to premium discounts, which have been successfully piloted in the states of Iowa, Illinois, and Indiana to increase the adoption of cover crops.
- Expand resources that deliver a “whole-farm” approach to conservation, producing improvements in water quality, water use, soil health, biodiversity, and farmer livelihoods.
 - » Increase public investment in the scaling of in-field practices and the expansion of edge-of-field practices through existing programs.
- Consider new or streamlined mechanisms to provide financial incentives for regenerative agriculture and increase support for farmers in purchasing the equipment needed for more sustainable production systems.

De-risking practice adoption

Theory of Change: Supporting the demonstration of ways to overcome barriers to adoption of regenerative agriculture practices through reduced/shared risks leads to proven, accessible solutions for addressing risks implemented across the supply chain.

De-risking practice adoption is working at the farm level with farmers to build a bridge across what is often called the “valley of death,” which is the transitional period when the adoption of regenerative agriculture practices has added cost to the business but has not yet demonstrated increased yields or profitability. Typically, this window of time lasts between three to six years for row crops like corn and soy.^{iv} De-risking practice adoption means making the existing conservation programs work more effectively, tailoring programs to the areas of greatest need, increasing the amount of value that farmers retain, and supporting the companies and partners who engage in this work. The result of de-risking practice adoption should be reduced and shared risks for farmers, ranchers, companies, and partners, and easier access to solutions for adopting regenerative agriculture across the supply chain.

Members of the Midwest Row Crop Collaborative have extensive experience designing and implementing programs aimed at de-risking practice adoption within their supply chains. Their projects across the Midwest landscape explore different mechanisms and approaches for providing cost share, technical assistance, and local networks. [Insights from project development, operation, and evaluation](#) can be incorporated into the design of federal programs to enable better coverage around the country and robust data on the practice’s benefits.

^{iv} Banking on Soil Health: Farmer Interest in Transition Loan Products, Environmental Defense Fund: <https://business.edf.org/files/Banking-on-Soil-Health.pdf>

With the shared goal of de-risking practice adoption and support for expanded investment in conservation programs, the Midwest Row Crop Collaborative holds the following objectives.

- Build on the success of, and high demand for, working lands programs like Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) through increased investment and ongoing improvements to program delivery.
- Expand resources for cover cropping, which have been shown to be successful in MRCC pilot programs, particularly when deployed with support for the financial, technical, and social aspects of farmer practice adoption.
- Adopt a holistic approach to support farms in the shift toward regenerative agriculture through a transition program.
 - » Learning from USDA's Organic Transitions Program, develop a model that identifies and provides resources for farmer transition assistance toward regenerative agriculture.
 - » Create priority within existing authorities for public-private partnerships to increase the availability of farmer incentives to help overcome cost, risk, or learning-curve barriers to the adoption of regenerative agriculture practices.
- Establish and communicate the opportunities for all farmers to benefit from conservation programs and the scaling of regenerative agriculture.
- Improve program delivery through reduced administrative burdens and efficiency refinements within programs for farmers.
 - » Expand the focus on regional approaches within core programs to support greater effectiveness and enrollment, as well as improved ease of access.
 - » Improve logistics to support public-private collaboration by investing in technological improvements for digital platforms related to reporting and program enrollment.
- Promote policies that incentivize no- or low-till practices.
- Align farm bill policies with scientifically-supported guidance for greenhouse gas reductions, and protection of natural ecosystems such as non-deforestation or non-conversion of such systems.



Agricultural network engagement

Theory of Change: Identifying and demonstrating strategies that support broad adoption of regenerative agriculture practices through trusted networks results in active networks able to communicate and advise on regenerative agriculture as an industry norm.

The farm bill authorizes important financial resources and incentives for partnerships that allow USDA and partners to reach farmers and groups through pilot programs and trials.^v The financial support and technical assistance from USDA programs encourage meaningful public-private partnerships, and the shared findings of the funded pilots and programs encourage continuous improvement across the sector.

While regenerative agriculture's scaling relies heavily on a compelling financial case and the technical ability to realize those returns, the social side of practice adoption is a core element to MRCC's understanding of systems change: farmers frequently credit other farmers as the reason they tried a new practice on their land.

To strengthen this capacity, on-farm grant-funded research trials with the partnership of key stakeholders like land-grant universities and the Cooperative Extension System, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and conservation districts can be scaled and adapted to improve technical assistance and on-farm planning by growers in many different regions across the country. Coupled with the work of supply chain partners like MRCC, investment in this area recognizes the value of agricultural network engagement and can offer significant benefit to farmers and ranchers.

MRCC priorities for the upcoming farm bill focus on promoting ambitious investment into expanded network development and encouraging increased investments in on-farm research that can promote further adoption of regenerative agriculture.

To increase the adoption of regenerative agriculture, the Midwest Row Crop Collaborative urges the following be emphasized in future policy.

- Invest in technical assistance to broaden the understanding and trust of regenerative agriculture at the field-level.
 - » Increase funding for Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS) staff.
 - » Prioritize hiring for unfilled NRCS positions.
- Support peer learning groups to encourage practice uptake through existing social infrastructure, like extension, as well as through new supportive structures, like a regenerative agriculture transition program.
 - » These programs should allow farmers to discuss success, failures, and lessons based on their personal experience with regenerative agriculture.
 - » Dedicated investment should be directed to historically underserved farmers and ranchers.
- Establish or codify a regenerative value chain coordinator at USDA, either in the Secretary of Agriculture's office or in Office of the Undersecretary of Farm Production and Conservation.
 - » This role would be well-positioned to gather private sector, NGO, and farmer input on best practices for regenerative agriculture, identify insights from monitoring, reporting, and verification developments, advise the Secretary on scaling regenerative agriculture programs, and expand the reach of existing programs.
- Increase investment in land-grant universities to support the adoption of regenerative agriculture through geographically specific technical assistance and outreach to farmers.

Building Demand for Climate-Smart Commodities

Theory of Change: Demonstrating supply chain sourcing that leverages multiple parts of the value chain to support demand for regenerative agriculture practices results in increased supply chain ability and demand so that farmer uptake continues with an increasingly clear business case.

The capacity to understand and measure the benefits of regenerative agriculture for farmers, their communities, the landscape, and the food system is growing rapidly—and is foundational to the ability of on-farm practice adoption work to be communicated through the value chain, and thus, build strong market demand. In addition to USDA's recent Partnership for Climate-Smart Commodities program, the 2023 farm bill offers opportunities to build on existing programs to develop an extensive body of evidence about the impacts of regenerative agriculture.

The experience of MRCC members highlights the challenges of using and improving current data systems. Having robust and reliable metrics is a priority among MRCC members so they can report on their projects and track progress towards climate change goals. They also share that measurement—while important—can be challenging to fund out of finite sustainability budgets, as increased expenses for measurement and data management reduce the funding available for project implementation and farmer support. Members recognize that public investment in data collection and analysis is integral for projects to collect consistent metrics on recognized platforms, and it is also of critical importance in the effective distribution of resources associated with public-private partnerships. To that end, data should be used to enhance on-the-ground results while prioritizing the data privacy of individual farmers.

There is an opportunity for the next farm bill to strengthen environmental metric collection and databases, ensure existing data is available for analysis, and share knowledge back to implementing partners, including the farmers themselves. With the support of technical assistance providers, interpreting data analyses and discussing what the results mean is key to enabling change in farm management and lasting practice adoption. The public sector can support this

by ensuring that NRCS field staff are well equipped to support farmers in both the agronomic and data stewardship aspects of regenerative agriculture. The public sector can also support this through promoting better access to data and information about outcomes from regenerative agriculture.

To build demand for sustainable commodities, the Midwest Row Crop Collaborative urges the following.

- Support the improvement of robust measurement, monitoring, reporting and verification tools (e.g., COMET-Planner, Fieldprint Platform, Cool Farm Tool, DNDC model, and similar) to maximize credibility, compatibility, usability, and interoperability.
- Work with private sector partners to develop tools that improve the cost-effectiveness and accuracy of monitoring, measurement, reporting, and verification (e.g. geospatial or remote monitoring tools) to help farmers engage in ecosystem markets and verify practices and impacts for value chain partners.
 - » These should include in-field practices (cover crops, nutrient reduction) and whole-farm approaches like edge-of-field, crop rotations, and integrated livestock.
- Ensure that standards for programs which enable farmer participation in emerging climate and ecosystems markets are strong and verifiable.
- Strengthen research and data collection to better reflect the co-benefits of regenerative agriculture related to biodiversity and water to communicate its value more effectively and broadly throughout the value chain.

Consumer Engagement

Theory of Change: Consumer campaigns focused on farmers, soil health, and/or climate foster increased consumer demand which stimulates other companies to share risk and expand projects to landscapes.

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented many challenges to the agricultural supply chain. Through the disruptions, Americans have developed a new understanding of the interconnectedness of the supply chain from the farmer to the grocery shelf. Already an element in the 2014 and 2018 farm bills, the prioritization of the food system's increased diversity and resilience is likely to continue. Within the first year in office, the Biden-Harris administration invested in small and mid-sized meat slaughter and processing, farm-to-school funding, and local food purchasing programs. Continued attention to small and mid-sized processing and mid-tier supply chain capacity will likely continue, and may also include support for small and mid-sized growers, often referred to as Ag of the Middle (AotM). This presents opportunities for regenerative agriculture as new partners enter the market, as supply chains are reimagined and reinvested in, and as consumers increasingly ask where and how their food and other goods are sourced. As the public's awareness of the relationship between well-being and agricultural production continues to grow, both the public and private sectors can play a role in supporting healthy and productive landscapes. Looking toward this discussion, the Midwest Row Crop Collaborative urges leaders to respond to the growing public appetite for food that benefits people and the planet by supporting extension programs that work to increase understanding and engagement with agriculture for students, households, and communities.

Equity and inclusion

Farmers of all backgrounds and experiences deserve equal footing when working with the Department of Agriculture, including access to programs and technical assistance that help inform decisions made on-farm.

To support a more equitable agricultural system, the Midwest Row Crop Collaborative seeks to ensure that farmers—including historically underserved farmers—are engaged in the design, implementation, and evaluation of these programs and that programs are designed to remove historical barriers to access and participation.

As the Department works through technical assistance, financing, and the implementation of farm bill resources, consultation processes with Tribal leaders in decision-making processes are key, as well as providing Tribes with support in planning and implementing regenerative agriculture.



An urgent call for leadership and partnership

The agricultural system acutely needs the social and environmental outcomes from growing practices that enhance soil and water health as well as increase farmer productivity. Based on years of research enabled by funding from public, private, and land-grant universities, we know that the practices that protect our land and waters are also beneficial to farms, rural communities, and our shared environment. MRCC's work in the Midwest can be a guide for the country as Congress considers what regenerative agriculture does for productivity and sustainability, and its members commend the companies aligning their crop sourcing and policy advocacy with their sustainability commitments. Beyond individual company action, MRCC urges decisive leadership from the public sector to maximize opportunities to scale regenerative agriculture and to champion the value of regenerative agriculture in policy and public dialogue.

Despite the imperative for action from each part of the food and agriculture system, no singular entity can go it alone. Deep and lasting systems change will require an integrated, holistic alignment of policy, partnerships, and programs to meet the growing challenges of the 21st century—including climate change, public health crises, and supply chain adaptation.

We currently sit at a critical juncture for the future of agriculture in the United States, with limited time available to drive the shifts needed in the public and private sectors to scale the adoption of regenerative agriculture. Encouragingly, the 2023 farm bill presents a potentially historic opportunity to align federal programming to ambitious goals: to generate positive outcomes from agricultural practices; to enable communities to protect and improve their environment, health, and wellbeing; to build resilience through diversity; to promote equity and economic viability across the entire agricultural system; and to produce crops with sufficient yield and nutritional quality to meet current and future needs, while keeping the impact of resource inputs as low as possible.

To realize these goals, we must deepen our collective investment in agriculture and expand our partnerships with farmers, ranchers, and other interested stakeholders. Increased funding and critical policy changes can incentivize the adoption of regenerative agriculture and enhance the infrastructure to make its scaling possible. Effective and strategic policy change will empower farmers and ranchers, create capacity across the agricultural supply chain, and lend support to the efforts of companies and NGOs as they incorporate these practices into their technical assistance and purchasing programs.

MRCC welcomes the opportunity to further partner and collaborate with other leaders in this space and will continue to seek partnership with those that share its commitment to driving positive environmental change in the Midwest and Mississippi River basin.

Deep and lasting systems change will require an integrated, holistic alignment of policy, partnerships, and programs to meet the growing challenges of the 21st century—including climate change, public health crises, and supply chain adaptation.

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