

A business case for partnership and capacity building in agriculture

Background

The Midwest Row Crop Collaborative (MRCC) convenes leading companies and nonprofits that span the full food and agriculture value chain to catalyze systems change. MRCC members test innovative approaches to address key systemic barriers, distribute risk, and learn from the process to inform and accelerate the design of future supply chain programs.

MRCC supports on-the-ground collaborative projects that drive impact and support shared-learning across the value chain. These projects inform policy priorities that enable the systemic change needed to strengthen the resilience of our food and agricultural systems.

Summary

Farming is one of the sectors most at risk from a changing climate. At the same time, farmers and their partners are ready to implement practices and other solutions that both mitigate climate change and adapt to projected impacts.

Agricultural supply chain partners' investments in landscape-level climate-smart and regenerative agriculture practices have the potential to catalyze significant and durable change. Many companies in the agricultural sector, including MRCC members, have set greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reduction goals that include land-based emission reductions. Given the significant current and future investments by the corporate sector to meet science-based targets and improve the productivity and resiliency of the commodities they rely on, the Farm Bill is a critical opportunity for Congress and the Administration to partner with the private sector for investments in landscape-level, climate-smart, and regenerative agriculture policies and practices.

MRCC members are excited to share recommendations with Congress and USDA leadership. These are informed by our collective experience and deep partnerships with farmers. We believe these shifts are essential to achieve at-scale practice adoption, meet greenhouse gas reductions, and enhance supply-chain resilience.

Investing in climate-smart agriculture

Food production, food and beverage processing, and food retailing rely on a consistent, high-volume supply of commodity crops including wheat, corn, soy, and rice. More frequent adverse weather events, depleted soil, excess nutrients, and declining water quality and biodiversity are all risks today's farmers face that hinder their ability to grow the crops necessary for agriculture and food value chain businesses to operate.

Scaled adoption of climate-smart agricultural practices supported by public and private investment offer a significant opportunity for farmers to become more resilient, build soil health, increase biodiversity, and protect water systems while at the same time helping them become more economically sustainable through reduced input costs and diversified income streams.

New Greenhouse Gas Protocol (GHGp) and Science Based Targets Initiative (SBTi) Forest Land and Agriculture Guidance (FLAG) on climate-smart and regenerative agricultural practices that reduce or remove greenhouse gases provide a mechanism for companies to account for and publicly report on sustainable and regenerative agricultural practices. Thus driving additional investment in these practices.

While climate-smart supply chain projects led by these companies and organizations operate at a significant scale, 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 agricultural systems. When properly calibrated, the private and public sectors work in tandem to meet shared goals and deploy innovative, scalable conservation across the landscape. To help align critical business interests in sustainability and USDA conservation objectives, MRCC members offer the following recommendations to Congress and USDA leadership.

Recommendations

- Develop tools in partnership with private sector leaders 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 and climate markets and verify practices and impacts for value chain partners. These tools should support the verification and tracking of practice impacts aligned with the proposed frameworks and guidance issued by the Greenhouse Gas Protocol (GHGp) and Science Based Target Initiative (SBTi).
- Create streamlined, consistent, and understandable processes for producers and other supply chain partners to account for existing practices and to track progress and accountability toward GHGp and SBTi.
- Support the improvement of readily available verification tools that include robust measurement, monitoring, reporting, and verification to maximize credibility, compatibility, usability, financial benefit, and interoperability by farmers. These should include in-field practices (e.g., cover crops and nutrient reduction) and whole-farm approaches like edge of field, more diverse crop rotations, and integrated livestock.
- Ensure that standards for programs which enable farmer participation in emerging climate and ecosystems markets are strong and verifiable.
- Accelerate the impact of conservation programs, like the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Conservation Stewardship Program, through increased investment, flexibility, adaptability, and ongoing improvements in program delivery to maximize the benefits of public-private collaboration, prioritize funding for practices and management systems with the greatest outcome for climate and co-benefits for biodiversity, water, and soil health, and increase investment in conservation technical assistance.
- Enable innovation by creating a dedicated team for moving innovative ideas and technologies from pilot-scale to mainstream programming, especially from programs like Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities, Conservation Innovation Grant program, and Regional Conservation Partnership Program.



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Conclusion

We know that the future of farming in America can be bright. We look forward to working with our partners in the supply chain to enhance the financial viability of farming through policies and programs like the ones recommended above.