

2023 Farm Bill Priorities

Maine Farmland Trust is working with Maine's congressional delegation and coalition partners to advance a 2023 Farm Bill that strengthens support for four top priorities:



1 Farmland
protection
and access



2 Local & regional
food systems
development



3 Climate-
smart
agriculture



4 A federal safety
net for PFAS-
impacted farms

We want to see well-funded and efficiently managed federal programs that are accessible and beneficial to small- and medium-sized farms, like many of those in Maine. We support less money going to the biggest, commodity crop farms in the country and more money spent supporting specialty crop and livestock producers, advancing conservation programming, and strengthening local and regional food economies.

Maine Farmland Trust supports measures that will advance equity and inclusion in the next Farm Bill. We promote increased funding for programs and policies designed to support underserved individuals and communities, especially farmers of color, as well as greater access to existing funding and programs so that all farmers can fairly access important resources and support.



1

The 2023 Farm Bill should invest in farmland protection and ensure access to quality agricultural land.

Maine farmland is the foundation for thriving farm businesses, communities, and rural economies, and is necessary for a strong local and regional food system. We want to see a 2023 Farm Bill that invests in farmland protection while more strongly prioritizing land affordability and access across programs.

How we will support change:

Protecting Maine's finite farmland from development and stewarding agricultural soils as critical natural resources for Maine's future are key to ensuring we have the ingredients needed to feed our region. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) can currently fund only about one-quarter of the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program – Agricultural Land Easement (ACEP-ALE) applications that it receives each year. Access to quality agricultural land is a challenge for many farmers, but barriers are especially high for low-income farmers, new and beginning farmers, and for farmers who have been excluded from farmland access due to longstanding structural and institutional racism. We are advocating for a 2023 Farm Bill that will increase access to land and ensure fair distribution of available resources to all farmers.

We specifically would like to see the following responses within federal programs:

- Increase the amount of support available for farmland protection and access efforts by increasing the amount of overall funding for ACEP-ALE.
- Ensure consistent sources of funding for Buy-Protect-Sell (BPS) to support farmland access.
- Prioritize ALE projects that maintain agricultural farm viability and include affordability protections, such as an Option to Purchase at Agricultural Value (OPAV).
- Increase the capacity at NRCS to be able to process land protection projects more efficiently.
- Create an expedited pathway to the Conservation Stewardship Program for farms with ALEs.
- Work to make the BPS portion of ACEP-ALE a more efficient and effective process so that it can function as an important farmland access tool. For example:
 - Provide certified entities with the same benefits in BPS transactions as in standard ACEP-ALE transactions.
 - Ensure that the 3-year window for farmland transfers for BPS projects can be regularly extended.
- Amend the process for Farm Service Agency (FSA) Direct Farm Ownership loans so that they can more easily be used by farmers seeking land and raise the maximum loan amounts so that they more accurately reflect rising costs of land. For example, ensure that it is easy for farmers to attain pre-approval and pre-qualification for Direct Farm Ownership loans so farmers seeking land can move quickly on land purchases when desirable land comes up for sale.
- Ensure adequate resources for service providers who are supporting farmers seeking land access and landowners transitioning out of farm ownership—especially with respect to farmland access for beginning and young farmers, farm transition for underserved farmers, and preventing land loss within socially disadvantaged communities and communities of color.



2

The 2023 Farm Bill should make needed investments in business technical assistance and local and regional food systems development so that Maine's farms and rural communities are better positioned to thrive.

Maine farmers need federal legislation that supports them as they grow their operations, compete in new markets, and transfer farm businesses to the next generation. Customized technical assistance for farmers and food entrepreneurs builds profitability through business planning, market development, financial literacy, management skills, and other needs. We are advocating for a 2023 Farm Bill that advances federal business technical assistance and economic and market development programs to provide needed support, grants, and loans to Maine farms, as well as investments in local and regional food systems development.

How we will support change:

We are advocating for Farm Bill-funded programs that invest in business technical assistance and strengthen in-state agricultural infrastructure and processing capacity, such as dairy and livestock processing. Infrastructure and processing needs in Maine far exceed allocated funding to date. We are encouraged by recent funding announcements that seek to strengthen local food economies, such as the Regional Food Business Centers announcement, but want to see these efforts made permanent for sustained support to each region of the country.

We specifically would like to see the following responses within federal programs:

- Provide funding for business technical assistance to support farmers in growing and diversifying their businesses.
- Provide sustained support for infrastructure and processing development to help farmers expand and adapt their businesses and support the growth of local and regional food systems.
- Ensure federal programs providing food to low-income Americans, seniors, and institutions prioritize purchasing from local small- and medium-size producers and/or entities led by historically underserved or socially disadvantaged communities, and that producers are paid fair, market equivalent prices for their products.
- Increase funding for the Local Agriculture Marketing Program (LAMP) to assist producers with diversifying their businesses through value-added production, accessing new markets, and building local and regional supply chains.
- Strengthen access to LAMP by streamlining the application process, ensuring equitable distribution of funds across geography, and reducing match requirements.
- Provide funding for services that support farmers and farmworkers with stress and wellness programming.



3

The 2023 Farm Bill should play a critical role in building a climate-friendly and resilient future.

Farmers need resources like funding, research, and risk management assistance to implement climate-friendly farming practices. Climate-smart farming practices can trap carbon in the soil, while improving the health of the soil, improving water quality, supporting wildlife habitat, and increasing farm profitability. The next Farm Bill must address climate change.

How we will support change:

We are advocating for federal investments in climate-friendly agriculture and support a Farm Bill that builds climate resilience by increasing conservation program funding, access to those funds by farmers, and efficiency of program delivery to meet growing demand. We strongly support the Agriculture Resilience Act which has been championed by Maine Representative Chellie Pingree.

We specifically would like to see the following responses within federal programs:

- Expand technical assistance through the Natural Resources Conservation Service and contracted third parties to support farmers in becoming more resilient to the impacts of climate change.
- Ensure the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) is a robust and supportive program to help farmers of all sizes and in all locations deal with climate change impacts. For example:
 - Increase funding levels for CSP so that more farmers are able to enroll.
 - Make changes to CSP to reduce barriers to access, including:
 - Creating in statute a minimum payment rate that keeps pace with inflation;
 - Ensuring farmers are buffered from losses in yield resulting from changes in management practices;
 - Giving preference to farmers who have started to adopt climate-friendly practices through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP);
 - Providing farmers with the same cost share assistance as provided through EQIP; and
 - Ensuring CSP payments are prioritized for practices that are focused on soil health and resilience to climate change impacts.
- Change EQIP to adequately help farms of all sizes and locations deal with climate change impacts. For example:
 - Increase funding for EQIP so that more farmers are able to enroll.
 - Make changes to EQIP to reduce access barriers such as through establishing a sufficient minimum payment structure and increasing access to upfront cost share assistance to better support enrollment by smaller and more diversified producers.
 - Prioritize EQIP payments for practices that are focused on soil health and resilience to climate change impacts.
- Prioritize and increase funding for agricultural research and outreach on soil health and climate change mitigation and adaptation. For example:
 - Create a new CSP On-Farm Conservation Stewardship Innovation Grant program.
 - Increase funding to and authorization of USDA Climate Hubs to support previously established climate risk mitigation and adaptation goals.



4

The 2023 Farm Bill should include a federal safety net for PFAS-impacted farms and prioritize PFAS focused research.

Learning from the experience of Maine farmers and based on the knowledge that per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) contamination is widespread across the country, we need policy action to support affected farmers with financial and technical resources. Farmers need support to replace lost farm income; cover testing costs and interpret results; acquire new, needed on-farm infrastructure; navigate challenges selling contaminated farmland and accessing new land; and pivot business plans and on-farm management practices.

How we will support change:

MFT is advocating for the inclusion of the Relief for Farmers Hit by PFAS Act in the next Farm Bill. This bill is a bipartisan, bicameral effort to provide vital assistance to farmers affected by PFAS across the country. U.S. Senators Susan Collins and Angus King and Representatives Chellie Pingree and Jared Golden introduced the Relief for Farmers Hit with PFAS Act, which would authorize grants for states to provide financial assistance to affected farmers, expand monitoring and testing, remediate PFAS, or even help farmers relocate.

The funds authorized by the Relief for Farmers Hit with PFAS Act could be used at the state level for purposes including:

- Income replacement and loan flexibility
- Financial support for new on-farm infrastructure needed to pivot business models
- Business planning technical assistance
- Relocation support
- Testing
- Farmland protection and access projects to help impacted farmers afford new land

The bill would also create a task force at USDA charged with identifying other USDA programs to which PFAS contamination should be added as an eligible activity – bringing even more resources to impacted farmers through existing programs. The task force would also offer technical assistance to states to help them coordinate their responses effectively.

We specifically would like to see the following responses within federal programs:

- Establish a PFAS-focused state block grant program to provide financial assistance to affected farmers, expand monitoring and testing, remediate PFAS, or help farmers relocate through integration of the Relief for Farmers Hit by PFAS Act into the next Farm Bill.
- Expand federal research and grant programs to dedicate funding for PFAS-related research and education, such as:
 - Including PFAS-related research and education as a qualifying topic area that can be addressed by Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education grants.
 - Including within the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative a separate track or priority for PFAS-related research.
 - Dedicating a portion of Foundation for Food & Agriculture Research program funds for PFAS/microplastics research.

