



# Building Resilience Through Productive Trees

Recommendations for the upcoming Farm Bill

## TITLE II: CONSERVATION

Integrating trees and shrubs into productive agricultural systems provides myriad conservation and climate benefits, from carbon sequestration to enhanced wildlife habitats and diversified revenue streams.

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is well-suited to provide targeted financial incentives to help establish and maintain diverse agroforestry practices across regions. In order to scale agroforestry effectively, it is important that conservation incentives accomplish two things: address high costs associated with implementing agroforestry practices and ensure the practice is appropriate for its unique agro-ecological context.

### AGROFORESTRY CHALLENGES

- Integrated agroforestry systems remain expensive for landowners to adopt, limiting their potential to scale in the US.
- Harvesting and grazing restrictions under CRP force producers to choose between making agroforestry systems economically productive and enrolling in conservation programs.
- Producers lack clear, dedicated support for agroforestry – from establishment to long-term management.

### THE FARM BILL OPPORTUNITY

- Leverage CRP to support integrated, productive agroforestry systems that deliver conservation, resilience, and economic benefits.
- Increase payments for agroforestry practices to reflect high upfront costs and the waiting period prior to production.
- Expand agroforestry management options to serve diverse US lands and harness additional economic benefits all while bolstering climate resilience.

*Establish a new Agroforestry Initiative within CRP to incentivize enrollment of marginal cropland and pastureland devoted to agroforestry practices.*

Agroforestry can support both conservation outcomes and producer bottom lines. In the first few years, newly agroforested land provides a habitat for wildlife, reduces soil erosion, sequesters

carbon and helps producers build resilience into their operations. In the long term, agroforestry practices can maintain and deepen these conservation outcomes and diversify revenue

streams as trees and shrubs mature *and* produce harvestable, high-value crops like fruit and nuts. CRP already recognizes the conservation value of agroforestry by sharing the cost of establishing practices like windbreaks, riparian buffers, and shelterbelts under 10- to 15-year contracts.<sup>1</sup>

But agroforestry faces one critical barrier under CRP. As it stands, the program prohibits harvesting and grazing on agroforested lands, disincentivizing re-enrollment once contracts expire so producers can harvest tree and shrub crops for profit. By excluding productive, profitable agroforestry operations, CRP misses the opportunity to maintain conservation outcomes while supporting producers to build resilience and diversify their operations – especially relevant in rural communities looking to revitalize.

Inspired by the success of the CRP Grasslands Initiative, Congress should establish a new Agroforestry Initiative that supports both establishing agroforestry practices and, eventually, harvesting and grazing agroforested acres, as long as conservation outcomes are maintained. This new initiative will enable long-term conservation, diversify revenue streams for landowners, and catalyze the climate mitigation potential of agriculture, specifically on marginal lands.

- **Increase total CRP acreage gradually from 27 million acres to 32 million acres over five years** including 1 million acres of productive perennial agroforestry systems under a new Agroforestry Initiative.
- **Increase federal cost-share to at least 75% for agroforestry practices** to reflect higher upfront costs and ensure that producers can incorporate high-quality, regionally suitable, and native tree and shrub types.

Under the new initiative, Congress should expand eligibility to support a diverse menu of agroforestry practices and lift harvesting restrictions to support producer re-enrollment. These updates will help preserve conservation outcomes long-term and provide additional revenue streams to producers.

- **Add silvopasture and alley cropping as eligible practices** under the CRP Agroforestry Initiative on marginal lands where planting trees and shrubs and/or grazing livestock is ecologically appropriate. Silvopasture eligibility should only be extended to producers adding trees to pasture, rather than taking trees out of woodlands for grazing.
- **Authorize non-emergency grazing and tree crop harvesting** on enrolled acres within contract periods as long as they do not hinder conservation outcomes such as carbon sequestration, soil health, water quality, and biodiversity. This authorization should not include wood harvesting. *(Currently, most CRP practices other than agroforestry are eligible for non-emergency haying every three years and grazing every other year. In order to support agroforestry enrollment long-term, Congress should allow tree crop harvesting and silvopasture so long as they do not interfere with conservation outcomes like biodiversity or carbon sequestration.)*

<sup>1</sup> CRP Practices Library, Farm Service Agency, US Department of Agriculture