



Investing in Forests from Seed to Stand

Recommendations for the upcoming Farm Bill

WHY FORESTS?

Forests can remove carbon from the atmosphere all while building local resilience, economic opportunity, and community health.

Forest restoration and management can scale carbon removal and provide many community co-benefits. To preserve our forests and realize their carbon-removing potential, we need the upcoming Farm Bill to take a holistic approach to reforestation — sourcing seedlings, planting them in appropriate ecosystems and agroforestry operations, and helping existing forests remain intact long-term.

REFORESTATION CHALLENGES

- A national seedling shortage hinders reforestation efforts, especially as wildfires ramp up replanting needs.
- Integrated agroforestry systems remain expensive for landowners to adopt, limiting their potential to scale in the US.
- Existing conservation easements have narrow restrictions, limiting their reach.

THE FARM BILL OPPORTUNITY

- Invest in private tree nurseries to ensure that seedling supply meets replanting demand.
- Empower landowners to implement agroforestry systems for integrated climate mitigation.
- Ensure that incentive structures can protect working forests long-term.



Bolstered nursery capacity and seed sourcing through existing forestry programs

Expanded opportunities for productive agroforestry on marginal lands



Improved forest protection through existing conservation easement programs

TITLE VIII: FORESTRY

1. *Root existing forestry programs in the latest science and economic research to support nursery capacity expansion and seed collection activities.*

The national seedling shortage has illuminated the critical role that tree nurseries and seed extractories play in supplying the young trees required to restore forests at scale. Congress should improve science and research integration into programs that already support state seed sourcing, seedling cultivation, and genetic resource management to maximize their impact and address the national seedling shortage.

- **Integrate the best available research** to guide the Forest Stewardship Program’s Rural Forestry Assistance Program (RFA) and Reforestation, Nurseries, and Genetic Resources (RNGR) programs. RFA should utilize the latest climate science and economic research to identify

priority areas for enhanced nursery and seed sourcing activities.

- **Prioritize climate-focused genetic work** that centers climate-resilient and regionally appropriate tree species across different ecological and climate contexts. For example, selective breeding can focus on traits for resistance to drought, fire, and other severe disturbances.
- **Include workforce development** as a form of technical assistance delivery under RNGR to ensure that state nurseries and seed extractories are well-staffed and create high-quality career pathways.

TITLE II: CONSERVATION

2. *Establish a new Agroforestry Initiative within the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) to incentivize enrollment of marginal cropland and pastureland devoted to agroforestry practices.*

Agroforestry requires upfront financial commitment to realize its immense potential to remove carbon, build resilience, and support biodiversity. CRP already supports certain agroforestry and other tree establishment practices on marginal lands.¹ However, because harvesting and grazing is not currently allowed on agroforested acres, landowners end up leaving the program in order to make economic use of trees and shrubs.²

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 agroforestry, 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 types.

- **Make silvopasture and alley cropping eligible practices under CRP Agroforestry for marginal lands** where tree establishment and livestock grazing are ecologically appropriate.
- **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.

3. Authorize a new Forest Conservation Easement Program (FCEP) to alleviate pressure to convert forests to non-forest land uses.³

Voluntary conservation easements can ensure that private working forests remain intact long-term using sustainable management practices. Existing programs already support these goals, but face a series of programmatic restrictions limiting their impact on US forestlands.

- **Authorize \$100 million per year in additional mandatory funds** to prevent conversion of forests under FCEP, modeled after the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP).
- **Absorb the existing Healthy Forest Reserve Program (HFRP) into a new FCEP subprogram, Forest Reserve Easements (FRE), modeled after the ACEP Wetlands Reserve Easements.**
- **Establish a second FCEP subprogram, Forest Land Easements (FLE), modeled after the ACEP Agricultural Land Easements.** FCEP-FLE should allow eligible entities like land trusts, state agencies, and other trusted actors to purchase easement titles from landowners with financial support from NRCS. Working forestlands should be eligible for these entity-held easements.
- **Provide federal cost-share splits over 60%** for socially disadvantaged farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners under both programs.

FCEP-FRE should maintain HFRP language prioritizing carbon sequestration and supporting government-held easements with an emphasis on endangered species habitat and biodiversity.

¹ [CRP Practices Library](#), Farm Service Agency, US Department of Agriculture

² [Non-Emergency Haying and Grazing Conservation Reserve Program](#), Farm Service Agency, US Department of Agriculture

³ [Land Trust Alliance 2023 Farm Bill Recommendations](#)