



Creating a Federal Match for State and Tribal Soil Health Programs in the Next Farm Bill

Summary:

Soil health is a key strategy to support farm viability, increase resilience to extreme weather, promote food security, and address environmental concerns. Creating a new program to provide federal matching grants for state and tribal soil health programs in the next Farm Bill would be a bold yet achievable way to help more producers adopt soil health practices. This approach is beneficial because it leverages federal funding, builds on local leadership and state-level innovation, and incentivizes the creation of new state and tribal programs. This idea already has bipartisan support—Rep. Pingree (D-ME) included a proposal in the [Agriculture Resilience Act](#), and former Rep. Davis (R-IL) included a proposal in the [NO EMITs act](#).

Background:

Soil health practices can reduce losses from droughts, floods, and other extreme weather while also benefiting farm profitability, food security, water quality, and helping to mitigate climate change.

- According to American Farmland Trust's 2019 [soil health case studies](#), eight out of the ten row crop farmers profiled attributed yield increases to soil health practices, with all ten experiencing positive returns on investment of between 7% and 343%.
- A [2021 study](#) revealed that under severe drought, just a 1% increase in soil organic matter significantly boosted yields and reduced crop insurance payouts by up to 40%. A [2019 USDA-ERS report](#) also predicted that the adoption of climate adaptation practices, such as those that improve soil health, could reduce expected cost increases of the crop insurance program by 7-15%.

Unfortunately, soil health practice adoption is still not sufficiently widespread—for example, as of 2017, cover crops were only planted on 6% of eligible acres. NRCS programs are the main form of support to help producers successfully adopt soil health practices, but these popular programs:

- Are oversubscribed—between 2010 and 2020, EQIP was only able to fund 31% of applications.
- Address a wide range of resource concerns beyond soil health—a [2020 analysis](#) found that between 2007 and 2018, only 17-27% of EQIP funding went to soil health practices.
- Leave out flexible, tailored, and innovative approaches, and do not address critical needs such as mobile equipment purchases.

Since the 2018 Farm Bill, states have been creating soil health programs to fill these gaps. Currently, ten states have programs that support soil health while benefitting water quality and the climate. But state funding for new programs is modest—many begin with appropriations of less than \$2 million.

Recommendation:

There is an urgent need to complement NRCS programs to help producers overcome cost, risk, and knowledge barriers to voluntarily adopting soil health practices. **We urge Congress to create and fund a new state and tribal soil health match program in the next Farm Bill.** Extreme weather, heat, and drought are costing farmers and ranchers time and money. Helping states and tribes supplement NRCS programs and support farmers in locally-defined ways to adapt and build resilience to this new normal is urgent.