

The Increasing Land Access, Security, and Opportunities Act

Strengthening land access, retention, and transition while improving access to capital and markets for underserved farmers, ranchers, and forest owners

Lead Sponsors: Rep. Nikki Budzinski (D-IL), Rep. Zach Nunn (R-IA), Rep. Joe Courtney (D-CT)

Land access, retention, and transition are critical to the success of agriculture. Yet, access to land is the [number one challenge](#) facing young farmers in the United States. Finding affordable land to purchase is the top challenge for these producers regardless of geography, number of years in farming, or whether or not they are first generation farmers. With the average U.S. farmer approaching 60 years old and nearly half of U.S. farmland on the brink of changing ownership over the next two decades, the next farm bill is our best chance at creating real and lasting policy solutions to this daunting trend that keeps farmland out of reach for so many while also jeopardizing our country's future food security and vitality of our rural communities.

Background & Solution

Land access is at the root of, and deeply tied to, many of the barriers farmers and ranchers face, including market access, access to operating capital, and the day-to-day challenges such as changing weather patterns, mental health, and housing. Secure land tenure is critical to providing producers with the certainty that they need to invest in and grow their operations. Strong pathways to land access are also directly connected to helping retain and transition land and knowledge within agricultural communities.

Responding to these needs is of critical importance for the success of this new generation of farmers, ranchers, and forest owners. Further, what is at risk if we do not respond to these needs is the health and vibrancy of communities as well as the strength and security of our food and agriculture systems, and thus our national security. The role that local and regional food systems play, especially in times of crisis, is undeniable. The work of responding has already begun—community-led land access efforts are underway across the country, from creative financing models, market development and infrastructure work, cooperative ownership models, and more. To continue thriving and creating lasting change, these efforts need policy support.

The [Increasing Land, Capital, and Market Access Program](#) (LCM), launched by USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) in August 2022, is the only USDA program that is designed from the ground up to be a flexible source of support and investment that meets farmers where they are and offers a menu of eligible activities—in support of increasing land, capital, and market access—to eligible entities already immersed in the farming communities they serve. An investment of this kind in secure access to land in the next farm bill will generate immense returns for taxpayers—increasing food access, strengthening local supply chains, growing rural economies, and building climate resilience.

Legislative Summary

The Increasing Land Access, Security, and Opportunities Act would address the interrelated challenges of land access and tenure, as well as access to capital, markets, and technical

assistance to help producers start and grow viable farm businesses, retain access to land, and transition land. The bill would authorize and expand USDA's *Increasing Land, Capital, and Market Access Program* with appropriations of \$100 million per year.

Specifically, the bill would:

- Make grants to, and enter into cooperative agreements with, State and Tribal governments, non-profit service providers, community lending institutions, farmer cooperatives, and other eligible entities to strengthen land, capital, and market access outcomes for historically underserved farmers, ranchers, and forest owners and for producers operating in high-poverty areas.
- Provide funding for direct assistance and services to help farmers and ranchers afford and acquire land, cover closing costs and down payments, secure clear title on heirs' property farmland, capitalize infrastructure and site improvements, acquire business technical assistance and farm viability training, and other activities.
- Prioritize projects that provide direct financial assistance to producers, involve collaborative networks or partnerships, utilize innovative land access and farmland protection and affordability tools, facilitate transition of farmland from existing producers to the next generation, and incorporate other factors that will compound the program's impact.
- Establish a stakeholder committee to develop a process for evaluating applications and distributing funds to ensure the program is responsive to the needs of farmers and ranchers.

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