



Frequently Asked Questions on the Bipartisan Farmer-to-Farmer Education Act

What does the bipartisan [Farmer-to-Farmer Education Act](#) do? Does it require new money?

No! This bipartisan bill, introduced by Senator Ben Ray Lujan (D-NM) and Senator Jerry Moran (R-KS), would simply add to NRCS's existing authority in Section 1242 of the conservation technical assistance statute to make it clear that the agency can enter into cooperative agreements to augment and build capacity for farmer-to-farmer conservation education networks across the country. A robust rollout of this strategy across the country would require as little as 5% of the existing conservation technical assistance funding. It does not create a new program or require new funding to accomplish its goals.

Why is the Farmer-to-Farmer Education Act necessary?

Drought, flooding, smoke, heat, and other unpredictability and extremes are becoming more common across the country, increasing stress for farmers, their businesses, and our food supply. One of the strategies farmer use to adapt to and build resilience to this unpredictability is adopting conservation practices that improve soil health—increasing soil organic matter, water infiltration, and water holding capacity, and reducing erosion. But farmers face many barriers to adopting these practices, including cost, risk of yield and revenue loss, lack of information on how to successfully incorporate new practices into existing systems, and cultural barriers (such as language barriers or lack of knowledge from technical assistance providers of traditional production practices).

Meanwhile, many farmer-leaders and early adopters across the country have been innovating and experimenting with new (or old!), more sustainable ways of farming. These producers have put the time and hard work into learning what does and does not work, and are a treasure trove of knowledge that can be put to use supporting others interested in adopting new ways of farming, or making adjustments to common practices. Seeing new strategies successfully implemented by other farmers is often the key to farmers decision-making to use it on their own farm.

Farmer-to-farmer learning happens both formally, at soil health field days or demonstration sites, and informally, at coffeeshops or kitchen tables and along fence lines. These mentoring efforts and farmer-to-farmer networks are already being carried out—unpaid—by passionate and community-minded farmers. A federal investment in these critical burgeoning activities will help realize their full potential and fill gaps in NRCS support. This bill would empower NRCS to enter into cooperative agreements with states, municipalities, community groups, farmer networks, Tribes, and others to provide financial support for these essential learning opportunities. A consistent funding source will help new farmers connect into existing networks and build new ones for those interested.

How would this work with the traditional conservation delivery system to reach conservation goals?

Technical and financial assistance through the traditional conservation delivery system, like USDA NRCS staff, is essential. These staff provide funding and trusted science-based technical knowledge to overcome cost, risk, and information barriers to practice adoption. However, NRCS support can have significant wait times and the informational resources available online or through consultants and service providers are often too general and may not reflect the unique circumstances of an individual farm or farmer. Additionally, need for practical knowledge about how this might impact revenue or play out on a farm in real time often remain unfulfilled—leaving farmers without the essential knowledge that would support successful long-term adoption of new practices. Additionally, NRCS staff are not

always able to provide information in the appropriate language or may not be familiar with Traditional Ecological Knowledge, and thus cannot provide the information most relevant to farming systems for Indigenous and other producers of color—leaving these groups without necessary support.

Supporting enhanced and augmented farmer-to-farmer education by adding to existing NRCS authority, as is proposed in the Farmer-to-Farmer Education Act, would provide the missing piece, and increase the likelihood of long-term, successful conservation practice adoption. With increased Inflation Reduction Act funding for conservation activities, we cannot afford to leave this incredible resource untapped. In short, the Farmer-to-Farmer Education Act offers a cost-effective way to increase technical assistance capacity, as well as to reach producers that have not always had access to NRCS programs.

Is there research that demonstrates the value of farmer-to-farmer learning in conservation?

A recent American Farmland Trust New England survey found that more than 50% of farmer-respondents were getting their technical assistance and education directly from farmers they know (compared with 20% from NRCS), and over a third identified a consultation with an experienced farmer as one of the most helpful forms of technical assistance. Such technical assistance can also help reach new farmers already invested in implementing conservation practices who do not have access to traditional training networks.

Farmer-to-farmer learning is a crucial part of an all-hands-on-deck approach to providing culturally tailored technical assistance. Research findings have identified [peer learning groups](#) as effective in enabling and inspiring women to implement conservation activities on their land (Carter et al. 2017; Carter 2019; Eells and Soulis 2013; Petrzelka et al. 2020; Wells 1998). Similarly, farmers of color often report a lack of trust or disinterest in engaging with government entities due to gaps in cultural understanding, language barriers, bias, and historic experience (Washington State Department of Agriculture, 2022). However, they report comfort in receiving support from a known and trusted person.

What co-benefits do farmer-to-farmer conservation networks provide?

Building farmer-to-farmer networks strengthens the social fabric of communities. In addition to conservation benefits this provides mental health and social benefits to those engaging in these networks. This approach also builds on existing farmer innovation and local leadership, further empowering communities and uplifting strategies that may not be incorporated into NRCS's current system, like Traditional Ecological Knowledge. Farmer-to-farmer networks are also highly adaptable and can be quickly pivoted to meet multiple needs, such as land access and emergency response. Successful farmer-to-farmer learning can also increase interest in NRCS conservation programs and help bring more people with practical, on-the-ground experience into the Technical Service Provider program.

Who supports this bill, and how can I get involved?

You can see the list of endorsing groups [here](#). If you'd like to help get the Act into the next Farm Bill:

- **Members of Congress** can co-sponsor this bill and/or support its inclusion in the final Farm Bill.
- **Organizations or businesses** can endorse the bill by clicking [here](#).
- **Individuals** can send a letter to your members of Congress through [AFT](#) or [NYFC's](#) action alert.
- **Farmers** can [click here](#) to work with us to tell your story about why peer education matters!

More questions? Contact Samantha Levy, AFT's Conservation and Climate Policy Manager at slevy@farmland.org, or Lotanna Obodozie, Young Farmers' Climate Campaign Director at lotanna@youngfarmers.org.