To amend the Food Security Act of 1985 to expand the provision of farmer-led technical assistance, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

Mr. Luján (for himself and Mr. Moran) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on ____________

A BILL

To amend the Food Security Act of 1985 to expand the provision of farmer-led technical assistance, and for other purposes.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Farmer to Farmer Education Act of 2023”.

SEC. 2. DELIVERY OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE.

Section 1242 of the Food Security Act of 1985 (16 U.S.C. 3842) is amended—

(1) in subsection (a)—
(A) by redesignating paragraph (2) as paragraph (3); and

(B) by inserting after paragraph (1) the following:

“(2) FARMER-TO-FARMER NETWORK.—The term ‘farmer-to-farmer network’ means any affiliation or association of farmers that share information, technical assistance, or any other type of mutually beneficial support.”;

(2) in subsection (f)(1), by inserting “and for the purpose of carrying out subsection (j)” before the period at the end; and

(3) by adding at the end the following:

“(j) PROVISION OF ASSISTANCE TO FARMER-TO-FARMER NETWORKS.—

“(1) PURPOSES.—The purposes of this subsection are—

“(A) to build capacity for farmer-to-farmer networks, connect farmers with mentors or group learning opportunities, and support goal setting to increase long-term adoption of consistent, science-based, site-specific practices designed to achieve conservation objectives on land active in agricultural, forestry, or related uses;
“(B) to increase the provision of technical assistance that meets the specific needs of, and is accessible to, farmers, ranchers, and forest owners using different farming models, practices, and scales; and

“(C) to establish and steward farmer-to-farmer networks.

“(2) COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS.—

“(A) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary may enter into cooperative agreements with eligible entities to carry out the purposes described in paragraph (1).

“(B) ELIGIBLE ENTITIES.—An entity eligible to enter into a cooperative agreement with the Secretary under subparagraph (A) is—

“(i) a nonprofit entity described in section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 and exempt from taxation under section 501(a) of that Code;

“(ii) a farmer-to-farmer network;

“(iii) an Indian Tribe or a Tribal organization (as those terms are defined in section 4 of the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (25 U.S.C. 5304));
“(iv) a unit of local government (including a conservation district and a con-
servation district association);

“(v) an institution of higher edu-
cation;

“(vi) a State; and

“(vii) any other entity designated by
the Secretary.

“(C) PRIORITIZATION.—In selecting eligi-
ble entities with which to enter into cooperative
agreements under subparagraph (A), the Sec-
retary shall give priority to eligible entities that
seek to meet the specific needs of, and are ac-
cessible to—

“(i) historically underserved farmers,
ranchers, and forest owners, including—

“(I) beginning farmers and
ranchers (as defined in section
2501(a) of the Food, Agriculture,
Conservation, and Trade Act of 1990
(7 U.S.C. 2279(a))) and beginning
forest owners;

“(II) veteran farmers and ranch-
ers (as defined in section 2501(a) of
the Food, Agriculture, Conservation,
and the Trade Act of 1990 (7 U.S.C. 2279(a)) and veteran forest owners;

“(III) socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers (as defined in section 2501(a) of the Food, Agriculture, Conservation, and Trade Act of 1990 (7 U.S.C. 2279(a)) and socially disadvantaged forest owners;

and

“(IV) limited-resource farmers, ranchers, and forest owners; or

“(ii) farmers, ranchers, and forest owners operating in high-poverty areas.

“(3) Responsibilities of Providers of Assistance to Farmer-to-Farmer Networks.—

“(A) In General.—If an eligible entity provides assistance to establish a farmer-to-farmer network using assistance provided through a cooperative agreement under paragraph (2), the eligible entity shall be responsible for not less than 2 of the following actions:

“(i) Facilitating and increasing farmer access to farmer-to-farmer networks.

“(ii) Facilitating mentor and mentee matchmaking among farmers.
“(iii) Coordinating training and resources to build the skills of farmer-to-farmer network leaders and participants for effective education, grassroots-based learning, and cross-training with respect to the facilitation of, information about, and other skills with respect to building effective farmer-to-farmer networks.

“(iv) Maintaining and promulgating a list of relevant entities, associations, and individuals that are supporting, or have an interest in supporting, farmer-to-farmer networks.

“(v) Administering subawards to increase farmer access to farmer-to-farmer assistance in accordance with paragraph (4).

“(vi) Other actions determined appropriate by the Secretary.

“(B) LANGUAGE ASSISTANCE.—If an eligible entity provides assistance described in subparagraph (A) to a non-English speaking farmer, rancher, or forest owner, the eligible entity shall, to the greatest extent practicable, provide
that assistance in the native language of the farmer, rancher, or forest owner.

“(4) Subawards.—

“(A) In general.—If an eligible entity awards a subaward pursuant to paragraph (3)(A)(v) to an eligible subawardee described in subparagraph (B), the eligible subawardee shall use that award—

“(i) to plan and conduct events, and identify and develop innovative activities, to support building capacity for farmer-to-farmer networks, connecting farmers with mentors or group learning opportunities, and supporting goal setting to increase long-term adoption of consistent, science-based, site-specific conservation objectives on land active in agricultural, forestry, or related uses; and

“(ii) to compensate participants in the events and activities described in clause (i) at market rates.

“(B) Eligible subawardees.—An entity eligible for a subaward under paragraph (3)(A)(v) is—
“(i) a nonprofit entity described in section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 and exempt from taxation under section 501(a) of that Code;

“(ii) a farmer-to-farmer network;

“(iii) an Indian Tribe or a Tribal organization (as those terms are defined in section 4 of the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (25 U.S.C. 5304));

“(iv) a unit of local government (including a conservation district and a conservation district association);

“(v) an institution of higher education;

“(vi) an individual; and

“(vii) any other entity designated by the Secretary.

“(C) REQUIREMENTS.—The Secretary, in conjunction with the Chief of the Natural Resources Conservation Service, shall establish any necessary additional requirements for sub-awards under paragraph (3)(A)(v).”.