

# ENERGY AND THE FARM BILL

*Working Together to Accelerate a Clean, Green, and Equitable Energy Transition in Rural America*



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**E**xpanding and preserving renewable energy investments is critical to providing clean, low-impact power.

A robust Farm Bill guarantees rural America a say in renewable energy deployment by funding infrastructure investments facilitating farmer, rancher, and landowner participation in the clean energy economy while maintaining and enhancing their working lands.



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The U.S. Department of Energy estimates that as much as 10 million acres of rural land may be needed for clean energy siting to meet clean energy goals. The 2023 Farm Bill provides an opportunity to influence how and where this clean energy development takes place, including maximizing benefits and reducing risks for farmers and working lands.

The Nature Conservancy recommends robust funding of existing Energy Title programs that support critical infrastructure and clean energy investments in rural America. It also recommends incorporating policies that allow farmers to participate in the clean energy economy while maintaining and enhancing working lands.

## ENGAGING ON THE FARM BILL

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) has a long history of working with producers, landowners, and other stakeholders across America to create opportunities that conserve natural areas and build more resilient working lands and communities. As owners, operators, and managers of agriculture and forest lands, TNC engages with and advocates for Farm Bill policies and priorities from an on-the-ground, in-field perspective.



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Vineyards with wind turbines in the background. © Jay Huang/TNC Photo Contest 2022

## TNC'S RENEWABLE ENERGY POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS IN THE FARM BILL

### Provide Cost-Share Funding, Technical Assistance

The Farm Bill should direct the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to engage with local stakeholders, including but not limited to, farmers, ranchers, and landowners to consider renewable energy opportunities.

The department should also work with state rural development energy coordinators and rural development state offices, state departments of agriculture, and land grant universities and/or extension offices.

The department should provide technical assistance and cost-share funding to incentivize dual-use solar photovoltaic (PV) practices that support simultaneous agricultural and renewable energy goals.

Specific projects to prioritize technical assistance and financial assistance should include:

- Installation of dual-use solar PV designed with best practices for agricultural lands to achieve energy production and agricultural goals related but not limited to:
  - Agricultural considerations such as agrivoltaics, grazing, and raised panels.
  - Rural livelihood considerations such as public acceptance, community benefits, and landowner concerns.
  - Environmental considerations such as pollinator habitat, native vegetation, soil health, wildlife habitat, and water quality and quantity.
- Projects should discourage the loss of prime farmland and ensure that project acres maintain their use-value tax assessment of agricultural lands while enrolled in the program.

### Support Robust Energy Title

Lawmakers should secure and maintain robust funding for Energy Title programs that support renewable energy and energy efficiency investments in rural America, most importantly, the Rural Energy for America Program (REAP).

The Farm Bill should also modify REAP to ensure more farmers can access benefits by expanding eligibility to include cooperatives and increasing USDA cost-share for bundled renewable energy and energy efficiency projects.

Other key Farm Bill programs for support:

- Renewable Energy Development Grants
- Rural Energy Savings Program
- Energy Resource Conservation
- Rural Energy Pilot Program
- Energy Efficiency and Conservation Loan Program
- Rural Business Enterprise Grant
- Value Added Producers Grant
- Community Facilities Loan and Grants
- Distributed Generation Energy Project Financing