

118TH CONGRESS  
1ST SESSION

# H. R. 5354

To amend the Food Security Act of 1985 to require the Secretary of Agriculture to establish a small farm EQIP subprogram under the environmental quality incentives program, and for other purposes.

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## IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SEPTEMBER 8, 2023

Ms. CARAVEO (for herself, Mr. VASQUEZ, Ms. SLOTKIN, and Ms. PETTERSEN) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Agriculture

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## A BILL

To amend the Food Security Act of 1985 to require the Secretary of Agriculture to establish a small farm EQIP subprogram under the environmental quality incentives program, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*  
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Small Farm Conserva-  
5 tion Act”.

6 **SEC. 2. SMALL FARM EQIP SUBPROGRAM.**

7 Section 1240B of the Food Security Act of 1985 (16  
8 U.S.C. 3839aa–2) is amended—

1 (1) in subsection (d)—

2 (A) by striking paragraph (1) and insert-  
3 ing the following:

4 “(1) AVAILABILITY; MINIMUM AMOUNT.—

5 “(A) AVAILABILITY.—A payment provided  
6 to a producer under the program shall be used  
7 to implement 1 or more practices under the  
8 program.

9 “(B) MINIMUM AMOUNT.—The amount of  
10 a payment provided to a producer under the  
11 program shall be not less than \$2,500.”;

12 (B) in paragraph (2), in the matter pre-  
13 ceding subparagraph (A), by striking “A pay-  
14 ment” and inserting “Subject to paragraph  
15 (1)(B), a payment”; and

16 (C) by adding at the end the following:

17 “(8) SOIL HEALTH MANAGEMENT SYSTEM PAY-  
18 MENTS.—

19 “(A) IN GENERAL.—Notwithstanding para-  
20 graph (2), the Secretary shall increase the  
21 amount that would otherwise be provided for  
22 practices comprising a soil health management  
23 system on a farm by 50 percent for any appli-  
24 cation for a soil health management system on  
25 an operation of not more than 50 acres.

1           “(B) RAPID AND STREAMLINED APPLICA-  
2           TION AND CONTRACT APPROVAL.—The Sec-  
3           retary shall provide payments under this para-  
4           graph on a continuous enrollment basis, using  
5           a rapid and streamlined application and con-  
6           tract approval process.”;

7           (2) in subsection (f), by adding at the end the  
8           following:

9           “(3) SMALL FARM EQIP SUBPROGRAM.—

10           “(A) TOTAL FUNDING.—For each of fiscal  
11           years 2024 through 2028, not less than  
12           \$100,000,000 of the funds made available for  
13           payments under the program shall be used to  
14           carry out the subprogram established under  
15           subsection (k).

16           “(B) TECHNICAL AND FINANCIAL ASSIST-  
17           ANCE.—Of the amounts made available under  
18           subparagraph (A)—

19           “(i) 35 percent shall be used to ensure  
20           the provision of tailored technical assist-  
21           ance for small-scale agricultural producers  
22           by—

23           “(I) hiring new Natural Re-  
24           sources Conservation Service staff  
25           who are familiar with the unique con-

1           servation challenges faced by small-  
2           scale agricultural producers;

3                   “(II) training current Natural  
4           Resources Conservation Service field  
5           staff regarding the challenges de-  
6           scribed in subclause (I); and

7                   “(III) ensuring sufficient Natural  
8           Resources Conservation Service staff-  
9           ing levels to deliver a streamlined and  
10          expedited application and contracting  
11          experience to small-scale agricultural  
12          producers; and

13                   “(ii) 65 percent shall be used to pro-  
14          vide financial assistance directly to small-  
15          scale agricultural producers.”; and

16           (3) by adding at the end the following:

17           “(k) SMALL FARM EQIP SUBPROGRAM.—

18                   “(1) IN GENERAL.—In each State, the Sec-  
19          retary shall establish under the program a subpro-  
20          gram, under which the Secretary shall—

21                   “(A) provide financial and technical assist-  
22          ance to small-scale agricultural producers that  
23          enter into contracts with the Secretary under  
24          the subprogram;

1           “(B) conduct outreach to small-scale agri-  
2           cultural producers to increase participation in  
3           the subprogram; and

4           “(C) provide to field staff of the Natural  
5           Resources Conservation Service training and  
6           education regarding the specific conservation  
7           needs of small-scale agricultural producers.

8           “(2) PAYMENTS.—

9           “(A) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall  
10          determine whether a small-scale agricultural  
11          producer is eligible to receive payments under  
12          this subsection—

13                 “(i) on a State-by-State basis, subject  
14                 to subparagraph (C);

15                 “(ii) in consultation with the technical  
16                 committee established under section  
17                 1261(a) of the State in which the small-  
18                 scale agricultural producer is located; and

19                 “(iii) based on—

20                         “(I) the operations of a small-  
21                         scale agricultural producer, including  
22                         with respect to farm size and gross  
23                         sales;

24                         “(II) demographic data compiled  
25                         by the National Agricultural Statistics

1 Service relating to small-scale agricul-  
2 tural producers, including—

3 “(aa) historically under-  
4 served farmers, ranchers, and  
5 forest owners, including—

6 “(AA) veteran farmers  
7 and ranchers;

8 “(BB) limited-resource  
9 farmers, ranchers, and for-  
10 est owners;

11 “(CC) beginning farm-  
12 ers and ranchers; and

13 “(DD) socially dis-  
14 advantaged farmers; and

15 “(bb) farmers, ranchers, and  
16 forest owners operating in high-  
17 poverty areas;

18 “(III) the applicable advanced  
19 payment requirements under sub-  
20 section (d)(4); and

21 “(IV) other relevant information,  
22 as determined by the Secretary.

23 “(B) AMOUNT.—The Secretary shall pro-  
24 vide payments under this subsection to a pro-  
25 ducer that is eligible for the payments under

1           subparagraph (A) in such amount as the Sec-  
2           retary determines—

3                   “(i) achieves the purposes described in  
4                   subparagraphs (A) and (B) of paragraph  
5                   (1);

6                   “(ii) addresses natural resource con-  
7                   cerns relating to production on small-scale  
8                   agricultural operations; and

9                   “(iii) is in accordance with any appli-  
10                  cable increased payment requirements  
11                  under subsection (d)(4).

12                 “(C) SIZE REQUIREMENTS.—

13                   “(i) IN GENERAL.—To be eligible to  
14                   receive a payment under subparagraph (A)  
15                   (other than a payment described in clause  
16                   (ii)), the farm size of an agricultural pro-  
17                   ducer may not exceed the median farm size  
18                   of the State in which the producer is lo-  
19                   cated, based on aggregate data published  
20                   by the National Agricultural Statistics  
21                   Service.

22                   “(ii) LIVESTOCK AND PASTURE MAN-  
23                   AGEMENT PAYMENTS.—To be eligible to  
24                   receive a livestock or pasture management  
25                   payment under subparagraph (A), the herd

1 size of an agricultural producer may not  
2 exceed the median herd size of the State in  
3 which the producer is located, based on ag-  
4 gregate data published by the National Ag-  
5 ricultural Statistics Service.

6 “(3) APPLICATIONS.—

7 “(A) IN GENERAL.—To be eligible to re-  
8 ceive financial and technical assistance under  
9 this subsection, a producer that is eligible for  
10 the assistance under paragraph (2)(A) shall  
11 submit to the Secretary an application at such  
12 time, in such manner, and containing such in-  
13 formation as the Secretary may require.

14 “(B) ADMINISTRATION.—To the maximum  
15 extent practicable, the Secretary shall limit the  
16 administrative burdens, and the regulatory bar-  
17 riers that contribute to administrative burdens,  
18 on producers applying for payments under this  
19 subsection.

20 “(C) RAPID AND STREAMLINED APPLICA-  
21 TION AND CONTRACT APPROVAL.—The Sec-  
22 retary shall provide payments under this para-  
23 graph on a continuous enrollment basis, using  
24 a rapid and streamlined application and con-  
25 tract approval process.



1 “(4) SUBPROGRAM COORDINATORS.—

2 “(A) IN GENERAL.—Subject to subpara-  
3 graph (B), the Secretary shall designate—

4 “(i) a national subprogram coordi-  
5 nator; and

6 “(ii) a subprogram coordinator in  
7 each State.

8 “(B) REQUIREMENTS.—At the time of des-  
9 ignation under subparagraph (A), a national or  
10 State subprogram coordinator shall be—

11 “(i) an employee of the Natural Re-  
12 sources Conservation Service; and

13 “(ii) responsible for, on a national or  
14 statewide basis, respectively—

15 “(I) public outreach relating to  
16 the subprogram;

17 “(II) assisting producers in the  
18 submission of applications under the  
19 subprogram;

20 “(III) distributing financial and  
21 technical assistance under this sub-  
22 section; and

23 “(IV) submitting to the Secretary  
24 annual recommendations with respect  
25 to additional conservation practice

1 standards and activities required to  
2 better serve small-scale agricultural  
3 producers.

4 “(5) LANGUAGE REQUIREMENTS.—The Sec-  
5 retary shall publish any outreach materials for  
6 small-scale agricultural producers relating to the  
7 subprogram under this subsection simultaneously  
8 in—

9 “(A) English; and

10 “(B) such additional languages as the Sec-  
11 retary determines to be appropriate for each ap-  
12 plicable State.

13 “(6) REPORT.—Not later than May 1, 2027,  
14 the Secretary shall submit to the Committee on Ag-  
15 riculture, Nutrition, and Forestry of the Senate and  
16 the Committee on Agriculture of the House of Rep-  
17 resentatives a report describing the results of the  
18 subprogram under this subsection, including—

19 “(A) activities carried out under paragraph  
20 (3)(B) to limit administrative burdens and reg-  
21 ulatory barriers; and

22 “(B) to the maximum extent practicable,  
23 demographic information relating to each small-  
24 scale agricultural producer participating in the

1 subprogram, as the Secretary determines to be  
2 appropriate.”.

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