

118TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

H. R. 7076

To promote innovative practices for soil health through USDA conservation programs, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

JANUARY 25, 2024

Mr. BEYER (for himself, Mr. LAWLER, and Ms. PINGREE) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Agriculture

A BILL

To promote innovative practices for soil health through USDA conservation programs, 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 “Innovative Practices
5 for Soil Health Act of 2024”.

6 **SEC. 2. ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY INCENTIVES PROGRAM.**

7 (a) DEFINITIONS.—Section 1240A of the Food Secu-
8 rity Act of 1985 (16 U.S.C. 3839aa–1) is amended—

9 (1) in paragraph (6)(B)—

1 (A) in clause (v), by striking “and” at the
2 end;

3 (B) by redesignating clause (vi) as clause
4 (vii); and

5 (C) by inserting after clause (v) the fol-
6 lowing:

7 “(vi) greenhouse gas emissions reduc-
8 tion planning; and”;

9 (2) in paragraph (7), in the matter preceding
10 subparagraph (A), by striking “natural resource
11 concern or problem” and inserting “resource con-
12 cern”;

13 (3) by redesignating paragraphs (9) and (10)
14 as paragraphs (10) and (11), respectively; and

15 (4) by inserting after paragraph (8) the fol-
16 lowing:

17 “(9) RESOURCE CONCERN.—The term ‘resource
18 concern’ means a natural resource condition of the
19 soil, water, air, plant, animal, or energy resource
20 base that impairs the sustainability or intended uses
21 of the resource.”.

22 (b) ON-FARM CONSERVATION INNOVATION
23 TRIALS.—Section 1240H(c)(1)(B)(i) of the Food Security
24 Act of 1985 (16 U.S.C. 3839aa–8(c)(1)(B)(i)) is amend-
25 ed—

1 (1) in subclause (II), by inserting “on-farm nu-
2 trient recycling,” after “plans,”;

3 (2) in subclause (VI), by striking “and” at the
4 end; and

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

6 “(VII) perennial production sys-
7 tems, including agroforestry and pe-
8 rennial forages and grain crops; and”.

9 **SEC. 3. CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM.**

10 (a) DEFINITIONS.—Section 1240I of the Food Secu-
11 rity Act of 1985 (16 U.S.C. 3839aa–21) is amended—

12 (1) in paragraph (2)—

13 (A) in subparagraph (A), by inserting “en-
14 hancements,” after “practices,”; and

15 (B) in subparagraph (B)(v), by inserting
16 “and climate change” before the period at the
17 end;

18 (2) in paragraph (3)(C), by inserting “main-
19 tained, actively” after “implemented,”;

20 (3) in paragraph (5), in the matter preceding
21 subparagraph (A), by striking “natural resource
22 concern or problem” and inserting “resource con-
23 cern”;

24 (4) by redesignating paragraph (7) as para-
25 graph (8); and

1 (5) by inserting after paragraph (6) the fol-
2 lowing:

3 “(7) RESOURCE CONCERN.—The term ‘resource
4 concern’ means a natural resource condition of the
5 soil, water, air, plant, animal, or energy resource
6 base that impairs the sustainability or intended uses
7 of the resource.”.

8 (b) CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM.—Sec-
9 tion 1240J(a) of the Food Security Act of 1985 (16
10 U.S.C. 3839aa–22(a)) is amended by striking paragraphs
11 (1) and (2) and inserting the following:

12 “(1) by maintaining, actively managing, and,
13 where practicable, improving existing conservation
14 activities; and

15 “(2) by undertaking additional conservation ac-
16 tivities.”.

17 (c) STEWARDSHIP CONTRACTS.—

18 (1) SUBMISSION OF CONTRACT OFFERS.—Sec-
19 tion 1240K(a)(2)(B) of the Food Security Act of
20 1985 (16 U.S.C. 3839aa–23(a)(2)(B)) is amended
21 by striking “improving, maintaining, and managing”
22 and inserting “maintaining, actively managing, and,
23 where practicable, improving”.

1 (2) EVALUATION OF CONTRACT OFFERS.—Sec-
2 tion 1240K(b) of the Food Security Act of 1985 (16
3 U.S.C. 3839aa–23(b)) is amended—

4 (A) in paragraph (1)(A), by striking clause
5 (iii) and inserting the following:

6 “(iii) other criteria consistent with an
7 equal weighting of the factors described in
8 clauses (i) and (ii), as determined by the
9 Secretary, including criteria the Secretary
10 determines are necessary to ensure that—

11 “(I) the program effectively tar-
12 gets improvements to soil health, in-
13 creases in carbon sequestration, and
14 reductions in greenhouse gas emis-
15 sions; and

16 “(II) other national, State, and
17 local priority resource concerns are ef-
18 fectively addressed.”; and

19 (B) by striking paragraph (3).

20 (3) CONTRACT RENEWAL.—Section 1240K(e)
21 of the Food Security Act of 1985 (16 U.S.C.
22 3839aa–23(e)) is amended to read as follows:

23 “(e) CONTRACT RENEWAL.—

24 “(1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary may provide
25 the producer an opportunity to renew an existing

1 contract in the first half of the fifth year of the con-
2 tract period if the producer—

3 “(A) demonstrates compliance with the
4 terms of the existing contract;

5 “(B) agrees to adopt and continue to inte-
6 grate new or improved conservation activities
7 across the entire agricultural operation, dem-
8 onstrating continued improvement during the
9 additional 5-year period, as determined by the
10 Secretary; and

11 “(C) agrees, by the end of the contract pe-
12 riod, to meet the stewardship threshold of at
13 least 2 additional priority resource concerns on
14 the agricultural operation, if applicable.

15 “(2) RANKING AND PAYMENTS.—In deter-
16 mining whether to accept an application for contract
17 renewal under this subsection, and when calculating
18 payments for those renewed contracts, the Secretary
19 shall consider the full conservation benefits across
20 the entire applicable agricultural operation, includ-
21 ing—

22 “(A) the number of priority resource con-
23 cerns with respect to which the producer is ex-
24 pected to meet or exceed the stewardship
25 threshold by the end of the contract period; and

1 “(B) the active management and mainte-
2 nance of ongoing conservation activities, includ-
3 ing—

4 “(i) the conservation activities adopt-
5 ed during a prior contract period; and

6 “(ii) the new or improved conservation
7 activities to be adopted if a contract is re-
8 newed.”.

9 (d) DUTIES OF THE SECRETARY.—

10 (1) CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP PAY-
11 MENTS.—Section 1240L(c) of the Food Security Act
12 of 1985 (16 U.S.C. 3839aa–24(c)) is amended—

13 (A) in paragraph (1)—

14 (i) in subparagraph (A), by inserting
15 “on 1 or more types of eligible land cov-
16 ered by the contract” after “activities”;
17 and

18 (ii) in subparagraph (B), by striking
19 “improving, maintaining, and managing”
20 and inserting “maintaining, actively man-
21 aging, and improving”; and

22 (B) in paragraph (2)—

23 (i) by striking subparagraph (B) and
24 inserting the following:

1 “(B) Income forgone by the producer, in-
2 cluding amounts that reflect—

3 “(i) increased economic risk; and

4 “(ii) loss in revenue due to—

5 “(I) production changes;

6 “(II) anticipated reductions in
7 yield;

8 “(III) transitioning to an or-
9 ganic, resource-conserving cropping or
10 grazing, or perennial production sys-
11 tem; or

12 “(IV) acreage converted to con-
13 servation uses.”; and

14 (ii) in subparagraph (E), by inserting
15 “, actively managed, and, where applicable,
16 improved” after “maintained”.

17 (2) SUPPLEMENTAL PAYMENTS.—Section
18 1240L(d) of the Food Security Act of 1985 (16
19 U.S.C. 3839aa–24(d)) is amended—

20 (A) in the subsection heading, by inserting

21 “, PERENNIAL PRODUCTION SYSTEMS,” after

22 “ROTATIONS”;

23 (B) in paragraph (1)—

24 (i) by redesignating subparagraph (C)

25 as subparagraph (D); and

1 (ii) by inserting after subparagraph
2 (B) the following:

3 “(C) PERENNIAL PRODUCTION SYSTEM.—

4 The term ‘perennial production system’
5 means—

6 “(i) the use of cropland for agro-
7 forestry, including alley cropping,
8 silvopasture, and related production prac-
9 tices, as determined by the Secretary;

10 “(ii) the use of woodland for agro-
11 forestry, including forest farming, multi-
12 story cropping, and related production
13 practices, as determined by the Secretary;
14 and

15 “(iii) the use of cropland for perennial
16 forages or perennial grain crops.”;

17 (C) in paragraph (2)—

18 (i) in subparagraph (A), by striking
19 “or” at the end;

20 (ii) in subparagraph (B), by striking
21 the period at the end and inserting “; or”;
22 and

23 (iii) by adding at the end the fol-
24 lowing:

25 “(C) a perennial production system.”; and

1 (D) in paragraph (3), by striking “or ad-
2 vanced grazing management” and inserting “,
3 advanced grazing management, or a perennial
4 production system”.

5 (3) SOIL HEALTH.—Section 1240L(k) of the
6 Food Security Act of 1985 (16 U.S.C. 3839aa-
7 24(k)) is amended by striking the period at the end
8 and inserting the following: “, including by—

9 “(1) conducting outreach to encourage the use
10 of contracts to improve soil health and sequester
11 carbon in the soil; and

12 “(2) offering payments for soil testing to pro-
13 vide producers and the Secretary with information
14 on the soil health and carbon sequestration impacts
15 of conservation activities.”.

16 **SEC. 4. FUNDING AND ADMINISTRATION.**

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

19 (1) in subsection (a)(2)—

20 (A) by inserting “an individual,” before “a
21 commercial entity”;

22 (B) by striking “State or local” and insert-
23 ing “State, local, or Tribal”; and

24 (C) by striking “nutrient management
25 planning,” and inserting “soil health planning,

1 greenhouse gas emissions reduction planning,
2 nutrient management planning, integrated pest
3 management planning, agroforestry planning,
4 organic transition planning,”;

5 (2) in subsection (e)—

6 (A) in paragraph (3)(A)—

7 (i) by inserting “individuals,” before
8 “commercial entities,”; and

9 (ii) by striking “State or local” and
10 inserting “State, local, or Tribal”; and

11 (B) in paragraph (5), by inserting “or or-
12 ganic” after “sustainability”; and

13 (3) in subsection (i)—

14 (A) in the subsection heading, by inserting
15 “PERENNIAL AGRICULTURE SYSTEM,” after
16 “ORGANIC,”; and

17 (B) in paragraph (2), by inserting “a pe-
18 rennial agriculture system,” after “production,”
19 each place it appears.

20 **SEC. 5. NATIONAL AND REGIONAL AGROFORESTRY CEN-**
21 **TERS.**

22 Section 1243 of the Food, Agriculture, Conservation,
23 and Trade Act of 1990 (16 U.S.C. 1642 note; Public Law
24 101–624) is amended—

1 (1) by striking the section heading and insert-
2 ing “**NATIONAL AND REGIONAL AGRO-**
3 **FORESTRY CENTERS**”;

4 (2) by redesignating subsections (b), (c), and
5 (d) as subsections (c), (d), and (e), respectively;

6 (3) by striking subsection (a) and inserting the
7 following:

8 “(a) **DEFINITION OF AGROFORESTRY.**—In this sec-
9 tion, the term ‘agroforestry’ means a management system
10 that intentionally integrates trees and shrubs into crop
11 and animal farming systems to build more profitable and
12 weather-resilient farms, ranches, and communities, ad-
13 dress natural resource concerns and conservation needs,
14 and establish productive and sustainable land use prac-
15 tices, including—

16 “(1) riparian forest buffers;

17 “(2) alley cropping;

18 “(3) silvopasture;

19 “(4) forest farming and multistory cropping;

20 and

21 “(5) windbreaks, shelterbelts, hedgerows, field
22 borders, and living snow fences.

23 “(b) **NATIONAL AND REGIONAL AGROFORESTRY**
24 **CENTERS.**—

1 “(1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Agri-
2 culture (referred to in this section as the ‘Sec-
3 retary’)—

4 “(A) shall establish at the Forestry
5 Sciences Laboratory of the Forest Service, in
6 Lincoln, Nebraska, a National Agroforestry Re-
7 search, Development, and Demonstration Cen-
8 ter; and

9 “(B) acting through the Chief of the For-
10 est Service and in cooperation with the Natural
11 Resources Conservation Service, shall establish
12 not fewer than 3 additional regional agro-
13 forestry centers at other locations, as deter-
14 mined by the Secretary.

15 “(2) NATIONAL AND REGIONAL DIRECTORS.—
16 The Secretary, acting through the Chief of the For-
17 est Service, in coordination with the Natural Re-
18 sources Conservation Service, shall appoint a Na-
19 tional Director and Regional Directors to manage
20 and coordinate the program established under sub-
21 section (c).”;

22 (4) in subsection (c) (as so redesignated)—

23 (A) in the matter preceding paragraph

24 (1)—

1 (i) by striking “Center” and inserting
2 “Centers established under subparagraphs
3 (A) and (B) of subsection (b)(1) (referred
4 to in this section as the ‘Centers’)”; and

5 (ii) by inserting “and organizations”
6 after “nonprofit foundations”;

7 (B) in paragraph (1)—

8 (i) by striking “on semiarid lands
9 that” and inserting “that build soil health
10 and”; and

11 (ii) by inserting “, including agro-
12 forestry systems on semiarid land and
13 other fragile agroecosystems where woody
14 perennial plant communities can enhance
15 carbon sequestration and reduce green-
16 house gas emissions” before the semicolon;

17 (C) in paragraph (3), by striking “forestry
18 products for commercial sale from semiarid
19 land” and inserting “agroforestry products for
20 commercial sale”;

21 (D) in paragraph (4)—

22 (i) by striking “in semiarid regions”;
23 and

24 (ii) by striking “the Great Plains re-
25 gion” and inserting “particular regions”;

1 (E) in paragraph (5), by inserting “tech-
2 nical assistance and” before “technology”;

3 (F) by striking paragraph (6) and insert-
4 ing the following:

5 “(6) develop improved silvopasture, alley crop-
6 ping, forest farming, multistory cropping, riparian
7 buffer, windbreak and shelterbelt, and other peren-
8 nial production and conservation systems and tech-
9 nologies to improve soil health, carbon sequestration,
10 drought preparedness, soil and water conservation,
11 environmental quality, and biological diversity;”;

12 (G) in paragraph (7), by striking “on
13 semiarid lands”;

14 (H) in paragraph (8), by striking “on
15 semiarid lands worldwide” and inserting
16 “worldwide, including on semiarid land”; and

17 (I) in paragraph (9)—

18 (i) by striking “on semiarid lands”;

19 and

20 (ii) by inserting “and climate change”
21 after “pollution”;

22 (5) in subsection (d) (as so redesignated)—

23 (A) in the matter preceding paragraph (1),
24 by striking “Center” and inserting “Centers”;

1 (B) in paragraph (1), by striking “and” at
2 the end;

3 (C) in paragraph (2), by striking the pe-
4 riod at the end and inserting “; and”; and

5 (D) by adding at the end the following:

6 “(3) facilitate agroforestry adoption by dissemi-
7 nating comprehensive information on Federal, State,
8 local, and Tribal programs that provide support for
9 agroforestry.”; and

10 (6) by amending subsection (e) (as so redesign-
11 nated) to read as follows:

12 “(e) GRANTS.—The Secretary may establish regional
13 grant programs at each of the Centers to support agro-
14 forestry projects, including demonstration farms.”.

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