

Give our Resources the Opportunity to Work (GROW) Act of 2018

S. 2557

Bill Summary

The Give our Resources the Opportunity to Work (GROW) Act of 2018, introduced by Senators Joni Ernst (R-IA), Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Chuck Grassley (R-IA), and Bob Casey (D-PA), lays out a comprehensive strategy to enhance support for farmers' efforts to improve soil health and water quality. This bill reforms the [Conservation Stewardship Program](#) (CSP), [Environmental Quality Incentives Program](#) (EQIP), and [Conservation Reserve Program](#) (CRP) to target federal investments in ways that protect the most sensitive acres while empowering producers to adopt and actively manage high-level conservation activities on working lands.

Privately owned crop, pasture, and rangelands account for nearly half of the landmass in the United States. Given the large environmental footprint of agricultural lands, farmers and ranchers understandably have a major role in the management of our shared natural resources. In order to provide producers with the tools they need to be effective stewards, the next farm bill must invest in federal conservation programs that support farmers in their conservation efforts, while simultaneously protecting sensitive land and natural resources.

Combined, CSP, EQIP, and CRP account for 90 percent of conservation spending, Congress' priority in the farm bill should therefore be on enhancing these programs' effectiveness and accessibility.

The GROW Act will invest in conservation on agricultural lands, while protecting the most sensitive acres and natural resources by:

Ensuring working lands conservation programs can support the growing demand for financial and technical conservation assistance:

- Maintain annual enrollment for CSP at 10 million new acres each year
- Maintain funding for EQIP at \$1.75 billion per year
- Expand the CRP Grasslands Initiative to up to 3 million acres to support sustainable grazing and wildlife habitat

Targeting land retirement to the most sensitive land:

- Prohibit prime farmland and Class I, II, and III land from CRP enrollment unless it is highly erodible and eroding at unsustainable levels, or unless it is a continuous CRP enrollment of high impact partial field enrollments
- Prohibit the enrollment of entire farms

Prioritizing enrollment of the most critical conservation practices and activities, with an emphasis on improving soil health and protecting water quality:

- Establish a new CLEAR (Clean Lakes, Estuaries, and Rivers) option within continuous CRP and direct USDA to enroll at least 4 million acres of conservation buffers
- Provide CSP bonus payments for cover crop adoption as well as supplemental CSP payments for resource conserving crop rotations and managed intensive rotational grazing
- Set aside at least 28.5 percent of total EQIP funding for conservation practices that protect source drinking water resources

Increasing program accessibility by enhancing coordination between programs and supporting conservation planning:

- Establish a clear coordination process through which participants can easily graduate from EQIP to CSP once eligibility qualifications have been met
- Authorize a payment for comprehensive conservation planning within CSP

Increasing conservation support for historically underserved participants:

- Increase beginning farmer access to land by reforming CRP so that more productive land remains in agriculture
- Increase beginning and socially disadvantaged farmer participation in working lands programs by increasing the set-aside from 5 to 15 percent within both EQIP and CSP
- Simplify the EQIP Advance Payment Option to ensure automatic enrollment for both beginners and socially disadvantaged farmers.

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