



STATEMENT OF THE NATIONAL SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE COALITION
SUBMITTED TO UNITED STATES SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE,
NUTRITION, & FORESTRY
REGARDING “CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE AGRICULTURE SECTOR”

MAY 21, 2019

WASHINGTON D.C.

Chairman Roberts, Ranking Member Stabenow, and members of the Senate Agriculture Committee,

Thank you for holding today’s Senate Agriculture Committee hearing to examine climate change and agriculture. Climate change has and will continue to impact agricultural productivity and viability in the United States. At the same time, farmers and ranchers are uniquely positioned to be a critical part of the solution. We applaud you for recognizing the severity of the problem, and we look forward to working with you to ensure farmers and ranchers have the tools they need to be leaders in nationwide efforts to significantly mitigate and adapt to the pressures of a changing climate.

NSAC Position on Climate Change and Agriculture

The National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC) is a national alliance of family farm, food, rural, and conservation organizations that together take common positions on federal agriculture and food policies to advance sustainable agriculture. Our member organizations, and the farmers and ranchers they work with across the country, believe that climate change presents a severe and immediate threat to the agriculture sector and to rural communities across the country. We also believe that farmers and ranchers can, and must, be part of the solution as we work to support and advance climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Not only are farmers and ranchers at the frontlines when it comes to the effects of climate change, including droughts, floods, extreme temperatures, severe storms, and shifting pest and disease pressures, but they are also uniquely positioned to be part of the solution and significantly contribute to climate change mitigation. Through soil health management practices that sequester and store carbon in the soil, as well as through the adoption of agricultural systems that reduce greenhouse gas emissions, farmers and ranchers absolutely must be part of climate change solutions, and they must have a seat at the table as we work to develop policy solutions to address this pressing issue.

Farm Bill Opportunities

NSAC worked across a wide range of issues included in the 2018 Farm Bill to protect and improve natural resources, expand opportunities for the next generation of farmers, invest in local and regional economies, and scale up agricultural research efforts to build a more sustainable food and

farming system. We thank you for your leadership and tireless efforts to pass a strong, bipartisan farm bill, and we look forward to continuing to work with you on farm bill implementation in the months and years ahead. As you know, the 2018 Farm Bill included several important provisions to help advance climate change mitigation and adaptation, including, but not limited to, the following:

- Increased payment rates for conservation activities that build soil health, including cover crops, resource conserving crop rotations, and advanced grazing management;
- Priority for conservation activities and systems that build soil health and address weather volatility;
- Establishment of on-farm soil health demonstration trials for innovative practices;
- Increased funding to protect agricultural land from development and to restore and protect wetlands;
- Strengthened protection of native grasslands that provide enormous carbon storage benefits;
- Addition of new soil health priorities within agricultural research programs and increased funding for organic research;
- Inclusion of public plant breeding provisions to increase farmers' access to the most productive and well-adapted seeds for their operations, geographies, and a changing climate;
- Clarification of the definition of cover crop termination in order to reduce farmers' fears that cover cropping could risk their crop insurance coverage; and
- Requirement for USDA to identify available data relevant to conservation practices and the effects of conservation adoption on crop yields, farm and ranch profitability, and soil health.

The implementation of these important provisions will be critical to supporting farmers and ranchers in their efforts to mitigate and adapt to climate change. We look forward to working with you and with USDA to ensure successful implementation of these provisions, as well as working with our member organizations across the country on outreach to promote these opportunities and ensure farmers and ranchers can utilize and benefit from these important provisions.

Addressing the Severity of the Crisis

Given the severity of climate crisis, as well as the need for incentives and support for farmers and ranchers on the frontlines of climate change, we also believe it is critical to scale up the resources and tools available for climate change mitigation and adaptation. In order to reduce the risk to producers in shifting to new climate-friendly agricultural systems, we need to invest in relevant financial incentives, technical assistance, and research.

It is essential that any national climate policy recognize the role that agriculture can and must play in avoiding the worst impacts of climate change, increasing soil health and carbon sequestration, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Climate change threatens agricultural productivity, as well as the viability and profitability of farmers and ranchers across the country. We need policy solutions that not only support farmers and ranchers in adapting to these pressures and building resilient agricultural systems, but that also provide them with the tools and resources to play a leading role in mitigating the effects of climate change through carbon sequestration and greenhouse gas emission reductions.

Conclusion

We thank you for holding the hearing today to further examine climate change and agriculture, and we look forward to working with you to support innovative policies that bring farmers and ranchers to the table as a critical part of the solution.

Sincerely,



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