

SEED INDUSTRY

2024 Farm Bill Priorities



Farm Bill programs play a pivotal role in ensuring certainty for producers across all regions and sectors of U.S. agriculture, and provide for a more nutritious and food-secure future both at home and abroad. Resiliency and prosperity in agriculture starts with seed. Better seed produces better crops for a better quality of life. ASTA offers the following top-line considerations for the 2024 Farm Bill, in the following priority areas: conservation, agriculture research, trade, innovation, and risk management. For full details, visit:

betterseed.org/farm-bill.

CONSERVATION

The seed industry plays a unique and critical role in supporting conservation programs by developing and providing diverse, locally and broadly adapted, high-quality seed, enabling farmers to both increase agricultural productivity and conserve natural resources. To support these efforts, ASTA recommends the following:

Provide New Approaches to Expand Cover Crop Adoption

- With over 50% of NRCS Conservation program applications going unfunded, new approaches should be considered to provide streamlined enrollment, planning and financial assistance to growers seeking to plant cover crops. This could include financial incentives for growers through a tiered structure by designating payment by number of cover crop species planted in seed mixes.

Ensure Access to the Highest Quality Cover Crop Seed

- To ensure farmers get the highest quality, resilient seed to meet production expectations while minimizing the chance for invasive species and other weeds and diseases, all cover crop seed should be tested by an accredited and audited seed lab and accompanied by a label comforting to state/federal laws.

Offer Flexibility in Conservation Program Delivery

- Local field staff, crop advisors and others need flexibility to make real-time decisions to modify cover crop seed selection in a manner that allows growers to meet the goals of the conservation program contract and to recognize the dynamics of local seed availability.

Enhance Carbon Sequestration, Land Resilience by Harnessing Plant Diversity

- To achieve greater greenhouse gas (GHG) sequestration, resiliency, and biodiversity, more practices should be offered through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CRP) for agricultural producers to increase legumes, forbs, and pollinators in grazing systems. Additionally, producers who implement grassland restoration and improvement practices should qualify for the cost-share and technical assistance.
- Within the rental and easement programs, USDA should utilize mid-contract management authority to improve carbon mitigation, resiliency, sequestration, and biodiversity, including plant diversity.

AGRICULTURE RESEARCH

Efficient and productive agriculture systems start with seed. The U.S. seed industry relies on the support of Farm Bill funding and programs to ensure continued leadership as the provider of the best seed to the world. Strong investments in research from discovery through development lead to better seed, which means better outcomes for farmers, consumers, and the environment in the short term and long term. To support these efforts, ASTA recommends the following:

Support Robust Funding for Primary USDA Research

- The Agricultural Research Service (ARS), the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), and the Economic Research Service (ERS) provide foundational research for the seed industry, including critical funding resources for plant breeders and important

data products on trade and economic trends that inform policy priorities. The Office of the Chief Scientist (OCS) also plays an important policy-coordinating role and ensures that research priorities are elevated within U.S. government-wide initiatives.

Increase Appropriations for National Plant Germplasm System (NPGS)

- To support modernization of the seed storage, characterization, data resources, and distribution capacity of the NPGS, increased authorization of appropriations is needed for the National Genetic Resources Program.

Reauthorize the Agriculture Genome to Phenome Initiative

- The seed sector is often challenged to respond quickly to rapidly evolving production challenges. The Ag Genome to Phenome Initiative (AG2PI) generates knowledge that bridges genomics,

phenotype, and the environment. These efforts support more responsive, and predictive plant breeding programs to ensure farmers have ready access to the best varieties of seed to meet their specific needs.

Continue Support for University Research

- Land-Grant Universities are essential partners in agricultural research. Continued support is needed for the Hatch-Act, Smith-Lever, and McIntire Stennis authorities, which are key to U.S. research and development.
- Robust support is needed through the Research Facilities Act in the 2024 Farm Bill for critical infrastructure needs at facilities at, or reaching, the end of their life cycles.

Gather and Provide Access to Needed Cover Crop Data

- To help producers and the seed industry plan ahead to ensure the availability of high- quality cover crop varieties at the right

place and the right time, the NASS Prospective Plantings survey should include data on cover crops — including acres and types of species planted last season, and intention to plant next season.

- ASTA supports the creation of a NIFA-funded clearing house on cover crop variety evaluation to provide farmers, crop advisors, technical service providers, and government agencies with needed information on the efficacy and benefits of different varieties or mixes of cover crops.

Reauthorize, Fully Fund the Agriculture Advanced Research and Development Authority (AGARDA)

- AGARDA should be reauthorized and fully funded to allow USDA to drive high-risk and long term research to address challenges that threaten the stability and economic viability of agriculture in the U.S.

TRADE

Exports are a vital part of the U.S. economic engine, and agricultural exports continue to be among its strongest components. To continue to expand U.S. agricultural exports, protect and create American jobs, strengthen farm income, and help offset the government-supported advantages afforded to international competitors, the Farm Bill must include investment toward public/private partnerships. To support these efforts, ASTA recommends the following Farm Bill Trade recommendations:

Increase Funding for Agricultural Trade Promotion and Facilitation

- Robust and increased funding is needed for USDA's Agricultural Trade Promotion and Facilitation Programs, including the Market Access Program (MAP), Foreign Market Development (FMD), Emerging Markets Program (EMP) and Technical Assistance for Specialty Crops (TASC). Sustained, long-term capacity building with international partners through these funds, which the seed sector has matched with investments and in-kind contributions to amplify impact, is critical to the development of new markets.

INNOVATION

Continued innovation in plant breeding and seed-variety development are crucial to ensuring long-term economic, social and environmental sustainability. The seed industry is founded on innovation, and innovation is a part of everything we do – from plant breeding and seed treatments, to soil health and habitat restoration. To support these efforts, ASTA recommends the following:

Create Systems that Foster Innovation

- Continued investments are needed to support process improvements and staffing shortages in the three agencies responsible for regulating innovative biotechnology products

under the Coordinated Framework for the Regulation of Biotechnology. USDA, EPA, and FDA should improve coordinated efforts to address regulatory inefficiencies that continue to delay the commercialization of products developed through innovative breeding methods.

- Biostimulants are emerging and promising tools to help mitigate or reduce GHG emissions, conserve and replenish soil health, and improve water quality. However, without a clear definition, the regulatory path to market is unclear. To fully realize the value of these tools, the Farm Bill should establish a federal definition for biostimulants.

RISK MANAGEMENT

To ensure economically sustainable domestic agriculture production, ASTA supports maintaining and strengthening Farm Bill commodity programs. We look to our grower partners in the commodity organizations and general farm organizations as they identify specific recommendations on policy.

Protect, Preserve, and Strengthen Farmer Safety Nets

- Crop insurance enables farmers to rebound quickly after disaster and allows producers to continue to meet their credit obligations and to purchase ag inputs such as seed to plant a crop another year.

- Building on the successful Pandemic Cover Crop program, the Farm Bill should establish a formal program providing a \$5 per acre rebate on crop insurance premiums for the use of cover crops. This program would allow growers to self-certify that they planted one or more cover crops and report acreage to FSA to be eligible for the premium discount.

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