

CLIMATE CHANGE

Farmers Leading the Way on Climate Action

POLICY BRIEF

Climate change is here and happening, especially in the Midwest. But it's not too late! Farmers hold immense power to, not only stop, but reverse climate change.

And many are already doing it.

FARMERS ARE CLIMATE-SMART

Many farmers are implementing conservation and climate-smart practices that build soil health, increase resilience to rainfall and drought, reduce emissions, and trap carbon in the soil.

As stewards of the land, farmers using conservation practices are insulating their communities from the most severe impacts of climate change and improving the land for future generations. But **conservation practices are not within reach for all farmers, yet**. Small, mid-sized, and underserved farmers may face more barriers to adoption including cost of implementation, experience using federal programs, and access to specialized equipment.



Wisconsin Farmers Union is actively working to empower farmers and other landowners to be climate changemakers through peer-learning, incentive programs, and by advocating for climate policy that benefits farmers and rural communities. A bold proposal to transform our society is needed to address the effects of climate change, to ensure food security, a healthy landscape, climate mitigation, and to attain a prosperous rural America through a strong family farm system of agriculture.

WFU partners on coalition projects like Wisconsin Women in Conservation, Farm Climate Smart WI, and Producer-Led Watershed Groups to help farmers of all backgrounds access conservation tools and funding.

CLIMATE OUTLOOK

In 2024 the Biden Administration released the Fifth National Climate Assessment. The assessment reported that, “Climate change—especially shifts in precipitation, air temperature, and soil moisture—is disrupting agricultural production and food systems, and is projected to reduce the availability and affordability of nutritious food. Impacts are distributed unevenly, with farmworkers, subsistence-based communities, and rural populations facing increasing risks.”¹



¹ <https://nca2023.globalchange.gov>

WHAT WE CAN DO: FEDERAL LEVEL

Renewable Energy & Emissions

Federally, Wisconsin Farmers Union (WFO) supports measures that increase adoption of conservation practices as well as the use of renewable energy. Both measures are needed to ensure a clean and diversified energy economy.

WFO supports a revenue-neutral carbon fee and dividend such as the **Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividend Act of 2021** (HR 2307). Such a policy should be to meet or exceed the emissions reductions required to meet the targets adopted in Paris at the 21st meeting of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

WFO also supports the expansion of the **Rural Energy for America Program** (REAP) to help farmers make renewable energy investments.

Maintain *USDA Programs Present in the Farm Bill: EQIP, CSP, CRP*

Maintain and strengthen appropriations for existing USDA programs such as Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) for using marginal farmland that is better served in mitigating climate change, the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), which focus on building soil health without placing additional regulatory burdens on farmers.

USDA Regional Climate Hubs

Expanded support to USDA's Climate Hubs which develop and deliver science-based, region-specific information and technologies to agricultural and natural resource managers that enable climate-informed decision-making, and assistance for implementation.

WHAT WE CAN DO: STATE LEVEL

State/Local Renewable Energy

WFO supports investments in energy efficiency and renewable energy which generate a reasonable economic return. Efforts to revitalize communities and markets with diverse crops that provide flexibility to farmers adapting to changing weather patterns are also key to maintaining Wisconsin's robust agricultural economy into the future.

Continue state investment in farmer-centered conservation projects like the Producer-Led Watershed Group program, Discovery Farms, and Nitrogen Optimization Pilot Program.

UW Extension grazing support through statewide grazing specialists. WFO supports expended grazing support through a DATCP position in the 2025-27 State Budget.

Give farmers a meaningful seat at the table with a **Climate Change Rural Task Force** to inform and articulate an agricultural and rural plan in the emerging climate legislative platform. Farmers must have a meaningful seat at the table.



WHAT WE CAN DO: LOCAL LEVEL

WFO encourages farmers to participate in partnerships with climate researchers to understand how farmers can anticipate and adapt to climate change most effectively and engage in beneficial mitigation strategies. Impacts on production, such as early spring changes, seasonal drought conditions, and insect patterns can be useful information to assist in research results to better understand how to ensure farms are resilient.