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DESPITE IMPROVEMENTS, THREE IN FOUR FARMERS TURNED AWAY FROM FEDERAL CONSERVATION PROGRAMS

Ahead of 2023 Farm Bill, Congress should prioritize climate resilience, dramatically increase stable funding for conservation programs

MINNEAPOLIS—A new report from the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy ([IATP](#)) finds that roughly three in four farmers who applied to access critical government conservation programs in 2022 were rejected. Report findings underscore that rising farmer demand to access programs that respond to the climate crisis, build soil health and protect water quality is not being met.

The report, [*Still closed out: More progress needed to connect farmers with federal conservation programs*](#), is an update to the 2021 report [*Closed out: How U.S. farmers are denied access to conservation programs*](#). The report examines the farmer application rate of approvals for two critical conservation programs: the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). Both programs help farmers conserve their land, water and soil while easing the financial burden of new on-farm conservation practices.

This report arrives in the aftermath of the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), which dedicated over \$10 billion for EQIP and CSP, and while Congress is debating the next Farm Bill. The numbers reflected in the report are from before enactment of the IRA and show continued demand for these popular programs.

“While we applaud the investment from the IRA into EQIP and CSP, it is clear that it’s not enough to truly meet demand,” said report author Michael Happ, IATP Program Associate for Climate and Rural Communities.

“Congress has an important opportunity through the Farm Bill to ensure the progress made is multiplied. EQIP and CSP are important programs for helping farmers adapt to a changing climate.”

The report breaks down by state the percent of applications denied from 2022, as well as the previous 12 years. State Natural Resources Conservation Service offices play a role in administering EQIP and set state-wide environmental priorities. The percent of applications submitted and denied varied by state, with some of the lowest approval rates (but greatest interest in CSP and EQIP) in major agriculture states. For example, Minnesota has awarded more CSP contracts than any other state. Yet, in 2022 the state only awarded contracts to 8% of those who applied; and awarded EQIP contracts to only 27% of the total applicant pool.

The report calls on Congress to ensure stable and robust funding for CSP and EQIP while ensuring funding goes toward truly climate resilient practices. It also calls on the U.S. Department of Agriculture to improve outreach to farmers of color while improving data collection on how conservation programs serve farmers of color. More action is needed as well to serve small and midsize farms.

“Farmers of all types are working with more variable and extreme weather. As we approach the 2023 Farm Bill, it is important to make EQIP and CSP more accessible, enroll more acres, build resilience and reduce emissions, so our farmers can stay afloat,” says Happ.

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Based in Minneapolis with offices in Washington, D.C. and Berlin, Germany, the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy works locally and globally at the intersection of policy and practice to ensure fair and sustainable food, farm and trade systems. To learn more, visit: www.iatp.org.