

The EQIP Improvement Act of 2023

Supporting voluntary conservation by stretching taxpayer dollars

The Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) Improvement Act, introduced by U.S. Senators Cory Booker (D-NJ) and Mike Lee (R-UT) [is a win for taxpayers](#) - and farmers and ranchers. Currently authorized at \$2.025 billion for FY23, EQIP is the largest farm bill program focused on improving conservation on working farms and ranches. Through a voluntary, competitive application process, EQIP provides agricultural operations with technical and financial assistance in planning and implementing publicly beneficial conservation practices tailored to particular on-farm and local needs.

Over the life of the [2018 farm bill](#), Congress authorized EQIP mandatory funding of \$9.175 billion from FY19-23. [Additional funding](#) for EQIP - \$8.45 billion from FY23-26 - was provided in the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA).

However, past implementation of EQIP has poorly served both farmers and ranchers and taxpayers. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) own data shows EQIP annually spends hundreds of millions of dollars on practices, like road building and land clearing, that provide little conservation value. Through the farm bill, the program contains an arbitrary requirement that 50% of funds be directed to animal livestock, tying the hands of state and local administrators who may identify more pressing conservation needs. With a maximum award of \$450,000 (over five years), EQIP dollars disproportionately benefit the largest, most sophisticated operations. These inefficiencies have led to EQIP being oversubscribed, with more than two-thirds of annual applications left unfunded, or 87,000 in 2021 alone.

The EQIP Improvement Act will create a better program through a number of reforms:

- Focus taxpayer dollars on the most effective conservation practices by reducing, but not eliminating, cost-share rates for infrastructure practices with low conservation value.
- Assist a greater number of farmers and ranchers by reducing the maximum award from \$450,000 to \$150,000.
- Better tailor the program to needs identified by state and local resource managers by eliminating the arbitrary requirement that 50 percent of funds be directed to livestock operations.
- Enhance Congressional oversight by requiring that USDA annually reports how funds are obligated by state, conservation practice, and operation size, but NOT by individual recipient.

EQIP is an important program to assist farmers and ranchers facing financial and technical barriers to improving the conservation performance of their agricultural operations. The EQIP Improvement Act will enhance fiscal responsibility by delivering assistance to more agricultural producers, leveraging additional private investment and ensuring taxpayer dollars produce a better return on investment. Common sense reforms such as these will foster better physical and financial resilience by helping farmers and ranchers adapt to economic and climate challenges, a win-win for taxpayers, farmers, and the environment.

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