



Statement of the American Farm Bureau Federation

**TO THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION and
FORESTRY**

**Perspectives on S. 3894, the Growing Climate Solutions Act of 2020.
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Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, my name is Zippy Duvall. I am the president of the American Farm Bureau Federation, and I am pleased to offer this testimony, on behalf of the American Farm Bureau Federation.

American farmers and ranchers play a leading role in promoting soil health, conserving water, enhancing wildlife, efficiently using nutrients, and caring for their animals. For decades they have pushed past the boundaries of innovation by investing in agricultural research and adopting practices with the goals of improving productivity, enhancing [sustainability](#), and providing clean and renewable energy. In fact, the use of ethanol and biodiesel in 2018 reduced greenhouse gas emissions by an amount equivalent to taking 17 million cars off the road.

Livestock and crop production are the heart of American agriculture, providing the food we enjoy every day. Ensuring this production continues sustainably is essential for people and the planet. Farmers have embraced technologies that reduced emissions and increased efficiency. Building upon the strong foundation of voluntary stewardship investments and practices, including those in the Farm Bill, we look forward to working with policymakers to further advance the successful sustainable practices used by U.S. agricultural producers. Throughout this process, lawmakers must ensure that any governmental analysis characterizing U.S. crop and livestock systems reflects U.S. agriculture's leadership globally in sustainable farming practices.

All told, agriculture accounts for less than 10% of total U.S. greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, far less than transportation, electricity generation, and industry sectors. Farmers continue to produce more with greater efficiency. In fact, U.S. agriculture would have needed nearly [100 million more acres in 1990 to match 2018 production levels](#).

U.S. farmers and ranchers have long been at the forefront of climate-smart farming, utilizing scientific solutions, technology, and innovations to raise crops or care for livestock. These efforts are designed to protect soil and water, efficiently manage manure, produce clean and renewable energy, capture carbon, and improve sustainability. Over two generations, we've been able to increase productivity by 270 percent, while using the same resources. In essence, we're doing more with less.

Total carbon sink efforts from forestland management, land converted to forestry, grasslands, and wetland management more than offset agriculture's contribution to total emissions. However, many of agriculture's carbon sequestration efforts are not directly assigned to the agriculture sector. It is certain that if the carbon sequestration efforts of U.S. farmers and ranchers were assigned to agriculture, our contributions to GHG emissions would be significantly lower. It is worth noting that U.S. farmers have enrolled more than 140 million acres in federal conservation programs, equal to the total land area of California & New York combined. Millions more acres are dedicated to nonfederal conservation programs.

More productive livestock operations allow ranchers, pork producers, and dairy farmers to maintain their total contribution to GHG emissions at less than 3%, while also leading to lower per-unit GHG emissions. Similarly, productivity gains in crop production allow farmers to produce more food, fuel, and fiber while using at least 100 million fewer acres than three decades ago.

U.S. farmers and ranchers contribute significantly fewer GHG emissions than their counterparts around the world. EPA data shows agriculture's global contribution to GHG emissions was 24% in 2010, more than double U.S. farmers' and ranchers' contributions to total U.S. emissions in 2018. This significant difference is largely driven by farmers' enthusiastic adoption of technology. Farmers are the pioneers of sustainability and any policy debate should recognize their contributions, efficiency gains, and the considerable impact of their carbon sequestration efforts.

With trade challenges and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, America's farmers and ranchers are facing difficult headwinds. As we continue to work with Congress, we must explore new markets and opportunities for our members. Our policy crafted by our grassroots members, hardworking farmers and ranchers, recognize the value of market-based incentives and compensation to farmers for planting crops or adopting farming practices that keep carbon in the soil. That is why we welcome opportunities for farmers and ranchers to hopefully participate in emerging carbon markets.

For producers and private forest owners, access to carbon markets is often difficult and too convoluted to achieve wide adoption. The Growing Climate Solutions Act would create a

certification program at USDA to help solve technical entry barriers to farmer and forest landowner participation in carbon credit markets. These issues – including access to reliable information about markets and access to qualified technical assistance providers and credit protocol verifiers- have limited both landowner participation and the adoption of practices to help reduce the costs of developing carbon credits.

It is our hope that USDA will be able to help landowners connect with private sector actors who can assist the landowners in implementing the protocols and monetizing the climate value of their sustainable practices. Third-party entities, certified under the program, will be able to claim the status of a “USDA Certified” technical assistance provider or verifier. The USDA certification lowers barriers to entry in the credit markets by reducing confusion and improving information for farmers looking to implement practices that capture carbon, reduce emissions, improve soil health, and make operations more sustainable.

Today, many third-party groups are developing protocols and testing methods to calculate emissions reduction and sequestration in agriculture and forestry. The landscape is evolving rapidly. In this context, the Growing Climate Solutions Act would provide the Secretary of Agriculture with an advisory council composed of agriculture experts, scientists, producers, and others. The advisory council will advise the Secretary about the certification program and whether it remains relevant, credible, and responsive to the needs of farmers, forest landowners, and carbon market participants alike.

Finally, the bill instructs USDA to produce a report to Congress to advise about the further development of this policy area including barriers to market entry, challenges raised by farmers and forest landowners, market performance, and suggestions on where USDA can make a positive contribution to the further adoption of voluntary carbon sequestration practices in agriculture and forestry.

The Growing Climate Solutions Act seeks to provide more clarity and guidance for those farmers and ranchers who want to provide the ecosystem services that many consumers and businesses are desiring. This builds upon American agriculture’s strong foundation of environmental stewardship.

Farm Bureau will continue to work to ensure that farm families maintain their ability to respond and adapt to climatic events and that public policies do not threaten the long-term resiliency of our rural communities. Congress must protect American agriculture and production practices from undue burden, and respect farmers' and ranchers' ability to innovate and solve problems.

American farm families want to leave the land better than when it was first entrusted to our care. We want to protect the planet, feed and clothe people, and promote vibrant communities. Working with our partners, land-grant universities, policymakers, and the farmers and ranchers we represent Farm Bureau intends to continue finding solutions for the challenges of the future.

Mr. Chairman, I commend you for convening this hearing and for all your hard work on behalf of agriculture across the country. I will be pleased to respond to questions.