



american
seed trade
association



The Farm Bill

Strength and success in agriculture begins with the seed. With better seed, farmers produce better crops to provide a better quality of life for all. ASTA offers the following topline considerations for the Farm Bill in the following priority areas: conservation, agriculture research, trade, innovation, and risk management.

AGRICULTURE RESEARCH

Investment in research has allowed the seed industry to continue to develop better seed to enable farmers to produce better crops for consumers. Utilizing tools like plant breeding and gene editing, seed varieties have been developed that produce higher yields, withstand drought, and offer resistance to harmful pests and diseases. To support these efforts, ASTA recommends the following:

Robust Funding for Primary USDA Research

The Agricultural Research Service (ARS), National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), and Economic Research Service (ERS) are critical drivers in supporting the advancement of U.S. agriculture through research, data collection, and innovation. In tandem with these agencies, the Office of the Chief Scientist (OCS) plays an important policy-coordinating role and ensures that research priorities are elevated within U.S. government-wide initiatives.

As our farmers work to provide the food, feed, fuel, and fiber to support the world, it's crucial that we support them by prioritizing investment in agriculture innovation. These investments and the work of these agencies support the development of improved seed varieties that are specifically designed to address challenges plaguing U.S. farmers.

National Plant Germplasm System (NPGS)

Existing in some form since the late 1800s, the NPGS is a cornerstone of American agriculture and global food security. With a catalogue of over 600,000 plant genetic samples, both public and private plant breeders can request and obtain seeds possessing specific traits and combine them with modern seed varieties to achieve their desired results – such as higher yield, drought tolerance, pest resistance, and more. **A reauthorized Farm Bill should support the modernization of seed storage, characterization, data resources, and distribution capacity within the NPGS.**

Reauthorize the Agriculture Genome to Phenome Initiative

The seed sector is often challenged to respond quickly to rapidly evolving production challenges. ASTA supports the Agriculture

Genome to Phenome Initiative (AG2PI), which facilitates more responsive and predictive plant breeding, to ensure that farmers have ready access to the best seed available 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, SmithLever, and McIntire Stennis authorities, which are key to U.S. research and development.

Robust support is needed through the Research Facilities Act in the Farm Bill to support facilities at, or reaching, the end of their life cycles.

Gather and Provide Access to Needed Cover Crop Data

The NASS Prospective Plantings survey should include data on cover crops – including acres and types of species planted last season, and intention to plant for next season. This data would better equip the seed industry to forecast demand, ensuring that farmers have access to the high-quality, professionally-produced cover crop seed they desire.

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 the necessary information on the efficacy and benefits of different varieties or mixes of cover crops.

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

Established in the 2018 Farm Bill, AGARDA works to develop new technologies and research tools to address challenges that threaten the stability and economic viability of agriculture in the United States. To continue driving research that addresses the challenges facing the food system, AGARDA should be reauthorized and fully funded.

INNOVATION

To remain a global leader in agricultural innovation, the U.S. must foster a regulatory system that encourages the development of new technologies. To support these efforts, ASTA recommends the following:

Create Systems that Foster Innovation

Operating under the Federal Coordinated Framework for the Regulation of Biotechnology, USDA, EPA, and FDA provide oversight for products of biotechnology.

The EPA rule on Plant-incorporated Protectants (PIPs) stifles innovation by applying different compliance requirements

between conventionally bred PIPs and equivalent PIPs developed through gene editing. **ASTA supports language in the Committee passed Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2024 (H.R. 8467) that clarifies EPA's regulatory scope and removes excessive regulatory burdens for plant breeders.**

Biostimulants are emerging and promising tools to support plant growth, conserve and replenish soil health, and improve water quality. ASTA supports the language in the Committee passed Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2024, which establishes a federal definition for biostimulants.

TRADE

To continue to expand U.S. agricultural exports, protect and create American jobs, and strengthen farm income, the Farm Bill must include investment toward public-private partnerships to support these efforts. ASTA recommends the following:

Increase Funding for Agricultural Trade Promotion and Facilitation

Robust 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 are critical to the development of new markets.

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. To support these efforts, ASTA recommends the following:

Provide New Approaches to Expand Cover Crop Adoption

The use of cover crops provides both economic and environmental benefits to our farmers. New approaches should be considered to provide streamlined enrollment, planning, and financial assistance to farmers seeking to plant cover crops.

Ensure Access to the Highest Quality Cover Crop Seed

To ensure farmers have the high quality, resilient seed to meet their production goals, all cover crop seed should be tested by an accredited and audited seed lab and accompanied by a label conforming to state and federal laws.

Offer Flexibility in Conservation Program Delivery

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

Enhance Land Resilience by Harnessing Plant Diversity

Programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) provide immense value to the farmer, the land, and the rural communities they represent. To amplify the impact of these programs, additional practices should be offered for producers to increase legumes, forbs, and pollinators within their grazing systems. Additionally, USDA should utilize mid-contract management authority, which promotes plant diversity, soil health, and ecosystem resilience.

RISK MANAGEMENT

To ensure economically sustainable domestic agriculture production, ASTA supports maintaining and strengthening the Farm Bill commodity programs. We support our grower partners, commodity organizations, and farm groups as they identify specific recommendations on risk management policies.

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 purchase ag inputs, such as seed, to plant a crop another year.

Building on past successful state and federal programs, the Farm Bill should establish a formal program providing a per acre rebate on crop insurance premiums for the use of cover crops. This would allow farmers 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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