

Conclusion & Recommendations

Far from mitigating the climate emergency, carbon-offset schemes threaten to further entrench environmentally destructive farm practices and chemical use, worsen social and racial equity issues, foster corporate self-dealing and monopoly, and threaten to exacerbate the economic marginalization of small to medium-scale farmers – all while forestalling meaningful reform by enabling corporate “greenwashing.” Fortunately, there are many other ways that Congress and the Administration could reduce agriculture’s carbon footprint and promote adoption of ecologically regenerative farming methods, even voluntarily.

CONGRESS AND THE ADMINISTRATION SHOULD:

- Ensure that USDA programs do not promote private carbon payment programs and reject corporate contributions to conservation programs that require farmers to share ownership of carbon credits with corporate donors.
- Invest in popular existing programs to fund environmental improvements in agriculture, such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). A study by the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy found that USDA denied more than half of all EQIP and CSP applications, in part due to lack of funds. Funding should be greatly expanded, with resources set aside to promote proven carbon-sequestering practices, primarily agroforestry.
- Close these programs’ existing loopholes, which allow large polluting farms, especially animal factory farms, to win large grants to subsidize the environmental cleanup necessitated by their inherently polluting business model.
- Support farmers who transition to ecologically regenerative practices, such as those encompassed within organic agriculture, that enhance soil health, protect biodiversity, and help make our food system more resilient to climate change.
- Promote agroforestry through existing USDA programs, such as encouraging tree plantings as a part of the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) or expanding farm safety net programs, such as crop insurance, to better include agroforestry.
- Improve federal food procurement to invest in genuinely climate-smart farms and community-based food systems and disinvest from environmentally harmful businesses.
- Regulate air and water pollution from the largest, most polluting farms, including working with the EPA to set limits on agricultural greenhouse gas emissions.

- Hold dominant agribusinesses liable for the environmental violations of the farms they contract with, given their control over farmers' practices.
- Better enforce existing antitrust laws to combat the monopoly power of the largest agribusinesses.
- Protect farmer data:
 - Ensure data portability for farmers to easily transfer their information between platforms.
 - Allow farmers to remove their data from a platform, so that corporations cannot continue to profit off their information after a farmer has stopped using their service.
 - Prohibit the use of farmer data gathered to verify carbon sequestration or provide planting recommendations to be used to speculate in futures markets.
 - Ensure corporations obtain a farmer's explicit consent before sharing or selling their data to third parties.