

Letter to USDA in support of pilot funding for the Sustainable Farms and Fields program

The Honorable Thomas Vilsack
Secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Mr. Secretary:

Congratulations on your return to USDA and thank you for immediately positioning agriculture as the first and best place to get some wins combating climate change. As you recently remarked, “Farmers are prepared for it. Farmers are anxious to do it. If it’s voluntary, if it’s market-based, if it’s incentive-based, I think you will see farmers, ranchers, and producers cooperate extensively.”

We wholeheartedly agree and hope you’ll take the opportunity to support Washington State in demonstrating the truth of this statement.

Last year, the Washington State Legislature created the Sustainable Farms and Fields (SFF) grant program to incentivize farmers, ranchers, and aquaculture operations to increase carbon sequestration and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. What makes this program so powerful is that farmers had a strong voice in its development. Not only did representatives from agricultural and environmental groups work together to produce the program’s foundation, but individual farmers across Washington had the opportunity to weigh in on what they wanted to see in a climate-smart program through an online survey. The very development of this program demonstrates that Washington farmers are prepared for market-based, incentive-based climate solutions.

The undersigned organizations are excited about the prospects for the SFF grant program to support farmers in transitioning the agricultural sector into a climate solutions sector.

We respectfully request that you consider funding SFF as a pilot project for USDA to demonstrate how a voluntary incentive program to climate-smart farming can be implemented at the state level.

The State Conservation Commission (SCC) and Washington State Department of Agriculture were allotted state funds in the current fiscal year towards the development of the SFF program. This initial funding was included in our state budget at a time when funding for most new programs was vetoed by Governor Inslee due to the onset of the COVID pandemic and the resulting fiscal climate. Program advocates elected not to request state funding for the upcoming biennial budget for SFF due to economic uncertainty but are exploring multiple private and public options to financially support Washington farmers with grants that help mitigate climate change through carbon sequestration.

The SFF program represents a unique and unparalleled opportunity to demonstrate a path forward for carbon-friendly farming not just in Washington State, but throughout the US and beyond. We hope that you’ll consider directing USDA funding towards this unique state-level program.