



Statement of the American Farm Bureau Federation

**TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON
AGRICULTURE**

**Climate Change and the U.S. Agriculture and Forestry Sectors
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Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, my name is Zippy Duvall. I am a third-generation farmer and president of the American Farm Bureau Federation, and I am pleased to offer this testimony, on behalf of the American Farm Bureau Federation and Farm Bureau members across this country.

America's 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 embraced innovation thanks to investments in agricultural research and adopted climate-smart practices to improve productivity, enhance [sustainability, and](#) provide 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. The daily choices we make on our farm and ranches are driven by our commitment to sustainability. Farmers have embraced technologies that reduce emissions and increase efficiency, making U.S. agriculture a leader in sustainability. 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 successful sustainable practices in U.S. agriculture. 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 approximately 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](#).

Carbon sequestration, achieved through the management of forestry, grasslands, wetlands, cropland and settlements contributed to GHG removals equivalent to 12% of total U.S. emissions. With increased investment in agricultural research we can develop the new frontier technologies to capture even more carbon in our croplands, our forests and our grasslands. We can definitely reduce our carbon footprint. With cutting-edge science, we may be able to achieve net zero emissions in some sectors of agriculture.

U.S. farmers and ranchers have long been at the forefront of climate-smart farming, utilizing scientific solutions, technology, and innovations to raise crops and 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 287 percent, while using the same resources. To say we're doing more with less is an understatement.

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, especially our forests, our contributions to GHG emissions would be lower. It is worth noting that U.S. farmers have enrolled more than 140 million acres in federal conservation programs--that's equal to the total land area of California and 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%. Innovation plays an important role, from methane digesters to advances in nutritional balance that lead to lower per-unit GHG emissions. In fact, we have seen a 25% reduction in per unit of GHG emission for our dairy industry, an 18% reduction in swine and close to a 10% drop for our beef cattle producers.

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 2019. This significant difference is largely driven by U.S. farmers' enthusiastic adoption of technology. American farmers and ranchers are 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 agriculture. We also recommend working with our

international trade partners to make certain that national sustainability standards do not become trade barriers to our agricultural exports.

At the American Farm Bureau, our policy is crafted by our grassroots members, hardworking farmers and ranchers, who recognize the value of a voluntary, market-based system of incentives for planting crops or adopting farming practices that keep carbon in the soil. That is why we welcome opportunities for farmers and ranchers to participate in emerging carbon markets.

To further promote and expand these opportunities, the American Farm Bureau felt it was important to convene a wide group of stakeholders to further explore policy options for farmers, ranchers and rural communities. What came out of that effort is now known as the Food and Agriculture Climate Alliance which consists of organizations representing a cross-section of farmers, ranchers, forest owners, the food sector, state governments and environmental advocates that are working together to develop and promote shared climate policy priorities.

The alliance united around three principles that guide our 40 recommendations: Support voluntary, market- and incentive-based policies; advance science-based outcomes; promote resilience and help rural economies better adapt to changes in the climate. We hope the work and recommendations of the alliance ensure farmers and ranchers will be respected and supported as society pushes for more climate-smart practices. Advocating for the right policies – voluntary, market- and incentive-based solutions – will allow us to build on our sustainability advances and recognize farmers as partners in this effort, while helping to prevent a move toward the punitive policies discussed a decade ago.

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. That is the story of my family's farm in Georgia and the story of millions of farms across this country. 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.