

115TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. 2989

To amend the Food Security Act of 1985 to encourage soil health, and
for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

JUNE 5, 2018

Mr. BENNET introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred
to the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry

A BILL

To amend the Food Security Act of 1985 to encourage
soil health, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Conservation for Very
5 Erodible Row Cropland Act of 2018” or the “COVER
6 Act”.

7 **SEC. 2. SOIL HEALTH INITIATIVE.**

8 Section 1240B of the Food Security Act of 1985 (16
9 U.S.C. 3839aa–2) is amended by adding at the end the
10 following:

1 “(j) SOIL HEALTH INITIATIVE.—

2 “(1) DEFINITION OF COVER CROP.—In this
3 subsection, the term ‘cover crop’ means a grass, leg-
4 ume, or forb that is planted for seasonal vegetative
5 cover.

6 “(2) SOIL HEALTH INITIATIVE.—

7 “(A) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall
8 provide payments under the program for prac-
9 tices that—

10 “(i) improve soil health;

11 “(ii) enhance the ability of a farmer
12 to absorb and recover from shocks and
13 stresses to production;

14 “(iii) increase the storage of carbon
15 on agricultural land; and

16 “(iv) achieve other conservation out-
17 comes, as determined by the Secretary.

18 “(B) DIVERSITY.—The Secretary shall en-
19 sure that producers receiving payments for
20 practices described in clauses (i) through (iv) of
21 subparagraph (A) are located in areas that re-
22 flect diverse conditions with respect to region,
23 water quantity, and agricultural practice.

24 “(3) SOIL HEALTH PRACTICES.—

“(A) IN GENERAL.—Practices that improve soil health under paragraph (2)(A)(i) shall—

“(i) reflect regional soil and climate conditions; and

“(ii) include—

“(I) any practice that improves soil health, as determined by the Secretary; and

“(II) not fewer than two of the practices described in subparagraph (B).

“(B) PRACTICES DESCRIBED.—The practices referred to in subparagraph (A)(ii)(II) are the following:

“(i) The planting of a regionally appropriate cover crop.

“(ii) No-till or reduced-till agriculture.

“(iii) Resource-conserving crop rotation.

“(iv) The use of organic soil amendments, including compost, biochar, and digestate.

“(v) The integration of livestock grazing.”.

1 **SEC. 3. COVER CROP PILOT PROGRAM.**

2 Section 1240H of the Food Security Act of 1985 (16
3 U.S.C. 3839aa–8) is amended—

4 (1) by redesignating subsection (c) as sub-
5 section (d); and

6 (2) by inserting after subsection (b) the fol-
7 lowing:

8 “(c) COVER CROP PILOT PROGRAM.—

9 “(1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall estab-
10 lish a pilot program to provide payments under this
11 subsection to producers to encourage—

12 “(A) the measurement of outcomes relat-
13 ing to the planting of a regionally appropriate
14 cover crop; and

15 “(B) opportunities to increase farm in-
16 come.

17 “(2) THIRD-PARTY PARTNERS.—In carrying out
18 the pilot program under paragraph (1), the Sec-
19 retary shall give priority to producers that partner
20 with—

21 “(A) academic entities to study the impact
22 of soil carbon sequestration on soil health and
23 farm productivity;

24 “(B) carbon offset protocol developers to
25 develop quantification methodologies for carbon
26 offset protocols;

1 “(C) livestock producers to integrate graz-
 2 ing where regionally appropriate; or

3 “(D) food manufacturers—

4 “(i) to enter into supply agreements
 5 for food produced under the pilot program;
 6 and

7 “(ii) to develop marketing products
 8 relating to the soil health benefits of that
 9 food.

10 “(3) DIVERSITY.—The Secretary shall ensure
 11 that producers receiving payments under paragraph
 12 (1)—

13 “(A) are located in areas that reflect di-
 14 verse conditions with respect to region, water
 15 quantity, and agricultural practice; and

16 “(B) plant regionally appropriate cover
 17 crops that enhance nutrient cycling and the ca-
 18 pacity of soil to hold water.

19 “(4) FUNDING.—Of the funds made available
 20 to carry out this chapter, the Secretary shall use to
 21 carry out this subsection \$20,000,000 for each of
 22 fiscal years 2019 through 2023.”.

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