

Getting food & farming back on track

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The Senate is in recess this week, but they'll be resuming Farm Bill debate on Monday. The bill will be pared down in the coming days, and PAN and partners are working hard to ensure that key policies that support healthy food, farming and communities are included in the final law.

Among the many amendments up for consideration, three rise to the top of our priority list. These provisions take steps to protect honey bees and support farmers who put smart practices in place to protect our shared air, soil and water. This is our once-every-five-years opportunity to get food and farming policy back on track.

Standing up for bees

With [bee populations](#) in rapid decline and EPA not stepping up to protect them, Senator Barbara Boxer (D-CA) has introduced Farm Bill amendment #954 to spur action. Calling for "protection of honey bees and other pollinators," this provision would increase congressional oversight, including keeping close tabs on pollinator populations and emerging independent science relating to "environmental and chemical stressors on pollinator health."

Boxer's amendment would also establish an inter-agency task force on bee health and commercial beekeeping, bringing together officials from the Departments of Agriculture and the Interior, EPA and FDA to collaborate on protecting bees. Beekeepers, among other stakeholders, are named as consultants to the task force.

This amendment underscores the incredible importance and urgency of protecting honey bees — and mobilizes inter-agency attention and resources. [Bees need help](#), and fast. And we need them to sustain the variety of food we eat and our agricultural economies.

Protecting air, water & soil

One of the most important things the Farm Bill does is support farmers' [stewardship of their land](#) and protection of our air, soil and water. Two conservation-related amendments would support for farmers who implement resource-saving practices.

Senators Leahy, Cowan and Collins sponsored an amendment (#1093) that would give organic and transitioning farmers better access to the [Environmental Quality Incentives Program \(EQIP\)](#). EQIP helps farmers and ranchers put smart conservation measures in place on their farm — a win-win for

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the farmer and for natural resources. But right now, [organic farmers](#) are eligible for much less support than conventional farmers through this program.

Another key amendment, introduced by Senators Whitehouse and Udall (#1058), would make farmers and ranchers who are tackling local conservation and adapting their practices to changing weather patterns eligible for the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP).

A worthwhile investment

As [noted](#) by PAN senior scientist Margaret Reeves, it's more important now than ever to support farmers working to conserve our resources:

"In the face of severe erosion, water depletion, mounting energy prices and one of the worst droughts in decades, we need bigger — not smaller — investments in farm conservation to protect the land that is our long-term food security."

Once the Senate is back in session on Monday, debate will pick up quickly. To stay updated on the progress of specific pieces of the Farm Bill, check out the "[amendment tracker](#)" created by our friends at the [National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition](#).

But this week, before the Farm Bill debate resumes, [join us](#) in getting a strong message across to the Senate: Support food and farming policies that are good for farmers, pollinators and our future. [Contact your Senators, today!](#)

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