



**NORTH AMERICA  
AGRICULTURE**  
Impact Report

2025

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# From the Desk of Kris Johnson



As we look toward 2030, The Nature Conservancy's vision is clear: a livable climate, healthy communities, and thriving nature. Achieving this vision requires bold action to address two interconnected crises—climate change and biodiversity loss—while ensuring a secure and resilient food system. Agriculture sits at the heart of this challenge—and at the heart of the solution.

The world's food system accounts for one-third of global greenhouse gas emissions, and the expansion of agricultural lands remains a leading cause of habitat loss. At the same time, farmers and ranchers face mounting pressures: extreme weather, rising costs, market volatility, and significant debt. These challenges threaten livelihoods and food security, and they will only intensify as global food demand is projected to increase by 50% by 2050.

**The North America Agriculture program is helping transform these challenges into opportunities for people and nature.** Through science-based strategies, policy advocacy, and partnerships across the food and agriculture industries, we are accelerating the adoption of regenerative practices that restore soil health, improve water quality, and reduce emissions—while supporting farm profitability and resilience.

In 2025, our team worked with producers, companies, and policymakers to scale solutions that matter. From informing supply chains and business models to mobilizing policy support, we are creating the conditions for systemic change. Our collaborations with industry leaders, such as the U.S. dairy sector, are helping them tackle ambitious climate goals. At the same time, we are equipping farmers and trusted advisors with technical guidance and financial resources to enable the transition to regenerative practices.

This work is more than conservation—it is about securing a future where agriculture thrives alongside nature. By embracing large-scale regeneration and restoration of the lands and waters that supply our food, we can ensure a sustainable future for people and the planet.

Thank you for standing with us as we advance this critical mission. Together, we are building a resilient agricultural system that nourishes communities, protects biodiversity, and helps achieve TNC's 2030 goals.

**Kris Johnson, Ph.D.**

Director, North America Agriculture  
The Nature Conservancy

# Our 2030 Goals

The Nature Conservancy believes that advancing regenerative agriculture solutions is among the essential pathways to reverse the interconnected crises of climate change and biodiversity loss.

By 2030, the North America Ag program aims to:



Improve management on **240 million acres** of grazing lands



Improve management on **57 million at-risk acres** of grazing lands from conversion



Avoid or sequester **57 million metric tons** of carbon emissions per year through regenerative management of crops and grazing lands



Improve environmental outcomes from **50% of U.S. row crop acres** through widespread adoption or in-field and edge of field practices.



Boost water quality in **4.3 million acres** of the Chesapeake Bay, Gulf and other lakes and coastal zones



Improve the health of **162,174 miles** of rivers and streams.

Learn more about TNC's global [2030 goals](#).



# Our Work

## Transforming Food Systems to Benefit People and Nature

Agriculture is on the frontlines of climate change and biodiversity loss, and farmers and ranchers increasingly feel the impacts—more extreme weather, rising input costs, and pressure to produce more food on less land. At the same time, agriculture is one of the most powerful levers we have to restore ecosystems, strengthen rural economies, and build a climate resilient future. The Nature Conservancy's [North America Agriculture](#) program is working to make that future possible.

We partner directly with **farmers and ranchers** to implement regenerative practices that improve soil health, enhance productivity, and increase resilience to climate and market shocks. By advancing science and elevating producers' local knowledge, we help ensure that practical, profitable solutions take root on the ground—whether through regenerative grazing systems, healthier soils, nutrient efficient cropping, or edge of field practices that improve water quality.

We collaborate with **trusted advisors, food companies** and the **agriculture industry** to transform business models and supply chains. Through partnerships with companies, cooperatives, and commodity groups, we help build accountability, expand market demand for sustainably produced food, and scale the innovations needed to meet climate and biodiversity goals. Our work spans agtech pilots, sustainability roadmaps, ecosystem markets, and virtual fencing research.

We work with **policymakers** at the state and federal levels to mobilize support for nature-friendly policies and public investments that make regenerative agriculture accessible and economically viable for producers of all backgrounds. From advancing Farm Bill priorities to shaping federal nature-positive programs, we advocate for policies that reduce risk, reward stewardship, and strengthen rural communities.

Together—with producers, industry partners, researchers, and policymakers—we are building a more resilient food system that reduces greenhouse gas emissions, protects water resources, restores habitat, and improves the livelihoods of the farmers and ranchers who feed us.

Learn more about our work and get acquainted with our team members at [nature.org/workinglands](https://nature.org/workinglands).

Iowa farm © Harlen Persinger



## Mapping for Maximum Impact

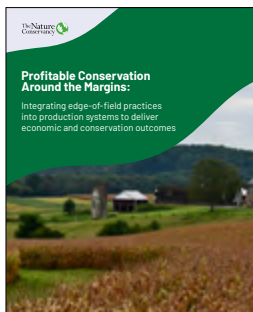
The Mississippi River Basin and Chesapeake Bay watershed are two of North America's most vital landscapes for water quality, yet nutrient runoff from farmland continues to threaten drinking water, aquatic ecosystems, and community health downstream. To address this challenge, The Nature Conservancy is using advanced GIS analysis to identify "edge of field" opportunity areas—locations where conservation practices can provide the greatest environmental and economic return.

With partial support from Corteva, TNC's analysis integrates ecological factors, agronomic considerations, and farm management realities. This approach identifies where five proven conservation practices can be most effective: restorable wetlands, vegetative riparian buffers, saturated buffers, grassed waterways, and contour buffer strips.

By incorporating farmer input to define marginal or hard to manage acres, the project highlights areas where edge of field practices can reduce nutrient runoff while improving farm profitability. The resulting maps can help producers and conservationists direct investments where they will have the most impact.

This work builds on findings from the new *Profitable Conservation Around the Margins* report, which shows that edge of field practices improve water quality, biodiversity, and bottom line performance by turning marginal lands into conservation assets. While the initial focus is Indiana and the Chesapeake Bay region, insights from this project can guide strategies across other geographies.

Learn more at [nature.org/EdgeofField](https://nature.org/EdgeofField).



[Read the full report here.](#)

Saturated buffer, Iowa © Lynn Betts (NRCS-SWCS)



“Whether you’re a farmer, a crop advisor, or part of the value chain, regenerative agriculture just makes smart business sense.”

Luke Petersen  
Regenerative Crop Systems Specialist

## Empowering Retailers and Advisors

Through its Farmer Advisor strategy, the North America Agriculture program is accelerating regenerative agriculture by empowering the trusted advisors and retailers who help shape on-farm decision making.

### Farmer Advisor Roadmap

In 2025, TNC brought together more than two dozen agricultural partners—from conservation groups and agribusinesses to farmer organizations and supply chain leaders—to co-create a roadmap for scaling regenerative agriculture through private-sector trusted farm advisors.

Through virtual sessions, a two-day workshop, and broad stakeholder input, the group aligned on a shared vision, identified key challenges, and set cross-sector investment priorities. The roadmap, to be released in early 2026, will strengthen TNC’s farmer advisor strategy and amplify the role of private-sector advisors in accelerating regenerative practices across North America.

### Expanding Retailer Capacity to Deliver Regenerative Agriculture

In 2025, The Nature Conservancy secured funding and advanced program design for a new Ag Retailer Equipment Cost Share program, laying critical groundwork for its launch in January 2026. The program will support agricultural retailers and service providers in the Upper Mississippi River Foodscape by offsetting equipment costs that enable regenerative agriculture services, including cover crops, reduced tillage, and diversified rotations.

Planning efforts in 2025 will ensure strong accountability and impact, as awardees will be required to track acres served, support outreach and field demonstrations, and share lessons learned to scale regenerative practices across the region.

By investing in the capacity of trusted local service providers, the initiative is designed to accelerate farmer adoption across thousands of acres.

Learn more at [nature.org/crops](https://nature.org/crops)

*Leif Fixen (right), North America agriculture strategy manager, and a partner visit a no-till field in Minnesota © Creative Fauna*

## Transforming Agricultural Landscapes

### Scaling Oats for a Sustainable Future

TNC's Upper Mississippi River (UMR) Foodscape team collaborated with farmers and industry leaders to advance food-grade oat production across the region—supporting crop diversification beyond corn and soy and strengthening farm resilience.

Efforts included a feasibility study for oat storage and milling infrastructure, farm level economic modeling, exploration of crop insurance options, and an oat field day with Practical Farmers of Iowa. [Learn why oats matter.](#)

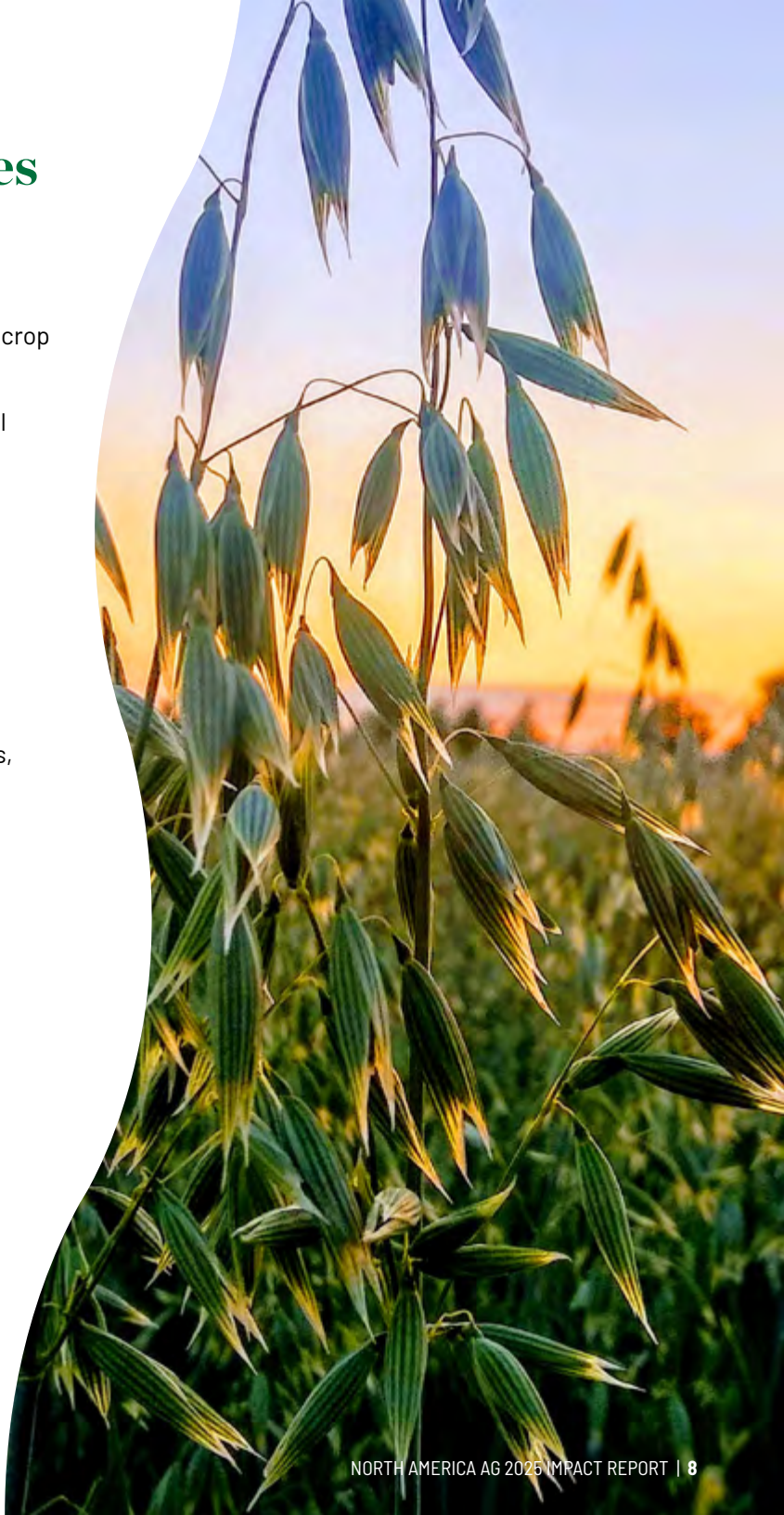
### Investing in Partners

In 2025, the UMR Foodscape team invested **\$250,000** in grants to support farmer-led innovation, watershed resilience, and transition pathways through various partner organizations throughout Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota and Wisconsin. By investing in these organizations, TNC is accelerating on-the-ground solutions that benefit farmers, communities, and ecosystems.

Learn more at [nature.org/UMRfoodscape](https://nature.org/UMRfoodscape).



UMR Foodscape © Alison Surdoyal/TNC; Oats on a Wisconsin farm © Ryan Stockwell/TNC





## Advancing Policy for Rotational Grazing

The UMR Foodscape team partnered with the Wisconsin Grazing Coalition to advance SB113, which would provide grants for technical assistance to help farmers adopt rotational grazing systems. Although the bill did not pass this session, the effort strengthened relationships and laid critical groundwork for future advocacy.

## New U.S. Foodscape

TNC recognized the Chesapeake Bay as its newest global foodscape, marking a milestone for regenerative agriculture across the Mid Atlantic. The project is linking upstream growers with downstream seafood producers through shared goals for cleaner water, improved habitat, and sustainable food production.

The Chesapeake Bay Foodscape team is partnering with trusted advisors to pilot new incentives and technologies, supporting diversified agricultural systems, and restoring habitat across working lands, along the shoreline, and in the water of the Bay. This work integrates land-based agriculture with water-based food production, highlighting how healthy watersheds support both upstream farmers and downstream watermen whose livelihoods depend on clean, productive waters.

Learn more about the [Chesapeake Bay Foodscape](#).

## Improving Public Health from the Ground Up

Thanks to a generous private donation, the North America Agriculture team launched the *Healthy Agriculture, Healthy America* initiative—a bold effort to explore how regenerative agriculture supports human health. This work bridges science, policy, and communications to create lasting impact.

In its first year, *Healthy Agriculture, Healthy America* has advanced scientific understanding of how regenerative agriculture can improve human health, while shaping policy conversations at state and national levels. Our team, for instance, provided evidence-based insights that informed a *Forbes* op-ed by former Senator Bill Frist of Tennessee, elevating the message that regenerative farming is America's first line of defense for health. We also delivered a policy recommendation letter to the Make America Healthy Again Commission, positioning regenerative agriculture as a solution for healthier communities.

Through research collaborations, case studies, and a science roadmap, we are prioritizing pathways that connect agriculture, human health, and ecosystem health—laying the groundwork for systemic change.

*Healthy Agriculture, Healthy America* is not just producing knowledge. It is driving influence and action to ensure regenerative agriculture benefits people, climate, and nature.

Learn more at [nature.org/HealthyAg](https://nature.org/HealthyAg).

Drinking water © iStock





## Catalyzing Digital Innovation

Combining strategic investment, technical support, and shared learning, the Regenerative Grazing Lands (RGL) team has played a pivotal role in advancing virtual fencing as a viable tool for improved grazing management and large-scale land health across U.S. grazing landscapes. Early pilot projects with ranchers in Colorado, Kansas, and New Mexico demonstrated both conservation and operational benefits, building confidence among staff, partners, and ranchers.

Initial investment from the Grantham Environmental Trust served as a catalyst—launching a coordinated, multi state strategy to address large-scale landscape challenges across the West. This early support elevated TNC as a trusted leader among agencies, partners, and ranchers, and positioned the organization at the forefront of advancing virtual fencing as a scalable tool for improved grazing management. As a result, TNC has leveraged this momentum to secure approximately **\$7 million** in additional funding, including **~1.3 million** in private philanthropy, **~\$4 million** in Bureau of Land Management funding, and **\$1.7 million** from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

Together, these early investments laid the foundation for broader uptake, catalyzing the expansion of virtual fencing to improve grazing management across **13 TNC state programs**. This growth includes a suite of projects in the Sagebrush Sea and Northern Great Plains, accelerating adoption in TNC's priority landscapes through strong collaboration with partners and rancher networks.

The RGL team also provides coordination and capacity building by hosting a monthly virtual fence network call for TNC staff. These sessions foster peer learning, provide new adopter support, and provide models for expanding and accelerating adoption.

Learn more at [nature.org/virtualfence](https://nature.org/virtualfence).

*Cow with GPS collar © Elizabeth Owens/TNC*

## Driving Sustainability from Pasture to Plate

TNC's North America Regenerative Grazing Lands (RGL) team worked with Where Food Comes From—the largest commercial provider of certification and verification services to the livestock industry—to integrate environmental sustainability measures into the company's CARE Certified standard. Using independent third-party verifiers, this program aligns beef production with regenerative principles and offers rancher incentives through traceability to ensure optimal outcomes.

To date, this initiative has influenced **about 36 million acres** of grazing lands—a major milestone helping to ensure independent, third-party verification that builds trust and drives adoption across the beef supply chain. [Learn more here.](#)

In 2025, the RGL team also launched a collaboration with Texas A&M and CARE Certified to evaluate the company's approach to certifying ranch operations using sustainable management principles. This work, combined with a side-by-side analysis of all major U.S. ranch certification programs, will provide a roadmap for improving and expanding certification programs to advance regenerative management in North America.

*Part of a herd of cattle standing in a field.*  
© Lauryn Wachs/TNC



“By connecting TNC leaders and actions across continents, we’re advancing grassland conservation worldwide with urgency and optimism.”

William Burnidge  
Special Projects Director  
North America Regenerative Grazing Lands

## Collaborating Globally

### TNC and USRSB Go to Rome

[Nancy Labbe](#), co-director of TNC’s North America Regenerative Grazing Lands strategy and chair of the U.S. Roundtable for Sustainable Beef, joined global leaders—including TNC’s Fábio Schuler Medeiros, global director of strategic cattle partnerships—at the second FAO Global Conference on Sustainable Livestock Transformation in Rome.

The conference focused on turning dialogue into action by fostering change, scaling innovations, and driving solutions. Nancy shared: “The issues and opportunities across the globe are more similar than I expected. Producer livelihoods, scalable solutions, and a transparent supply chain remain top priorities.”

Learn more about the [TNC-USRSB collaboration](#).

### Grasslands Conservation Network

Nearly 100 experts from four continents gathered at University of California, Santa Barbara for the Grassland Conservation Network’s biannual meeting, organized by the North America Agriculture Program’s Regenerative Grazing Lands team.

The event brought together TNC’s top grasslands experts and renowned advocates from outside the organization to share and develop strategies and plans for protecting one of the planet’s most threatened habitats. The gathering reinforced a powerful message: diverse expertise and collective action are driving hope and progress for grassland conservation worldwide.

*Meadow of coneflowers in the Tallgrass Prairie, OK*  
© Harvey Payne

## Strengthening Rancher-led Networks

The Nature Conservancy is leveraging targeted philanthropic and public investments—including funds from the U.S. Department of Defense and USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service—to strengthen partner organizations and program delivery in support of rancher-led and Indigenous partner organizations across the Northern Great Plains and the West. This funding is advancing sustainable grazing management, prescribed fire training, and generational land transfer efforts that protect working grasslands from conversion to crop production and other detrimental uses.

These investments support on-the-ground stewardship projects—such as grazing management planning and invasive species control—that improve rangeland health, livelihoods, and long-term resilience.

Funding also advances improved grazing management on public and private lands, delivering conservation benefits and fostering influential peer learning through technology and outreach delivered by organizations that producers trust.

**“Strategic investment in rancher-led networks is delivering measurable conservation outcomes while sustaining rural economies.”**

Rob Manes  
Co-director, North America Grazing Lands

*Rancher in the Southern High Plains region © Morgan Heim*





## Accelerating Climate Solutions with Science-driven Collaboration

Through collaborations with leading brands, producer organizations, and public partners, TNC is helping pair science-based solutions with incentives and technical support. These efforts are reducing emissions, improving soil and water stewardship, and building resilient dairy systems that benefit farmers, communities, and nature.

### Celebrating Partnerships and Contributions

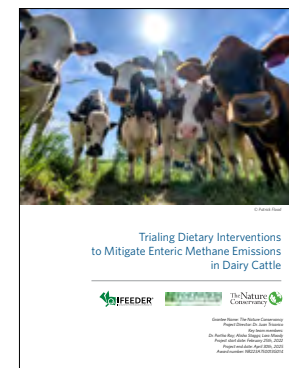
A major engagement launched this year, signaling progress toward climate goals. A collaboration with Danone and Ahold Delhaize USA focuses on reducing methane emissions through practices such as manure separation, composting, and irrigation efficiency—helping farmers cut greenhouse gases while improving resilience.

Learn more about [this collaboration](#).

### Research and Innovation

A USDA-funded project led by TNC, the Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy, and the Institute for Feed Education and Research explored feed management strategies to reduce enteric methane emissions.

Findings confirm these practices offer both production and environmental benefits, though variability highlights the need for financial incentives to encourage adoption.



Read the [full report here](#).

Wisconsin dairy cows © Patrick Flood

## Driving Measurable Impact

The Feed in Focus program—an industry-led effort to help improve feed production and feed efficiency on U.S. dairy farms, while reducing GHG emissions and contributing to improved water quality and soil health—reached new milestones.

In 2025, **37 farms** of varying sizes across **three states** participated, representing **44,037 acres** and **34,852 dairy cows**. The program helped reduce greenhouse gas emission by **5,142 metric tons of CO<sub>2</sub>e**, the equivalent of **1,072 homes'** use of electricity in one year.

In collaboration with the farmers, project staff are collecting data and creating scientifically credible examples of the best agronomic and farm management practices.

Learn more at [nature.org/USdairy](https://nature.org/USdairy).

## Simplifying Sustainability


TNC collaborated with Dairy Management Inc. on the development of the Dairy Conservation Navigator. The site features a learning hub with **13 courses** on dairy sustainability topics; practices and technologies list that allows users to identify, explore, and compare proven and emerging practices; and practical information on **80+ practices**.

Learn more about the [Dairy Navigator](#).

## Creating Greater Impact

TNC worked with partners to host two Dairy Sustainability Forums, uniting **more than 75 organizations** to collaboratively address regional sustainability challenges. The forums, held in the Upper Midwest and the Southeast, promoted cross-sector collaboration to align conservation efforts across states for greater impact.

Wisconsin dairy farmer © Alita Films



“We know every dairy farm is different and we pride ourselves on meeting the individual farmers where they are in their sustainability journey.”

Joel Leland  
Dairy Program Specialist

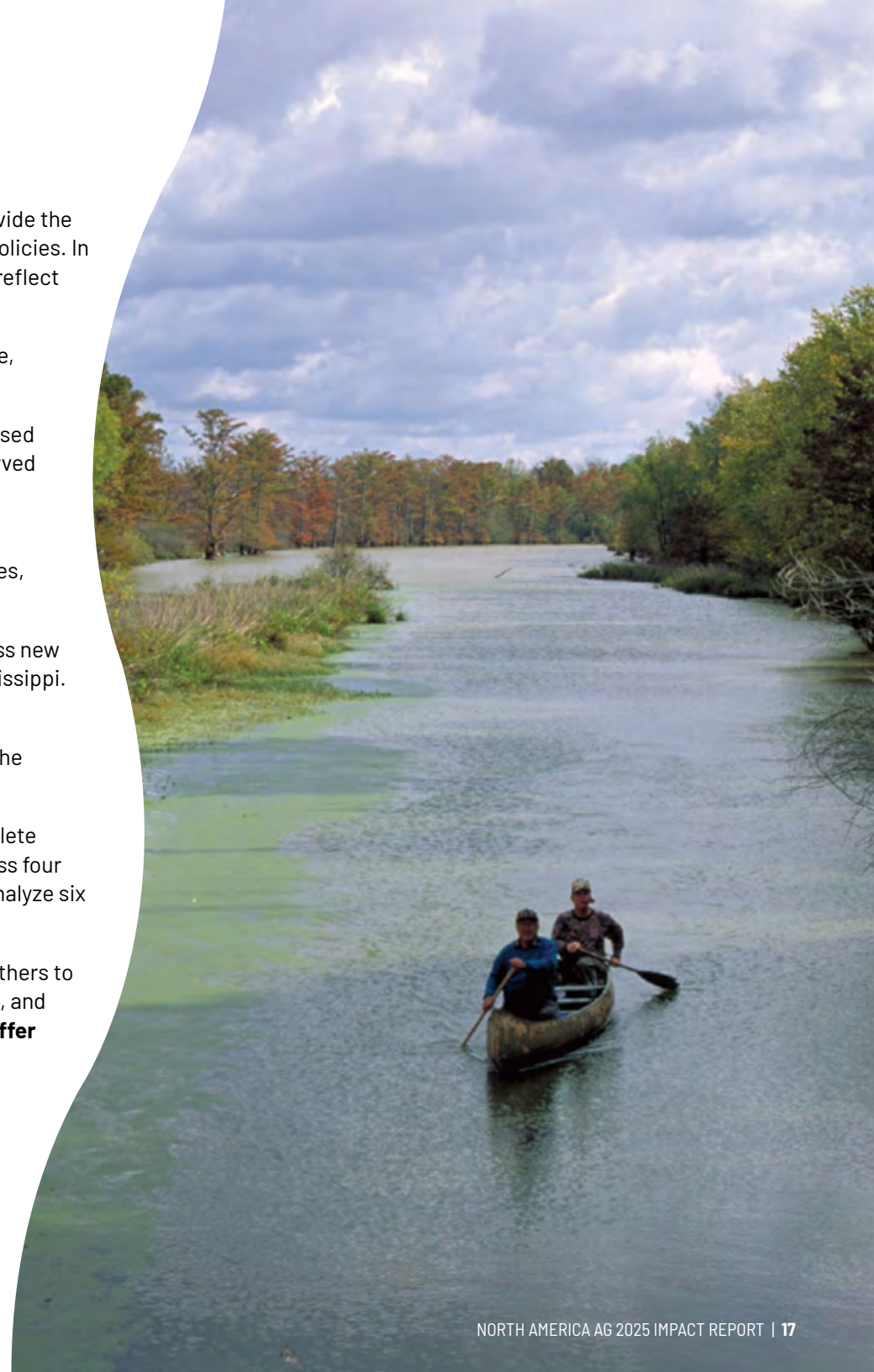
## Leading on Water Policy

Created in 2022, the Ag-Water Policy Accelerator was created to provide the expertise and resources needed to advance effective water quality policies. In 2025, the effort was renamed the Water Policy Accelerator (WPA) to reflect its expanded nationwide focus.

Throughout 2025 WPA delivered policy research, legislative guidance, strategy development, and campaign support **across 24 states**.

- With WPA support, the Tennessee state program blocked a proposed repeal of all **wetland protections** and secured a policy that preserved key safeguards.
- In Illinois, a **wetlands bill** drafted by WPA in 2024 advanced out of committee, and staff is continuing to work with sponsors, agencies, and the Governor's office to pass it.
- The WPA team also supported **ongoing efforts** in Delaware to pass new wetlands protections and strengthen existing protections in Mississippi.
- Working closely with TNC's North America Policy and Government Relations team, WPA coordinated input on proposed changes to the federal **Waters of the United States** rule.
- WPA worked with the Upper Mississippi Foodscape team to complete an **inventory of agriculture-related water quality programs** across four states, including partnering with the University of Minnesota to analyze six priority policies.
- WPA worked with the Global Conservation Campaigns team and others to conduct policy and communication research in Minnesota, Illinois, and Iowa. This work is informing recommendations on **agriculture buffer policies**.

Cache River Wetlands of Illinois © Harold E. Malde



## From Advocacy to Impact

Alongside government relations staff across the country, the North America Agriculture program played a pivotal role in safeguarding and advancing federal investments in conservation, strengthening the resilience of USDA-funded projects, and elevating the role of regenerative agriculture in national health and policy conversations. Through strategic advocacy, research, and engagement with policymakers and producers alike, TNC helped secure critical resources for farmers and demonstrate the value of conservation.

- **Increased baseline funding for Farm Bill conservation programs:** TNC's top Farm Bill priority in 2025 was defending conservation funding throughout the reconciliation process and securing the permanent integration of remaining Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) dollars into Farm Bill conservation programs. Through a coordinated campaign that included national and state-level economic research, op-eds, congressional briefings and events, paid media, and grassroots outreach, we helped achieve a landmark outcome. These efforts will result in approximately **\$2 billion per year** in additional mandatory funding for conservation programs, providing long-term stability and scale for voluntary, producer-led solutions.
- **USDA conservation project defense:** In 2025, USDA-funded conservation projects—particularly pending IRA-funded awards—were subject to heightened review, pauses, and, in some cases, termination. As USDA reassessed active and pending projects, TNC worked proactively to educate new agency leadership, career staff, and Congress on the demonstrated benefits of our conservation partnerships for producers, rural communities, and the environment. While not all projects were ultimately preserved, TNC-led initiatives advanced at a higher-than-average rate, enabling continued delivery of conservation outcomes on working lands.
- **Advancing the agriculture and human health connection:** Policymaker interest in the intersection of agriculture and human health grew significantly in 2025. TNC provided targeted recommendations to the Make America Healthy Again (MAHA) Commission ahead of the September release of the MAHA Strategy, with our influence reflected in a new focus on land stewardship and a recommendation underscoring the importance of conservation technical assistance. This momentum was further reinforced by USDA's announcement of a Regenerative Agriculture Pilot program, which will invest **\$700 million** through the Environmental Quality Incentives and Conservation Stewardship programs, alongside **\$300 million** in technical assistance. TNC is working to support strong implementation of the pilot, positioning it as a key opportunity to demonstrate how on-farm conservation advances both environmental outcomes and administration health priorities, even amid a challenging budget environment.

U.S. Capitol Building © Devan King/TNC

# Conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends.

To learn more about The Nature Conservancy's work to advance regenerative agriculture for the benefit of people, climate, and nature, visit [nature.org/workinglands](https://www.nature.org/workinglands).



We are grateful to all of our donors for their ongoing support. To make a donation that will have an immediate impact on nature, please visit [nature.org/donate](https://www.nature.org/donate).

*Grazing cattle, South Dakota © Richard Hamilton Smith*