

METHODS: RCAP POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS 2026

We present policy recommendations supporting farmer adoption of more resilient agricultural practices. Based on issue-specific focus groups with a wide range of agriculture stakeholders conducted in summer of 2025, strategic policy recommendations cover three crucial areas: farmer technical assistance; value chains; and capital (access to land, credit, and insurance). Recommendations are made in three different policy arenas: federal legislation, implementation of federal legislation, and state and local policies. We highlight pathways for academic researchers, farmer-serving organizations, and other stakeholders to be involved in policy-relevant work.

We define resilient agricultural practices as those that promote three characteristics of agricultural systems – species and functional **diversity**, **perenniality**, and **circularity** of nutrient and energy cycling. Technical assistance for farmers is crucial for providing access to information about more resilient practices

The policy recommendations in this report are a result of a formal research process, integrating voices of a wide variety of experts in applied agricultural fields, agricultural advocacy, agency staff, and academic researchers. As human subjects research, the project was reviewed and deemed exempt by the University of Wisconsin Institutional Review Board.

FOCUS GROUPS

In fall 2023, the core research team developed a selection of prioritized areas of policy interest, along with the range of scale we wished to explore. These priorities were based on the team's experience and expertise, and weighed considerations such as which issues were raised in our previous research interviews with farmers across the country, policy-centered focus groups conducted in spring 2021, and researchers' experience with a variety of organizations working on developing policies supporting the adoption of more resilient agricultural practices.

We invited approximately 40 individuals to participate in iterative focus group conversations conducted in the summer of 2025. Individuals represented a variety of professional groups and organizational types, including those who provide information to and support technical assistance providers; directly design or deliver technical assistance to farmers; oversee agricultural credit programs; advocate for resilient

Series: Policy for Resilient Agricultural Systems, 2026

agriculture policies; provide or coordinate county level conservation assistance; and those who work for farmer-serving orgs.

The non-random sample of participants were identified from researchers' professional contacts, as well as through some snowball sampling (i.e. researchers asked their contacts for suggestions). We recruited participation from people associated with a range of organizations, from different regions of the United States, and invited about an equal number of women and men.

Participants were invited to take part in a two part data collection effort. First, topical focus groups were hosted via Zoom, each lasting about 2 hours. Each participant was involved in one of three topical focus groups, either technical assistance, value chains, or capital. Data from that first round was analyzed by the research team, and a first round of analysis was sent to participants to review. Participants were asked to participate in a second round of focus groups, providing feedback on the initial analysis. This second round of focus groups lasted approximately 1.5 hours. All focus groups were conducted using Zoom, were recorded (both video and audio), and transcribed. Additionally, research team members took notes during the focus groups. All data was stored securely on university administered cloud-based storage systems or on password-protected computers.

Twenty-five individuals were able to participate in the first round of focus groups, with approximately a dozen individuals able to participate in the second round. Some participants who were unable to take part in the second focus group were able to provide feedback on the initial analysis individually, or via email.

Participants were offered an honorarium of a \$200 gift card to recognize their time and expertise. All data, audio and video recordings, and interview/focus group transcripts were stored on secure, university systems, or password-protected computers, and no identifiable data was shared outside of the research group. Information like specific organizations, locations, or events have been redacted or generalized. Since data was collected primarily through group interviews involving several participants, we requested that participants not share their fellow participants' identity or identifying details, but reminded participants that we could not guarantee confidentiality.

INITIAL ANALYSIS AND INSIGHTS

Initial analyses were conducted with the help of Nvivo, a software package used to facilitate qualitative data analysis. First we analyzed focus group transcripts taking a

Series: Policy for Resilient Agricultural Systems, 2026

deductive approach, coding transcripts using pre-determined thematic labels directly related to the project's research questions and to the prepared focus group question guide. Next we analyzed and coded emergent themes, identifying themes beyond those pre-identified by researchers.

Coded transcript excerpts were compiled by topic and theme, and researchers developed policy recommendation drafts based on those findings.

Participants received draft policy recommendations and a collection of representative transcript quotes, along with guided reflection questions. Participants were asked to attend a second focus group to provide feedback and discuss the draft recommendations and policy strategy. While only about half of the participants were able to participate in the second round of focus groups, others provided feedback in individual conversations or via email.

Based on the second round of data collection, we modified and added to the initial draft recommendations.

To access policy recommendations and related resources, please refer to the webpage: <https://ag-resilience.org/policy-socioeconomic/>.