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CRYSTAL DOROTHY

## IN THE LAST DACADE

**\$29 billion**

In crop damages caused by floods and excess moisture over the last decade.

**172 million**

Cumulative acres impacted by flooding.

**9,460**

Agriculture disasters due to flooding over the last decade.

**303**

Number of easements enrolled in EWPP-Floodplain Easement Program.

## REFORM USDA'S EMERGENCY WATERSHED PROTECTION PROGRAM

Extreme weather can strike farmers, landowners, agriculture producers at any time and any place. Dealing with the aftermath can be challenging and expensive especially in rural communities. Floodplain easements compensate landowners and farmers for permanently conserving flood-prone lands through voluntary and market driven policy measures backed by science and economics.

A new report by American Rivers shows improving the national and existing USDA Floodplain Easement Program in the 2023 Farm Bill, Congress can enroll easement acres annually and provide farmers with much needed flood damage reduction strategies to conserve and protect ecosystems while feeding our nation and the world.

### OVERVIEW

USDA's Emergency Watershed Protection-Floodplain Easement Program (EWPP-FPE) is an existing program that offers technical and financial assistance to help communities relieve imminent threats to life and property caused by floods, fires, and other natural disasters that impair a watershed.

The EWPP-FPE needs to be reformed to help farmers reduce the financial impact of floods and use their flood-prone land for more profitable purposes that improve the health of people, wildlife, and rivers.

**RISING COSTS:** Farmers enrolled in the Federal Crop Insurance Program reported that flooding caused \$29 billion in damages in the last decade.

**FREQUENTLY FLOODED:** Flooding is the most prevalent natural disaster in the United States. Over 90% of natural disasters involve some kind of flooding. On average each year, flooding causes \$8 billion in damages and 82 fatalities.

**IN DEMAND:** Requests for easements greatly exceed awards. Despite the valuable assistance of the program, concerns remain with the implementation of EWP, including its eligibility requirements and approval processes. Funding for floodplain easements is rarely available in where flood damages occur.

## HOW CONGRESS CAN HELP

This next farm bill needs to be better, not just bigger. We urge members of Congress to introduce legislation to reform USDA's Emergency Watershed Protection-Floodplain Easement Program.

Congress needs to help farmers, landowners, and ag producers manage flood prone land to protect people, reduce the cost of disaster recovery, improve water quality, and conserve habitat for fish and wildlife.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Fund long-term flood damage reduction strategies

Establish a mandatory, open-enrollment program to benefit agricultural producers increase resiliency to floods.

### Establish a tracking system for floodplain easements

The existing Conservation Effects Assessment Project (CEAP) offers one important opportunity to conduct an evaluation of floodplain easements.

### Require USDA to collaborate with economic experts

This research should include evaluation of alternative funding sources for floodplain easements based on their provision of marketable ecosystem services.

### Require USDA to work with FEMA and USACE to track damages

The USDA needs to track where flood and excess rain/moisture damages through programs administered by FEMA and the USACE. This would identify properties that are at the most at risk of flooding, and help prioritize investments.

### Require USDA to develop Best Management Practices to reduce flood damages in the Ag sector

These recommendations could include flood-compatible recreational uses like hunting and fishing, crop modifications that are flood-tolerant, and alternative land uses like grazing.

### Require USDA to improve guidance on floodplain restoration to meet natural resource challenges

NRCS needs to develop clear guidance on how farmers can maximize the multiple benefits of floodplain restoration.

### Remove land-tenure requirements

This reduces unnecessary paperwork for landowners and NRCS staff and delivers funding where it's needed most.

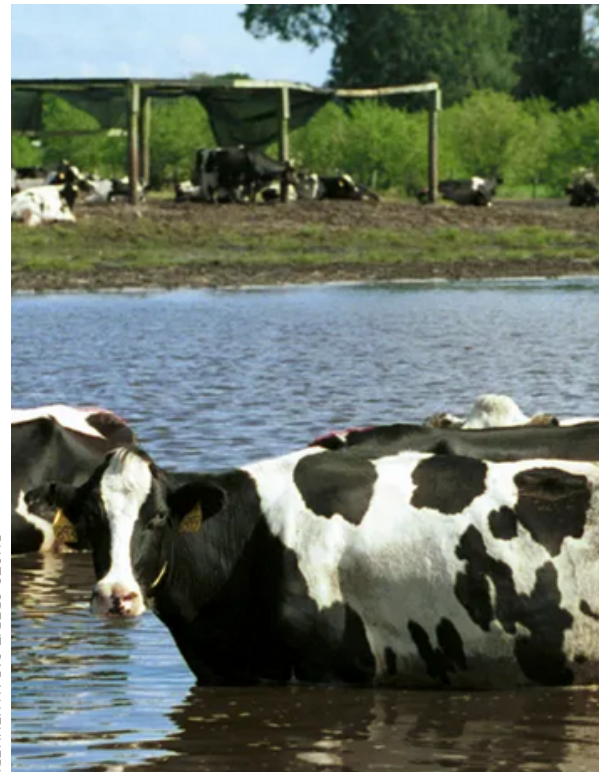


PHOTO CREDIT: SARAH KENNEDY

Payments provided to landowners will allow them to put their land to work to provide flood storage. If landowners are reimbursed for flood storage-compatible uses of the floodprone areas of their property, flood damages will be reduced.



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American Rivers is championing a national effort to protect and restore all rivers, from remote mountain streams to urban waterways. Healthy rivers provide people and nature with clean, abundant water and natural habitat. For 50 years, American Rivers staff, supporters, and partners have shared a common belief: Life Depends on Rivers. [www.AmericanRivers.org](http://www.AmericanRivers.org)