



AGree 2016 | Initiatives and Farm Bill Convenings

A Trusted Platform for Dialogue, Action, and Advocacy

AGree was launched in 2011 to drive positive change in the food and agriculture system by connecting and challenging leaders from diverse communities to build consensus, catalyze action, and elevate food and agriculture as a national priority. Since its inception, AGree has served as a platform for dialogue and action on complex and often contentious policy issues with an eye toward directly informing and influencing private sector action and food and farm policy in the upcoming farm bill and related processes such as budget and annual appropriations.

Unique in the food and agriculture policy space, AGree has forged common ground between farmers and ranchers, companies, commodity organizations, researchers, environmentalists, doctors and nutritionists, and other experts who understand that food and agriculture underpin the very wellbeing of our nation.

Despite widely divergent views, AGree's partners created a common vision for a 21st century food and agriculture system, developed [eight Initiatives](#), and reached consensus on diverse recommendations that take an integrated, multidisciplinary approach to addressing critical issues. AGree is now supporting groundbreaking research on the relationship between agricultural conservation and risk management; has launched a pilot watershed-scale conservation effort with farmers, the supply chain, NGOs, and regulators in Minnesota; and is launching a nationwide Next Generation Farmers and Ranchers program to support existing farmer and rancher apprentice organizations and their graduates.

As we look ahead towards the next farm bill – which is anticipated to be passed in 2018 with preparations beginning in 2016 – AGree can provide a safe and trusted space for discussion among a broad range of groups about complex and often controversial food and agriculture policy issues.

Congressional leaders responsible for developing the next farm bill, foundations, and others have expressed interest in utilizing the AGree platform to convene diverse stakeholders around controversial but important issues affecting food and agriculture, including aspects of 2014 Farm Bill implementation and considerations for the 2018 Farm Bill. These requests indicate that AGree is positioned as a trusted partner who can play a crucial role in the 2018 Farm Bill discussions – as an information resource, honest broker of dialogue around challenging food and agriculture issues, and advocate for specific policy recommendations.

AGree Farm Bill Convenings and Initiatives in 2016

Through extensive dialogue and commissioned research, AGree's Co-Chairs and Advisors have developed the following [eight Initiatives](#) to drive change in policy and encourage private sector action:

- [Working Landscapes](#): Achieving Productivity, Profitability, and Environmental Outcomes;
- [Food & Nutrition](#): Cultivating Healthy Communities;
- [International Development](#): Promoting Development through Food and Agriculture;
- [Research & Innovation](#): Strengthening Agricultural Research, Education, and Extension;
- [Next Generation](#): Attracting Young People to Food and Agriculture;
- [Local Food](#): Revitalizing Community-based Food Systems;
- [Immigration Reform](#): Creating a Stable, Legal Workforce; and
- Risk Management: Protecting Farmers, Conserving Resources.

In addition to in-depth engagement on several Initiatives (outlined below in *AGree Initiatives in 2016*), AGree will also – as originally envisioned – provide a trusted platform for dialogue and problem-solving among diverse interests in advance of the 2018 Farm Bill.

Farm Bill Convenings

Given the dynamic nature of the food and ag sector and with the next farm bill on the horizon, AGree will hold – contingent on funding – approximately six convenings in the next 12 – 18 months on priority food and agriculture issues including but not limited to farm bill-relevant issues. These will be not-for-attribution, one-day convenings that provide participants an opportunity to explore issues in depth, hear new perspectives, and establish relationships with those in attendance. Short summaries will document the issues addressed, the range of views expressed, areas of convergence, and opportunities for collaboration, as well as areas of disagreement and divergence. Approximately 20 – 25 individuals will participate in each convening. The not-for-attribution summaries and key messages will be broadly distributed through multiple communications channels targeting key stakeholders and decision makers, including Congressional and campaign staff.

Based on Initiative activities and consultations in recent months with key stakeholders involved in the 2018 Farm Bill process and a wide range of political, NGO, industry, and government leaders, topics for convenings include but are not necessarily limited to:

1. **2014 Farm Bill Conservation Partnership Implementation**

How are conservation partnership programs, such as the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), included in the 2014 Farm Bill working? As we look ahead to the next farm bill, what are we learning and how can the programs be improved (e.g., through programmatic changes or synergies across federal departments)?

2. **2014 Farm Bill Crop Insurance Program Implementation**

From the perspectives of farmers, ranchers, insurance providers, and NGOs, how are the new crop insurance programs working and what changes, if any, should be considered?

3. **The Future of Risk Management Policy**

Is it time to rethink our approach to our safety net for American producers? How can producers – given price volatility and increasingly variable climate conditions – mitigate their risks beyond utilizing public safety net programs and familiar risk-reducing financial mechanisms?

4. **Regional, Local and Urban Food Policies**

How can existing federal policies and programs be expanded to support local, regional and urban food systems efforts that address equity, health, and food access? Specific areas to consider include 2014 Farm Bill implementation, the creation of a new “Urban Agriculture” title in the 2018 Farm Bill, programs that support new and beginning farmers and ranchers, and coordination with state and local policy and other federal agencies’ efforts (e.g., Transportation, Commerce, SBA, etc.).

5. **New Technologies**

The debate about GMOs rages globally, but a growing number of new technologies such as gene editing techniques are emerging. What are these technologies, how are they being used, and what are the implications for producers and consumers globally, government officials, and political leaders? In particular, what is the appropriate leadership role for the U.S. federal government (e.g., level of oversight of new technologies and agency involvement beyond USDA)?

6. **Antibiotic Use**

Driven by consumer demand, many large food companies are pledging to exclusively purchase meat that was produced without the use of prophylactic antibiotics. These pledges place pressure on producers to shift practices, yet producers lack support systems to help them make the change. How can private industry, researchers, and government best support producers in developing and implementing antibiotic-free practices?

7. **Food Labeling** (beyond GMO labeling)

GMO labeling issues are controversial and a constant headline, but there are a broader array of labels under consideration (e.g., GMO free). How does this proliferation of potential labeling requirements look from a farmer and rancher perspective?

8. **Data**

Policy makers, political leaders, companies, and others depend on robust and credible data to make informed decisions and wisely allocate taxpayer resources. In an era of “Big Data,” is it time modernize how USDA collects data, what data is collected, and how it is analyzed, used, and shared?

AGree Initiatives in 2016

In addition to holding convenings relevant to the 2018 Farm Bill, AGree will engage in an in-depth way on multiple Initiatives:

- **Enhance Profitability, Productivity, and Environmental Performance**

AGree catalyzed and is supporting a producer-led [Working Lands Conservation Partnership](#) (WLCP) pilot in Minnesota to improve water quality, productivity, and profitability in several Minnesota watersheds, and is exploring additional pilots in other states. AGree will communicate the WLCP model and the lessons learned from these pilots to a broad range of stakeholders, including state and federal policymakers, on a regular basis.

- **Drive Conservation through Data Integration and Analysis**

AGree is driving broader adoption of conservation practices among mainstream farmers and other producers through the integration and analysis of data on soil type and yield variability, which can strengthen and inform the crop insurance program, supply-chain sustainability standards, and decisions by farmers and ranchers. In close consultation with USDA leadership and policy makers, AGree’s [Conservation and Crop Insurance Task Force](#) is also advocating for near-term administrative changes to crop insurance policy that could facilitate producers’ willingness and ability to adopt conservation practices.

- **Support Local Food Systems and New Farmers and Ranchers**

AGree and its partner New Entry Sustainable Farming Project (Tufts University) are launching a [NextGenFR](#) pilot program in 2016 to support the next generation of U.S. farmers and ranchers and ensure a robust cadre of producers who can maintain our food supply across the country and be strong contributors to local and regional food systems. In partnership with New Entry, AGree is working to secure resources to support the initial launch. AGree will continue to provide convening power and strategic guidance on an ongoing basis.

- **Strengthen the [Nexus between Food, Nutrition and Health](#)**

The medical implications and associated healthcare costs of diet-related disease are well understood, and there is a growing evidence base for the healthcare costs of hunger and food insecurity. To improve health and reduce healthcare costs, AGree is pursuing ways to scale community models that leverage partnerships between healthcare, public health and wellness, anti-hunger, food retail, education, and other community institutions (e.g., faith-based groups). AGree is exploring a pilot in North Carolina that integrates services across these sectors, broadens existing local work, and leverages AGree's connections with national level players (e.g., USDA Food and Nutrition Service, Walmart, etc.). AGree and its partners will test the pilot model, build an evidence base, and then consider the policy implications of scaling and replicating the effort.

In addition, AGree will continue to engage on issues related to [research](#), [immigration](#), and [global food security](#).

Conclusion

AGree's work in 2016 will include the Initiative-specific activities outlined above, with a focus on cooperative conservation pilots, data integration to support the adoption of conservation practices, a nationwide network of next generation farmer and rancher apprentice programs, and the nexus of food, nutrition and health. In addition, AGree will organize farm bill convenings as described above, contingent on resources, to provide a safe space for constructive dialogue on pressing and controversial food and agriculture policy issues.

If there are topics for which you think the AGree platform could be leveraged to support policy analysis and development, please share your ideas with Deb Atwood (datwood@merid.org or 202.354.6447).