

AGree Diversified Farming Systems Research Scope of Work

This document provides an overview of the objectives, outcomes, and deliverables with accompanying cost estimates for the development of four policy white papers for the AGree initiative's Diversified Farming Systems workstream.

Background

[AGree](#) is a multi-stakeholder coalition made up of farmers and farm groups, environmental and conservation NGOs, and agribusinesses that advances policy change to incentivize the adoption of conservation practices. AGree's approach is grounded in supporting bipartisan and data-driven policies that recognize the role of innovative conservation practices in improving soil health, reducing agricultural risk, improving long-term resilience, and supporting farm profitability.

In 2023, AGree created the Diversified Farming Systems (DFS) Working Group to advance efforts to overcome economic and policy barriers to enable widespread and scaled adoption of diversified farming systems that manage farm risk, and improve social, economic, and environmental outcomes. Increased adoption of DFS can improve the overall health of the land (e.g., functional biodiversity, nutrient cycling, water retention, chemical inputs and greenhouse gas emissions reductions, carbon sequestration, etc.), reduce the need for external inputs, and increases positive on-farm outcomes and economic stability for producers and communities.

The AGree DFS Working Group carried out a series of 25+ interviews with a variety of diversified producers, academic and government researchers, and agriculture policy experts, held two expert panels and conducted background research of peer reviewed publications and technical assistance resources. Relevant findings are included in the addendum.

Based on the initial findings and an internal consensus-building process, AGree identified the following three policy objectives to scale DFS:

- Advance alternative markets and infrastructure that remove barriers to scale DFS.
- De-risk DFS through federal policies and programs, including crop insurance and conservation; and,
- Accelerate research and expand data access to support farmers' adoption of DFS.

Moving forward, the AGree DFS Working Group aims to support a process of research and convenings with key interest holders to collectively set policy priorities. The research will review current market, crop insurance, credit, infrastructure and conservation policies and programs and recommend adjustments to scale diversification. In tandem, AGree would invite external partners to form a DFS Advisory Group to review and input into the research, and gain specificity on policy objectives and possible pilot projects related to the collectively determined policy priorities.

Objectives

Meridian Institute, on behalf of the AGree initiative is seeking authors (two co-authors per white paper) that have knowledge of Diversified Farming Systems and specialize in policy related to the Federal Crop Insurance

Program, infrastructure, market development, and conservation programming. The authors would also need to identify data availability, access and needs related to those areas.

Tasks:

In order to reflect a collaborative, consultative process with the Advisory Group, and to ensure that the White Papers are relevant, amplifying, and not duplicative, the authors will:

- Solicit and synthesize existing research, evidence, tools, and case studies.
- Conduct interviews with experts/stakeholders on relevant policies.
- Participate in 1-2 consultative workshops (facilitated by AGree) in which Advisory Group members provide feedback on an initial outline or draft document.
- Incorporate feedback into a revised, final document reflective of group input.
- Present brief at an AGree Coalition Learning Event.

The four white papers (two co-authors per paper) will answer at a minimum the following questions:

- **Crop Insurance:** What are the suite of options that would **strengthen the Federal Crop Insurance Program (FCIP)** to overcome barriers and incentivize diversified farming systems practices and products (perennialization, cover crops, cover crop seeds, agroforestry, greater number/diversity of crops in rotation, etc.)?
- **Infrastructure:** What are the **infrastructure policies and programs** that would need to be improved and/or expanded to scale DFS, to include but not limited to improving cleaning, processing, and storage equipment for alternative crops?
- **Markets:** What policies and entities contribute to the development of **additional stable and reliable markets** for farmers seeking to diversify their operations (i.e. seed capital to support market growth strategies, Economic Development Authority, values-based procurement, marketing support for local agriculture programs, value-added producer grants)?
- **Conservation programming:** What are the **current conservation programs** that have the highest potential for impact but are underutilized (such as EQIP's Conservation Crop Rotation and Conservation Stewardship Program's Resource-Conserving Crop Rotation) and what improvements are needed to their conservation practice standards, job sheets, payment scenarios, technical assistance support, and financing mechanisms (including reimbursement-based granting system) to expand use, impact, and relevance to supporting and scaling adoption of DFS systems?
- Assess **data needs** to advance diversified farming system policies as part of each paper.

Deliverables:

By September 1, 2024, the co-authors will submit a 5-7 page brief, reflecting the writing process described above.

Cost/Application:

Each co-author will be compensated \$3,000 USD in two instalments of \$1,500.

Interested parties should submit to Vanessa Kulick Price (vkulickprice@merid.org) by COB April 29:

- Resume or CV describing brief summary of background, qualifications and similar previous assignments. (No more than two pages).

- Two samples of previous work (URLs are fine); especially those reflecting consultative writing processes.

Structure and Process:

- **AGree DFS Working Group:** Coalition members will be key advisors to ensure the convening and research endeavor is robust and includes a diversity of expertise. The Working Group will provide strategic oversight but will be unable to influence research findings or outcomes. Meridian Institute will manage the engagement of the DFS Working Group in the convening and research processes.
- **DFS Advisory Group:** will include the AGree DFS Working Group, in addition to 10-15 outside experts that will review and input into the white papers' research and formulate policy recommendations based on their outcomes. To ensure the robustness of the research endeavor and resulting recommendations, this initiative will be advised by an Advisory Group managed by Meridian. The general composition of the Advisory Group will include:
 - Diversified producers
 - Crop insurance experts
 - Alternative crop experts
 - Environmental benefits experts
 - Policy experts
- **Project manager:** Meridian Institute staff would provide overall coordination and manage the research and convening efforts.

Partners

There are many active entities engaged in advancing DFS through a variety of intervention points. These will be important to interview to support the research and policy-setting processes. Potential interviewees might include producers, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA), USDA's NIFA Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program, USDA's RBCS Value-Added Producer Grant program, USEDA, National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, Newago Insurance Agency, National Corn Growers Association, The Farm Credit Council, Diverse Corn Belt, University of Illinois, UC Berkeley, Forever Green Initiative, Michigan State University, University of Missouri, Practical Farmers of Iowa, Savanna Institute, Ujamaa Collective, Sustainable Food Lab, Environmental Defense Fund, Pinion, Iowa State University, and Purdue University.