

119TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. _____

To require the Secretary of Agriculture to establish and maintain a training program for Natural Resources Conservation Service personnel and third-party providers on the rapidly evolving methodologies, science, and practices of soil health management systems on agricultural land, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

Mr. MERKLEY (for himself, Mr. WYDEN, and Mr. WELCH) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on

A BILL

To require the Secretary of Agriculture to establish and maintain a training program for Natural Resources Conservation Service personnel and third-party providers on the rapidly evolving methodologies, science, and practices of soil health management systems on agricultural land, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

1 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

2 This Act may be cited as the “Soil Conservation And
3 Regeneration Education Act of 2026” or the “Soil CARE
4 Act of 2026”.

5 **SEC. 2. TRAINING FOR SOIL HEALTH IN NRCS PROGRAMS**
6 **FOR AGRICULTURAL PRODUCERS.**

7 Section 1242 of the Food Security Act of 1985 (16
8 U.S.C. 3842) is amended—

9 (1) in subsection (d), by inserting “of Agri-
10 culture” after “Department”; and

11 (2) by adding at the end the following:

12 “(j) TRAINING FOR SOIL HEALTH MANAGEMENT.—

13 “(1) DEFINITIONS.—In this subsection:

14 “(A) SERVICE.—The term ‘Service’ means
15 the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

16 “(B) SOIL BIOLOGY.—The term ‘soil biol-
17 ogy’ includes the collective biomass and activi-
18 ties of soil-dwelling organisms from an array of
19 trophic levels.

20 “(C) SOIL HEALTH MANAGEMENT.—The
21 term ‘soil health management’ means land man-
22 agement methods that are employed to increase
23 and balance soil health, such as microbial bio-
24 mass and macrofauna, for the purpose of im-
25 proving biological functions, including forming
26 and stabilizing soil structure, cycling nutrients,

1 controlling pests and disease, and degrading or
2 detoxifying contaminants.

3 “(D) TRAINING PROGRAM.—The term
4 ‘training program’ means the training program
5 established under paragraph (2).

6 “(2) ESTABLISHMENT OF TRAINING PRO-
7 GRAM.—Not later than 1 year after the date of en-
8 actment of this subsection, the Secretary shall estab-
9 lish a training program—

10 “(A) to provide education, resources, and
11 technical support to Service personnel and
12 third-party providers on the rapidly evolving
13 methodologies, science, and practices for im-
14 proving soil health; and

15 “(B) to assist Service personnel and third-
16 party providers in supporting agricultural pro-
17 ducers in understanding and implementing soil
18 health management systems that regenerate
19 farmland.

20 “(3) PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT AND DELIV-
21 ERY.—

22 “(A) IN GENERAL.—The training program
23 shall—

24 “(i) be made available in each Service
25 region twice every 2 years; and

1 “(ii) include—

2 “(I) a nationally available online
3 curriculum on soil health management
4 systems that is—

5 “(aa) developed through co-
6 operative agreements with enti-
7 ties described in subparagraph
8 (B); and

9 “(bb) delivered by the Serv-
10 ice; and

11 “(II) in-person training work-
12 shops on soil health management sys-
13 tems that regenerate farmland, that—

14 “(aa) include coverage
15 across regions and geography
16 types;

17 “(bb) are developed through
18 cooperative agreements with enti-
19 ties described in subparagraph
20 (B); and

21 “(cc) are delivered by the
22 Service.

23 “(B) COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS.—

24 “(i) IN GENERAL.—The training pro-
25 gram shall be developed and delivered

1 through cooperative agreements with enti-
2 ties with soil health management systems
3 expertise and experience working with and
4 training producers, including—

5 “(I) farming consultants, includ-
6 ing producers and producer coopera-
7 tives;

8 “(II) nonprofit organizations
9 serving organic, agroecological, and
10 other regenerative producers;

11 “(III) conservation districts;

12 “(IV) land-grant colleges and
13 universities (as defined in section
14 1404 of the National Agricultural Re-
15 search, Extension, and Teaching Pol-
16 icy Act of 1977 (7 U.S.C. 3103));

17 “(V) Long-Term Agroecosystem
18 Research sites; and

19 “(VI) other entities with ade-
20 quate expertise in soil health manage-
21 ment systems, as determined by the
22 Secretary.

23 “(ii) INITIAL AGREEMENTS.—Not
24 later than 1 year after the date of enact-
25 ment of this subsection, the Secretary shall

1 enter into cooperative agreements under
2 clause (i) for the initial development and
3 delivery of the training program.

4 “(C) PARTICIPATION.—

5 “(i) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary
6 shall encourage relevant Service personnel
7 and third-party providers—

8 “(I) to complete the online cur-
9 riculum described in subparagraph
10 (A)(ii)(I); and

11 “(II) to the extent practicable, to
12 attend at least 1 in-person training
13 workshop described in subparagraph
14 (A)(ii)(II).

15 “(ii) RELEVANT SERVICE PER-
16 SONNEL.—For purposes of clause (i), rel-
17 evant Service personnel shall include, at a
18 minimum, Service personnel involved in
19 conservation planning activities with, and
20 the delivery of technical assistance to, pro-
21 ducers, including field office staff of the
22 Service.

23 “(iii) COMPLETION SCHEDULES FOR
24 THIRD-PARTY PROVIDERS.—

1 “(I) ESTABLISHMENT OF SCHED-
2 ULES.—The Secretary shall estab-
3 lish—

4 “(aa) a schedule for the
5 completion by third-party pro-
6 viders of the online curriculum
7 described in subparagraph
8 (A)(ii)(I); and

9 “(bb) a schedule of in-per-
10 son training workshops that will
11 be provided in accordance with
12 subparagraph (A)(ii)(II).

13 “(II) USE OF SCHEDULES.—The
14 Secretary shall encourage each third-
15 party provider—

16 “(aa) to complete the online
17 curriculum in accordance with
18 the schedule established under
19 subclause (I)(aa); and

20 “(bb) to the extent prac-
21 ticable, to attend at least 1 train-
22 ing workshop identified on the
23 schedule established under sub-
24 clause (I)(bb).

“(D) CONTINUING EDUCATION.—The Secretary shall provide continuing education for relevant Service personnel and third-party providers, with a focus on the use of new conservation practice standards related to soil health.

6 “(E) MATERIALS FOR PRODUCERS.—The
7 Secretary shall require relevant Service per-
8 sonnel and third-party providers to provide soil
9 health education materials to producers through
10 the programs and conservation activities of the
11 Service, including materials relating to the top-
12 ics covered by the curriculum described in para-
13 graph (4).

14 “(4) CURRICULUM.—

15 “(A) IN GENERAL.—The training program
16 shall include the following minimum curriculum
17 components:

18 “(i) A unit on the principles of soil
19 health published by the Service, with a
20 focus on biological function and regional
21 context.

22 “(ii) A unit on—

23 “(I) the transition to agriculture
24 management systems that build soil
25 health, including operations, infra-

1 structure, regulations, finance, and
2 marketing needs; and

3 “(II) associated risks and oppor-
4 tunities, including reducing input
5 costs by building on-farm and ranch
6 fertility.

7 “(iii) A unit on organic production
8 and soil health management.

9 “(iv) A unit on diversified production
10 systems, including—

11 “(I) perennial cropping systems;

12 “(II) agroforestry or silvopasture
13 systems;

14 “(III) livestock integration into
15 cropping systems; and

16 “(IV) prescribed grazing.

17 “(v) A unit on the body of research on
18 soil biology and agriculture that regen-
19 erates farmland, including potential im-
20 pacts on soil health, water quality and se-
21 curity, biodiversity, ecosystem function, re-
22 silience to extreme weather, carbon seques-
23 tration, and agricultural profitability.

24 “(vi) A unit on key conservation prac-
25 tices that maximize soil health and miti-

1 gate climate impacts by implementing soil
2 health principles.

3 “(vii) A unit on—

4 “(I) issues specific to Indian
5 Tribes; and

6 “(II) traditional ecological knowl-
7 edge.

8 “(viii) A unit on—

9 “(I) the special needs of new,
10 small scale, and underserved pro-
11 ducers; and

12 “(II) how best to meet those
13 needs.

14 “(ix) A unit on approaches, tools, and
15 skills to support farmers in performing soil
16 health tests.

17 “(x) A unit on all conservation pro-
18 grams available to producers that improve
19 soil health, reduce production inputs, and
20 regenerate soil, farmland, and nearby eco-
21 systems.

22 “(B) UPDATES.—The Secretary shall re-
23 view and update the curriculum and all mate-
24 rials of the training program every 2 years
25 based on the latest—

1 “(i) soil health management innova-
2 tions; and

3 “(ii) scientific and technological ad-
4 vancements.

5 “(5) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—

6 There is authorized to be appropriated to the Sec-
7 retary to carry out this subsection \$10,000,000 for
8 the period of fiscal years 2027 through 2032.”.