

USDA launches effort to upgrade climate data tracking

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The Agriculture Department will use \$300 million to improve its measurement, verification and tracking of carbon sequestration and greenhouse gas emissions as it moves ahead with climate-smart

agriculture and forestry efforts, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said.

Vilsack and Ali Zaidi, White House national climate adviser, said during a Tuesday call with reporters that the approach will provide farmers, ranchers and forestland owners with the latest and most precise information so they know what results they will get when they adopt certain [conservation practices](#).

Zaidi said the national strategy will involve several agencies working with the USDA "to unleash full investment potential in this space."

"Today we are talking about the science that we are going to need to harvest the climate solutions that are available to us through nature, through climate-smart agriculture, through climate-smart forestry," he said.

The department will build its plan around a national strategy it is releasing Wednesday for public comment until Aug. 11.

Accurate data will be particularly valuable for those agricultural producers who decide to enter carbon or environmental systems markets, Vilsack said.

The strategy will be based on:

- Establishment and advancement of a Soil Carbon Monitoring and Research Network with a perennial biomass component.
- Establishment and advancement of a Greenhouse Gas Research Network.
- Expansion of data management, infrastructure and capacity.

- Improved models and tools for assessing greenhouse gas outcomes at operational, state, regional, and national scales.
- Improved conservation practice standards and implementation data by the Natural Resources Conservation Service.
- Improved tracking of data sets on national conservation activity over time and from various sources.
- Improved USDA Greenhouse Gas Inventory and Assessment Program.

"This is going to put a finer point on our ability to collect information and data. It is going to allow us to better coordinate that information. It is going to allow us to accumulate more information from a variety of sources," Vilsack said, citing a memorandum of understanding that USDA signed with NASA for climate data.

William Hohenstein, director of the USDA's Office of Energy and Environmental Policy, said some current USDA data is out of date or incomplete.

"In too many places within that inventory, the data has been collected for other purposes or collected at irregular time scales," Hohenstein said.

He said the nearly \$20 billion the Agriculture Department received through a 2022 reconciliation package for climate work provides the funding and the opportunity to do more. The \$300 million for improving the data comes from that law.

"These investments are historic and they are allowing us to think systematically about how to collect the data we need in terms of soil carbon. And systematically through the research network that is being established evaluate the technologies and practices that have greenhouse

gas benefits," Hohenstein said. "It will help us calibrate the models that we use and quantify at the farm scale and national scale carbon density."

Vilsack noted that some lawmakers working on the 2023 farm bill have speculated on using climate funding to provide more funding for farm programs. He said it is crucial to keep that funding for climate and [conservation work](#).

"It is important and necessary that we create multiple ways for farmers and ranchers to generate revenue and income," Vilsack said, adding that climate-smart products and [climate](#)-smart practices can yield additional revenue streams.

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