



December 7, 2021

Build Back Better Act: Agriculture and Forestry Provisions

Overview

Title I of the House-passed Build Back Better Act (BBBA, H.R. 5376) would increase spending within the House Agriculture Committee’s jurisdiction by \$81.7 billion over the 10-year period FY2022-FY2031 (Table 1). The increase in spending, as estimated by the Congressional Budget Office (CBO), is allowed under budget reconciliation instructions provided in S.Con.Res. 14.

In the BBBA, forestry and agricultural conservation programs each would receive about \$27 billion to support climate resilience and wildfire risk mitigation. Rural development would receive about \$18 billion, including funding for rural electricity transition to clean energy, biofuels infrastructure, and rural drinking water. Economically distressed farm loan borrowers would receive debt relief, estimated to add \$7 billion to an existing \$6 billion of debt relief enacted earlier in 2021. Agricultural research programs would receive \$2 billion, with half for research facilities at universities and half split among an assortment of research, extension, and education programs.

These amounts do not include \$10 billion of increases in the BBBA for child nutrition programs (Title II, Subtitle E) in the jurisdiction of the House Education and Labor and Senate Agriculture Committees. They also do not include the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (P.L. 117-58), such as \$2.9 billion for rural broadband and agricultural watersheds and \$5.4 billion for the Forest Service.

Forestry

The BBBA would provide \$27.15 billion in Subtitle B for forestry research and forest protection, restoration, post-fire recovery, and carbon management activities on federal and nonfederal lands (for background, see CRS Report R46312, *Forest Carbon Primer*). The funding would include \$17.1 billion for management of the National Forest System (NFS, administered by the Forest Service, is within the U.S. Department of Agriculture [USDA]), including funding for hazardous fuel reduction and vegetation management; roads and trails management; forest planning; and other activities. The funding in Subtitle B would include \$9.6 billion to support grants and other financial assistance for nonfederal forest management—including funding for urban and community forestry—and grants supporting the development and application of innovative wood products. The funding in Subtitle B also would include \$300 million for forestry research to support activities related to forest carbon monitoring and for conducting greenhouse gas life cycle analyses of domestic wood products, among other activities, and \$200 million for administrative expenses.

Table 1. Agriculture in the Build Back Better Act
(budget authority in millions, FY2022-FY2031)

Subtitle of Title I (Agriculture)	Amount
Subtitle B - Forestry	
National Forest System Restoration	17,100
Non-Federal Land Forest Restoration	6,000
State and Private Forestry Conservation	3,850
Administrative costs	200
Subtotal	27,150
Subtitle F – Conservation	
Additions to farm bill programs	21,077
Soil Conservation Assistance	5,048
Conservation Technical Assistance	950
Subtotal	27,075
Subtitle C, Part 1 - Rural Development	
Rural Electric Clean Energy Transition	9,700
Rural Energy for America; Biofuels Infrastructure; and Rural Energy Savings	3,125
Electric Loans for Renewable Energy	2,880
Rural Water Assistance	1,067
Rural Partnership Program; Admin. Costs	1,523
Subtotal	18,295
Subtitle C, Part 2 - Agricultural Credit	
Farm debt relief and loan modifications	11,676
Offset: rescinding debt relief in P.L. 117-2	-5,029
Assistance for underserved farmers	1,384
Offset: rescinding outreach in P.L. 117-2	-1,010
Subtotal	7,021
Subtitle D - Research, Urban Agriculture	
Research Facilities Act, and other programs	2,000
Subtitle E – Miscellaneous	
Farm and Food Worker Relief Grants, OIG	205
Total	81,746

Source: CRS, using CBO, “Estimated Budgetary Effects of Title I (Agriculture), H.R. 5376 as modified by Rules Committee Print 117-18,” Nov. 15, 2021, Rules Committee Print 117-18, and P.L. 117-2.

Notes: Sorted by amount and subtitle. Subtitle A is definitions only.

Conservation

The BBBA would provide over \$21 billion in additional funding for existing farm bill conservation programs, such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (\$9.0 billion), Conservation Stewardship Program (\$4.1 billion), Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (\$1.7 billion), and Regional Conservation Partnership Program (\$7.5 billion). These programs provide financial and technical assistance to private landowners to voluntarily implement conservation practices on agricultural land (see CRS Report R40763, *Agricultural Conservation: A Guide to Programs*). Program funds would be directed to climate change-related goals. Additional funding would be provided for conservation technical assistance (\$200 million), Regional Climate Hub activities (\$50 million), carbon sequestration quantification programs (\$600 million), and administrative expenses (\$100 million). The BBBA also would create a new \$5 billion soil conservation program that incentivizes cover crop planting. Payments would be made to producers and landowners for establishing one or more cover crops on up to 1,000 acres annually through the 2026 crop year.

Rural Development and Energy

Rural Water

The BBBA would provide \$970 million for grants to support projects that replace service lines containing lead. The USDA Water and Waste Disposal (WWD) Program and the USDA WWD Grants to Alleviate Health Risks Program would administer these grants. The BBBA would provide \$97 million in additional funding for grants for water systems in persistent poverty counties, insular areas, tribal areas, and colonias. The USDA WWD Program, the USDA WWD Grants to Alleviate Health Risks Program, and the USDA WWD Program for Alaskan Native Villages would administer these grants.

Biofuels and Rural Energy Programs

The BBBA would provide over \$15 billion for rural energy and biofuel efforts. This would include \$9.7 billion for a new initiative, USDA Assistance for Rural Electric Cooperatives, which would give financial assistance to eligible entities for purchase of renewable energy, renewable energy systems, and carbon capture and storage systems or to make energy efficiency improvements, among other things. The bill includes \$2.9 billion for loans for electricity storage projects and \$2 billion for the Rural Energy for America Program (REAP), \$303 million of which would be for underutilized renewable energy technologies. REAP provides financial assistance for renewable energy systems and energy efficiency improvements. The BBBA also would provide \$960 million for grants for biofuel infrastructure projects (e.g., installing fuel pumps that dispense certain biofuel blends).

Rural Business

The BBBA would provide \$970 million to create the Rural Prosperity Program, which would provide grants for rural communities to enhance job growth and economic resiliency. Within this program, \$873 million would be for Rural Prosperity Development Grants for states and tribal

governments, with higher amounts going to areas with lower populations and lower income. Applicants would be required to contribute a nonfederal match of 25%. The other \$97 million would be for Rural Prosperity Innovation Grants for nonprofits and institutions of higher education serving rural areas. Applicants would be required to contribute a nonfederal match of 20% of the grant amount.

Agricultural Credit

The BBBA would replace the farm loan debt forgiveness program in the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA; P.L. 117-2), which the courts have blocked because the relief was found to be race-based and not narrowly tailored to meet a compelling state interest (see CRS Legal Sidebar LSB10631, *The American Rescue Plan Act: Equal Protection Challenges*). The BBBA provision is tailored to economically distressed borrowers and does not appear to be based on race. The CBO estimates that the BBBA plan would provide \$11.7 billion of debt reduction (\$10.7 billion for USDA direct loan debt forgiveness—either in full or up to \$150,000 per borrower to be reduced by coronavirus and market facilitation program payments in 2018-2020—and \$1 billion of loan modifications to direct and guaranteed farm loans). The BBBA would replace other ARPA assistance for socially disadvantaged groups and reallocate it with \$1.4 billion for underserved farmers. These BBBA provisions would add \$7 billion to the \$6 billion repurposed from the ARPA after being rescinded and used as an offset.

Research and Urban Agriculture

The BBBA would provide \$1 billion for competitive grants for the construction or improvement of agricultural research facilities at 1890 (historically Black) and 1994 (tribal) land-grant institutions, as well as certain other minority-serving colleges and universities. It also would provide \$855 million for climate-related agricultural research, education, and extension under a variety of existing programs (including, for the first time, \$30 million for the Agriculture Advanced Research and Development Authority; 7 U.S.C. §3319k); \$130 million for scholarship programs for students at 1890 Institutions, tribal students, and multicultural students; \$10 million for the Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production (7 U.S.C. §6923); and \$5 million for the Census of Agriculture.

Farm and Food Worker Relief Grants

The BBBA would provide \$200 million in additional funding for the Farm and Food Worker Relief Grant Program that was created with \$665 million in the FY2021 appropriation (P.L. 116-260). These grants would provide COVID-19 assistance to frontline grocery workers.

Oversight

The USDA Office of Inspector General would receive \$5 million.

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