DRAFT for USDA Approval: Land Use Change Initiative Charter

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This charter outlines the objectives, structure, roles, responsibilities, and current deliverables of the Land Use Change Initiative. This document is subject to periodic review and amendment as needed to adapt to the initiative's evolving needs.

Purpose Statement:

There is no scientific agreement on how to measure land use change (LUC) largely due to the term's inherent ambiguity which prevents the application of scientific methods. Different data sources and methods of calculation are used by different stakeholders, resulting in a considerable range of LUC estimates. These inconsistencies have, in turn, created confusion for natural resource management decision-making and policy development. In recent years, LUC estimations have impacted the sustainability ratings of American agricultural producers on the global stage, restricting access to some international markets. Disagreement on how to assess LUC and lack of empirical assessment methods have also created controversy and additional scrutiny around the sustainability of row crop and livestock systems. In addition, an increasing number of consumer goods manufacturers and other companies have made commitments to reduce or eliminate “LUC” in their supply chains to meet social, climate and nature targets.

Our communities need alignment on data, methodologies, interpretations and the most valuable action pathways to advance comprehensive solutions for land management challenges to ecosystem resilience and agricultural viability. Success will protect vital habitats, preserve farm and ranch land, open and expand international markets, and enable companies to meet environmental, social, governance (ESG) commitments

Our agricultural land plays a vital role in feeding a growing global population and in addressing climate change and supporting ecosystem resilience. Land use, land management and land cover conversions in the United States impact rural economic opportunities, food security, biodiversity, water quality and quantity, energy security and landscape productivity and resilience. The American Farm Trust documented the loss of 11 million acres of productive US farmland between 2001 and 2016 due to urbanization and suburbanization (American Farmland Trust 2022), and the 2022 Census of Agriculture (USDA 2024) documented continued losses from 2017-2022, as the number of farms in the U.S. declined by 141,733. Future projections estimate another 18 million acres of agricultural land and 12.5 million acres of natural or semi-

natural lands will be lost to development by 2040 (Xie et. al., 2023). According to the US Fish and Wildlife Service, of the 20% of the Great Plains grasslands that remain undisturbed, 93% of it is unprotected and at risk of conversion (USFWS 2024). When conversion happens in the United States, it can create greenhouse gas emissions (EPA 2024, Kwon et al., 2020) and negatively impact water resources (EPA 2022 and biodiversity (EPA 2024). These outcomes can create downstream impacts for agricultural commodities and supply chains – especially for agricultural commodity sustainability assessments, market access efforts and scope 3 emissions accounting.

LUCI acknowledges that resilient rural economies require the maintenance and conservation of productive farmland, grasslands, and other rural ecosystems. In this context, communities need clear and accurate measurements of how and where America's land cover and qualities are changing to analyze causes and identify valuable actions. Accurate, timely, and geospatially explicit data for land cover and land management are critical for academia, conservationists, government bodies, retail and food companies, rural and Indigenous communities, and the agricultural sector, communities and organizations. For example, Reitsma et al 2015 documented impacts to soil sustainability and future agricultural productivity from land use change. The ways data are collected, used and interpreted, in turn, has far-reaching implications for consumer prices, the security of our water, food and energy, biodiversity, ecological resilience and farm/ranch profitability.

Objectives, Values, Project Scope, and Key Results:

HISTORY

The Land Use Change Initiative (LUCI) was established in 2023 to **address quantification and understand gaps around rural land use in the United States**. For farmers, the benefits of LUCI's work will include continued and expanded market access as well as innovative corporate and public partnerships to support conservation, land stewardship and long-term resilience. Ranchers will gain confidence in reliable pathways to maintain or improve the health of the grasslands on which their livelihood depends. Climate champions will have more reliable data for quantifying carbon emissions and sequestration. Conservationists will be able to more accurately understand the extent and health of vital ecosystems. Companies that use agricultural feedstocks for food, feed, fuel, and other products will be better able to assess their own LUC impacts, and regulations around LUC in these industries will be informed by better tools and methods for assessment. For each of these stakeholders and more, the cross-sector relationships developed through LUCI will drive the mutual understanding and collaboration necessary to solve complex land use challenges across the United States.

MISSION

LUCI builds awareness, capacity, alignment, and implementation support to assess, and address agricultural and rural Land Use Change and its impacts in the United States.

VISION

LUCI envisions a collaborative effort for a future where Land Use Change is actively managed and mitigated in the United States through clear, accurate, interoperable and accessible measurements, programs and science to support short and long-term sustainable outcomes for the environment, farmers, ranchers and other critical community members.

OBJECTIVES

- **Convene**
  - Identify and recruit key people together to share in the effort to build relationships, expand dialogue, and achieve initiative objectives
- **Alignment**
  - Align community members to develop a clear, compelling vision for addressing the challenges with LUC quantification
  - Identify shared definitions, LUC quantification techniques and standards with the ultimate aim of improving the accuracy, consistency, repeatability, validation and reliability of LUC data, quantification methods and interpretations
  - Act on solutions – building from LUC quantification, roadmap LUC regionally and contextually valuable solutions
  - Building consensus on the drivers **-** Convening community members to build consensus on the drivers of conversion and land management changes
- **Awareness**
  - Communicate the need for addressing LUC quantification and the strategies to do so via most appropriate means
  - Create opportunities to think creatively in addressing the LUC challenge and build awareness around those solutions
- **Implementation Support**
  - Work collaboratively in identifying and coordinating resources needed to move forward on aligned solutions
  - Build consensus-based recommendations for quantification of land use, land cover, and land management changes
  - Build consensus-based recommendations on quantifying the impacts of conversion on greenhouse gas emissions, biodiversity, water resources, and economic outcomes for farmers and ranchers

VALUES

- **Science-based –** We are dedicated to science-based approaches, guiding our analyses, decisions and implementation with rigorous evidence.
- **Accountability and transparency** – We commit to the highest standards of accountability and transparency.
- **Inclusiveness** – We embrace inclusivity by ensuring a balanced, broad spectrum of North American voices actively involved in decision-making and implementation.
- **Recognition** – We foster respect and recognition, valuing diverse perspectives and understanding.

Food, energy and fiber security - We prioritize food, energy and fiber security to ensure stability and sustainability

- **Resilience –** We strive for resilience in economic viability, ecosystem health, environmental sustainability, and social equity.

Current action areas and phasing:

DISCOVERY and level setting

- Primer report – landscape scan of critical issues and needs
- Farmer and rancher engagement – communications and convening to ensure farmer and rancher voices are represented
- Community convening – virtual and in-person workshopping to identify gaps and set directions for action
- White paper development on critical issues for awareness building

SCALING and consensus building:

- Recruitment to bring critical community members to the table for action
- Definitions: Building consensus on the critical definitions, data and technical aspects of ag and rural LUC quantification in the United States and opportunity to share lessons learned from this consensus beyond the United States. This includes conversion of natural habitats and extends to conversion of agricultural lands
- Quantification framework: Convening to support the development of a third-party, neutral land management and conversion quantification assessment framework.
- Landscape connectivity: connecting existing organizations and efforts to identify and fill gaps, share lessons learned and build trust.
- Raising awareness of the impacts of land use change on people and the environment
- Continue amplifying technical efforts to compare and improve LUC monitoring tools and methodologies and their applicability to economic outcomes for rural communities, carbon accounting models, protocols and standards (such as the GREET and Greenhouse Gas Protocol), emissions reduction and environmental targets (namely the

Science Based Targets initiative and Science Based Targets for Nature), demand-side regulations and voluntary commitments made by commodity buyers or industry groups.
- Dialogue to understand drivers and pathways for action and building multi-stakeholder, collaborative solutions.

SUCCESSFUL Outcomes

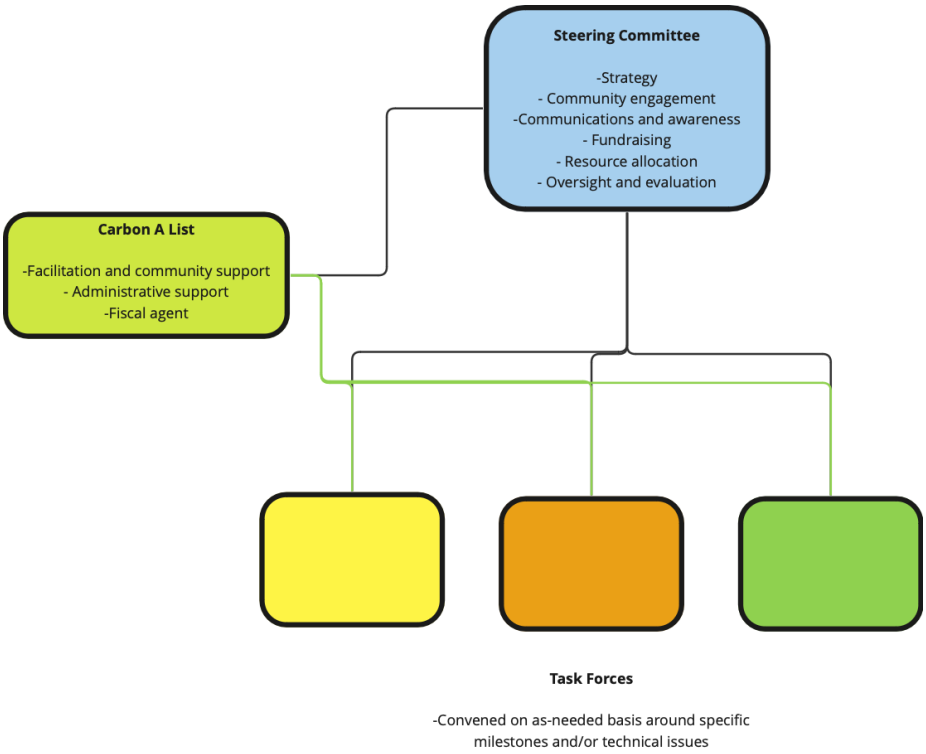
- Consensus achieved on definitions.
- Efficiency is built to enable movement at the pace necessary to address the continual issues while being efficient with individual contribution requirements.
- Established and utilized framework to evaluate quantification approaches for conversion, GHG, water, social and economic outcomes.
- Solutions identified and action underway to address LUC for environmental, social and market outcomes.

Currently out of scope for direct action:

- Indirect land use change quantification methods (e.g. GTAP). This topical area is addressed through other efforts. However, it is recognized that better LUC quantification could help inform assessments of indirect land use change.
- LUC quantification outside the United States. A focus is needed to work in the United States. Expanding beyond the United States could impact this focus and the work needed domestically.

LUCI
LAND USE CHANGE INITIATIVE

Governance Structure:



Steering Committee

- The Steering Committee sets the overall direction, priorities, and policies of the initiative.
- Composition: The Steering Committee consists of a minimum of 5 and a maximum of 15 members representing diverse sectors including farmers, ranchers, agriculture industry, conservation, commodity promotion, academia, and government. The composition shall ensure representation from relevant stakeholders.
- Selection process for new Steering Committee members: New Steering Committee members nominations will be accepted from anywhere. New Steering Committee member nominations will be discussed and approved by a majority of the current Steering Committee members.
- Responsibilities: The Steering Committee provides strategic guidance, overseeing the implementation of activities, recruitment, communications, allocating resources, and monitoring progress towards the initiative's goals.

- Meeting Frequency: The Steering Committee will meet once a month to review progress, address strategic issues, hold discussion and make decisions on behalf of the initiative.
- Process: The Steering Committee will utilize Chatham House Rule where participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be shared.

Steering Committee Members:

- Represent a cross section of community members impacted by and/or influencing land use change topics.
- Review and recruit new members
- Onboard new participants
- Attend and actively participate in meetings.
- Support deliverable development and capacity-building efforts.
- Provide timely input and feedback to relevant stakeholders and documents supporting LUCI

Administrative support (currently delivered by Carbon A-List):

- Administrative support for financial accountability and development resources (membership dues, grant resources, other contributions)
- Schedule meetings and ensure complete and timely attendance.
- Assist in developing and facilitating meeting agendas.
- Document and share meeting minutes with members.
- Facilitate communication within the initiative and with other relevant entities.

Advisory committee

LUCI will form an advisory committee to provide expert advice, and recommendations to ensure that LUCI's goals are effectively met and that the initiative remains aligned with its mission, vision and objectives. The advisory committee will consist of diverse experts and stakeholders, including representatives from agricultural and rural communities, environmental organizations, scientific and academic institutions, and relevant government agencies. Members will be selected based on their expertise, experience, and commitment to the values and objectives of LUCI.

Task Forces:

- Task Forces are established to focus on specific thematic areas or tasks within the initiative, such as research, capacity-building, communications, or fundraising.
- Timeframe: Task Forces are expected to achieve their specific objective on a defined, short-term basis. Timelines are established by the Steering Committee.
- Composition: Task Forces should include relevant members of the Steering Committee and/or individuals with relevant expertise and interests in the respective thematic areas.
- Responsibilities: Task Forces are responsible for developing and implementing activities, producing deliverables, and reporting progress to the Steering Committee.
- Meeting Frequency: Task Forces should meet regularly (e.g., monthly or bi-monthly) to plan and coordinate their activities, share updates, and address any challenges or opportunities.

Conflict of Interest Policy:

COI POLICY LINK