



OUR VISION FOR A FAIR FOOD & FARM BILL

WORC's 2018 Farm Bill Platform

Introduction

The Farm Bill is a package of federal legislation enacted every five to seven years to set the general direction for America's farm and food policy. The Farm Bill is much more than an agricultural aid package – in fact, it influences you every day. Policies in the Farm Bill help determine what type of food is available to you, how much it costs, and the tools available to your community to protect farm and ranch land and promote renewable energy and energy efficiency. Farm Bill policy helps ensure fair markets and prices for family farmers and ranchers, and provides nutrition assistance to hungry families and schoolchildren.

Over the last three decades, farm policy has worked well for corporate agribusiness at the expense of family farmers and consumers. At the same time that deregulation put midsized, independent farm families at the mercy of wild market fluctuations, unchecked consolidation compounded the problem. Unrestrained mergers have led to a system in which a few powerful corporations sit between two million American

2018 WORC Farm Bill Platform

To put people before profits, Federal Ag policy must:

-  Invest in local food systems
-  Restore competitive markets
-  Ensure fair access to credit and insurance
-  Implement thoughtful supply management
-  Promote conservation
-  Invest in public research
-  Invest in sustainable energy

farmers and 300 million American eaters. There are just a handful of companies that buy crops and livestock from farmers, and their disproportionate market power allows them to lower the prices farmers receive. In the retail sector, more than half of the grocery store market is controlled by just five firms – who own all the old regional grocery store chains – ensuring that these lowered farm prices are not passed on to consumers.

Over the past five years, there has been record growth in market demand for local and regional food. Family farmers and ranchers of all sizes are eager to produce for these emerging markets but face significant challenges at every step in the value chain to produce, process and bring their products to market. At this critical juncture, targeted policy shifts can go a long way to create a more favorable environment and help family farms, ranches and related businesses thrive and contribute positively to the rural economy.

It is also critical that we support the next generation of farmers through beginning farmer and rancher programs and ensure that the federal Farm Bill policies and programs are accessible to all who qualify. The U.S. needs more than one kind of farmer raising more than one kind of crop or animal. The role of farmers as stewards of the land should be supported and encouraged. Federal farm and food policy should serve the needs of an array of farm sizes, production models, regions, supply chains and diversified crop cultivation.

To achieve this, federal food and farm policy should support and reflect the diversity of our communities. Congress and the U.S. Department of Agriculture should ensure full and fair access for socially disadvantaged and other underrepresented groups including beginning and Native American farmers and ranchers.

We urge Congress to pass a Farm Bill before the current one expires on September 30, 2018 that prioritizes and incorporates the following concepts and policies.

Invest in local and regional food systems

To revitalize communities, increase market access for independent family farmers and ranchers and create jobs, independent markets and distribution chains need to be strengthened and rebuilt. Consolidation in the food system has all but eliminated the local butchers, independent dairies, produce wholesale marketplaces and regional grain milling operations that used to be everywhere. Funding for government grant, loan and credit programs should be preserved and targeted to support the rebuilding of local and regional food production infrastructure and distribution



chains. The public sector is a considerable purchaser of food. Governments at all levels should use that purchasing power to leverage positive demand for change and lead the way in re-creating regional food systems. Our policy priorities include:

- Protect and expand funding for the Value Added Producers Grant, Rural Business Development Grant and Farmers' Market and Local Food Promotion Program.
- Ensure that the aggregation, processing, and marketing of value-added food and farming products is an eligible purpose for Rural Business Development Grants (RBDG).

- Ensure Rural Development and Farm Service Agency programs can be used to assist participants in maintaining and increasing the production, aggregation, processing, distribution, and marketing of value-added, niche, or regionally marketed meat and dairy products, with priority given to those that increase and enhance the availability of small and very small processing facilities.
- Expand and fund successful pilot programs that establish and strengthen local and regional farm-to-institution supply chains.
- Expand existing local procurement language and geographic preference language to allow local production as a product specification for school food, provided competitive bidding is maintained.
- Expand and improve the Farm to School Grant Program to include early education and summer feeding programs; increase access to farm-fresh and traditional foods among tribal communities; and improve program participation from beginning, veteran and socially disadvantaged farmers.



Restore fair and competitive markets

Crop and livestock producers require a competitive and open marketplace so they are not forced to be virtual or actual serfs of corporate agribusiness. A fair and competitive marketplace should cover the cost of production, return reasonable profits for farmers and support fair pay for workers. This cannot happen without breaking up the agribusiness cartels who control seed, chemical, meatpacking, poultry and grocery chain markets. This requires vigorous enforcement of existing anti-trust laws. Our policy priorities include:

- Require USDA to publish and finalize the Farmer Fair Practices rules under GIPSA and restore the Competitive Injury Rule for farmers and ranchers seeking justice under the Packers and Stockyards Act.
- Restore GIPSA as an independent agency within USDA.
- Amend the Packers and Stockyards Act to prohibit the use of certain anti-competitive forward contracts as proposed in the Captive Supply Reform Act.
- Re-instate country-of-origin labeling for pork and beef.

Protect healthy families

The real earnings of working families in America have been stagnant – or declining – for the past three decades, which has made harder to put healthy food on the table. Nutrition safety nets need to be protected low-income families can access healthy, nutritious foods. For both farmers and consumers at all income levels to thrive over



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the long term, families need the opportunity to earn a decent living so that they can afford their own healthy foods. Our policy priorities include:

- Congress should preserve full funding for SNAP in the Farm Bill.

Ensure fair access to credit and crop insurance

Farm lending, crop insurance and disaster programs are critical to the survival of family farms. However many of these programs are designed to benefit the largest corporate commodity growers, and they can work to the detriment of mid-sized independent family farms and ranches. Federal crop insurance programs should impose limits on insurance subsidies to farmers, require conservation compliance, and better target affordable policies to the farmers who need them. Farmers need to have access to credit, both through traditional banks and through public loan programs at USDA. Farm lending, crop insurance and disaster programs



need to reflect and be equitably available to the full diversity of farmers – beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers, Native American farmers and ranchers, small and mid-sized farmers, and farmers transitioning to organic or more sustainable production. Farm families also deserve the same access to loan restructuring that distressed homeowners received during the recent

credit crisis. Our policy priorities include:

- Support a comprehensive study by USDA Risk Management Agency (RMA) on the potential long-term risk and program cost reduction benefits of multi-year conservation and intensive management grazing practices for inclusion in actuarial analysis of crop insurance policies, cost-effective premium reduction or other incentives.
- Expand collection of data on wholesale meats sold under grass-fed, pasture-raised labels—as well as meats sold through direct markets – for use in lending, disaster assistance and risk management programs, or any program where product price is used to determine benefits.
- Actively support sustainable management by ensuring that all Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) conservation practices are approved Good Farming Practices under Federal Crop Insurance Corporation policies.
- Ensure transparency in USDA lending. USDA should be required to release detailed information on the size and types of operations receiving USDA direct and guaranteed loans. This information should be available to the public.
- Congress should not dramatically raise the limits on federally guaranteed loans. Proposals to nearly double the current limit will exacerbate the problem of loans being

used to fuel the construction and expansion of large scale contract confinement farming operations.

Institute sound supply management policies

Basic supply management tools like agricultural reserves can help stabilize commodity prices. The United States used to have a commodity reserve for grains – like the strategic petroleum reserve – that could help ease price hikes while still providing farmers with a needed safety net. Fairer prices for U.S. farmers and a more stable supply of U.S. farm products would also prevent excess, low-priced export commodities from being dumped abroad, undercutting markets and prices in the developing world. Our policy priorities include:

- Increase market prices to producers by setting a floor price or loan rate at farmers' cost of production.
- Reestablish a farmer owned grain reserve with storage payments at the commercial rate.



Protect and target conservation funding



Conservation programs for working lands and the use of rotational production methods can provide market and environmental benefits. Conservation funds should be preserved and should subsidize the transition to and maintenance of farm management strategies that improve biodiversity, minimize air and water pollution, and conserve soil, water, and other essential resources. Conservation programs should help farmers identify crops and techniques appropriate to their

region's water resources and climate. Our policy priorities include:

- Ensure the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) provides equal incentives for pastured-based soil health beneficial activities, as are currently available for cropland activities.
- Provide more sustainable grazing options through the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), including priority and incentive payments for beneficial grazing and ensure that incidental grazing payment reductions do not serve as a barrier to buffer installation within CRP.
- Increase the opportunity and acreage available for grazing within the Grasslands

Initiative.

- Protect and expand funding for the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP)
- Prioritize grazing management within EQIP to recognize the benefits and incentivize beneficial grazing practices such as high level rotational management.
- Cap the amount of EQIP funding available to an individual operation at \$150,000 in order to ensure that EQIP funds reach a greater number of applicants.
- Prohibit EQIP funding for all new and expanding large scale contract confinement farming operations.
- Require transparency on how EQIP funds are used. USDA should release detailed information on the use and amount of EQIP contracts, including the size and types of operations receiving funding through EQIP. This information should be available to the public.

Reinvest in public research for the public good

The national network of land-grant universities and extension services has the potential to be mobilized in support of a fairer and more diversified food system, but not without significant reinvestment in their work. Funding for research to improve productivity and environmental stewardship on small and mid-sized farms, facilitate value-added processing and the construction of regional distribution networks, and explore other regional market-building opportunities is a public good. This research funding should be continued



through public sources with the knowledge that results from it being publicly controlled. Our policy priorities include:

- Authorize increased extension funding for adaptive grazing management planning, integrated crop-livestock systems, sustainable feed production, and sustainable livestock and poultry practices and include these practices among the areas covered by high-priority research and extension initiatives.



Invest in truly sustainable energy solutions

To meet our climate and energy goals, farmers and rural communities will need to be a big part of the solution. Rural energy programs should focus on real rural energy solutions that also contribute to other environmental and community goals. The emphasis must be on more robust rural energy conservation efforts that can help farmers, ranchers and rural residents reduce

their energy use and their monthly energy costs. Support for renewable energy production should be focused on locally-owned, scaled and beneficial projects that are based upon sustainable resource planning and use, and enhance, rather than diminish our natural resources and economies.

