



SAFSF 2023 Farm Bill Principles

Sustainable Agriculture and Food System Funders (SAFSF) is the leading national network for philanthropic grantmakers and mission-based investors working in support of just and sustainable food and agriculture systems. Our members include community and corporate foundations, private foundations, health conversion foundations, investment organizations, individual donors and investors, and more. SAFSF members make investments at local, regional, state, Tribal, national, and international levels to support activities and strategies related to justice, farms and farming systems, environmental sustainability, markets, health, agricultural products, and much more within the food system.

The farm bill, which is set to be reauthorized in 2023, is the most significant piece of legislation Congress enacts (roughly every 5 years) that has a direct impact on farming livelihoods, how food is produced, what kinds of foods are grown, and how economically distressed families eat. The 2018 Farm Bill includes twelve titles that cover commodity crops support, conservation of natural resources, nutrition, access to credit, rural communities, research and education, forestry, energy, horticulture, crop insurance, and beginning and historically disadvantaged farmers and ranchers, among other things. The breadth and scope of the farm bill likely touches more American lives than any other legislation.

We believe federal policy should support just and sustainable agriculture, food and fiber systems, in which it is possible for all people to equitably participate in and benefit from these economies. The following principles must be applied to the farm bill in order to make progress toward this goal.



PRINCIPLE 1: Close the racial and economic gaps created by provisions that subsidize farm consolidation

PRINCIPLE 2: Protect our rich agricultural lands and our long-term environmental health through robust conservation programs



PRINCIPLE 3: Repair and rebuild thriving rural communities damaged by farm bill provisions

PRINCIPLE 4: Build resilient local and regional food and fiber systems





PRINCIPLE 1:

Close the racial and economic gaps created by provisions that subsidize farm consolidation and favor production methods that create barriers and reduce opportunities for operators of small and medium scale farms and historically disadvantaged farmers.

Government subsidies under the commodity (Title I) and crop insurance programs (Title XI) enshrined in the farm bill favor certain production systems and practices, farmers, and scales of operation. Under the guise of supporting family farmers and rural communities, these **direct payments and subsidies benefit the largest and wealthiest farmers rather than those operating at family or community scale**. Loopholes that have been written into the programs make it easy for the largest and wealthiest farmers to rake in large amounts of government payments that they bid into land values and cash rents. This in turn fuels economic inequity, driving up land prices, and pushing small and mid-sized operators (who are much less resourced), off the land, or keeping new farmers from entering.

Over the long view, **approximately 25 percent of commodity and crop insurance subsidies have flown to the largest one percent of all farms¹**. In addition, scrutiny of the recent trade aid subsidy program revealed that **more than 99 percent of those subsidies flowed to white farmers²**. The next farm bill should level that playing field.

Additionally, active discrimination towards socially disadvantaged farmers³ by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has limited their access to credit and government resources and continues to lead to significant loss of land and economic opportunity⁴. While the Administration has committed to pursuing equity within USDA, the final remedies must be addressed in the statute. As such, the **federal farm bill must address inequities created across all the provisions to move towards a more equitable future**.



PRINCIPLE 1:

Close the racial and economic gaps created by provisions that subsidize farm consolidation and favor production methods that create barriers and reduce opportunities for operators of small and medium scale farms and historically disadvantaged farmers.

EXAMPLES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- Close payment limitation loopholes on commodity subsidies to help level the playing field for small, beginning, and historically disadvantaged farmers.
- Continue to require and *actually* enforce USDA's mandate to regularly release demographic data on who receives government farm subsidies to shine light on racial, economic and structural disparities, opening the door to policy corrections.
- Protect heirs' property from forced sales to help stem the loss of informally inherited land in Black, Latino, and Native American communities across the country.
- Direct the Farm Service Agency to analyze their current programs and lending systems to address loan access barriers for emerging and Black, Latino, Asian and Native American farmers. Push FSA to expand outreach and technical assistance to build their participation in loan, grant, cost-share and other programs to increase the financial security of their farm operations.





PRINCIPLE 2:

Protect our rich agricultural lands and our long-term environmental health through robust conservation programs that support crop, livestock, and natural diversity, as well as conservation-based farming systems, as valuable tools to reduce agricultural risk, support production of nutrient-dense food, sustainable fibers and address water quality, biodiversity and climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Recent farm bills have made significant cuts to key conservation program funding⁵ at a time when farmers are facing increasing challenges as a result of climate change. **The Inflation Reduction Act rightly adds new funding for climate smart conservation**, through existing farm bill conservation programs, that results in a significant net gain over previous cuts. Rising temperatures, extreme heat, drought, wildfire on rangelands, and heavy downpours are expected to increasingly disrupt agricultural productivity in the United States.

Moreover, expected increases in challenges to livestock health, declines in crop yields and quality, and changes in extreme events in the United States and abroad threaten rural livelihoods, sustainable food security, and price stability. Therefore, **it is critical that the farm bill position climate change as an actual threat and prioritize and strengthen investments in programs and practices that have measurable climate and conservation benefits.**



PRINCIPLE 2:

Protect our rich agricultural lands and our long-term environmental health through robust conservation programs that support crop, livestock, and natural diversity, as well as conservation-based farming systems, as valuable tools to reduce agricultural risk, support production of nutrient-dense food, sustainable fibers and address water quality, biodiversity and climate change mitigation and adaptation.

EXAMPLES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- Increase funding for conservation programs and improving the operation of conservation programs are critical to drive the adoption of conservation practices that address water quality, water quantity, and build climate resilience.
- Modernize federal crop insurance to help farmers reduce risk through conservation practices and systems that build soil health and climate resilience, rather than subsidizing and shielding them from the risk of continued monocropping systems with little to no conservation and climate change.
- Eliminate crop insurance program barriers for farmers who want to adopt conservation practices.
- Improve conservation compliance to ensure effective implementation and enforcement of basic conservation, including soil health considerations, as a condition for receipt of commodity and crop insurance subsidies.





PRINCIPLE 3:

Repair and rebuild thriving rural communities damaged by farm bill provisions that hasten depopulation and loss of economic opportunity through consolidation and concentration in the agricultural sector.

Rural communities continue to struggle with population loss. **Sixty six percent of the nation's non-metro counties have lost population over the past decade.** For the first time ever recorded, non-metro counties saw an overall population loss, meaning rural communities had more deaths than births, and more people moved out than moved in⁶. In addition to population loss, non-metro counties face higher rates of poverty than metro counties. **Moreover, extreme poverty, meaning the county's poverty rate is 40 percent or greater, is a uniquely rural problem⁷.**

The farm bill is often touted as critical legislation for strengthening rural America and family farmers, yet rural community demographic data suggests otherwise. Rural depopulation, underemployment, health issues, aging infrastructure and shifting to a more regional mindset, are some of the key issues that influenced the Rural Development title of the 2018 Farm Bill⁸. However, **the Rural Development title receives minimal funding (part of the one percent "other" category) compared to other titles⁹ that *actually* contribute to some of the negative challenges facing rural America.**



PRINCIPLE 3:

Repair and rebuild thriving rural communities damaged by farm bill provisions that hasten depopulation and loss of economic opportunity through consolidation and concentration in the agricultural sector.

EXAMPLES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- Reform federal programs and regulations that aid in the consolidation of agriculture, facilitate rural depopulation and harm rural economies (e.g. essentially unlimited subsidies in commodity and crop insurance programs, lack of effective regulations on livestock consolidation).
- Prioritize funding for provisions that foster rural economic opportunities, giving precedence to those communities and regions that have suffered consistent population loss and persistent and extreme poverty.
- Expand outreach and technical assistance for rural communities that lack the resources to complete competitive grant proposals.
- Create dedicated funding to ensure that rural communities are transitioning from fossil fuels towards a clean energy future and leading in renewable energy development and beneficial electrification.





PRINCIPLE 4:

Build resilient local and regional food and fiber systems that safeguard the right of every human being to eat and be nourished regardless of economic circumstances.

The coronavirus pandemic made it impossible for anyone in America to ignore the problems with our country's food system. The problems were not new, but the ripple effects of the pandemic exacerbated existing problems to the point where they created serious threats to the ability of everyday people to feed themselves and their families. **The importance of local food and regional food systems was significantly underscored by the pandemic.**

Co-ops, farmers markets and direct to consumer models, such as Consumer Supported Agriculture Systems (CSAs), along with regionally sourced farm-to-families emergency food boxes, became the most steady and reliable sources of food when grocery store shelves were empty due to the breakdown of national and global food supply chains¹⁰.

Congress and USDA have significantly boosted resources in the short-term for existing and new provisions to support local and regional food system infrastructure and markets. Once these short-term additional resources expire, there will still be a significant funding gap while the challenges that require ongoing resources will remain. **The farm bill should double down on this and focus on how it can best support building a resilient local and regional food system** that prioritizes initiatives designed to guarantee food sovereignty, address consolidation, ensure farmworker health, and more fully recognize the importance and power of local and regional food systems in meeting the hunger and nutritional needs of communities across the country.



PRINCIPLE 4:

Build resilient local and regional food and fiber systems that safeguard the right of every human being to eat and be nourished regardless of economic circumstances.

EXAMPLES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- Recognize the inherent value of Indigenous knowledge and community-led solutions.
- Invest in small-medium scale infrastructure, including relationship infrastructure, to build resilient regional economies based on food and fiber farming and processing.
- Expand the reach and scale of food and nutrition benefits programs that simultaneously support economically distressed households and local growers.
- Facilitate the ability of schools, hospitals, government facilities and other institutions to source food from local and regional farms and food producers.
- Direct USDA to simplify the complex processes by which organizations access USDA grants to expand the number of community-led, including BIPOC-led, organizations that receive funding for direct work on community-based food systems, equitable food-oriented development, and small-scale farming to feed local and regional communities.



ENDNOTES

1 Hemi Kim, Why is U.S. Farming So Heavily Subsidized?, Sentient Media (2022) <https://sentientmedia.org/why-are-farmers-subsidized/>

2 Nathan Rosenberg, USDA gave almost 100 percent of Trump's trade war bailout to white farmers, The Counter (2019) <https://thecounter.org/usda-trump-trade-war-bailout-white-farmers-race/>

3 Socially Disadvantaged Farmers, Ranchers or Agricultural Producers (SDA) Definition:

1. A farmer/rancher who has been subjected to racial or ethnic prejudices because of their identity as a member of a group without regard to their individual qualities.
2. A socially disadvantaged group is a group whose members have been subject to racial or ethnic prejudice because of their identity of a group, without regard to their individual qualities (note:gender alone is not a covered group). Identified socially disadvantaged groups include: Blacks or African Americans; American Indians or Alaska Natives; Hispanics; Asians; Native Hawaiians or other Pacific Islanders.
3. A socially disadvantaged applicant is an individual or entity who is a member of a socially disadvantaged group. For an entity, at least 50% ownership in the farm business must be held by socially disadvantaged individuals.

4 Center for American Progress, Progressive Governance Can Turn the Tide for Black Farmers (2019) <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/progressive-governance-can-turn-tide-black-farmers/>

5 The National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, "A Closer Look At The 2018 Farm Bill: Working Lands Conservation Programs" (2019). <https://sustainableagriculture.net/blog/a-closer-look-at-the-2018-farm-bill-working-lands-conservation-programs/>

6 Kenneth Johnson, "Rural America Lost Population Over the Past Decade for the First Time in History (2022). University of New Hampshire, School of Public Policy. <https://carsey.unh.edu/publication-rural-america-lost-population-over-past-decade-for-first-time-in-history>

7 Tracy Farrigan, Extreme Poverty Counties Found Solely in Rural Areas in 2018. Amber Waves, United States Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/amber-waves/2020/may/extreme-poverty-counties-found-solely-in-rural-areas-in-2018/>

Farrigan explains: "In 2018, there were 664 high poverty counties in which an average of 20 percent or more of the population had lived below the Federal poverty level since 2014. The majority were rural (78.9 percent—524 counties). These high-poverty counties represented about 1 of every 4 rural counties, compared with about 1 of every 10 urban counties. Fifteen of the 664 counties were extreme poverty areas, where the poverty rate was 40 percent or greater. The extreme poverty areas were also persistent poverty counties, with poverty rates of at least 20 percent over the past 30 years. In 2018, all of the extreme poverty counties were in rural America. These counties are not evenly distributed, but rather are geographically concentrated and disproportionately located in regions with above-average populations of racial minorities. Several extreme poverty counties, for instance, were found in South Dakota, with six counties where Native Americans made up more than 50 percent of the population. These counties were also found in Mississippi, including four counties where there has historically been a high incidence of poverty among the African-American population."

8 Congressional Research Service, Rural Development Provisions in the 2018 Farm Bill (P.L. 115-334), https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/20200220_R46235_f87042be8bba07f6e356f50fa3e1ac7f6521ca24.pdf

9 National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, What is the Farm Bill? <https://sustainableagriculture.net/our-%20work/campaigns/fbcampaign/what-is-the-farm-bill/>

10 USDA Agricultural Marketing Service, Final Report: Local And Regional Food System Covid-19 Rapid Response (2021). <https://lfsccovid.localfoodeconomics.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Local-and-Regional-Food-Systems-Response-to-COVID-19-Final-Report-004.pdf>

CONTACT

Traci Bruckner, SAFSF Senior Director, Public Policy traci@safsf.org

Maggie Mascarenhas, SAFSF Public Policy Associate mmascarenhas@safsf.org