



# SAFSF

SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE  
AND FOOD SYSTEMS FUNDERS

# FEDERAL POLICY PRINCIPLES

## ABOUT SAFSF

Sustainable Agriculture and Food System Funders (SAFSF) is the leading national network for philanthropic grantmakers and mission-based investors supporting just and sustainable food and agriculture systems.

SAFSF's 100+ member organizations include community and corporate foundations, private foundations, health conversion foundations, investment organizations, individual donors and investors. Collectively, SAFSF's members are responsible for over \$3 billion annually in philanthropic funding, of which \$264 million is specifically directed to support justice, farms and farming systems, environmental sustainability, markets, health, agricultural products, and much more within the farm, food and fiber system.

## OUR PERSPECTIVE

Federal policy has a direct impact on farming livelihoods, how and what kind of crops are produced, rural community vitality, and how economically distressed families eat.

SAFSF believes federal policies can and 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 should be considered in order to speed progress toward this goal.

- Close the racial and economic gaps that are the result of subsidized farm consolidation and racial discrimination
- Protect our rich agricultural lands and long-term environmental health by supporting conservation-based farming systems
- Repair and rebuild thriving rural communities damaged by federal policy
- Build resilient local and regional food and fiber systems

If you have questions about SAFSF's policy work, please contact Traci Bruckner, Senior Director of Public Policy, at [traci@safsf.org](mailto:traci@safsf.org) or Maggie Mascarenhas, Public Policy Associate, at [mmascarenhas@safsf.org](mailto:mmascarenhas@safsf.org).

## **CLOSE THE RACIAL AND ECONOMIC GAPS THAT ARE THE RESULT OF SUBSIDIZED FARM CONSOLIDATION AND RACIAL DISCRIMINATION**

Instead of supporting rural communities, family farmers, or those farms operating at community scale, direct payments and subsidies for commodity and crop insurance programs benefit the largest and wealthiest farmers. This leads to increased farm consolidation and fuels economic inequity by driving up land prices, and pushing small and mid-sized operators off the land, or keeping new farmers from obtaining land.

Active discrimination towards socially disadvantaged farmers by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has also limited their access to credit and government resources and continues to result in significant loss of land and economic opportunity. Federal policy, in general, should address inequities created across all the provisions to move towards a more equitable future for all.

## **PROTECT OUR RICH AGRICULTURAL LANDS AND LONG-TERM ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH BY SUPPORTING CONSERVATION-BASED FARMING SYSTEMS**

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. Significant cuts have been made to conservation funding at a time when farmers are facing these increased challenges due to climate change.

Climate change must be recognized as a real-time threat so that programs and practices that have measurable climate and conservation benefits are prioritized.

## **REPAIR AND REBUILD THRIVING RURAL COMMUNITIES DAMAGED BY FEDERAL POLICY**

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, 2020 Census data shows that non-metro counties saw an overall population loss, meaning rural communities had more deaths than births, and more people moved out than moved in. Additionally, extreme poverty, meaning the county's poverty rate is 40 percent or greater, is a uniquely rural problem.

Rural depopulation, underemployment, health issues, aging infrastructure, and shifting to a more regional mindset, are some of the key issues driving federal policy. Of greatest concern is the lack of a comprehensive rural development policy. Instead, we have a collection of disparate rural development programs. It is critical to explore a systems-based approach to spark rural economic opportunity that ensures all who live in rural America can thrive.

## **BUILD RESILIENT LOCAL AND REGIONAL FOOD AND FIBER SYSTEMS**

The importance of local and regional food systems came into stark relief during the Covid-19 pandemic. Co-ops, farmers markets, and direct-to-consumer models, such as Consumer Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs, 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 chains.

Federal Policy, such as the CARES Act and the American Rescue Plan Act, significantly boosted resources in the short term to support local and regional food system infrastructure and markets during the pandemic. Federal policy must also continue to address the negative effects of consolidation, ensure farmworker health, and recognize the importance and power of local and regional food systems in establishing long-term food and nutrition security. In addition, we must also ensure sustainable fiber producers are seen as an integral part of the agricultural system.