



2023 FARM BILL PLATFORM

Small-scale family farms are the backbone of rural America, making up 89% of all US farms.



Despite their importance, many farmers are struggling from factors outside of their control. Fluctuating markets and farm product prices, increasing corporate consolidation, unbalanced trade policies, environmental degradation, and ongoing systemic racism have left farmers, and the communities they support, in a dire situation. The U.S. food system today is considered by most standards to be more concentrated than at any point in the last century around a handful of multinational corporations and their subsidiaries. As these companies reap record profits, family farmers face record levels of farm debt while more than 34 million people in the US face food insecurity. These issues became even more apparent when COVID-19 rattled the US and global economy with massive supply chain disruptions, higher prices for farmers and consumers, and worsened poverty and hunger.

Public policy shapes our food system.

Current federal farm policy generally supports industrial scale, multinational corporations and agribusinesses at the expense of family farmers and the average consumer. For decades, US farm policy has been designed to endlessly expand production, force export markets abroad to absorb the oversupply, and offer insufficient support and insurance programs to buffer farmers from the resulting low prices. Current farm policy also fails to guarantee fair and open markets or equitable access to farm credit.

The 2023 Farm Bill is an opportunity to fundamentally transform our food system by implementing policies that support good food for everyone, thriving rural communities and local economies, and resilience against climate change and ecosystem damage. Community-based, farmer-led agricultural systems based on the tenets of agroecology and food sovereignty are the best path forward to a resilient food system that supports everybody's needs. Farm Bill policies must prioritize what farmers need to keep them on their land and feeding their communities.

Since 1986, the National Family Farm Coalition (NFFC) has fought for fair prices for farmers, robust conservation programs, food sovereignty, and trade justice. Our 31 member organizations span nearly every state and represent a wide diversity of producers across the country, including commodity farmers, fruit and vegetable growers, ranchers, and fishermen. The following policy priorities and proposals reflect our deep commitment to the people who feed us.

OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Racial Equity

Racism has deep roots in our food and agricultural systems. We must dismantle racial oppression and exploitation of any form in favor of a society where all people enjoy equitable opportunities and outcomes.

Food Sovereignty

All people, from food producers and harvesters to consumers, have the right to healthy and culturally-appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods.

Agroecology

Food production should be designed and managed by applying ecological, social, cultural, and political principles so it meets our present needs without diminishing future generations' ability to meet theirs. Principles for a healthy, land-based farming system should also be applied to achieve healthy, thriving wild fisheries and seafood systems.

Parity Pricing and Fair Wages

All food producers and food chain workers must receive fair prices for their products that cover their costs of production, and fair wages above the current cost of living that ensures a dignified livelihood.

Participatory Governance

Farmers, ranchers, fishers, and food chain workers play a critical role in our society and must have a formal role in all decision-making processes that affect their livelihoods and communities.

International Solidarity

In order to move toward a more just future, civil society and social movement action cannot be restricted by national barriers. We must support community-based efforts for equitable, fair farm and food systems across the globe.



OUR MISSION

Mobilizing family farmers, fishers, and ranchers for fair prices, vibrant communities, and healthy foods free of corporate domination.

2023 FARM BILL PRIORITIES AND PROPOSALS



PRIORITY - Dairy Reform with Supply Management and Price Floors

Current federal dairy policies lack effective market regulation, forcing dairy farmers to scale up their operations to stay competitive - to "get big" or "get out." Producing more milk without addressing fairness in milk pricing and price volatility sets up a vicious cycle in which increased production floods the market and lowers prices further, triggering consolidation as smaller operations sell their herds to larger ones to avoid taking on more debt. For decades, milk prices below cost-of-production have led hundreds of thousands of family dairy farmers to sell their cows and farms, a long-term crisis that worsened during COVID-19. There are now fewer than 30,000 dairy farms remaining in the US, a loss of more than 70% over the past twenty years.

NFFC and our farmer members advocate a common sense federal dairy policy that uses [supply management](#) and price floors to guarantee fair prices for farmers while discouraging overproduction and further consolidation. **In 2021, we introduced the [Milk from Family Dairies Act \(MFDA\)](#)**, which will ensure fair and stable prices for family dairy farmers, reduce dependence on export markets, provide reliable and reasonably-priced dairy products for consumers, and revitalize rural economies – all with the goal of significant savings to taxpayers. The MFDA also prioritizes support for the next generation of dairy farmers to successfully enter the sector.

KEY PROPOSALS

- ✱ Set scale-appropriate price floors tied to costs of production, supporting economic vitality of family-scale dairy farmers and rural dairy communities.
- ✱ Annually estimate the total quantity of milk produced and consumed in the US and national dairy herd size average, to balance production and demand through a supply management system.
- ✱ Establish a market production base of fluid milk for each dairy farmer based on their herd's past production, which cannot be bought, sold, or otherwise commodified.
- ✱ Track and manage imported and exported dairy products through Milk Marketing Order Boards.
- ✱ Strengthen the Department of Justice's capacity to regulate and prevent dairy market consolidation.
- ✱ Increase USDA funding for dairy apprenticeships, grants and low-interest loans, and the Local Agriculture Market Program (LAMP).
- ✱ Invest in local food system infrastructure to support diversification and decentralization of the dairy industry.





PRIORITY - Strengthening Land Access for Historically Underserved Producers and Family Farmers

Over 40% of all US farmland - 400 million acres - is expected to transfer hands in the next few decades. The trends of

this transition are already cause for concern. Farmland is increasingly seen as an attractive (and profitable) investment opportunity by wealthy individuals and corporations, who are purchasing large plots of land at prices unattainable for small-scale, independent farmers.

As the current farming population retires and leaves the profession, keeping agricultural land accessible to and controlled by local communities is crucial. Supporting community-based land tenure agreements has the best potential for a long-term, sustainable solution to improved farmland access. NFFC supports policies that will strengthen land rights for family farmers and historically marginalized communities in the US and abroad.

Average US farmland value is now \$3,800 per acre – the highest since the 1970's.

Farmland prices have nearly doubled since 2005, becoming a massive barrier to beginning, landless, young, and historically underserved producers. [Weak land governance policies](#) have allowed multinational corporations to easily purchase farmland for resource extraction, concentrated animal feeding operations, large-scale monocrop commodity farms, and more.

The displacement and land theft from indigenous communities during colonization and discriminatory practices targeting Black landowners led to devastating land loss and insecure land tenure for these communities.

Black landowners in particular still regularly face threats to their land rights. Between 1910 and 1997, Black farmers lost roughly 90% of the farmland they owned. While white farmers have also experienced significant farm loss, foreclosed farms owned by white farmers generally have been consolidated into farms owned by other white farmers. Although there has been a significant decline in the number of family farmers regardless of race, total farmland owned by white farmers decreased by only 2% in the same time period. The long history of legal discrimination against Black farmers and the resulting abuse of [heirs' property](#) has harmed rural livelihoods and led to increasingly insecure land rights.

KEY PROPOSALS

- ✦ Provide public resources to support the formation of land trusts, agrarian commons, and other community-based land tenure arrangements; and ensure farmers involved in these land tenure arrangements have equal access to all USDA programs.
- ✦ Create a USDA land grant program to support land access for aspiring historically underserved farmers and ranchers.
- ✦ Bolster USDA's mandate to oversee, track, regulate, and make publicly accessible the scale and scope of corporate and foreign investment in US farmland, including farmland bought by US companies with capital sourced from abroad.
- ✦ Increase assistance to heirs' property owners by scaling up the Heirs' Property Relending Program with permanent baseline funding.
- ✦ Fund the USDA Tenure, Ownership, and Transition of Agricultural Land (TOTAL) Survey and hold public hearings on its findings related to the impacts of land tenure changes in the US.
- ✦ Support indigenous and native land tenure through new and existing USDA programs.
- ✦ Strengthen and expand limitations on corporate ownership of farmland.



PRIORITY - Improving Agricultural Credit Access

Access to credit is a critical tool for food producers, particularly for family-scale farmers operating on razor thin economic margins.

However, the lending sector is also full of risk; farmers must have strong credit protections and safeguards in place to protect their farms from predatory practices. Most farmers [rely on credit](#), using annual loans to keep their operations running. These loans buy critical supplies like seeds, machinery, and livestock

The US farm sector [has more debt than ever before](#), stemming from a lack of fair agricultural pricing standards, market disruptions from COVID 19, trade wars, and climate disasters. Without basic farmer borrower protections, strong institutional oversight, and flexible lending terms, access to farm credit is too often an extractive relationship between farmers and lenders, rather than an essential service underpinning our rural economies. The situation is even more challenging [for Black farmers](#), who have experienced decades of discriminatory lending and credit practices from the USDA as well as private lending institutions.

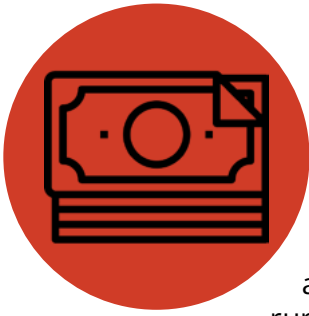
KEY PROPOSALS

- ✿ Extend the current farm foreclosure moratorium to keep farms operating and families in their homes.
- ✿ Allow loan restructuring and restore farmer FSA lending eligibility after a loan write-down.
- ✿ Enact farmer borrower protections to limit over-collateralization on farm loans including restricting lenders from requiring farmers' homes to be used as collateral.
- ✿ Eliminate the 7-year FSA loan eligibility term limit.
- ✿ Improve transparency and fairness for farmers challenging FSA loan denials in the National Appeals Division.
- ✿ Expand equitable relief, or farmer financial compensation, when FSA erroneously denies a farmer's loan resulting in harm.
- ✿ Ensure farmers on heirs' property have access to FSA lending programs if they provide a 'Tenant in Common' agreement for the management of the farmland.

Total US agricultural debt exceeded \$500 billion in 2022.

The USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) is known as the "lender of last resort," but for many family-scale operations FSA is the only option and offers better terms than the private sector. NFFC has been a leading force in securing reforms of FSA lending practices since the 1987 Agricultural Credit Act. Our agricultural credit priorities focus on making FSA lending terms more flexible to help family-scale farmers recover from the impacts of COVID-19, limiting over-collateralized farm loans, strengthening farmer borrower rights in appeals processes, and measures to keep farmers from losing their homes.





PRIORITY - Equitable Implementation of USDA Debt Relief

As farm debt has recently grown to historic levels in the absence of fair pricing policies, small-scale farmers and historically underserved rural communities have been hit particularly hard. For farmers of color, and Black farmers in particular, this has been further exacerbated by a lengthy history of racial discrimination and predatory lending. Debt relief - using public policy to pay off publicly held (FSA-held or guaranteed) farmer debt - is one tool for leveling the playing field for farmers in economic distress, and for farmers of color who have experienced racial discrimination. Supporting the financial stability of these farmers and addressing racial discrimination in USDA will make our rural economies stronger.

Building from debt relief provisions for small-scale farmers in the 2020 Relief for America's Small Farmers Act and the 2021 Emergency Relief for Farmers of Color Act, two NFFC priorities, the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act included \$5.3 billion for debt relief for economically distressed farmers and farmers who have faced discrimination, while also [regrettably removing](#) all framing or language about racial discrimination.

A recent study estimated that USDA discrimination contributed to over \$326 billion of lost Black wealth over the past century.

To be justly implemented, the IRA's debt relief provisions must prioritize the economic needs of these farmers in crisis, and ensure that financial assistance to farmers doesn't impose unnecessary tax burdens. These actions would go a long way toward rebuilding rural communities as well as their trust in federal farm policies and the USDA's approach to policy implementation.

NFFC supports exempting Inflation Reduction Act farmer debt relief payments from federal taxes, including income tax.





Supply Management and Parity Pricing for Commodity Agriculture

As corporate influence and unregulated capitalism have slowly eroded price floors for producers over the past 50 years, farm subsidies and insurance schemes have been established to supplement farmer income for many major commodity crops like corn and soy, as well as dairy. Subsidies offer a necessary lifeline to farmers when prices fall, but fail to address the underlying reasons for loss of farmer income. Subsidies (as currently structured) also support a farm economy which favors agribusinesses at the expense of small farmers - the overproduction of cheap commodity grains allows international grain traders and meatpackers to purchase huge amounts of corn and soy for ethanol, corn syrup, and especially animal feed. The production of inexpensive animal feed by industrialized meat companies supports [Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations \(CAFOs\)](#), which marginalize pasture-based livestock agriculture and contribute to widespread environmental damage, public health impacts, and environmental justice concerns.

Drawing from the successes of the New Deal era and [NFFC's 2008 Food from Family Farms Act](#), implementing supply management and parity pricing for commodity agriculture would ensure higher income for farmers and potentially billions

of dollars in taxpayer savings while reducing the dominance of manufactured, processed foods that rely on cheap grain products. **In alignment with our advocacy for supply management and fair pricing standards for dairy, we call on Congress to enact similar supply management and parity pricing policy for other agricultural commodities, such as grains.**



Support and Expand Local and Regional Food Systems

Local and regional food systems are key to healthy communities, a strong food supply chain, and farmer livelihoods. In many regions throughout the country, local food systems are undercut by the multiple barriers that family farmers face trying to get their products into increasingly concentrated markets. At the same time, nearby consumers who want access to affordable, culturally appropriate, and healthy food often have to rely on large grocery chains to meet their food and budget needs.

The pandemic further exposed the fragility of consolidated food supply chains. When millions of consumers faced empty grocery store shelves, local producers continued to feed their communities by selling products direct-to-consumer. Direct connections between farmers and consumers result in a shortened, more flexible, and resilient food chain. We all benefit from resilient local and regional food systems that adequately reward farmers and serve the needs of people most at risk.

The Local Agriculture Market Program (LAMP), first established in the 2018 Farm Bill, is a key program that supports developing and expanding direct-to-consumer marketing, local and regional food markets and enterprises, and value-added agricultural products.

The 2023 Farm Bill should increase LAMP funding and promote opportunities that make direct connections between farmers and consumers to shorten and decentralize the food chain, reduce food insecurity, and promote food sovereignty.





Defend and Expand the Farmer Outreach and Training Opportunities Program (FOTO)

The Farming Opportunities Training and Outreach (FOTO) program was established in the 2018 Farm Bill to help educate and train veterans, beginning, and 'socially disadvantaged' farmers and ranchers who who want to own and manage their own agricultural operations. FOTO is an umbrella program that combined and strengthened the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP) and the Outreach and Assistance to Socially Disadvantaged and Veteran Farmers and Ranchers Program (2501 Program). The Section 2501 Program grew from the Minority Farmers Rights Act of 1990, which passed with support from NFFC, member organizations (the Land Loss Prevention Project and Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund), and allied organizations, and has been funded in every subsequent farm bill.

By providing grants to organizations that serve these farming populations, FOTO provides an important opportunity to dismantle some of the barriers to entering the profession, while supporting historically underserved producers. Participants of FOTO programs benefit from technical assistance, workshops, mentoring and apprenticeships, and more. Ensuring that more farmers and ranchers from diverse backgrounds are able to enter the field is essential to the growth and stability of our food system, especially as

the number of small and mid-size farms and the number of farmers and ranchers dwindles every year. **We support increased funding to FOTO in the 2023 Farm Bill**



Re-Establish Mandatory Country of Origin Labeling

The 2002 Farm Bill established mandatory country of origin labeling (MCOOL) for many foods, but in 2015, the World Trade Organization (WTO) made a questionable ruling that the US MCOOL for meat products violated international trade rules. American consumers deserve to know the origins of their food and overwhelmingly support reinstating and expanding Mandatory Country of Origin Labeling for meats, dairy, and seafood.

Transparency and easy access to information about food is important to protecting producers, consumers, and local economies. Current regulations allow a "Product of the US" label if the product is processed in US facilities, regardless of where it is grown or harvested. Reinstating Mandatory Country of Origin Labeling (MCOOL) would restore market integrity and fair competition for US producers, while allowing consumers to make fully informed purchasing decisions. **NFFC urges Congress to restore Mandatory Country of Origin Labeling for meat, dairy, and seafood.**



Strengthen Enforcement of the Packers and Stockyards Act

Originally enacted in 1921, the Packers and Stockyards Act was designed to promote fair competition and transparency within the meatpacking industry by stopping unfair, deceptive, predatory, and monopoly practices, including corporate retaliation against farmers who speak out about exploitation and discrimination. Since the Act's passing, agribusiness influence on Congress has undermined its implementation by cutting funding to USDA, introducing weak regulatory rules, and dismantling the USDA Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration (GIPSA), responsible for meat and poultry agribusiness oversight. The lack of robust enforcement of the Packers and Stockyards Act has severely restricted competition within the meat industry.

The top four firms in their respective industries control 85% of the beef market, 54% of the poultry market, and 70% of the pork market.

The USDA is in the process of [creating new rules](#) to support enforcement of the Packers and Stockyards Act, which NFFC is closely following. We call on Congress to strengthen the Packers and Stockyards Act to break up meatpacking monopolies and regulate fair and competitive markets for farmers, ranchers, and consumers.



Strengthen Anti-Trust Rules and Enforcement

Ongoing corporate concentration has transformed agriculture. Agribusinesses with concentrated market shares hold immense power to unfairly manipulate the food system and curb competition. Increasing global trends of consolidation and vertical integration within the food system have led to monopolies that control multiple levels of the global supply chain. Consolidation and concentration hurt the ability of family farmers to diversify and to freely access markets, resulting in higher prices and less choice for consumers.

NFFC supports efforts to strengthen and enforce antitrust regulations that support fair market practices, as well as a moratorium on agribusiness mergers and the breaking up of corporate monopolies in the food sector



In addition to our policy priorities above, NFFC also supports the work of our members and allies to:



Protect Tribal Land Tenure and Sovereignty

The colonization of the US resulted in the theft of land from its original Indigenous residents over generations, resulting in insecure land tenure even today. Native Americans have lost 99% of their original land holdings. [A complicated redistribution](#) of tribal land ownership enforced in the 19th century further weakened tribal land holdings, and the federal government holds 56 million acres of land “in trust” that cannot be developed or sold without the approval of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The loss of native lands has negatively impacted Indigenous groups, who experience higher rates of poverty and food insecurity than other demographics.

NFFC supports the reclamation of ancestral lands by Native American tribes, and policies that support and protect tribal self-governance and sovereignty of land.



Provide Regulatory Relief for Small/Custom Meat Processors

Under current law, meat from custom meat processors is barred from sale to all consumers except for the individual who owns the animal at the time of slaughter. This is a barrier to customers wishing to purchase local meat - who are required to purchase the whole animal before processing - and to small farms wishing to expand market opportunities.

Farmers wishing to sell their meat directly to consumers at farm stands, farmers' market, or otherwise, must use USDA or state-inspected facilities that meet strict USDA requirements. Due to regulations written for large-scale slaughterhouses and the corporate consolidation of meat processing there is a shortage of facilities that meet USDA requirements, and farmers

regularly report a year-long wait or longer to have animals processed for sale. In areas with limited processing options, if one processor closes or cannot take on more demand, farmers may have to drive much farther or forgo having their animals slaughtered.

Custom processing facilities are operating safely across the US, are regulated under federal law, and have the capacity to meet the demands of local markets. **NFFC supports action that will decentralize the meat processing sector and allow direct-to-consumer and retail sales of meat from processed by custom slaughterhouses.**



Defend State-Level Regulations for On-Farm Slaughter and Clarify Personal Use Exemptions

We support proposals to protect and clarify the Federal Meat Inspection Act's personal-use-exemption. Twenty-seven states have livestock slaughter laws, based on this federal exemption, that allow livestock owners to have an agent slaughter their livestock on-farm, and to use that meat without state or federal inspection. The Federal Meat Inspection Act, enacted in 1906 and last updated in 1989, bases the personal-use exemption on who raised the animals instead of who owns them.

Currently, farmers selling livestock for on-farm slaughter, itinerant (traveling) slaughterers, and custom processors all rely on guidance provided by the USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS), which bases the personal use exemption on ownership. USDA FSIS guidance, however, is vulnerable to change.

The Federal Meat Inspection Act should be revised to protect personal use-based on ownership, reflecting modern FSIS guidance and ensuring that livestock producers and processors have permanent protection to practice on-farm slaughter in accordance with state laws.



Protect Farmer and Fisher Data Privacy Rights

New digital technologies have allowed producers to access and track huge amounts of data that can be used to improve production, efficiency, and sustainability. But data comes at a cost. Many producers are increasingly concerned about the security of their business and personal data, and how it might be shared, used or even sold by agriculture technology providers (ATPs) and equipment manufacturers. A 2014 survey showed that 77% of farmers are worried about data privacy.

Agricultural data is a hot commodity and offers a wealth of information to corporations with access to sophisticated analysis methods. The collection and sale of farmer data is an alarming trend that further consolidates power into the hands of manufacturers, who extract huge amounts of data directly from producers' machines. While farmers sometimes have access to the data accumulated, [complicated legalities and contracts](#) mean that they do not actually "own" the raw data, giving corporations free reign to access valuable data and to even sell it to others, like seed and fertilizer companies.

Policy makers must include the agriculture sector in discussions around data collection and privacy rights. **NFFC supports policies that specifically protect the privacy of and access to producer data.**



Protect the Right to Repair of Farm Equipment

As farm equipment rapidly continues to modernize with technological advancements, farmers have faced more difficulties repairing their own equipment. Under the guise of consumer safety, equipment companies, such as John Deere, have imposed restrictions that require equipment repairs be completed by manufacturer-approved mechanics with proprietary parts and software unavailable to the public. Producers have long reported that manufacturer-approved repairs are costlier and take longer than a third-party technician or repairing the equipment themselves. Some have even reported purchasing older, more outdated equipment just to be able to repair it themselves. Farmers should be able to repair their farm equipment without being forced to use corporate-approved parts and labor, just like cars can be repaired at any mechanic of your choosing.

NFFC supports legislation that protects farmers by requiring farm equipment manufacturers to provide owners and independent repair businesses with access to service information, diagnostic tools and affordable replacement parts.

