



FARM BILL PLATFORM



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

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 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.

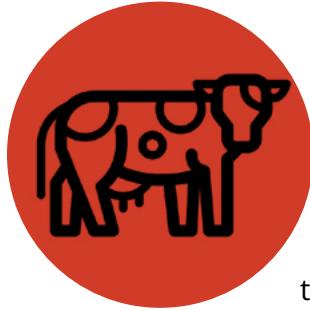
Since 1986, the National Family Farm Coalition (NFFC) has fought for fair prices for farmers, robust conservation programs, food sovereignty, and trade justice. Our 30 member organizations span nearly every state and represent a wide diversity of producers across the country, including commodity farmers, fruit and vegetable growers, ranchers, and fishermen. The following policy priorities and proposals reflect our deep commitment to the people who feed us.

Learn more about our work online at www.nffc.net

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.



FARM BILL PRIORITIES



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 25,000 dairy farms remaining in the US, a loss of more than 70% over the past twenty years.** The latest 2022 USDA Census also showed that the US lost 16,000 dairy farms from 2017-2022, a 39% decline in only five 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 proposed a framework for 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. We continue to develop this proposal as a bill for introduction. [Read the full proposal here.](#)

KEY POLICY PROPOSALS

- Set scale- and region-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 financialized
- Track and manage imported and exported dairy products through Milk Marketing Order Boards
- Strengthen the federal government'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) to build out regional dairy supply chains
- Invest in local food system infrastructure to support diversification and decentralization of the dairy industry

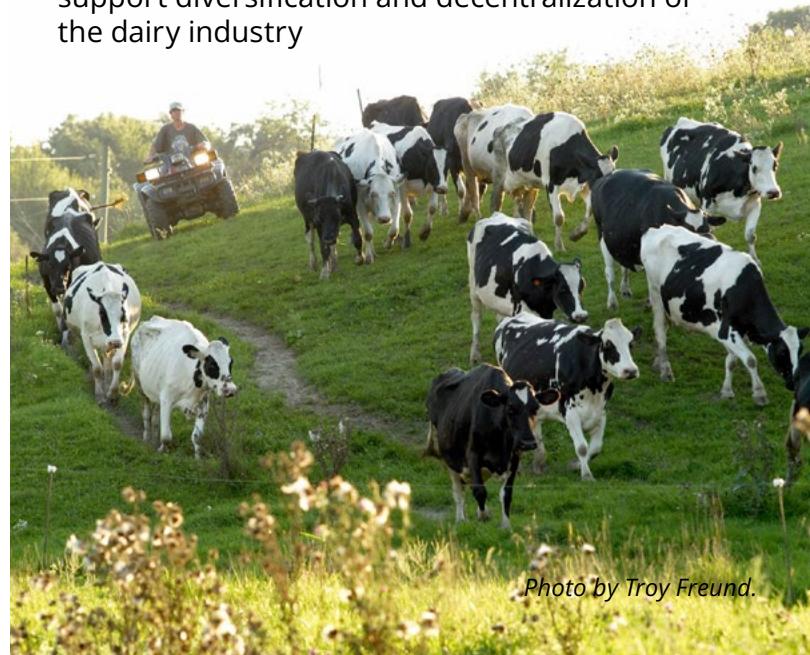
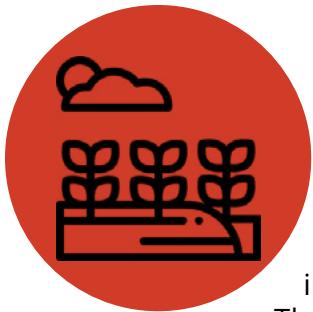


Photo by Troy Freund.



PRIORITY - Strengthening Land Access and Fighting Land Consolidation by Corporations

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

The rising trends of farmland consolidation is 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. Farmland prices have nearly doubled since 2005, becoming a massive barrier to beginning, landless, young, and historically underserved producers.

Average US farmland value is now \$4,350 per acre – the highest on record.

Record-high farmland prices and [weak land governance policies](#) have allowed corporate entities to easily purchase farmland for resource extraction and speculative investment, often at the expense of local farmers and landowners. With the legal and financial resources to recruit billions of dollars in capital from investors, corporate buyers have an unfair advantage to outbid independent

family-scale farmers. Federal policy has, in many cases, exacerbated this tendency. **As a result, the number of corporate-owned agricultural properties has tripled since 2009.**

The Farmland for Farmers Act (S. 2583 in the 118th Congress) is a landmark bill that would stop large corporations, pension funds, and investment firms — both domestic and foreign — from making new purchases of farmland for investment purposes. The bill uses a targeted approach exempting small corporations actively engaged in farming, heirs' property owners, farmer cooperatives, and others. It also strengthens state authority and guidance for compliance, enforcement, and tracking of farmland purchases. Finally, the bill prevents USDA and farm credit system programs from being used by corporate investments to manage their risk, ensuring those institutions fulfill their purpose to serve independent farmers and their communities.

The displacement and land theft from indigenous and Black communities during and beyond colonization, and discriminatory practices targeting Indigenous and Black landowners led to devastating land loss and insecure land tenure for these communities. Indigenous communities have been forcefully dispossessed of 99% of their native land. Similarly, between 1910 and 1997, Black



farmers lost roughly 90% of the farmland they owned. While white farmers have also experienced significant farm loss since the 1980s farm crisis, foreclosed farms owned by white farmers have generally 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% since 1910. The long history of legal discrimination against Indigenous and Black communities has harmed rural livelihoods and led to increasingly insecure property rights.

Generations of distrust by dispossessed communities towards legal and government institutions led to the system of heirs' property, where land passes through generations of families without a clear title of ownership. [Heirs' property](#) remains commonplace in certain US regions, especially among Southern Black communities, and is especially vulnerable to ownership and succession challenges. **To support heirs' property owners, The Heirs Education and Investment to Resolve Succession of (HEIRS) Property Act (H.R. 8198 in the 118th Congress)** directs the USDA to enter into cooperative agreements with nonprofit organizations, providing funding for pro-bono legal or accounting services to heirs property owners needing to resolve ownership or succession issues of their farmland. The bill also reauthorizes the [Heirs Property Intermediary Relending Program](#).

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 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, including the New Producer Economic Security Act (S.1237/H.R. 2536).** The Act directs USDA's Farm Service Agency to establish a pilot program to resource locally-led, community-based projects that address the interrelated challenges of land, capital, and market access for the next generation of farmers and ranchers. The New Producer Economic Security Act will help address the challenges of land access and tenure by making grants and cooperative agreements to strengthen land, capital, and market access

outcomes for new farmers, ranchers, and forest owners; provide funding for direct assistance and services to help next generation farmers and ranchers afford and acquire land and cover related activities; and establish a stakeholder committee to develop a process for evaluating applications and distributing funds. These added authorities will greatly expand USDA's ability to provide grants, market opportunities, and technical assistance for new and historically-underserved farmers, and farmers operating in high-poverty areas.

OTHER KEY POLICY 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 existing laws limiting 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.

According to the USDA, farm sector debt is expected to reach \$624.7 billion in 2026. This stems 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 by the USDA as well as private lending institutions.

Total US agricultural debt is expected to exceed \$620 billion in 2026.

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 so that it can better realize its stated goal of becoming a “lender of first opportunity.”

The Fair Credit for Farmers Act (S.3126/H.R. 6169) improves access and accountability for FSA farm loan services while strengthening farmer-borrower rights. These improvements will especially help to ensure that historically underserved farmers and ranchers receive equal

treatment in FSA lending and appeal processes. The Act includes improvements such as payment deferral, waived guaranteed loan fees for covered borrowers, debt refinancing options, and limiting loan over-collateralization that puts farmers' homes and assets at risk. It also corrects the imbalance of power in the appeals process, putting the burden of proof on FSA, rather than farmers, who won't be required to file needless multiple appeals.

With these reforms to FSA loan application and appeals processes, the Fair Credit for Farmers Act will support a fundamental shift in the dynamic between farmers and FSA, to a relationship where farmers have protections and are joint partners with FSA staff in seeking farm success.

OTHER KEY POLICY PROPOSALS

- 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.
- Fully fund FSA in appropriations, including county offices, so that staffing is robust and contributes to high-quality customer service for farmers.
- Ensure that staffing changes at USDA do not negatively impact farmer access to credit.





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

We support the **Livestock Owned by Communities to Advance Local (LOCAL) Foods Act (S.1212/H.R. 5341)**, which protects and clarifies on-farm slaughter by updating the **Federal Meat Inspection Act's personal-use exemption**. Twenty-seven states have livestock slaughter laws based on this federal exemption, which allow livestock owners who did not raise their animal to have an agent slaughter their livestock on-farm, and to use that meat without USDA 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 slaughterers (often referred to as "mobile butchers"), and custom processors all rely on guidance from 2018 provided by the USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS), which correctly interprets the personal-use exemption to include not just a producer, but who owns the animal before slaughter. Without statutory protection, however, this USDA FSIS guidance is vulnerable to change.

The Federal Meat Inspection Act should be revised through the LOCAL Foods Act 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.



Supply Management and Parity Pricing for Commodity Agriculture

As corporate influence and unregulated markets have slowly eroded price floors for producers over the past 50 years, farm subsidies and insurance schemes have supplemented 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 [precipitated the rise in 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 on the successes of the New Deal era, NFFC proposed the [2008 Food from Family Farms Act](#) with the goal of implementing strategic food reserves, supply management, and parity pricing for commodity agriculture to ensure higher income for farmers and potentially billions of dollars in taxpayer savings while reducing the dominance of manufactured, processed foods relying 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 markets are key to healthy communities, a strong food supply chain, and farmer success. In many regions throughout the country, demand for local food is far greater than current levels of supply due to the multiple barriers that family farmers face trying to get their products to markets. At the same time, nearby consumers who want access to affordable, 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 were able to fill in the gaps by selling products direct-to-consumer. Direct connections between farmers and consumers

result in a shortened, more flexible food chain and improved food security. We all benefit from resilient local and regional markets that adequately reward farmers and serve the needs of people most at risk.

Established in the 2018 Farm Bill, the [Local Agriculture Market Program \(LAMP\)](#) supports developing and expanding direct-to-consumer marketing, local and regional food markets and enterprises, and value-added agricultural products. **The Farm Bill should increase LAMP funding, reduce matching requirements to broaden producer participation, and expand opportunities for family-scale fisheries through a systems approach that promotes food sovereignty.**

Biodiverse, regionally-adapted crops and livestock are vital pieces of a resilient regional food system. **We support the Seeds and Breeds for the Future Act (S.2023 in the 118th Congress) which reduces vulnerability to environmental risks and disruptions, and increases crop hardiness and yield.** The Act provides funding for USDA research grants to develop new, publicly available plant cultivars and animal breeds.



Achieving Trade Justice to Support Family Farms

Trade policy has significant consequences for the economic viability and success of family-scale farmers. The prevailing free trade paradigm has largely benefited corporate agribusiness, making it hard for smaller-scale farms to compete in an era of increasing consolidation. Trade policy has, for example, threatened marketplace transparency, farmers' control over intellectual property, and efforts to balance sector-wide supply with demand, all of which hinder farmers' ability to get a fair price that, at minimum, covers their cost of production.

The US farm trade deficit surpassed \$43 billion in 2025.

While trade policy is a perennial concern, and especially so in an ever-evolving climate marked by tariff changes, treaties like the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement – up for a mandatory review in 2026 – offer a chance for Congress to improve upon how trade affects the family farm.

The 2002 Farm Bill established mandatory country of origin labeling (MCOOL) for many foods, but in 2015, the World Trade Organization (WTO) made a controversial ruling that US MCOOL for beef and pork 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 beef, pork, dairy, and seafood.

Transparency and easy access to information about food is important to protecting producers, consumers, and local economies. With the farm trade deficit at an all-time high, Congress must act to protect market opportunities for US farmers and ranchers, not multinational corporations importing cheaper products from abroad that undercut US farmers/ranchers and support poor environmental and labor practices abroad.

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 beef and pork through the American Beef Labeling Act (S.421) and the COOL Enforcement Act (H.R. 5818).** Additionally, we call for the expansion of MCOOL for dairy and seafood products.





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

Ongoing corporate concentration has transformed agriculture. Agribusinesses with concentrated market shares hold immense power to unfairly manipulate the food system and curb competition. 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 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 Farm Bill.**



Strengthen Anti-Trust Rules and Enforcement

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.



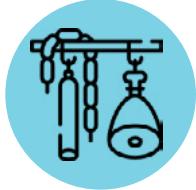
In addition to our policy priorities above, NFFC also supports the work of our members and allies to:



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 could help meet the demands of local markets. NFFC supports action that will decentralize the meat processing sector, fund construction of smaller, new, local facilities, and allow direct-to-consumer and retail sales of meat from processed by custom slaughterhouses. **To that end, we support the PRIME Act (S.2409/H.R. 4700), which would permit the intrastate distribution of animals and meats that are slaughtered and prepared at custom animal slaughter facilities without federal inspection.**





Protect the Right to Repair for 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.



Support Climate Resilience and Conservation

Robust conservation program funding in Title II of the Farm Bill enables family-scale farmers to incorporate conservation practices into their operations that support their business's viability and agroecological principles. Increasing mandatory funding for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, the Conservation Stewardship Program, the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program, the Regional Conservation Partnership Program, and the Conservation Reserve Program would all support family-scale farmers who care for their land and local waterways. USDA should have the resources and authorities necessary to make sure this funding is tailored to benefit family-scale farmers and that it is distributed towards practices that small- to mid-sized producers are well-poised to implement.

NFFC endorses the [Agricultural Resilience Act \(S.1507/H.R. 3077\)](#), which would establish, expand, and revise multiple USDA programs and activities to reduce carbon emissions and improve conservation outcomes in the agricultural sector.

