

December 6, 2023

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chair
Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry Committee
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Boozman
Ranking Member
Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry Committee
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Glenn “G.T.” Thompson
Chair
Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable David Scott
Ranking Member
Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow, Ranking Member Boozman, Chairman Thompson, and Ranking Member Scott:

Re: The next farm bill is an opportunity for the transformation of our food and agriculture systems

The next food and farm bill must not be a status quo, business-as-usual farm bill. As the climate crisis drives dangerous weather across the country, workers are losing their lives putting food on our tables. Agriculture’s greenhouse gas emissions continue to be a major contributor to climate change¹, while on-farm chemical use, such as fertilizers and livestock feeding operations poison water sources across the country.² Farmers are rising to the challenge of mitigating climate change, but USDA turns away two out of every three farmers seeking conservation assistance.³ Furthermore, farm income is increasingly consolidated among a few large, corporate operations while Black, Indigenous, and People of Color farmers are continuing to lose their land and face discrimination in USDA program access⁴. And the end of pandemic emergency food assistance has caused more than 2 million Americans to face food insecurity.⁵

The next food and farm bill is an opportunity to address these urgent issues and transform our food and agriculture system into one that our farmers, workers, and communities need and deserve.

We urge Congress to champion policies that center racial justice; work to end hunger and increase access to nutritious food; meet the climate crisis head on; ensure safety and dignity for food and farm workers; and protect farmers and consumers from consolidation.

¹ <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/natural-resources-environment/climate-change/>

² <https://www.usgs.gov/mision-areas/water-resources/science/agricultural-contaminants#:~:text=Agricultural%20contaminants%20can%20impair%20the,streams%2C%20rives%2C%20and%20groundwater.>

³ <https://www.iatp.org/still-closed-out>

⁴ <https://www.npr.org/2023/02/19/1156851675/in-2022-black-farmers-were-persistently-left-behind-from-the-usdas-loan-system>

⁵ <https://www.pennmedicine.org/news/news-releases/2023/august/food-insufficiency-increase-following-drawdown-of-snap-benefits>

Our organizations believe the following bills collectively represent the direction the next farm bill must take to transform our food and farm systems. While not every section of every bill may be within the jurisdiction of the agriculture committee, the intent and values of all of these bills match the direction the farm bill must take. None of the undersigned organizations is working on all of these bills, and it is not an exhaustive list. The undersigned agree that their inclusion is an essential step forward to ensure the survival of our food system, communities, and planet.

We ask Congress to consider carefully any farm bill legislation that does not deliver these wins for our communities.

Promoting Fair Opportunities in Agriculture

1890s Advancing and Building Leadership and Excellence Opportunity Act (S. 2058 / HR 4326)-

Increases the number of authorized Centers of Excellence (COEs) at 1890 Land-Grant Institutions, focusing on climate change, forestry reliance and conservation, food safety and bioprocessing and value-added agriculture, and transdisciplinary social science.

Farming Opportunities Training and Outreach Grant Program Reauthorization Act (S. 2380) -

Reauthorizes Farming Opportunities, Training, and Outreach (FOTO) and adds project proposals providing translation services as a priority for both 2501 and BFRDP.

Fair Credit for Farmers Act (S. 2668)- Improves access and accountability for the farm loan services offered by the Farm Service Agency (FSA), including through payment deferral, waived guaranteed loan fees for historically underserved 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.

Increasing Land Access, Security, and Opportunities Act (S. 2340 / HR 3955) - Increases access to capital for underserved farmers, boosts training and economic opportunity for beginner farmers, and helps make land more affordable for young and Black, Indigenous and other people of color (BIPOC) farmers.

Justice for Black Farmers Act (S.96 / HR 1167) – Creates civil rights oversight to end discrimination within USDA, protects remaining Black farmers from losing their land, restores the land base lost by black farmers, creates a farm conservation corps, provides substantial resources to 1890s and to nonprofits who serve Black farmers, assists all socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers by increasing technical assistance and priority to USDA programs, and enacts system reforms to help all farmers and ranchers succeed.

Protecting America's Meatpacking Workers Act (S. 270 / HR 798)- Calls for a GAO report on racial and ethnic disparities in meat and poultry processing, including workplace injuries, exposure to chemicals, physical or mental abuse, predatory practices, ability to speak out, etc.

Supporting Urban Agriculture and Innovative Farming Act (S. 2591) - Provides mandatory funding and makes programmatic reforms to the Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production (OUAIP), including utilizing trusted community partnerships to lead outreach and delivery of services through cooperative agreements.

End Hunger and Increase Access to Nutritious Food

Closing the Meal Gap Act (S. 1336 / HR 3037) - Boosts SNAP benefit allotments by utilizing the more adequate Low-Cost Food Plan; authorizes the standard medical deduction for seniors and disabled individuals; eliminates the cap on the Excess Shelter Deduction; eliminates time limits; and expands SNAP benefits for Puerto Rico.

Enhance Access To SNAP Act of 2023 (S. 1488 / HR 3183)- Eliminates the barriers that college students with low incomes face when accessing SNAP.

Food Secure Strikers Act (S. 2553 / H.R. 4845) - Allows striking workers to apply for SNAP benefits.

Improve Access to Nutrition Act (HR 1510)- Repeals the three-month time limit on SNAP for certain working-age adults who struggle with deep-set barriers to finding consistent employment.

Lift the Bar Act (S. 2038 / HR 4170) - Eliminates the five-year bar (waiting period) for legal permanent immigrants to access SNAP and other federal programs.

Local Farms and Food Act (S. 1205 / HR 2723) - Invests in local and regional food system infrastructure, including food hubs and farmers markets through the Local Agriculture Market Program (LAMP) and makes locally grown produce more accessible and affordable for SNAP recipients through the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP).

OH SNAP, Close the Fruit and Vegetable Gap Act (S. 2015 / HR 4149) - Significantly expands the successful Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP), which incentivizes low-income recipients to consume fruits and vegetables; eliminates the match requirement.

The Restore Act (S. 1753 / HR 3479)- Repeals the lifetime federal ban on individuals with felony drug convictions from receiving SNAP.

Meet the Climate Crisis Head On

Agriculture Resilience Act (S. 1016 / HR 1840) - Sets a national goal of achieving net-zero emissions in agriculture by 2040 through farmer-led, science-based initiatives. Makes investments to help farmers and ranchers improve soil health, expands conservation programs, increases research into climate agricultural practices, and supports on-farm renewable energy projects.

A. Donald McEachin Environmental Justice for All Act (S. 919/ HR 1705)

Establishes several environmental justice requirements, advisory bodies, and programs to address the disproportionate adverse human health or environmental effects of federal laws or programs on communities of color, low-income communities, or tribal and indigenous communities.

Farmer-to-Farmer Education Act (S.2614) - Adds farmer-to-farmer conservation education into the existing Conservation Technical Assistance statute. This would augment existing farmer-led education networks and build capacity for new ones—particularly for historically marginalized communities—through the use of cooperative agreements and existing funding.

Seeds and Breeds for the Future Act (S. 2023)- Invests in the development of regionally-adapted and publicly available seed varieties and animal breeds to help farmers confront drought and varying growing conditions; outlines priorities for competitive research grants that includes cultivars and breeds bred for a changing climate as well as to enhance the nutritional and health outcomes of local and Native American, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian populations.

Small Farm Conservation Act (S. 2180, H.R. 5354) - Helps meet the conservation needs of young and BIPOC producers through dedicated funding and a simplified application process for small farms and ranches. It creates a new subprogram of EQIP dedicated to helping these producers access USDA funds to conserve their soil, water, and air; and increasing access to technical assistance.

Ensure Safety and Dignity for Food and Farm Workers

Agricultural Worker Justice Act (S. 2601 / HR 4978)- Prohibits the USDA from purchasing food produced by workers who are paid less than the prevailing wage for their locality and directs the DOL to establish a regional prevailing wage. The Act also includes authorization of the local food purchase assistance cooperative agreement program.

Asunción Valdivia Heat Stress Injury, Illness, and Fatality Prevention Act (S. 2501 / HR 4897) - Establishes a permanent, federal standard to protect workers against occupational exposure to excessive heat, both in indoor and outdoor environments. The standard would include common-sense precautions, such as paid breaks in shaded or climate-controlled spaces, providing sufficient water, and requiring emergency response and transportation for workers incurring heat-related illness.

Child Labor Exploitation Accountability Act (S. 1288 / HR 2822)- Requires companies competing for contracts with USDA to disclose labor and worker safety infractions by the company and any of their contractors in the preceding three years.

Fairness for Farm Workers Act (S. 2253 / HR 4579) - Updates the nation's labor laws to ensure farm workers receive fairer wages and compensation. The bill would amend the *Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938* to provide overtime and additional minimum wage protections for farm workers.

Protect America's Children from Toxic Pesticides (S. 269 / HR 5085) - Bans the most damaging pesticides that have been scientifically proven to harm the safety of people and our environment and provides protections for farmworkers that bear the burden of pesticide exposure.

Protect America's Meatpacking Workers Act (S. 270 / HR 798)- Expands workplace safety and health requirements that apply to meat and poultry processing establishments, including by prohibiting waivers (subject to limited exceptions) related to line speeds and inspections.

Supporting Our Farm and Food System Workforce Act (S. 2703)- Creates an Office of the Farm and Food System Workforce at USDA to serve as a liaison and a resource for farm and food system workers.

Voice for Farm Workers Act (S. 2702)- Expands the role and staff of the USDA Farmworker Coordinator to allow for increased collaboration within the Department, with farm workers, and with relevant stakeholders.

Protect Farmers and Consumers from Consolidation

Fairness for Small-Scale Farmers and Ranchers Act (S. 2670 / H.R. 4979)- Halt mergers of big agriculture firms and strengthen antitrust laws across the agricultural sector.

Farm System Reform Act (S. 271 / HR 797)- Strengthens the Packers & Stockyards Act to crack down on the monopolistic practices of meatpackers and corporate integrators; places a moratorium on large factory farms, sometimes referred to as concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs); and restores mandatory country-of-origin labeling requirements.

Industrial Agriculture Accountability Act (S. 272 / HR 805)- Places liability for responsible disaster mitigation on corporations and industrial operators by requiring those entities to register with USDA and submit disaster preparedness plans.

Opportunities for Fairness in Farming Act (S. 557 / HR 1249)- Establishes restrictions and requirements for checkoff programs to make these programs more responsive to the farmers who are required to contribute to them and limiting anticompetitive behavior by preventing USDA checkoff programs from paying organizations that lobby on agricultural issues.

Opportunities in Organic Act (S. 1582 / HR 3650)- Strengthens and expands the organic marketplace by reducing cost-barriers, expanding access to new markets and resources, and providing support and training, particularly for smaller scale and socially disadvantaged producers and underserved regions.

Strengthening Local Processing Act (S. 354 / HR 945)- Promotes competitive agricultural markets and invests in economic development by addressing acute livestock supply chain issues, supporting small meat and poultry processing plants, and promoting training programs that will bolster the resilience of communities and their food systems.

Sincerely,

A Better Balance
Agri-Cultura Cooperative Network
Agricultural Justice Project
Alabama State Association of Cooperatives
Alianza Nacional de Campesinas
Alliance to End Hunger
American Indian Mothers Inc
American Sustainable Business Network
Appetite For Change
California Climate and Agriculture Network (CalCAN)
California Environmental Voters
Campaign for Family Farms and the Environment
Castanea Fellowship
Catskill Mountainkeeper
Certified Naturally Grown
Chicago Food Policy Action Council
Children of Smithfield
Climate Justice Alliance
Coastal Enterprises, Inc.
Coming Clean
Community Food Advocates
Cultivate Charlottesville
Earthjustice
Equitable Food Oriented Development Collaborative
Farm Aid
Farm Bill Law Enterprise

Farmers Market Coalition
Farmers Market Fund
Farmworker Association of Florida
Farmworker Justice
First Focus Campaign for Children
Florida Veterans for Common Sense
Food Animal Concerns Trust (FACT)
Food for the Spirit
FoodCorps
Fresh Approach
Grazing Reform Project
Greater Kansas City Food Policy Coalition
Green America
Groundwork Center for Resilient Communities
Grow Windham
HEAL (Health, Environment, Agriculture, Labor) Food Alliance
Health Care Without Harm
Hell's Backbone Grill & Farm
Illinois Stewardship Alliance
Independent Restaurant Coalition
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy
Iowa Interfaith Power & Light
Kansas Rural Center
La Semilla Food Center
Land Stewardship Project
Latino Farmers & Ranchers International, Inc.
Loaves & Fishes Food Pantry, Inc.
Marbleseed
Midwest Farmers of Color Collective
National Black Food & Justice Alliance
National Employment Law Project
National Family Farm Coalition
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
National Young Farmers Coalition
New CT Farmer Alliance
New Orleans Food Policy Action Council
North Coast Food Web
Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance
Northeast Organic Farming Association of CT (CT NOFA)
Northeast Organic Farming Association of New Hampshire (NOFA-NH)
NORTHEAST ORGANIC FARMING ASSOCIATION OF NEW JERSEY NOFA NJ
Northeast Organic Farming Association of New York (NOFA-NY)
Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont (NOFA-VT)
Northeast Organic Farming Association-Interstate Council

Northeast Organic Farming Association, Massachusetts Chapter (NOFA/Mass)
Northwest Center for Alternatives to Pesticides
Not Our Farm
Nourish Colorado
Oklahoma Black Historical Research Project, Inc.
OMI Cultural Participation Project
Operation Spring Plant.Inc.
Oregon Climate and Agriculture Network
Oregon Food Bank
Oxfam America
Pasa Sustainable Agriculture
Pesticide Action Network
Pinnacle Prevention
Real Food Media
Regenerative Institute of Community Education
Rogue Farm Corps
root2RISE West Hartford
Rural Advancement Fund of the National Sharecroppers Fund
Rural Coalition
San Diego Food System Alliance
Socially Responsible Agriculture Project
Soil Centric
Soul Fire Farm
Springfield Food Policy Council/40 Acres Farm
SPROUT
Stanford University Environmental Justice Working Group
Student Action with Farmworkers
Tenacious Turtle
The Food Trust
The Land Institute
The Transformation Project
The Wave Foundation
The Zoo City Farm and Food Network
They Keep Bees
Toxic Free North Carolina
Union of Concerned Scientists
United Food and Commercial Workers International Union (UFCW)
Wallace Center at Winrock International
Windham-Willimantic NAACP Environmental Justice Committee
Women Food and Agriculture Network (WFAN)
Workers Center of Central New York
Working Landscapes NC
Workplace Fairness