

2023



CT-05 FARM BILL LISTENING SESSION

An overview of the agriculture & nutrition priorities of stakeholders in the 5th Congressional District

U.S. CONGRESSWOMAN 
JAHANA HAYES
SERVING THE 5th DISTRICT OF CONNECTICUT

FARM BILL OVERVIEW

The Farm Bill is a multi-year law that establishes an array of agricultural and food programs. It provides an opportunity for policymakers to comprehensively address agricultural and food issues. In addition to developing and enacting farm legislation, Congress is involved in overseeing its implementation. The Farm Bill is typically renewed about every five years. Since the 1930s, Congress has enacted 18 Farm Bills.

THE FARM BILL BY TITLE

Title I, Commodities: Provides support for major commodity crops, including wheat, corn, soybeans, peanuts, rice, dairy, and sugar, as well as disaster assistance.

Title II, Conservation: Encourages environmental stewardship of farmlands and improved management through land retirement programs, working land programs, or both.

Title III, Trade: Supports U.S. agriculture export programs and international food assistance programs.

Title IV, Nutrition: Provides nutrition assistance for low-income households through programs, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

Title V, Credit: Offers direct government loans and guarantees to producers to buy land and operate farms and ranches.

Title VI, Rural Development: Supports rural housing, community facilities, business, and utility programs through grants, loans, guarantees.

Title VII, Research, Extension, and Related Matters: Supports agricultural research and extension programs to expand academic knowledge and help producers be more productive.

Title VIII, Forestry: Supports forestry management programs run by USDA's Forest Service.

Title IX, Energy: Encourages the development of farm and community renewable energy systems through various programs, including grants and loan guarantees.

Title X, Horticulture: Supports the production of specialty crops, USDA-certified organic foods, and locally produced foods and authorizes a regulatory framework for industrial hemp.

Title XI, Crop Insurance: Enhances risk management through the permanently authorized Federal Crop Insurance Program.

Title XII, Miscellaneous: Includes programs and assistance for livestock and poultry production, support for beginning farmers and ranchers, and other miscellaneous and general provisions.

THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT CT-05 AGRICULTURE



In 2017, the Fifth Congressional District accounted for 24% of agriculture sales in the state.

**According to the 2017 USDA Ag Census*

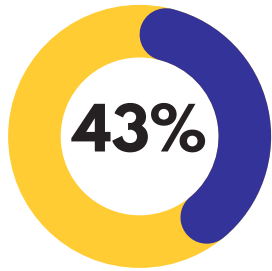
CT-05 is home to 1,404 farms, comprising 95,583 total acres. CT has a total of 380,000 acres of farmland.



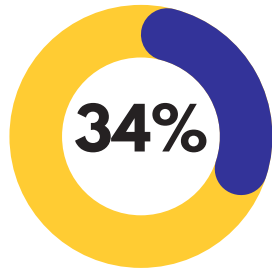
The average farm in CT-05 is **68 acres**, far short of the national average of **445 acres**. **91%** of farms in CT-05 are smaller than **179 acres**.



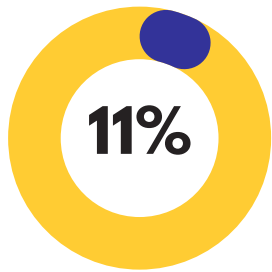
CT-05 FARMLAND BY USE



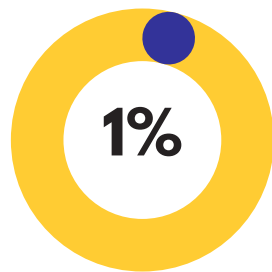
Cropland



Woodland



Pastoral



Irrigated



CT-05 FARMS BY SALES VALUE

92% of farms in CT-05 have nearly \$100,000 in sales value each year. Of those farms, 44% sell less than \$2,500.



CT-05 FARM INCOME

**According to the 2017 USDA Ag Census*

The market value of agricultural products sold in CT-05 was **\$138,421,000**



Net cash in CT-05 farm income was **\$8,475**



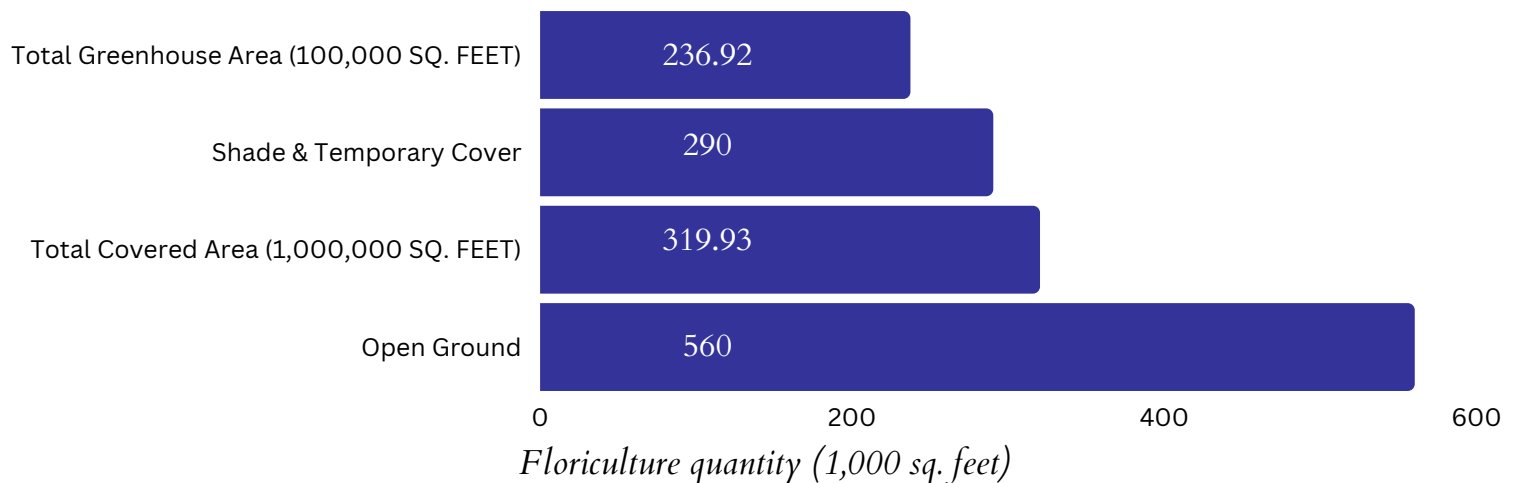
The yearly average federal investment was **\$6,760** per CT-05 farm

CT-05 HORTICULTURE

Nursery crops, greenhouses, floriculture, and sod are the most valuable products grown in CT-05, accounting for \$97,000,000 in sales.

The greenhouse industry is the number one industry in CT-05 and we are the 36th most valuable Congressional District in greenhouse production.

FLORICULTURE & NURSERY CROPS BY THE NUMBERS IN CT



DAIRY FARMING IN CT



CONNECTICUT
IS HOME TO 90
DAIRY FARMS



97% OF
WHICH ARE
FAMILY OWNED





CT-05 NUTRITION

In 2022, there were **380,310** food insecure individuals in Connecticut. **83,530** of those individuals are children.

In the 5th Congressional District of Connecticut there are **81,100** food insecure individuals.

People facing hunger in Connecticut are estimated to report needing **\$258,120,000** more per year to meet their food needs.

In Connecticut, **\$584,718,600** were distributed through SNAP which generated **\$994,021,620** in economic activity.

In Connecticut **31.4%** of households receiving SNAP benefits have children.

There are **414** food pantries in Connecticut.

The Connecticut Food Bank distributed enough food to prepare almost **40 million meals**.

Connecticut leads all states because it receives **only 74 cents** for every one dollar we pay in federal taxes.

The Connecticut Foodshare Mobile Pantry delivers food to individuals facing food insecurity and transportation barriers. They deliver food every weekday to 9 -12 different locations around the state of Connecticut.

The Connecticut Fresh Match Program allows SNAP recipients to double the fruits and vegetables they purchase at participating farmers markets. Farmers market partners in the Fifth District matched over \$17,000 in 2021-2022.

The Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP) provides vouchers/coupons to low-income seniors to purchase fresh produce at farmers markets and other direct-to-consumer venues. In FY22, nearly 3,000 individuals from Connecticut participated in Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP).



CT-05 SNAP OVERVIEW

**TOTAL CT-05
HOUSEHOLDS**

286,232

**MEDIAN CT-05
HOUSEHOLD INCOME**

\$80,396

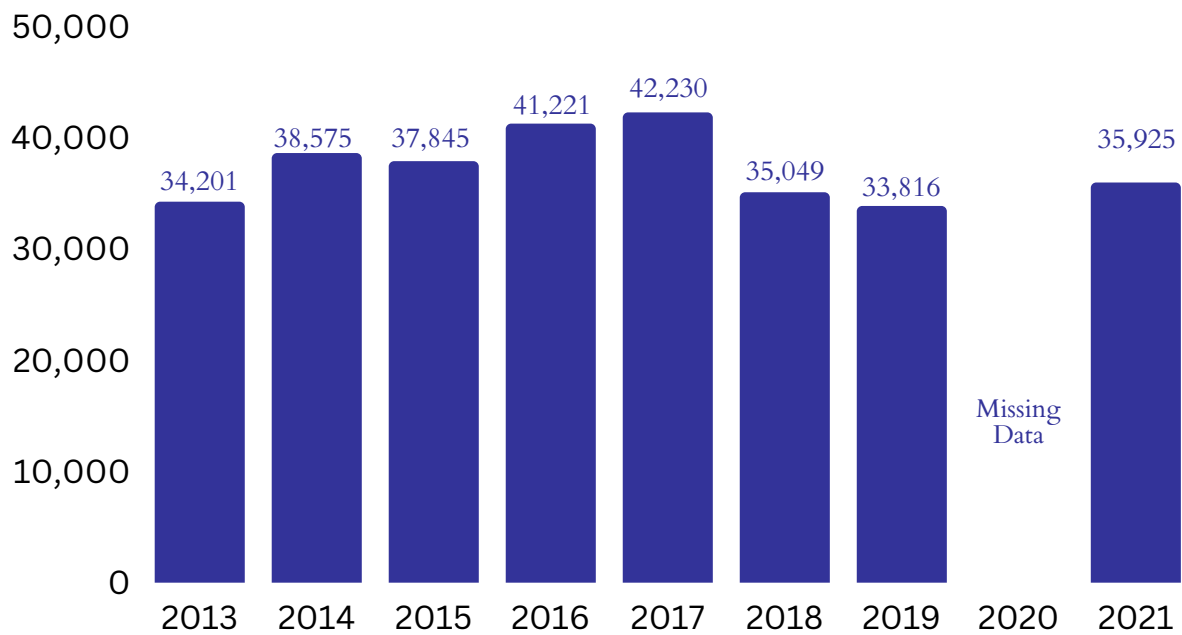
**TOTAL CT-05
HOUSEHOLDS
PARTICIPATING IN SNAP**

12.6%

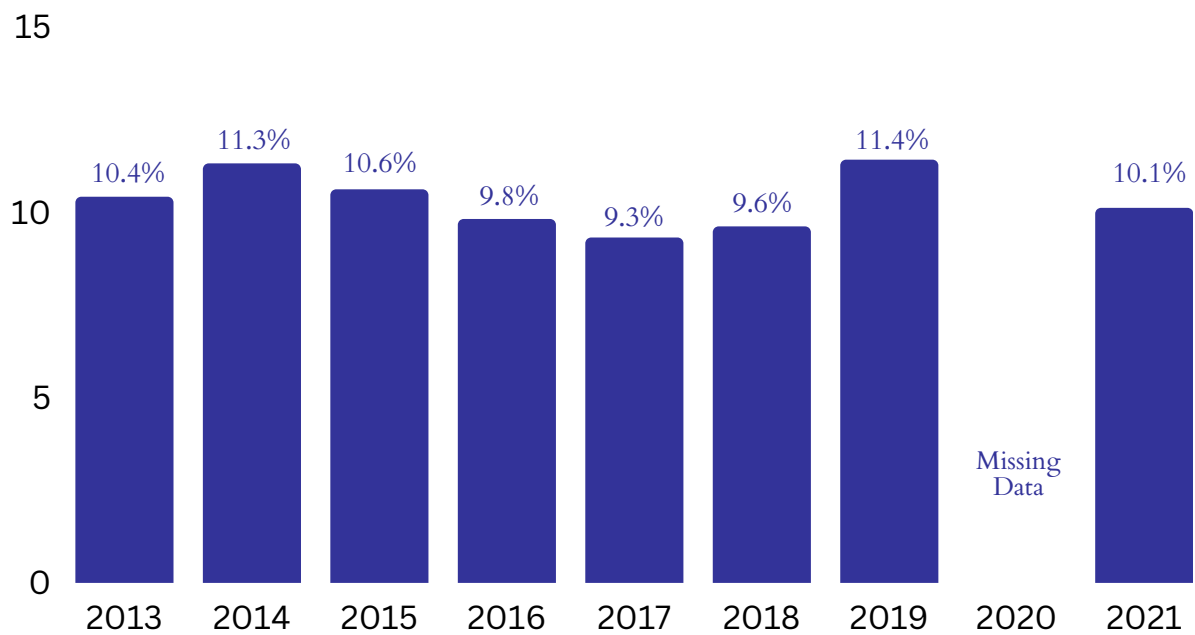
**CT-05 HOUSEHOLD
POVERTY RATE**

10.1%

CT-05 HOUSEHOLDS PARTICIPATING IN SNAP, 2013-2021



CT-05 HOUSEHOLD POVERTY RATE, 2013-2021



Note: 2020 data was not included above because collection was significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic

CT-05 CONSERVATION

In 2019, 1.1 miles in Canton were designated Wild & Scenic making the Upper Farmington River a designated segment for a total of 15.1 miles.

In 2022, Congresswoman Hayes secured a U.S. National Park Service Wild and Scenic designation for the 41 miles of the Housatonic River which run through Sharon, Canaan, Cornwall, Salisbury, New Milford, Kent, and North Canaan.

23,000 acres of Connecticut farmland were converted to urban development or low-density residential land use between 2001 and 2016, putting Connecticut in the top three states nationally for the percent of farmland developed or compromised.



CT-05 BROADBAND

A 2018 study of the Northwest Corner of Connecticut found that only **79%** of households had access to wired broadband service; **20%** only had access to a wired connection that does not meet the current Federal Communications Commission (FCC) definition for broadband – and is not upgradeable.

Further, **over 18,000 homes** have no access to any form of wireless internet. Most of those homes were African American or Hispanic households.

According to the Connecticut State Department of Education, **50,000 students** do not have access to a device and **29,000 students** do not have access to reliable WiFi.

FARM BILL PRIORITIES SUBMITTED BY CONGRESSWOMAN JAHANA HAYES

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COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND
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SUBCOMMITTEE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD,
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RANKING MEMBER, SUBCOMMITTEE ON NUTRITION,
FOREIGN AGRICULTURE, AND HORTICULTURE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON LIVESTOCK, DAIRY,
AND POULTRY

July 25, 2023 |

The Honorable Glenn "GT" Thompson
U.S. House of Representatives
Chairman, Committee on
Agriculture
1301 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C., 20515

The Honorable David Scott
U.S. House of Representatives
Ranking Member, Committee on
Agriculture
1301 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C., 20515

Dear Chairman Thompson and Ranking Member Scott,

As the House Committee on Agriculture begins drafting the 2023 Farm Bill, I request that specific policies and programs be prioritized. We have an excellent opportunity to address the many challenges facing American agriculture. A once-in-a-century pandemic revealed critical gaps in our food supply chain and emphasized the importance of safety net programs that support families in need. In addition, persistent inflation has led to tighter margins for farmers, particularly smaller operations like those in the Fifth District of Connecticut. To tackle these problems, I urge the prioritization of the following issues:

Nutrition

Thrifty Food Plan (TFP)

In the United States of America, over 40 million people rely on Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to feed themselves and their families, including over 35,500 households in the Fifth Congressional District of Connecticut. SNAP is a highly responsive, means-tested program that gives stability to millions of families in need and is considered one of our most effective anti-poverty tools. However, like the farm support programs, which spend more money when commodity prices are low, SNAP spending must increase when the need is high. Therefore, the 2023 Farm Bill must expand eligibility for SNAP and decry any effort to undermine this vital program.

SNAP benefits are based on the Thrifty Food Plan (TFP), which estimates the cost for a family of four to eat a healthy diet on a budget. Before the 2018 Farm Bill, the Thrifty Food Plan was last updated by Congress in 2006. Evidence consistently showed benefit levels were too low to provide for a realistic, healthy diet, even with households contributing additional funds toward groceries. Specifically, a U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) study found that before the 2021 Thrifty Food Plan assessment, nearly nine out of ten SNAP participants reported facing barriers to achieving a healthy diet. The most common barrier was the cost of healthy foods.¹

In the 2018 Farm Bill, Congress directed USDA to re-evaluate the Thrifty Food Plan by 2022 and every five years thereafter. Based on the 2021 evaluation with current food prices, food composition data, consumption patterns, and dietary guidance, SNAP beneficiaries received, on average, \$36.24 more per person per month.² Therefore, I urge the Committee to keep the reevaluation of the Thrifty Food Plan as part the 2023 Farm Bill and explore transitioning to the Low-Cost Food Plan.

Broad-Based Categorical Eligibility (BBCE)

Broad-Based Categorical Eligibility (BBCE) is a critical state flexibility that allows SNAP administrators to ensure the program aligns with similar means-tested anti-poverty programs, like Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), targeted to the lowest-income Americans. This ensures efficient program administration and helps to prevent a benefit cliff that would otherwise be present for SNAP recipients who work additional hours or see a slight increase in earnings. BBCE participants can save for the future and earn more at work while still getting support from SNAP.³ Therefore, the 2023 Farm Bill must protect BBCE to ensure SNAP recipients can increase their earnings and save for unexpected expenses without facing harsh benefit cliffs.

¹ Maeve Gearing, Megan Lewis, Claire Wilson, Carla Bozzolo, and Dani Hansen. *Barriers that Constrain the Adequacy of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Allotments: In-depth Interview Findings*. Report prepared by Westat, Inc. for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, June 2021. Project Officer Rosemarie Downer. Available online at www.fns.usda.gov/research-and-analysis

² U.S. Department of Agriculture. (2021, August 16). *USDA modernizes the Thrifty Food Plan, updates SNAP benefits*. Food and Nutrition Service U.S. Department of Agriculture. Retrieved March 21, 2023, from <https://www.fns.usda.gov/news-item/usda-0179.21>

³ Rosenbaum, D. (2019, July 30). *SNAP's "broad-based categorical eligibility" supports working families ...* Food Assistance . Retrieved March 21, 2023, from <https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/7-24-19fa.pdf>

Eliminating Lifetime SNAP Ban for Drug Felons

In the 2023 Farm Bill, Congress has the opportunity to address the lifetime SNAP ban for drug felons. Despite completing their sentences, formerly incarcerated individuals are often prevented from accessing food assistance, making them vulnerable to hunger and recidivism. Formerly incarcerated individuals with prior drug offenses are reincarcerated at rates up to 50 percent⁴ due to the barriers and discrimination they face in accessing employment, housing, and food, and an estimated 91% are food insecure.⁵ The 2023 Farm Bill must include language that will eliminate the lifetime ban on SNAP.

International Food Assistance

After decades of progress, global hunger is on the rise. Vulnerable communities have seen their food systems eroded by compounding shocks like conflict, climate change, and the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, an acute global food crisis is spiraling, driven by the war in Ukraine. As many as 828 million people worldwide faced chronic hunger last year, 46 million more than the prior year and 150 million more than in 2019. Moreover, 45 million people are estimated to be at risk of death or facing starvation because they have too little to eat.⁶ This tragedy is setting the stage for continuing national security crisis. Food for Progress, McGovern-Dole, Food for Peace, Farmer to Farmer, and other Title III programs are critical for fighting world hunger. Congress must fully fund these programs in the 2023 Farm Bill and ensure that programs in countries with political conflict, like Haiti, are prioritized.

⁴ United States Sentencing Commission. (2017, February 17). *The past predicts the future: Criminal history and recidivism of...* Recidivism Among Federal Drug Trafficking Offenders. Retrieved March 21, 2023, from https://www.ussc.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/research-and-publications/research-publications/2017/20170309_Recidivism-CH.pdf

⁵ Wang, E. A., Zhu, G. A., Evans, L., Carroll-Scott, A., Desai, R., & Fiellin, L. E. (2013, April). *A pilot study examining food insecurity and HIV risk behaviors among individuals recently released from prison*. AIDS education and prevention : official publication of the International Society for AIDS Education. Retrieved March 21, 2023, from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3733343/>

⁶ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, International Fund for Agricultural Development, United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations World Food Programme, & World Health Organization. (2022, July). *The state of food security and nutrition in the world 2022*. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Retrieved March 21, 2023, from <https://www.fao.org/3/cc0639en/online/cc0639en.html>

The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)

Throughout the pandemic, The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) has helped supplement the diets of low-income people by providing emergency American-grown food at no cost. This program allows States to give local organizations such as food banks, faith-based groups, soup kitchens, and food pantries that directly serve the public. Unfortunately, amid layoffs and unemployment during the COVID-19 pandemic, the need for emergency food brought local organizations to the brink. While many were able to fill the community's immediate needs, the charitable sector cannot solve hunger alone. Therefore, the 2023 Farm Bill should increase funding for TEFAP and removing the state match requirement. Congress must also advocate for increased funding for TEFAP infrastructure programs that support food distribution organizations to refrigerate and distribute fresh foods.

We also must ensure that TEFAP provides diverse and inclusive food options for all Americans in need. In 2019, more than 44,900,000 immigrants lived in the United States, making up nearly 14 percent of the total United States population.⁷ Numerous TEFAP users require culturally, ethnically, or religiously appropriate foods, many of which are nutritious and produced in the United States. Therefore, the 2023 Farm Bill should include language urging USDA to actively seek input from local distributors on which foods should be added to the TEFAP available food list to provide a consistent source for diverse and impacted communities, as well as assistance to agricultural producers who offer these products.

College Student Food Security

Students are not strangers to the issue of food insecurity – nearly a quarter of students at the University of Connecticut reported concerns about food insecurity, and around 30% reported skipping meals to save money. At the national scale, a 2018 Government Accountability Office (GAO) report revealed that more than 30% of college students might face food insecurity and that almost 60% of potentially eligible students were not receiving SNAP benefits.⁸ The 2023 Farm Bill must ensure that eligible low-income college students are automatically enrolled in SNAP. Furthermore, Congress should increase the SNAP eligibility of low-income college students by expanding eligibility to students who qualify for work-study, have a \$0 Expected Family Contribution, meet the financial eligibility criteria for a maximum Pell Grant, or are an independent student whose household is otherwise eligible.

To better track hunger among college students, the 2023 Farm Bill must require the Secretary of Agriculture to submit a report to Congress on the Food and Nutrition Service's (FNS) strategy to address student hunger and publish an updated State Outreach Plan Guidance. Furthermore, Congress should create a demonstration program to administer up to ten projects at the Institute of Higher Education to allow students using SNAP benefits to purchase meals at on-campus dining halls or retail stores.

⁷ Hanna, M., Batalova, J., & Levesque, C. (2021, February 11). *Frequently requested statistics on immigrants and immigration in the United States*. Migration Information Source. Retrieved March 21, 2023, from <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/frequently-requested-statistics-immigrants-and-immigration-united-states-2020>

⁸ United States Government Accountability Office. (2018, December). *FOOD INSECURITY Better Information Could Help Eligible College Students Access Federal Food Assistance Benefits*. December 2018 Food Insecurity. Retrieved March 21, 2023, from <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-19-95.pdf>

SNAP Online Purchasing Pilot Program

In the 2023 Farm Bill, the SNAP Online Purchasing Pilot program should be expanded to include retailers that already deliver meals to Medicare and Medicaid enrollees residing in rural areas or suffering from chronic disease. The 2014 Farm Bill required USDA to establish a pilot program testing the feasibility of SNAP beneficiaries using their benefits online with authorized retailers to have food delivered to their homes. Currently, the SNAP Online Purchasing Pilot program does not permit the purchase of prepared foods using SNAP benefits. Congress should expand the pilot program to include home-delivered meal providers that already deliver meal benefits to Medicaid and Medicare enrollees in rural areas or those with chronic diseases. Extensive published research demonstrates that ensuring access to Medically Tailored Meals will lead to improved health outcomes, decreased healthcare utilization, and lower spending, especially for those individuals who suffer from certain chronic conditions and are food insecure. For example, a study published in JAMA in October 2022 concluded that national implementation of medically tailored meal programs for diet-sensitive conditions such as diabetes, cancer, and cardiovascular disease could be associated with approximately 1.6 million averted hospitalizations annually, resulting in lower overall healthcare utilization and annual net cost savings of about \$13.6 billion⁹.

Increasing Food Access in Underserved Communities

America's families should have access to healthy and nutritious foods. Unfortunately, that is not always the case. Food deserts are becoming more prominent across the country and in my home state of Connecticut. Specifically, out of more than half a million food stamp recipients in the state, nearly 3,800 live in towns without retailers accepting SNAP payments. Congress must address this critical gap by ensuring that independent food retailers have the support they need to feed American families. Specifically, the 2023 Farm Bill should increase funding for programs like the Healthy Food Financing Initiative (HFFI) to ensure that food retailers can invest in underserved communities and increase access to healthy foods. We must also increase funding for nutrition incentive programs such as the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP), which often helps local farmer's markets increase community access to fresh fruits and vegetables.

⁹ Hager K et al. "Association of National Expansion of Insurance Coverage of Medically Tailored Meals with Estimated Hospitalizations and Health Care Expenditures in the US." JAMA Network Open. 2022;5(10):e2236898. doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2022.36898

SNAP Expansion to the U.S. Territories

The 2023 Farm Bill presents an opportunity to expand nutrition assistance within the U.S. territories. For decades, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands have been operating under the Nutrition Assistance Program (NAP) Block Grant instead of SNAP. While SNAP's mandatory funding extends to however many people are in need, the NAP block Grant provides a fixed amount of federal spending that Congress authorizes each year. This has required the territory to set eligibility and benefit levels far below SNAP levels in the states, the District of Columbia, Guam, and the Virgin Islands. This leaves residents in the U.S. territories of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands unable to provide benefits for growing numbers of eligible beneficiaries during economic downturns and natural disasters outside of disaster relief appropriations by Congress.

With high levels of poverty¹⁰, these U.S. territories cannot adequately meet the fluctuating nutritional needs of their constituents under the NAP Block Grant infrastructure. Therefore, Congress must meet the hunger demand across the territories and amend the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 to transition the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands to SNAP. Specifically, in consultation between the Secretary of Agriculture and the Governors of each of the territories, this transition should be done in a manner that allows each territory to implement eligibility standards, deductions, and benefit levels suited to the economic and social needs of its constituent.

Reduce Food Waste

Nearly 40% of the food produced in the U.S. goes to waste. This includes food thrown out due to needing clarification over the date printed on its packaging (date labels). Manufacturers use a variety of labels such as "best by" or "enjoy by" to show how long food will have the best taste. However, consumers may falsely believe these are expiration labels and throw out food that is still safe to eat.¹¹ While states regulate date labels for some foods, the 2023 Farm Bill presents the opportunity to end consumer confusion around food date labeling and ensure Americans do not throw out useable food. Congress should require USDA to work with the Food and Drug Administration to standardize date labels on food products.

¹⁰ Rosenbaum, D. (2021, November 5). Northern Mariana Islands to Receive Substantial Additional Food Assistance in a Move Toward Parity With Rest of U.S. Retrieved April 20, 2023, from <https://www.cbpp.org/blog/northern-mariana-islands-to-receive-substantial-additional-food-assistance-in-a-move-toward>.

¹¹ U.S. Government Accountability Office. (2019, September 9). *Date Labels on Packaged Foods: USDA and FDA Could Take Additional Steps to Reduce Consumer Confusion*. Government Accountability Office. <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-19-407>

Conservation

Conservation is critical to any farming operation, preserving the land and natural resources for future generations. Implementing sustainable agriculture practices is also essential to the financial health of any operation, saving farmers money through reduced energy use, water use, and fertilizer use.

In the 2018 Farm Bill, Title II funding accounted for \$60 billion of the total projected cost, about 7% of the total authorized funding.¹² Congress must ensure that the Natural Resource Conservation Service's conservation programs have their financing preserved. The four most popular programs—the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), the Agricultural Easement Program (ACEP), and the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)—are consistently oversubscribed. For instance, in FY 2020, USDA funded just 27% of eligible program applications received for EQIP and 35% for CSP.

Rising inflation makes this funding less impactful, and projections released by the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) show that the new 10-year baseline will be approximately \$2 billion lower for Title II funds than the 2018 baseline. Therefore, in the 2023 Farm Bill, Congress should double baseline funding for Title II programs, which have demonstrated popularity. In addition, the 2023 Farm Bill should reflect the popularity of these programs by preserving their baseline funding and the *Inflation Reduction Act's* funding to ensure more producers can access these programs and improve their operations.

While increasing funding is critical, Congress should also act to increase the effectiveness of EQIP. Between 2009 and 2016, \$600 million, representing just 14% of all EQIP funding, went towards conservation practices that USDA identified as producing significant environmental benefits. Simultaneously, \$1 billion in EQIP funding was spent on practices that produced relatively little environmental benefits. Congress should ensure that EQIP funds go towards practices that benefit the environment by reducing cost shares for ineffective programs and prioritizing practices for awards that provide significant environmental benefits for water quality and soil health. Additionally, the overall five-year EQIP payment cap should be reduced from \$450,000 to \$150,000 to allow more small farmers to receive EQIP funding rather than concentrating federal funds in the hands of the largest operations.

Connecticut, and New England, routinely see less benefit from USDA programs than other parts of the country. The 2023 Farm Bill should serve all parts of the nation equally, and smaller states like Connecticut should not see fewer opportunities for federal assistance.

¹² Myers, S. (2023, January 13). Overview of title II conservation programs in the farm bill. American Farm Bureau Federation. Retrieved March 21, 2023, from <https://www.fb.org/market-intel/overview-of-title-ii-conservation-programs-in-the-farm-bill>

Dairy & Livestock

The Dairy Margin Coverage (DMC) Program has been the number one protection for Connecticut dairy farmers against milk price volatility. Continued funding in the 2023 Farm Bill for DMC is critical to my constituents and dairy farmers across the United States.

In 2020 and 2021, Americans across the country confronted empty shelves at the grocery store. Necessary precautions during the pandemic revealed the fragility of our food supply chains, as heavily consolidated meat processing facilities closed, and stores several states away could not stock their shelves. Congress must address the consolidation of food processing. The 2023 Farm Bill should expand support for small- to medium-sized processing facilities to insulate local and regional food supply chains from disruptions at extensive, centralized facilities via the Meat and Poultry Processing Expansion Program.

Farm Safety Net

Congress correctly prioritized the needs of workers and small businesses when responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, many farmers experienced difficulties interacting with the Small Business Administration (SBA), an agency not equipped to respond to the specific needs of the agricultural sector. Congress must ensure farmers are well served in times of crisis. Furthermore, economic injury loan programs must be available with expertise in agriculture and farm business.

The 2023 Farm Bill should authorize new loan programs through the USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) to better serve farmers during economic crises. Specifically, it should include \$10 billion for direct loans through FSA, \$10 billion for a guaranteed loan program through FSA-approved lenders, and \$300 million for program administration and training for new staff.

Young, Beginning, & Underserved Farmers

In the 2023 Farm Bill, this Congress has the opportunity to address and correct historic discrimination within the federal agricultural policy. Alleged discrimination within the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) in federal farm assistance and lending has caused Black farmers to lose nearly 90 percent of their valuable farmland between 1910 and 1997. Without intentional change in lending with USDA direct loans, this pattern will only continue. Even in fiscal year 2022, Black farmers who applied for USDA direct loans were approved at lower rates and rejected at higher rates than any other racial demographic.

This Congress must create an independent civil rights oversight board to review appeals of civil rights complaints filed against USDA, investigate reports of discrimination within USDA, and provide oversight of Farm Service Agency County Committees. The 2023 Farm Bill should also protect remaining Black farmers from land loss and increase funding to provide Black farmers pro-bono assistance, succession planning, and support for the development of farmers cooperatives.

In 1920, there were nearly 1 million Black farmer in the United States. Today, it is estimated that there are less than 50,000 remaining Black farmers, making up less than 2% of all farmers. This means Black farmers have lost millions of acres of farmland and hundreds of billions of dollars of intergenerational wealth.

According to the 2017 Census of Agriculture, of the nearly 3.4 million producers in the United States, 64% were male, and 95.4% were white. In addition, 73% of producers had 11 years or more experience farming, and more than a third were over 65.¹³ Younger generations are passionate about food production and are eager to be given a chance to start their own operations. However, it is increasingly difficult for them to get started for prohibitive land prices, student loan debt, and labor shortages.

While USDA provides loans for new farmers, these loan programs are limited in substantially assisting new farmers as costs continue to rise. The 2023 Farm Bill should adopt the proposals made by President Bidens in the FY 2024 budget to help beginning farmers, including the elimination of Direct Farm Ownership and Operating Loan limits, reduction of application and eligibility requirements for the Emergency Loan program, revising Beginning Farmer Funding targets to improve the timeliness of loan closings and reducing Direct Farm Ownership experience eligibility requirements. The 2023 Farm Bill should also adopt proposals to increase the Direct Down Payment Loan Program limit, double the Microloan limit, and open access to Beginning Farmer benefits to entities comprised of non-related individuals and expand mediation services to Territories and Tribes to serve a broader, more diverse population of farmers.

Land in Connecticut is the fourth most expensive in the country, contributing to new producers significant barriers to accessing land. Notably, women and Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) farmers struggle to access the capital required to start a working farm, and

¹³ National Agricultural Statistics Service. (2017). 2017 Census of Agriculture Congressional District Profile, Connecticut Fifth District. USDA. Retrieved March 21, 2023, from https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/Online_Resources/Congressional_District_Profiles/

obtaining a loan through the Farm Service Agency can be prohibitively slow. In comparison, commercial developers with access to private capital can quickly purchase land for development, removing it from production and potentially preventing it from ever being farmed again. Congress should support the Farm Service Agency's "Application Fast Track Pilot Program" to expedite the loan approval process and ensure that young, beginning, and underserved farmers, who rely on FSA for loans, are more competitive with commercial lenders when working to own their first farm.

The 2023 Farm Bill should direct USDA to establish a pilot program to make loans to alternative lenders, which typically take place through online platforms that use technology to bring together borrowers underserved by traditional lending institutions¹⁴. Alternative lenders can also offer farmers flexible loan terms, experience with distressed borrowers, and quick turnaround on loan applications compared to traditional banks¹⁵. Examples of flexible loan terms include but are not limited to, revenue-based repayment, interest-only loans during organic transition periods, and extended grace periods. Alternative lending also takes advantage of blended capital strategies where various financing mechanisms are combined, such as grants and equity, to create an appropriately structured package of financing that improves the long-term success of the borrower. Alternative lending can also offer business-aligned capital for non-conventional forms of production, such as diversified operations and direct marketing, as well as post-farm gate operations. Many alternative lenders also incorporate non-economic factors into their underwriting strategies, such as soil health, water quality, local food security, and social equity.

From Fiscal Year 2023 through Fiscal Year 2028, the Secretary will create a pilot to make loans to alternative lenders up to \$500,000 to make or guarantee microloans and provide business, financial, marketing, and credit management services to microloan borrowers. The Secretary shall determine whether a lender has the necessary legal authority, a proven track record of successfully assisting agricultural borrowers, and the services of staff with appropriate loan-making and servicing expertise. Recipients should also have a proven track record of offering flexible loan terms that assist historically underserved farmers and ranchers or advance soil health.

¹⁴ Michlistch, K. (n.d.). An introduction to alternative lending. Morgan Stanley Investment Management. <https://www.morganstanley.com/im/en-us/individual-investor/insights/articles/an-introduction-to-alternative-lending.html>

¹⁵ Laca, A.-L. (2018). The Pros and cons of alternative lending. Delivering the capital and commitment rural America deserves. <https://www.farmermac.com/pros-cons-alternative-lending/>

Rural Broadband

A 2018 study of the Northwest Corner of Connecticut found that only 79% of households had access to wired broadband service. Furthermore, only 20% had access to a kind of wired connection that does not meet the current Federal Communications Commission (FCC) definition for broadband – and is not upgradeable. Five years later, several towns in the Fifth Congressional District of Connecticut still lack broadband services. According to the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection's (CTDEEP) 2022 Connecticut Broadband Report, the Northwest Corner of Connecticut is home to nine of the ten towns in the state with the highest percentage of unserved broadband locations.¹⁶

Access to reliable, high-speed internet is not a luxury but a necessity. Yet, despite the tremendous progress of the *American Rescue Plan Act* and the *Infrastructure Investment Jobs Act* in closing connectivity gaps. In the 2023 Farm Bill, Congress has the opportunity to ensure we all communities – particularly rural communities are connected. For this reason, Congress must expand access to broadband programs and ensure that their funding is being targeted to rural areas that need it most.

Conclusion

As Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Nutrition, Foreign Agriculture, and Horticulture, I am dedicated to the expansion of SNAP, funding TEFAP, aiding our hungry veterans, elevating new farmers, expanding conservation efforts, and bringing broadband to all communities. The Farm Bill has a long, bipartisan tradition, and I request we maintain this tradition of collaboration to address the significant issues in American agriculture.

Sincerely,

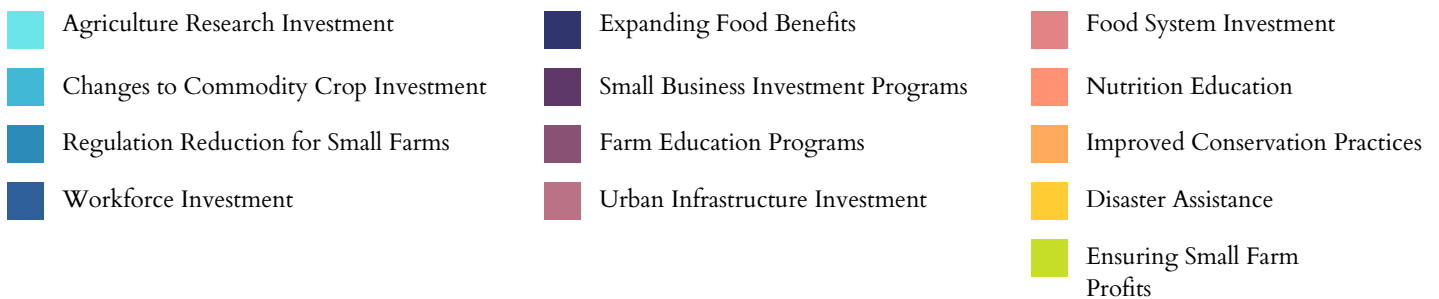
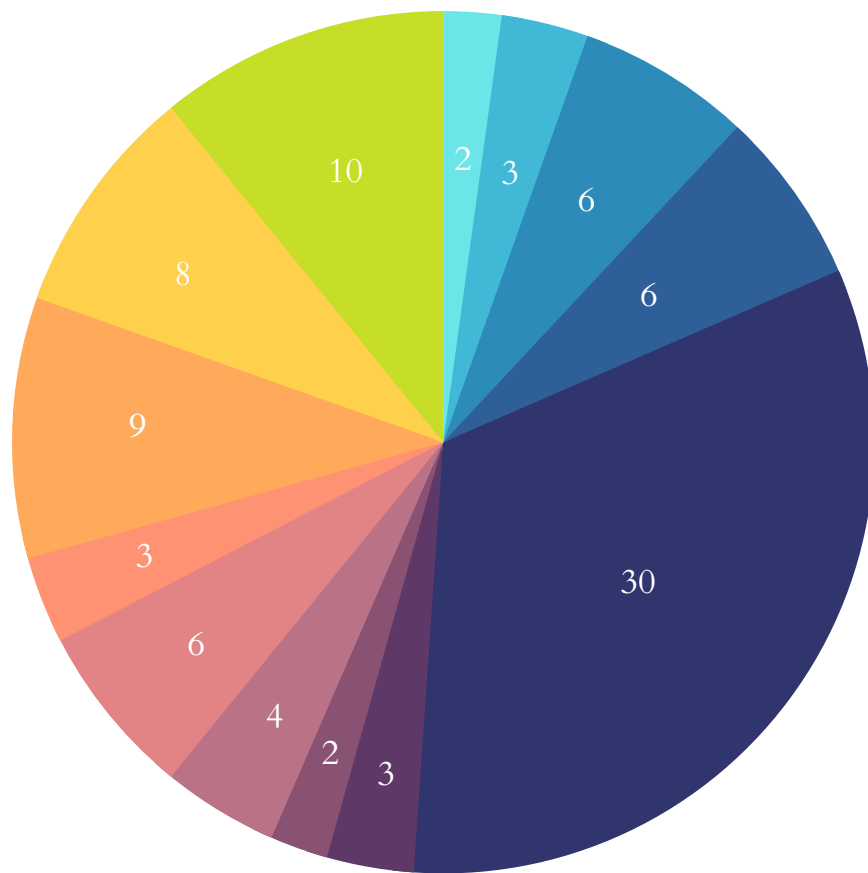


Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on
Nutrition, Foreign Agriculture, and Horticulture

¹⁶ *Connecticut Broadband Report*. Connecticut Department of Energy & Environmental Protection, Bureau of Energy and Technology Policy. https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DEEP/energy/Broadband/DEEP_CT-Broadband-Report_FINAL.pdf

TRENDS IN RESPONSES FOR FARM BILL PRIORITIES

Through an electronic survey, stakeholders shared their top three Farm Bill priorities. The following represents responses by category.



RESPONDENTS TO THE FARM BILL SURVEY INCLUDE

AFSCME Council 4	Hungry Reaper Farm
Angevine Farm	Ivy Mountain Goat Farm
Arthur Carroll Crop Insurance Agency	Jones Family Farm
Averill Farm	Kalenauskas Farm, LLC
Bridgeport Industrialization Opportunities Center	Karen's Lambs, LLC
Cheshire Community Food Pantry, Inc.,	Lamothe Sugar House
Connecticut Food Association	March Farms
Connecticut Food System Alliance	Middlebury Social Services
Connecticut Foodshare	New Milford Social Services
De Hoek Farm	Paley's Farm & Garden Center LLC
Echo Farm LLC	St. Vincent DePaul Mission of Waterbury
Farm Credit East	The Humane Society of the United States
FoodCorps	UConn
Food Rescue US	UConn College of Ag - Department of Extension
Food Rescue US - Fairfield County	UConn Health
Friendly Hands Food Bank, Inc	UConn Rudd Center for Food Policy and Health
Hodges Family Farm	Waldingfield Farm Inc
	White Flower Farm

SURVEY RESPONSES AS SUBMITTED FROM STAKEHOLDERS

EXPANDING FOOD BENEFITS

- Advance domestic food security and food access through SNAP and related programs.
- Enhance healthy lifestyles/diets for SNAP participants and low-income communities.
- Strengthen and improve nutrition assistance programs, such as SNAP to address food insecurity and support vulnerable populations.
- Provide a tax incentive for farmers to donate fresh, healthy produce to food rescue organizations or directly to food pantries.
- Provide more programs for food-insecure families.
- Include SNAP/WIC funding maintenance or increases. Nobody should go hungry in this country!
- School meal programs. The connections between keeping students fed and improved academic performance has been shown too many times to be debated!
- Keep the EBT, WIC, and other government food programs intact or increased.
- Nutrition – Please do not reduce the current SNAP funding. This is even more critical now that Covid funding has ended.
- Ensure that older adults have enough to eat-including high protein foods. This will keep them healthy and able to live independently longer.
- There needs to be far greater opportunities for educating all people through NIFA programs like Smith-Lever that can grow Cooperative Extension so people can be taught about community nutrition (have SNAP-Ed administered like EFNEP!), farm-to-institution food programs, agriculture production, and climate resilience where people live and work, not just on a college campus. Teaching people ways to better their lives and businesses is crucial to improving community health and bringing BIPOC farmers greater equity,
- Reauthorize and increase to \$500 million per year mandatory funding for TEFAP food purchases, adjusted for inflation, increase authorization for TEFAP administrative funds for storage and distribution to \$200 million per year, and reauthorize \$15 million per year in discretionary funding for TEFAP infrastructure grants.
- INCLUDE THE CLOSE THE MEAL GAP ACT!
- No reduction in benefit or income eligibility. The purchasing power of every dollar spent by many is not as strong as it was years ago- with higher prices flooding consumer markets.
- INCLUDE THE IMPROVING ACCESS TO NUTRITION ACT!

SURVEY RESPONSES FROM STAKEHOLDERS

- Farm Credit East's top priority is for Congress to pass a timely Farm Bill, protecting the programs farmers and consumers rely on, including conservation and nutrition assistance as well as maintaining and enhancing accessibility of safety net and risk management programs like crop insurance to help producers mitigate risk given the volatile markets, weather, and other challenges like the lack of available workers.
- Streamline SNAP eligibility and enrollment by removing administrative hurdles that impede access to the program, especially for older adults, college students, immigrants, veterans, military families, and others who face barriers. For example, Congress should extend SNAP eligibility to service members by excluding the Basic Allowance for Housing from the gross income calculation for SNAP eligibility. Protect and strengthen SNAP funding based on the Low-Cost Food Plan.
- Provide surplus dairy products to Foodbanks that distribute food statewide to pantries, kitchens, and agencies dealing with food insecurity.
- Reauthorize and streamline Commodity Supplemental Food Program by reducing the administrative burden of reporting requirements.
- INCLUDE THE SNAP ACT, HOT FOODS ACT, LIFT THE BAR ACT!
- Consider getting rid of the hot meal ban- it is challenging for many older adults, disabled persons and displaced families to cook meals.
- Expand the ability of schools and food assistance programs to purchase food from local farms.
- Support demonstration projects. Encourage, fund, and prioritize multiple rigorous demonstration projects in SNAP to evaluate different, innovative approaches to jointly reduce hunger and improve nutrition. Options include: increase benefit levels; behavioral economics; incentivize nutrient dense foods.
- Ensure access to full SNAP benefits by preserving the merit-staffing requirement for eligibility determination.
- Increase necessary administrative funds and allow administrative flexibilities, not outsourcing, to improve efficiency.
- Extend SNAP's entitlement structure to Puerto Rico and other U.S. Territories.
- Pass language consistent with the Food Donation Improvement Act (McGovern 2021) which would extend liability protections to food donors and enable greater food donation.
- Investments to provide surplus produce to Foodbanks that distribute food statewide to pantries, kitchens and agencies dealing with food insecurity.

SURVEY RESPONSES FROM STAKEHOLDERS

- Expand eligibility for SNAP benefits to include college students. The existing law could be amended by expanding the exemptions to include certain categories of college students, such as those exempted during the public health emergency, or removing the college student disqualification provision entirely. Our research found that rates of food insecurity are 25%–32% on UConn's regional campuses, and there are significant racial/ethnic disparities. Black and Latinx students are twice as likely to be food insecure as White and Asian students.
- Increase support in general to Foodbanks that distribute food statewide to pantries, kitchens and agencies dealing with food insecurity.

ENSURE SMALL FARM PROFITS

- The state of Connecticut needs to support and endorse agritourism. Currently, if you have land, you sold the development rights to (to the state), you have to jump through hoops to do certain events, put up structures such as pavilions, etc. There must be more support for this incentive.
- Include funding for new farmer support programs, food support programs.
- Include tax benefits for farmers. There is no job that's more important and average wage is below minimum when you consider crop loss due to climate change.
- We need to have a Farm Bill that will help us to continue providing food for all people. Land is being sold for more home and productive. Land can never be replaced. We need a bill that keeps all farms profitable. The cost of our inputs has decreased our profits. Diversity is a key component to success for our state.
- There are some people who think that farmers should pay time and a half for workers over 40 hours. Currently farmworkers are exempt from that and it needs to stay that way or farms will go under. Some are also trying to categorize different farm jobs at different rates of pay. That would not only be a nightmare but farmers employing others would not be able to afford this.
- Some kind of health insurance cooperative so farmers can provide affordable health insurance to workers and their families.
- Encourage small farmers by supporting herd share operations and supporting products coming from private home kitchens.
- Incentives for farms to expand, upgrade, renovate existing infrastructure and business.
- Maintain support of the farm credit system. A vital tool to keep farm businesses functioning.

SURVEY RESPONSES FROM STAKEHOLDERS

FOOD SYSTEM INVESTMENT

- De-monopolize the food system – take on big meat packing companies, reform subsidies to support fruit and veg producers, invest in community-led programs over corporate sustainability plans.
- Allow organic farming a larger seat at the table, focus on regionalization of agricultural products to keep Farms in areas like the northeast corner farming.
- Invest in Local Food Systems. Support local and regional food systems to promote access to fresh and healthy food, boost economic opportunities for local farmers, and reduce food deserts in underserved areas.
- Support farmers markets.
- Funding for food banks. Our food bank serves over 5,000+ families in NWCT alone with zero state, local or federal funding. Food is a basic human right which should be prioritized over the ARTS!
- Pass a Farm Bill that will embrace the ways in which food recovery from food businesses can help alleviate food insecurity.

WORKFORCE INVESTMENT

- Develop workforce and training programs involving the food & farm industry.
- Food system labor – ensuring food chain workers have safe, living wage jobs and benefits. Per HEAL Food Alliance's Farm Bill Platform, this could be introduced under a new title in the Farm Bill.
- Increase administration funding of existing programs to increase accessibility.
- There is currently a shortage of labor due to young adults not wanting to work. I have heard more excuses along the lines of "if i make money, I'll lose my benefits". Also, to pay fair wage, and workers compensation, we opt to not pay ourselves, the farm owners. We cannot offer insurance since it's too expensive. For such an important industry, there is little support.
- Include Farmland access programs that transfer land affordably and securely to the next generation of farmers.
- Farm wage differentials have not risen to meet the levels of increases on basic goods and services.

DISASTER ASSISTANCE

- Financially help small farmers survive weather related damages.
- Continue support to crop insurance and dairy.

SURVEY RESPONSES FROM STAKEHOLDERS

- Implement language to provide immediate help after a disaster (flood, fire, tornado).
- The RMA needs to do a better job with specialty crop insurance policy development. RMA needs to involve farmers directly in the ground work phase of policy development by creating regional working groups which includes growers and agents. For example, the RMA's current proposed changes to the Apple policy had no Apple growers or agents in their working group and as a result the changes are detrimental to the Northeast region.
- RMA needs to tailor existing specialty crop insurance policies to have a better fit for our region. For example, tailoring planting periods that line up with the planting dates in the Northeast region or making sure the crops price election is reasonable for our region.
- RMA needs to focus on creating actual production history (APH) policies for specialty crops in the Northeast and needs to stop offering only area and revenue-based policies in our region. By creating more APH crop policies, more of our growers will have the option to cover their crops from disastrous weather events that are beyond their control.
- Crop insurance- Should not be changed from what it is currently. Crop insurance issue saying without it your business may no longer be around much longer. That it is critical with climate change and dealing with warm winters that bring the trees out of dormancy early, spring freezes that kill flowers and developing fruitlets, droughts that reduce crops and wet seasons such as 2023 that increase disease pressure resulting in reduced crops.

URBAN INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT

- Prioritize BIPOC producers for USDA programs - increase funding for training and land access programs.
- Aging schools and infrastructure present challenges to being productive with time and resources. The same can be held for farms that create and seek to manufacture value-added products from their farm resources. There should be a program focused on population-dense states to have programs that allow for renovating and repurposing older buildings that support ag enhancement to create wonderful locally grown food products which can also be exported out of state!
- Support for urban agriculture. Urban farmers, usually BIPOC, grow greater diversity of crops under better environmental care procedures and help reduce climate change!
- Preserving funding for USDA programs like 2501 that offer opportunities for socially disadvantaged farmers.

REGULATION REDUCTION FOR SMALL FARMS

- Make the USDA smaller farm friendly. The endless red tape and impenetrable USDA publications make navigating their applications and regulations near impossible.

SURVEY RESPONSES FROM STAKEHOLDERS

- Make USDA programs more user friendly to farmers. Paperwork and timelines disincentive adoption of well intended programs. Also, many are not applicable to northeastern agriculture.
- Revise IRS rules such that the country's 30x30 land conservation goals and farming can better coexist. Relax rules regarding what easements qualify for favorable tax treatment. Farming easements must be more flexible than general easements for farmers to grant them and still be able to operate as a farm. Make a new category of farm easement that perhaps gets less favorable tax treatment but which allows the necessary flexibility. Let's get creative!!!
- Revise tax regulations regarding farms. Relax rules regarding what is a hobby and what is a commercial farm. I am a real farm that loses money. I don't need the IRS all over me to make me lose more money with audits. There are other tests in addition to profits that would better capture what is a real farm and what is a hobby.
- Advance racial equity by improving access to USDA funding and programs exclusively for BIPOC farms and streamlining the application process and/or bureaucratic red tape.
- Do Not expand work requirements, time limits or change the age. This will be another added burden to many families and older adults struggling with food insecurity and higher cost burdens and will not guarantee employment security with a living wage that will increase their self sustainability.

IMPROVED CONSERVATION PRACTICES

- Continue programs for energy efficiency and climate resilience
- Support and encouragement of environmental sustainability initiatives
- We need to have strong commitment to balancing economic and environmental sustainability as we seek food security with all audiences. We need to have new and improved conservation practices that embrace technology like controlled environment ag where food can be grown by urban and small land holding farmers where water, air and land conservation can be addressed at a higher rate than what occurs in row crops in the mid-west. Container farming is a very viable resource that should be embraced for urban ag and others with little land.
- Fully fund and expand conservation programs including EQIP, CSP, AMA.
- Continue USDA conservation programs.
- Create an equitable and sustainable farming future by providing funding for education and training focusing on careers in agriculture and related disciplines including practices that have substantial climate benefits, promote soil health and prevent pollution.
- Include climate resilience and crop insurance that actually helps small producers - RMA poised to make changes that are totally unacceptable to New England growers.

SURVEY RESPONSES FROM STAKEHOLDERS

- Include Saving America's Pollinator Act – this would ban neonicotinoids that NOFA chapters have pushed for on the state level. Eliminates the use of toxic substances on farmland and in our food system while supporting a just transition for farmers.
- To keep out of the Farm Bill: the "Exposing Agricultural Trade Suppression" (EATS) Act (H.R.4417/S.2019). This act would negate many state laws (including many in CT) that protect consumers and animals. EATS usurps states' rights, ignores constitutional law, poses serious food/product safety and public health risks, and is terrible for animals -- would negate states' protections for animals (both domestic and wildlife) and would allow industries that are cruel to animals (e.g., factory farms that cruelly/intensively confine animals and puppy mills) to flourish. Previous similar attempts (2014 and 2018 amendments by Rep. Steve King) were rejected with bipartisan opposition.

FARM EDUCATION PROGRAMS

- Increase funding for agri-science programs in high schools.
- More education for farmers, many are still tilling their fields because they aren't aware of the benefits of no-till. There are way too many chemicals used on farms today because of lack of education.

CHANGES TO COMMODITY CROP INVESTMENTS

- Reduce the amount of federal funding for unnecessarily grown commodity crops that could be replaced with other more useful products.
- Support for horticulture/floraculture (as opposed to large scale commodity production).
- Within the Farm Bill, FoodCorps would like to see an expansion of the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program. We are working with national and state partners to consider increasing the scope and reach of this program that puts fruits and vegetables into the hands of more students and more schools and increased opportunities for our local farmers. We would love to see the Congresswoman champion this effort.

NUTRITION EDUCATION

- Encourage whole milk in schools
- Nutrition – develop education on how to better use SNAP benefits as well as allow incentives to use the benefits for healthy foods.
- Build the evidence base on how to best improve nutrition as well as reduce food insecurity. Increase accessibility, availability, and affordability of nutritious foods, including fruits and vegetables. Test a pilot program to provide a monthly cash value benefit (CVB) for SNAP, as is available for WIC.



CONTACT US

Have questions regarding the Farm Bill or any other Congressional inquiries? Please contact my office.



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