

SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE & FOOD SYSTEMS FUNDERS



Farm Bill Policy Primer for Funders¹

Introduction

As a growing number of funders are concerned about the food system and its interconnectedness with other major health, environmental, justice, and community issues there is more attention being paid to food/farm policy. In an effort to make general resources available to members on these topics, the following is an evolving list of resources.

How to Get Involved

Farm Bill Call Series: Sustainable Agriculture Food Systems Funders (SAFSF) will be hosting a series of calls on the farm bill over the course of 2011. Announcements about these calls will be posted to SAFSF's website at: www.safsf.org.

The first call in the series, Farm Bill 101, will occur March 11, 2011 (10 a.m. Pacific/ 1 p.m. Eastern). Future calls will cover:

- ▶ The relationship between the Farm Bill and health;
- ▶ The effect on farmer's access to credit and finance;
- ▶ The Conservation Title and the impact on surface water quality and conservation; and
- ▶ Opportunities for funders to work together to influence Farm Bill policy and support positive change

SAFSF has a policy-focused study group which meets via conference call monthly (2nd Wednesday of the month at 1 p.m. Eastern). For more information about how to join the study group please contact Scott Cullen at scullen@gracelinks.org. For general information about SAFSF please contact Virginia Clarke, SAFSF's Coordinator at vclarke@safsf.org.

The Farm Bill

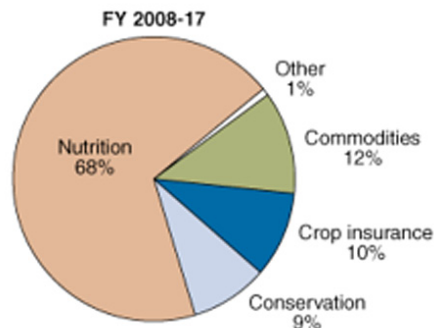
For nearly eighty years, ever since Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal, Congress has crafted policies that affect U.S. agriculture. Originally designed to balance out the booms and busts of agricultural production, today the "Farm Bill" represents billions of dollars in government expenditures. Congress passed the most recent version of the farm bill — the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act (H.R. 2419; Public Law 110-234) — on June 18, 2008, authorizing nearly \$300 billion in mandatory spending over five years. Most farm bills are written to expire in five years; the next farm bill will likely be debated in 2013.

In the current farm bill, approximately two-thirds of the \$300 billion is directed to the food stamp (renamed Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program/SNAP) and associated nutrition programs. The bill also continues the long history of

1. The background narratives for each policy section draw heavily from material written by the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, and "U.S. Farm Bills and Policy Reforms" by Nadine Lehrer.

agricultural commodity programs that provide subsidies for specific food and feed grains, oilseeds, and cotton — these programs in particular have been criticized for their negative indirect effect on the environment (encouraging intensive fossil-fuel and chemical dependent agricultural practices) as well as on human health (an oversupply of corn is implicated in the rise of unhealthy beverages and snacks).

Figure: Farm programs account for about 22% of Farm Act budget allocations



Source: USDA. Economic Research Service using Congressional budget estimates.

The current farm bill also provides mandatory spending for conservation, renewable energy, fruit and vegetable production, and organic farming — some of which received substantial increases in funding in 2008 over previous farm bills. Very modest funding is provided for research and rural development. The text authorizing all of these farm and food programs is organized across fifteen “titles” and is over 1,000 pages long.

Despite the impressive price tag, it is increasingly clear that U.S. farm and food policy is failing on several fronts. The number of independent family farmers on the land has plummeted, as farms and ranches have been forced out by high land prices. Obstacles are preventing the next generation from farming, with farmers over the age of 65 outnumbering those below the age of 35 by more than two to one. Agriculture is the leading source of pollution in the nation’s rivers and lakes, and the U.S. is losing soil ten times faster than the natural replenishment rate. These failures threaten the very future of farming, rural communities, watersheds, and our fundamental ability to feed ourselves.

Re-shaping policies so that they serve the needs of family farms, rural and urban communities, the environment, and public health is critical to re-balancing power and restoring the capacity of our agricultural system for self-renewal. Many organizations have been working for years and continue to do so to reform the farm bill. To learn more about these groups and the different sections of the farm bill, see the following resources:

Background on the Farm Bill

- What is the “Farm Bill”? Renee Johnson and Jim Monke, Congressional Research Service, www.nationalaglawcenter.org/assets/crs/RS22131.pdf
- The 2008 Farm Bill Side-By-Side Comparison, U.S. Department of Agriculture, www.ers.usda.gov/FarmBill/2008/
- Better Food Starts with the Farm Bill, Food & Water Watch, www.foodandwaterwatch.org/factsheet/better-food-starts-with-the-farm-bill/
- 2008 Farm Bill Programs that support sustainable agriculture (including conservation, rural development, local foods, organic, beginning farmer, research programs, etc.)
- National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition’s Grassroots Guide to the 2008 Farm Bill, www.sustainableagriculture.net/publications/grassrootsguide/

General Information on the Farm Bill

- American Farmland Trust, www.farmland.org/programs/campaign/
- Community Food Security Coalition, www.foodsecurity.org

- Environmental Working Group,
www.ewg.org
- Food and Water Watch,
www.foodandwaterwatch.org
- Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy,
http://www.agobservatory.org/issue_farmbill.cfm
- National Agricultural Law Center,
www.nationalaglawcenter.org/farmbills
- National Family Farm Coalition,
www.nffc.net
- National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition,
www.sustainableagriculture.net
- Organic Farming Research Foundation,
www.ofrf.org
- Oxfam America: “Fairness in the Fields”,
www.oxfamamerica.org/resources/files/OAFairness_in_the_Fields.pdf
- Public Health Action on the Farm Bill,
www.publichealthaction.org
- Slow Food USA,
www.slowfoodusa.org/farmbill/
- U.S. House Committee on Agriculture,
agriculture.house.gov/
- U.S. Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee,
ag.senate.gov/site/

Commodity Subsidies

- A Non-Work Guide to Commodity Programs, Scott Marlow, Rural Advancement Foundation International-U.S.,
www.rafiusa.org/pubs/nonworkguide
- Farm Commodity Programs in the 2008 Farm Bill, Jim Monke, Congressional Research Service,
farmpolicy.typepad.com/farmpolicy/files/crs_report_farm_commodity_program_in_o8_fb.pdf
- Farm and Commodity Policy, USDA Economic Research Service Briefing Room,
www.ers.usda.gov/Briefing/FarmPolicy/

Conservation Programs

- 2008 NRCS Farm Bill Conservation Programs, USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service, <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/farmbill/2008/index.html>

Competition and Concentration

- Factsheets on competition issues,
www.foodandwaterwatch.org/food/agricultural-policy/taking-on-corporate-power-in-the-food-supply/
- Retail
www.foodandwaterwatch.org/factsheet/consolidation-and-buyer-power-in-the-grocery-industry/
- Beef
www.foodandwaterwatch.org/food/agricultural-policy/beef-industry/
- Dairy
www.foodandwaterwatch.org/factsheet/dairy-consolidation-price-manipulation/
- Pork
www.foodandwaterwatch.org/factsheet/pork-processing-highly-concentrated-hog-production-vertically-integrated/

- Poultry
www.foodandwaterwatch.org/food/agricultural-policy/abusive-poultry-contracts/
- Seeds
www.foodandwaterwatch.org/factsheet/consolidation-and-intellectual-property-rights-in-the-seed-industry/

Local Foods

- Guide to Federal Funding Local and Regional Food Systems, National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition,
www.sustainableagriculture.net/foodsystems/funding/

Health

- Farm Bill 1.01, Food System Network NYC,
www.foodsystemsnyc.org/articles/farm-bill-jan-2011
- Healthy Food Action, Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy,
www.iatp.org/healthyfoodbill/index.php?q=node&page=6

Beginning Farmers:

- Beginning Farmer and Rancher Opportunities, Center for Rural Affairs,
www.cfra.org/resources/beginning_farmer
- National Young Farmers Coalition,
www.youngfarmers.org/

Child Nutrition

Child Nutrition legislation engages a broad demographic of supporters, including unexpected allies and is an ideal area for more public education around food system issues: everyone wants children to be healthy, and everyone who wants our government to address health care, education, energy, climate change or social justice can stand behind improving school lunch. In December 2010, President Obama signed into law the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act, otherwise known as the Child Nutrition Reauthorization bill. The bill authorizes \$4.5 billion over 10 years and increases school lunch reimbursements by 6 cents per meal in order to help schools afford healthier foods. It includes \$40 million in mandatory funding for a new Farm to School program run by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Additional Resources:

- Child Nutrition Frequently Asked Questions, Food Research and Action Council (FRAC),
www.frac.org/legislative-action-center/cnr-priorities/cnr-faq/
- WIC and SNAP 101: How Do These Programs Work, Alethia Carr, IATP Food and Society Policy Fellow,
www.foodandsocietyfellows.org/digest/article/wic-snap-101-%E2%80%93-how-do-these-programs-work
- National Farm to School Network, Federal Policies webpage,
www.farmtoschool.org/policies.php

Food Safety

Over the last several years, the rise in major outbreaks of foodborne illnesses and nationwide recalls of contaminated foods has called into question the sufficiency of the U.S. food safety system. The new FDA Food Safety Modernization Act, signed into law in December 2010 provides new food safety tools and updates food safety standards to ensure the safety of our food supply. Like the recently passed Child Nutrition law, attention and action now turns to implementation.

There have been many rumors about what is in the new food safety law; the following is a recap of the new law provided by the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition.

The FDA Food Safety Modernization Act

Improves Our Capacity to Prevent Food Safety Problems

- ▶ Hazard analysis and preventive controls: Facilities must identify, evaluate, and address hazards and prevent adulteration via a food safety plan. In certain circumstances, gives FDA access to these plans and relevant documentation.
- ▶ Access to facility records: Expands FDA access to a registered facility's records in a food emergency.
- ▶ 3rd party testing: Provides for laboratory accreditation bodies to ensure U.S. food testing labs meet high quality standards and, in certain circumstances, requires food testing performed by these labs to be reported to FDA. Allows FDA to enable qualified 3rd parties to certify that foreign food facilities comply with U.S. food safety standards.
- ▶ Imports: Requires importers to verify the safety of foreign suppliers and imported food. Allows FDA to require certification for high-risk foods, and to deny entry to a food that lacks certification or that is from a foreign facility that has refused U.S. inspectors.

Improves Our Capacity to Detect and Respond to Food-borne Illness Outbreaks

- ▶ Inspection: Increases the number of FDA inspections at all food facilities.
- ▶ Surveillance: Enhances food-borne illness surveillance systems to improve the collection, analysis, reporting, and usefulness of data on food-borne illnesses.
- ▶ Traceability: Enhances tracking and tracing of high-risk foods and directs the Secretary to establish a pilot project to test and evaluate new methods for rapidly and effectively tracking and tracing food in the event of a food-borne illness outbreak.
- ▶ Mandatory Recall: Allows FDA to initiate a mandatory recall of a food product when a company fails to voluntarily recall the contaminated product upon FDA's request.
- ▶ Suspension of Registration: Allows FDA to suspend a food facility's registration if there is a reasonable probability that food from the facility will cause serious adverse health consequences or death.

Enhances U.S. Food Defense Capabilities

- ▶ Directs FDA to help food companies protect their products from intentional contamination, and calls for a national strategy to protect our food supply from terrorist threats and rapidly respond to food emergencies.

Increases FDA Resources

- ▶ Authorizes increased funding for FDA's food safety activities, such as hiring personnel, and includes targeted non-compliance fees for domestic and foreign facilities.

Regulatory Flexibility

- ▶ Modernizes our food safety system without being burdensome. Provides training for facilities to comply with the new safety requirements and includes special accommodations for small businesses and farms. Exempts small businesses from certain aspects of the produce standards and preventive control requirements.

Additional Resources

- A Sustainable Agriculture Perspective on Food Safety, November 2010, National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, www.sustainableagriculture.net/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/Sustainable-Food-Safety_FINAL.pdf
- Food Politics and Food Policy and Law webpages of Food Safety News, www.foodsafetynews.com/sections/food-politics/
- Bridging the GAPS: Strategies to Improve Produce Safety, Preserve Farm Diversity, and Strengthen Local Food Systems, Elanor Starmer (Food and Water Watch) and Marie Kulick (Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy), www.iatp.org/iatp/publications.cfm?refid=106746
- Where's the Local Beef, www.foodandwaterwatch.org/food/report/wheres-the-local-beef-2/