

# **FAIR FARM BILL**

## **POLICY HANDBOOK**

Recommendations toward breaking the mold of past farm bills to create a more fair, inclusive, and competitive food and agriculture system.



**Farm Action**

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS



## [Introduction](#)

## [Definition of Terms](#)

## [Pillar One: Food, Not Feed](#)

- Key Goal: [Shift funding and programs away from commodity feed crops and towards raising food for people.](#)
- Key Goal: [Provide government assistance for transition programs.](#)
- Key Goal: [Stop the abuse of commodity checkoff programs.](#)

## [Pillar Two: Justice for All](#)

- Key Goal: [Build equitable access to USDA programs.](#)
- Key Goal: [Invest in socially disadvantaged farmers.](#)
- Key Goal: [Create worker protections within the agricultural industry.](#)

## [Pillar Three: Build Local, Eat Local](#)

- Key Goal: [Strip corporations of their excessive market power and control of food supply chains.](#)
- Key Goal: [Invest in local and regional food systems.](#)
- Key Goal: [Enhance labeling transparency to provide more market opportunities and improve competition.](#)

## [Pillar Four: Conservation and Regeneration](#)

- Key Goal: [Require certain conservation and regenerative practices within Farm Bill programs.](#)
- Key Goal: [Provide both financial and technical support to farmers transitioning their practices.](#)
- Key Goal: [Improve public transparency of climate and environmental initiatives.](#)

# INTRODUCTION



Time and time again farmers, rural communities, and advocates have tried to shift government support away from the industrial agriculture model controlled by a handful of corporations. Time and time again, we have failed, because Big Ag controls the process from policy narrative to legislative votes.

The farm bill is the best opportunity to achieve meaningful reforms to our current consolidated food and agriculture system — but first, we need to change conversations everywhere from the kitchen table to the Capitol.

This policy handbook is a tool to do just that. The farm bill can seem like a vast and at times bewildering maze of legislation, so we're offering a straightforward approach to understanding what it has been, and what it could become. We've organized our recommendations into four broad "pillars," or areas of change; major shifts in policy within these four categories would mean we've finally broken the Big Ag-friendly mold of farm bills past. Within these pillars, you'll find concise, concrete, and actionable policy recommendations.

Reforming our food system to be more fair, inclusive, and competitive will be a long process. That is why we have set forth goals for not just the 2023 farm bill but the 2028 one as well. We hope that in working toward a more fair farm bill, we can build and strengthen lasting relationships between the farmers, ranchers, food system workers, policymakers, and advocates who all seek the same thing: a food and farm system that works for everyone — not just the powerful few.

# DEFINITION OF TERMS



- A **Pillar** represents a broad policy concept: for instance, that the farm bill should help us build local infrastructure so we can eat food produced locally.
- Following a short narrative to illustrate its importance, each of the four Pillars lists **Key Goals**, which target policy and funding mechanisms we could change in pursuit of that broad concept.
- Toward these goals, we have identified **Objectives**, or specific legislative measures, for both the 2023 and 2028 farm bills.
- For each Objective we've noted one or more **Titles**, or farm bill categories, that the policies fall within.
- Many Objectives also include one or more **Marker Bills**, or legislation introduced to Congress that's actually intended for inclusion into the farm bill.
- Some sections also flag **Measures We Oppose**: likely tactics or arguments the opposition might use to defeat our objectives, goals, or pillars.

# PILLAR ONE: FOOD, NOT FEED



The majority of government funding and taxpayer-backed agriculture programs support intensive livestock and poultry production or the production of grains to feed these animals. If we instead supported the production of food that feeds people, farmers could afford to escape industrial agriculture's treadmill and profitably grow food for their communities.

## **Key Goal: Shift funding and programs away from commodity feed crops and towards raising food for people.**

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Americans' tax dollars should support a system that feeds their families and neighbors. We could accomplish this by shifting direct payments, loans, and additional risk management tools or safety net supports through the Farm Bill programs toward growing vegetables, fruits, nuts, legumes, and cereal grains.

Currently, about one third of corn and roughly 70% of soybeans produced in the U.S. go to animal feed. An estimated 99% of U.S. livestock are raised under the EPA definition of a Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation (CAFO). In 2019, U.S. taxpayers spent \$2.75 billion on corn and \$1.33 billion on soybean commodity payments, which means that CAFO production received roughly \$1.8 billion in subsidy payments for feed that year. Essentially, U.S. taxpayers gave industrial agriculture \$1.8 billion toward feed to support their inhumane, industrialized approach to livestock management.

It is time to direct government funding toward sustainable food production systems for our communities, instead of toward industrial complexes that produce meat for export to developed and rapidly-developing nations whose growing economic middle classes can afford to pay global market prices for meat.

- **2023 Objective: Expand crop insurance options to support more diversified, regenerative, non-conventional operations that produce food for people.** One example of this would be expanding the recent micro-farm insurance program.
  - Marker Bills: Food and Farm Act; Crop Insurance Modernization Act of 2018
  - Titles: Horticulture; Crop Insurance; Miscellaneous
- **2023 Objective: Set payment limits on risk management and commodity programs so that the largest farms aren't receiving the bulk of the support.**
  - Marker Bill: Rural America Preservation Act of 2012
  - Titles: Commodities; Crop Insurance
- **Measures We Oppose: Attempts to raise or weaken current payment limits,** including attempts to broaden and dilute the definition of “actively engaged in farming.” “Actively engaged in farming” is one of the 2018 Farm Bill requirements, established to ensure that farm program payments only go to current producers.
  - Titles: Commodities; Crop Insurance

## **Key Goal: Provide government assistance for transition programs.**

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The farm bill has the power to help farmers escape industrial agriculture's treadmill by incentivizing organic, regenerative food production practices that provide healthy and affordable food for our neighbors.

- **2023 Objective: Increase funding to grant programs, like NIFA and SARE, with a focus on assisting farmers transitioning to organic and/or regenerative food production models.**
  - Marker Bills: Beginning Farmer and Rancher Opportunity Act of 2017; Justice for Black Farmers Act of 2021
  - Titles: Conservation; Rural Development; Research, Extension, and Related Matters; Miscellaneous
- **2023 Objective: Authorize and fund regional food business centers to support farmers and small food businesses with technical assistance and business development.**
  - Marker Bills: USDA Regional Food Business Center as created by USDA using American Rescue Plan and Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Acts
  - Title: Rural Development; Horticulture; Miscellaneous

- **2028 Objective: Provide a voluntary buyout for farmers who want to stop producing livestock or poultry according to CAFO methods.**
  - Marker Bills: Farm System Reform Act of 2021; Agriculture Resilience Act
  - Titles: Conservation; Rural Development; Research, Extension, and Related Matters; Miscellaneous
- **Measures We Oppose: A continued focus on subsidizing industrial agriculture models in programs like EQIP.**

## **Key Goal: Stop the abuse of commodity checkoff programs.**

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The checkoff system takes the hard-earned money of farmers and ranchers and uses it to guarantee a self-perpetuating, pro-corporate, anti-independent producer policy agenda. In the short term, farmers and ranchers should have a say in where their money is spent. In the long term, checkoffs should be voluntary.

- **2023 Objective: Ensure checkoff programs are transparent and accountable.** This can be accomplished by requiring their budgets and disbursements to be published and periodically audited, and by restricting their engagement with lobbying organizations that have conflicts of interest or that conduct anti-competitive activities.
  - Marker Bill: Opportunities for Fairness in Farming Act of 2021
  - Title: Commodities; Miscellaneous
- **2028 Objective: Allow commodity producers to participate in checkoff programs on a voluntary, rather than mandatory, basis.**
  - Marker Bill: Voluntary Checkoff Program Participation Act
  - Title: Commodities; Miscellaneous
- **2028 Objective: Require programs to publicly disclose research they funded, and require academic journals to disclose their funding sources.**
  - There are currently no marker bills toward this objective.
  - Titles: Commodities; Research, Extension, and Related Matters; Miscellaneous
- **Measures We Oppose: Attempts to create new checkoffs, attempts to weaken current rules.**

# PILLAR TWO: JUSTICE FOR ALL



Everyone deserves an equal chance to succeed, but the USDA has openly admitted to discriminatory practices that stack the deck against marginalized farmers. Historically underserved farmers and ranchers have long been denied participation in local and national agricultural programs and policy development.

We are strongest when we are standing together, and to achieve the kind of fair and inclusive society that will benefit us all, we need to reform our food and farm system so that we are all standing on level ground. We must make credit accessible to all, ensure robust representation on government boards and commissions, and direct funding to organizations led by members of disadvantaged communities that provide technical assistance.

## Key Goal: Build equitable access to USDA programs.

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USDA has a proven track record of systemic racism and discriminatory practices. We need clear legislative markers and oversight programs to ensure equitable access in the future.

- **2023 Objective: Technical assistance through BIPOC-led organizations** that support organizations that are already supporting underserved communities.
  - There are currently no marker bills toward this objective.
  - Titles: Conservation; Research, Extension, and Related Matters
- **2023 Objective: Maintain and grow “set-asides” for all USDA support programs** that require 5% of funding to go to socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers and 5% to go to beginning farmers and ranchers.
  - Marker Bill: Climate Stewardship Act of 2021
  - Titles: Crop Insurance; Miscellaneous



- **2023 Objective: Increase transparency and accountability in USDA oversight.**
  - Marker Bill: Justice for Black Farmers Act of 2021
  - Title: Miscellaneous
- **2023 Objective: Create more equitable funding.** Funding to land-grant universities and community-based organizations should be equitably distributed to all the research programs. The farm bill should include set-asides for research funding and increased funding to HBCUs and Tribal Colleges.
  - Marker Bill: Justice for Black Farmers Act of 2021
  - Title: Research, Extension, and Related Matters
- **2023 Objective: Equitable representation of BIPOC farmers on government boards and commissions.** BIPOC farmers bring unique experiences and valuable knowledge to the table. Not only should they have equal rights to these positions, their perspectives will greatly benefit these committees.
  - There are currently no marker bills toward this objective.
  - Title: Miscellaneous
- **2023 Objective: USDA school procurement programs,** such as the Farm to School Grant Program, should proactively prioritize and engage beginning, veteran, and socially-disadvantaged farmers and serve racially diverse and high-need student populations.
  - Marker Bill: Farm to School Act of 2021
  - Title: Miscellaneous
- **2023 Objective: Expand Tribal access to conservation funding** to include traditional conservation practices that are not necessarily recognized by USDA and NRCS.
  - There are currently no marker bills toward this objective
  - Title: Conservation
- **2023 Objective: Increase Tribal sovereignty and self-determination** so that Indigenous people can access and support the production of fresh and traditional local foods.
  - Marker Bills: Farm to School Act of 2021; 638 authorization in Pilot Program for Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR), where 8 of the 276 tribes were given direct control of FDPIR program administration
  - Titles: Nutrition; Miscellaneous

- **2028 Objective: Require all entities holding contracts** (procurement, insurance, or otherwise) with USDA to consent to a full audit including an examination of labor, environmental, civil rights, and other federal law compliance. Entities found in violation of any federal law would have their contracts revoked, and would be barred from entering another contract for a certain period of time.
  - There are currently no marker bills toward this objective.
  - Titles: All farm bill titles and USDA programs
- **2028 Objective: Invest in land access** for new entry and transitioning farmers, including farm transition plans. These loan structures should include low interest rates and minimum payments.
  - There are currently no marker bills toward this objective.
  - Title: Miscellaneous
- **Measures We Oppose:** Any attempts to change the definition of “socially disadvantaged.”

## Key Goal: Invest in socially disadvantaged farmers.

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Everyone deserves a fair opportunity to earn a living and build upon their family’s legacy in agriculture. We must address discrepancies in agriculture institutions’ lending and credit practices that disproportionately affect marginalized communities.

- **2023 Objective: Debt-repayment of USDA loans for small farms.**
  - Marker Bills: Build Back Better Act; Relief for America’s Small Farmers Act
  - Title: Credit
- **2023 Objective: Invest in socially disadvantaged farmers by improving credit access, credit assistance, and succession planning.**
  - Marker Bill: Justice for Black Farmers Act of 2021
  - Title: Credit
- **Measures We Oppose:** Any attempts to change the definition of “socially disadvantaged.”

## Key Goal: Create worker protections within the agricultural industry.

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USDA must do everything within its jurisdiction to protect food system workers. A food system that relies on workers who are forced to endure inhumane working conditions or risk their personal health is unjust and unstable. In order to ensure a fair and resilient food system, we must provide both farmers and food system workers with government protections.

- **2023 Objective: Protect meatpacking workers from line-speed waivers** that adversely impact worker safety.
  - Marker Bill: Protecting America's Meatpacking Workers Act of 2021
  - Title: Miscellaneous
- **2023 Objective: Conduct reviews assessing racial discrimination, safety, and other challenges food system workers face.**
  - Marker Bill: Protecting America's Meatpacking Workers Act of 2021
  - Title: Miscellaneous

# PILLAR THREE:

## BUILD LOCAL, EAT LOCAL



A food system controlled by corporate behemoths poses both a food security and national security threat. By breaking up agrifood corporations and investing in local and regional food systems, we can enhance market transparency and competition. It's time to empower people, not corporations, and create a resilient food and agriculture system that will feed us even if calamity strikes. If we build local, we can eat local!

### Key Goal: Strip corporations of their excessive market power and control of food supply chains.

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We need to empower people, not corporations, by enforcing and strengthening our anti-monopoly laws.

- **2023 Objective: Strengthen the Packers and Stockyards Act** so that it has the power to protect livestock and poultry producers from anti competitive practices as originally intended.
  - Marker Bills: Farm System Reform Act of 2021; Protecting America's Meatpacking Workers Act of 2021; Meat Packing Special Investigator Act
  - Title: Miscellaneous
  - Measures We Oppose: Attempts to block USDA Packers and Stockyards Act rules from being finalized; pro-alternative marketing agreements (AMAs) language that limits the impact of new Packers and Stockyards Act rules
- **2023 Objective: Begin the process of reviewing the largest mega-mergers of the past two decades.**
  - Marker Bills: Prohibiting Anticompetitive Mergers Act of 2022; Food and Agribusiness Merger Moratorium and Antitrust Review Act of 2019
  - Title: Miscellaneous

- **2028 Objective: Create a moratorium on large agribusiness, food and beverage manufacturing, and retail grocery mergers and acquisitions.**
  - Marker Bills: Food and Agribusiness Merger Moratorium and Antitrust Review Act of 2019; Prohibiting Anticompetitive Mergers Act of 2022
  - Title: Miscellaneous
- **2028 Objective: Place an immediate moratorium on new large CAFOs, and phase out the largest existing CAFOs by 2040.**
  - Marker Bill: Farm System Reform Act of 2021
  - Title: Miscellaneous

### **Key Goal: Invest in local and regional food systems.**

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We need to invest in and build up local and regional food production, processing, distribution, and retail. In order to offer local and regional food systems comparable levels of support to what consolidated industrial food production systems currently enjoy, we must invest in more land access, access to information and technology, improved infrastructure, and more sales and distribution outlets.

- **2023 Objective: Increase funding for Local Agricultural Marketing program (LAMP) to \$500 million.**
  - Marker Bills: Agriculture Resilience Act; Climate Stewardship Act of 2021; Protecting America's Meatpacking Workers Act of 2021
  - Title: Horticulture
- **2023 Objective: Provide \$1 billion additional funding to the Food Supply Chain Guaranteed Loans and Grants program,** in addition to what the USDA has made available using ARPA funding, to support local and regional vegetable, fruit, and nut processing.
  - There are currently no marker bills toward this objective.
  - Titles: Credit; Rural Development
- **2023 Objective: Require that USDA establish purchasing targets or set-asides for purchases of foods from independent regional producers, foods from socially disadvantaged producers, and foods from organic/regenerative farms.**
  - There are currently no marker bills toward this objective.
  - Title: Nutrition

- **2023 Objective: Increase schools' abilities and directives to support regional food systems by:**
  1. **Allowing schools to use "local" as a product specification** in their procurement requests
  2. **Increasing mandatory funding of Farm to School Act** to \$15 million and increase maximum grant award to \$500,000
  3. **Continuing (and expanding to more states) the Pilot Project for Unprocessed Fruits and Vegetables** and allow participating states more flexibility in procuring fresh, locally grown fruits and vegetables
  4. **Increasing Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP) funding** and requiring a percentage to be purchased locally
    - Marker Bills: Kids Eat Local Act of 2021; Farm to School Act of 2021; Local School Foods Expansion Act of 2021
    - Title: Nutrition
  
- **2023 Objective: Increased investment in community food projects that address food security in urban low-income areas.** We can improve community resilience by developing urban agriculture projects.
  - Marker Bill: Climate Stewardship Act of 2021
  - Titles: Nutrition; Horticulture; Miscellaneous

## **Key Goal: Enhance labeling transparency to provide more market opportunities and improve competition.**

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Current policies have enabled misleading labeling practices, allowing multinational corporations to steal independent producers' markets out from under them and obscure the truth from the American consumer.

- **2023 Objective: Require Country of Origin Labeling (COOL) on beef, pork, and dairy products.** It is already a requirement for poultry, fruits, and vegetables.
  - Marker Bills: Farm System Reform Act of 2021; American Beef Labeling Act; Protecting America's Meatpacking Workers Act of 2021
  - Title: Miscellaneous

- **2023 Objective: Require truth in labeling** by prohibiting imported meat products from being labeled as “Product of U.S.A.”
  - Marker Bill: Farm System Reform Act of 2021
  - Title: Miscellaneous

# PILLAR FOUR: CONSERVATION AND REGENERATION



The farm bill's subsidized insurance programs offer protection in the case of crop failure, but they primarily benefit farms that grow corn, soybeans, cotton, sugar, and wheat. These same farms also receive the lion's share of farm bill-funded disaster payments — without any requirement that they work to mitigate the extreme weather patterns that contribute to the rising costs of these taxpayer-funded programs. Requiring participants to commit to certain conservation and regenerative practices in order to receive payments through these programs would be a basic but highly effective way to reduce the impact agriculture has on severe weather events.

## Key Goal: Require certain conservation and regenerative practices within Farm Bill programs.

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There are many practices that farmers can deploy to mitigate the effects of extreme weather on their operations, and practices that reduce their contribution to the increased frequency and severity of extreme weather events. Crop insurance, commodity or price support, and disaster payment programs exist to help buffer farmers and ranchers from the effects of severe weather. In order for farmers to benefit from these programs they should demonstrate that their farming practices are part of the solution, not the problem.

- **2023 Objective: Require farmers to meet certain conservation standards** in order to participate in federal crop insurance, commodity/price support, and disaster payment programs.
  - Marker Bills: Agriculture Resilience Act; Food and Farm Act
  - Titles: Commodities; Conservation; Crop Insurance



- **2023 Objective: Expand the Pandemic Cover Crop Program (PCCP)**, which offers growers reduced crop insurance rates at \$5 for every acre planted in cover crops. Make PCCP a permanently-funded program with increased reductions per acre.
  - Marker Bill: Part of the USDA's Pandemic Assistance for Producers initiative
  - Title: Crop Insurance
- **2023 Objective: Create set-asides in EQIP for livestock producers who use pasture-based systems.**
  - Marker Bill: Food and Farm Act
  - Titles: Conservation; Miscellaneous
- **2028 Objective: Prioritize EQIP spending on projects that demonstrably improve the quality of the environment.**
  - Marker Bill: Food and Farm Act
  - Title: Conservation
- **2028 Objective: Hold corporate integrators responsible for pollution** and other harmful effects of CAFOs.
  - Marker Bill: Farm System Reform Act of 2021
  - Title: Miscellaneous
- **Measures We Oppose:** Judicial or legislative attempts, such as the King Amendment and the EATS Act, to block states' abilities to implement public welfare, environmental protection, and animal welfare standards.

## **Key Goal: Provide both financial and technical support to farmers transitioning their practices.**

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Farmers transitioning away from industrial agriculture and towards conservation and regenerative practices need both financial and technical resources to be successful. The farm bill should support these efforts, as a more climate-smart agriculture system would be more resilient and less costly for taxpayers in the long run.

- **2023 Objective: Expand and permanently fund EQIP Cover Crop Initiative pilot program**, which offers financial and technical assistance to farmers for cover cropping in 11 states.

- Marker Bill: There are currently no marker bills toward this objective.
  - Title: Conservation
- **2023 Objective: Offer financial assistance to farmers transitioning to organic farming.**
  - There are currently no marker bills toward this objective.
  - Title: Horticulture
- **2023 Objective: Increase baseline funding for conservation programs.**
  - Marker Bill: Climate Stewardship Act of 2021
  - Title: Conservation
- **2023 Objective: Restore and streamline the organic cost-share program,** which helps subsidize organic certification fees for growers.
  - Marker Bill: Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018
  - Title: Horticulture
- **2023 Objective: Prioritize multiple benefit practices in conservation programs** that emphasize diversified operations, grazing, etc. Multiple benefits include soil health, water quality protection, water-retention capacity of soil, habitat protection, reduced input use, etc.
  - Marker Bills: Agriculture Resilience Act; Climate Stewardship Act of 2021
  - Title: Conservation
- **2023 Objective: Invest in renewable energy** for farmers and rural small businesses.
  - Marker Bill: Climate Stewardship Act of 2021
  - Title: Energy
- **2023 Objective: Reduce subsidies to CAFO** operations through REAP and EQIP.
  - Marker Bills: Farm System Reform Act of 2021; Agriculture Resilience Act; Climate Stewardship Act of 2021
  - Title: Conservation
- **2023 Objective: Authorize and fund regional food business centers** to support farmers and small food businesses with technical assistance and business development.
  - Marker Bills: USDA Regional Food Business Center as created by USDA using American Rescue Plan and Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Acts
  - Title: Rural Development; Horticulture; Miscellaneous

- **2023 Objective: Re-establish Civilian Conservation Corps** to provide youth from low-income communities, Indigenous communities, and communities of color with skills and work experience in forestry and wetlands restoration.
  - Marker Bill: Climate Stewardship Act of 2021
  - Title: Conservation; Rural Development
- **2023 Objective: Establish a Farm Conservation Corps** to provide young adults from socially disadvantaged communities with the academic, vocational, and social skills necessary to pursue careers in farming and ranching.
  - Marker Bill: Justice for Black Farmers Act of 2021
  - Titles: Conservation; Rural Development
- **2028 Objective: Provide voluntary buyouts for farmers who want to transition out of operating a CAFO.**
  - Marker Bill: Farm System Reform Act of 2021
  - Titles: Conservation; Credit
- **Measures We Oppose:** Judicial or legislative attempts, such as the King Amendment and the EATS Act, to block states' abilities to implement public welfare, environmental protection, and animal welfare standards.

## Key Goal: Improve public transparency of climate and environmental initiatives.

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Transparency in funding and research is necessary to prevent industrial corporations from greenwashing or passing the costs of their harmful practices on to taxpayers and the surrounding communities.

- **2023 Objective: Increase funding for agricultural research programs**, including the Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative (OREI), Organic Transitions Program (ORG), Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE).
  - Marker Bill: Climate Stewardship Act of 2021
  - Title: Research

- **2028 Objective: Increase publicly-funded research**, and prohibit industry-funded research publications from being used to determine approval of agricultural products and chemicals.
  - There are currently no marker bills toward this objective.
  - Title: Research
  
- **2028 Objective: Require all corporations holding contracts (procurement, insurance, or otherwise) with USDA to consent to a full audit**, including an examination of labor, environmental, civil rights, and other federal law compliance. Corporations found in violation of any federal law would have their contracts revoked, and would be barred from entering another for a certain period of time.
  - There are currently no marker bills toward this objective.
  - Title: Miscellaneous
  
- **Measures We Oppose:** Judicial or legislative attempts, such as the King Amendment and the EATS Act, to block states' abilities to implement public welfare, environmental protection, and animal welfare standards.