



Farm Action Fund



Farm Action

FOOD, NOT FEED

How can the farm bill improve U.S. health outcomes?

Our current farm support system creates barriers to the production of fiber-rich crops. Instead, our system incentivizes farmers to grow corn and soybeans destined to become cheap animal feed to fuel an export economy.

We need a farm bill that empowers farmers to be leaders in this country's health epidemic by doing what they do best — growing food for their communities.

THE U.S. IS IN A DIET-RELATED HEALTH CRISIS

Today, only four percent of farm subsidies go toward the production of fruits and vegetables, while over 30% go to support animal feed and industrial livestock operations. The result of this upside-down farm subsidy program is the United States is in a diet-related health crisis. Improved and equitable access to nutritious foods would directly address food and nutrition insecurity. However, current policies create barriers to their production and instead drive farmers to overproduce animal feed grains and highly processed sugars and fats.

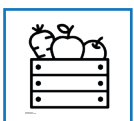


More than 9 percent of the U.S. population has type 2 diabetes and in 2020, 41.9 percent of U.S. inhabitants were classified as obese. Obesity-related conditions such as heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, and certain types of cancer are the leading causes of preventable premature death in America. Poor nutrition has been associated with more than half a million deaths per year.



The estimated medical cost of obesity in the United States was nearly \$173 billion in 2019, and medical expenses for adults who had obesity were, on average, \$1,861 higher than for people with healthy weights. In 2018, national health expenditures were \$3.6 trillion and are projected to nearly double to \$6.2 trillion by 2028.

To critics who claim that the country cannot afford the programs we're recommending, we'd respond that the country cannot afford to leave the obesity epidemic untreated.



Increasing the consumption of fiber-rich food is an essential first step toward addressing this nation's health crisis. The U.S. Surgeon General has said that scientific evidence strongly suggests that "a dietary pattern that contains excessive intakes of foods high in calories, fat (especially saturated fat), cholesterol, and sodium, but that is low in complex carbohydrates and fiber, is one that contributes significantly to the high rates of major chronic diseases among Americans."

Americans today are not eating enough fruits, vegetables, and other fiber-rich foods. On average, Americans only eat half the amount of recommended dietary fiber. Nearly 90 percent of the U.S. population falls below the recommended dietary allowance (RDA) for vegetables, and 80 percent fall below the RDA for fruit. Instead, Americans derive well over half their caloric intake from ultra-processed foods.

Policy recommendations to support a Fair Farm Bill.

- ✓ Massively scale up the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP) to at least \$200 million and tie procurement to protect domestic producers.
- ✓ Expand crop insurance options by strengthening the recent changes USDA Risk Management Agency (RMA) has made to Micro Farm and Whole Farm Revenue Protection (WFRP) Program.
- ✓ Increase funding for technical assistance and grants directed towards farmers of color, specifically to universities with relationships in these communities.
- ✓ Increase funding to grant programs, like National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) and Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (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).
- ✓ Authorize and fund recent USDA programs, funded through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), that lift up and support local and regional food production systems. These programs include: Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement Program (LFPA); Local Foods for Schools Cooperative Agreement Program (LFS); Heirs' Property Relending Program (HPRP); Increasing Land, Capital, and Market Access Program; and Food Supply Chain Guaranteed Loan Program.

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USING THE FARM BILL TO DRIVE POSITIVE HEALTH OUTCOMES

Increasing access to fruits and vegetables has proven to successfully increase consumption.

Research measuring the health benefits gained from incentivizing producers to grow fruits and vegetables showed almost universal improvement in the measured food-related health behaviors, including greater nutritional awareness, less consumption of processed foods, better food preparation skills, and weight loss. Inarguably, nutritious food is good medicine.

A farm bill that prioritizes human health is just the prescription this ailing country requires.

Unfortunately, our farm support system creates barriers to the production of fiber-rich crops and instead incentivizes farmers to grow corn and soybeans destined to become cheap animal feed to fuel an export economy.

From risk management to technical assistance, our farm programs make conventional feed grain production the easy choice, while creating barriers to those trying to produce nutritious and organically/regeneratively-produced food.

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