



Farm Action Fund®

STATE ADVOCACY GUIDE: Fighting Corporate Control of American Agriculture

Policy Recommendations to Advance the Movement

INTRODUCTION

State governments play a critical role in shaping policies that impact the food and agriculture system. While federal policies often garner national attention, many key decisions are made at the state level.

Farm Action Fund has prepared these policy recommendations to empower you to play a part in reversing the tide of monopoly power at the state level. As advocates fighting for the implementation of these recommendations, you can help us win the fight for America's food and farm system to benefit every American farmer, family, and community.

ABOUT FARM ACTION FUND

Farm Action Fund is a nonpartisan farm organization that develops recommended policy solutions focused on securing America's food supply and providing economic opportunity to farmers and rural communities through a fair, sustainable, healthy food system.

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PILLAR 1: LEVELING THE PLAYING FIELD FOR FARMERS AND RANCHERS



America's independent farmers and small businesses are the backbone of the nation's food system. Yet, that food system is currently in a crisis. Over the last several decades, unprecedented consolidation across the food and agriculture system has driven farmers from their land, stolen valuable market opportunities, and eroded once vibrant rural economies. The multinational and foreign corporations that dominate today's markets continue amassing more power and profit off the backs of everyone else.

But, the trends of market consolidation can be reversed and America's independent farmers and small businesses can finally be given the fighting chance they deserve.

Key Priorities

Stop Foreign, Corporate, and Billionaire Investors

Farmland ownership has long been a source of wealth and power in rural America. However, as large foreign countries and corporations continue to gobble up agricultural land as part of their investment and food strategies, family farmers are forced out of business, and rural communities are hollowed out. This is both a food and national security issue.

Urge Your State Officials To:

- **Pass legislation that limits ownership and leasing of farmland by corporate investors.** Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and South Dakota all ban corporations from holding a title for farmland, but all of these states have exceptions written into their laws. States and local elected officials should review the federal Farmland for Farmers Act and adopt similar legislation in their own regions.
- **Pass legislation that bans or restricts foreign ownership of farmland.** Only 22 states currently regulate foreign ownership of farmland.

Strengthen the Packers & Stockyards Act

More than 100 years ago, the U.S. passed the Packers & Stockyards Act (P&S Act) to protect farmers and ranchers from concentrated, abusive monopoly power in the livestock industry. The P&S Act successfully leveled the economic playing field for decades, but the erosion of its power by courts in the 1980s has allowed a handful of corporations to gain unprecedented control over meat and poultry markets.

Urge Your State Officials To:

- **Pass legislation that grants state attorneys general the authority to enforce the P&S Act.** State laws should be extended to provide state attorneys general the authority to bring legal action against abusive meatpacking corporations for violations of those actions set out in sections 202(a) and 202(b) of the P&S Act.

Right to Repair

Multinational farm equipment manufacturers like John Deere are imposing severe restrictions on who can repair the products they sell. Prevented from fixing their own tractors, farmers are often forced into long equipment transports and wait times for repairs. This can result in losses of tens or even hundreds of thousands of dollars in potential yields. Equipment manufacturers are also crushing independent repair shops and critically harming once vibrant rural economies by forbidding everyone except a few authorized dealers from accessing necessary diagnostic tools.

Urge Your State Officials To:

- Pass Agriculture Right to Repair legislation.** Colorado has already passed Agriculture Right to Repair legislation, and over the past couple of legislative sessions, 28 other states (AK, AL, DE, FL, GA, HI, IA, IL, IN, KY, ME, MD, MI, MO, MN, MS, MT, NJ, OH, OK, RI, SD, TN, TX, UT, VT, WA, and WV) have introduced similar legislation.

Reform Commodity Checkoff Programs

Reform to the checkoff tax is long overdue. Federal law requires farmers at operations of all sizes to participate in and pay into checkoff programs, funds from which are designed to promote certain commodities over others. Due to decades of lax oversight, checkoff programs are shrouded in secrecy while funneling farmers' tax dollars to trade and lobbying organizations – representing the world's largest meatpackers and grain traders – which promote policies that benefit large monopolies and harm family farmers and ranchers.

Urge Your State Officials To:

- Direct your state auditor to audit state-level checkoff boards.** Recently, the North Dakota State Auditor's office caught the North Dakota Soybean Council's illegal use of federal soybean checkoff funds to lobby on agriculture policy. States need to conduct such audits of all checkoff programs regularly, to ensure checkoff funds are not being misused.

Enforce Truth in Labeling

Food labels are a critical component of our food economy. Often the only form of communication between farmers and consumers, labels affect a farmer's ability to earn a fair price for their products. Americans prefer to buy from nearby farmers using sustainable practices, so transparent labels also support the growth of resilient local and regional food systems. Labels should say where food comes from and be honest about how it was produced. Yet, global corporations often use misleading labels and claims to sell generic or imported products at a premium while our government looks the other way.

Urge Your State Officials To:

- Enforce consumer protection laws.** State attorneys general should take action under existing consumer protection statutes to enforce labeling laws, protecting differentiated market opportunities for farmers. If you identify a misleading food label, submit a complaint to your state attorney general and urge them to take action.

Promote Vigorous Antitrust Enforcement

Rampant consolidation across food and farm sectors has enabled dominant corporations to amass power and, in many cases, violate antitrust legislation. This has created an unfair playing field where farmers and other small businesses cannot compete against multinational corporations.

Urge Your State Officials To:

- Encourage robust antitrust enforcement.** State attorneys general should enforce antitrust laws to prevent collusive price-fixing, ensuring fair competition and protecting consumers from potential corporate profiteering.
- Increase funding for antitrust enforcers** so that they have the resources they need to effectively do their jobs.



PILLAR 2: REBUILDING A FOOD SYSTEM THAT BENEFITS ALL

Ensuring all Americans have access to nutritious, high-quality food starts with supporting the farmers who grow it. However, many farmers face economic challenges in shifting towards crops that support a healthier food system. Now is the time to reshape agricultural policy to prioritize and incentivize the production of fruits, vegetables, legumes, and other nutritious crops. In doing so, we can strengthen public health, reduce healthcare costs, and foster a system that aligns with the country's long-term wellness and economic goals.



Key Priorities

Increase and Improve Access to Farm Production Tools

Farmers growing livestock feed crops, such as corn and soybeans, currently have far better access to taxpayer-funded resources than those growing food crops like fruits, vegetables, legumes, and whole grains. Such imbalances drive farmers toward certain crops and production models, resulting in the growing agricultural trade deficit and dependence on foreign countries to feed our population. Additionally, with increased consolidation affecting the financial sector, seeds, and farmland ownership, independent farmers and ranchers struggle to access the needed inputs to keep their farms and ranches operating.

Urge Your State Officials To:

- ❑ **Support young, beginner, and socially disadvantaged farmers' access to land** by facilitating farmland transfer to the next generation of farmers, repurposing urban lots into community gardens, strengthening farmland protection, and passing heirs' property protections.
- ❑ **Build a more resilient seed supply** by urging state attorneys general to enforce consumer protection laws and investigate unfair market practices in the seed sector, ensuring public access to traits and germplasm developed with public research funding, and safeguarding farmers' data.
- ❑ **Expand equitable credit access** with targeted loan and credit guarantee programs, grant programs to fund equipment, land, and infrastructure purchases, and tax incentives to lending institutions that provide loans to young, beginning, or socially disadvantaged farmers.

Make Smart Investments in Local and Regional Agricultural Infrastructure

Rampant consolidation and vertical integration have also disrupted critical infrastructure, leaving farmers unable to get their products from farm to market. To build a more resilient and decentralized food system, we need to shift government spending to strategic investments in local and regional processing and distribution. With just four corporations controlling 85% of beef processing, 67% of pork processing, and 60% of chicken processing, consolidation in meatpacking has pushed out nearly all the smaller independent meat processing facilities. With so few remaining slaughter and processing plants, farmers and ranchers are limited in where they can take their animals for slaughter and the prices they are able to get.

Urge Your State Officials To:

- **Make strategic investments** in local meat processing facilities to support farmers, ranchers, and rural economies.
- **Create or expand grant and low-interest loan programs** that fund infrastructure projects directly benefitting farms.
- **Create or expand cooperative development programs** to encourage collective investments in infrastructure, such as cooperative cold storage or community-owned processing facilities.

Implement Values-Aligned Government Food Purchasing

While work to build up more regional distribution systems and reintroduce competition into our markets continues, these investments must be protected by leveraging government procurement power to support independent farmers. State governments are a major purchaser of food. Today, much of those taxpayer funds are directed to the world's largest and most abusive food corporations. Governments must change their procurement policies to prioritize purchases from local and regional producers, along with other values that bolster a stronger, more resilient food system.

Urge Your State Officials To:

- **Create set-asides in government procurement policy** for values-based purchasing (such as local, organic, regenerative, new and beginning farmers, etc.) by directing portions of government procurement budgets towards these targeted producers.
- **Increase funding** for programs that direct government spending towards small, local, sustainable, beginning, and socially disadvantaged farmers.



ACTIONS FOR ADVOCATES

MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD

Advocating for reform at the state level allows for tailored solutions that reflect local needs and priorities. By engaging directly with state legislators and agencies, your voice can influence decision-making processes, build momentum for positive change, and ensure that grassroots perspectives are represented in policy discussions.

Consider Utilizing This Advocacy Handbook to Take Action in the Following Ways:

Write your elected officials: Reaching out to your state legislators and other elected officials is one of the most direct ways to advocate for policy change. Lawmakers rely on constituent input to guide their decisions, and your voice can make a difference.

When contacting elected officials:

- Be clear and specific about the issue you are addressing.
- State your position and provide relevant facts or personal experiences.
- Keep your communication brief and respectful.
- Call, email, or send a handwritten letter—each can be effective.
- Encourage others in your community to do the same to amplify the message.

Attend a town hall meeting: Town hall meetings provide a valuable forum for constituents to engage directly with elected officials, ask questions, and voice their concerns in a public setting. These events allow advocates to raise awareness about key issues and demonstrate community support for policy changes.

To make the most of a town hall meeting:

- Research when and where your elected officials are hosting town halls.
- Prepare a concise, well-informed question that highlights your key issue.
- Speak clearly and confidently when asking your question.
- Bring allies who can also ask related questions to reinforce your message.
- Follow up with the official or their staff afterward to continue the conversation.

Meet with your elected officials or their staff: Face-to-face meetings, whether in person or virtually, provide an opportunity to build relationships and directly convey the importance of your issue. Legislators and their staff appreciate hearing from constituents who can provide expertise and local perspectives.

To have a successful meeting:

- Schedule an appointment in advance and be flexible with timing.
- Prepare key talking points and bring supporting materials.
- Be concise—meetings are often brief, so get to the point quickly.
- Share personal stories or community examples to make the issue relatable.
- Ask for a specific action, such as supporting or opposing legislation.
- Follow up with a thank-you email or letter, reiterating your key points and offering to serve as a resource.

Write a letter to the editor: A letter to the editor (LTE) is a powerful way to raise awareness, shape public opinion, and put pressure on policymakers. Elected officials and their staff monitor local news outlets, making LTEs an effective tool for amplifying your message.

To write an effective LTE:

- Keep it concise (150-250 words) and to the point.
- Clearly state your position and why it matters to your community.
- Reference a recent article, news event, or policy issue to make it timely.
- Use a personal story or local example to illustrate your point.
- End with a call to action, urging lawmakers or the public to take steps toward policy change.

Join a local organization: Seek out like-minded local or statewide advocacy organizations near you and work collaboratively with them to advocate for policies contained in this guide.

For questions or additional assistance, reach out to Farm Action Fund at info@farmactionfund.us.