

NEW MEXICO Food & Agriculture POLICY COUNCIL

Farm Bill Priorities as of July 28, 2023

The New Mexico Food & Agriculture Policy Council is focused on the **2023 Farm Bill**. As we consider a wide range of Farm Bill priorities, we appreciate the opportunity to share and highlight how programs are working in New Mexico and some recommendations to consider for the upcoming Farm Bill that may provide more equitable access to programs by individuals, families, communities, farmers, ranchers, support organizations, and agencies.

We want to thank New Mexico's Congressional Delegation and staff for the opportunity to meet in person with our group of farmers and support organizations to share our Farm Bill program highlights from our specific experiences and to provide a few recommendations.

Overarching Recommendations:

- 1) Provide equitable access to Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) who may have been historically discriminated against or marginalized, to all USDA programs and resources;
- 2) Provide a sliding scale approach to USDA programs access such as decreasing required matches depending on applicants' budgets and provide "turnkey" grants (no match required) for program requests less than \$50,000 for one-year requests;
- 3) Urge set asides for specific programs NRCS & FSA (specific EQIP, CSP, & CRP Grasslands).
- 4) Make funding available within the year of an approved loan or grant contract; and,
- 5) Increase USDA staff and technical assistance to meet the needs of all people and communities;
- 6) Strengthen protocols used in the determination of minority preference.

RESILIENT LOCAL & REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEMS:

Local Farms and Food Act

S.1205, H.R. 2723

Lead Senate Sponsors: Brown (D-OH) & TBD

Lead House Sponsors: Pingree (D-ME) & Newhouse (R-WA)

Co-Sponsors: Congressman Gabe Vasquez (D-NM), Congresswoman Leger Fernandez (D-NM);

Senator Ben Ray Lujan (D-NM)

The Local Farms and Food Act will improve equity and access to the suite of Local Agriculture Market Programs (LAMP) and expand the reach of impactful nutrition incentives through

GusNIP and Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program. This bill will provide a variety of programmatic reforms and increase funding to scale for program demand.

Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GUSNIP)

Strengthen the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program by:

- Increase overall funds to \$3 billion to continue national expansion in-store and online;
- Reduce or eliminate the match requirement for more equitable distribution of funds and scalability;
- Allocate \$3 billion over five years to support integrating incentives directly onto the SNAP card to optimize redemption and reduce stigma.

Local Agricultural Marketing Program (LAMP)

Increase mandatory funding for LAMP from \$50 million per year to \$75 million per year and increase appropriations authority from \$20 million to \$30 million per year in order to:

- Create a streamlined Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion “turnkey grant” for projects of \$100,000 or less;
- Reduce VAPG match from 50% to 25% for smaller growers who have \$250,000 or less in gross sales;
- Increase eligible activities and funding uses under LAMP to support:
 - Physical infrastructure and equipment purchases
 - Federal nutrition benefit redemption and related activities
 - Value chain coordination, outreach and technical assistance
- Prioritize geographic diversity and balance for FMLFPP awards

Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (SrFMNP)

- Provide appropriations authority for SrFMNP at \$10 million per year, in addition to the existing \$20.6 million in annual mandatory funding and make it equitable for all states to apply based on low-income senior eligibility. New Mexico’s seniors and farmers have benefited from the Senior FMNP for close to two decades. Federal fund for the Senior and WIC FMNP leverage important federal funding. In 2022, 60,000 low-income residents purchased NM produce with federal and state dollars totaling \$338,018 (ref: NM Farmers’ Marketing Association)

Strengthening Local Processing Act (source: National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition)

S. 354

Lead Senate Sponsors: Thune (R-SD) & Brown (D-OH)

Lead House Sponsors: Pingree (D-ME) & Baird (R-IN) & Congresswoman Leger Fernandez (NM)

Now more than ever, there is a need to build greater capacity among independent processors to meet the demand for regionally-produced meat and expand government procurement options. This comprehensive bill promotes competitive agricultural markets and invests in economic development by addressing acute livestock supply chain issues, supporting small meat and poultry processing plants, and promoting training programs that will bolster the resilience of communities and their food systems.

- Scale-appropriate regulations through compliance with Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) plans;
- Increased cost share for state meat and poultry inspection programs;
- Increased cost share and expansion of the Cooperative Interstate Shipment Program;
- Grant program to expand small plants, including small and very small federally inspected plants, which will promote and support small-herd operations; and an education and training grant program.

Fresh Produce Procurement Reform Act

Lead Senate Sponsors: Brown (D-OH) & TBD

Lead House Sponsors: DeLauro (D-CT) & Valadao (R-CA)

Building on the lessons from the Farmers to Families Food Box program, this bill seeks to create a more nimble, responsive, inclusive, and resilient food distribution system for fresh produce. In order to increase the sale, distribution, and consumption of local produce, we support:

- USDA partnering with existing farmers, distributors, and food hubs to purchase, pack, and deliver fresh fruits and vegetables to local food banks, schools, youth-serving organizations, tribal governments, and other nonprofit community members serving nutrition-insecure populations.
- Increase recipients access to a wide variety of U.S.-grown fresh fruits and vegetables guided by Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommendations, prioritizing locally-sourced products.

Supporting Urban Farmers Act 2023

- This bill makes programmatic reforms to improve the content and delivery of technical assistance to urban and innovative producers, enables cooperative agreements with community experts, increases access to grant funds among farmers and their networks, and scales composting and food waste initiatives.
- Expected in the Senate and highly likely in the House
- Led by Senators John Fetterman (D-PA) and Sherrod Brown (D-OH)
- Developed through our Urban Agriculture working group
- In New Mexico, 2023 Competitive grant recipients include La Semilla Food Center (Anthony, NM) and the Indigenous Farm (Corrales, NM)
- In New Mexico, Farm to Table is the lead partner with USDA Farm Service Agency for the USDA Urban Agriculture and Farmer Innovation Program 2023-2027)

Enabling Farmers to Benefit from Processing Nutrition Programs Act, co-sponsors are Senators Fetterman, Booker, and Brown.

This bill streamlines the application process for farmers so that they can be considered for SNAP, SFMNP, FMNP and GusNIP programs in a way that eases paperwork on the farmer. The second element of the bill ensures that EBT equipment made available in markets is mobile or responsive to the unique needs of the market.

CLIMATE CHANGE & AGRICULTURE:

Agriculture Resilience Act (ARA) (source: National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition)

Lead Sponsors: Sen. Henrich (D-NM) and Rep. Pingree (D-ME)

Co-Sponsor: Congresswoman Teresa Leger Fernandez

With the continued challenges presented by climate change, agriculture needs to reduce its emissions and create systems that are more robust and flexible in the face of changing conditions. This act addresses additional areas that the Inflation Reduction Act did not. Transforming the food and farming system through crop insurance, agroforestry, organic farming, farmland protection, pasture-based systems, conservation set-asides, manure management, and agrivoltaic systems; these are climate solutions that will sustain both farmers and the food system in spite of weather and market challenges.

- Include a focus on racial justice, and uplift communities rather than enrich corporations.
- Conservation funding that specifically supports efforts toward both farm resilience and mitigation, including targeted conservation funding for beginning farmers and farmers of color.
- Focus research on developing food systems that are healthful, sustainable, and resilient to extreme weather and other impacts of climate change and other potential intersecting global and national disruptions.
- Within SARE, create new agricultural resilience centers, increase the participation of historically underrepresented institutions in its research, and expand the opportunities for early-career researchers to engage in climate and agriculture work
- Increase the working lands programs' focus on the most climate-resilient and greenhouse gas mitigating practices.
- Within EQIP, help producers to sequester carbon and become more resilient to drought and other extreme weather events.
- Third-party technical assistance (TA) provider can include Tribal governments, and that their expertise can include soil health planning, greenhouse gas emission reduction planning, integrated pest management planning, and organic transition planning.
- Increase the organic cost share payment to \$1500 to help reduce the burden of paperwork on organic farmers.

Farm Workforce Support Act

H.R. 2915

Co-Sponsor: Congressman Gabe Vasquez

The act is meant to establish a system of analysis for guest worker programs (H2A), in particular farm workers, to ensure the safe and humane treatment of workers as well as gaining a better understanding of the impacts of the program.

- Analyze the impact the program on hiring, including the impact on domestic workers and guest workers and whether there is an increasing reliance on the program by American employers;
- Identify challenges in securing adequate, affordable housing for guest workers;
- Implications of wage rate requirements under the program on an American employer's ability to recruit domestic workers in comparison to guest workers;
- Analyze the economic impact of lost wages from a spouse and unmarried children of a guest worker; and
- Examine compliance with working condition guarantees outlined in a guest worker's contract made pursuant to the H-2A program.

Working Lands Conservation Programs (source: National Association of Conservation Districts)

Lead Senate Sponsors: Ernst, Grassley

Conservation programs are central to climate change mitigation and require funds to be integrated into the conservation title of the Farm Bill in order to ensure farmers, ranchers and food producers can continue to combat climate change. Specifically we request:

- Examine NRCS conservation payment rates in response to rising prices.
- Address barriers to conservation program participation and provide outreach to historically underserved producers and tribes.
- Avoid one-size-fits-all policies, additional national carve-outs, and limitations on conservation practices within programs.
- Recognize the importance of technical assistance and conservation planning.
- Provide USDA-wide access to the Experienced Services Program to provide additional support for the next generation of conservation workers.
- Support integration, innovation, and funding for urban communities across conservation programs and the Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovation.
- Reform the Technical Service Provider Program to ensure it is a reliable option for producers seeking qualified technical assistance.

Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative bill

Lead Sponsors (not confirmed): Thune (R-SD), Hoeven (R-ND)

The Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative is updated to allow for producers to receive technical assistance for planning, and grants for partnerships are shifted to cooperative agreements. In addition, the program language now provides funded "training" rather than "self-help."

Small Farms Conservation Act

- The Small Farm Conservation Act modifies EQIP to create a new subprogram dedicated to helping small farms and ranches access and receive adequate financial and technical assistance.
- Introduced by Senators Michael Bennet (D-CO), Ben Ray Luján (D-NM), Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Martin Heinrich (D-NM), Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), Peter Welch (D-VT), Ron Wyden (D-OR), Angus King (I-ME), Bernie Sanders (I-VT), Jack Reed (D-RI), and John Fetterman (D-PA).
- [Congress.gov page](#)
- [Young Farmers press release](#)
- [Young Farmers action toolkit](#)

Farmer to Farmer Education Act: (Source: Senator Lujan, American Farmland Trust and National Young Farmers Coalition)

Lead Sponsor: Senator Ben Ray Lujan (D-NM) (not introduced yet)

Farmers are met with numerous challenges on a daily basis, including the need to learn and adapt to new conservation practices as well as finding adequate support when issues occur. Often, farmers discover that the existing programs lack the necessary support and guidance. Technical assistance through the National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) can have significant wait times and the informational resources available online or through consultants and service providers are often too general and do not reflect the unique circumstances of an individual farm or farmer. NRCS could use additional support in providing farmers with the help they truly need and deserve.

Farmer-to-farmer education provides a way to overcome many adoption barriers by having someone with firsthand experience share both the benefits and challenges of practice adoption and by addressing the perceived risks to yield, labor costs, and product quality that can prevent farmers from trying a new practice.

To address these issues, this bill would create a new Technical Assistance program that will augment existing farmer-led education networks and build capacity for new ones—particularly for communities historically marginalized from existing systems—as a key strategy to increase adoption of conservation practices. Through this program, NRCS in each state would enter into cooperative agreements with community-based organizations that are able to identify and build on established and burgeoning peer-to-peer networks, and/or create new ones. These organizations would be chosen for their ability to provide culturally relevant assistance to support farmers of different cropping systems and approaches, and to reach farmers from marginalized communities such as women, farmers of color, immigrants farmers, etc. \$45 million request.

The Sustainable Farms, Fiber and Forest Act:

Sponsor: Senator Ben Ray Lujan (NM-D)

Add “fiber” to the Local Agriculture Marketing Program. Suggested changes and language:

Provision 1: Add “sustainable fibers” to the 41 references to “food” in LAMP.

SEC. 210A. [7 U.S.C. 1627c] LOCAL AGRICULTURE MARKET PROGRAM.

Provision 2: Define Sustainable Fibers

(a) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

SUSTAINABLE FIBERS.—The term “sustainable fiber” means fibers produced by farming operations that use sustainable cropping or grazing systems, or other systems and practices beneficial to natural ecosystems, as determined by the Secretary, including—

- textile products from plant-based fibers such as cotton, flax, and hemp;
- animal-based fibers and products such as wool, alpaca, and leather; and
- natural dye products such as plant extracts.

Provision 3: Add sustainable fibers to RFPP

Regional Food Partnerships Program

The partnership program includes a geographical diversity provision – “To the maximum extent practicable, the Secretary shall ensure geographical diversity in selecting partnerships to receive grants under subparagraph (A).” One could add a similar provision, such as “to the maximum extent practicable the Secretary shall ensure project diversity among types of agricultural products, including sustainable fibers.”

Provision 4: Add Agroforestry to LAMP

Include marketing of agroforestry products as part of local food markets and value-added agriculture within the Local Agriculture Marketing Program (LAMP), including direct support for demonstration infrastructure for farmer/landowner learning, and to add the National Agroforestry Center to the existing cooperative extension provision for technical assistance and outreach to LAMP stakeholders.

AgroForestry Market Bill: (Sources: Rural Coalition and others)

Sponsors: Senators Amy Klobuchar, Lujan, Brown (not introduced yet – may have several marker bills)

Adding AgroForestry to USDA programs such as conservation, food, agriculture, and related programs.

Agrivoltaics Act, Co-sponsor:

Sponsor: Sen Heinrich (NM)

<https://www.heinrich.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/heinrich-braun-introduce-bipartisan-bill-to-support-agrivoltaics-research-and-demonstration>. Here is a video about how this works. This could benefit NM.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T6PEk_OZUmI

Agrioltaics, or the colocation of solar panels on agricultural land producing crops or livestock, is a small but growing market for solar energy deployment and agricultural producers looking to

diversify their incomes. Agrivoltaic systems are an important tool in our toolbox to meet clean energy deployment goals while helping to maintain strong agriculture-based rural economies. Agrivoltaic systems offer multiple benefits for farmers and solar installations. For example, some crops grown beneath solar panels can benefit from partial shading during the hottest part of the day—thereby requiring less water and offering improved yields. Solar panels placed above crops may have improved performance due to the local cooling effects of crops and reduced maintenance costs due to the limited need for mowing.

Interest in agrivoltaics is growing at all levels. Farmers and solar developers are installing agrivoltaic systems in different environments and with different crops and livestock. Universities, states, and the federal government are all investing in agrivoltaics research. States are also experimenting with incentives for agrivoltaic systems.

More research and analysis is needed to establish best practices for agrivoltaic system design and deployment in different regions across the country. Senators Heinrich and Braun are introducing the Agrivoltaics Research and Demonstration Act of 2023 to help fill in these gaps and support farmers, ranchers, rural communities, and solar developers expand the deployment of agrivoltaic systems.

HEALTHY FOOD ACCESS

Farm to School Programs (Source: National Farm to School Network)

[2023 Farm to School Farm Bill Platform](#)

EXPAND AND IMPROVE THE SUCCESSFUL FARM TO SCHOOL GRANT PROGRAM –

Incorporate the measures in the Farm to School Act, including: Ensure a mandatory budget of \$15m per year; raise the grant cap to \$500,000 for projects that need it; better target funding to support Tribal projects, community need, and beginning/socially disadvantaged producers

Farmers Markets and Food Banks Revitalization Act (source: National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition)

Senate Sponsor: Gillibrand (D-NY - not yet confirmed)

House Sponsor: Kaptur (D-OH)

This bill makes essential investments in local and regional food systems which will strengthen the connections between local farmers and local eaters, all while supporting public health and a vibrant economy.

- Increase funding for the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP) which provides low-income seniors with access to locally grown food and increases Women, Infants, and Children
- Increase funding for the Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) individual benefit levels, overall increasing funding that is spent with local farmers.
- Offer resources to update and establish farmers markets through a new infrastructure funding program and create a new Department of Agriculture pilot program for food banks to procure produce from local growers.

Contact: NM Food & Agriculture Policy Council at: pam@farmtotablenm.org 505-660-8403, www.nmfoodpolicy.org

