

NEW MEXICO Food & Agriculture POLICY COUNCIL

Farm Bill Priorities as of January, 2024

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)

H.R. 4033, Nutrition Administration Assistance Act:

Sponsor: Congresswoman Teresa Leger Fernandez

The Nutrition Administration Assistance Act would supply additional funding to States for the administration of the Commodity Supplemental Food Program, Emergency Food Assistance

Program and Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program. Introduced 6/12/2023 with Congresswoman Stansbury. Senate bill introduced by Senators Lujan and Heinrich (D-NM).

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.

S.3390, Support the Enabling Farmer, Food worker, Environmental, and Climate Targets through Innovative, Values-aligned, and Equitable (EFFECTIVE) Food Procurement Act

EFFECTIVE Food Purchasing Act- S.3390 | Sen. Welch

To improve purchasing of food by the Department of Agriculture.

Cosponsors: Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Sen. Cory Booker (D-NJ), Sen. Peter Welch (D-VT)

This legislation will better align USDA's commodity food purchases with values to support a just, healthy, and sustainable food system.

Background: USDA is the largest food purchaser in the federal government, spending billions of dollars each year on commodity food procurement, including for school districts, senior feeding programs, Indian reservations, and food banks. While USDA is making commendable efforts to shift its food purchasing to align with Administration priorities, right now the vast majority of its food purchases are not aligned with goals around climate mitigation, fair markets for producers, equity and inclusion, worker well-being, resource conservation, or animal welfare. For example, recent analyses found:

- Only 25 corporations received 50% of USDA AMS spending in FY 2022, reflecting food sector concentration and undercutting sustainable and small-scale farmers, ranchers, and fishers.
- The carbon footprint of the USDA Foods Program in FY 2018 was 19.1 million tons of CO₂e and that shifting some of its purchases toward plant-based sources of protein, in line with Dietary Guidelines recommendations, would avoid 4 million tons of CO₂e from being emitted each year – equivalent to taking every vehicle in Mississippi off the road. With this legislation, USDA could leverage its massive purchasing power to better support its own values and policy objectives, including:
 - Supporting socially disadvantaged producers and worker well-being
 - Ensuring equity and inclusion for those who follow restricted, religious, or culturally specific diets
 - Mitigating climate change, protecting our environment, and promoting organic agriculture
 - Supporting resilient and transparent food supply chains
 - Increasing market opportunities for small-scale producers and addressing food system consolidation
 - Expanding healthy choices and transparency for school districts and other program beneficiaries

What this bill will do:

- Direct USDA to use its existing framework for food procurement to prioritize procurement of food products that support the values and policy objectives listed above.
- Create a \$25 million pilot program that would:
 - o Shift USDA away from evaluating bids based only on cost to evaluating bids based on values, including climate mitigation, worker well-being, resilient supply chains, and equity;
 - o Provide grants and technical assistance to support small and socially disadvantaged producers and businesses to access market opportunities through USDA's procurement;
 - o Study how USDA can shift its procurement toward a regional model;
 - o Measure the greenhouse gas emissions associated with USDA's procurement and reduce emissions in line with the Biden administration's existing commitments; and
 - o Increase transparency in USDA's food purchasing

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:

H.R.1840, Agriculture Resilience Act (ARA) (source: National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition)

Lead Sponsors: Sen. Heinrich (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.

H.R.2915, Farm Workforce Support Act

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.

S. 557/H.R. 1227, the Opportunities for Fairness in Farming Act (OFF Act)

The OFF Act would not end checkoff programs; rather, it would bring much needed transparency and accountability to these programs. Many checkoff programs have well-documented histories of waste, conflicts of interest, and misuse of funding that work against farmers' best interests. As a result, farmers and ranchers across the country have grown disillusioned with how these modern mandatory checkoff programs operate.

The OFF Act would strengthen checkoff programs by:

- Prohibiting checkoff programs from contracting with any organization that lobbies on agricultural policy.
- Prohibiting employees and agents of checkoff boards from engaging in activities that involve a conflict of interest.
- Establishing uniform standards for checkoff programs that prohibit anti-competitive activity, unfair or deceptive acts, or any act or practice that may be disparaging to another agricultural commodity or product.

- Requiring transparency through the publication of checkoff program budgets and expenditures.
- Requiring periodic compliance audits by the USDA Inspector General.

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 Lujan (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](#)

H.R.4290, The Acequia Communities Empowered by Qualifying Upgrades for Infrastructure (ACEQUIA) Act:

Sponsors: Congresswoman Teresa Leger Fernandez and Senator Ben Ray Lujan

Acequia users have historically had difficulties in accessing farm and conservation programs administered by the USDA. This bill supports acequias by ensuring that they, like other agricultural systems, are able to access USDA disaster assistance programs. Specifically, this legislation amends the Non-insured Disaster Assistance Program to ensure that Parciantes qualify for drought assistance. Additionally, the legislation codifies current agency guidance that Parciantes do not need to obtain a special-use permit to perform routine maintenance or in-kind improvements on federal land. Introduced 6/22/2023 with Congresswoman Stansbury and Congressman Vasquez. Senate bill introduced by Senators Lujan (D-NM) and Cornyn (R-TX). *Bipartisan in the Senate.*

H.R.4920, Responsible Wildland Fire Recovery Act :

Sponsor: Congresswoman Teresa Leger Fernandez and Senator Ben Ray Lujan

This bill would allow the Secretary of Agriculture to waive all cost share requirements for USDA disaster recovery programs in the event a wildfire is started by a USDA controlled burn.

Introduced 7/25/2023. Senator Lujan and Senator Lummis (R-WY) introduced this bill in the Senate. *Bipartisan in the Senate.*

H.R.5015, Seedlings for Sustainable Habitat Restoration Act:

Sponsor: Congresswoman Teresa Leger Fernandez and Senator Ben Ray Lujan

This bill will clarify that funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law is available to support the development of seedling nurseries at state forestry agencies, local private or non-profit entities, and institutions of higher education. This funding will allow for the rapid expansion of critical nurseries around the nation and provide the native seedlings that are urgently needed to support reforestation and habitat restoration programs at the US Forest Service and other federal, state, and local agencies. Introduced 7/27/2023 *Bipartisan in the Senate.*

H.R.5764, Supporting Water-Efficient Strategies and Technologies (Supporting the WEST) Act:

Sponsor: Congresswoman Teresa Leger Fernandez: **not yet introduced*

This bill would support arid-climate and drought resilient agriculture practices within Conservation Stewardship Program and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) by providing a higher cost-share rate for EQIP projects that use conservation practices standards that are drought-resilient or water-conserving.

H.R.4425, Women in Agriculture Act:

Sponsor: Congresswoman Teresa Leger Fernandez

Bill to create a Women Farmers and Ranchers liaison at USDA. The bill would also designate ergonomically designed machinery and equipment as a high priority for USDA research. Lastly, the bill would reinstate a set aside for childcare development in rural areas. Introduced

6/30/2023 with Congresswomen Kiggans (R-VA), Pingree (D-ME) and Gonzalez-Colon (R-PR). Awaiting Senate introduction. *Bipartisan in the House.*

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.

S.B.2667, The Sustainable Farms, Fiber and Forest Act:

Sponsor: Senator Ben Ray Lujan (NM-D)

LAMP needs additional funding to add fiber and forest initiatives otherwise they are competing for the same funding as the food and farm initiatives currently in LAMP.

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: Senator Martin 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

Agrivoltaics, 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.

Specialty Crop Block Grant is also key to supporting agriculture initiatives in New Mexico

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.

The **Community Food Projects Grant Program** is very important to communities in New Mexico who are focused on food security solutions. This program is one of the most effective food initiatives and community building programs available and needs increased funding.

New Mexico Food & Agriculture Policy Council Governing Committee:

Helga Garza, Governing – Chair – Agri-Cultura Network

Susan Wilger, Immediate – Past Chair – Executive Advisor & Consultant

Lawrence D. Gallegos – Vice Chair – National Grazing Lands Coalition

Samantha Hilborn-Naluai – Secretary – Rodale Institute

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