



Beyond the Farm Bill Description

The failure of Congress to pass a Farm Bill in 2012, and the ensuing disastrous nine-month extension that eviscerated a score of programs, illustrates how impotent this policy tool has become. Instead of addressing the urgent challenges our food system faces, the Farm Bill is a patchwork of programs that not only fail to support each other, but often contradict and undermine each other. This failure, combined with growing influence of corporate money in Washington, holds true reform at a standstill.

Without a larger discussion about overarching goals for farm and food system we want, this failure is no surprise. In fact, the Farm Bill largely ignores the deep systemic challenges plaguing our farmers and food system: wild fluctuations in agriculture prices that hurt farmers and consumers, skyrocketing land prices that keep beginning farmers off the land, the exploitation of farm and food workers, the growing market power of big corporations who overwhelm local food systems built to connect with their community, and rising income inequality that keeps healthy food out of reach for many, despite its availability.

Now is the time to think differently. This is why IATP is launching a new initiative to work with partners and experts to identify policy proposals that go Beyond the Farm Bill to tackle structural barriers and build an alternate system. By harnessing new ideas, we aim to create a public policy agenda that supports a fair and sustainable food and farm system, grounded in the values of:

RESILIENCY: We need agriculture and food systems that build resiliency and are able to withstand shocks in market prices, climate-induced weather events, and declining soil fertility among many other economic and environmental challenges. Policies that ensure fair prices for farmers and consumers are essential.

JUSTICE: Our current food systems is largely based on exploitation of labor, whether farmworkers in the field, processing plant, supermarket or restaurant. Just as farmers and communities of color have faced historic discrimination, today communities of color disproportionately experience diet-related diseases and lack ownership and power over their food environment. This exploitation must be reversed.

HEALTH: Work by farmers and farmworkers, and in meatpacking plants, is some of the most hazardous in our economy. Often farmers and food system workers don't have adequate health insurance. At the same time, diet-related diseases and associated health costs are skyrocketing—many disproportionately affecting communities of color. Policies must support a healthier food system from the farm to fork.

SOVEREIGNTY: Corporate concentration in ownership of the agriculture and food system is suffocating innovation, driving inequality, and limiting economic development in rural and urban communities. Consumers and farmers need opportunities for ownership of food and farm-related enterprises, and opportunities for farmer-owned operations. Ownership of land and control of natural resources must remain central in any established policy framework.

The best policy ideas often come from community experience but too often they are not at the policy-making table. Additionally, the failures of the food and farm system are truly global in nature; there is a lot to learn from the rest of the world.

Join us in this initiative to break the policy chains of the Farm Bill and think bigger for a fair, sustainable, and healthy farm and food system.