



ACTION AUGUST 2013

INFORMATION AND TALKING POINTS FOR FAIR AND FULL FARM BILL

During the GOAT (Getting Our Act Together) process, we provide you with opportunities to develop and align with groups across the nation that stand united for a full and fair Farm Bill. But one of the best things you can do is have an in-person meeting with your Congressional representatives. These are some talking points to help you articulate the main concepts within the Fair and Full Farm Bill letter signed on by more 325 organizational groups across the United States that include churches, youth groups, policy organizations, farmers, health, hunger, urban, rural, environmental and community based groups who care about farms and food for all. Feel free to use the points you feel most comfortable covering.

BACKGROUND

The U.S. Congress is on recess until September 6, 2013, meaning there are no daily sessions in Congress. Members of the U.S. House Representatives and U.S. Senators are scheduled to be back in their home states for their "constituent work periods."

Congress has been working for over 2 years to renew the now-expired 2008 Farm Bill. Some programs were extended in January 2013. The Farm Bill, which is renewed approximately every 5 years, has in the past included both agriculture and nutrition titles. Prior to the recess, the U.S. Senate passed their Farm Bill on June 10, 2013, and the U.S House passed their Farm Bill on July 11, 2013. The US House's Farm Bill passed their Farm Bill without a nutrition title, while the Senate Farm Bill includes a nutrition title but calls for \$4 billion in cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)/food stamps. The nutrition title covers domestic food and nutrition and commodity distribution programs, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) that help people below the poverty line. Instead of including a nutrition title in their Farm Bill, many conservative members of Congress, who are the majority of the Republican members of House of Representatives, want to create a separate nutrition bill and vote on it. Alternatively, they would require more cuts to the nutrition title in a Senate/House bill that includes both agriculture and nutrition titles. Just before the recess, a working committee appointed by the Republican leadership announced they want to now cut \$40 billion from the SNAP Program.

In order to finish a Farm Bill this year, House and Senate must convene their Farm Bill conference committee to reconcile the differences in their respective Farm Bills. A conference committee is "a temporary, ad hoc panel composed of House and Senate conferees, which is formed for the purpose of reconciling differences in legislation that has passed both chambers. Thus far, the Senate has appointed conferees to the conference committee but House Leadership have not because it is reported that they are waiting "until the House comes back into session in September, and that probably won't take place until a final decision is made on whether to bring up a nutrition bill that would cut the food stamp program — now officially called the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program [SNAP] — by \$40 billion over 10 years."



The programs and funding in the farm bill extension passed in January 2013 will expire again September 30, 2013. Many programs not funded for Fiscal Year 2013 would enter a second year with no funding. This is why it is so important for you to act in August and reach out to your representatives.

It is also election time for various states, including NJ, Mass & VA, which makes it an excellent time to advocate for equity, support for diverse producers, strong local food networks, and the other critical issues covered in the letters produced within GOAT.

TALKING POINTS OVERVIEW

- Congress should pass a full and Fair Farm Bill this year that alleviates hunger and malnutrition, supports vibrant and diverse urban and rural farms and healthy communities.
- The Farm Bill is the single largest piece of federal policy impacting our food system.
- Funding for the current Farm Bill was extended until September 30, 2013.
- A good Farm Bill can strengthen nutrition programs, help struggling communities, support new entry, socially disadvantaged and veteran farmers and ranchers, and encourage farming and ranching practices that promote much needed conservation.
- Congress needs to pass a multi-year Farm Bill in 2013 to continue programs that promote a just and healthy food system. Many key programs are currently without funding and several others will be without funding soon.

FOOD IS A BASIC NEED

Congress should protect funding for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP (formerly known as food stamps), from cuts and harmful structural changes.

- Despite the wealth of resources in the United States, 48.8 million Americans are at risk of hunger: 47 million people rely on SNAP for basic food needs, **one in six adults and one in five children.**
- The majority of those who receive this assistance are children, the elderly, or people living with a disability.
- Recipients include individuals with low-wage, full-time jobs, and military families.
- Federal nutrition programs help create long-term self-sufficiency and reduce poverty.
- The U.S. Department of Agriculture highlights the program's importance as an economic driver in local communities. **Every dollar of SNAP benefits distributed results in \$1.84 in gains for local economies.**

NO FOOD WITHOUT FARMS

Congress should fund programs that help beginning and socially-disadvantaged farmers, American Indian, women, and veteran farmers and ranchers in both rural and urban areas start in the business of agriculture.



- Due to high land costs and the increasing complexity of the agricultural economy, it is often difficult for beginning farmers to enter the business unless they inherit an existing farm.
- Small farms, operated by younger and more diverse farmers, including women and minorities, are finally increasing in all parts of the country due, in part, to support from Department of Agriculture programs hard won by communities like ours in previous Farm Bills.
- Programs like the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program and the Outreach and Technical Assistance for Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers Program fund education, extension, outreach, and technical assistance aimed at helping new farmers successfully acquire, own, operate, and retain farms and ranches.

LOCAL AND SMALL FARMS ARE AN ECONOMIC DRIVER FOR HEALTHY FOOD

Congress should support programs that help small farmers grow their businesses and help underserved communities get better access to healthy foods.

- Many programs including those listed below—have no funding due to the expiration of the 2008 Farm Bill. They support the growth of local and regional markets, help small farmers find markets for their products, and help underserved communities gain access to healthier foods.
- The Farmers Market Promotion Program helps to establish and expand direct-to-consumer markets by providing new markets for small and mid-sized farmers, offering consumers the opportunity to support local producers and giving people in vulnerable communities greater access to fresh food. Since 2008, the USDA has focused on developing new farmers markets in underserved communities, so-called “food deserts,” where fresh food is often difficult to obtain and where obesity rates, particularly among children, are high.
- The Farmers Market Electronic Benefit Transfer Program and the Senior Farmers Market Program makes farmers markets more accessible for SNAP recipients and low-income seniors, allowing these customers to use electronic benefit cards and coupons, respectively, at local farmers markets. The National Organic Certification Cost Share Program helps small farmers to offset the substantial costs of moving from conventional farming methods to high value organic agriculture

CONSERVATION HELPS FARMERS AND CONSUMERS

We ask for full funding for farm conservation programs, enhanced and streamlined to better meet the pressing and accelerating natural resource and environmental issues of our day.

- Congress should prioritize funding for farm support programs that promote conservation of soil and water and deter further environmental degradation.
- Each year since 2010 Congress has voted to cut conservation funding to fund other programs and priorities in the federal budget. These are important programs and should not serve as a piggy bank.



- The Conservation Stewardship Program incentivizes conservation activities for farmers and ranchers. This is a very popular, successful program with a long waiting list.
- In September 2012, Congress passed a continuing resolution preventing the Conservation Stewardship Program from enrolling any new farmers in the program this year. If funding to the Conservation Stewardship Program is not restored, more than 9,000 producers will lose the opportunity to work with U.S. Department of Agriculture to conserve and improve soil, water, and wildlife on their land.

THE FARM BILL CAN SERVE AS A TOOL FOR EQUITY AND SUSTAINABILITY

We support equity, justice, opportunity, and access across all titles of the Farm Bill.

- Current versions of both the House and Senate bill contain some noxious provisions that should be not be included in the final bill. We support removing elements that make the bill less fair and that weaken protections for consumers, including those in need of food assistance; or for farmers, labor and the environment. These include:
- Provisions that would reduce funding for nutrition education programs or make more people ineligible for SNAP for unjust reasons.
- Provisions weakening protections under Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Act (GIPSA), , the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Fair Labor Standards Act and Commerce Clause of the US Constitution.
- Provisions ending Agriculture Programs as permanent law, and sun setting many important and historic programs at the end of each Farm Bill.
- Be sure your legislator is aware of these problems in the bill.

Let us know how you used these talking points!

If you are going to meet with a representative, then please let us know! Send an email to angela@ruralco.org and/or jgill@cafoodjustice.org. We'll be happy to help you formulate your arguments and we'd love to hear how it went.

These talking points were prepared and circulated by the groups who regularly participate in the "Getting Our Act Together (GOAT) on the Farm Bill" Collaboration, which promotes a fair farm bill with equity and sustainability.