

US AGRICULTURAL POLICY

Producing Poverty: Assessing the Impact of Federal Policy and Farm Bill Programs on Rural Communities



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List of Acronyms

AAA	Agricultural Adjustment Act
ACA	Affordable Care Act
AoA	Agreement on Agriculture
ARC	Agricultural Risk Coverage
CAC	Campesino-a-Campesino
CAFO	Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation
CBOs	Community Based Organizations
CBSA	Canada Border Services Agency
CFTA	Canada Free Trade Agreement
CITT	Canadian International Trade Tribunal
COOL	Country of Origin Labeling
CUSTA	Canada U.S. Free Trade Agreement
DSB	Dispute Settlement Body
DSM	Dispute Settlement Mechanism
EMTALA	Emergency Medical Treatment and Labor Act
EQIP	Environmental Quality Incentives Program
ERS	Economic Research Service
EWG	Environmental Working Group
FCIC	Federal Crop Insurance Corporation
FmHA	Farmers Home Administration
FSA	Farm Service Agency
GAO	Government Accountability Office
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
ITA	International Trade Administration
ITC	International Trade Commission
ISDS	Investor to State Dispute Settlement
LDCs	Least Developed Countries
LVC	La Via Campesina
MDIS	Market Driven Inventory System
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
NAP	Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program
NASS	National Agricultural Statistical Agency
NFFC	National Family Farm Coalition

NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
NTB	Non-Tariff Barriers
PLC	Price Loss Coverage
RC	Rural Coalition
RMA	Risk Management Agency
SDFRs	Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers
SDT	Special and Differential Treatment
SP	Special Product
SSM	Special Safeguard Mechanism
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
USTR	United States Trade Representative
WFRP	Whole Farm Revenue Protection
WTO	World Trade Organization

Preface

This group of nine Masters students in the School of International Service at American University as their Capstone project worked with community partners Rural Coalition and the National Family Farm Coalition in an effort to further these organizations' objectives and more broadly, their missions. Each student contributed a unique perspective to an area relevant to the Farm Bill. Below we highlight the significant contributions of each participant and their areas of study.

- Mary Roop, M.A. International Development. Mary focused on parity and supply management in the *Producing Poverty: Assessing the Impact of Federal Farm Bill Programs on Rural Communities* report. While her Masters concentration was economics in development, she brings a rural perspective to the work from her years growing up on a farm in rural Wisconsin.
- Madison Hayes, M.A Ethics, Peace and Global Affairs. Madison earned her B.A. in Anthropology at the University of Florida before attending American University. There, her concentration was in Human Rights and Social Justice. Her work in *Producing Poverty* focused on the social impacts of rural economic decline.
- Tracy Watson, M.A. International Development. Tracy comes from a non-profit and corporate communications background and earned her B.A. in English Literature at San Francisco State University. She contributed the section "Black Farm Decline and Federal Policy", which investigated the ways that Federal policy has precipitated Black land loss, from Reconstruction to the late 20th Century (focusing on three distinct periods).
- Andrew Esposito, M.A. Global Governance, Politics, and Security. Andrew focused on the World Trade Organization and the North American Free Trade Agreement in the *Producing Poverty: Assessing the Impact of Federal Farm Bill Programs on Rural Communities*. Specifically, he explored the pressures exerted by the WTO and NAFTA on domestic agricultural policy.
- Jonathan Mallek, M.A. International Economic Relations. Jon originally grew up on a dairy farm in Junction City, WI. He received his B.A. in International Studies from St. Norbert College before coming to American University to focus on environmental and agricultural economic policy. His contribution in *Producing Poverty* focused on the farm safety net, mainly crop insurance.
- Colton Fagundes, M.A. Global Environmental Policy. Colton contributed the section on food sovereignty. His goal was to tie together the other authors research into an encompassing framework. He hopes for this work and further work to contribute towards building a stronger food sovereignty movement in the U.S.

Introduction

In this undertaking, we sought to better understand and articulate some of the ways in which United States agricultural policy has contributed to decline in the domestic rural sector. Our community partners, Rural Coalition/*Coalición Rural* (RC) and National Family Farms Coalition (NFFC), draw their membership from diverse, small and mid-sized family farm operators, thus we began our exploration by investigating the role of select agricultural policies and practices which appear to have substantially altered the experience of this group and which directly impact the sustainability of their operations. In particular, we examined how such policies and programs have impacted farm consolidation (i.e. vertical concentration), farm-gate prices (i.e. parity or an agricultural “living wage”), discrimination in USDA programs, and rural development programs.

Our work can be compartmentalized into two interdependent spheres:

- a) the macroeconomic – focusing on the role of trade policies (*vis-à-vis* General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, World Trade Organization, Canadian Free Trade Agreement, and North American Free Trade Agreement) and U.S. agricultural policy (U.S. Farm Bills) in creating structural inequalities for small and mid-sized family farms; commodity and crop insurance; and RC’s and NFFC’s historical resistance against NAFTA, CFTA, GATT, and the WTO
- b) the socio-psychological – focusing on the human consequences of macroeconomic agricultural policies (i.e. the persistence of rural poverty, land loss, foreclosures and linkages to racial discrimination, rural migration, inequality, food insecurity, disintegration of rural infrastructure, and the contours of the rural health crisis)

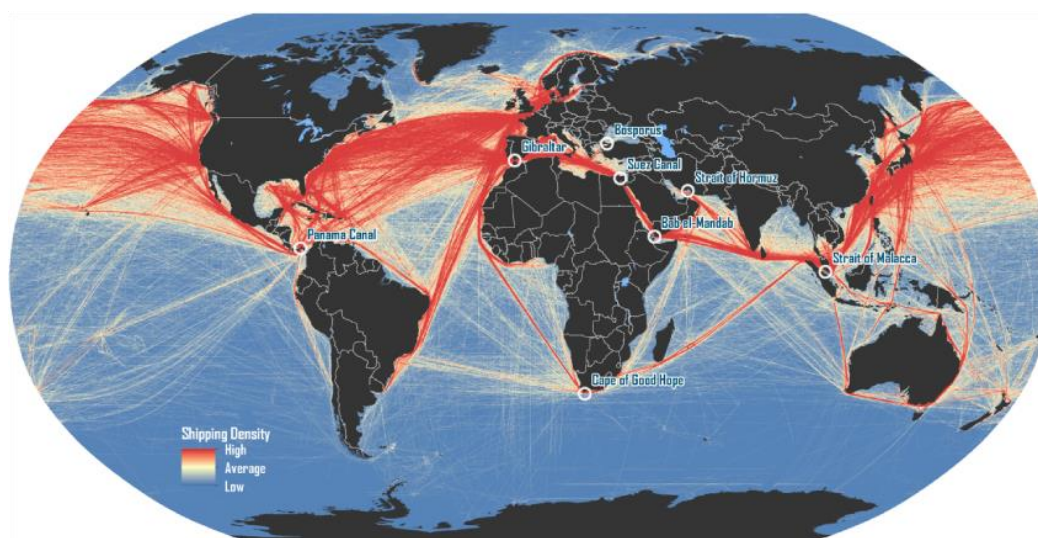
Our research methodology incorporated interviews with key informants, policy and discourse analysis, participant observation, and reviews of comparative case studies. We are also fortunate to have two researchers with farming backgrounds on our team. Their work draws upon personal insights that allow us to present a more granular perspective on the lived experience of those impacted directly by past and present agrarian policies. Analysis of U.S. agriculture policy is typically approached from a macroeconomic perspective, and as such focuses on aggregated national data, which can obscure the individual and the communal (regional) implications of said policy. We concur that “the personal is political” and our analysis of U.S. farm policy would be soulless and bereft of its fundamentally human dynamic, if it were not grounded in the experiences of contemporary farm operators. It is with these convictions in mind that we have attempted to surface the linkages between the aggregate

and the individual, the national and the communal, for these two poles of discourse cannot be fully representational in isolation.

Lastly, our analysis has been contextualized by several disciplines, including: agricultural history, rural sociology, critical race theory, macro- and microeconomics, international development, and political ecology, which positions itself at the problem-solution nexus of unequal ownership of, and access to, essential resources, inequities in their utilization, and contestation over resource control. In the context of globalization, we have explored how agricultural policies and grassroots agrarian movements for social justice have collided. It is our hope that our work will contribute to the endeavor to precipitate progressive policy reform that advances the cause of equity and parity within the rural sector.

The U.S. Farm Bill Contextualized in a Multilateral Trading System

International Shipping Lanes



Source: National Center for Ecological Analysis and Synthesis. C1998-2017. Maritime Shipping Routes and Strategic Passages. Accessed May 01, 2017.
<https://people.hofstra.edu/geotrans/eng/ch1en/appl1en/maritimerroutes.html>.

Introduction:

U.S. trade frameworks have institutionalized corporate power and outreach for agribusiness. Decades of market liberalization rightfully intending to thwart the threats of another world war by increasing economic cooperation and linkages have ultimately succumb to commercial interests producing rural poverty, environmental decline, and corporate dependencies. The agribusiness corporations have been at the heart of policy changes in the composition of trade deals and organizations, declining price parity and supply management programs, and an ad-hoc crop insurance program. The culmination of these results has produced commercial monopolies of power over our food systems, policy channels, and food sovereignty. Agriculture markets best emphasizes this trend.

Agricultural markets are different than the markets for most goods. Mainstream economic theory, however, treats agriculture the same as other markets. This economic view

has long supported that overall welfare has increased due to market liberalization and the multilateral trading system. The theories of basic supply and demand, comparative advantage, and economies of scale models are used by mainstream economists to demonstrate these points as specialization and export opportunities respectively increase through deepening trade linkages. But, these models are flawed when considerations are made to the underlying assumptions of agricultural markets. Within the Supply and Demand model, producers are unable to readily shift levels of production and most farmers lack access to perfect information on the markets, which will be discussed in greater detail in the Price Parity section. Within these trade models, there is also a narrative of displacement caused by trade liberalization. For example, in the comparative advantage model, economists assume that as trade increases, the import competing industry will contract and the labor of that industry will move to the expanding export competitive industry. Lastly, the economies of scale model demonstrate a firm's incentive to expand production to reduce average costs.

Typically, in mainstream economic theory, economists assume that labor seamlessly moves from one industry into another, and it can be the government's role to provide structural assistance programs for displaced workers. But, within the context of farmers and greater reality, this transition is never seamless and is strenuous and demoralizing (i.e. the 1980's farm crisis). For farmers, who have owned family farms for generations, this is exactly the circumstance they have faced due to increased international competition, less price and market management programs, and rising market share by agribusiness producers and processors. Our community partners, the Rural Coalition and National Family Farm Coalition, have made it their duty to collectively respond to these neoliberal trade policies proposed by the WTO and NAFTA and to ensure the futures of small and medium sized independent farms.

This paper seeks to synthesize the academic literature and put it into the conversation with our community partners' perspective to serve as a basis for them to conduct policy, thus further fulfilling their duties to their members. To accomplish this, this paper will investigate the rise of both the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), their antecedents, their guiding principles and components regarding agriculture. Following each organizational analysis, alternative literature critiquing the organizational policies and components will be discussed. Due to recent remarks by the U.S. President, the WTO and NAFTA were specifically chosen to be investigated, because of the potential revisions of these multilateral trade agreements. Ultimately, upon reviewing the literature, data, and upon learning from farmers and leaders in NFFC and RC, the author concludes that the trade deals have served as accommodations towards the expansion of agribusiness and have undermined effective market management policies for small and medium sized independent farmers. International Trade is not the issue, but it is rather the framework from which trade has been conceptualized, placing greater power in the hands of agribusiness.

The GATT and WTO

History and Principles of GATT

Following World War Two, in 1947, representatives from various nations met in Geneva, Switzerland respectively to enhance multilateral cooperation through the

implementation of global institutions. The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) was a product of the 1947 conference. The leading conceptualization was that countries who were more bound together through alliances, information sharing, and cooperation would be less likely to fight one another. The GATT relied on consensus to further the trade liberalization agenda.

To advance this agenda, the GATT advocated the Most Favored Nation Status, Reciprocity, Transparency, and Tariff Binding and Reduction.¹ Most Favored Nation Status ensured that all member nations were granted equal market access without exception. Reciprocity advocated that nations granted the same trade measures it was receiving from other countries. Transparency encouraged nations to provide unrestricted access to their respective trade policies. Lastly, the GATT sought for nations to incrementally bind and reduce tariff measures to increase trade flows. The GATT primarily focused on manufacturing and industrial goods. Agriculture, however, was excluded from the GATT, because of countries' post-world war reconstruction of their economies and infrastructure. Agriculture would remain untouched until the GATT's Uruguay negotiation rounds from 1986 to 1994.

History and Principles of the WTO

Following the Uruguay rounds, 129 nations concluded to institutionalize their trade relations into the WTO. Among the greater push for market integration, agriculture also became an item on the agenda. This resulted in the adoption of the Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) in 1995. The AoA endorsed greater flows of agricultural goods and comprised of the following principles of improving market access, reducing domestic supports, decreasing export subsidies, providing provisions for Least Developed Nations (LDCs) and food importing developing countries, and implementing the WTO agreement on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures.²

To improve market access, non-tariff border measures are replaced by tariffs, which then needed to be reduced by 36% in developed and 24% in developing nations over the span of six and ten years respectively. Least developed countries were excluded from reductions in tariffs.³

Levels of domestic support were stratified into boxes. These include Green, Amber, and Blue. To calculate the impact of a support program, the WTO uses the Aggregate Measurement of Support, which is "generally measured by multiplying the gap between the applied administered price and a specified fixed external reference price ("world market price") by the quantity of production eligible to receive the administered price."⁴ Programs in the Green Box cause minimal to no trade distortions. These cannot be industry specific, a direct price support, or have the program cost fall upon consumers. Governmental programs can be direct payments to producers if they are decoupled from (no relationship between)

¹ World Trade Organization, "Principles of the trading system," *WTO*, Accessed April 08, 2017, https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/whatis_e/tif_e/fact2_e.htm.

² World Trade Organization, "Agreement on Agriculture." *WTO*, Accessed April 08, 2017, https://www.wto.org/english/docs_e/legal_e/14-ag_01_e.htm.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

levels of production. In fact, direct transfers for producers can occur without any levels of production.⁵ Blue Box programs restrict the quantity of the production within a certain period or set a maximum limit on livestock. They are considered trade distorting, but are not required to be reduced.⁶ Amber Box programs are trade and production distorting. They require reductions by WTO members and abide by the “De Minimis” principle, meaning supports can only account for 5% of production for developed countries and 10% for developing countries.⁷

Within the AoA, developed economies must reduce the total value of export subsidies by 36% and the quantity of subsidized exports by 27% over a six-year period. Developing economies must implement two thirds of the same reductions over ten years. Least Developed Countries are excluded from any reductions.⁸

Least-Developed and Net Food-Importing Developing Countries: The Uruguay round resulted in an agreement ensuring that countries receiving food aid would not be adversely impacted by market liberalization. To achieve this, they established a Committee on Food Aid to review the amount demanded of food aid, commitments by developed countries to meet the demand for food aid, financial assistance for LDCs to build agricultural productivity and infrastructure, guidelines ensuring the increasing proportion of food stuff is provided in grant form, and that developing countries are given greater consideration concerning their own food aid programs.⁹

Lastly, the agreement on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures sets rules on governments’ ability to set regulations on food, animal, and plant safety. Harmonization of standards is the objective, but it allows a country to have higher standards if there exists supporting research.¹⁰

Any kind of unfair trade protectionism would be addressed through the WTO’s Dispute Settlement Body (DSB). If a country was found to be to be unfairly limiting exports from another country, representatives from the countries (in the case of the U.S., officials from the USTR, Department of Agriculture, and Department of Commerce) would meet to settle the dispute through a consultation. If the consultation fail to bring an outcome, then the WTO Secretariat chooses a panel of three to five trade experts. These experts are chosen based upon criteria laid out in Annex Two, Article Eight of the WTO Agreement.¹¹ Both countries prepare legal statements supporting their case. The Panel then holds hearings with both countries. Ultimately, the Panel drafts a report concluding its “findings of fact, the applicability of relevant provisions and the basic rationale behind any findings and recommendations that it

⁵ World Trade Organization, "DOMESTIC SUPPORT IN AGRICULTURE The boxes." *WTO*, October 01, 2002, Accessed April 08, 2017, https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/agric_e/agboxes_e.htm.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ World Trade Organization, "Agreement on Agriculture." *WTO*, Accessed April 08, 2017, https://www.wto.org/english/docs_e/legal_e/14-ag_01_e.htm.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ WTO, *Understanding on rules and procedures governing the settlement of disputes*, Accessed April 27, 2017, https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/dispu_e/dsu_e.htm#3.

makes” and submits it to the Dispute Settlement Body.¹² Appeals can be made which will then bring in the Appellate Body consisting of seven trade specialists. The body then decides if it will uphold, modify, or deny the prior-made decision. This decision is then made to be fully monitored by the DSB and implemented by both parties.

Critiques Against the WTO and its Mechanisms on Agriculture Global Free Trade: Implications for Sustainable Agriculture

Ritchie argues that the GATT (and later the WTO) institutionalize the interests of agribusiness towards market deregulation. Ritchie points to the lobbying done by agribusiness and other corporate entities pushing the Reagan Administration to negotiate in their favor during the Uruguay round. The author claims this round as being a “global deregulation round.”¹³ Agribusiness was instrumental in forming policies advocating the elimination of family farm support programs, deregulated import and export controls, and weakening consumer health and environmental safety standards.¹⁴ Benefits of these advocating the positions are described below.

Agribusiness benefits from eliminating farm price stabilization programs, which then push down world market prices. By pushing down global market prices, producers will be incentivized to buy more chemicals to reduce their costs of production. Independent farmers will be less able to convert their farms towards sustainable practices increasing reliance on corporate goods and services. Eliminating subsidies towards conservation and independent farmers increases the conversion of farms into industrial and commercial feedlots, absent farmers, and undiversified livestock.

By lowering import and export controls, agribusiness increases flows of agricultural goods. Import quotas were the primary tools of developing countries to protect their domestic fisheries and agricultural industries from cheap foreign competition. Article XI of the GATT allowed countries to stop the exporting of agricultural products abroad during times of crisis. This was done so resources can be primarily catering to the domestic market and not sent abroad for a higher price. Agribusiness wanted to eliminate Article XI to have greater access to resources abroad.

Lastly, large agricultural corporations endorsed harmonization of consumer health and environmental standards to increase the flow of cheaply produced food. One such example Ritchie uses is California’s prohibition of carcinogenic pesticides, which under the harmonization principle would be contradicting GATT rules.

Ritchie demonstrates the historical role agribusiness has played in shaping U.S. agricultural policy abroad. Agribusiness seek to reduce policies, regulations, and standards that pose to restrict the flow of goods and services. Ritchie advocates the ban of export dumping by all nations, which will decrease food dependency by the global south, and reduce the Global North’s inefficient resource allocation. Independent farmers worldwide will have a greater chance to survive due to the heightening of standards and not succumb to the lowest common

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Mark Ritchie, *Global Free Trade: Implications For Sustainable Agriculture*, (Minneapolis, IATP, Accessed May 03, 2017).

¹⁴ Ibid.

denominator measures.

WTO Agricultural Negotiations: The New Blue Box Proposal on Domestic Support and the Doha Development Round

Dr. Steve Suppan argues that current Doha negotiation rounds on reconfiguring blue box parameters as having the potential to further “depress prices, facilitate agricultural export dumping, and contribute to” foreign markets becoming more dependent on exporting goods while facing greater food insecurity.¹⁵ The contention between developing and developed nations arises from falling commodity prices. Developing nations face food insecurity as profits from exporting agricultural goods diminishes. This is countered by developed nations advocating for an expansion of the blue box criteria to handle past domestic policy failures. Suppan projects that the U.S. will be unable to provide subsidies to its farmers if an expansion of the blue box fails to pass.

The U.S. has been pushing for an expansion of the blue box conditions since the ratification of the 1996 and 2002 farm bills. While being lobbied by agribusiness, the 1996 farm bill eliminated government policies promoting acreage set-asides. Consequently, this caused overproduction and the collapse of farmgate prices for corn, wheat, soy and rice from 1996 to 2000. In the 2002 bill, to curb the shock of suppressed agricultural prices, the government issued emergency payments in the form of counter-cyclical payments. Countercyclical payments “pay farmers the difference between the target price for a commodity set by the U.S. Congress and the national average market price or the loan rate price set by Congress, whichever is higher.”¹⁶ However, the countercyclical programs did not abide by the blue box conditions, and the U.S. was brought to the WTO DSB by Brazil for its cotton countercyclical payment program.

Now, the U.S. adamantly supports the expansion of the blue box criteria to keep its countercyclical payments to farmers. However, WTO developing countries view the provision as market distorting and undermines the established principles on domestic market support. It is a clear contradiction by the U.S. to rollback measures on domestic supports and have developing countries bear continued depressed prices and rising food insecurity. Ultimately, Suppan argues that the U.S. should be willing to bargain its expansion of the blue box program in exchange for raising tariff ceilings in certain areas.

Brazil’s Challenge of U.S. Cotton Program at the WTO

In 2006, Brazil brought the United States to the WTO’s Dispute Settlement Body over the accusations that the U.S.’ subsidies program for cotton did not abide by Blue Box criteria. This case follows the WTO ruling against the U.S. in the 2002-2005 US-Upland Cotton case. Ultimately, the WTO’s Compliance Panel ruled in favor of Brazil that the U.S. did not make enough significant changes to its cotton subsidy program to be aligned with Blue Box requirements. Specifically, the U.S. was found guilty of trade distorting effects through the

¹⁵ Dr. Steve Suppan, "WTO Agricultural Negotiations: The New Blue Box Proposal on Domestic Support and the Doha Development Round." *IATP*. July 6, 2005 Accessed April 27, 2017, <https://www.iatp.org/documents/wto-agricultural-negotiations-the-new-blue-box-proposal-on-domestic-support-and-the-doha-d>. Page 2

¹⁶ *Ibid.* Page 3

Marketing Loan Program and the Counter Cyclical Payment Program.¹⁷

In Daryll E. Ray's article *WTO: Needs a "blue light (box) special" for agriculture*, Ray believes that the WTO's ruling in favor of Brazil has set-up a precedent for "a disaster for farmers world-wide." The WTO's inaccuracies regarding agricultural trade spur from the underlying assumptions of the Agreement on Agriculture.¹⁸

Ray begins with the WTO's Disputes Panel Analysis false belief that low prices during the 1990s were attributed to subsidy programs, when actually subsidy programs were the result of low prices. Furthermore, the low prices experienced by Brazil from 1998 to 2002 were the result of the U.S. completing its elimination of its price floor program in its 1996 Farm Bill. By ruling that the U.S.' Marketing Loan and Counter-Cyclical Payment Program was contrary to blue box criteria, the WTO neglected that "(I)n the face of low prices, it is in the economic interest of the individual farmers to minimize the per unit cost of production. One of the easiest ways to accomplish this goal is to adopt yield enhancing technologies as long as the market price remains above the variable cost of production."¹⁹ Farmers can still partially cover their fixed costs even when price is below the costs of production. Ultimately, Ray and the greater Agricultural Policy Analysis Center conclude that an international mechanism outside the WTO should be implemented to be better acquainted with the unique nature of crop and food markets.

Dumping as a Structural Feature of US Agriculture: Can WTO Rules Solve the Problem?

Ritchie, Wisniewski, and Murphy explore curbing the levels of US agricultural dumping and the role of the WTO in resolving this issue. They choose the WTO, because the its agreement on agriculture institutionalized export dumping and higher subsidies.

They state the two definitions of agricultural dumping in both the GATT and WTO, which are summarized as: 1) Exporting a product at a price below that of its home market (Article Six of the GATT); and 2) When no normal prices are present (meaning markets are distorted due to government policies, subsidies, taxes, and incentives), dumping exists when the export price is below the domestic cost of production. The authors argue that cases of US agricultural dumping in markets lacking a normal price should be determined solely by comparing export price to the full cost of production.²⁰

To end dumping, the authors first advise nations to mitigate or eliminate direct export subsidies through the WTO. For deeper cuts on export dumping, nations could tackle the

¹⁷ Karen Halverson Cross, "WTO Appellate Body Upholds Compliance Panel's Findings in Cotton Subsidies Dispute." *American Society of International Law*, ASIL, September 16, 2008, Accessed April 10, 2017, <https://www.asil.org/insights/volume/12/issue/19/wto-appellate-body-upholds-compliance-panels-findings-cotton-subsidies>.

¹⁸ Dr. Daryll E. Ray "WTO: Needs a "blue light (box) special" for agriculture." *Agricultural Policy Analysis Center*. Agricultural Policy Center of the University of Tennessee. December 28, 2007. Accessed April 08, 2017. <http://www.agpolicy.org/weekpdf/386.pdf>.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Mark Ritchie, Suzanne Wisniewski, and Sophia Murphy, "Dumping as a Structural Feature of US Agriculture: Can WTO Rules Solve the Problem?" *IATP*, April 17, 2003, Accessed April 27, 2017, <https://www.iatp.org/documents/dumping-as-a-structural-feature-of-us-agriculture-can-wto-rules-solve-the-problem-2>.

exporting and importing corporations profiting from dumping. This can be accomplished through reducing and eliminating export dumping of all products through a WTO-led initiative on corporate compliance. Ultimately, the Ritchie, Wisniewski, and Murphy propose that reforms should be made within the US and the EU to endorse domestic policies that guarantee producers an export price equivalent to the full cost of production, because many developing nations do not have sufficient infrastructure to implement countervailing duties.²¹

CFTA (CUSTA) and NAFTA

History and Principles of the CFTA

Being motivated by the GATT, the U.S. and Canada sought to expand their foreign market access and reduce both tariff and specifically non-tariff barriers.²² Concerning agriculture, Canada wanted to limit U.S. dumping and countervailing duty laws, and it sought to establish a clearly defined dispute settlement procedure between both nations. The U.S., on the other hand, wanted to increase its market access to Canadian markets by limiting Canada's freight weight subsidy programs on prairie grain.

Being implemented on January 1, 1989, the CFTA sought to eliminate all tariffs by 1998, implement a Rules of Origin principle on products in the automotive sector, liberalize financial services trade, adopt a binding binational dispute settlement mechanism, and liberalize flows of energy products, among others.²³ Regarding agriculture, the CFTA adopted the following measures:

1. Ban Agricultural Export Subsidies in bilateral trade (Article 701);²⁴
2. Eliminate Canadian freight subsidies on prairies grain (Article 701);²⁵
3. Eliminate all tariffs in a ten-year period (an extension of 20 years is given to Canadian horticulture for reasons relating to suppressed price conditions) (Article 401 and 702);²⁶
4. Exempt restrictions on meat import laws by both nations (Article 704);²⁷
5. Eliminate Canadian import licenses on Wheat, Barley, and Grain when U.S. grain support prices equal Canadian price supports. (Article 705);²⁸
6. Average Canadian import quotas on chicken, turkey, and eggs equal to that of their quotas for the past five years (Article 706);²⁹
7. Exempt Canadian imports on products containing ten percent or less of sugar (Article

²¹ Ibid.

²² Luther Tweeten, Jerry Sharples, and Linda Evers-Smith, "IMPACT OF CFTA/NAFTA ON U.S. AND CANADIAN AGRICULTURE." *Ag Econ Search*. International Agricultural Trade Research Consortium, March 01, 1997, Accessed April 08, 2017, <http://ageconsearch.tind.io/record/51206/files/97-3.pdf>. Page 4

²³ Ibid. Page 4

²⁴ Ibid. Page 4

²⁵ Ibid. Page 4

²⁶ Ibid. Page 4

²⁷ Ibid. Page 4

²⁸ Ibid. Page 4

²⁹ Ibid. Page 4

707);³⁰

8. Harmonize Technical regulatory barrier on pork and product inspections and adopt canola oil as a product of rapeseed (Article 708);³¹
9. Adhere to GATTs rights and obligations. Any measure not included in the CUSTA agreement full under the GATT principles. (Article 710)³²

History and Principles of NAFTA

All of these measures carried over into the North American Free Trade Agreement on January 1, 1994. NAFTA succeeded in eliminating all tariff barriers and most of non-tariff barriers over a span of 15 years. Beyond the measures adopted between the U.S. and Canada, both Mexico and the U.S. agreed to reform Mexican tariff and non-tariff barriers of U.S. exports to Mexico, national sanitary and phytosanitary rules, and U.S. marketing orders. Marketing orders are national guidelines for evaluating product quality, market promotion, and supply levels. NAFTA specifically reconfigured national non-tariff barriers into tariff-rate quotas or regular tariffs.³³

NAFTA also used the CFTA when constructing its dispute settlement mechanism (DSM). The process remains between two member countries and does not involve the third member state. This process consists of a Request to Panel Review by the impacted country, then “initial consultations (government to government), taking the issue to the NAFTA (Free) Trade Commission (which is comprised of trade ministers), or going through arbitral panel proceedings (composing of five members).”³⁴ Chapters 19 and 20 of the NAFTA agreement set forth the selection process of the five arbitral panel members. Each country participates in a reverse selection process by choosing two citizens from the opposing countries roster list (again comprised of trade ministers. The fifth panel member’s nationality always alternates from one dispute to the next.

Anti-dumping and countervailing duty cases are determined differently under the dispute settlement process. Once a country has filed a Request for a Panel Review under an anti-dumping circumstance, a three-member panel consists of representatives from either the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA), the U.S. Department of Commerce (DOC), International Trade Administration (ITA), Secretaría de Economía, or the Unidad de Prácticas Comerciales Internacionales. In cases of determining countervailing measures, the Secretaría de Economía and the Unidad de Prácticas Comerciales Internacionales are also used and are joined by either the International Trade Commission (ITC), or the Canadian International Trade

³⁰ Ibid. Page 4

³¹ Ibid. Page 4

³² Ibid. Page 4

³³ M. Angeles Villareal, and Ian F Fergusson "The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)." Federation of American Scientists. Congressional Research Service, February 22, 2017, Accessed April 09, 2017. <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R42965.pdf>. Page 9

³⁴ Governments of the United States, Canada, and Mexico, "Overview of the Dispute Settlement Provisions." *NAFTA Secretaria*,. January 01, 1994, Accessed April 07, 2017, <https://www.nafta-sec-alena.org/Home/Dispute-Settlement/Overview-of-the-Dispute-Settlement-Provisions#Chapter11>.

Tribunal (CITT).³⁵

Critiques Against NAFTA and Its Mechanisms on Agriculture Principles of a New U.S. Trade Policy for North American Agriculture

In January of 2017, the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, in coordination with our community partners National Family Farm Coalition and the Rural Coalition, and others, published *Principles of a New U.S. Trade Policy for North American Agriculture*. Within this document, the authors promoted increasing the living standards of all people through the renegotiation of NAFTA. From their perspective, a new trade deal should be democratically assessed and developed, ensuring that peoples from both the rural and urban, and all affected sectors will be able to voice their opinions throughout the negotiation process. Among the principles, the civil society organizations desire to restore local and national sovereignty over farm and food policy; stop corporate giveaways in trade agreements; and to ensure economic viability and resilience in rural communities.³⁶

The restoration of national sovereignty over farm and food policy should take precedent over the multilateral trade rules outlined in the NAFTA and WTO agreements. This can be best accomplished through such initiatives as the re-adherence to the Country-of-Origin Meat labels by NAFTA member states. On the U.S.' part, it should clarify the complexity of the labels and the necessity for consumers to know what is in their foods. NAFTA members should also push for the renegotiation of the WTO's Agreement on Agriculture "to protect the right of each country to establish policies with respect to food and agriculture that allow for inventory management and strategic food reserves and to establish border control and other mechanisms to protect the right of each country to prevent dumping of agricultural commodities at below cost of production."³⁷

Next, the organizations advise NAFTA to stop corporate giveaways. Corporate giveaways are reference to the trade deals making it easier for agribusiness to reach higher economies of scale, resulting in greater export opportunities and market share. Our community partners argue that the benefits of the trade agreement have heavily benefited agribusiness at the costs of farm workers, farmers, and consumers. To achieve greater equity, NAFTA negotiations needs to remove the Investor-to-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS); respect and protect national antitrust and anti-competitive standards; reject intellectual property rights that curb farmers' abilities to save and share seeds; and limit the power of agribusiness and seed companies.³⁸

Lastly, national farm policies need to ensure the viability of farmers and rural communities. Specifically, the International Trade Commission should effectively administer anti-dumping, countervailing duty mechanisms, and import surge protections against goods flooding U.S. markets; and new NAFTA rules should be implemented to enhance job prospects

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ IATP, "Principles of a new U.S. trade policy for North American agriculture." *Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy*, January 17, 2017, Accessed April 12, 2017, <https://www.iatp.org/blog/201701/principles-of-a-new-us-trade-policy-for-north-american-agriculture>.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

in agricultural markets across all three member countries.³⁹

Reforming NAFTA's Agricultural Provisions

While NAFTA trade liberalization did produce greater flows of meats and staple crops to Mexico and seasonal vegetables and fruits north to the United States, Timothy Wise argues it also resulted in "social and environmental consequences of market failures that plague the sector and to asymmetries between the trading partners, which are particularly acute in agriculture."⁴⁰ In Mexico specifically, problems arose when it liberalized its corn markets ahead of a 14-year schedule. In addition to the corn price dropping 50%, labor displacement and rural poverty became rampant, fueling labor migration and food dependency.

To offset trade liberalization asymmetries, Wise advises the Mexican government to work within and outside of NAFTA's framework. Working outside of NAFTA, Mexico should first impose countervailing duties against the United States for its corn subsidies. Second, the Mexican government could subsidize corn growers, because it is not illegal under NAFTA and would be below its WTO domestic support limit. Third, it could impose voluntary export restraints on white corn and beans. Working within NAFTA, Mexico could argue for the adoption of special and differential treatment (SDT), special products (SP), and special safeguard mechanisms (SSM). SDT gives greater implementation periods of trade deals to developing nations. SP allows for flexibility on market access for food. SSM allows developing nations to raise tariffs in response to high levels of imports or price drops. Second, Mexico could argue for anti-trust rules curbing market consolidation and speculation on agricultural goods. Furthermore, Wise argues financial speculation spurs volatility in the prices of agricultural goods undermining public and private investment.

Down on the Farm: NAFTA's Seven-Years War on Farmers and Ranchers in the U.S., Canada and Mexico.

In a 2001 report, Public Citizen argues NAFTA has "established new opportunities for... agribusiness to develop export platforms in all three NAFTA countries for hoarding and dumping agriculture commodities across national borders..."⁴¹ Agribusiness has transcended national laws and incapacitated governments from dealing with import surges. Furthermore, Public Citizen states agribusiness has relocated to Mexico to access cheaper labor and less safety and sanitary standards to increase their own profit margins. The growth of agribusiness in Mexico has fueled the decrease in farmers' wages, labor displacement, and the dependency of these markets on agribusiness.

Public Citizen uses a case study example of U.S. corn dumping into Mexico. Before NAFTA, the Mexican government ensured a price floor for corn and only allowed imports

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Timothy A. Wise, "Reforming NAFTA's Agricultural Provisions." *Tufts University*. November 01, 2009, Accessed April 27, 2017, <http://www.ase.tufts.edu/gdae/Pubs/rp/PardeeNAFTACH3WiseAgricNov09.pdf>. Page 1

⁴¹ Public Citizen, "Down on the Farm: NAFTA's Seven-Years War on Farmers and Ranchers in the U.S., Canada and Mexico." *Public Citizen*, June 26, 2009, Accessed April 27, 2017, <http://www.citizen.org/documents/ACFF2.PDF>. Page 35

during supply shortages. Some of the effects of market liberalization were expected such as: Mexican farmers went out of business due to increased foreign competition, and Mexico became dependent on corn imports. Unexpected consequences of market liberalization were that corn prices rose and biodiversity of corn began to diminish. Having lost its domestic corn producers, Mexico has become prone to a food crisis if U.S. supply fails.⁴²

Agribusiness Concentration, Competition, and NAFTA

In 2002, James M. MacDonald explores two trends of market competition within agricultural markets. These include: the increasing concentration in markets buying commodities from farmers or selling inputs to farmers, and the balance of power favoring agribusiness through the changing methods of exchange between farmers and agribusiness. Ultimately, he concludes that small farmers and processors have lost market share in the face of rising mergers among agribusiness.

Among some of his interesting statistics, MacDonald finds the value added by 100 of the largest food processors grew from 1982 to 1997; the rise of food plant size increased around 88% across 31 defined food markets from 1972 to 1992; the numbers of farmers have fallen, while the mean farm size has increased; and the market control of the four largest steer and heifer and hogs packing companies grew from 24% and 63% in 1980 up to 81% and 88% in 1998 respectively.⁴³

MacDonald supports that the increased market concentration is attributed to agricultural corporations achieving greater economies of scale, whereby increasing production reduces a firm's average cost. Looking specifically into the hog meatpacking market, MacDonald finds that average processing index costs (excluding hog purchases) for firms exceeding 4,000,000 hogs per year is below 12% a plant half its size, and 25-40% below smaller plants. For the cattle meatpacking industry, a firm processing 1,350,000 cattle per year has indexed processing costs around 78.6, while a firm processing 750,000 has an indexed cost of 130.7.⁴⁴ MacDonald attributes rising consolidation in the meatpacking industries due to technological advances better organizing labor and capital, and the consolidation in cattle and hog producers supplying a steady stream of goods to process.

Next, the increasing use of contracts between large farmers and contractors arose new complexities in agricultural markets. "Nearly one third of all family farm sales were covered by production or marketing contracts in 1997, and coverage is closely related to farm size nearly two thirds of the very largest farms had contracts, and 44 percent of sales from those farms were covered by contracts. In contrast, only 16 percent of small farms had contracts, and contracts in turn covered only 20.9 percent of their production."⁴⁵ Contracts put pressure onto smaller farmers reducing costs, and reduction in the number of farming communities.

MacDonald expects larger mergers and market concentration following trade

⁴² Ibid. Page 39

⁴³ James M. MacDonald, "AGRIBUSINESS CONCENTRATION, COMPETITION AND NAFTA." *AgEcon Search: Research in Agricultural and Applied Economics*, Farm Foundation, Accessed May 02, 2017. <http://purl.umn.edu/16883>. Pages 2-3

⁴⁴ Ibid. Page 8

⁴⁵ Ibid. Page 8

liberalization. This uniquely depends on the U.S. Justice Department's evaluation of whether a merger threatens competition domestically or abroad, and if its impact will significantly reduce producers' ability to negotiate prices. However, in the realm of international trade agreements, international law supersedes national law. Concerning contracts, MacDonald expects "to see increased scrutiny paid to marketing and production contracts between processors and producers, as well as closer attention paid to contracts between producers and input suppliers that govern seed and chemical purchases."⁴⁶ MacDonald concedes that vertical contracts are an "a complex and unsettled area of the law, and the competitive effect of vertical contractual relationships is a complex and unsettled area in economics."⁴⁷ Ultimately, MacDonald feels "As trade agreements expand markets and bring new participants into conflict, we are likely to see more attempts to use competition policies as protective devices."⁴⁸

Setting the Record Straight: Debunking Ten Common Defenses of Controversial Investor-State Corporate Privileges

Rallying against the installment of an Investor-State Dispute Settlement mechanism in the Trans-Pacific Partnership, Public Citizen released reasoning contradicting ten statements by the US Trade Representative concerning the benefits of an ISDS mechanism. Some of Public Citizen's counter statements are quoted below demonstrating why an ISDS mechanism constricts national governments and thus its citizens:

- "ISDS gives foreign corporations greater procedural and substantive rights than domestic firms by providing only foreign firms access to extrajudicial tribunals and by enabling them to obtain compensation for government policies and actions that apply equally to domestic firms and that would not be deemed to violate domestic property rights protections."⁴⁹
- "ISDS undermines the rule of law by empowering extrajudicial panels of private sector attorneys to contradict domestic court rulings, including those in which countries' supreme courts interpret domestic Constitutions and laws, in decisions not subject to any substantive appeal."⁵⁰
- "ISDS cases have led to the watering down of environmental, health and other public interest policies, and chilled the establishment of new ones, as the mere threat of an ISDS case against an existing or proposed policy raises the prospect that a government will need to spend millions in tribunal and legal costs to defend the policy, even if the government might ultimately prevail."⁵¹
- "Investor-state tribunals often order governments to pay foreign corporations large

⁴⁶ Ibid. Page 16

⁴⁷ Ibid. Page 16

⁴⁸ Ibid. Page 19

⁴⁹ Public Citizen, "Setting the Record Straight: Debunking Ten Common Defenses of Controversial Investor-State Corporate Privileges." Accessed May 03, 2017, <https://www.citizen.org/sites/default/files/ustr-isds-response.pdf>. Page 1

⁵⁰ Ibid. Page 1

⁵¹ Ibid. Page 1

sums of taxpayer funds as compensation for future profits that the tribunals surmise the firms would have earned if not for the challenged government actions or policies.”⁵²

- “Purported safeguards and explanatory annexes added to agreements in recent years have failed to prevent ISDS tribunals from exercising enormous discretion to impose on governments obligations that they never undertook when signing agreements.”⁵³
- “Transparency rules and amicus briefs are insufficient to hold accountable tribunals that remain unrestrained by precedent, States’ opinions or substantive appeals.”⁵⁴
- “State and local governments have no standing to defend the state and local policies that are often challenged in ISDS cases.”⁵⁵

Conclusion

International Trade is not the issue, but it is rather the framework from which trade has been conceptualized, placing greater power in the hands of agribusiness over independent producers. This best manifest itself through the theoretical foundations of the WTO and NAFTA. These agreements have bound the economies of countries together and constricted the ability of governments to regulate and advocate effective domestic market management policies for their independent producers. Independent farmers are not looking for a governmental handout, but are rather seeking a market framework that endorses equity, sustainability, and viability. Whether it be through the WTO Box programs or NAFTA’s ISDS, the established power and influence of agribusiness guised as market liberalization over domestic policy becomes evident. The blocking of the TPP and its proposed ISDS was a victory for the American people, but it does not deflect from the fact that our rural communities are still facing economic decline, poverty, and food insecurity. These are issues that need to be addressed when crafting new trade deals.

Ultimately, the rise of U.S. agribusiness’ power and influence began before the entrance of the WTO and NAFTA. Rather, it follows the evolution of the U.S. farm bill itself. In the following section, my colleague will display the history and evolution of crop insurance and its use as an ad-hoc measure attempting to fill the gap left by effective market management policies. The author asks the reader to continue to consider the intertwined nature of crop insurance, price parity, and international trade deals while proceeding forward.

⁵² Ibid. Page 1

⁵³ Ibid. Page 1

⁵⁴ Ibid. Page 1

⁵⁵ Ibid. Page 1



The Farm Safety Net: Crop Insurance & Crop Commodity Program⁵⁶

Introduction

“The way I see it, I choose a certain policy to ensure enough coverage to get by. I don’t do it hoping to make a profit.” – Peter Mallek, dairy farmer from Junction City, WI, reflected, when asked how he chooses among the multitude of crop insurance policies to insure his crops. Mallek’s approach is common among small farmers today.⁵⁷ Yet, public sentiment contends that the system of agricultural support to farmers in the United States is unfair and wasteful, and that farmers are gaming the system at the expense of taxpayers.⁵⁸ Subsidies are the main point of contention during debates on the Farm Bill. They are perceived simultaneously to be inadequate from the farmer point of view while still costing taxpayers a fortune. Even so, farmers have come to rely on them as a way to stave off what the very same policies have made almost inevitable – farmgate price declines, subsequent farm crises, and a resulting collapse of the rural economy in general. The entire debate seems to full of contradictions that it can be hard to keep up.

It was not always this way, however. Supply management and price floors were not perfect during their use in the mid-twentieth century, but they were arguably better for farmers than the current system of farm subsidies today (see section below on parity). The focus on subsidies, while warranted because of their inadequacies, does not get to the root of the problems afflicting the agricultural community today and distracts from the possibilities of

⁵⁶ Photo credit: http://gracefullplate.com/fried-chicken-and-hard-cider-in-iowa/iowacornheader3_1cceda70ad97e/

⁵⁷ Peter Mallek, Ed Mallek and Son Farm, Telephone, n.d.

⁵⁸ “Farm Programs: Additional Steps Needed to Help Prevent Payments to Participants Whose Incomes Exceed Limits,” August 2013. GAO-13-741. <http://www.gao.gov/assets/660/657321.pdf>.

real change. Chronically low and volatile prices and supply levels are the root cause of instability for farmers over the decades⁵⁹ and subsidies put in place are merely a band-aid rather than a solution to these enduring issues.^{60,61,62,63}

Bringing back the policies of more stable times for farmers is appealing, but that path of action is probably the least likely scenario in the political climate of the twenty-first century.⁶⁴ Pro-market sentiment has taken over and the concept of government involvement on the supply side of major global commodities is dead on arrival for most politicians. It is also considered market-distorting enough to be in violation of rules through the WTO. Leaving that battle for another discussion, what is left for debate then is the wrangling over subsidies – how big should the band-aid be and in what method should it be applied? Ideally, subsidies should both be an adequate risk management tool for farmers and insulate them from shocks beyond their control in a fair and equitable manner.

The first place to start when discussing subsidies is to define what exactly is meant by the word that has become everyone’s favorite punching bag. “Subsidy” broadly can mean any intervention on the part of government that influences prices.⁶⁵ The focus of this section will center on what makes up the bulk of this “intervention” by the government to farmers – aid to farmers in affording their crop insurance premiums and through the farm commodity program. Today, federal crop insurance is the largest and most significant aspect of the farm safety net. Not far behind it in cost is the crop commodity program.

Farm Safety Net

Agriculture invites a unique kind of risk that is not present in other economic sectors. Farming is financially risky due to its inherent exposure to weather changes, as well as the biophysical aspect of growing crops and thus inability to change supply once planting has taken place. Frequently changing demand coupled with inelastic supply (or as agricultural economist Harwood Schaffer calls it: “the low price elasticity of supply and the low price elasticity of demand”⁶⁶) result in large and volatile price swings that often leave farmers financially ruined with high debt. The main idea behind crop insurance and the crop commodity program is to give farmers tools to protect themselves against the loss of crops

⁵⁹ M Mazoyer and L Roudart, *A History of World Agriculture: From the Neolithic Age to the Current Crisis* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2006).

⁶⁰ Wilson, B., 2016. Family Farm Justice: Blogs. <https://familyfarmjustice.me>.

⁶¹ Naylor, G., 2011. Without clarity on parity, all you get is charity. In: Holt-Gimenez, E. (Ed.), *Food Movements Unite! Strategies to Transform Our Food Systems*. Food First, Oakland, pp. 35-41.

⁶² NFFC (National Family Farm Coalition), 2007. *Food from Family Farms Act: a Proposal for the 2007 US Farm Bill*, pp. 1-8.

⁶³ Ray, D., Ugarte, D., Tiller, K., 2003. *Rethinking Agricultural Policy: Changing Course to Secure Farmer Livelihoods Worldwide*. Agricultural Policy Analysis Center. University of Tennessee, pp. 1e68.

⁶⁴ Ron Smith, “Budget Will Dictate Farm Bill Debate,” *Delta Farm Press*, March 31, 2017, <http://www.deltafarmpress.com/peanuts/budget-will-dictate-farm-bill-debate>.

⁶⁵ Merriam-Webster, “Definition of SUBSIDY,” 2017, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/subsidy>.

⁶⁶ Harwood Schaffer and Daryll Ray, “Policy Pennings,” *Agricultural Policy Analysis Center*, accessed April 11, 2017, <http://www.agpolicy.org/weekcol/800.html>.

and revenue, helping them manage some of the inherent risk within agriculture.⁶⁷ Since weather-related risks typically affect large geographical areas that could result in tremendous losses over many farms, the government steps in to back insurance programs financially rather than private insurers going it alone. Federal crop insurance (Title XI in the farm bill) is different than the farm commodity programs (Title I in the farm bill), which will be discussed in the section further below.

Crop Insurance History

Crop insurance in the United States was born out of the Great Depression and the ensuing New Deal through the Federal Crop Insurance Act of 1938.⁶⁸ The program would be carried out through the newly-created Federal Crop Insurance Corporation (FCIC). At that time, the program was limited in that it only offered yield-based insurance and covered only major crops in primary growing regions. The program was overall quite expensive to both farmers and the government, and participation among farmers was low for some time. However, fast forward several decades to 1980, and this began to change.⁶⁹ In that year, Congress introduced public-private partnerships into the realm of crop insurance by authorizing private crop insurance companies. The hope was that by bringing in the efficiencies of the private sector, which would be the delivery system for crop insurance, together with the regulatory and financial support of the federal government, the 1980 Farm Bill would create the basis of a new and innovative approach to solving the long-standing problem of agricultural risk. The federal government subsidized insurance premiums at 30% and participation was voluntary. Unfortunately, participation remained around only 25% to 30% for farmers into the early 1990s.

Looking to boost participation and reduce ad-hoc disaster relief assistance that was common at that time, Congress introduced the Federal Crop Insurance Reform Act of 1994. This act created the Risk Management Agency within the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) which would administer the Federal Crop Insurance Program. Farmers were now required to participate in the crop insurance program in order to receive deficiency payments and loans related to other programs. Coupled with the mandatory participation was catastrophic coverage (CAT), which compensated farmers for losses in yield of greater than 50 percent at 60 percent of the price of the crop. CAT is completely subsidized by the government and is today the foundation of the most basic level of crop insurance offered by the federal government. Participation in the insurance program increased nearly threefold by 1998.

In 2000, Congress passed the Agricultural Risk Protection Act which made it easier for farmers to access different types of insurance coverage. An important addition was revenue insurance (actually created in 1997, but drastically expanded in 2000), which allowed farmers protection based on historical yields and price of certain commodities. In tandem, the 2000 Act

⁶⁷ Harwood Schaffer and Daryll Ray, "Why Farm Bill Economics Don't Work in the Real World of Agriculture," *AgFax*, April 26, 2016, <http://agfax.com/2016/04/26/farm-bill-economics-dont-work-real-world-agriculture>

⁶⁸ USDA Risk Management Agency, "History of the Crop Insurance Program," *USDA Risk Management Agency*, 2017, <http://www.rma.usda.gov/aboutrma/what/history.html>.

⁶⁹ Dennis Shields, "Federal Crop Insurance: Background," *Congressional Research Service*, August 13, 2015, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R40532.pdf>.

allowed private entities to experiment with new insurance products and features that could become offered to farmers somewhere down the line. This has led to an explosion of options for farmers nearly two decades later. As of 2014, the most popular insurance product was revenue-based, grabbing over 75% of policies, likely because of currently low prices, with yield-based coming in second.⁷⁰ A new option garnering a lot of attention in the agricultural policy world is Whole Farm Revenue Protection (See Box 1^{71,72,73}). In tandem with the whole farm program, NAP, or the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program, is seen as a way to dramatically increase small farmer access to the farm bill and its programs (See Box 2⁷⁴). Whether that will actually happen, however, is open to debate and will have to wait until reliable data on the 2014 Farm Bill programs are available.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ USDA Risk Management Agency, “Whole Farm Revenue Protection Facts,” April 2016, <http://www.rma.usda.gov/pubs/rme/wfrpfactsheet.pdf>.

⁷² Calum G. Turvey, “Whole Farm Income Insurance,” *The Journal of Risk and Insurance* 79, no. 2 (2012): 515–40.

⁷³ Viola Glenn, “A Whole Year of Whole Farm – The (Preliminary) Data Is In!,” *RAFI*, May 7, 2015, <http://rafiusa.org/blog/whole-farm-review-protection-a-year-in-review/>.

⁷⁴ National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition. “Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program.” Accessed April 24, 2017. <http://sustainableagriculture.net/publications/grassrootsguide/credit-crop-insurance/noninsured-crop-disaster-assistance-program/>.

Box 1: WHOLE FARM REVENUE PROTECTION

Whole Farm Revenue Protection (WFRP) was introduced with the 2014 farm bill. It is an insurance policy aimed at managing risk and protecting revenue on a farmer's entire farm, rather than just one crop like in the yield- or revenue-based plans. The aim of WFRP is to bring in small, diverse growers that previously may not have had access to such an option. Inherent in a whole farm policy is that it promotes a diverse harvest with multiple crops, as well as livestock, something that has previously been absent from prior crop insurance policies which insured, and thus supported, monocrop production of commodity crops. Beyond what it covers, WFRP is like regular revenue-based crop insurance.

Benefits:

- Available nationwide, the first crop insurance product so widespread
- Coverage available on organic, conventional crops, livestock, or any combination
- Options available to expanding operations
- Farmers can qualify for higher premium subsidies the more they diversify.
- A cap for revenue that can be insured, at \$8.5million, promoting use by small farmers

At least one downside of Whole Farm Revenue Protection is that it requires strict record-keeping. Insurance agents will need five years of farm tax forms and enough information to fill out the "Intended Farm Operation Report," a relatively involved process. Another possible disincentive is that coverage is based either on the lower of a farmer's expected revenue range or an average of the previous five years. Prices were strong when the farm bill was passed but have since plummeted, meaning farmers are often not able to insure as much as they would like and do not have the flexibility of other insurance plans. In many areas WFRP is second-best and has been slow to catch on, however it could receive some tweaks in the next farm bill that make it more user-friendly. Preliminary data from 2015 shows that around 1,100 policies were sold with nearly all but a few dozens in west coast states. Strong data on the new program, such as take-up and by whom, is spotty and will hopefully improve with age.

As the Federal Crop Insurance Program grows to include more crops in more areas with each successive Farm Bill, so do its costs. The last decade has proven volatile for the price tag of the program, emblematic of the products it insures, from a low of only \$3 billion in 2005 to a high of \$14.1 billion in 2012. In four of the last ten years, the government has paid more in indemnities than in premiums received, meaning it has taken an underwriting loss. On average, the federal government covers about 62% of total insurance premiums. As of 2014, the federal crop insurance program was the largest component of the farm safety net and covered over 130 crops and insured nearly 300 million acres.⁷⁵ (See Figure 1)

Box 2: NONINSURED CROP DISASTER ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

NAP, or the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program, created in 1994, is another form of financial assistance to farmers for normally non-insurable crops. In its most basic form it is yield-based crop insurance created as a way to fill in the gaps where the standard insurance programs fall short. It is run by the Farm Service Agency (FSA) rather than the Risk Management Agency (RMA). In 2014, the program saw some major improvements that have expanded its access and usability. NAP now allows coverage up to 100% of a crop's value, as opposed to the low 55% value previously, which earned the program the nickname of "Not A Penny" .

NAP is aimed specifically at historically and socially disadvantaged farmers and allows such eligible producers lower premiums and waived fees. It brings into the fold producers that normally are not insured such as small and diverse farmers, organic producers, or producers in largely non-agricultural geographic areas. According to the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, it "helps level the playing field" for farmers who need it.

Unfortunately, there is limited data available on the level of take-up of NAP since the changes of the 2014 Farm Bill have taken place. Data from prior to 2014 shows minimal interest in the program. The expanded availability and coverage as well as the simplification are expected to have made NAP more farmer-friendly and accessible, leading to a likely increase in interest.

History of Farm Commodity Program

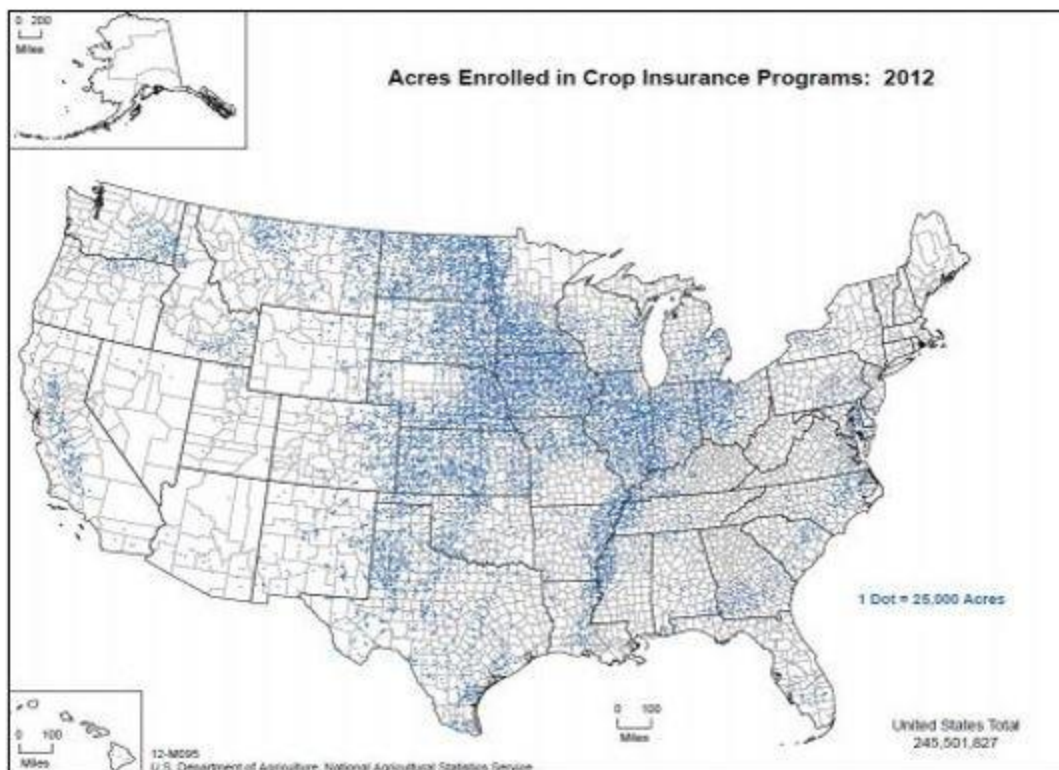
Like crop insurance, the farm commodity program began after the Great Depression as a vehicle to protect farm household income but also to manage supplies and support commodity market prices. The programs have been aimed at producers of nearly two dozen main commodities, including wheat, corn, and soybeans. In general, the crop commodity program pays farmers when the price of their covered commodity falls below a certain level. This concept has transformed into several variations throughout the decades. Unlike the crop

⁷⁵ Shields, 2015, pg. 23

insurance portion of the farm safety net, however, the crop commodity program is dwindling rather than expanding with each recent farm bill. What started out as a robust program of price supports and supply management has turned into a program that closely resembles crop revenue insurance.⁷⁶

Introduced with the 2014 Farm Bill, Price Loss Coverage (PLC) and Agricultural Risk Coverage (ARC) are now the bulk of the crop commodity program. Payments under PLC are

Figure 1: Acres Enrolled in Crop Insurance, 2012

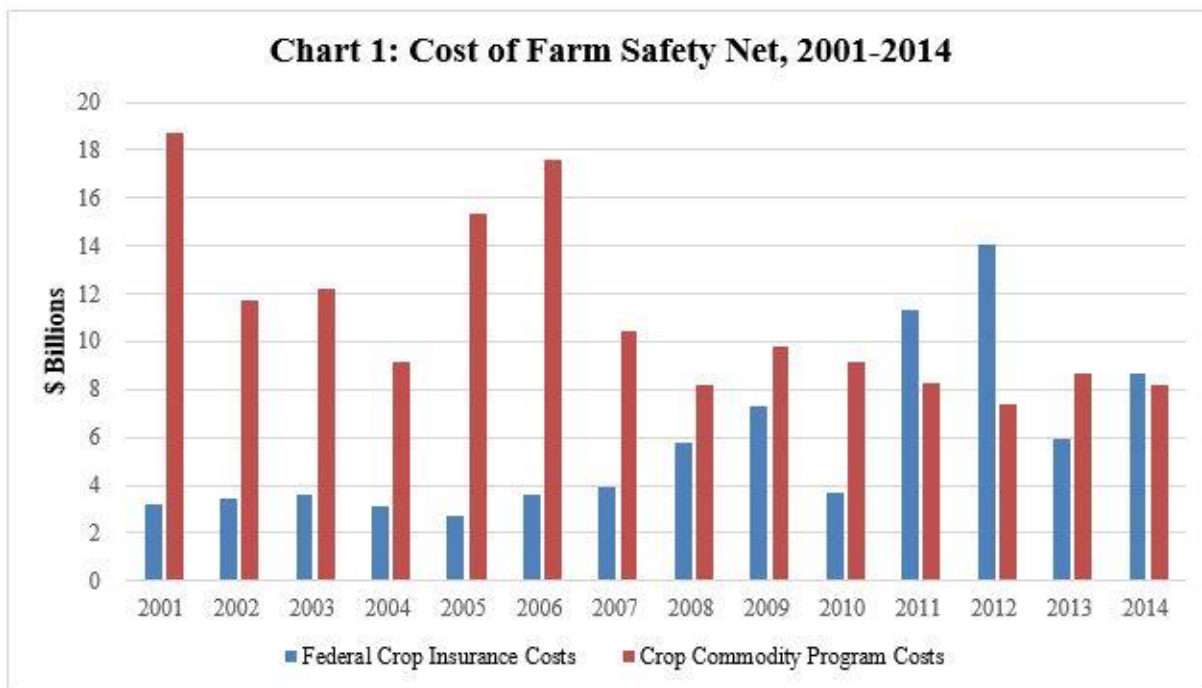


Source: Dennis Shields, "Federal Crop Insurance: Background," *Congressional Research Service*, August 13, 2015, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R40532.pdf>.

triggered when the national average farm commodity price falls below its reference price set by the federal government. ARC, on the other hand, is triggered when crop revenue is below a multi-year moving average of historical crop revenue for that specific farmer and region. Depending on the history of the farm's production and how the predicted price of a commodity might fluctuate, one program could produce a larger payout than the other. After the passage of the 2014 Farm Bill, farmers had to choose in which program they would partake on a commodity-by-commodity basis and that was the program they would stick with likely until the next farm bill passes.

⁷⁶ Geoffrey Becker, "Farm Commodity Programs: A Short Primer," *Congressional Research Service*, February 7, 2005, <http://nationalaglawcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/assets/crs/RS20848.pdf>.

The PLC and ARC are considered “partially decoupled” payment programs, meaning payments are made on “base acres” rather than current plantings, but remain connected to current market prices. What seems like an unnecessary complication is intended to “better comply with WTO rules on domestic support and to minimize any influence on producer behavior and prevent any subsequent market distortion”.⁷⁷ Previous provisions before PLC and ARC, including direct payments, counter-cyclical payments, and average crop revenue election payments (ACRE), were repealed because they were considered too market distorting and too expensive. By switching to ARC and PLC, Congress was able to save nearly \$6.5 billion in spending on Title I between 2014 and 2018. Some of that money went into the expanded Title



Source: Data from U.S. Department of Agriculture, Risk Management Agency, <http://www.rma.usda.gov/abouttma/budget/costsoutlays.html>.

XI crop insurance programs.⁷⁸ (See Chart 1)

Shortcomings of the Farm Safety Net

With a clearer picture of how the farm safety net came about, it is necessary to evaluate some of the issues that have grown out of agricultural subsidies:

1. Big Farmers vs. Small Farmers

⁷⁷ Dennis Shields, “Farm Commodity Provisions in the 2014 Farm Bill,” *Congressional Research Service*, March 28, 2014, <http://nationalaglawcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/assets/crs/R43448.pdf>.

⁷⁸ Ibid

Sifting through data from the 2012 Census on Agriculture⁷⁹, it becomes obvious why there is often public dismay against farm subsidies. Only 38% of farmers received money through the crop commodity program in 2012, for instance. Approximately \$8 billion that year went to only 800,000 farmers. Some states receive more than others with almost 75% of farms in states in the Midwest receiving payments, while other states barely reach 10%.⁸⁰ That disparity at the state level does not even come close, however, to the range of payments some individual producers get. According to the Environmental Working Group (EWG), the largest single payout in 2014 was over \$8 million through the crop commodity program but the average payout was around \$5,000.⁸¹ While it makes sense that larger producers get proportionately larger support, the larger farms are precisely the ones that do not need public money to remain viable. In an attempt to address this, the 2014 farm bill caps the maximum payout a farmer can receive at \$125,000. However, there are several loopholes, including that an eligible spouse can receive another \$125,000, as well as additional co-owners of the operation.⁸² The profile of a farmer receiving money under the crop commodity program is not the small family farm that sells food at the farmer's market. Rather, the average recipient of both crop commodity payments and crop insurance subsidies is likely male, white, operates a large enterprise, and grows the main monoculture commodity crop: corn (see Chart 2). Chart 2 makes it appear that corn is the big beneficiary of subsidies, but as Wilson states, corn is the crop that has been hit the hardest by the gutted supply management policies of old; it is now the most overproduced crop and its farmgate price is considerably below the cost of production -- hardly the "big beneficiary" it is often painted.⁸³

⁷⁹ USDA National Agricultural Statistical Service, "Census of Agriculture - 2012," *USDA National Agricultural Statistical Service*, 2014,

https://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2012/Full_Report/Volume_1,_Chapter_1_US/.

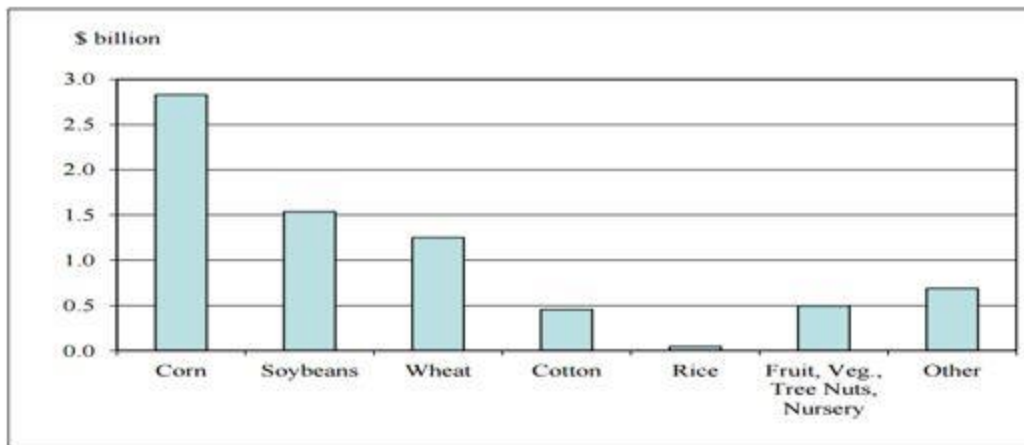
⁸⁰ EWG's Farm Subsidy Database, "EWG's Farm Subsidy Database," 2016, <http://farm.ewg.org/index.php>

⁸¹ EWG's Farm Subsidy Database, "EWG's Farm Subsidy Database, By Individual Recipient," 2016, https://farm.ewg.org/top_recips.php?fips=00000&progcode=totalfarm&yr=2014®ionname=theUnitedStates.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Brad Wilson, Practicum Trip to Iowa, February 2017.

Chart 2: Crop Insurance Premium Subsidies by Crop, 2013



Source: Dennis Shields, "Federal Crop Insurance: Background," *Congressional Research Service*, August 13, 2015, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R40532.pdf>.

2. Insurance companies get large \$

Funding the crop commodity programs and paying part of the insurance premiums to farmers is only a portion of the expense incurred by the federal government as part of the farm safety net programs. Another cost comes up through reimbursement of administrative and operating (A&O) expenses of the private insurance companies that deliver the crop insurance packages to farmers.⁸⁴ The point of this arrangement has two goals. The first is to help ensure quick delivery of indemnity payments to farmers so as to shorten gaps without operating cash as much as possible. The second is for the federal government to share risk with the insurance companies that could incur large costs in single years due to weather-related catastrophes. The calculated reimbursement rate for A&O has been approximately 12% of total premiums (including farmer-paid and government-paid) in the last few years.⁸⁵ This amounts to an extremely large payout to insurance companies and counts towards the total costs of programs like crop insurance. Farmers thus receive an ever smaller amount of the money meant to help them.

3. Paperwork: Too Much Information, Yet Not Enough

In some ways, the farm safety net's subsidies are flexible for farmers and have been becoming more so with each successive farm bill. Farmers have the ability to choose which policies will work best for their operation based on how much risk they undertake each year. Rather than treat all farmers the same, the range of policies from PLC and ARC to buy-up insurance coverage and whole farm revenue protection allows for diverse operations of all

⁸⁴ Mario J. Miranda and Joseph W. Glauber, "Systemic Risk, Reinsurance, and the Failure of Crop Insurance Markets," *American Journal of Agricultural Economics* 79, no. 1 (1997): 206–15, doi:10.2307/1243954.

⁸⁵ Dennis Shields, "Federal Crop Insurance: Background," *Congressional Research Service*, August 13, 2015, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R40532.pdf>. Pg 18.

sizes that span all 50 states. However, with much choice comes great responsibility. And paperwork.

For farmers to receive subsidies from the government, they must comply with rules laid out by Congress. They must submit documentation to justify payments which is logical and is the case in any sector. However, the nature of farming, especially family farming, is that farmers are farmers and not bookkeepers. They do not have secretaries or assistants which make it difficult to keep track of the moving parts required to prove need of assistance such as complex tax forms, historical legal documents, and planned farm operations.⁸⁶ On top of that, the complexity of farm programs today requires extensive research and comparison before deciding on products. Most farmers must consult their county extension or insurance agents for guidance before deciding on any policy. Even then, there is often a lot of guess work like predicting the price change in a commodity before deciding between PLC and ARC. The level of trust a farmer must place in the hands of his or her consultant is tremendous and the fate of their farm depends on the decisions made.⁸⁷ Unfortunately, this trust can often break down along racial and gender lines, not to mention any possible language barriers. Immigrant, young, and women farmers might not get the same level of service as the existing network of old-time farmers in some areas. (See below for racially-motivated land loss and resulting civil suits).

4. Research before change

Farm bills are often crafted based on the environment of the farm economy at the time. Certain policies might be quite functional for the year they are passed because of known prices and incomes in the short term. However, no one can predict the future, and what happens one or two years down the line is anyone's guess. What this means practically for the farm bill cycle is that what works one year could be disastrous the next. In that case, relief through new policies in the next farm bill could be years away. This situation of fluctuating prices followed closely by changing policies make it difficult to get accurate data across time on certain policies. Adding to the uncertainty is the exogenous force of ecological volatility that can be difficult to assess yield-based policies.

Take the margin protection program (MPP) within the dairy commodity program, newly instituted in 2014. Dairy farmers see it as disastrous as it largely has not lived up to its expectations.⁸⁸ However, could the MPP have worked in different times with better circumstances? Unfortunately, no one knows the answer and the opportunity to find out may not present itself. The MPP likely will be scrapped in the next farm bill and replaced with something that gives more support at a lower cost. The real life setting in which the MPP experiment occurred means that there cannot be any more time given to a failing program. What farmers need in policy from the government is consistency, but that is something that has been elusive since the very first farm bill.

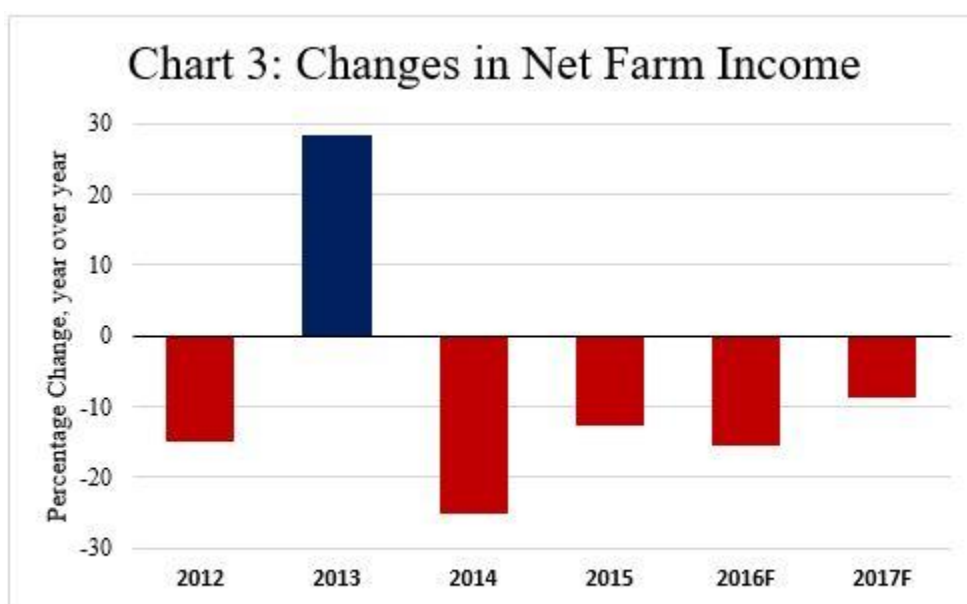
⁸⁶ USDA Risk Management Agency, "Policies," *USDA Risk Management Agency*, 2017, <http://www.rma.usda.gov/policies/>.

⁸⁷ Jenny Kilpatrick, Crop Insurance Questions, Email, April 7, 2017.

⁸⁸ Bill Tomson, "Dairy Farmers Prepare Push to Alter Farm Bill Safety Net," November 9, 2016, <https://www.agri-pulse.com/articles/7972-dairy-farmers-prepare-push-to-alter-farm-bill-safety-net>.

5. Prices are still low, still hard to make ends meet

Aggregate farm income in the United States hit a record high in 2013 at nearly \$125 billion. Times were good because of high commodity prices due to a surging Chinese economy and a seemingly insatiable global demand for crops, whether for food, livestock, or even agrifuel. Unfortunately, what goes up must come down. Supply outstripped global demand and China's economy began to slow; prices plummeted following their peak in 2013.⁸⁹ Total farm income for 2017 is forecasted at \$62 billion, or less than half of what it was just four years ago.⁹⁰ (See Chart 3.) One might expect the farm safety programs to kick in and help soften the blow. However, falling prices reduce the size of subsidized crop insurance premiums since less valuable crops cost less to insure. On the other hand, payments under the most popular crop commodity program, ARC, are triggered when prices fall below their multi-year moving average of historical crop revenue for that specific farmer and region. This does in fact help soften the blow when prices are falling but does very little when prices begin to rise again, even if still historically low. Support payments unfortunately do not adequately fill the gap in terms of revenue or timeliness during this cyclical ebb and flow. Many farmers simply cannot keep up.



Source: Economic Research Service. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/farm-income-and-wealth-statistics/data-files-us-and-state-level-farm-income-and-wealth-statistics/>

6. Random vs. Systemic Risk

⁸⁹ The Economist, "How Bad Is This Farm Slump?," *The Economist*, March 2017, <http://www.economist.com/news/united-states/21719813-farmers-are-making-comparisons-1980s-bust-how-bad-farm-slump>.

⁹⁰ USDA Economics Research Service. "Wealth and Income Statistics." 2017. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/farm-income-and-wealth-statistics/data-files-us-and-state-level-farm-income-and-wealth-statistics/>

Crop insurance is meant to protect farmers by helping manage risk. Risk, however, can be a broad term with threats that can be broken down into several categories. Two of the most prominent are “random” risk and “systemic” risk. Random risk is any foreseen or unforeseen event that can happen to any individual farmer irrespective of what happens elsewhere. It is just that – random – and can encompass everything from flooding to pests that threaten crops. Systemic risk, on the other hand, arises less from random events than it does from market structures that produce shocks and uncertainty and is usually more widespread because of it. With crop insurance, yield-based protection is considered protection against random risk. It protects the policyholder when yields deviate from the expected value because of unforeseen events. Revenue-based protection, by nature of taking into account both yield *and* price, protects against systemic risk arising from government policy, market variations, as well as random risk.⁹¹

The original blueprint for the farm safety net was that the farm commodity programs would manage the systemic risk (price), while the crop insurance programs would manage the random risk (yield). However, that blueprint has morphed into something a bit different as now crop insurance protects against both random and systemic risk. One explanation for this is that commodity programs have been gutted and limited due to international agreements; to comply, the USDA has shifted programs over to crop insurance. The current situation is an expensive setup because systemic risk, by definition, affects all farmers in today’s environment because prices are low for everyone. Since government policy of treating the symptoms rather than the causes of low farm prices is likely to continue, systemic risk will remain present. Insuring farmers against low prices through revenue insurance is one of the drivers of the ever-increasing crop insurance bill faced by the federal government.

7. Actuarial Soundness

As the crop insurance program expands to more crops in more areas, so do concerns about its cost. Current law requires that the Risk Management Agency (RMA) strive for “actuarial soundness” for the federal crop insurance program as a whole. Actuarial soundness is when total payouts, or indemnities, equal total pay-ins, or premiums (including premium subsidies). The RMA sets insurance rates not to make a profit but rather to cover all expected losses in a given year.⁹² Policymakers have to keep actuarial soundness in mind when they alter the crop insurance program along with the two other pillars: participation rates and cost. All three are intertwined and in a delicate balance.

Existence of the actuarial soundness legal mandate means that imposing any constraint on crop insurance will affect the payout/pay-in ratio. In this sense, the constraint, such as imposing conservation practices to be eligible for crop insurance, is a cost of the insurance product. Additionally, imposing a regulation will likely cause farms to decide to enter or exit insurance contracts, which in turn has implications for the loss ratio. As Carl Zulauf, Professor at Ohio State University, puts it, “The concern is that the farmers who have the lowest losses

⁹¹ OECD, “Managing Risk in Agriculture: A Holistic Approach,” 2009, <http://www.oecd.org/agriculture/agricultural-policies/45558582.pdf>.

⁹² Shields, 2015. Pg. 6

will exit the program causing the loss ratio to increase and thus premiums to increase, which in turn causes more farmers to leave the program.”⁹³ To keep those farmers in the program, the federal government would have to increase premium subsidies. Calls have been increasing inside and outside of Congress to get more bang from the crop insurance buck by imposing stronger conservation compliance rules to be eligible for crop insurance or to expand the programs to more areas and crops. However, such expansionary modifications will likely come with a huge price tag due to the competing balance of actuarial soundness, participation, and cost.⁹⁴

Where Does This Leave Farmers?

On the surface, it would appear that farmers are getting a pretty good deal between both the crop insurance subsidies and crop commodity subsidies. In some instances, this is the case. Larger producers are able to cash in on both the commodity program while also insuring most of their risk through insurance and can receive large payouts. They even have the resources necessary to play programs off one another to increase their payout relative to their size. In most instances for farmers, however, that is not the case. Small farmers are still struggling to get by, even with support from the government. Prices are near almost historic lows while input prices are near historic highs which leave struggling farmers with two options: produce more to fill the gap or stop farming. The first option only adds to the problem of overproduction and pushes prices lower, while the second is undesirable for reasons beyond just losing a business – it is losing a way of life, a life’s work, a legacy.

Farm data throughout the decades is an extremely useful tool that provides snapshots of a diverse community. However, the frequently published numbers simply do not tell the whole story. The total annual farm safety net price tag makes it appear that farmers have all of their costs and risk covered by the federal government. Yet, if one takes away the slice of money that goes to insurance companies, the large amounts that go to a handful of big producers, and the takes into account the volatility of payouts through the commodity programs, then farmers are actually getting a fairly small amount in subsidies. In good years, such as the record year in 2013, this does not matter as much -- farmers can get by and even prosper. In bad years, such as what is forecasted in 2017, where farm income could be almost half of that in 2013, the farm safety net is all there is to help farmers get by. It is wholly inadequate. Family farms have been hurting for decades and something must be done to help stave off the pain; the band-aid of farm subsidies is an insufficient and inefficient method of “helping” farmers. Getting back to the price stability of the past, discussed below, is one possible way forward.

⁹³ Carl Zulauf, Actuarial Soundness, Email, April 6, 2017.

⁹⁴ Katie Farrin, Mario Javier Miranda, and Erik O’Donoghue, “USDA ERS - How Do Time and Money Affect Agricultural Insurance Uptake? A New Approach to Farm Risk Management Analysis,” *USDA Economic Research Service*, accessed February 5, 2017, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/pub-details/?pubid=74681>.

The History of Parity within U.S. Agriculture Policy



Introduction

In 1979 Washington, D.C. played host to nearly 1,000 tractors that traveled to the city, some covering hundreds of miles over multiple weeks, to rally support for farmers and their ability to earn a living wage. The rallying cry was “100 percent of parity,” a concept that is fundamental to farm-gate prices yet oftentimes misunderstood. However, the tractorcade is just one example throughout American history of rural communities voicing the injustices that farmers and ranchers have endured due to policy changes that support systematic discrimination. Farmers and ranchers continue to fight for ways to earn enough to support their families and their farms; however, the concept of parity that was paraded through the streets of the U.S. capitol in 1979 is not commonly used in modern food movements. The following section looks at the rural economic decline in the United States through a historical lense of parity within agriculture policy with the hope that parity and a living wage for farmers will not be want in modern food movements or in upcoming farm bill discussions.⁹⁵

The farm bill relies on market mechanisms to determine the price farmers receive for their crops. That means the farmers who are making decisions concerning what to plant and

⁹⁵ Brasch, Sam. When Tractors Invaded D.C. Modern Farmer Media. Feb 5 2014. <http://modernfarmer.com/2014/02/living-legacy-d-c-tractorcade-35-years-later/>

how much of it right now are at the mercy of market conditions outside their control. This means that their livelihood and those of their families are dependent on factors such as the grain stock of export competitors of the U.S., the changes in currency values between the time of planting and the time of sale (known as daily futures volatility), weather, and speculation based on the 'buy low, sell high' arbitration strategy. Farmers across the country have imperfect information and yet work in an environment that does not have effective safeguards against such mechanisms.⁹⁶ Oftentimes this leads to social privileges against minority ranchers and farmers that do not have an inside informant in the policy- and decision-making bodies such as the USDA. Institutional discrimination in agriculture politics will be discussed later in this report.

Price Parity and Supply Management

Parity is calculated using several price estimates including a base period and an index of goods. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) economists, in preparation for the 1933 Agricultural Adjustment Act, determined that the period between August of 1909 and July of 1914 was a time of economic stability in which farmers were receiving a fair price for their goods and, consequently, a living wage. This would be considered a 1 to 1 (1:1) ratio of farm prices to farm inputs. The goal of future policy was to maintain this 1:1 ratio. As the cost of inputs rose, so too would the price paid to farmers. The base period is critical in calculating the parity level. If economists or policy makers use a base period in which farmers were not earning enough income to support their farms, the analysis does not accomplish its goal of determining a living wage.

The index was calculated based on the prices of items used in family living, items used in farming, and interest and taxes. Currently the United States Department of Agriculture calls this the Prices Paid Index for Commodities and Services, Interest, Taxes and Farm Wage Rates (PPITW).⁹⁷ Using the index of prices paid by farmers and the base period, we can determine the parity level. Parity, for any given commodity, equals the average price of the commodity during the base period multiplied by the current index of prices paid by farmers. For example, the average price of corn between 1909 and 1914 was \$0.642. The cost of things farmers bought in October of 1949 (the year policy would stop using the 1909 to 1914 base period) were 2.4 times more expensive (240%) than in the base period. Parity was calculated by multiplying the \$0.642 by 2.4 to get a parity price of \$1.54. The idea is that a farmer receiving \$1.54 per bushel of corn in 1949 would have the same standard of living as a farmer earning 64.2 cents per bushel of corn in 1912.⁹⁸ See Chart 1 below for an outlined summary of the

⁹⁶ Schaffer, Harwood D. and Daryll E. Ray. Why Farm Bill Economics Don't Work in the Real World of Agriculture. AGFAX. Apr 26 2016.

⁹⁷ Agriculture Prices: National Agriculture Statistics Service, Agricultural Statistics Board, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). ISSN: 1937-4216.
<http://usda.mannlib.cornell.edu/usda/current/AgriPric/AgriPric-03-30-2017.pdf>

⁹⁸ Agricultural Act Of 1949. In *CQ Almanac 1949*, 5th ed., 02-131-02-146. Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly, 1950. <http://library.cqpress.com/cqalmanac/cqal49-1399104>.

calculations of the parity levels in 1914 and 1948. This chart includes the price support amount of an 80 percent of parity legislation.

Chart 1: Example of Parity levels in 1914 and 1948

Base Years	Current Year	Cost of Corn Per Bushel in Base Period	Index of Prices	Parity Level	Price Support - 80 Percent of Parity
1909-1914	1914	\$0.642	1	\$0.642	\$0.514
1909-1914	1949	\$0.642	2.4	\$1.540	\$1.232

The government has implemented various price support mechanisms to ensure farmers are receiving the parity price. Typical supply management tools include acreage set-asides, inventory reserves, and price supports. Set-asides incentivize farmers to take land out of production to limit excess production and curb price declines. The Conservation Reserve Program is currently used as a set-aside program, not only to manage over-production but results in environmental benefits by limiting the stress put on land and soil during the farming process.

Inventory reserves (which are a fundamental instrument of supply management and the Market Driven Inventory System that will be highlighted later in this reports) is, as the name implies, a stock of commodities contributed by farmers who receive compensation for limiting the production they put in the market. In this way, farmers are incentivized to withhold commodities when price drops below a certain threshold, and incentivized to sell more of their reserves when farm gate prices rise above a specified threshold.⁹⁹ Finally, price supports are supported through government stock purchases. These purchases are only made prices fall due to an exogenous shock that cannot be solved quickly enough by the tools mentioned above.

When looking back at the history of U.S. agrarian policy, specifically concerning parity policy, it is helpful to have the definition of what commodities are close at hand. George Naylor, a farmer and farm policy advocate for parity, defines commodities as nonperishable grains and oilseeds that can be stored or shipped at any time of the year. The grains under the commodities umbrella can be both food grains, such as wheat or rice, and feed grain, like corn. The international prices for these commodities are set at futures exchanges such as the Chicago Mercantile Exchange (beginning in 1992). Many of the policies in the Farm Bill focus on these commodity crops.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Ray, Daryll, Daniel De La Torre Ugarte, and Kelly Tiller. Rethinking U.S. Agriculture Policy: Changing Course to Secure Farmer Livelihoods Worldwide. Agricultural Policy Analysis Center. The University of Tennessee. 2003.

¹⁰⁰ Naylor, George. Without Clarity on Parity, All You Get Is Charity. Food Movements Unite! Strategies to Transform Our Food System. Ed. Eric Holt-Gimenez. 2011.

Why does agriculture need such extensive price support mechanisms as crop reduction and grain reserves? Why do we not use these tools in the textile industries or machinery, for example? Naylor said, "...contrary to much of our economics training, 'supply and demand' is not the holy grail that can solve all agricultural, resource, and labor problems."¹⁰¹ This is an idea that plagues farmers on a regular basis but those attempting to understand agriculture and agribusiness must be open to a new perspective, a variation of traditional economic theory.

In economic theory the quantity of a good that a firm decides to produce depends on the price set for that good. This is called the supply curve and is typically drawn as an upwards sloping line at a 45 degree angle. The demand curve, representing the amount of goods the consumers will purchase at a given price is represented by a 45 degree downwards slope. Any movement of these slopes changes the equilibrium and prompts a response to the changes in market conditions. If, for example, consumer preferences change for wheat, in traditional economic theory, an increase in demand would shift the demand curve creating a new equilibrium. The firm (or farmer) would respond to this shift by increasing production of wheat and take advantage of the marginal profit. Unfortunately, we know that a farmer cannot instantly produce more wheat like a textile factory could increase production of popular style of pants. The growing of crops is cyclical and interpreting commodity prices 9 months before the date of sale makes agriculture economics fundamentally different than traditional economic methods.¹⁰² When agricultural markets experience market failure we cannot depend on supply and demand responses to respond in the short- to medium-run for the markets to stabilize and prices to increase back to equilibrium. Parity supply management mechanisms are an alternative, long-term safety net for farmers against market failures and price drops.¹⁰³

Supply management, at its core, is policy finding ways to prevent overproduction in order to bolster the price of agricultural goods and increase wages for farmers. Ironically, supply management only came into existence during the Great Depression of the 1930s, a time of food shortages and soup kitchens. At that time, the farm population made up one quarter of the entire population and therefore the economic decline hit those working in agriculture especially hard. Parity at its inception within the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA) in 1933 was defined as "the price that gave agricultural commodities the same purchasing power in terms of goods and services farmers buy that the commodities had." Price supports in the 1930s gave agricultural commodities parity with industrial prices based on a ratio between the two sectors during a stable economic period (1909 and 1914). When Congress did set price support levels in 1938, it settled on between 52 and 75 percent of parity with those price levels of 1910 to 1914.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Ibid

¹⁰² Ibid

¹⁰³ Schaffer, Harwood D. and Daryll E. Ray. Why Farm Bill Economics Don't Work in the Real World of Agriculture. AGFAX. Apr 26 2016.

¹⁰⁴ Winders, Bill. The Politics of Food Supply: U.S. Agricultural Policy in the World Economy. Yale University Press. New Haven and London. 2009

A Look at Parity and Supply Management through a Historical Lense

It is important to note that the supply management mechanisms were considered radical and unpopular in the AAA, but they did raise prices and allow farmers to pay off the loans they had taken out. During WWI and the post-war boom, farmers had been able to invest in land. There was an international demand as well that supported the high levels of production. However, international demand dropped quickly in the wake of the Great Depression and the domestic market was flooded with commodities, pushing the price levels lower and lower. The AAA took the political stage to implement supply management techniques. As part of the new law, farmers plowed over crops, killed newborn livestock and took land out of production, all to reduce supply and raise farm incomes. Within the first years of the AAA, 35 million acres of land were taken out of production and farmers' incomes rose by \$1.1 billion.¹⁰⁵

Not only was there a perfect economic storm in the years leading up to the AAA and the New Deal, but there were situational, political, discursive and interest group factors at play to allow for a break with gradual change farm policy. The farming community had been robust and productive during WWI and was seen in a positive, wholesome light to the nation. Not only did the American people want to support farmers, they wanted their representatives to work for them too. Moreover, the American Farm Bureau Federation was established in 1919 and had cultivated relationships with policy makers on the Hill and within the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Farmers had the support of the public, and the interest groups were on-board for a big picture change in agriculture policy.¹⁰⁶

Between 1940 and 1948 supply management policies continued to grow. Additional commodities were included in supply management policies and during WWII, price support levels increased to 110 percent of parity. Export subsidies were also added to the list of supply management tools. By encouraging exports, overproduction was minimized. However, the Hope-Aiken Act of 1954 began a period of supply management retrenchment, reducing price support levels while also using a sliding scale of parity rather than the established historical base period. There was wide criticism that using the 1909-1914 base period did not take into account technological advances and farm methods when considering the level of a living wage. As a result, "the 1948 AAA changed the base price concept from the average of 1910-1914 prices (the year 1909 was dropped) for individual commodities to 'adjusted base prices' which are the most recent 10-year average of the index of prices received for all commodities."¹⁰⁷

Current U.S. policy uses a PPITW 2011 base. The United States Department of Agriculture's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) released in March, 2017, the prices received, prices paid, and the ratio of prices received to prices paid with the indexes 2011

¹⁰⁵ Lehrer, Nadine. U.S. Farm Bills and Policy Reforms: Ideological Conflicts Over World Trade, Renewable Energy, and Sustainable Agriculture. Cambria Press. Amherst, New York. 2010.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid

¹⁰⁷ Engelbert, Kevin. A Brief History of Parity Pricing and the Present Day Ramifications of the Abandonment of a Par Economy. Cornucopia Institute. Jan 2013. <https://www.cornucopia.org/2013/01/a-brief-history-of-parity-pricing-and-the-present-day-ramifications-of-the-abandonment-of-a-par-economy/>.

base. Chart 2 below shows that, even using the 2011 base, farmers are only receiving 81 to 88 percent of their total expenses.¹⁰⁸

CHART 2

Prices Received, Prices Paid, and Ratio of Prices Received to Prices Paid Indexes 2011 Base – United States: February 2017 with Comparisons

Index Group	February 2016	January 2017	February 2017
	(percent)	(percent)	(percent)
Prices received by farmers	92.5	86.4	91.7
Prices paid by farmers	106.3	106.5	106.6
Ratio of prices received to prices paid	88	81	88

Source: USDA, NASS

The same report from the NASS analyzed the prices paid by farmers and prices received by farmers using the 1910-1914 base period. Chart 3 shows agricultural production receiving 955 percent of the parity level using the 1910-1914 base in February of 2016, 892 percent in January of 2017, and 946 percent in February of 2017. These numbers are only significant when looked at in consideration with the data on Chart 4, the prices paid indexes using the 1910-1914 base. The excerpt of this chart reveals that in February of 2016, while farmers were receiving only 955 percent of parity, the prices being paid were 2,877 percent of the historical prices. In February of 2017, prices paid were 2,886 percent of parity while prices received were at 946 percent.

CHART 3

Prices Received Indexes, 1910-1914 Base – United States: February 2017 with Comparisons

[Revised historical price indexes for months not shown are available at www.nass.usda.gov]

Index Group	1910 - 1914 Base		
	February 2016	January 2017	February 2017
	(percent)	(percent)	(percent)
Agricultural production	955	892	946
Crop production	730	683	755
Livestock production	1153	1121	1115

Source: USDA, NASS

CHART 4

¹⁰⁸ Agricultural Prices. USDA. ISSN: 1937-4216. <http://usda.mannlib.cornell.edu/usda/current/AgriPric/AgriPric-03-30-2017.pdf>. Accessed 4/26/17.

Prices Paid Indexes and Related Parity Ratios – United States: February 2017 with Comparisons

[Revised historical price indexes for months not shown are available at www.nass.usda.gov]

Index Group and Ratios	1910-1914 Base			2011 Base		
	February 2016	January 2017	February 2017	February 2016	January 2017	February 2017
	(percent)	(percent)	(percent)	(percent)	(percent)	(percent)
Prices paid by farmers for commodities, services, interest, taxes, and wage rates (PPITW)	2877	2881	2886	106.3	106.5	106.6
Production	2190	2171	2175	105.2	104.3	104.5
Feed	1107	1110	1119	100.4	100.7	101.5
Livestock and poultry	2354	2003	1987	119.3	101.5	100.7
Seeds	3755	3643	3643	114.3	110.9	110.9
Fertilizer	917	814	840	76.2	67.6	69.8
Chemicals	976	944	929	108.8	105.1	103.4
Fuels	1328	1900	1901	47.5	67.9	68.0
Supplies and repairs	1244	1256	1257	105.5	106.5	106.5

Source: USDA, NASS

Production controls were eased in 1964 and then in 1973 parity was removed completely from price supports and replaced with target prices and deficiency payments. Production controls were subsequently suspended temporarily. Even export subsidies in the form of food aid decreased and were replaced with commercial exports making their supply control effects disappear.¹⁰⁹

In the 1970s, for the first time since WWI, principally due to the U.S. sale of nearly all grain stocks to the Soviet Union, the world demand was greater than its production. The growing export markets left many Americans cognizant and fearful of potential food shortages. Instead of maintaining high prices for farmers, the government utilized direct payments guaranteed to producers. When market prices dropped below target prices, these direct payments would kick in. Consumers greatly enjoyed this policy because production increased and prices dropped. Farmers increased production with the knowledge that if prices dropped, they would be financially secure receiving their direct payments. Unfortunately, with the removal of a price floor, and no mechanisms to prevent overproduction and drops in international demand, the price did drop, leaving many farmers dependent on government support in the late 1970s. During this time there was an emphasis on large-scale expansion and ‘fencerow to fencerow’ planting. Years of supply management policies were reversed. Acres of crops set aside for supply management purposes were planted. The “march to battle” sent out by the then Secretary of Agriculture, Earl Butz, was ‘get big or get out.’¹¹⁰

Then, in 1996, the most decisive market-oriented policy was passed in the form of the Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform (FAIR) Act. While it maintained the Conservation Reserve Program (under which farmers could set aside acreage for soil and water conservation purposes to receive a subsidy), the FAIR act mandated direct payments to all farmers based on the number of acres in production rather than coupling payments to market prices. The political, interest group, cultural, and economic climate was primed for a market-oriented

¹⁰⁹ Winders, Bill. *The Politics of Food Supply: U.S. Agricultural Policy in the World Economy*. Yale University Press. New Haven and London. 2009

¹¹⁰ Lehrer, Nadine. *U.S. Farm Bills and Policy Reforms: Ideological Conflicts Over World Trade, Renewable Energy, and Sustainable Agriculture*. Cambria Press. Amherst, New York. 2010.

shift. The World Trade Organization had been created in 1994 to regulate international trade, there was a Republican Congress that traditionally favored free market systems, and there was pressure to reduce a budget deficit. (FAIR saved \$2 billion from the 1996 federal budget.)¹¹¹ There were still remnants of the parity and supply management in policy but the FAIR act discontinued these policies entirely.

The aftermath of the FAIR act led to extreme price fluctuations and the necessity of government subsidies paid to farmers. Many academics and policy makers have worked to demonstrate that supply management mechanisms could be used to minimize government expenditures and increase price stability while supporting a fair wage. For example, Schaffer, Hellwinckel, Ray and De La Torre claim that a Market-Driven Inventory System (MDIS) which utilizes a commodity reserve would eliminate government agricultural payments in the form of subsidies, lower the amount of government support to the agriculture sector, and stabilize price and income for farmers that would be significantly hurt by market fluctuations.¹¹²

The Market-Driven Inventory System: One Possibility to Ensure Parity for Farmers

The MDIS analysis done by takes a historical perspective to compare the world under the free market structure with direct payments compared to an domestic agricultural system under the MDIS. Then, in a second analysis, Schaffer, et al., use the model to predict government expenditures and commodity prices for the future. The model shows (see Graph 1) that between 1998 and 2010 government payouts totaled \$152 billion. Had the MDIS system been in place the government would have saved nearly \$100 billion in direct payments, spending only \$56 billion on loans and commodity reserves. Over this 13 year period the MDIS net farm income averaged minimally lower than under the free market and direct payment system, the difference between \$51.1 billion and \$52.1 billion. (See Graph 2)

The key aspect of the MDIS is that it is only activated when crop prices drop so low or rise so high that they are not providing farmers with reasonable living wages. Otherwise, the system stays out of the way of market forces. The beneficiaries include taxpayers, consumers, crop farmers, livestock farmers, and industrial users of raw agricultural commodities. The MDIS, using the commodity reserves and loan system, is one example of a policy option that keeps parity at the heart of the decision-making.¹¹³

GRAPH 1

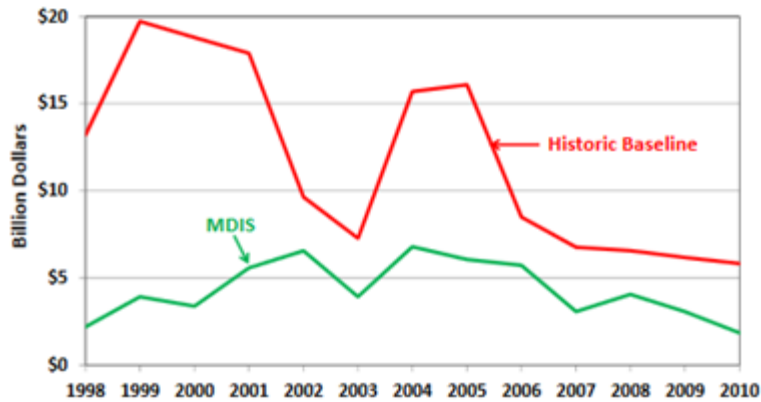
Source: University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture

¹¹¹ Ibid

¹¹² Schaffer, Harwood D., Chad Hellwinckel, Daryll E. Ray, and Daniel G. De La Torre Ugarte. An Analysis of a Market Driven Inventory System (MDIS). <http://docplayer.net/15998210-An-analysis-of-a-market-driven-inventory-system-mdis.html>.

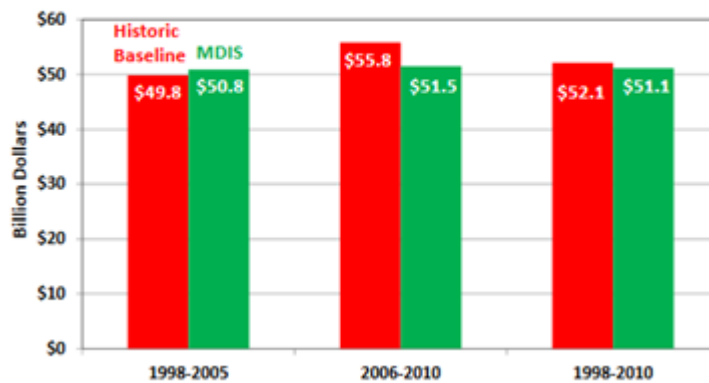
¹¹³ Schaffer, Harwood D.

Total Actual Government Payments vs. Simulated Government Payments Under MDIS Policies for the 8 Program Crops, 1998-2010



Graph 2

Actual Net Farm Income in the Historic Baseline vs. Net Farm Income under MDIS, 1998-2005, 2006-2010, and 1998-2010



Source: University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture

Conclusion

Parity and supply management have a long and interconnected history. Since the installation of the Agricultural Adjustment Act in 1933 to the sliding parity scale of the late 1940's and the liberalization of agriculture in the Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act of 1996, United States farm policy has evolved into a very different creature than its original form. The voices heard throughout the U.S. capitol during the Tractorcade of 1979 are oftentimes lost in current farm policy debates. As the government shifted from supply management mechanisms to direct payments, the fundamental issue of coupling price supports to fair wages has become less and less of a reality. As farmers and their representatives move forward, advancing the objective to create sustainable living wages for farmers, it is critical not to forget the fundamentals of successful farm policies of the past by which the American farm legacy has come to be what we know today. Equity for ranchers and

farmers must be seen as a key pillar in the efforts to create a food system fair for all parties involved.

The Social Impacts of Rural Economic Decline

Economics and statistics are, by nature, somewhat detached, quantitative fields. While this approach often generates urgently important knowledge with the potential to guide policy in beneficial ways, it belies the deeply meaningful nature of the subject being studied. Numbers can do a lot. They can tell us how much crop prices have fallen, who is benefitting from which programs, how many people are living in poverty, and how healthy people in rural areas are compared to people in urban areas. We can use them to correlate trends, and with enough expertise even demonstrate causation. But they cannot tell us what the intersection of all of these factors means for people's lived experience or why it matters. This is what I intend to help remedy here. I hope that in what follows I am able to tell a story--backed by numbers--in a way that paints a fuller, more meaningful picture of life in rural America today.

Introduction to Social Impacts

The international impacts of the current agricultural system are fairly well-known: dumping, dependency, food insecurity, labor displacement, and rural poverty (see Section 1 for details). The Doha round of WTO negotiations and the global fight for food sovereignty have brought these issues to the fore. It is generally assumed, however, that agriculture policy has benefitted American farmers tremendously. Policymakers talk about "increasing market shares" and "the breadbasket of the world," and the United States regularly violates international trade agreements, providing an unfair advantage to American farmers.

On the surface, the numbers seem to support the mainstream narrative that American farmers are doing well. Just to give two examples, predictions show that in 2017, the median

household income of farm families should be \$79,733,¹¹⁴ and the average net cash farm income of farm businesses should be \$109,800.¹¹⁵ In this context, it seems egregious that the US government will likely pay out \$19.7 billion in crop insurance payments alone between 2016 and 2018.¹¹⁶ But these figures paint a deeply misleading picture.

The median household income figure is skewed by the fact that farmers' income largely comes from off-farm employment. Median income household income from farming alone (a number which includes subsidies) is actually *below zero*, and falling.¹¹⁷ Moreover, average net cash farm income of farm businesses only measures the income of 41% of American farms-- commercial farms and farms run by operators whose primary occupation is farming (also called intermediate farms). This is hardly representative. Besides leaving out small farms entirely, the number is further skewed by the fact that nearly 25% of those farms included in the measure are commercial farms¹¹⁸ which will likely net an average of \$404,200 in 2017. Meanwhile the average intermediate farm will net only \$10,900,¹¹⁹ below the poverty threshold for a single person and far below what is needed to support a family¹²⁰. This measure also includes subsidies.

“I was shocked, but more than that I was shamed, because I felt a fool” (IPTV 2013)- Kaye Hagedorn, discussing how she felt after she and her husband lost their farm during the 1980’s farm crisis.

¹¹⁴ “Highlights from the February 2017 Farm Income Forecast,” USDA Economic Research Service, last modified February 13, 2017, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/farm-economy/farm-sector-income-finances/highlights-from-the-farm-income-forecast/>.

¹¹⁵ “Farm Business Income,” USDA Economic Research Service, last modified February 7, 2017, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/farm-economy/farm-sector-income-finances/farm-business-income/#note>.

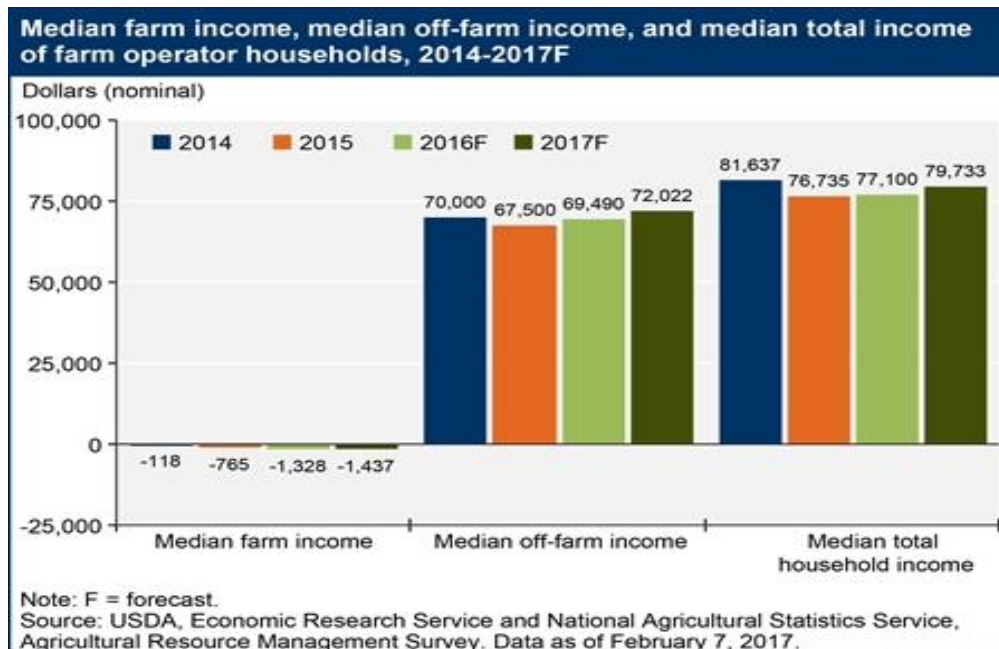
¹¹⁶ Anne Weir Schechinger, “The Empty Promise of Farm Subsidy ‘Reform’ Savings,” Environmental Working Group, last modified January 29, 2016, <http://www.ewg.org/agmag/2016/01/empty-promise-farm-subsidy-reform-savings>.

¹¹⁷ “Highlights from the February 2017 Farm Income Forecast,” USDA Economic Research Service, last modified February 13, 2017, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/farm-economy/farm-sector-income-finances/highlights-from-the-farm-income-forecast/>.

¹¹⁸ “Farm Business Income,” USDA Economic Research Service, last modified February 7, 2017, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/farm-economy/farm-sector-income-finances/farm-business-income/#note>.

¹¹⁹ “Farm-level average net cash income,” USDA Economic Research Service, last modified February 7, 2017, <https://data.ers.usda.gov/reports.aspx?ID=49648>.

¹²⁰ “U.S. Federal Poverty Guidelines Used to Determine Financial Eligibility for Certain Federal Programs,” Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, last modified 2017, <https://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty-guidelines>.



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Though somewhat better off than farmers in developing countries, small and mid-sized farmers in the US are struggling, and have been for a long time¹²². Agriculture is hardly the cash cow it has been made out to be; in reality, it is one of the least profitable rural occupations.¹²³ Prices are simply too low and subsidies too inadequate for any but the largest farms (which benefit from economies of scale) to thrive.

The mainstream narrative also obscures troubling trends, such as farm bankruptcies. In their 1974 report “A New U.S. Farm Policy for Changing World Needs”, the Committee for Economic Development announced victory--removing price floors had succeeded in decreasing the farm labor force by one million people over 10 years. They termed this “the optimum farm labor forc[e].”¹²⁴ But the land loss continued. Between 1975 and 1979, 3,301 farmers filed for bankruptcy. Unfortunately, no farm bankruptcy data exists from 1980 to 1986, the worst years of the farm crisis, but if the data from 1987 is any indicator (4,812 in one year) the situation

¹²¹ “Highlights from the February 2017 Farm Income Forecast,” USDA Economic Research Service, last modified February 13, 2017, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/farm-economy/farm-sector-income-finances/highlights-from-the-farm-income-forecast/>.

¹²² See Section 6 for a discussion of international farmer alliances

¹²³ USDA Economic Research Service, “Rural America at a Glance: 2016 Edition.” Economic Information Bulletin 162 (2016): 1-6, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/eib162/eib-162.pdf?v=42684>

¹²⁴ Mark Ritchie, *The Loss of Our Family Farms: Inevitable Results or Conscious Policies? A Look at the Origins of Government Policies for Agriculture* (Minneapolis, MN: League of Rural Voters, 1979).

was dire.¹²⁵ Since then, there have been nearly 24,000 farm bankruptcies,^{126 127} and the bankruptcy rate is predicted to increase in the coming years.¹²⁸ According to one estimate, “soon there will be fewer than two million farms in America for the first time since the pioneers moved westward after the Louisiana Purchase”.¹²⁹

As farmers have lost their farms, investors and other non-farmers bought it up, resulting in the consolidation of land ownership,¹³⁰ an increase in tenancy, and the expansion of ecologically destructive industrial farming. The lack of profitability and loss of land has also driven massive outmigration from rural areas. From 2010-2015, for the first time, immigration and babies born couldn't counteract the effect of outmigration and death. In the five-year period, the total population of rural America fell by 136,000 people.¹³¹ Farmers and their families aren't the only people suffering as a result of these trends. The effects of the ongoing farm crisis have been spilling over for decades, adversely affecting whole communities as the loss of farm income, the steady decline of rural populations, and the transition to industrial farming have decimated local businesses.

“The little towns used to have, y’know, businesses in them that...that related to the agricultural economy, to the livestock economy. We would take our eggs to town, our cream to town.”- George Naylor (unpublished interview)

Over the years, creameries, grain elevators, farm implement dealers, hog buyers, grocery stores, garages and gas stations, veterinarians, restaurants, dentists, barber shops, hardware stores, lumberyards, insurance storefronts, banks (Wilson 2017; Naylor 2017),¹³² and “mom and pop businesses of all kinds” (Wilson 2017) have disappeared from small towns. There is still an elevator in Brad Wilson's town, Springville, Iowa, but it “no

longer buys oats or grinds feed like it used to,” (Wilson 2017) because family farms have lost their livestock to the concentrated animal feeding operation (CAFO) industry.

Rural areas haven't just lost their businesses, though, they have lost the places that sustain a community, mentally, physically, and spiritually. The erosion of the tax base means

¹²⁵ Jerome M. Stam and Bruce L. Dixon, “Farmer Bankruptcies and Farm Exits in the United States, 1899-2002,” *Agriculture Information Bulletin* no. 788 (2004), https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/aib788/17750_aib788_1_.pdf

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Robert Dinterman and Ani Katchova, *Farm Bankruptcies in the United States*, published April 2017, https://aede.osu.edu/sites/aede/files/publication_files/Farm%20Bankruptcies%20-%20Policy%20Brief.pdf.

¹²⁸ Ani Katchova and Robert Dinterman, “Financial Stress and Farm Bankruptcies in U.S Agriculture” (presentation at the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago Agricultural Conference, Chicago, IL, November 29, 2016).

¹²⁹ Jesse Newman and Patrick McGroarty, “The Next American Farm Bust Is Upon Us,” *Wall Street Journal*, last updated February 8, 2017, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-next-american-farm-bust-is-upon-us-1486572488>

¹³⁰ Prairiefire Rural Action, Inc., *Fate of the Land: Rural America's Continuing Crisis* (Des Moines, IA: Prairiefire Rural Action, Inc., 1988.)

¹³¹ “Overview,” USDA Economic Research Service, last modified September 13, 2016, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/rural-economy-population/population-migration/>.

¹³² Prairiefire Rural Action, Inc., *The Continuing Crisis in Rural America: Fact vs Fiction* (Des Moines, IA: Prairiefire Rural Action, Inc, 1987).

that local governments are unable to provide as many public services, despite rising demand,¹³³ and “amenities such as swimming pools, parks, and cultural activities are gone or seriously neglected.”¹³⁴ Schools and hospitals have closed.¹³⁵ Churches have shuttered their doors, and membership has fallen at those that remain.¹³⁶ ¹³⁷ The fabric of these rural communities is swiftly disintegrating.

It should come as no surprise, then, that rural indicators are so bleak. 85.3% of persistent poverty counties (counties where at least 20% of the population has been below the poverty line for the past 30 years) are rural.¹³⁸ Overall, unemployment is higher in rural areas, incomes are lower, and the recovery from the recession has been slower.¹³⁹ Ironically, food

insecurity is most prevalent in rural areas, the very places where food is produced.¹⁴⁰

This social disintegration has been particularly devastating for areas dominated by industrialized farms. Research has repeatedly shown that, compared to communities with large farms, industrial farming experience increases in inequality, poverty, stamp enrollment, environmental damage,

I was an Iowa farm child more than thirty years ago. I wrasseled sheep. I fed the pigs. I heard the cattle low. This was life, ‘twas all I knew, ‘twas all I then could see. But history rushed around it crushing culture to its knee. - excerpt from “Iowa Farm Child” by Brad Wilson

prevalent in rural areas, where food is

disintegration has been devastating for areas industrialized farms. Research has repeatedly shown that, communities with large farms, industrial farming experience increases in unemployment, food environmental damage,

social conflict, litigation, and crime, as well as decreases in family income, educational achievement, civic engagement, population size, and the availability of public services. The numbers of small and medium-sized farms decline, local governments are less likely to govern democratically, per capita economic growth rates are lower, and children are more likely to receive free and reduced price school lunches and become pregnant as teenagers. People who live near CAFOs also report an unbearable stench, increased community strife, poorer quality

¹³³ Prariefire Rural Action, Inc., *The Continuing Crisis in Rural America: Fact vs Fiction* (Des Moines, IA: Prariefire Rural Action, Inc, 1987).

¹³⁴ Patti Edwardson, e-mail message to the author, April 30, 2017.

¹³⁵ Sheldon Weisgrau, “Issues in Rural Health: Access, Hospitals, and Reform,” *Health Care Financing Review* 17, no.1 (1995): 1-14, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4193574/pdf/hcfr-17-1-1.pdf>.

¹³⁶ Curtis W. Stofferahn, *Industrialized Farming and Its Relationship to Community Well-Being: An Update of a 2000 Report by Linda Lobao*, published September 2006, <http://www.und.edu/org/ndrural/Lobao%20%20Stofferahn.pdf>.

¹³⁷ Brad Wilson, interview by Madison Hayes, Andrew Esposito, Tracy Watson, and Jon Mallek, Springville, IA, February 2017.

¹³⁸ “Geography of Poverty,” USDA Economic Research Service, last modified March 1, 2017, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/rural-economy-population/rural-poverty-well-being/geography-of-poverty.aspx>.

¹³⁹ USDA Economic Research Service, “Rural America at a Glance: 2016 Edition.” *Economic Information Bulletin* 162 (2016): 1-6, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/eib162/eib-162.pdf?v=42684>

¹⁴⁰ “Rural Hunger Facts,” Feeding America, accessed April 9, 2017. <http://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/impact-of-hunger/rural-hunger/rural-hunger-fact-sheet.html?referrer=https://www.google.com/>.

of life, declining trust in the government, and decreased land values, among other problems.¹⁴¹ Taken altogether, these factors reflect a profound and collective social trauma. For many, this trauma has literally become a matter of life or death.

Health Crisis

Unfortunately, I am not able to run a statistical analysis to demonstrate that low farmgate prices are behind poor health outcomes. Theoretically, this may be possible, and it should be a priority for future research. However, it is beyond the scope of this paper and time-series health data spanning the last century, disaggregated by level of urbanization, is hard to come by. Instead, I will attempt to shed light on a complex, self-reinforcing etiology, each component of which is somehow tied to the farm crisis. This series of interconnected issues- including socioeconomic, demographic, and lifestyle factors, the presence of serious environmental health risks, despair, cultural barriers, and a lack of healthcare options- conspire to put people in rural communities at increased risk of serious illness and mortality.

Health Risks and Outcomes

According to Dr. Tom Boyce, the chief of the University of California-San Francisco's Department of Pediatrics' Division of Developmental Medicine, "socioeconomic status is the most powerful predictor of disease, disorder, injury and mortality that we have."¹⁴² The chronic stress of poverty is harmful to one's health, with especially deleterious effects on children, heightening cortisol production and blood pressure and even impeding cognitive development.¹⁴³ Poverty also has another effect: although the Affordable Care Act has largely closed the gap, before the law was passed, rural residents were less likely to have insurance¹⁴⁴

"Promoters of hog confinements, slaughtering plants, and even casinos (as in my own community) use the lack of jobs and the dwindling population numbers to convince some citizens that they must support this new enterprise for the jobs it will create. This pits neighbor against neighbor. My mother felt ostracized after speaking out against a large dairy proposed to be built near her farm. She understood the environmental impact and the quality of life issues these livestock operations bring. Some of her neighbors had been convinced that it was an economic opportunity." - Patti Edwardson (personal communication)

¹⁴¹ Curtis W. Stofferahn, *Industrialized Farming and Its Relationship to Community Well-Being: An Update of a 2000 Report by Linda Lobao*, published September 2006, <http://www.und.edu/org/ndrural/Lobao%20&%20Stofferahn.pdf>.

¹⁴² Claire Conway, "Poor Health: When Poverty Becomes Disease," University of California San Francisco News Center, last modified January 6, 2016, <https://www.ucsf.edu/news/2016/01/401251/poor-health>.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Vann Newkirk and Anthony Damico, "The Affordable Care Act and Insurance Coverage in Rural Areas," Kaiser Family Foundation, last modified May 29, 2014, <http://kff.org/uninsured/issue-brief/the-affordable-care-act- and-insurance-coverage-in-rural-areas/>

¹⁴⁵ ¹⁴⁶ meaning they were unlikely to receive regular preventative care or catch chronic disorders early, and may not have been able to afford medical care even when it was necessary. Lack of education, which goes hand in hand with poverty and is likely worsened by rural school closures, is also a major indicator of poor health outcomes. A review of 44 studies conducted in developed countries found that people with low levels of literacy have less knowledge of health services and outcomes, are less likely to be vaccinated, require more doctor's visits and hospitalizations, and have poorer overall health. Women with low levels of literacy are also less likely to receive pap smears or mammograms and more likely to be depressed.¹⁴⁷

As a consequence of the outmigration of job-seekers, rural areas have also experienced a graying of the population, meaning these communities are disproportionately impacted by the usual geriatric health problems.¹⁴⁸ The prevalence of maternal and infant risk factors is also concerning. Teen pregnancy rates are higher in rural counties,¹⁴⁹ putting mother and child at increased risk of health problems including low birth weight, preterm birth, cephalopelvic disproportion, and maternal anemia, infection, and, hemorrhaging.¹⁵⁰ Babies born in areas with industrial farms are even more likely to be born to teenage mothers.¹⁵¹ Pregnant women in non-metro counties are also less likely to receive the proper prenatal care and more likely to be hospitalized due to complications. They are also more likely to abuse substances while pregnant¹⁵²; between 2003 and 2013, rural areas have seen a growth rate in the number of babies born addicted to opioids that is "nearly 80 percent higher than the growth rate of such cases in urban communities."¹⁵³

¹⁴⁵ Michael Meit, et al. *The 2014 Update of the Rural-Urban Chartbook*. Published October 2014.

<https://ruralhealth.und.edu/projects/health-reform-policy-research-center/pdf/2014-rural-urban-chartbook-update.pdf>

¹⁴⁶ Sheldon Weisgrau, "Issues in Rural Health: Access, Hospitals, and Reform," *Health Care Financing Review* 17, no.1 (1995): 1-14, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4193574/pdf/hcfr-17-1-1.pdf>.

¹⁴⁷ Darren A. DeWalt et al., "Literacy and Health Outcomes," *Journal of General Internal Medicine* 19, no. 2 (2004): 1228-1239. doi:10.1111/j.1525-1497.2004.40153.x.

¹⁴⁸ Rogers, Carolyn C. "The graying of rural America." *Forum for Applied Research and Public Policy* 15, no. 4 (2000): 52-55

¹⁴⁹ Brady E. Hamilton, Lauren M. Rossen, and Amy M. Branum, *Teen Birth Rates for Urban and Rural Areas in the United States, 2007-2015*, published 2016, <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db264.pdf>

¹⁵⁰ Demetra-Gabriela Socolov et al., "Pregnancy during Adolescence and Associated Risks: An 8-Year Hospital-Based Cohort Study (2007-2014) in Romania, the Country with the Highest Rate of Teenage Pregnancy in Europe," *Biomed Research International* 2017 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.1155/2017/9205016>.

¹⁵¹ Curtis W. Stofferahn, *Industrialized Farming and Its Relationship to Community Well-Being: An Update of a 2000 Report by Linda Lobao*, published September 2006, <http://www.und.edu/org/ndrural/Lobao%20%20Stofferahn.pdf>.

¹⁵² Julie Lasson, "Despite Federal Law, Some Rural Hospitals Still Turn Away Women in Labor," ProPublica, last modified March 3, 2017. <https://www.propublica.org/article/despite-federal-law-some-rural-hospitals-still-turn-away-women-in-labor>

¹⁵³ Beata Mostafavi, "Study: Rural Communities See Steep Increase in Babies Born with Opioid Withdrawal," University of Michigan Health Lab, last modified December 12, 2016, <http://ihpi.umich.edu/news/study-rural-communities-see-steep-increase-babies-born-opioid-withdrawal>.

Environmental hazards are yet another risk factor confronting rural communities. Occupational hazards are of particular concern, putting farmers and farmworkers at “high risk for fatal and nonfatal injuries, work-related lung diseases, noise-induced hearing loss, skin diseases, and certain cancers associated with chemical use and prolonged sun exposure”¹⁵⁴ and killing 5,816 people from 2003-2011.¹⁵⁵ CAFOs are also known to pose significant health risks- studies have shown that they pollute the air and contaminate drinking water, leading to upper respiratory, intestinal, and eye problems.¹⁵⁶ Other risks include:

pathogens (disease- and nondisease-causing) passed from animals to humans; the emergence of microbes resistant to antibiotics and antimicrobials, due in large part to widespread use of antimicrobials for nontherapeutic purposes; food-borne disease; worker health concerns; and dispersed impacts on the adjacent community at large,¹⁵⁷

Those nearest to the operation are at the highest risk.¹⁵⁸

Rural lifestyles and values also contribute to poor health outcomes. For example, people in rural areas are more likely to smoke and less likely to exercise.¹⁵⁹ They are also more likely to have self-reliant attitudes and “a different perception of health and illness (illness occurs when a person cannot work)”¹⁶⁰ that make them less likely to seek medical attention. In the context of mental health care, this avoidant predisposition is further compounded by stigma.¹⁶¹

Whether the result of socioeconomic, demographic, environmental, lifestyle, or cultural factors, it is a well-known fact that residents of rural communities are more likely to

¹⁵⁴ “Agricultural Operations,” Occupational Safety and Health Administration, accessed April 12, 2017, <https://www.osha.gov/dsg/topics/agriculturaloperations/#1>

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Curtis W. Stofferahn, *Industrialized Farming and Its Relationship to Community Well-Being: An Update of a 2000 Report by Linda Lobao*, published September 2006, <http://www.und.edu/org/ndrural/Lobao%20&%20Stofferahn.pdf>.

¹⁵⁷ Pew Commission on Industrial Farm Animal Production, *Putting Meat on the Table: Industrial Farm Animal Production in America*, published 2008, http://www.pewtrusts.org/~media/legacy/uploadedfiles/wwwpewtrustsorg/reports/industrial_agriculture/pcfifapfinalpdf.pdf

¹⁵⁸ Pew Commission on Industrial Farm Animal Production, *Putting Meat on the Table: Industrial Farm Animal Production in America*, published 2008, http://www.pewtrusts.org/~media/legacy/uploadedfiles/wwwpewtrustsorg/reports/industrial_agriculture/pcfifapfinalpdf.pdf

¹⁵⁹ Michael Meit et al., *The 2014 Update of the Rural-Urban Chartbook*. Published October 2014. <https://ruralhealth.und.edu/projects/health-reform-policy-research-center/pdf/2014-rural-urban-chartbook-update.pdf>

¹⁶⁰ W. Nelson et al., “A proposed rural healthcare ethics agenda,” *Journal of Medical Ethics* 33, no. 3 (2007): 136-139, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2598268/>

¹⁶¹ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, “Rural Behavioral Health: Telehealth Challenges and Opportunities,” *In Brief* 9, no. 2 (2016), <http://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content//SMA16-4989/SMA16-4989.pdf>.

present with chronic health problems¹⁶². Obesity, immobility due to chronic illness, tooth loss, and high blood pressure are all more common in non-metro counties. Living in a rural area increases your risk of dying from heart disease, cancer, trauma, stroke, and chronic respiratory disease, and the overall mortality rates for infants, children, young adults, working-age adults, and seniors are all higher in rural areas.^{163 164}

“Behind the continued deterioration of the rural economy and the farm crisis lies a crisis of tremendous emotional proportions. Fear, anger, self-doubt and guilt” - Daniel Levitas (1983)

People in rural areas are also more likely to report having a serious mental illness or experiencing serious psychological distress within the last month.¹⁶⁵ Residents of industrial farming communities are especially prone to stress, hopelessness, and mental illness. Having CAFOs nearby is also linked to increased rates of depression.¹⁶⁶ As Brad Wilson points out, this emotional state may be better described as despair--a “loss of meaning”¹⁶⁷--than depression, which connotes an endogenous neurotransmitter imbalance. Suffering emotionally when faced with poverty, isolation, and the loss of one’s way of life is an entirely normal human reaction. However, without a way to change the status quo, a strong community support system, or assistance from a qualified mental health professional, despair can drive people to make tragic decisions.

Indeed, the further a community is from a city center, the higher its suicide rate, especially among young people, and the trend has only worsened with time. The rural-urban split is partly attributable to the higher prevalence of gun ownership in rural areas, but this doesn’t explain the steep upward trend in rural suicide rates. Rural economic decline and social isolation seem like the more likely culprits.¹⁶⁸ Even more telling is a recent CDC analysis of suicide rates by occupation and gender which found that suicide rates are highest among men in the farming, fishing and forestry industries.¹⁶⁹ Ramirez-Ferrero attributes this to what

¹⁶² Despite the severity of these issues, the public health field has been slow to address the rural physical and mental health crises, and the health impacts of the food and agriculture system more broadly. See the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future for a rare example of this sort of research.

¹⁶³ Ernest Moy et al., “Leading Causes of Death in Nonmetropolitan and Metropolitan Areas- United States, 1999-2014,” *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report Surveillance Summaries* 66, no.1 (2017): 1-8, https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/66/ss/ss6601a1.htm?s_cid=ss6601a1_w

¹⁶⁴ Michael Meit et al., *The 2014 Update of the Rural-Urban Chartbook*. Published October 2014. <https://ruralhealth.und.edu/projects/health-reform-policy-research-center/pdf/2014-rural-urban-chartbook-update.pdf>

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

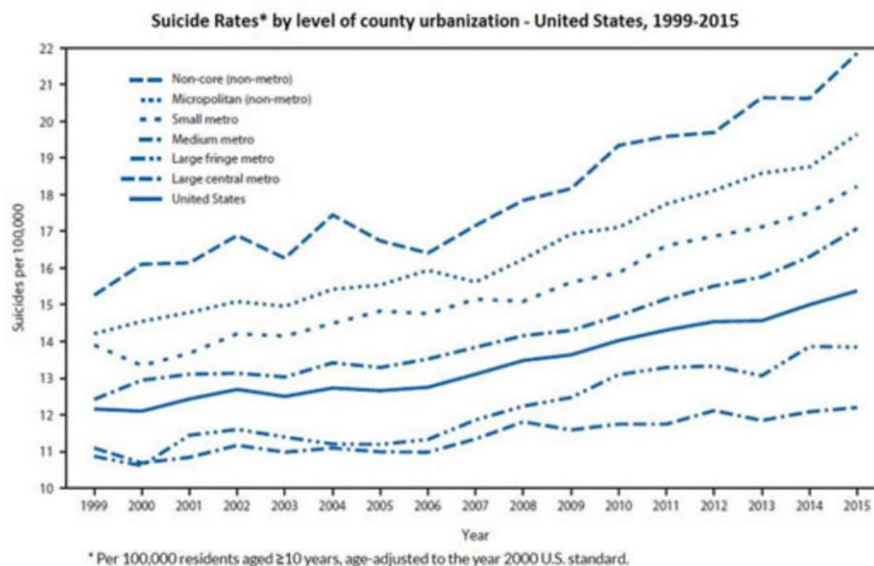
¹⁶⁶ Curtis W. Stofferahn, *Industrialized Farming and Its Relationship to Community Well-Being: An Update of a 2000 Report by Linda Lobao*, published September 2006, <http://www.und.edu/org/ndrural/Lobao%20&%20Stofferahn.pdf>

¹⁶⁷ Wilson, Brad. “Supporting Troubled Farmers: Issues and Ethics.” Unpublished manuscript, last modified 1987.

¹⁶⁸ Julie Beck, “The Growing Risk of Suicide in Rural America,” *The Atlantic*, last modified March 10, 2015, <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2015/03/the-growing-risk-of-suicide-in-rural-america/387313/>.

¹⁶⁹ Wendy LiKamWa McIntosh et al., “Suicide Rates by Occupational Group- 17 States, 2012,” *Weekly* 65, no. 25 (2016): 641-645, <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/65/wr/mm6525a1.htm>

he calls an “invitation to die”: financial failure in a society that values a man according to his financial success.¹⁷⁰



Source: Trends in Suicide by Level of Urbanization — United States, 1999–2015, MMWR (Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report), 66(10), 270-273, 2017.

Health Care

On top of being home to a highly at-risk population, rural areas also face a staggering lack of health care options. Hospitals have been steadily closing in rural communities due to financial difficulties caused in part by “a declining population, economic stagnation, shortages of physicians and other health care professionals, a disproportionate number of elderly, poor, and underinsured residents, and high rates of chronic illness”.¹⁷¹ Just since 2010, 78 rural hospitals have closed, and six others have closed and then reopened.¹⁷² Many others are at risk of closing.¹⁷³

This leaves many rural patients too far from a hospital to receive care within the “golden hour” after heart attacks, trauma and stroke in which treatment is needed to prevent

¹⁷⁰ Eric Ramírez-Ferrero, “The Invitation to Die,” in *Troubled Fields: Men, Emotions, and the Crisis in American Farming* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 13.

¹⁷¹ Sheldon Weisgrau, “Issues in Rural Health: Access, Hospitals, and Reform,” *Health Care Financing Review* 17, no.1 (1995): 1-14, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4193574/pdf/hcfr-17-1-1.pdf>.

¹⁷² “78 Rural Hospital Closures: January 2010- Present,” Cecil G. Sheps Center for Health Services Research, University of North Carolina, accessed April 9, 2017, <http://www.shepscenter.unc.edu/programs-projects/rural-health/rural-hospital-closures/>.

¹⁷³ iVantage Health Analytics, *Rural Relevance- Vulnerability to Value: A Hospital Strength INDEX Study*, published 2016, http://www.chartis.com/resources/files/INDEX_2016_Rural_Relevance_Study_FINAL_Formatted_02_08_16.pdf.

loss of heart muscle and brain tissue”.¹⁷⁴ Non-emergency patients are also affected by the distance. A study published in 2008 showed that oncology patients in small towns and isolated rural areas had to travel for a median of 59 minutes to reach the nearest cancer treatment center¹⁷⁵, and travel distances have likely increased further as more hospitals have closed.

Among those remaining hospitals, many provide poor quality care or have stopped providing certain services altogether. Some have closed their obstetrics units, citing “high costs and a lack of doctors.”¹⁷⁶ Despite being illegal under the Emergency Medical Treatment and Labor Act (EMTALA), in at least 20 cases since 2012, hospitals have turned away or failed to treat women in labor, with heartbreaking consequences. In multiple cases, women in labor had to call for an ambulance from nearby parking lots after being denied help at a local hospital, resulting in at least one stillbirth. Women who do deliver in rural hospitals without maternity wards may not receive appropriate care, either. In one case, a woman with preeclampsia gave birth to a stillborn baby and then died after the hospital failed to treat her. These hospitals are also wholly unequipped to care for babies born in critical condition.¹⁷⁷ All of this is especially alarming considering the host of maternal and neonatal risk factors facing women and infants in rural areas.

The crisis of healthcare availability goes beyond hospitals, though. For example, there are fewer primary care providers and dentists per capita in rural areas than in cities.^{178 179} There is also a shortage of mental health care providers, which is particularly disturbing considering the high rates of mental illness, emotional distress, and suicide in rural communities.¹⁸⁰

Tragically, the lack of rural health care services not only leaves the people who are most in need of medical care without access to treatment, it has also helped *create* one of the most alarming public health crises in recent US history: the opioid epidemic. For the first time, “death rates from overdoses in rural areas now outpace the rate in large metropolitan

¹⁷⁴ Jayne O’Donnell and Laura Ungar, “Rural hospitals in critical condition,” USA Today, accessed April 9, 2017, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2014/11/12/rural-hospital-closings-federal-reimbursement-medicare-aca/18532471/>

¹⁷⁵ Tracy Onega et al., “Geographic access to cancer care in the U.S,” *Cancer* 112, no. 4 (2008): 909-918.

¹⁷⁶ Julie Lasson, “Despite Federal Law, Some Rural Hospitals Still Turn Away Women in Labor,” ProPublica, last modified March 3, 2017. <https://www.propublica.org/article/despite-federal-law-some-rural-hospitals-still-turn-away-women-in-labor>

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Mark P. Doescher, Gina A. Keppel, Susan M. Skillman, and Roger A. Rosenblatt, *The Crisis in Rural Dentistry*, Policy Brief, published April 2009, https://www.ruralhealthweb.org/NRHA/media/Emerge_NRHA/PDFs/Rural_Dentists_PB_2009.pdf

¹⁷⁹ Esther Hing, and Chun-Ju Hsiao, *State Variability in Supply of Office-based Primary Care Providers: United States, 2012*, published May 2014, https://www.ruralhealthweb.org/NRHA/media/Emerge_NRHA/PDFs/db151.pdf.

¹⁸⁰ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, “Rural Behavioral Health: Telehealth Challenges and Opportunities,” *In Brief* 9, no. 2 (2016), <http://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content//SMA16-4989/SMA16-4989.pdf>.

areas”.¹⁸¹ Opiate addiction is likely linked to despair, as Case and Deaton’s latest article argues,¹⁸² but it seems probable that a series of more mundane factors are driving the epidemic’s impact on rural America. Rural jobs (such as farming) are more likely to result in injury, yet rural communities lack access to appropriate pain-management resources, such as physical therapy.¹⁸³ It makes sense, then, that rural states prescribe the most opioid painkillers.¹⁸⁴ This long-term use of opiates puts people at greater risk of addiction, yet when people in rural areas attempt to get help, they may not find it. Only 8.5% of rural hospitals offer substance abuse treatment, and “only about 3 percent of all opioid treatment programs are situated in rural areas”.¹⁸⁵ Rural areas not only lack detox facilities, counselors, and other resources such as AA, they are also much less likely to have access to doctors that can prescribe Suboxone, the most effective treatment for opiate addiction.^{186 187 188 189}

Cumulative Disadvantage

In the national dialogue, rural America is consistently portrayed a certain way: culturally homogenous, geographically located in the Mid-West, and almost entirely white. While it’s true that nationwide, only 4.58% of farms have non-white principal operators, in some states that number is much higher. In Hawaii, for example, 60.73% of farms have non-white principal operators, followed closely by Arizona at 56.91%. The deep South is also home

¹⁸¹ Haeyoun Park and Matthew Bloch, “How the Epidemic of Drug Overdose Deaths Ripples Across America,” *New York Times*, last modified January 19, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/01/07/us/drug-overdose-deaths-in-the-us.html>

¹⁸² Anne Case and Angus Deaton, “Mortality and morbidity in the 21st century,” (paper prepared for the Brookings Panel on Economic Activity, March 23-24, 2017), post-conference version, last modified April 10, 2017, <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/case-deaton-postconference-april-10-2017-with-appendix-figs.pdf>.

¹⁸³ Luke Runyon, “Why is the opioid epidemic hitting rural America particularly hard?” KUNC, last modified January 3, 2017, <http://www.kunc.org/post/why-opioid-epidemic-hitting-rural-america-particularly-hard>

¹⁸⁴ Katherine M. Keyes, Magdalena Cerdá, Joanne E. Brady, Jennifer R. Havens, and Sandro Galea, “Understanding the Rural-Urban Differences in Nonmedical Prescription Opioid Use and Abuse in the United States,” *American Journal of Public Health* 104, no. 2 (2014): e52-e59. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3935688/>.

¹⁸⁵ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, “Rural Behavioral Health: Telehealth Challenges and Opportunities,” *In Brief* 9, no. 2 (2016), <http://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content//SMA16-4989/SMA16-4989.pdf>.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ Luke Runyon, “Why is the opioid epidemic hitting rural America particularly hard?” KUNC, last modified January 3, 2017, <http://www.kunc.org/post/why-opioid-epidemic-hitting-rural-america-particularly-hard>

¹⁸⁸ Jack Healy, “2 of a Farmer’s 3 Children Overdosed. What of the Third- and the Land?” *New York Times*, last modified March 12, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/12/us/opioid-epidemic-rural-farm.html?_r=0

¹⁸⁹ Roger D. Weiss et al., “Adjunctive Counseling During Brief and Extended Buprenorphine- Naloxone Treatment for Prescription Opioid Dependence,” *Archives of General Psychiatry* 68, no. 12 (2011): 1238-1246.

to large numbers of non-white farmers¹⁹⁰. Farmworkers are also overwhelmingly foreign-born, with almost 65% hailing from Mexico.¹⁹¹

This whitewashing does a great disservice to our understanding of rural issues, because Black, Latino, and Native American communities have been disproportionately affected by the rural economic and health care crises. As the former director of the Land Assistance Fund of the Federation of Southern Cooperatives Jerry Pennick stated in 1987, “the farm crisis began for black farmers when blacks began farming...It’s just gotten worse during the general farm crisis”.¹⁹² For example, socially disadvantaged populations are more likely to experience poverty¹⁹³ and live near swine CAFOs.¹⁹⁴ Rural counties with large minority populations are also much more likely to be designated as Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs).¹⁹⁵ Furthermore, the ten states with the highest percentages of socially disadvantaged principal operators had 340% more hospitals at high risk of financial distress in 2015 than the ten states with the highest percentages of white principal operators.^{196 197}

On top of bearing the brunt of rural decline, socially disadvantaged farmers and farm workers also face additional burdens. Farm workers are especially vulnerable since most are migrant workers, and over a third speak no English.¹⁹⁸ Farmworkers make low wages and are often subjected to labor rights violations and female farmworkers are at an increased risk of sexual abuse and harassment in the workplace.^{199 200 201} Florida, in particular, has a shameful and disturbingly recent history of slavery. As recently as 2010, employers were prosecuted for

¹⁹⁰ 2012 Census of Agriculture, United States, Volume 1, Chapter 2: State Level Data, Tables 1 and 54; USDA.gov, accessed April 28, 2017,

https://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2012/Full_Report/Volume_1,_Chapter_2_US_State_Level/

¹⁹¹ National Center for Farmworker Health, *Farmworker Factsheet: Demographics*, published January 2016, http://www.ncfh.org/uploads/3/8/6/8/38685499/naws_ncfh_factsheet_demographics_final_revised.pdf

¹⁹² O.D., “Lean Years for Black Farmers,” *The Progressive*, 1987.

¹⁹³ “Poverty Demographics,” USDA Economic Research Service, last modified March 1, 2017,

<https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/rural-economy-population/rural-poverty-well-being/poverty-demographics/>.

¹⁹⁴ Curtis W. Stofferahn, *Industrialized Farming and Its Relationship to Community Well-Being: An Update of a 2000 Report by Linda Lobao*, published September 2006, <http://www.und.edu/org/ndrural/Lobao%20%20Stofferahn.pdf>.

¹⁹⁵ Janice C. Probst et al, “Person and Place: The Compounding Effects of Race/Ethnicity and Rurality on Health,” *American Journal of Public Health* 94, no. 10 (2004): 1698, <http://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/pdf/10.2105/AJPH.94.10.1695>.

¹⁹⁶ Bryстана Kaufman et al., *Geographic Variation in Risk of Financial Distress among Rural Hospitals*, published 2016.

¹⁹⁷ 2012 Census of Agriculture, United States, Volume 1, Chapter 2: State Level Data, Tables 1 and 54; USDA.gov, accessed April 28, 2017,

¹⁹⁸ National Center for Farmworker Health, *Farmworker Factsheet: Demographics*, published January 2016, http://www.ncfh.org/uploads/3/8/6/8/38685499/naws_ncfh_factsheet_demographics_final_revised.pdf

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Sara Obeidat, “Female Farm Workers Awarded \$17 Million in Florida Abuse Case,” *Frontline*, last modified September 15, 2015, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/female-farm-workers-awarded-17-million-in-florida-abuse-case/>

²⁰¹ Farmworker Justice, *U.S. Department of Labor Enforcement in Agriculture: More Must Be Done to Protect Farmworkers Despite Recent Improvements*, published 2015, <https://www.farmworkerjustice.org/sites/default/files/FarmworkerJusticeDOLenforcementReport2015%20%281%29.pdf>.

“holding six hundred guestworkers from Thailand against their will”²⁰² and forcing them to labor as farmworkers. This was only the latest in a long series of such prosecutions.

“I didn’t even know there were laws or anything that would protect me. He took advantage because he knew I wasn’t going to say anything. It was a trauma that followed me everywhere” (Clarren 2005) -

Black, Latino, and Native American farmers and farmworkers also suffer the daily and enduring impact of discrimination. For

years, researchers puzzled over the fact that the infant mortality rate among Black babies is double that of white babies, regardless of the mother’s income or educational achievement, but that the pattern didn’t hold for the babies of foreign-born Black women. Recently, however, a consensus has begun to emerge in the medical community that the pain of discrimination is not only psychological, and that the sexism and racism that Black women experience, “stacked up over a lifetime, can cause chronic stress, which in turn can damage the biological systems necessary for a healthy pregnancy and birth.”²⁰³ This sort of pain is not generationally bounded, either. An entire body of research has surfaced showing that trauma--such as that caused slavery and genocide--can be passed down to future generations via epigenetics, causing lasting emotional and physical health problems.²⁰⁴ This helps explain why the opioid epidemic has hit Native Americans harder than any other racial or ethnic group--a crisis fueled by generations of trauma on top of the

According to Shirley Sherrod, her grandfather said he would “never borrow any money from Farmers’ Home Administration because it was just a way of taking black folks’ land.” But after the kibbutz-style farming operation her family ran with several others- “the largest tract of black-owned farmland in the country”- was hit by several years of drought, her husband and the farm manager had no choice but to go to the FmHA. There, she said, “the county supervisor told them ‘you’ll get a loan here over my dead body’.”

It took three years to get that emergency loan, and the FmHA didn’t approve them for irrigation. The administration also put a lien on all their assets. The result was both predictable and heartbreaking: “In 1985,” Sherrod said with some

²⁰² “Anti-Slavery Program,” Coalition of Immokalee Workers, accessed April 12, 2017, <http://www.ciw-online.org/slavery/>.

²⁰³ Zoë Carpenter, “What’s Killing America’s Black Infants?” *The Nation*, last modified February 15, 201, <https://www.thenation.com/article/hats-killing-americas-black-infants/>.

²⁰⁴ Mary Annette Pember, “Trauma May Be Woven Into DNA of Native Americans,” *Indian Country Media Network*, last modified May 28, 2015. <https://indiancountrymedianetwork.com/news/native-news/trauma-may-be-woven-into-dna-of-native-americans/>

geographic isolation²⁰⁵ and remarkably easy access to painkillers²⁰⁶ common in rural communities.

Furthermore, throughout history, economic downturns have fueled discrimination, periodically putting racial and religious minorities at an even higher risk of victimization. One analysis found that “cotton price shocks predict lynchings of African Americans in the US South from 1882 to 1930.”²⁰⁷ Then, during the 1980’s farm crisis, right-wing extremist groups such as the KKK, the Posse Comitatus, and the Aryan Nation recruited disenfranchised white farmers using a mix of racist, anti-Semitic conspiracy theories and fraudulent legal schemes that they (falsely) promised would help farmers keep their land.²⁰⁸ This link between economics and discrimination also appears to have influenced the 2016 election, when white rural voters overwhelmingly voted for Donald Trump,²⁰⁹ a candidate endorsed by the KKK.²¹⁰ Anti-Muslim hate groups have proliferated in the last few years,²¹¹ and hate crimes, especially those against Muslims²¹², have been on the rise.²¹³ Unsurprisingly, one analysis found that a State’s level of income inequality is the best predictor of the number of hate crimes per capita it experiences.²¹⁴

The harms that socially disadvantaged farmers experience do not stop there, because discrimination is not just interpersonal; it has been baked into nearly every institution in the United States, including those designed to protect farmers. Black, Native American, Latino, and

²⁰⁵ Christine Vestal, “Fighting Opioid Abuse in Indian Country,” Pew Trusts, last modified December 6, 2016, <http://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/blogs/stateline/2016/12/06/fighting-opioid-abuse-in-indian-country>

²⁰⁶ Nate Hegyi, “Cherokee Nation Sues Wal-Mart, CVS, Walgreens Over Tribal Opioid Crisis,” NPR, last modified April 25, 2017. <http://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2017/04/25/485887058/cherokee-nation-sues-wal-mart-cvs-walgreens-over-tribal-opioid-crisis>

²⁰⁷ Cornelius Christian, “Lynchings, Labour and Cotton in the US South” (Job Market Paper, October 14, 2014), http://sites.bu.edu/neudc/files/2014/10/paper_234.pdf.

²⁰⁸ “Update on the Activities of Far-Right Individuals and Organizations and Programs of Counteraction,” confidential memorandum (Des Moines, IA: Prairiefire Rural Action, Inc., 1987).

²⁰⁹ Rich Morin, “Behind Trump’s win in rural white America: Women joined men in backing him,” Pew Research Center, last modified November 17, 2016, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/11/17/behind-trumps-win-in-rural-white-america-women-joined-men-in-backing-him

²¹⁰ Peter Holley, “KKK’s official newspaper supports Donald Trump for president,” The Washington Post, last modified November 2, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2016/11/01/the-kkks-official-newspaper-has-endorsed-donald-trump-for-president/>

²¹¹ “Hate groups increase for second consecutive year as Trump electrifies radical right,” Southern Poverty Law Center, last modified February 15, 2017, <https://www.splcenter.org/news/2017/02/15/hate-groups-increase-second-consecutive-year-trump-electrifies-radical-right>

²¹² Grant Smith and Daniel Trotta, “U.S. hate crimes up 20 percent in 2016 fueled by election campaign- report,” Reuters, last modified March 13, 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-crime-hate-idUSKBN16L0BO>.

²¹³ Eric Lichtblau, “U.S Hate Crimes Surge 6%, Fueled by Attacks on Muslims,” The New York Times last modified November 14, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/15/us/politics/fbi-hate-crimes-muslims.html?_r=0.

²¹⁴ Maimuna Majumder, “Higher Rates of Hate Crimes Are Tied To Income Inequality,” FiveThirtyEight, last modified January 23, 2017, <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/higher-rates-of-hate-crimes-are-tied-to-income-inequality/>

female farmers have all been subject to USDA discrimination²¹⁵ and the impact has been vast and devastating. The experiences of Black farmers in particular will be discussed in the following section.

²¹⁵ USDA NRCS Outreach and Advocacy Division, *Discrimination Lawsuits*, accessed May 4, 2017, https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/nrcs141p2_015583.pdf

Black Farm Decline and Federal Policy



Source: Tracy McCurdy (AU Land Justice Presentation)

Themes:

- A) Reconstruction/land granting to freed slaves/labor conditions
- B) Agrarian Reform vis-à-vis Black Farmers
- C) Structural Exploitation of Black Farmers
- D) Legal Contestation of Federal policy by Black and other SDFRS
- E) Land Allocation Patterns
- F) Black Agrarianism
- G) Black Land Loss

Introduction

In 1920, 1 in 7 U.S. farms, 950,000 in absolute numbers, were Black-run (the equivalent of 15% of all U.S. farms)^[1]. By 1992, only 1 in 100 farms were Black-operated. As of 2012, there were 44,629 Black farmers in the U.S. (2012 U.S. Agricultural Census) It would be egregiously reductionist to suggest that the issue of farmland loss is the exclusive province of Black family farmers. Disputes over land control and displacement of “landed peoples” is neither exclusive to a country nor a group. In the context of the United States, the dispossession of marginalized peoples, indigenous and African descendants, in particular, evokes a horrific history of genocide, land-grabbing, human bondage, and resource extraction that extends back to the very first settlements here. ^[2] It likewise would be an equally egregious oversight to fail to acknowledge that the disparity between white farm loss and Black farm loss is of such a magnitude that it cannot and must not be relegated to the margins of any discussion on the current farm crisis.

It is a sad truism that the aggressive and systematic consolidation of land into the hands of the few is not exclusively a Black farmer issue – reaching its tentacles, as it does, into the barns and the fields of every small and medium farmer in this nation. However, the character and the methods deployed to dispossess the Black farmer evidence, at an atomic level, motifs of an economic lynching. For Black farmers (as well as other socially disadvantaged farmer ranchers – SDFRs), land loss has been accelerated geometrically due to rampant and sanctioned discrimination by creditors and the USDA – a legacy of the colonial-settler system of land acquisition. A consequence of this is that Black farmers were losing land at a rate 2.5 times that of their white counterparts up through the 1980s. (Black farmland acquired rarely goes to another Black farmer, compounding aggregate Black land loss.)^[3] This discrepancy has been directly linked, in numerous studies (USDA, civil rights organizations, and academia), to the unchecked and subjective discretionary power given to the Farmers Home Administration (FmHA) county supervisors and committees over federal loan distribution (i.e. whom, when, and how much, if any). Several critical and confirmed reports found that USDA loan service decentralization created a sort of “loan lottery”, in which Black farmers disproportionately and consistently lost.

In my research, I sought to understand the dynamics of Black farm decline in the U.S., and to wit, I determined that the period of Reconstruction would be the base period from which I would begin this investigation. This decision was pragmatic, in that it was during this period that Blacks *en masse* became entitled to own land and to bequeath it. The Civil War is commonly constructed as a contest between forces for the emancipation of Black people and those advancing their perpetual bondage. But in deconstructing that premise, one finds ample proof that the contest was fundamentally a question of which type of agricultural system we would perpetuate – a plantation system, in which a mighty few exclusively controlled the means of production and a nation’s natural resources, thereby concentrating their wealth, or one of universal rights to land tenure and parity for those who worked the land. As evidenced by the current state of rural decline, and the institutionalization of land concentration by a few through the dispossession of the many, that question has not been satisfactorily resolved.

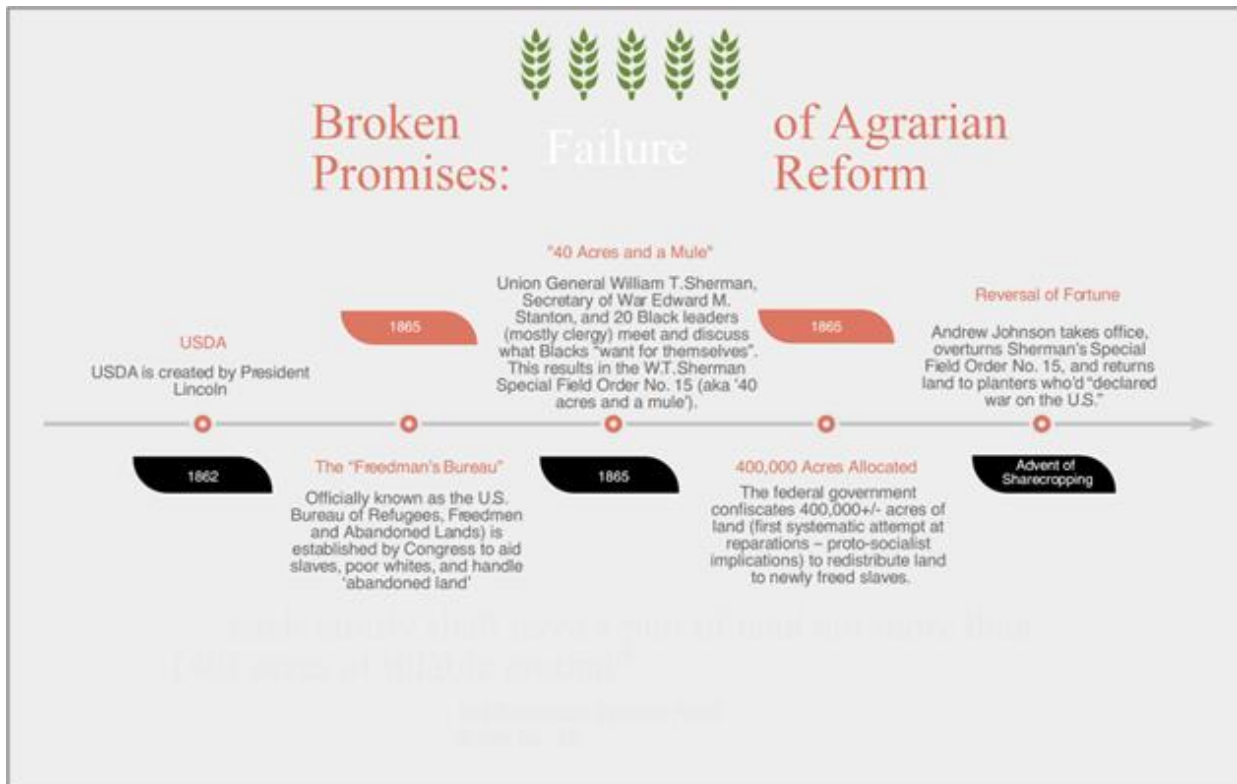
Reconstruction 1865 – 1877^[4]

The Shock of a ‘Wage Labor’ Economy and a ‘Free Labor Force’

Key Points:

- Plantation owners must now pay former slaves, now workers
- Implementation of a wage system was problematic (abandonment of former feudal system)
- Freed slaves were unwilling to work for subsistence wages, seek a ‘livable wage’ or ‘wage parity’
- Confederate currency was useless and legitimate currency is scarce
- Sharecropping became the new labor contract, former slaves enter into these begrudgingly
- Planters expected pre-Emancipation Proclamation labor conditions
- Plantations were decentralized and chain gangs are replaced by Family-Kinship units – the advent of Black Family Farms in the South

Broken Promises: Failure of Agrarian Reform and Redistribution



Source: "The Truth Behind '40 Acres and a Mule'"^[5]

Structural Exploitation of Black Farmers – Declining Terms of Trade

The brief window of opportunity for former slaves (as a group) to become landowners, and to build, accrue, and bequeath wealth, was closed before it fully opened. And what took its place was a new form of racialized control of Black labor, with direct consequences for Black land. The labor conditions for Black farmers were patently regressive. Through every conceivable channel, Black farmers were funneled into a system of indentured servitude virtually identical to their pre-Reconstruction experience. Inputs, essential to farming, could only be purchased by a sole rural lender, often a former plantation owner. This lender of first, last, and only resort (for Black farmers) held monopolistic control over credit – and – where Black Farmers could sell their crops (thus excluding them from the “free market” and the chance for profit and parity). Credit rates charged to Black farmers were exorbitant and the terms of credit commonly included using future crops as collateral, which created debt and land bondage.[6]

Under these terms and conditions, Black farm survival hinged on using all possible acreage for “commodity” or “cash” crops (i.e. cotton), to the detriment of food production. Consequently, Black farmers had to borrow (at inflated rates) to feed themselves and their families. In 1862 Congress made peonage illegal. By the 1870s federal laws prohibited liens on IOUs for “cash rent” to be carried over from year to year, but local authorities and state courts routinely violated these laws with IOUs held for Black farmers, with the result that debt compounded in a way specific to this group.[7]

The penalties exacted for “non-compliance” or neglect”, should a Black sharecropper fail to cultivate a specified amount of land, were abominable (i.e., a sharecropper could be forced to pay for someone else to cultivate the land they operated). In this way, credit was used as a device to dispossess Black farmers, by creating a structure in which any land tenure held by was exceedingly tenuous and the threat of foreclosure imminent. Deprived of the same protections against predatory lending and peonage extended to white farmers, the terms of trade for Reconstruction-era Black farmers were analogous to indentured servitude. With the advent of mechanization and sharecropper migrations North, Black sharecropping in the South declined, but the impacts are multi-generational (economic stagnation and racial economic disparity vis-à-vis the inability of Black farmers to accrue and transfer wealth or land).[8]

How FDR’s ‘New Deal’ Codified Black Disenfranchisement [9]

Background

At the time of the New Deal’s enactment, the South’s economy was predominantly agricultural (in 1930, 53% of southern workers were engaged in agriculture versus 19% in manufacturing). Nationally, Blacks were more dependent on agricultural employment than whites and largely “confined to the Cotton Belt”. (Black agricultural workers in the 11 former Confederate states constituted 87.4% of all Black farm workers.) Cotton and tobacco, plantation crop staples, provided two-thirds of a white southern farmer’s cash income and the large scale and labor

intensive nature of producing cotton made the demand for cheap labor paramount for them. The bulk of this labor pool came from Black sharecroppers and tenant farmers. And the feudalistic plantation system offered virtually no opportunity for land ownership or advancement for Black farmers, with Blacks consistently and illegally paid less than their white counterparts. Central to this racialized hegemony was the influence of southern congressmen.

The Stakes

Late 19th and early 20th century laws were on the books that made it a criminal offense for sharecroppers and tenant farmers to refuse to begin or complete work they'd received an advance for (whether or not they could, or already had, repaid it), effectively forcing them to remain on plantations as severely underpaid labor, in several southern states. These laws remained on the books for decades, albeit inconsistently enforced, until the late 1980s (in some states).[10] In short, a matrix of laws permitting tacit Black bondage, placed a stranglehold on Post-Reconstruction Black labor. These laws were calculated to create an oversupply of labor, which consequently depressed southern agricultural wages to a fraction of their Northern equivalents, and in so doing, provided an economic adjustment that more than compensated white plantation owners for the grievous disruption caused by emancipating their former serfs. In this way, federal law was used to substitute racial inferiority with economic inferiority along racial lines.

At the time the New Deal was being negotiated, southern congressmen held over half of the committee chairmanships, and a majority of leadership positions in every New Deal Congress. The support of these leaders for President Roosevelt's proposed social and economic program depended on it not disturbing "southern agricultural, industrial, or racial patterns". Extending the overtime, minimum wage, and several other provisions of the New Deal to Blacks was considered a clear assault on these patterns. Roosevelt, although born a northerner, "understood and sympathized" with the South and believed, justly, that "any direct attempt to reform traditional racial and class patterns" would imperil the support for his administration of southern Congressional leaders. Thus, due to the self-interest of key individuals in the Roosevelt administration, a series of discriminatory modifications were made to the New Deal. The following are a select group of these:

Key Legislation [11]

1933 – Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA) – meant less work for 1,000s of Black cotton sharecroppers. This Act attempted to increase the prices for cotton, by reducing the acreage allowed for cotton production. The first acres to be cut from production would invariably be those workers by Black tenant farmers and sharecroppers. When Department of Agriculture legal officials attempted to prohibit this practice, southern congressmen and prominent officials (such as Secretary of Agriculture Henry Wallace) opposed them, ostensibly, to ensure southern support of the New Deal. This was no idle worry, as southern congressmen had already made plain their willingness to tank the New Deal, if it threatened white economic hegemony.

1933 – National Industrial Recovery Act – is estimated to have cost some 500,000 Black people (particularly in the South) their jobs. Created to institutionalize “fair competition”, this Act introduced minimum wages and maximum hours for employees. The enforcement arm of this was the National Recovery Administration (NRA). Labor codes used to ensure compliance were modified so that occupations that were generally performed by whites were covered, while others were excluded. Moreover, Black employees were often listed at a lower job classification than the one they actually performed. Most NRA codes typically narrowed the wage differential between the North and South, but conceded a significantly lower minimum wage standard for southern employers. And it was common for industry codes to list a state as “southern”, if most of the employees within that (who worked in that industry) were Black. President Roosevelt refused to acknowledge or redress these inequities. No codes of fair employment were created for domestic and agricultural workers, the two professions dominated by Blacks in the South.

1935 – Tennessee Valley Authority (FDR’s taxpayer-funded, government-power-generating monopoly) floods 730,000 acres; white farmers receive settlements. Tenant farmers (a large percentage of which are Black) receive no compensation for losses.

1935 – Social Security Act (aka Old Age Insurance) excluded agricultural workers (60% of the nation’s Black population were agricultural workers) and domestic workers. “The standard assumption that the standard of living of the Negro and his cost of living do not rise above the barest subsistence” was clearly evident in the practice of paying eligible Blacks lower Social Security benefits than their white contemporaries.

1938 - The Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) was part of a suite of legislation and executive orders designed to raise wages and lower unemployment. But while Blacks (and other minorities) contended with the lowest wages and highest rates of unemployment in the nation, their ability to receive the protections granted to their white peers was virulently and inexorably blocked at every turn.

Figure 1.

Occupational category	White	Negro	Other	Total, all races
Agriculture	8,192,181	1,987,839	291,978	10,471,998
Domestic and personal service	3,268,725	1,576,205	197,521	5,042,451
Total workers excluded from coverage	11,460,906	3,564,044	489,499	15,514,449
Percentage of excluded workers	74	23	3	100
Total workers in all occupations	42,584,49	5,503,53	741,88	48,829,920

	7	5	8
Excluded workforce as a percentage of total workers	27	65	66[10] . . .

Source: Census Bureau (1933, Table 12, p. 24).[12]

NOTE: . . . = not applicable.

In 1933, unemployment for Blacks was twice the national average. But when it came to relief benefits for Blacks, despite the copious need of this group, the prevailing attitude of a sufficient number of white southerners was that relief spending would “raise the Negro to the white man’s level”. Thus, any relief funds allocated, which the New Deal channeled through states, were routinely lower for Blacks than for whites. Through various tactics, such as those mentioned above, Blacks were corralled into underpaid agricultural labor in the South (even forcibly prevented from taking better paying jobs), in order to ensure the economic prosperity of white plantation owners and the perpetuity of the plantation system, half a century after it had been abolished.

Flawed by Design: Uneven USDA Program Access

Timeline:

1982 – U.S. Civil Rights Commission publishes 196-page report that exposes the causal links between USDA policies (which privilege “capital intensive farming”) and rampant discrimination within the Farmers Home Administration (FmHA), and Black farming and farmland loss; moreover, the report lays bare the fact that Black farmers received a disproportionately smaller amount of FmHA loans – with loans to them consistently smaller than those to comparable white farm operations.[13] The agency was found to “disproportionately encourage liquidation, foreclosure on mortgages”, and to fail to inform at-risk farmers of options for farm rescue (deferral relief). (*Rural Catholic Life*, July 1984, p. 7)

1983 – President Reagan kills USDA Office of Civil Rights[14]

1996 – USDA Civil Rights Office is reopened; USDA report confirms crop disaster payments and loan discrimination against minorities (from 1990–1995). Payments to discrimination victims often came after a farm had foreclosed.[15]

1997 – USDA Civil Rights Team finds agency’s system for handling civil rights complaints is in “shambles”[16]

1998 – USDA Commission on Small Farms admits “historical discrimination against minorities”[17]

Both civil society and the USDA confirm a pervasive “culture of impunity” throughout the agency (i.e. the process for addressing complaints about employment and program benefits is

woefully inadequate and there are virtually no consequences when USDA personnel violate USDA anti-discrimination policy).

1999 – GAO report found that 44% of program discrimination and 64% of employment discrimination cases were backlogged over a year[18]

Latino farmers in Florida affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Wilma were told that there was no disaster relief and weren't invited to add their names to the local Farm Service Agency (FSA) list of potential beneficiaries, once it became available.

2007: The State of the USDA [19]

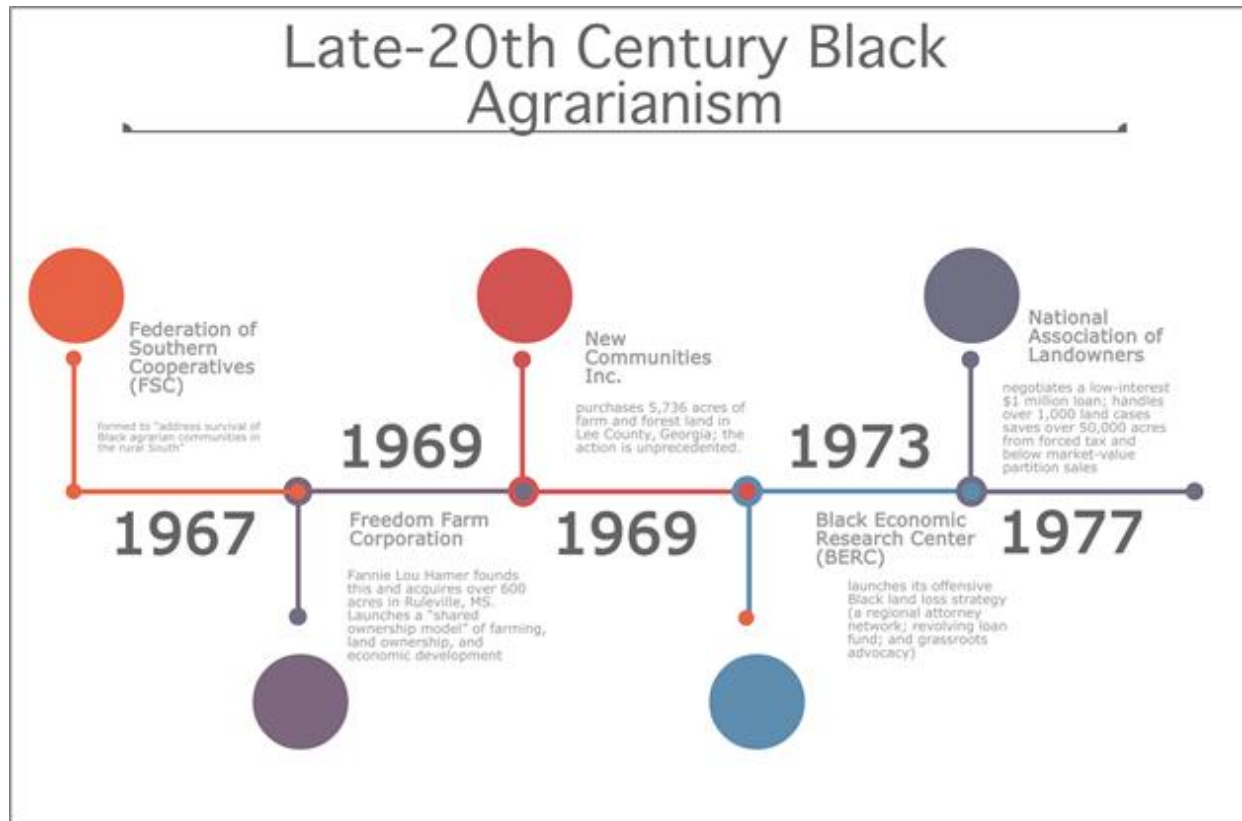
Key Findings

- Benefits remain concentrated on 'cash crops' that are cost-prohibitive for small and socially-disadvantaged farmers to produce
- The *Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)* – a program created to support conservation efforts by small and socially-disadvantaged farmers – has been coopted by large farms and other conservation groups (the pool of eligible farmers is expanded, while the program's funds are reduced)
- Outreach/targeting/technical assistance to socially disadvantaged farmers remains consistently insufficient
- Program benefits are inequitably distributed, with 5% of POCs only receiving 1% of benefits
- USDA inconsistently collects data on POCs/SDFRs, thus thwarting the ability of Congress to accurately gauge this population and allocate USDA funds for this group accordingly (this was especially acute with Native producers, where it had been routine to count an entire reservation as one producer)
- Producers of Color (POCs) remain systemically excluded from program delivery decision-making positions within USDA (on county farm committees and as Farm Service Agency staff). As of 2007, according to an Oxfam report, only 90 of 7,882 committee members around the country were Black.

2012 Postscript:

The USDA has taken several actions to address some of its aforementioned shortcomings. It has aligned with grassroots farming groups, such as, the National Black Farmers Association, the Landowners Association of Texas, the Texas Small Farmers & Ranchers Community Based Organization, and 100 Ranchers, created the Minority Farmers Advisory Committee as an outreach tool, and launched a microloan program targeting new and small farmers and ranchers. Additionally, modifications have been made to the county committees within its Farm Service Agency (FSA), to ensure minority representation. More research is needed to determine how effective these partnerships are at enabling equal access for Blacks and other SDFRs to USDA programs and support.[20]

Late-20th Century Black Agrarianism [21]



Additional Actions:

1968 – 500+ Black Nationalists form the Republic of New Afrika (RNA)

1971 – RNA enters into a land purchase agreement with a Black landowner in MS, the purchase is foiled by FBI interventions

1982 – The Land Loss Prevention Project begins working to provide legal defense to curb the “alarming rate of Black land loss in North Carolina”

2010 - After years of litigation, NCI receives a \$12.5 million settlement in 2010 (as a part of the *Pigford* class action) and purchases a 1,600-acre former plantation (originally owned by one of the largest slave owners in Georgia, General Hartwell Hill Tarver). The site, *Restora*, opened in 2014 and boasts a working collective farm and museum.

“We can’t destroy people’s history, their future, without there being a great deal of justifiable rage.” (*Rural Catholic Life*, November 1985. p.7)

Mr. Pigford goes to Washington: SDFR Legal Actions [22]

1997 – *Pigford vs. Glickman* class-action lawsuit against USDA (represented 22,000 Black farmers)

1999 - *Pigford* claimants win lawsuit; \$2.3 billion; settlement is the largest civil rights settlement in U.S. history. However, the settlement only allows for claims that took place during 1981 – 1996 window and payout restricted claimants to one of two tracks:

- a) \$50,000 upfront (regardless of the degree of loss)
- b) Larger amount later, if the claimant can provide substantial documentation

The Bush administration spent \$12 million to contest the *Pigford* claims. Many farmer-claimants were denied. (It was estimated that only 1 in 10 claimants received any payment).[22] Even if all 22,000 claimants took the \$50,000 payment option, and had been fully compensated, the government would still get out of paying \$1.2 billion dollars it agreed they were entitled to. Most claimants had neither the time nor resources to pursue track two.

1999 – Native American farmers and ranchers file a discrimination class-action suit against USDA (The *Keepseagle* Case). The case is settled for \$760 million in 2010.

2000 – Latino and female farmers (the *Garcia* Case and the *Love* Case, respectively) are offered \$1.3 billion to settle their class-action discrimination suits against USDA; claimants are given the option to receive \$50,000 upfront or continue to pursue their case. The majority of the claims were dismissed as “fraudulent”, with little recourse for claimants to challenge this decision, and many feel, without sufficient (or any) grounds for doing so.

2008 – President Obama and Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack signal a “new civil rights era at the USDA”. Decide to reopen *Pigford* case (*Pigford II*), in attempt to address payout-gap of *Pigford I* and in response to concerns about the handling of it. Obama commits another \$1.25 billion to Black farmers excluded from the first case. Right-wing media and congressmen rally around the Shirley Sherrod case and remove funding for *Pigford II* from their budgets. It’s still in the air.

“The most basic and important public policy question of our day is that of land tenure and what kind of a system of agricultural production we want.”
(*Rural Catholic Life*, November 1985, p. 19)

Land Allocation Patterns

There is a widespread perception that U.S. farmers are, and always were, white. Where does this come from? Federal land allocation, via homesteading grants, were largely opportunities for white ownership of farmland (although there were some Black homesteaders as well). The size of a farm’s acreage is directly linked with its ability to receive USDA supports, and in a virtuous cycle, those supports enable a farm operation to expand, and more importantly, to persist. Farm viability is a matter of scale, and the scale of an operation correlates consistently with the racial profile of the farm owner. That correlation has historical antecedents:

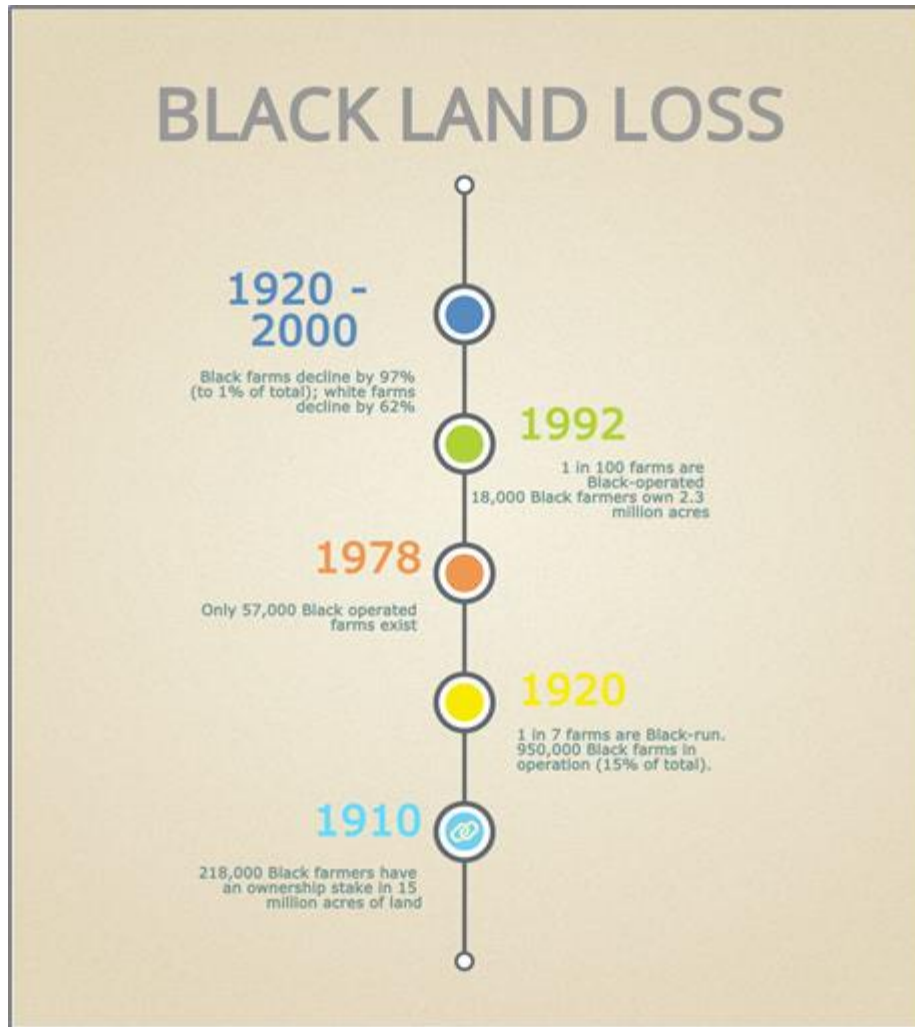
Since the 1930s, in fact, the average farm size has grown from 150 acres to more than 440 acres today—although three-quarters of all farms are still less than 100 acres.¹⁰ Small farmers—a disproportionate number of whom are minorities who often lack political clout—receive relatively little support from the government. In 2000, small farmers received an average of \$1,552 in government subsidies, compared with \$43,385 for large farms.¹¹ Benefits also varied significantly by race. About 34 percent of white farmers received government payments in 2002, compared with 18 percent of black farmers. On average, whites received more than 2.5 times the amount of farm payments going to black farmers—\$9,300 compared with \$3,460 for blacks...[23]

What accounts for this discrepancy?

When farmland was parceled out to homesteaders in the 18th and 19th centuries, most African Americans were either slaves or sharecroppers, while American Indians were being forcibly driven off their ancestral lands. Those who did own land usually had to make do with marginal property that earlier generations of settlers had bypassed.

In the contemporary context, a law passed in 1985 called “The Quantified Base Law” allows local FSA agents to assess the base acreage of a farm, which is then used to determine the amount of any USDA payouts (loans, grants, disaster relief, etc.). This ‘base acreage’ is locked at the amount determined by FSA in 1985. Black farmers consistently report that the amount assessed is an underestimate of their previous or current actual yield/acreage, resulting in gross underpayments to them. The only way this law can be changed is through Congress.[24]

Black Land Loss by the Numbers [25]



Sources:

1910 – 218,000 Black farmers have an ownership stake in 15 million acres of land[26]

1920 – 1 in 7 farms are Black-run. 950,000 Black farms in operation (15% of total).[27]

1978 – only 57,000 Black operated farms exist (down 93% from 1910, based on 240,000 Black-operated farms)[28]

1920–2000 – Black farms decline by 97% (to 1% of total); white farms decline by 62%.[29]

1992 – 1 in 100 farms are Black-operated; 18,000 Black farmers own 2.3 million acres.[30]

2012 – There were 44,629 Black farmers, comprising 1.4% of all farmers ([2012 U.S. Agricultural Census](#))

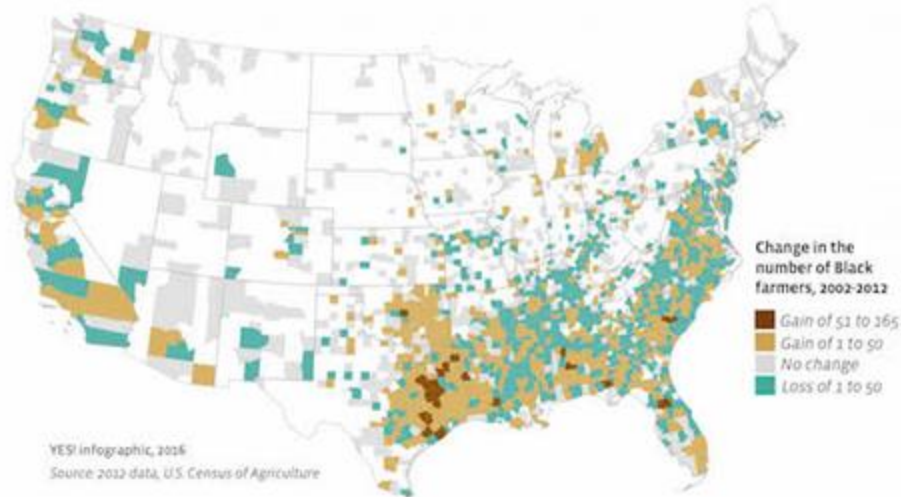
	Black-operated Farms	All Farms
Farm Size		
< 50 acres	49	39
50 to 179 acres	37	30
180 to 999 acres	13	23
1,000 acres or more	1	8
Total	100	100
Farm Sales		
< \$10,000	79	56
\$10,000 to \$49,999	15	19
\$50,000 to \$249,999	4	13
\$250,000 to \$999,999	1	8
\$1,000,000 or more	1	4
Total	100	100

Source: USDA NASS, 2012 Census of Agriculture.

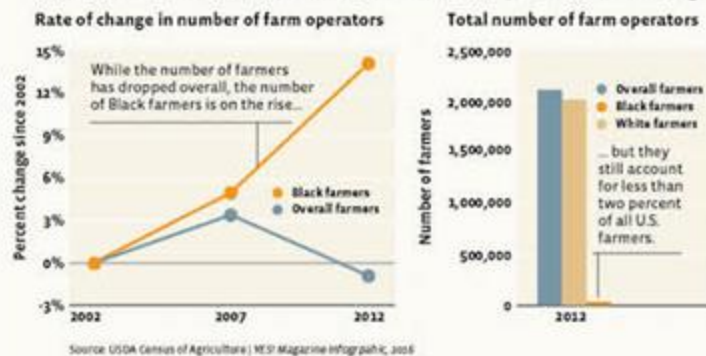
Given the pervasive and the formidable nature of institutionalized racism in the years leading up to Reconstruction, and the strides that culminated in the Civil Rights movement, one would expect throughout this period an upward trend of Black farmland ownership and management, analogous to the pattern of Black representation in other industries. In the 150 years after Reconstruction, what emerged was quite the opposite. However, between 2007 and 2012, the number of Black farmers *grew* by 12%, a happy trend that it is hoped augurs a renaissance in Black farming (although it must be mentioned that some of this is due to the first-time reporting of many veteran Black farmers on the US Agricultural Census).

The Resurgence of Black Farmers

Overall, the U.S. has gained thousands of Black farmers since 2002, 67% of that growth occurred in Texas. But the historic decline of Black farmers continues in much of the country.



Number of U.S. Black Farmers Is Tiny, But Growing



Source: Yes! Magazine, July 27, 2016.

Ending Discrimination: The 2501 Program

The Outreach and assistance for Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers Competitive Grants Program (commonly referred to as the 2501 Program) has been lauded as a clear response to the lack of adequate outreach for SDFRs, but this assessment is paradoxically inconsistent. The question of this program's reach and efficacy was raised multiple times throughout the 2017 "100 Farmers" conference in Oklahoma City, OK (March 15 – 17 2017).

The responses ranged from genuine enthusiasm, to disinterested dismissal. I observed among the respondents that those who favored the program tended to be beginning farmers, while those who were dismissive of it were older, long-time farmers. I state these observations with the caveat that this group of farmers can only be considered a very small sample of the total SFDR population and experience. Nonetheless, the responses of conference participants suggest there is more engagement with beginning and new SDFRs. On the surface, it appears that these farmers are being given preferential treatment to their seniors. This notwithstanding, as of this writing, there is consensus both within and without the family farm and Black agrarian movements that this program is severely underfunded, under-allocated, and that the recent expansion of the program to include veterans and other SDFRs, without proportional increase in funding, has effectively reduced the program's already meager sources to the point of inutility.

Conclusion

In a 1985 edition of *Rural Catholic Life* titled, "Violence in America", which focused on the rise of right-wing extremism in rural America, the contributors vehemently affirmed that the Church could not passively, or explicitly, condone acts of violence against minorities, which were being instigated by extremist groups exploiting the rural crisis of the day. At this time, the authors estimated that one out of three family farms would be lost, along with the livelihoods and ways of life that were tied to them. The authors were unstinting in their empathy for farmers economically and emotionally dislocated, underserved, and socially dispossessed; in their reproach of federal agricultural policies (the 1981 Farm Bill, in particular) that undermined the viability of family farms; and in their denouncement of acts of aggression against rural minorities, who themselves were duly devastated by the crisis. Noteworthy is the linkage between rural crisis, farm foreclosure, and the appeal of hate groups in the rural sector (as discussed in the previous section on Social Impacts).

Some thirty years later, these correlations persist – and so must the fight to unmask the true root cause of family farm collapse. Central to this fight is the work of those in the family farm justice movement (such as our community partners, Rural Coalition and National Family Farms Coalition) to expose the truest form of violence, the covert, psychological, and systemic violence of institutions and policies which obstruct the individual's ability to secure basic human rights: food, housing, education, and livable wage employment, and to preserve their way of life. The authors conclude that America's justice agenda must include "a just farm bill, tax and land reform, and a recommitment to sustainable agriculture" as top priorities. This call for justice is universal and timeless, harkening back to calls from environmental and labor organizations to incorporate meaningful labor protections in NAFTA, and evokes the solidarity of farm operators and workers in the South and North, whose collective survival hinges on halting the neo-liberalization of global agriculture.

"We strongly believe that the family farm is the best means of developing this just food system. It is becoming increasingly clear that the issues connecting food and agriculture

interlink urban and rural people as never before. The fate of our family farms is not an abstract concern. What happens to them will determine whether or not a land-owning elite will increasingly control our basic human right to food.”[31] This is a right shared by all peoples, and it is our hope that SDFRs will continue, for generations to come, to meaningfully participate in a vibrant, sustainable, and equitable food system. In the following section on Food Sovereignty, we look deeply at the facets of an ecologically balanced, environmentally crucial, and socially inclusive food system.

Case Studies

Study: May Wang, CA (Hmong/beginning farmer)

Ms. Wang is a beginning tenant farmer who practices crop diversity on a small plot of rented land.

Because she doesn't own the land, she is excluded from disaster relief benefits. The cost of land is prohibitive and her rent is constantly changing, perpetuating her tenant-farmer status.

Language is a barrier, but if outreach and technical assistance could be offered for Hmong first generation farmers, and if the paperwork was less intimidating, she feels she'd be more encouraged to apply for relief funds.

"Shut Out: How US farm programs fail minority farmers". Oxfam. 2007




Case Study: Candice Wright, NC (Black farmer)

According to a 2006 assessment by the Center for Rural Affairs, Value-Added Producer Grants (VAPG) applications are too complex and have too short of an application period, though they are supposed to help small/innovative farmers. Ms. Wright cites this as a barrier to accessing these funds.

If the forms were simplified, and technical assistance was readily available, farmers like Ms. Wright, would have an easier time applying.

“Shut Out: How US farm programs fail minority farmers”. Oxfam. 2007



Endnotes

[1] Oxfam, “Shut Out: How US farm programs fail minority farmers”. *Oxfam*. 2007

[2] David Ostendorf. “Those who control the land control people.” *Prairie Journal* vol. 4. no. 2. (Summer 1993): p. 8-9

[3] John Bookser-Feister. “Slippin’ Away: The American Black Farmer”. *Catholic Rural Life*. July 1984. p. 7.

[4] Devon Douglas-Bowers. “Debt Slavery: The Forgotten History of Sharecropping”. *The Hampton Institute*. November 7, 2013. <http://www.hamptoninstitute.org/sharecropping.html#.WPB1AIWcGP>

[5] Henry Louis Gates, Jr., “The Truth Behind ‘40 Acres and a Mule’”, *The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross*, accessed March 3, 2017, <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/african-americans-many-rivers-to-cross/history/the-truth-behind-40-acres-and-a-mule/>.

[6] Devon Douglas-Bowers. “Debt Slavery: The Forgotten History of Sharecropping”, *The Hampton Institute*, November 7, 2013, <http://www.hamptoninstitute.org/sharecropping.html#.WLoZoH DPIX>

[7] (Ibid.)

[8] (Ibid.)

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- [9] Marc Linder, "Farm Workers and the Fair Labor Standards Act: Racial Discrimination in the New Deal", *Texas Law Review*, 65, (1987): pgs. 1335 – 13939, Iowa Research Online
- [10] Alabama, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, North Carolina, and South Carolina, to name a few.
- [11] Marc Linder, "Farm Workers and the Fair Labor Standards Act: Racial Discrimination in the New Deal", *Texas Law Review*, 65, (1987): pgs. 1335 – 13939, Iowa Research Online
- [12] Larry DeWitt. "The Decision to Exclude Agricultural and Domestic Workers from the 1935 Social Security Act". *Social Security Bulletin*, 70, No. 4, (2010). <https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/ssb/v70n4/v70n4p49.html>.
- [13] The Nation, "The Real Story of Racism at the USDA". *The Nation*. July 23, 2010. <https://www.thenation.com/article/real-story-racism-usda/>
- [14] (Ibid.)
- [15] (Ibid.)
- [16] (Ibid.)
- [17] (Ibid.)
- [18] (Ibid.)
- [19] (Ibid.)
- [20] Sylvia A. Harvey. "Number of Black Farmers in U.S. Is Growing, Thanks in Part to the New Policies at the USDA" *Yes! Magazine*, July 27, 2016.
- [21] Dania C. Davy, et al. "Black Agrarianism: Resistance". *Food First*. 6. (Fall 2016): 2-6.
- [22] The Nation, "The Real Story of Racism at the USDA". *The Nation*. July 23, 2010. <https://www.thenation.com/article/real-story-racism-usda/>
- [23] Oxfam, "Shut Out: How US farm programs fail minority farmers". *Oxfam*. 2007
- [24] Ben Burkett and others interviewed at the OBHRI "100 Farmers" conference, Oklahoma City, OK, March, 2017.
- [25] The Nation, "The Real Story of Racism at the USDA". *The Nation*. July 23, 2010. <https://www.thenation.com/article/real-story-racism-usda/>. These numbers are approximations, given the USDA has inconsistently tracked/recorded Black farmland.
- [26] (Ibid.)
- [27] (Ibid.)
- [28] (Ibid.)
- [29] (Ibid.)
- [30] (Ibid.)
- [31] John Bookser-Feister. "Slippin' Away: The American Black Farmer". *Catholic Rural Life*. July 1984. p. 7

Food Sovereignty

RC and NFFC are both members of La Via Campesina (The Peasant's Way), a global coalition of representing more than 200 million small and medium-size farmers, landless people, women farmers, indigenous people, migrants and agricultural workers that works to defend small-scale sustainable agriculture and opposes corporate driven agriculture and transnational companies²¹⁶ La Via Campesina (LVC) has rallied behind the concept of food sovereignty in their efforts to transform the global food system, and both Rural Coalition (RC) and National Family Farm Coalition (NFFC) have adopted the term in their work. This section will contribute to an understanding of food sovereignty in the United States by presenting an analysis that draws upon our research presented throughout the earlier sections of this briefing paper while braiding in insights offered by RC and NFFC. We will focus on connecting the activism and community organizing of RC and NFFC with the global food sovereignty movement.

Our motivation to include such a discussion stems from concerns that some of RC's and NFFC's global allies do not always fully understand that the crises in the Global South amongst rural communities and small scale producers have parallels in the United States. There is a common misconception that all agriculture in the U.S. is solely composed of large and industrialized farmers and rich white farmers. However, this is obviously not the case. The farmers and communities that RC and NFFC offer visible proof. The global food sovereignty movement also needs to encompass the needs and struggles of these people in the U.S. Pitting farmers in one country against farmers in another country obscures the ways in which land concentration and market consolidation is a global phenomenon driven by vested corporate interests. As will be discussed, the food sovereignty movement recognizes corporate agribusiness as the main antagonist in the struggle for the rights of small scale producers. However, some actors calling for food sovereignty do not recognize how many farmers in the U.S. share in this struggle.

NFFC and RC are working to represent this domestic U.S. struggle to the world. As clearly stated on NFFC's Food Sovereignty webpage, NFFC recognizes the role U.S. farm policy has played in the current global food crisis: "Decades of inequitable farm and trade policy has devastated the fabric of family farm agriculture and rural communities in the U.S. and around the world", and "the reform U.S. farm policy is essential to rebuilding a sustainable family farm agriculture system and a healthful, safe food supply". However, an essential part of NFFC's and RC's role in the international space is to not only reform U.S. policy that affects farmers globally, but to build solidarity between farmers inside and outside the U.S. NFFC lists the fourth and fifth items of "What We Fight For" on their food sovereignty webpage as "The representation of international peasant struggles in the United States through La Via Campesina" and "Shining a spotlight on the global food crisis and the U.S. policy reforms that are necessary to stop it".²¹⁷

²¹⁶ La Via Campesina (LVC), "The International Peasant's Voice," Published on Wednesday, 09 February 2011, <https://www.viacampesina.org/en/index.php/organisation-mainmenu-44/>

²¹⁷ National Family Farm Coalition (NFFC), "Food Sovereignty," accessed on May 4, 2017.

This section of the briefing report will contribute to the work already being done by NFFC and RC to build solidarity between their constituents and farmers globally. First, we will lay out an introduction to food sovereignty. Next, we will offer analysis on the intersections between each of the previously covered topics of this briefing paper, the work of RC and NFFC, and the food sovereignty movement as whole. This analysis will be split up into three thematic subsections based on the main research topics of the briefing paper: agricultural trade and economic policy; racism and inequalities in U.S. agriculture; and rural crises. Each of these subsections will start with a brief review of the food sovereignty literature relevant to the given theme and then will discuss how the U.S. context influences the ways which RC and NFFC pursue food sovereignty.

Introduction to Food Sovereignty

At the NGO Forum to the 1996 World Food Summit in Rome, LVC presented food sovereignty as a solution to food insecurity. The statement called for the right of all nations to shape their own agricultural and food policies without having to commit macroeconomic restructuring and trade liberalization, thus permitting each nation to achieve levels of food self-sufficiency deemed appropriate while respecting rights of cultural and productive diversity. Further, LVC iterated that food was not a commodity and markets alone could not ensure food security.²¹⁸ Food sovereignty advocates mostly agree that the centralization and globalization of agriculture – i.e. the consolidation of land ownership in the capital intensive agricultural system that begun under the Green Revolution and that was exacerbated by the privatization demands of the World Bank and IMF - undermines the abilities of agrarian peoples to produce food for self-reliance.²¹⁹ After this initial declaration, other organizations outside of LVC began to adopt the language of food sovereignty and subsequent food sovereignty declarations specified that all people and communities had the right to make decisions in the food system, not just nation states.²²⁰

In 2007, the International Planning Committee on Food Sovereignty organized the Forum for Food Sovereignty in Sélingué, Mali, where about 500 delegates of diverse organizations and institutions representing indigenous people, fisher folk, women, environmentalists, scholars, consumers and trade unions from more than 80 countries adopted the "Declaration of Nyéléni". The declaration proposedly conceptualized food sovereignty in ways that move beyond a sole focus on the producers and production, and that brought rough consumers into the movement and asserted the human rights of all people suffering from inequality and oppression.²²¹

²¹⁸ La Via Campesina (LVC), "Appendix 1" in *Food sovereignty: Reconnecting food, nature & community*, ed. Annette Aurelie Desmarais and Nettie Wiebe Hannah Wittman, (Oxford: Pambazuka, 2010).

²¹⁹ Alison Hope Alkohn, and Teresa Marie Mares, "Food sovereignty in US food movements: radical visions and neoliberal constraints," *Agriculture and Human Values* 29, no. 3 (2012): 347-359.

²²⁰ Philip McMichael, "Historicizing food sovereignty," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 41, no. 6 (2014): 933-957.

²²¹ María Elena Martínez-Torres, and Peter M. Rosset, "Diálogo de saberes in La Vía Campesina: food sovereignty and agroecology," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 41, no. 6 (2014): 979-997.

Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It puts the aspirations and needs of those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations.²²²

The six declarations that come out of the forum Nyéléni made very clear that above all, food sovereignty is about “the right of democratic control over food and food producing”.²²³

Several scholars of food sovereignty use the food regime framework originally laid out by sociologists Harriet Friedman and Philip McMichael in the late 1980’s. Food regime analysis splits up the history of global agricultural systems into three time periods, each governed by separate actors and with distinct sets of rules and norms. The first regime was led by the British until World War II, and then the US dominated until around the 1980’s, when a crisis of low commodity prices ushered in an era that McMichael calls the ‘corporate food regime.’²²⁴ Many food sovereignty scholars and activists, including LVC and the Nyéléni Declaration, explicitly place food sovereignty in opposition to the corporate food regime. The food sovereignty movement presents alternatives to the food regime by opposing neoliberalism and the Uruguay Round of agricultural liberalization (Holt-Gimenez and Shattuck, 2012). The original 1996 food sovereignty declaration challenged the ‘neoliberal’ restructuring globally imposed upon countries in the Global South by the WB, IMF and WTO in the 1980’s and 1990’s that led to the massive dislocation of small scale producers.²²⁵ McMichael believes that food sovereignty is most viable alternative available to this regime that is characterized by volatile prices, concentration of farming land, and consolidation of market control.²²⁶

Food Sovereignty on Trade and Economic Policy

The food sovereignty movement has engaged trade issues from the beginning. In the 1996 Rome declaration they state, “Food is first and foremost a source of nutrition and only secondarily an item of trade”.²²⁷ The movement has always been clear that food sovereignty requires an end export dumping and subsidized exports. This has been one of the most unanimous and consistent calls coming from the movement. Furthermore, fair prices have always been a main goal, “Food prices in domestic and international markets must be regulated and reflect the true cost of producing that food,” so that profit in trade is not based on exploitation of vulnerable low earning producers and degradation of the environment.²²⁸

²²² “DECLARATION OF NYÉLÉNI”, <https://nyeleni.org/spip.php?article290>, (2007).

²²³ Eric Holt Giménez, and Annie Shattuck, “Food crises, food regimes and food movements: rumblings of reform or tides of transformation?,” *The Journal of peasant studies* 38, no. 1 (2011): 128.

²²⁴ Philip McMichael, “A food regime genealogy,” *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 36, no. 1 (2009): 139-169.

²²⁵ Philip McMichael, “The land question in the food sovereignty project,” *Globalizations* 12, no. 4 (2015): 434-451.

²²⁶ McMichael, “Historicizing food sovereignty.”

²²⁷ LVC, “Appendix 1,” 197.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 198.

These positions on trade tie directly into food sovereignty's definitions as the right to define food and farming policy. The 1996 declaration found it unacceptable that trade and production decisions were increasingly being dictated by the need for foreign currency to meet high debt loads. Thus, a major focus of the food sovereignty movement has been to allow developing countries certain forms of protection for developing countries domestic markets.²²⁹ The food sovereignty's engages with trade policy through protests of the World Trade Organization,²³⁰ calls for the re-regulation of commodity markets²³¹, and fights to replace oppressive trade relations and corporate influence in agricultural policy with socially-embedded markets and democratic governance.²³² But how do these demands translate into more concrete policy change?

Burnett & Murphy claim the food sovereignty movement is mostly vague in its position on trade and generally discusses trade in terms of creating fairer trade (though the movement does not support the current fair trade certification approach).²³³ Burnett & Murphy see some less ambiguous demands in calls for achieving better wages for farm workers, creating bilateral and multilateral trade policies that are fair to all participating countries, meeting local food needs first before exporting surplus, and only importing agricultural products to fill the demands that cannot be made by local production. However, we would add that LVC has actually made some more specific claims, such as the statement coming from the Cancun summit that adds to the demands on trade and economic policy we have already mentioned. The Cancun statement declares that food sovereignty necessitates government intervention to meet six conditions, including the control of production (i.e. supply management) in order to avoid surpluses, and international commodity agreements to control supply and guarantee fair prices to peasant producers for export products such as coffee and cotton.²³⁴

Thus, the food sovereignty does not reject trade, rather it just emphasizes local production first, but Burnett & Murphy reasonably worry that critiques by prominent figures within the movement often give the impression that the movement as a whole rejects trade. Burnett and Murphy argue that, because a significant amount of people that make up the food sovereignty movement are producers that rely on exports to make a living, or are workers employed in export oriented food production, the movement needs to step up efforts to engage these stakeholders and their needs while forming positions on trade.²³⁵

Burnett and Murphy also argue that the frequent calls by the FSM to abolish the WTO and relegate international food policy to the United Nations and the Food and Agricultural

²²⁹ C. Laroche Dupraz and Angèle Postolle, "Food sovereignty and agricultural trade policy commitments: How much leeway do West African nations have?," *Food Policy* 38 (2013): 115-125.

²³⁰ Annette Aurélie Desmarais, *La vía campesina*, (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2012).

²³¹ Peter Rosset, "Food sovereignty and the contemporary food crisis," *Development* 51, no. 4 (2008): 460-463.

²³² Madeleine Fairbairn, "Framing transformation: the counter-hegemonic potential of food sovereignty in the US context," *Agriculture and Human Values* 29, no. 2 (2012): 217-230.

²³³ Kim Burnett and Sophia Murphy. "What place for international trade in food sovereignty?," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 41, no. 6 (2014): 1065-1084.

²³⁴ LVC, "Statement On Agriculture After Cancun," (2003), <http://viacampesina.org/en/index.php/actions-and-events-mainmenu-26/10-years-of-wto-is-enough-mainmenu-35/368-statement-on-agriculture-after-cancun>.

²³⁵ Burnett and Murphy, "What place for international trade."

Organization (FAO) should be reconsidered. They argue that, because the FAO does not currently have any jurisdiction to enforce policy while the WTO does, and because it would not be wise to separate food and agricultural trade policy from other trade policies, the movement should take advantage of the more recent "cracks in the edifice" of the WTO to act in the short term to reform the WTO into a more democratic organization that can foster food sovereignty.²³⁶

Connecting U.S. and Global Food Sovereignty on Trade and Economic Policy

NFFC makes clear in their outline for the Food Family Farms Act (FFFA) that food sovereignty means "Trade and farm policy should respect every country's right to establish policies based on needs and traditions for food security, conservation of natural resources, and distribution of economic opportunity" and "Prosperity for U.S. farmers must not come at the expense of farmers and peasants in other nations".²³⁷ However, as to the dumping of U.S. agricultural commodities on countries in the Global South will not simply entail an end to U.S. farm subsidies, as has been claimed by some developing countries, academics, and actors within the food sovereignty movement.²³⁸ Instead, the FFFA proposes that, "The United States must take the lead in promoting international commodity agreements aimed at setting floor prices and equitable sharing of responsibility for international reserves and supply management, thus eliminating the destructive practice of dumping".²³⁹ Furthermore, the FFFA calls for adoption of provisions that enact Section 22 of the 1933 Agricultural Adjustment Act that allows for a limitation on imports of a specific commodity if that level disrupts the fair domestic market price for U.S. farmers.²⁴⁰

Achieving food sovereignty in the Global South is intimately connected and reflected in the achievement of food sovereignty in the U.S. (and in other countries of the Global North, but that remains beyond the scope of this paper). Given the influence of domestic U.S. commodity prices on prices globally, achieving parity for farmers U.S. farmers would likely lift the prices farmers receive throughout the Global South.²⁴¹ U.S. farm safety net programs, including disaster crop insurance programs and the Commodity Title funded Price Loss Coverage (PLC) and Agricultural Risk Coverage (ARC) programs, allow for farmers to stay afloat while receiving farm gate prices that are frequently either below or barely above the cost of production. Dumping occurs when these low priced commodities are sold into the markets of countries who have been pressured to reduce domestic barriers and agricultural supports as part of the neoliberal paradigm. The example we provided in this briefing paper of the effects of NAFTA on the Mexican countryside are infamous. In fact, the displacement of Mexican peasant farmers in the wake of NAFTA was one of the main drivers of the creation of LVC and

²³⁶ *ibid.*

²³⁷ NFFC, "Food For Family Farms Act: A Proposal for the 2007 U.S. Farm Bill," (2007), <http://nffc.net/Learn/Fact%20Sheets/FFFA2007.pdf>, 5.

²³⁸ Dupraz and Postolle, "Food Sovereignty and agricultural trade policy."

²³⁹ NFFC, "Food For Family Farms," 5.

²⁴⁰ *ibid.*

²⁴¹ Brad Wilson, "Food Sovereignty as Government Intervention", Brad Wilson's Z Blogs (blog), September 22, 2015, <https://zcomm.org/zblogs/food-sovereignty-as-government-intervention/>.

the food sovereignty movement.²⁴² However, eliminating these programs would make it even more difficult to obtain a livable income from farming in the U.S. Despite some promising programs, such as Whole Farm Revenue Protection (discussed in the section *The Farm Safety Net: Crop Insurance and Crop Commodity Program*) and certain funding for conservation (discussed in *Briefing Paper #2*), much U.S. federal ‘subsidies’ favor large scale conventional industrial agriculture.

This is why NFFC and RC argue for the reinstatement of parity through supply management (the details of which we outlined in *The History of Parity within U.S. Agricultural Policy*). Small to medium scale farmers in the U.S. would benefit more from fair prices than the current structure of the farm safety net. Higher prices and an end to overproduction would simultaneously make farming a more equitable and viable livelihood opportunity for all farmers in the U.S. while ending dumping on other countries. However, to be most effective, NFFC promotes global parity through intentionally coordinated floor prices, supply management and strategic reserves.²⁴³

The global food sovereignty movement has potential allies in farmers, ranchers and other food producers of the U.S. and should support the trade and economic policies pursued by NFFC and RC. Of course, the food sovereignty movement as a whole is in no way unanimously opposed to U.S. policies promoting parity and protection of domestic market’s (it is outside the scope of this paper to do a general survey of the food sovereignty movement make definitive statements on dominant attitudes towards U.S. policy). However, it seems at least some actors within the movement have denied that agriculture in the U.S. needs any support, and some have even claimed that developing countries will only temporarily need protections and supports until those countries can achieve stronger domestic agricultural markets.²⁴⁴ The work of RC and NFFC and the history of farming crisis in the U.S. show that this is not true. State intervention is required even in highly industrialized countries to protect farmers from volatility in global markets and forces of capitalist dispossession.

Food Sovereignty and the Rural Crisis

The food sovereignty movement decidedly challenges the urban bias historically engrained in international development theory and policy. McMichael shows that the development paradigm exported post-WWII from the Global North to newly independent ex-colonial states made the normative claim that progress entailed the end of subsistence production and the migration of peoples out of rural areas and into urban settings and industrial employment. International institutions, such as the IMF and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (now part of the World Bank Group) pushed this development model on the world. During the same period, the Rockefeller Foundation and the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) led the way for the Green Revolution, which spread U.S. style industrial agriculture to other countries with the

²⁴² Maria Elena Martinez-Torres, and Peter M. Rosset, "La Vía Campesina: the birth and evolution of a transnational social movement," *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 37, no. 1 (2010): 149-175.

²⁴³ NFFC, "Food For Family Farms."

²⁴⁴ For example, see Dupraz and Postolle, "Food sovereignty and agricultural trade policy".

support of provisions attached food aid of surplus U.S. commodities. The Green Revolution assumed that the main goal of all agriculture was to increase overall yield efficiency. This was pursued through the adoption of technologies (high-yielding seed varieties, fertilizers, synthetic pesticides, and fossil fuel driven machinery) that increased yields while reducing the need for labor. Colonialism had already concentrated ownership of productive lands and exploited rural communities for labor on plantations producing commodities for export to the Europe. This created persistent poverty and hunger and recurring famines throughout much of the Global South. The Green Revolution and neglect by many post-colonial governments for small scale producers led to further concentration of rural lands, decreased the need for hired labor on larger farms, and thus Development theory predicted that countries in the Global South would mimic the historical trajectories of the Global North. But the Global South experienced much variability in its ability to industrialize and absorb the displaced labor. Though some countries attempted to stem the rural crisis through land reform, the era of 'globalization' (the Structural Adjustment Programs of the WB and IMF, WTO's liberalization of agriculture, and free trade agreements) has led to huge spikes in the amount displaced rural people.²⁴⁵

Food Sovereignty and the U.S. Rural Crisis

Food sovereignty has been 'reframed' in the U.S to accommodate for the country's predominantly urban consumer population.²⁴⁶ While the food sovereignty movement has roots in mostly rural agrarian contexts, only around 2% of the U.S. population is directly involved in food production.²⁴⁷ Thus, the majority of the literature on U.S. food sovereignty has focused on the urban and consumer aspects of food sovereignty.²⁴⁸ Much less academic work has been published on how food sovereignty rural/agrarian issues in the U.S.

The section of this briefing report *The Social Impacts of Rural Economic Decline* show how the loss of livelihood opportunities and the lack of public investment continues to detrimentally affect rural communities and peoples in the U.S. This crisis mirrors global phenomena. The majority of rural to urban/sub-urban migration has already occurred in the U.S. while most countries Global South are still majority or near majority rural and engaged in primary food production, but many of these are countries are undergoing long term trends of increased migration to urban areas.²⁴⁹ We have already discussed how the appearance of fairly high rates of income for U.S. farmers obscures how much of this income is supplemented with off-farm and employment and erases the history of widespread farm bankruptcy and foreclosure. Agriculture is the generally main provider of livelihoods in rural areas, both

²⁴⁵ Philip McMichael, *Development and Social Change: A Global Perspective: A Global Perspective*, Sage Publications, 2011.

²⁴⁶ Fairbairn 2012, "Framing Transformation".

²⁴⁷ Molly Anderson, "The role of US consumers and producers in food sovereignty," *Food Sovereignty: A Critical Dialogue*, Yale, CT (14-15 September) (2013).

²⁴⁸ For example, see Maggie Dickinson, "Beyond the minimally adequate Diet: Food Stamps and Food Sovereignty in the US," In *Conference Paper*, vol. 23. 2013.

²⁴⁹ McMichael, "Development and Social Change."

directly and indirectly.²⁵⁰ Thus, the crisis in rural America is historically connected to the concentration of farming lands and the consolidation of power and profitable opportunities in agricultural markets.

The realities of current demographics in the U.S. understandably leads food and agricultural movements to focus on the country's urban and consumer populations. However, the ongoing rural crises necessitates support beyond the limited amount of people that can participate in the alternative markets that have been created for locally and sustainably produced foods. Food sovereignty moves beyond these 'market-driven' approaches carried out by most food movements in the U.S. (save some notable exceptions) by challenging the political economy of the food regime that favors private profits at the expense of more widespread health, food, environmental and human security.²⁵¹ Greater change will require political actions. As such, RC and NFFC seek national policies and changes to international trade regimes to make agricultural a more equitable endeavor in the U.S. that will keep current small to medium scale producers on the land while creating new opportunities for people to return farming or take up the activity for the first time. As discussed in the section *Food Sovereignty on Trade and Economic Policy*, although RC and NFFC have historically been primarily concerned with the immediate protection of communities they represent in the U.S., both of the coalitions know that truly empowering their communities will require deeper changes in the current political-economy that would also benefit producers in the Global South. Solidarity between farmers in all countries can help build the strength of the efforts to breakdown and replace the current agri-food system. Thus, RC and NFFC plays a vital role in the revitalization of rural communities and the creation of food sovereignty on a global scale.

Food Sovereignty and (Racial) Inequality

Perry outlines how exploitation and division of labor in the global food system has been drawn across racial lines since colonialism, "In light of this, there's no denying the racial roots of countermovements".²⁵² On the other hand, Perry argues that LVC may contribute to the tendency of the literature on food and agricultural countermovement to obfuscate the issue of race: "This may be an illusion advanced further by La Via Campesina, that, solidarity amongst all people - regardless of their race, who are involved in agriculture and land stewardship – should mobilize against the hegemonic control by agri-foods corporation's".²⁵³ However, Perry's makes clear this analysis does not mean that the food sovereignty movement is not relevant to people of color, but the rather opposite is the case. Food sovereignty is expressed on the ground through in local resistance movements like the Movimiento Sin Tierra (Landless Worker's Movement) in Brazil, which brings together various indigenous and other people of

²⁵⁰ Rudy Arredondo (National Latinos Farmers and Ranchers Association), personal communication.

²⁵¹ Alison Hope Alkon, "Food justice, food sovereignty and the challenge of neoliberalism," at *Food sovereignty: a critical dialogue*, International Conference at Yale University, September (2013).

²⁵² Perrey, Shoshana Devra. "Food Regimes, Race and The Coloniality of Power Linking histories in the food sovereignty movement." at *Food sovereignty: a critical dialogue*, International Conference at Yale University, September (2013), 18.

²⁵³ *ibid.*, 18.

color groups: “Food sovereignty builds from these resistance movements to craft futures where food rights reflect the historical roots of ethnic heritages and express thriving food traditions in the modern world (18)”. According to Perry, the problems food sovereignty has with more explicitly engaging issues of race stem from conceptualization, adopted by LCV, of ‘peasant’ as an analytical category:

Peasants are those who, from a Eurocentric perspective, come from a poor, farming class of people living in the countryside. ‘Peasants’ masks group’s ancestral identities and shifts the focus towards their labor, in a way that reproduces the Eurocentric optic as well. This is a problem because it diverges from locating the differential treatment of peasants, or workers, based on historical differences, ethnic specificity and land-based rights. Rather, it lumps diverse groups of people into the homogenous category of ‘peasants’. (13-14)

Raj Patel affirms that ‘radical egalitarianism’ is a precondition for food sovereignty.²⁵⁴ In other words, achieving food sovereignty requires first tackling the power imbalances present within patriarchal, classist, and racist societies. His argument flows from the way in which he conceptualizes food sovereignty as “the right to have rights”.

While food sovereignties definitions and declarations have been diverse, they mostly share some core fundamental principles, many of which are framed in rights based language. Organization like LVC require adherence to certain principles to be part of the organization, but members are assured that doing so does not entail the forgoing of their organization’s or community’s autonomy to handle their own internal matters. The overarching unified goal of the food sovereignty movement is the right for nations, peoples, states, regions, people to be able to craft their own agrarian and food policy. In this, food sovereignty allows for geographies other than the nation-state to have sovereignty—those that have been crafted by their own histories and contours of resistance. As such, Patel believes that food sovereignty’s most radical aspect is this “layering of jurisdictions over which rights can be exercised” that challenges the prevailing notion of the nation-state the ultimate authority on the purveyance of rights. In place of the nation state system, Patel sees the food sovereignty movement as shaping a ‘cosmopolitan federalism’ characterized by different sovereignties and political jurisdictions laying on top one another. However, Patel argues food sovereignty’s call to various cultural, social, political and material rights mean nothing unless those rights are extended to all people. Thus, he asserts that a ‘moral universalism’ of fundamentally shared principles of rights must be established before the overlapping jurisdictions can undertake the mission of defining their own food and agricultural policies.

The Nyéléni Declaration mirrors Patel’s calls for radical egalitarianism: “Food sovereignty implies new social relations free of oppression and inequality between men and

²⁵⁴ Raj Patel, “What Does Food Sovereignty Look Like?”, *Food sovereignty: Reconnecting food, nature & community*, ed. Annette Aurelie Desmarais, Nettie Wiebe, and Hannah Wittman, Oxford: Pambazuka, 2010, 186-196.

women, peoples, racial groups, social and economic classes and generations”.²⁵⁵ However, as Patel points out, LVC and the food sovereignty movement face some obstacles in reaching goals of a more equitable society. The family farm has long served as a space of reproducing patriarchal power relations. Also, the food sovereignty movement has not explicitly engaged the issue of farm workers.²⁵⁶

Addressing Inequality in the U.S. for Food Sovereignty.

As we have shown in the section *Black Farm Decline and Federal Policy*, Black farmers and ranchers in the U.S. suffered land loss through a long history of institutional racism. In similar manners, other people of color, women, and indigenous people have mostly been forcibly excluded from agriculture in the U.S., and there is a societal perception of farming as white male activity.

Brent et al point out that the food sovereignty movement is generally fairly silent on the issue of race, but U.S. based movements such as food justice, immigrant labor justice movement, agrarian justice have established that food sovereignty in the U.S. necessitates fighting for racial justice and against racism.²⁵⁷ Brent et al categorize NFFC as part of the agrarian justice movement and explains how NFFC has connected U.S. histories of struggles against Black land loss and the corporate consolidation of the food industry with the global struggle against dispossession caused by the rush for farmland. NFFC also challenges preconceived notions in the U.S. of men as farm operators. This was specifically pointed out by one representative at March 2017 NFFC annual board meeting that the practicum team attended in Washington, DC. During a discussion on NFFC’s unique role in the agricultural space, she brought up how impressed she was with the amount of women members when she came onto NFFC in the 1980’s.

RC explicitly fights for more for more egalitarian policies in agriculture. Their first guiding principles states, “Justice and equal opportunity are the right of all people regardless of race, sex, or place of residence”.²⁵⁸ RC seeks to empower historically discriminated farmers and ranchers through working in the policy space and building community. They have played a role in achieving several key policies, such as the Section 2501 Outreach to Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers Program and the requirement for USDA agents to give receipts of service that prevents those agents from denying that they had met with a farmer or rancher claiming discrimination. In the section *Ending Discrimination: The 2501 Program*, we already discussed the issues with lack of sufficient funding for the program. Currently, RC supports the strengthening of the authorities the Office of Advocacy and Outreach (OAO) and equipping the office with the full funding necessary to carry out its functions. The 2008 Farm Bill authorized the OAO to improve access to USDA programs and improve the viability and

²⁵⁵ Nyéléni Declaration 2007.

²⁵⁶ Patel, “What Does Food Sovereignty Look Like?”

²⁵⁷ Zoe W. Brent, Christina M. Schiavoni, and Alberto Alonso-Fradejas. "Contextualising food sovereignty: the politics of convergence among movements in the USA." *Third World Quarterly* 36, no. 3 (2015): 618-635.

²⁵⁸ Rural Coalition, “About us,” accessed May 4, 2017. <https://www.ruralco.org/about-us/>.

profitability of small, beginning or socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers.²⁵⁹The OAO is to carry this out through monitoring, evaluating and setting goals for each of the agencies within the USDA. By making various reforms that will increase the efficacy of the OAO, RC hope establish a foundation for annually restoring the 2501 program to no less than its previous \$20 million a year.

LVC considers agrarian reform to be an essential part of food sovereignty. LVC's invocation of agrarian reform is very different than the agrarian reform called for by international institutions such as the World Bank that seek to formalize land tenure (i.e. privatization). Instead, LVC calls the redistribution of land and productive resources from concentrated ownership towards control by small scale producers. The history of land loss in the U.S. and the injustices that have been levied against people of color both support the argument that there should be redistributive agrarian reform in the U.S. However, as Roman-Alcala points out, the particular entrenched nature of private property regimes and prevailing ideologies make land redistribution politically impractical in the U.S. Also, the U.S. is mostly urban and lacks a large population actively seeking to return to food production. As such, while many member in NFFC and RC maintain more radical long-term goals, their immediate actions seek political reforms to end discrimination in federal programs while making farming a more viable and equitable activity for all.²⁶⁰ One such structural change (frequently discussed at RC) is an end to the 'competitive' mentality of the USDA's grant awarding process. This reform is subtly more radical than it may seem. It has the potential—if combined with an end to discrimination in all forms— to lay the grounds for a much more egalitarian distribution of wealth.

Conclusions on U.S. Food Sovereignty

The socio-economic history of rural U.S. and the political economic history of the farm bill have fostered inequalities and injustices along several lines that impede the foundations of food sovereignty. These barriers shape the ways in which advocates must engage the state to open the space for food sovereignty and influence how RC and NFFC pursue change. In this section of the briefing paper, we have embedded some of RC's and NFFC's advocacy efforts within the global food sovereignty movement and the academic literature on food sovereignty. RC and NFFC build solidarity between the communities they represent and global allies such as LVC to coalesce a stronger movement worldwide for justice in food and agriculture. We have only covered a small sampling of the insights NFFC and RC offer for the discussion on U.S. food sovereignty. There are many avenues for further research on the relationship between food sovereignty and more specific U.S. policy.

Concluding Remarks

²⁵⁹ "Briefing Paper on Authorities and Actions for Office of Advocacy and Outreach," distributed at Rural Coalition/GOAT Meeting, March 14, 2016.

²⁶⁰ Antonio Roman-Alcalá, "Broadening the land question in food sovereignty to northern settings: A case study of occupy the farm," *Globalizations* 12, no. 4 (2015): 545-558.

Our research has sought to contribute to a deeper understanding of certain social and political-economic aspects of U.S. agriculture and the Farm Bill. We began with a discussion on the U.S.'s commitment to trade in various bilateral and multilateral arrangements and examined the debates over how such commitments affect farmers in the U.S. and globally. The briefing paper then worked down from this broad international scale to the national and local. We discussed how current crop insurance programs serve as a valuable but imperfect fix to issues of chronically low prices and agriculturally related risk. This naturally led into an exploration on the history of parity and supply management in U.S. agriculture. These two historical tools within the Farm Bill could serve well to address the ongoing U.S. rural and agrarian crises. Our third section examined the social aspects of these crises. The fourth section shed light on how and why these crises have been especially acute amongst the Black community. We concluded by tying our research back into the international context with an analysis of the Rural Coalition and National Family Farm Coalition's role in the food sovereignty movement. Trade, economic, social and racial justice are elusive yet obtainable within the U.S. agricultural policy space. We hope our research can contribute to future debate on those matters and strengthen the work of our community partners.

Timeline Linking Crop Insurance, Price Parity, and Multilateral Trade Agreements (1930s to Present):

1930s

- **1938 - Federal Crop Insurance Act**
 - Establishes Commodity Credit Corporation
 - Characterized by high program costs, low participation
- **1938 - The Agricultural Adjustment Act**
 - In the second round, passed with price supports between 52 and 75 percent of parity

1940s

- **1941 - Steagal Commodity Credit Act**
 - Section Four established no less than 85 percent parity for all agricultural commodities, and Section Three increased Commodity Credit Corporation's resources to \$2,650,000,000.
 - Steagall Amendment expanded commodities covered by AAA.
- **1942 - Stabilization Act**
 - Increased parity to 90 percent and extended this level two years past the end of WWII
- **1948 - Agricultural Act (also known as the Hope-Aiken Act)**
 - Article II set parity at a sliding scale that would no longer base parity prices on the 1909-1914 level.
 - Parity was adjusted to levels based on the previous 10 years of prices beginning in 1950.
- January 1, 1948 *General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade* Implemented
 - Promoted the following principles:
 - Most Favored Nation Status: All members must provide the same terms of trade to other members.
 - Reciprocity: Members must give the same conditions on trade that it receives.
 - Transparency: Disclosure of national trade policies by all members.
 - Tariff Binding and Reduction: Decrease protectionism and enhance greater flows of goods.
 - Impact on Agriculture: Agriculture was exempt from the GATT rules and would not be approached until Uruguay Rounds.

1950s

- **1954 - Agricultural Trade Development and Assistance Act** (also known as Public Law 480)
 - Created export subsidies and international food aid.

1970s

-
- **1973 - Agriculture and Consumer Protection Act**
 - Removed the concept of parity from price supports
 - Suspended production controls
 - **1977 - Food and Agriculture Act: Title XI**
 - **Grain Reserves:** Encourages producers to store wheat and feed grains when they are in abundant supply and extend the time for their orderly marketing. This is done through the purchasing of buffer stocks, which is acquired through a CCC loan program. A Farmer receives a CCC loan, holding a specified quantity off the market. The loan is either paid off with interest to regain control of the grain, or it is defaulted turning the grain over to the CCC.
 - **International Emergency Food Reserve:** The President is given authority to negotiate with foreign nations in the establishment of an international food reserve for countries facing humanitarian crises.

- **1978 - Rural Coalition Formed**

1980s

- **1980 - Federal Crop Insurance Act passed**
 - Introduced public-private partnerships in crop insurance
 - Aimed to increase participation and lower costs
 - Expanded number of commodities insured
- **January 4, 1980- January 2, 1981 - The Soviet Grain Embargo**
 - In response to the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan, the United States implemented a partial embargo to the USSR on shipments of corn, wheat, and soy beans. The embargo restricted supply from 17 million metric tons to 8 million metric tons.
 - To insulate grain prices for the shock of the embargo, the US government did the following:
 - Raised incentives for farmers to participate in the farmer-owned grain reserve programs
 - Permitted the CCC to accept the contracts initially designated towards the Soviet Union
 - Allowed the CCC to purchase wheat and corn for use in food assistance programs
 - Increased levels of federal financing and insurance for US grain reserves.
 - 1980 - **Emergency Export Act of 1980**
 - Took 4 million tons of wheat that was embargoed to the USSR in a US held International food security reserve
- 1980s - U.S. Farm Crisis
- **1985 - Food Security Act**
 - Reduced Farm Support Prices, but provided export expansion programs
 - Reduced the target prices of commodity goods
- October 3, 1987 - *Canada Free Trade Agreement (CFTA)* Signed by National Leaders
- September 28, 1988 - *Canada Free Trade Agreement* Signed by Reagan and Approved by Congress:

- **1986 - National Family Farm Coalition Formed**

- January 1, 1989 - *Canada Free Trade Agreement (CFTA)* implemented
 - Agricultural provisions for the CFTA include:
 - Eliminate nearly all tariffs within 10 years (by 1/1/1998), temporary tariff protection for fresh fruits and vegetables,
 - U.S. liberalize imports of Canadian products containing sugar,
 - Canada eliminate import licenses for U.S. grain and their products when the level of support provided by U.S. programs declined to the level in Canada. But either country could impose import restrictions if grain imports increased due to changes in grain policies in the exporting country,
 - Each country exempt from the meat import restrictions of the other,
 - Neither country to apply direct subsidies to exports to the other,
 - Procedures specified for settling disputes and reviewing trade barriers.

1990s

- **1990 - Food, Agriculture, Conservation, and Trade Act**
- December 17, 1992 - *North Agreement Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)* Signed by George H. Bush
- **1993 - La Via Campesina Movement Starts**
 - Both NFFC and RC are members of LVC
- November 20, 1993 - *NAFTA* Signed by Congress
- December 8, 1993 - *NAFTA* Implementation Act Signed into law
- January 1, 1994 - *NAFTA* Implemented
 - Agricultural Components from the CFTA were further extended into *NAFTA*.
- **March 25, 1993 - Rural Coalition Speaking at Congressional Trade Briefing on NAFTA**
 - Board chair Carlos Marentes testified at a Congressional Trade Meeting. Then, he and Lorette Picciano then spoke at the Tri-National Trade Meeting to discuss *NAFTA*'s impact on rural development and agriculture. (Rural Coalition 1994)
- **1994 - Federal Crop Insurance Reform Act**
- January 1, 1995 - *World Trade Organization (WTO)* Implemented
 - **WTO Agreement on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures:** This agreement sets the rules on a member-government's ability to set regulations on food safety and animal and plant safety.
 - **Agreement on Agriculture**
 - **Market Access:** Non-tariff border measures are replaced by tariffs,
 - **Domestic Support:** Levels of Domestic support are stratified into boxes. These include Green, Amber, and Blue.
 - **Export Subsidies:** Economies are required to reduce the total value of export subsidies and the quantity of subsidized exports over a six-year and ten year period for developed and developing economies respectively.
 - **Least-Developed and Net Food-Importing Developing Countries:** The Uruguay round resulted in an agreement among the ministers to ensure that food aid would not be adversely impacted by market liberalization.

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- **1996 - The Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act of 1996**
 - Price Floors, Ceiling and Reserve Supply Program Eliminated
 - Created the Risk Management Agency (RMA)
 - Now administered the Federal Crop Insurance Program
 - Ended price supports and production controls
 - **November 30, 1999 - Seattle WTO Protest:**
 - In November of 1999, a series of protests took place during a WTO ministerial meeting in Seattle, Washington, rallying against further developments in international trade. Dissenting people representing workers unions, environmentalists, consumer protection groups, labor rights groups rallied against the progression of the WTO.

2000s

- **2000 - Agricultural Risk Protection Act**
 - Made it easier for farmers to access insurance
 - Expanded variety of insurance options available
 - Premium subsidy level greatly increased
- **2002 - The Farm Security and Rural Investment Act**
 - Continued income supports (direct payments) and export subsidies
- **September 4-11, 2003 - Cancún Protests at WTO Ministerial Meeting**
- **November 17-21, 2003 - Miami Protests to Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA)**
- **August 5, 2004 - Dominican Republic-Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR) Signed**
- **January 1, 2005 - FTAA Negotiations Cease**
- **2008 - Food, Conservation, and Energy Act**
- **January 1, 2009 - NAFTA Integration Process Concluded**

2010s

- **July 8-11, 2013 - Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (US-EU) Negotiations Begin**
- **2014 - Agriculture Act**
 - Created PLC and ARC
 - Retired ACRE, countercyclical commodity programs
 - Created option of Whole Farm Revenue Protection
- **October 5, 2015 - Trans-Pacific Partnership Negotiations Conclude**
- **February 4, 2016 - Trans-Pacific Partnership Signed**
- **January 23, 2017 - U.S. Withdraws from TPP Negotiation**
 - President Donald J. Trump signs executive order officially withdrawing U.S. involvement in the TPP.

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