

2023

FARM BILL

A NEW YORK STATE POLICY PLATFORM



A collaboration between Equity
Advocates, Black Farmers United
NYS and Food for the Spirit .

CAMPAIGN HISTORY

The Farm Bill is a federal law renewed every five years that governs our farm and food policy. The most recent Farm Bill, the Agricultural Act of 2018, expires September 2023. We now have an opportunity to reshape our food system through this legislation and build upon the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, which has continued to highlight the importance of our local and regional food systems and supply chains as NYS recovers from the ongoing health and economic impact of the pandemic.

To engage New Yorkers in shaping the 2023 Farm Bill, Equity Advocates, Black Farmers United NYS , and Food for the Spirit co-hosted a series of virtual Farm Bill listening sessions and additional targeted outreach from the Summer of 2022 through February 2023. We prioritized outreach to and participation of Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) farmers, producers, practitioners in New York State and those with direct experience with Farm Bill programs. Over 300 New Yorkers informed the development of these recommendations on how the 2023 Farm Bill can better support them in terms of land access, urban agriculture, climate change, community food project funding, nutrition, local and regional food systems, and more.

Our collective Farm Bill recommendations are as follows:

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Next Farm Bill Must Be a Racial Justice Bill.

Progress towards a just food system requires us to acknowledge and address the historic and ongoing structural racism embedded in our food system and to actively promote food sovereignty and racial equity. We advocate for ensuring equity in all Farm Bill policies as a way to offset discrimination in communities that have historically been marginalized. Equity and justice must be at the center of every facet of the next Farm Bill if we hope to eliminate inequities throughout the food and farm economy and repair historical and ongoing discrimination against farmers and communities of color, Tribal Nations, and food and farm workers.

- 1. Direct the USDA to conduct and publish on the USDA website an equity assessment of Farm Bill programs** by collecting data and reporting on where funds are awarded by region, demographics, and what match is required for the program to address disparities in access.
- 2. Direct the USDA to gather and publish baseline DEI data** on grant and loan applicants and awards with the goal of producing more equitable funding outcomes.
- 3. Increase representation of BIPOC farmers and alternative food system stakeholders in USDA's policy and grant making decisions**, including those who serve on review panels and identify resources to provide stipends for grant reviewers.
- 4. Provide a sliding scale approach to USDA programs** such as decreasing required matches depending on applicants' budgets, consider creating an universal application, and provide "turnkey" grants (no match required) for program requests less than \$50,000 for one-year requests.
- 5. Improve the USDA census process and data** collection to more accurately identify BIPOC farmers in New York State and around the country.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Farm Bill Program Applications are Overly Burdensome and USDA Must Provide Increased Support.

USDA Must Reduce Inherent Barriers to Access in Applications..

Participants consistently expressed a need for additional support and technical assistance from the USDA to navigate farm bill programs, make application processes less burdensome, and ensure funding is equitably and justly distributed, issues that can be addressed through the following recommendations:

- 1. Increase funding and support for targeted outreach about USDA programs that support local & regional food systems, BIPOC farmers, producers and practitioners in NYS to meet high interest and need.** Many participants who attended our Farm Bill listening sessions were unaware of a distinct number of grants which would have greatly benefited their farms and organizations due to the lack of outreach to their communities. In addition, many participants did not know who their local USDA contact is, pointing to the need for and a local point of contact for the agency in each region of the state, ideally in all communities.
- 2. USDA should provide technical assistance & resources for grant writing and reporting to level the playing field,** potentially through a resource like the SBA funded Procurement Technical Assistance Centers (PTAC), which provides technical assistance to small businesses interested in selling products or services to governments or through a USDA funded shared grant-writer available to applicants. Some grants have language built in that a percentage of the funding can be used to pay a grant writer but they'd get paid only if the organization wins the award. We would encourage more of this language.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

3. **USDA should adopt a policy to give grantees an opportunity to correct minor errors in grant applications rather than disqualify.** Smaller applicants without a dedicated grant writer or expertise are more likely to have a minor mistake (i.e. check the wrong box, put an incorrect number on an application) and currently the USDA simply disqualifies these applicants. Creating more open communication from USDA to grantees and providing a window of time to correct an error would reduce barriers for grantees to access resources.
4. **Allow for more alternative funding models in grant programs, such as partnerships, community agreements and allowing for re-granting through community-based organizations** with a demonstrated track record of serving disadvantaged communities.
5. **Shorten the reimbursement time period for grant recipients.** The reimbursement model is burdensome for smaller entities because it requires them to have upfront funding to participate in some farm bill programs (even beyond the match) which is a huge challenge.

We also uplift key tenants in the “[Transformational Farm Bill](#)” letter sent to President Joe Biden from the Union of Concerned Scientists and over 150 organizations across the country.

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Title IV: Nutrition

Families across the state have still not recovered from the devastating impact of the pandemic. In addition, rising inflation has led to historically high food and fuel prices that have caused hunger and poverty rates to skyrocket. With so many New Yorkers struggling to make ends meet in this current economic climate, many listening session participants expressed the need for changes to farm bill nutrition programs that will expand their reach, impact, and cultural relevance, including:



Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program

- **Increase mandatory funding to a minimum of \$200 Million per year** and expand funding for training, technical assistance, and program evaluation. Set aside a certain amount of money for socially disadvantaged farmers and nonprofit organizations that target socially disadvantaged communities.
- **The Training, Technical Assistance, Information and Evaluation Center(s) should be directed to strengthen their offering** by providing a more direct communication exchange with grantees who need assistance; providing grantees with a streamline outreach package that they can choose from so that are not left to implement systems that have failed from passed grantees; making sure that awardees receive the same attention and opportunities to be informed and be fully supported throughout the award period.
- **Reduce the required match for SNAP incentives to no more than 10%.**
- **Continue the produce prescription portion of GusNIP.**
- **Maintain the priority for farm direct retailers** and retailers who purchase regionally-grown and processed produce.
- **Direct USDA to streamline benefits administration** and reduce stigma for recipients by codifying the existing practice of allowing states to integrate SNAP incentives directly onto EBT cards.

Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program

- **Increase mandatory funding for SFMNP to \$50 Million per year and ensure equitable access across all states.** Specifically, direct the USDA to allocate program funding to states, territories, and tribal nations based on an equitable formula that includes the population of seniors at 185% of poverty in each state, territory, or tribal nation as a percent of the total number of seniors.
- **Increase the minimum benefit to \$35.** The current benefit level is insufficient due to inflation and rising food costs, with seniors expressing frustration with low rates or determining the checks are not worth redeeming or accessing due to small amounts.
- **Provide flexibility in checks to allow seniors to receive change from a purchase.**
- **Expand access to SFMNP by increasing the program eligibility limit to 200% of the Federal poverty guidelines, increasing funding for outreach to seniors, and increasing the number of coupons available per senior location.** There are significant portions of senior populations that do not know about this program or are unable to physically travel to a farmers' market. The USDA must improve delivery services to homebound senior citizens who experience transportation issues.
- **Expand implementation mechanisms to include home delivery options, CSA shares, other types of aggregation, and innovative delivery systems to reach older adults at congregate meal sites, senior centers, and in particularly isolated areas.**
- **Provide necessary administrative outreach capacity and transportation methods to support seniors in biweekly market trips and explore the integration** and use of existing medicaid transportation to bring seniors to farmers markets.
- **Direct the USDA to provide clarifying guidance for states to pursue alternative or electronic redemption models,** which maintain paper checks to prioritize flexibility and ease of access for participants while new models are piloted.

Community Food Projects

- **Maintain and strengthen the CFP including increased public outreach about the program.** CFP is a popular program, which has been an important tool in supporting the growing food justice and urban agriculture movement. The USDA must maintain CFP's prioritization of innovative, community-led projects, and multi-year planning projects.
- **Increase overall funding levels to \$10 million per year in order to meet high demand.** CFP is a highly competitive program with only 18% of applicants receiving funding. And yet in 2018, mandatory funding for the Community Food Projects grant program was reduced from \$9 million to \$5 million annually.
- **Abolish or reduce the match to no more than 10% and direct the USDA to waive the match requirement to more effectively reach an underserved area or population.** The current dollar to dollar match is especially challenging as CFPs are specifically designed for community-led projects and it requires one of the higher matches across USDA programs. Potential applicants said: "The match is the reason we've never applied" and "we would never apply for a grant that had a dollar-for-dollar match."
- **Direct USDA to simplify the application and reporting processes, and prioritize support for smaller and community-based entities.** Current requirements demand a significant amount of upfront labor, with some applicants even feeling like they need to hire a grant consultant to apply, which discourages many eligible, but under-resourced, organizations from applying.
- **Direct the USDA to collect and publicly share data on what percentage of CFP's Planning Projects (PP) are successful in securing a Community Food Project grant (CFP) in subsequent years.** CFP's Planning Project grant is one of the only USDA programs that supports planning for food systems projects and the USDA should ensure there is a clear pathway for PP grantees to succeed and receive CFP funding. To support transition from planning to implementation, USDA should increase the maximum award level for the Planning Project and consider a streamlined or "turnkey" application process for previous PP grantees.
- **Direct USDA to improve the transparency** around the external peer review panelists and prioritize a diverse group of members that represent a range of community voices.
- **Make the Technical Assistance grant more inclusive** by prioritizing funding for TA projects proposed by socially disadvantaged who not only have a history of supporting BIPOC communities but whose leadership reflects the demographics of their projects' target populations. Provide grants to more than one applicant with a focus on relationships with BIPOC-led TA organizations.

Eligibility

- **Expand access to SNAP by removing barriers for eligibility**, including for new asylum seekers, refugees and undocumented immigrants and DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) recipients, and individuals with prior felonies. Remove the current time limits on benefit eligibility for able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWDs), and permanently expand SNAP eligibility to students by eliminating long-standing work-for-food SNAP rules that require many students to work at least 20 hours per week or participate in federal work-study. Also, remove barriers for individuals that are a part of Unions from accessing SNAP while on strike. (Lift the Bar Act - Gillibrand a co-sponsor to allow all lawfully present immigrants to access food)
- **Direct USDA to create waiver rules to allow States to apply for a Waiver to lower the age range to the State lawful employment age requirement.** For example, NY is 14. In the state of Montana “Able-bodied household members who are age 16 through 59 must register for work, and may be required to participate in a SNAP Employment.”
- **Eliminate the 5 year ban on lawfully present immigrants in SNAP.**
- **Include language from HR 2837 - Making Essentials Available and Lawful (MEALS) Act of 2021 to remove the federal law that serves to permanently disqualify individuals from SNAP who are convicted of a Federal or State felony** offense involving the possession, use, or distribution of a controlled substance after August 22, 1996. Federal law allows State legislatures to modify the disqualification to impose a less severe restriction or opt out of the disqualification entirely. NYS is one of 25 states that opts out of this disqualification entirely, but it should be removed nation-wide.
- **Lift the poverty threshold** to enable individuals and households with slightly higher income and the working poor to become eligible for SNAP.
- **Adjust SNAP rules to make it easier for self-employed people to access the program.** For example, farmers who apply for SNAP are at a disadvantage because farmers have to add the depreciation of their farm equipment (real and significant) that counteracts income on the SNAP application.
- **Extend certification periods.** During the COVID-19 pandemic NYS OTDA received statewide waivers from USDA to extend SNAP certification periods for six-months during particular months. The USDA should permanently extend certification periods.

Eligibility

- **Ensure families living apart can access SNAP for their children.** Currently in households with divorced or separated parents, whoever applies for SNAP first with the child(ren) as a dependent gets their SNAP benefits raised and the other parent does not, even if the child lives with both parents due to a shared custody agreement. Direct the USDA to provide guidance on how to address this problem.

Benefit

- **Include language from HR 4077, S2192 - the Closing the Meal Gap Act of 2021 to:**
 - Increase benefit levels and move from the Thrifty Good Plan to the Low-Cost Food Plan as the basis for calculating the SNAP formula.
 - Permanently authorize the standard medical deduction in every state for seniors and disabled individuals applying for SNAP benefits at a minimum of \$140.
 - Eliminate the cap on the Excess Shelter Deduction in the SNAP formula for all households.
 - Eliminate time-limits on benefits.
 - Create a path to transition to SNAP for those who live and work in U.S. territories to SNAP, thus ending discrimination and expanding benefits for territories.
- **Direct the USDA to explore increasing benefit levels for SNAP recipients with health conditions** that require a very specific diet, which is often more expensive.
- **Explore adjusting SNAP benefit allotments according to local self-sufficiency standards and cost of living**, especially given the drastic differences in cost of living expenses and housing costs across the country. In 2022, the state of Mississippi increased their SNAP benefits allotment per household due to the increase of cost of living .

Application Process

- **Include language from the [S.1181 - HOPE Act of 2021](#) which will streamline applications to allow eligible individuals to apply for multiple nutrition programs at once** by directing the USDA to commit to combining the SNAP & WIC application as a first step towards universal benefits application. In 2022, the Department of Education released a letter informing institutions of higher education that students' FAFSA application can be used for them to streamline their SNAP application process. We encourage more streamlined applications that will reduce the time needed to apply for food assistance.

Approved Food and Vendors

- **Safeguard SNAP's current access to a broad range of food to meet different cultural and nutritional needs.** There may be pressure to restrict SNAP benefits to certain foods, but restrictions or attempts to micro-manage food choice can be counterproductive as nutrition, dietary, religiously required, medically needed, and culturally appropriate food items are not universal.
- **Provide more TA to small businesses that want to accept SNAP.**
- **Include language from [HR6338- The SNAP Plus Act of 2021](#) to remove the restrictions on purchasing hot prepared foods** through SNAP and expand participants' choices.

The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)

- **Increase funding for TEFAP by indexing the program to the Low-Cost Food Plan.** Currently, the annual TEFAP appropriation is calculated based on changes to the Thrifty Food Plan. However, the Low-Cost Food Plan is more closely aligned with the amount that low- and moderate-income families report needing to spend on food.
- **Eliminate the income attestation regulations for TEFAP food distribution to expand program accessibility and reduce administrative burden on sites.** There are currently no federal standards or procedures for determining an individual's eligibility to receive prepared meals through TEFAP. Rather, individuals are presumed to be needy because they seek meals at an approved TEFAP site. Sites do not have to maintain records of the names of participants to whom they serve meals but must keep a count of the number of meals served. The USDA should adapt its rules to use this same logic for Eligibility Criteria for Household Distribution and remove the TEFAP Attestation form requirement. Alternatively, the USDA could replace this with the option to have community eligibility based on geographic location.
- **Require all states to establish TEFAP advisory boards composed of food banks, pantries/direct service providers, and clients with lived experience.**
- **Increase administrative funding and provide more flexibility for allowable administrative expenses.** Loosening TEFAP's restrictive rules regarding eligible expenses for administrative dollars would be a significant benefit as storage and distribution costs increase, especially as the program adds additional fresh produce to the approved list.
- **Expand access to Kosher and Halal food on the USDA's Foods Available List for the Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP).** There are currently only 8 Kosher and 1 Halal certified foods available on the FY23 list. The 2014 Farm Bill required USDA to develop a plan to increase purchase of Kosher and Halal Foods. We ask that the USDA's Food and Nutrition Service prioritize this work by publishing this plan publicly and update and expand this TEFAP foods list to include additional Kosher and Halal certified products. In addition, change the rules so that organizations can say what food items they do not want (or can not accept) and then get more of another item they can accept.
 - Remove the requirement that kosher and halal TEFAP commodities be cost-neutral.
 - Set a due date for the USDA kosher and halal plan.
 - If adequate commitments about expanding the available TEFAP commodities cannot be secured, then direct allocations to culturally competent providers within metropolitan statistical areas

The Commodity Supplemental Food Program

- **Provide more flexibility and choice in which foods are provided in food packages and enable agencies and/or seniors to “de-box the box.”** Agencies and senior centers report concerns with anticipated food waste, disposal, and rodent control issues. Shifting to a client choice model would be valuable to avoid unwanted food waste and disposal costs.
- **Increase fresh produce as well as culturally appropriate and religiously required food items in the program** to ensure the dietary and religious needs of seniors are better met. There are very limited Kosher and Halal certified foods on the USDA Commodity food list.

Title X: Horticulture



Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Program

- **Expand access by increasing LAMP's total mandatory funding from \$50M to \$75M per year and appropriations authorization from \$20M to \$30M per year and by prioritizing equitable distribution of LAMP program funds.** The 2023 Farm Bill should increase funding for this program and direct USDA to prioritize geographic diversity by directing resources to underrepresented areas and prioritizing proposals from entities that are led by and primarily serve socially disadvantaged individuals and communities.
- **Reduce matching fund requirements to enable greater access by lower-budget organizations and organizations serving underserved areas or populations.** Even for the planning grant, the current match is a significant barrier. Direct the USDA to reduce the matching requirement from 25 to 10 percent for all FMPP and LFPP applications from organizations with less than a \$500,000 annual budget and direct the USDA to waive the match requirement if the Secretary determines a waiver is necessary to more effectively reach an underserved area or population.
- **Direct USDA to provide technical assistance, training, and outreach to LAMP grantees and potential grantees to enable greater success in applying for awards.**
- **Direct USDA to create streamlined “turnkey” LAMP grants – grants that include a limited set of key activities with pre-defined requirements – with simplified application and reporting requirements and no matching requirement for projects of \$100,000 or less.** The USDA Farm to School program has successfully administered turnkey grants and serves as the inspiration for this recommendation.
- **Allow FMPP funds to be used for costs to farmers markets associated with administration and outreach for SNAP, WIC, and SFMN programs.**

Regional Food Systems Partnership Program

- **Maintain the flexibility and innovation RFSP enables across regional scales while reducing the match.** Direct the USDA to waive the match requirement if the Secretary determines a waiver is necessary to more effectively reach an underserved area/population.
- **Address the requirement that prime applicants must retain 50% of the total grant,** which limits organizations that are fiscally sponsored and multi-partner projects from effectively participating in the program. Doing so would enable funds to specifically assist small producers in urban areas aggregate their products to be able to reach larger markets.
- **Direct USDA to specifically authorize value chain coordination and outreach and technical assistance projects as eligible for all programs.** Increased resources and support for neighborhood-level food hubs, value chain development, and cold chain technical assistance is critical to support local and regional food economies.
- **Extend the time period for grant awards.** Time constraints for grants can be a barrier and even 3 years is not always enough time to demonstrate success.

Fresh Produce Procurement Partnership Program

- **Congress should create a permanent, values-based, fresh produce procurement partnership at USDA to connect farmers, distributors, tribal entities, food hubs, and other community-based entities that do emergency food distribution to purchase, pack, and deliver fresh fruits and vegetables to food banks, schools, senior centers, youth-serving organizations, tribal governments, and other community based organizations serving nutrition insecure populations.** This partnership program should build on the positive elements of the first two rounds of the Farmers to Families Food Box Program and the AMS Local Food Purchasing Assistance Program currently being implemented through states. Under this program, recipients would have access to a wide variety of fresh and healthy fruits and vegetables prioritizing locally and regionally grown and guided by Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommendations. [The Fresh Produce Procurement Reform Act, introduced by Representative Rosa DeLauro \(D-CT-03\)](#), outlines a vision for this program that can serve as the base Farm Bill text.

Title XII: Miscellaneous

Small and large-scale food producers are vital to the food movement. They hold the key to where our food begins and where it ends. We call for increased support for food producers across all platforms. Throughout this process land stewards share the sentiment of needing additional resources such as non-barrier funding opportunities, technical assistance, equipment and infrastructure in order for them to continue feeding, teaching and fostering communities. More prominently, disadvantaged farmers must be given the same resources and opportunities so that they can continue to foster communities.



Fresh Produce Procurement Partnership Program

- **Increase funding for the Urban Agriculture and Innovation Production grants program by 10 times to \$50 Million per year** to provide agricultural opportunities for urban and suburban residents and enhance local food security.
- **Maintain program accessibility and flexibility** by continuing not to require a match and allowing grantees to spend down and reallocate funds over the course of 3 years.
- **Maintain collective applications potential to re-grant funding to community partners** since individual farmers and gardens would not be eligible unless they had 501c3 status, and very few do because of how onerous it is as a small group.
- Supporting a pathway for farmers and gardeners to gain 501c3 status as well so that they are eligible to apply for funding streams that can enhance their capacity.
- **Make the grant portal more user-friendly and provide technical assistance for applications, including grant writing support by including language from the [H.R.5173 - Urban Agriculture and Community Food Security Act](#) into the 2023 Farm Bill.** The bill would provide technical assistance to navigate zoning restrictions, water and land access, and how to access municipal resources. This bill would also provide tools for improving access to urban land for farming, loans and grants for urban agriculture microentrepreneurs and additional funds for community food security projects. The USDA should continue to convene quarterly peer learning calls for new grantees to foster relationships and share best practices.

Fresh Produce Procurement Partnership Program

- **Set aside funding that promotes soil remediation which grants urban agriculture food growers access to get their soil tested at low to no cost.** [Urban communities' soil](#) is the most toxic sediment in the country. However, not enough is being done to promote soil remediation or to alleviate the financial burden for community gardeners to get their soil tested.

Community Compost & Food Waste Reduction Project Cooperative Agreement

- **Reduce matching fund requirements to enable greater access by lower-budget organizations and organizations serving underserved areas or populations.**
- **Prioritize applicants that include a plan for transport of the compost and coordinated connections to urban farms, schools, and community gardeners who can benefit from the compost product.** Being thoughtful about who benefits from the end product and how it gets to where it needs to go is key to project growth and success. Further, planning for, transportation, and distribution of compost to local sites should be an allowable expense.
- **Prioritize applications that include community-based groups and BIPOC farmers, producers and practitioner partners.** The requirement to work with a municipality is positive but potentially limiting in who has those established relationships or the political capital to navigate developing relationships with government entities.
- **Direct the USDA to provide clarifying guidance so compost education is an allowable expense.** Projects that support building connections between composting activities and community education about compost and waste reduction would have better outcomes.
- **Improve/ restructure funding restrictions for compost education so that it includes staff time and programming efforts.** In order for the work to be carried out it is important that staff are being considered in the facilitation of the program.

Farm to School Program

- **Streamline applications, maintain the turnkey grant option and increase technical assistance and application support for grantees.** Schools have limited capacity to do this kind of grant application. Even for one application in New York from three high-capacity organizations, it “took an entire grant team from our three organizations. It was really in depth. We met for three months to put this together.”
- **Reshaping the grant requirements** so that it eliminates barriers for local community-based groups and BIPOC farmers, producers and practitioner partners. The requirement to work with a school district is positive but potentially limiting in who has those established relationships or the political capital to navigate developing relationships with those entities.
- **Prioritize applications that include community-based groups and BIPOC farmers, producers and practitioner partners.**
- **Reduce matching fund requirements to enable greater access by lower-budget organizations and schools serving underserved areas or populations.**
- **Align the timeline with the growing season,** the time to hear feedback if you are awarded the grant doesn't align with the growing season.

4 H Program and Youth Development

- **Provide funding for 4H and other youth agriculture programs** specifically targeted towards BIPOC communities. These programs can include healing justice to help individuals who are experiencing trauma. Healing work, rest, and play time on the land is just as critical as the technical agricultural skills.
- **Implement youth led agriculture programs** to further encourage and aid beginning farmers, paid internships, peer mentoring program with senior farmers

Beginning Farmer & Rancher Development Program

- **Reduce matching fund requirements to enable greater access** by lower-budget organizations and those serving underserved areas or populations.
- **Direct the USDA to increase transparency regarding criteria for decisions regarding a waiver** on the 25% match for projects targeting underserved areas or populations.
- **Provide more technical assistance to BIPOC farmers to improve accessibility specifically by establishing a Navigator Program, directing USDA to enter into cooperative agreements with Community Based Organizations, to develop and expand services targeted to beginning and BIPOC farmers.** Use organizations such as Black Farmers United NYS, National Young Farmers Coalition, and Northeast Farmers of Color Land Trust, Farm School NYC, Soul Fire Farm to spread outreach within BIPOC communities, encourage and aid awarded applicants to spread awareness to veteran and BIPOC farmers and producers.
- **Authorize, fund, and implement a “Good Jobs, Food Jobs” initiative** to provide more technical assistance and seed money to more food-related startup companies (especially those focused on food processing), and particularly those owned by BIPOC.
- **Direct USDA to provide translated materials (including USDA press releases and technical assistance) based on the language needs of that region,** increase staff at field offices to provide verbal translation of materials, and have resources available in a timely manner so that all farmers can meet application deadlines.
- **Explore ways to funnel direct funding to senior farmers, producers, and gardeners with decades of experience and skills to pass on to beginning farmers.** Technical assistance typically stemming from academic institutions or extension programs is valuable but so are elders in this field who deserve to be seen as valued educators and TA providers. We recommend prioritizing funding to BIPOC led organizations that are doing the work already.
- **FSA should develop a new Multi-Year Developmental Loan program for beginning farmers and BIPOC farmers.** This program would allow extended payment in terms of 3-10 years on direct and guaranteed operating loans for qualified farmers still within the first 10 years of operation. These types of loans are within current authorities, but the additional collateral requirements of multi-year operating loans are prohibitive for beginning and BIPOC farmers. To ensure that this program serves its intended goal and does not expose these farmers to too much risk, Congress may decide to require borrowers under this program to receive additional technical assistance and training on financial planning.

Beginning Farmer & Rancher Development Program

- **Authorize loans to facilitate farmland transition between retiring and beginning farmers. A key to being able to access land is being able to afford land, but often debt load to purchase land is untenable for beginning farmers.** If a beginning farmer wants to purchase land that is for sale, the Federal government can provide via direct or guaranteed loans half of the capital required to buy the land. The farmer would then start off with half of the debt and the retiring farmer would be paid in full. FSA or a guaranteed lender would then hold their 50% of the cost of the land in trust where no interest is accrued so that when the beginning farmer has paid off the first half of the debt, they can purchase the remaining half of the debt from the government or lender on a more sustainable timeline. Include language from the [S.300 - Justice For Black Farmers Act of 2021](#) pertaining to the pay back loan period.

Outreach and Assistance for Socially Disadvantaged and Veteran Farmers and Ranchers Program

- **Increase funding for “the 2501 Program” to match demand and ensure that all funding exclusively supports projects that benefit farmers of color and military veterans, and focus on addressing disparities in access and success in agriculture.**
- **Reduce barriers in the grant application process and provide grant writing support.** With so many requirements to even be considered eligible and highly specific application components, it remains inaccessible for smaller and lower-capacity entities.
- **Reform administration and peer review of the program to ensure a more transparent,** timely and responsive process established by the Fall/Winter application period, with a minimum of a 90 day application window to give ample time for applicants to prepare and submit applications.
- **Increase transparency and public access to program grantee and project information,** including project outcomes, impacts and evaluation metrics, and reporting requirements.

Outreach and Assistance for Socially Disadvantaged and Veteran Farmers and Ranchers Program

- **Provide scale appropriate direct assistance through the authorization of a USDA direct micro-grant program for small, beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers.** BIPOC and beginning farmers have difficulty accessing financing due to lack of credit history, the increased risk associated with lending to a new or young farmer, or discrimination from USDA or other loan agencies. To address this problem, USDA should offer micro-grants ranging in value from \$5,000 to \$30,000 to allow these farmers to expand their new farm businesses. Micro-grants would offer financial assistance that can cover annual operating expenses, purchase farmland, equipment or other farm infrastructure.

Campaign Leads



Equity Advocates builds the capacity of nonprofit organizations to address the underlying causes of food inequity through policy and systems change. We partner with New York-based organizations working to alleviate hunger and poverty, providing them with the tools they need to be more civically engaged—including policy education, advocacy training and coalition-building services. Through this work, we are building a nonpartisan grassroots coalition of powerful advocates and leaders within the food movement.



We advocate for, unify, amplify, and create pathways to ownership for NYS Black farmers through education, policy development, networking, and mutual aid.



Food for the Spirit is a nonprofit organization that uses the arts and creative facilitation to support racial healing, ecological justice, and equitable food systems.

Sign on Organizations

As New York York State community food leaders, farmers, land stewards, gardeners, and advocates, this platform represents our policy aims in order to foster a more equitable food system.

Sign on to the platform [here](#).

References

1. ' President Biden's Farm Bill Must Transform Our Food System, Union of Concern Scientist, <https://blog.ucsusa.org/karen-perry-stillerman/farm-bill-2022/>
2. Recommended in "Urban Agriculture Policy Recommendations" report for the Policy Research Center for Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers at Alcorn State University.
3. <https://dphhs.mt.gov/hcsd/SNAP>
4. <https://www.actionnews5.com/2022/10/03/snap-benefits-income-guidelines-increase-due-inflation/>



We have the right to speak up and take action.

The Farm Bill was made by people, and that means we can change it.

Photo credit: [La Semilla Farm Bill Zine](#)