Building Equitable Food Systems Through Policy

Ruth Tyson
Union of Concerned Scientists, Food and Environment Program
What’s wrong with our food system?
How do we fix it?
“U.S. food policy should work to ensure a plentiful supply of healthy food for the nation. But the current system of agricultural subsidies mostly benefits large-scale growers of commodity crops such as corn and soybeans. Our diet is dominated by processed foods made from these subsidized crops, and a growing body of research connects this diet to increases in obesity and the diseases that go with it...

The solution? We need access to more fruits and vegetables—and therefore, we need policies that encourage farmers to grow them. But Big Ag benefits from the status quo and is fighting to protect it.”

- The Union of Concerned Scientists
Food Justice

“Food Justice is a process whereby communities most impacted and exploited by our current corporate controlled, extractive agricultural system shift power to re-shape, re-define and provide indigenous, community based solutions to accessing and controlling food (including the means to produce food) that is humanizing, fair, healthy, accessible, racially equitable, environmentally sound and just.”

-Dara Cooper, Co-Founder, National Black Food Justice Alliance
Food Justice Strategies

● Resistance
  ○ Defending what is “working”
  ○ Stopping further destruction
● Resilience
  ○ Building alternatives to the current system
● Reform
  ○ Change through policy
Healthy Food Policy Solutions

● Expand healthy food access
  ○ Dozens of federal programs are designed to improve access to healthy food for people of all ages across the country. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive program (FINI), and the Farm to School program, are just a few examples of federal programs that seek to improve equitable access to healthy food.

● Advance sustainable agriculture
  ○ Sustainable agriculture is supported through a variety of different programs, from the Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education Program (SARE) which supports farmers with the latest information, to the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) which promotes the use of conservation practices, to the Farmers Market & Local Food Promotion Program (FMLFPP) which helps connect fresh, healthy food grown by farmers to local consumers.
The Farm Bill Titles

- Commodities
- Conservation
- Trade
- Nutrition
- Credit
- Rural Development
- Research, Extension, and Related Matters
- Forestry
- Energy
- Specialty Crops & Horticulture
- Crop Insurance
- Miscellaneous

The farm bill is one of the largest pieces of legislation (proposed at $1 trillion) that goes through the House and Senate, and has everything to do with what food is accessible and affordable. Congress reauthorizes the Farm Bill every 5 to 7 years.

Efforts to reauthorize a comprehensive Farm Bill that prioritizes healthy food access, sustainable farming techniques, and equity continue, even as Congress proposes devastating cuts to food programs like SNAP, conservation programs, and beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers programs.
Farm Bill Process

● **Reauthorization**
  ○ Listening Sessions/Hearings
  ○ House/Senate Agriculture Committees
  ○ Full Congress/"The Floor"
  ○ Conference Committee
  ○ Full Congress/"The Floor"
  ○ The White House

● **Appropriations**
  ○ For discretionary funded programs

● **Administration (Rule making)**
  ○ Comment on USDA’s proposed rules

● **Outreach and Evaluation**
(some of) What’s in the Farm Bill

- **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)**
  - Federal food benefits for low- and no-income people
- **Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive (FINI) Grant Program**
  - Grant program to increase fruit and vegetable consumption
- **Socially Disadvantaged and Veteran Farmers and Ranchers**
  - Outreach and technical assistance for USDA programs
- **Beginning Farmers and Rancher Development Program (BFRD)**
  - Provides training for new farmers, including SDFR
- **Healthy Food Financing Initiative (HFFI)**
  - Public-private partnerships to fund healthy food access in food apartheid communities
- **Farm to School Grant Program**
  - Provides grant funding, technical assistance, and training to improve local food access
2014 Farm Bill - $489 billion

Projected outlays under the 2014 Farm Act, 2014-2018

- Nutrition: 80%
- Commodities: 5%
- Conservation: 6%
- Crop insurance: 8%
- Other: 1%

Total outlays = $489 billion

Farm Bill Funding: The Small Programs

- Trade Subsidies: 24%
- Research and Extension: 7%
- Energy: 8%
- Specialty Crops: 7%
- Everything Else: 54%

Farm Bill Funding: Excluding Nutrition

- Crop Insurance: 45%
- Commodity Programs: 23%
- Conservation: 4%
- Everything Else: 28%
## 2014 Commodity Crops

**Figure 1. Program Crops and Their Reference Prices**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Crop</th>
<th>Reference Price</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corn</td>
<td>$3.70/bu.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soybeans</td>
<td>$8.40/bu.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wheat</td>
<td>$6.50/bu.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grain sorghum</td>
<td>$3.95/bu.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barley</td>
<td>$4.95/bu.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oats</td>
<td>$2.40/bu.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Oilseeds</td>
<td>$20.15/cwt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dry peas</td>
<td>$11.00/cwt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rice</td>
<td>$14.00/cwt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peanuts</td>
<td>$535/ton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lentils</td>
<td>$19.97/cwt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small chickpeas</td>
<td>$19.04/cwt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large chickpeas</td>
<td>$21.54/cwt.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1Reference prices are used in Price Loss Coverage.
Local Food and Regional Market Supply (Local FARMS Act)

- Introduced by Senator Sherrod Brown (D-OH), and by Representatives Chellie Pingree (D-ME), Jeff Fortenberry (R-NE), and Sean Maloney (D-NY) to help farmers reach new markets, increase food access, and strengthen infrastructure

- The new **Agricultural Market Development Program**
  - The Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Program
  - The Value-Added Producer Grants Program
  - Local and Regional Food Systems Value Chain Coordination Program (new)
  - Regional Food Economy Partnership Program (new)

- **Food Safety Certification Cost-share Program** Food safety certifications

- **Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act**

- **Harvesting Health Pilot** authorizing
  - Produce prescription program
What about the District?

- **FEED DC Act of 2010**
  - Helps small grocers serve fresh fruits and veggies
- **Cottage Food Act of 2013**
  - Allows small food businesses to sell goods at public events
- **Food Policy and Director Establishment Act of 2014**
  - Created DC’s Food Policy Council
- **Sustainable DC**
  - Plan to increase agricultural land
- **DC Urban Farming and Food Security Act of 2014**
  - Incentivizes urban agriculture through tax abatement
What can you do?

- Request a meeting with your federal representatives
  - Maryland and Virginia are both represented by Senators and Representatives, while DC is represented by non-voting Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton.
  - This initial meeting can be as simple as sharing your work with them.
- Support and/or join an advocacy coalition
  - Advocacy coalitions can be a great way to meet new individuals and organizations in your area, while simultaneously learning more about federal policy and how it impacts you.
- Raise awareness about policy opportunities
- Go to a local Food Policy Council meeting
Resources

- National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
- National Black Food and Justice Alliance
- Union of Concerned Scientists, Food & Environment
  - Text “food justice” to 662266
- Soul Fire Farm
- DC Greens
- HEAL Food Alliance
- Community Food and Justice Coalition
- United States Department of Agriculture
- Sustainable DC
- DC Food Policy Council