



## Energy & Horticulture — The 2023 Farm Bill

Center Forward Basics

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### Overview

The Farm Bill is the United States' largest piece of packaged legislation which funds our national food and agriculture systems. The Farm Bill's twelve titles include: commodities, conservation, trade, nutrition, credit, rural development, research, forestry, energy, horticulture, crop insurance, and a miscellaneous title that includes issues like beginning farming, socially disadvantaged farmers, veteran farmers and ranchers, agricultural labor safety, workforce development, and livestock health.

As the first Farm Bill after the COVID pandemic, the forthcoming 2023 legislation offers the opportunity to address many critical issues that impact the health and well-being of all U.S. residents. Key issues in the 2023 Farm Bill include:

- SNAP and food system stability
- Immigration reform
- Land access
- Environmental health and justice
- Growing jobs and economic opportunity, especially for rural communities, migrant workers, and farmworkers
- Indigenous coalition priorities

### COVID-Era Farm Bill

While it most deeply affects agricultural, rural, and Indigenous communities, the far-reaching food, economic, and environmental policy implications impact the health and well-being of all Americans. Since the onset of COVID-19, farmers and farmworkers have worked tirelessly to prevent the global coronavirus crisis from becoming a hunger crisis. From lockdowns and outbreaks, to breaks in the supply chain, disruptions to immigration, migration and the labor force, and rapidly shifting market demands, the resilience of agricultural communities has been deeply tested. While COVID-19 created some opportunities to bridge long-standing service gaps for rural communities—such as expanded telehealth—the pandemic exacerbated many already deep-rooted concerns.

For most U.S. farmers, however, COVID-19 is just one of many modern challenges that needs policy attention. Hurricanes, historically poor planting seasons, increasingly unpredictable weather, retaliatory tariffs impacting exports, rising utility costs, labor shortages, and many other factors have been building over the past several years. Modern farming communities have adapted to the best of their abilities, but the compounding pressures have pushed tens of thousands of farmers out of business. Since 1950, self-employed farming has declined more than 73% and farm work employment has declined 52%. In 2020, climate-related disasters alone cost farmers \$3.6 billion in crop and rangeland losses.

The same pressures that push farmers out of farmland create vast inequities for members of rural, Tribal, and other marginalized communities. Issues like access to financial capital, affordable housing, healthcare, education, and food impact all American communities. By centering rural communities and prioritizing equitable community development across diverse geographies, the Farm Bill can help build health equity for all communities.

### Center Forward Basics

Center Forward brings together members of Congress, not-for profits, academic experts, trade associations, corporations and unions to find common ground. Our mission: to give centrist allies the information they need to craft common sense solutions, and provide those allies the support they need to turn those ideas into results.

In order to meet our challenges we need to put aside the partisan bickering that has gridlocked Washington and come together to find common sense solutions.

For more information, please visit [www.center-forward.org](http://www.center-forward.org)

## Energy Title

Title IX of the Farm Bill, often referred to as the "energy title," was established in the 2002 Farm Bill with the aim of promoting the development of renewable energy and biobased products. The energy title encompasses initiatives that promote the cultivation and processing of crops for biofuel production, assist farmers, ranchers, and business proprietors in the installation of renewable energy systems, and provide backing for energy-related research. Thanks to sustained bipartisan efforts, the energy title has expanded to encompass a range of programs dedicated to supporting the bioeconomy. However, the 2018 Farm Bill reduced mandatory funding for energy title programs to \$375 million, a significant decrease from the \$1 billion mandated by the 2008 Farm Bill. Additionally, the 2018 bill provided an extra \$1.7 billion in discretionary funds, however, only a negligible share of this funding was assigned.

Generating renewable energy on farms and reducing emissions related to agricultural activities has become an important part of operations for many farmers and ranchers. To assist these producers in saving money and adopting renewable energy sources, the Rural Energy for America Program (REAP) offers grants and loans. This program supports energy efficiency enhancements and facilitates the acquisition of wind, solar, or other renewable energy systems. Additionally, it extends grants to help farmers with energy audits and renewable energy development. Since 2008, REAP has allocated hundreds of millions of dollars in grants and loan guarantees to finance numerous renewable energy initiatives throughout the country. Farmers and rural businesses have utilized REAP funding to replace irrigation motors and grain dryers, set up solar panels, purchase and install wind turbines, and undertake energy efficiency enhancements.

The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) has introduced supplementary grants for the Rural Energy for America Program (REAP), covering up to 50% of a project's cost and doubling the existing grant-based cost-sharing level from 25% to 50%. Under the IRA, the total cost-sharing, combining grants and loans, can extend up to 75%. Notably, the IRA designates funds specifically for REAP grants and loans aimed at "underutilized renewable energy technologies." Although the USDA has not yet provided a precise definition for this term, it is intended to ensure the program supports a diverse range of technologies, encompassing newer innovations in the field. The 2023 Farm Bill presents an opportunity to build upon the success of this program and equip farmers and rural communities with additional resources to combat the climate crisis through investments in energy efficiency and renewable energy.

## Horticulture Title

The Farm Bill's horticulture title covers farmers market and local food programs, funding for research and infrastructure for fruits, vegetables, and other horticultural crops, and organic farming and certification programs. In 2008, Congress added this title to the farm bill to specifically address specialty crops. The title included provisions for pest and disease management, established programs to assist producers in the transition to organic agriculture, and funded additional research on organic practices. The title also provided funding for farmers' markets. In addition, specialty crops continued to be affected by other titles in the farm bill, such as by nutrition programs in Title IV. With the addition of this title in the Farm Bill, an increase of funding for the cost-share program and the USDA's National Organic Program (NOP) took place and provided first-time funding for organic data collection. It established programs to assist producers in the transition to organic agriculture and funded additional research on organic practices.

Although the Horticulture Title is a relatively recent addition to the farm bill, it is expected to maintain its significance in future farm bills, given the increasing demand for specialty crops and organic products. While specialty crops contribute a quarter of the total value to U.S. crop production, Horticulture Title programs dedicated to specialty crops receive considerably less funding and attention compared to commodity programs within the farm bill. Advocates of specialty crop and organic agriculture propose that the upcoming farm bill should continue to allocate funding for initiatives supporting specialty crop and organic producers. Moreover, they emphasize the importance of ensuring stakeholder interests are adequately represented within the governance structure of the USDA and suggest aligning NOP (National Organic Program) standards with the objectives of organic agriculture.

The investment previous farm bills had made, most notably the 2018 farm bill's creation of the Local Agriculture Market Program (LAMP), paid off by ensuring the baseline infrastructure required was there to meet the needs of the moment. The 2023 Farm Bill offers the opportunity to expand and ensure equitable access to these critical programs and streamline their administrative function based on lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic and LAMP's first five years. Also allowed is the opportunity for this title to build on prior farm bills and recent USDA actions to strengthen local and regional food system resilience, enhance market opportunities for specialty crop growers, and support organic producers.

## A Bipartisan Effort

When people have access to essential needs and resources for their livelihood, they gain the ability to actively participate in the progress of their communities and the general prosperity of our nation. It will take a bipartisan effort to make sure local farmers and the affected communities are served as America navigates the post-pandemic world. Overall, the Farm Bill's twelve sections contribute to enhancing local infrastructure, endorsing rural economic growth projects, safeguarding our country's food security, promoting the cultivation and process of crops, and advocating for environmental care and preservation.

## Links to Other Resources

- American Cancer Society - <https://www.fightcancer.org/policy-resources/prevention-and-early-detection/healthy-eating-and-active-living>
- Bipartisan Policy Center - <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/report/the-2023-farm-bill/#:~:text=The%202023%20Farm%20Bill%20gives,integrity%2C%20and%20promoting%20workforce%20participation.>
- Community Commons - <https://www.communitycommons.org/collections/2023-Farm-Bill-Advancing-Public-Health-at-the-Intersection-of-Food-Environment-and-Economic-Policy>
- Environmental and Energy Study Institute - <https://www.eesi.org/farmbill2023>
- Farm Bill Platform - <https://sustainableagriculture.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/2023-Farm-Bill-Platform.pdf>
- Food & Ag Climate Alliance Energy Titles - <https://agclimatealliance.com/wp-content/blogs.dir/98/files/2023/02/farm-bill-recommendations-energy.pdf>
- National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition - <https://sustainableagriculture.net/our-work/campaigns/fbcampaign/what-is-the-farm-bill/>
- Opportunities in the 2023 Farm Bill - <https://agclimatealliance.com/>
- The Farm Bill Energy Title: An Overview and Funding History - <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/misc/R45943.pdf>
- U.S. Department of Agriculture — The Farm Bill - <https://www.usda.gov/farmbill>
- U.S. Department of Agriculture — 2018 Farm Bill & Legislative Principles  
<https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2018-farm-bill-and-legislative-principles.pdf>