

Pennsylvania Recommendations for the 2023 Farm Bill

The federal Farm Bill is omnibus legislation that sets the nation’s farm and food policy for five years. Contained in the bill are 12 titles that encompasses key areas of focus, from conservation to nutrition. While distinct in their approach, each of these titles are interconnected. The following material provides a perspective into each title of the Farm Bill and articulates Pennsylvania’s desired outcomes under each title. Our hope is that Congress considers these recommendations during the drafting and negotiating of this vital piece of public policy.

The Federal Farm Bill supports policies and programs that impact a wide percentage of Pennsylvanians. Food assistance programs offer access to healthy foods that are available for our most vulnerable populations. In many cases, these programs source products produced by American farmers, creating new market opportunities for our agriculture community.

Agriculture continues to be fundamental to the economic wellbeing of Pennsylvania and represents a significant part of our heritage. The diversity of our agriculture industry is key to our strength. We are national leaders in several key areas of agriculture production. We have the highest number of young farmers of any state in the nation. We are a leader in the number of farmers who sell directly to consumers and are a leader in organic agriculture. Our dairy, mushroom, fruit, and poultry production are known across the country are market leaders and innovators. We are the snack food capital of the world and are home to numerous manufacturing companies that produce products that consumers interact with daily. Overall, agriculture is a \$81.5 billion industry in Pennsylvania, supporting 301,000 direct jobs and an additional 291,000 indirect and induced jobs. Our priorities for the Federal Farm Bill reflect the diverse needs of Pennsylvanians.

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Title I- Commodity Programs

Why it's important

This title provides support for major commodity crops, including wheat, corn, soybeans, as well as disaster assistance. The 2018 Farm Bill extends authority for most current commodity programs but with some modifications and included important changes to safety net provisions for the dairy industry.

The new dairy program protects a portion of the margin between milk and feed prices. The Dairy Margin Coverage (DMC) program adds higher levels of margin coverage, provides for lower producer-paid premium rates for 5 million pounds or less of milk production, and allows producers to cover a larger percentage of milk production compared with the 2014 Margin Protection Program.

The commodity title links to trade, nutrition, credit, rural development, horticulture, crop insurance, and elements within the miscellaneous title, particularly support for beginning farmers and ranchers, workforce, and assistance programs. Without strong commodity assistance, other aspects of agriculture could be impacted. Likewise, weak or underfunded adjacent programs could affect the commodity title, thus potentially sabotaging the overall agricultural and nutrition/food assistance landscape.

Our program request:

Support Programmatic Adjustments to Dairy Margin Coverage (DMC)

DMC is widely viewed as a significant improvement over previous Farm Bill provisions to assist dairy farmers. Several programmatic adjustments are suggested to make the program more accessible for dairy producers:

- Update production history to reflect current on-farm production costs
- Increase catastrophic margin level to \$5 hundredweight from \$4 per hundredweight while maintaining ability to buy up coverage
- Increase Tier I coverage to 10 million pounds of milk from 5 million pounds for all producers.

Title II- Conservation

Why it's important

This title helps agricultural producers by addressing environmental resource concerns on private land through conservation easements, working lands assistance, and partnership opportunities. The 2018 Farm Bill reauthorized and amended many of the largest conservation programs and creates several new pilot programs and initiatives.

USDA's National Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) administers two main working lands programs: the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) and Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). Both are used by farmers to help pay for conservation improvements on their land.

USDA also administers the largest land retirement program—the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), which takes highly-erodible lands out of production through a rental payment program. In addition, the agency administers watershed protection programs and programs aimed at long-term land protection, including the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) and Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP), which helps states and land trusts administer easements for farmland protection.

Conservation is critical to the success of farms. Without adequate conservation, farmers can lose valuable resources to erosion, which has the potential to impact local water quality. However, conservation work often has a lower return on investments for farms, so in eras of low commodity prices, support programs for conservation can help agriculture producers continue to be exceptional stewards of their land. Farmers, properly managing working lands, have the ability to solve some of the environmental problems we are facing, so finding the support for conservation through funding and encouraging a conservation workforce are needed items in the next Farm Bill.

Our program request:

Continue the Chesapeake Bay State's Partnership Initiative

The USDA has set aside \$22.5 million for high priority conservation work in the Bay watershed. By continuing to provide funding, state providers can help increase the level of best management practices occurring on farms in high-priority watersheds. Currently, money is flowing to EQIP and CSP, managed by NRCS, with the goal of reducing nitrogen and phosphorous. An additional \$73.7 million per year for 10 years would fully fund the federal share for conservation in the most recent Watershed Implementation Plan. That level of funding will result in additional state and local matches to address the water quality needs in the Bay.

Support more Technical Assistance

Setting aside funding to recruit and train additional technical service providers is essential to completing conservation work but also to develop workforce opportunities. In addition, finding ways to streamline approvals for individuals to become technical service providers, such as certified crop advisors also advising on conservation practices, should be an agency focus. To help implement the level of work needed on farms, it will be important for technical service work to be completed by non-governmental organizations that have established relationships with landowners. In addition, streamlining and simplifying the application process will help get conservation work completed in a quicker way and will help producers complete the application process themselves. Clear, concise, and easily understandable applications will help achieve programmatic goals of increasing the level of on-farm adaptation of best management practices. Consideration should be made to develop new provisions in the Farm Bill that creates a pathway to careers in conservation by working with high schools, community colleges and career and technical schools to on the promotion of careers and certification programs that do not require four-year degrees.

Support Soil Health

Pennsylvania supports dedicated assistance that helps states create state-level soil health programs. Soil health is fundamental to the success of any farm and funding best management practices that aide in retention of topsoil helps with the conservation of Pennsylvania farms. Giving states programmatic flexibility at the state level to administer funds for soil health will create local-based solutions that work for diverse agriculture states like Pennsylvania. Having funding flow through states with established programs and a working relationship with technical service providers will improve efficiencies and get projects on the ground at a faster rate. Additional capacity is also needed to help state's train public and private sector staff that can help with technical assistance and communicate funding opportunities to landowners.

Streamline NRCS Conservation Approval Process

NRCS should be proactively investigating and implementing new conservation practices and technology instead of waiting for producer and stakeholder groups to petition to have conservation practices gain interim status. This current approach is too slow and does not fit the ever-evolving understanding and advancements that are occurring around conservation.

Conservation Reserve Program Revisions and Solar Use

CRP remains an important land management tool that helps prevent erosion through the voluntary retirement of highly erodible soils. CRP provides payments to landowners in return for keeping land out of active production. However, some enrollment of entire farms in CRP has raised question as to whether productive agriculture lands are being retired instead of those most susceptible to erosion. Pennsylvania supports crafting language to ensure that only marginal lands are enrolled in CRP and changing the rental payment structure to provide the highest level of payments for lands that meet that definition. In addition, Pennsylvania supports changing guidelines around the use of solar on grounds enrolled in CRP. Currently, farms that want to use solar are prevented under the guidelines of the CRP and CREP contracts. Farmers can opt out of that contract but must pay all USDA funds associated with CREP and a penalty for early withdrawal. These grounds may provide a beneficial dual use by keeping highly erodible soils out of production while also producing renewable electricity CRP contracts should allow for that utilization.

Improve Federal Farmland Preservation Program

The USDA administers the Agriculture Conservation Easement Program and Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCCP) to protect farm and ranch land across the country. However, utilization of the program is sometimes limited due to the issues of states needing to be certified and some of the deed terms contained in the program. Operating the program like a traditional block grant program, coupled with a reduction of administrative burdens, will help increase the adoption of the program—which can help Pennsylvania address its backlog of more than 1200 farms waiting to participate in the farmland preservation program.

Revitalize the Civilian Conservation Corps

Sen. Bob Casey introduced the Restore Environmental Vitality and Improve Volatile Economy by the Civilian Conservation Corps of 2021, or the REVIVE the CCC Act (S.2414), which would revitalize the 1930s-era Civilian Conservation Corps into a modern-day employment, job

training and conservation program. The REVIVE the CCC Act would advance our nation's efforts to tackle the conservation challenges while creating well-paying, quality conservation jobs that protect and restore waterways, working lands and the health and resiliency of our rural and urban communities. This would help address the ongoing issues with the need for technical assistance and help provide a workforce pipeline for rewarding careers in conservation.

Title III – Trade

Why it's important

The Trade title addresses U.S. agricultural export programs and U.S. international food assistance programs. Major programs support agricultural trade promotion and facilitation, such as the Market Access Program (MAP). Access to overseas markets is an important component of growing a strong agriculture industry. The export value of agriculture is more than \$196 billion in 2022, coming on the heels of two years of double-digit percentage growth in exports, according to the American Farm Bureau Federation. Programs like the Market Access Program help farmers and food companies identify new market opportunities for their products.

Pennsylvania works closely with Food Export-Northeast to promote agricultural products from the region. Food Export uses MAP funding to work with small and medium sized companies to understand the complexities of exporting and reach new audiences in the global marketplace. Last year, the group work with nearly 500 companies in the Northeast, including more than 60 Pennsylvania businesses. Pennsylvania has three major ports that supply global access for food products, so it's important that we leverage federal resources to further expand the reach of Pennsylvania products.

Our program request:

Grow the Market Access Program (MAP)

Access to international trade is essential to the growth of Pennsylvania agriculture. Further support for the Market Access Program (MAP), which allows producers, state governments and cooperative to have access to resources for promotion, will help grow export markets for our goods. Funding for MAP should be double the amount it currently provides.

Title IV – Nutrition

Why it's important

Out of the \$428 billion spent on the farm bill, 76.1 percent of that is allocated for nutrition programs. The nutrition title provides food assistance for low-income households, children, and senior citizens. The 2018 Farm Bill reauthorizes and amends various programs from the previous farm bill. For example, it reauthorized Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) and lengthened participants' certification periods and maintained mandatory funding for Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP). While programs like Supplemental Nutrition

Assistance Program (SNAP) and The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP's) commodity funds for food are mandatory to fund through appropriations laws, TEFAP's administrative costs are discretionary, as is CSFP. SFMNP and GusNIP are funded from sources outside of annual appropriations bills and are delivered through competitive grants.

The 2018 Farm Bill further reauthorized, renamed, and expanded the Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive into the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program, a grant program for projects that incentivize SNAP and other low-income participants' purchase of fruits and vegetables. Improvements to TEFAP, CSFP, SFMNP, SNAP, and GusNIP should be considered in the 2023 farm bill. These programs can help ensure that Pennsylvania residents can live, work, and play without worrying about where their next meal will come from. Improving child and adult nutrition has myriad added benefits, including educational performance, decreased health care costs, and improvements in market access for farmers.

Access to food continues to be a significant concern for Pennsylvanians across the state. Pennsylvania's charitable food system served more than 88 million individuals between March 2020 and March 2023. Many of those individuals were served by food banks on a routine basis. In that same time frame, more than 725 million pounds of food were distributed. After the SNAP Emergency Allotment ended, there was a 10 percent increase in food distributed by the charitable food sector in a one-month period and food banks reported receiving additional new inquiries from seniors about food assistance.

Nutrition and agricultural programs within the Farm Bill benefit one another. Broadly speaking, recipients of nutritional assistance programs support markets. This market support, alongside other Farm Bill market development programs, benefit farmers and the larger agricultural industry directly.

Our program request:

Improve The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)

The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) contains administrative funding to support the storage, transportation, and distribution of commodities to end users. This administrative funding should be proportionate with TEFAP commodities and should be increased to \$200 million per year to reflect the actual costs of the storage, transportation, and distribution of TEFAP foods. Due to the fact that TEFAP commodity funds are available for expenditure over a two-year period, TEFAP administrative funding too should also be able to be carried over for use in a second federal fiscal year if it is not fully expended in the first federal fiscal year. TEFAP mandatory food funds should be authorized at a level of at least \$450 million per year in the next Farm Bill to respond to the increased demand in the emergency food network statewide and across the country as well as the sustained increase in food costs. Mandatory funding for the TEFAP Farm to Food Bank Program should be increased, and Congress should allow states to prioritize projects for donated food or food purchased at a low cost from local growers and producers through this program.

Improve the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP)

This Farm Bill should improve continuity of requirements across different programs. The income threshold to qualify for the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) should be increased to 185% of poverty to make it commensurate with the income threshold needed to qualify for the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP). The Farm Bill should also remove the provision that requires participants to show proof of identification each month prior to receiving the food box. This provision is overly burdensome and is not similarly required to receive benefits through other programs like TEFAP, SNAP, or FMNP/SFMNP. Authorized investment in this program should be increased to accommodate the growing population of older adults.

Expand the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP)

Fewer than one-third of senior citizens in the United States eat the recommended amount of fruits and vegetables, which are vital to preventing and treating health problems. The Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP) addresses this by providing low-income seniors access to fresh, unprepared, locally grown fruits, vegetables, and herbs. SFMNP should be improved to increase senior citizen's access to commodities and to expand farmer's access to markets. Expanding the accessibility of this program to more low-income seniors would encourage market development and community support for agricultural programs. SFMNP should also allow access to locally produced protein like eggs and cheese to improve nutrition for older adults. Voucher amounts currently range from \$20 and \$50 per year, not accounting for supplements at the state level. Investments in voucher funding should be increased to a minimum of \$35 or maximum of \$85 for eligible seniors.

Improve and Expand the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

SNAP is the nation's first line of defense against hunger, and as such, should be strengthened and protected to ensure that it can continue providing needed benefits to the most vulnerable. Increased retail food prices have been driving demand at food banks over the past year, even before the end of SNAP Emergency Allotments. This Farm Bill should maintain existing SNAP funding with no cuts and should protect SNAP choice. Policies and funding proposals that ensure affordable access to nutritious foods is paramount. Access to SNAP should be improved, especially for older adults, college students, and others who do not qualify for or are unable to participate in SNAP due to eligibility and enrollment barriers. Participation in worked based learning programs or subsidized employment and apprenticeships should not be used for eligibility and benefit determination. Eligibility for job retention services should be extended to 180 days. Additional suggestions for programmatic improvements include:

- Establish the Standard Medical Deduction, Combined Application Project and Elderly Simplified Application Project as permanent state options.
- Increase the earned income deduction
- Protect the state option to use Broad-Based Categorical Eligibility
- Remove the cap for shelter deductions
- Raise the resource limit for SNAP
- Exclude the Basic Allowance for Housing from the gross income calculation to improve SNAP accessibility for military families.
- Make permanent the temporary changes in SNAP eligibility for college students
- Establish a demonstration project that would allow states to exclude income from publicly-funded Guaranteed Income pilots from participants' SNAP eligibility

- Exclude state error rates for federal fiscal years 2022 and 2023 from counting toward liability
- Permit telephonic signatures to be recorded in writing

Improve and Expand the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP)

The Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP) provides grants on a competitive basis to projects that help low-income consumers access and purchase fresh fruits and vegetables through “cash” incentives that increase their purchasing power at locations like farmers markets. GusNIP unfortunately lacks public and private funding support across the country, which this Farm Bill could address by improving access to funding. Because it is a competitive grant, the state match requirement should be eliminated to allow all states equitable access to compete for funding.

Improve and Expand the Milk Donation Reimbursement Program

This program allows eligible dairies that partner with non-profit organizations that distribute food to low-income individuals to receive limited reimbursements to cover expenses related to certain fluid milk product donations. The program was established in the 2018 Farm Bill and should be expanded as it provides many co-benefits such as decreasing food waste, providing nutrition, and offsets producer costs for donations. There are currently 30 enrolled dairy organizations across the country. Enrollment and program funding should be doubled over the next 5 years as the program provides many co-benefits such as decreasing food waste, providing nutrition, and offsets producer costs for donations.

Title V- Credit

Why it's important

The credit title offers direct government loans to farmers/ranchers and guarantees on private lenders’ loans. The Farm Service Agency’s direct and guaranteed loan program serve as a point of entry for many young, beginning and small farmers. Access to credit continues to be a concern for these producers, so providing a predictable source of credit helps that next generation get a foothold in agriculture. FSA also partners with commercial lenders on its loan programs to help leverage federal support with young, beginning and small farmers. FSA provides about \$13 billion in direct loans and \$17 billion in loan guarantees, according to the Congressional Research Service.

Access to credit continues to be a concern for agriculture. Having the ability to use capital allows producers to take risks, pursue new market opportunities, or even enter the industry. Credit influences the ability for young and beginning farmers to gain a foothold when also impacting other areas of the Farm Bill like rural development, horticulture and commodities.

Our program request:

Increase FSA Lending Limits

The Farm Service Agency is often the go-to resource for young, beginning and small farmers. FSA administers direct and guaranteed loans to producers. Both have caps on them to limit the amount money that can be loaned to individual farmers for various purposes, including farm ownership loans. Those limits have not kept pace with the cost of inflation and should be raised. Consideration should also be given to finding ways to provide additional support for beginning farmers who could benefit from an FSA direct loan.

Establish USDA Express Loans

Congress should look to the model that exists under the Small Business Administration “Express” program to speed up the process on lower dollar value loans. The SBA program provides a 50 percent guaranteed loan program for a \$500,000 loan with a 36-hour turnaround. This quicker turnaround can be achieved by lenders being able to make the credit decisions, due to the fact that these lenders have a greater exposure.

Title VI- Rural Development

Why it's important

Rural American faces unique challenges to our suburban and urban counterparts, making the Rural Development title an essential part of the Farm Bill. Perhaps the most striking example of the need for targeted investment in rural communities is the ongoing effort to bring reliable broadband service to rural communities. That is one of the many initiatives that USDA’s Office of Rural Development works on to help rural communities stay competitive.

USDA offers direct and guaranteed loans for community facilities, such as wastewater treatment facilities, or other infrastructure that broadly supports community use. Some of the authorization for these programs will expire in September, so it’s important that reauthorization be included in the next Farm Bill.

The Farm Bill provides an excellent opportunity to focus on the needs of rural America through targeted investments. It is where the majority of agriculture producers live and work so supporting these communities through strong infrastructure and broadband connectivity have a direct correlation to the quality of life in these areas.

Our program request:

Expand USDA Farm Worker Housing Loans

Additional funding is needed for the USDA’s farm worker housing program to allow for more agriculture employers to offer housing to workers who are here either on a temporary or year-round basis. Funding can be used for the construction, repair and purchase of housing. The program helps assist those who cannot obtain commercial credit that will allow them to charge affordable rates to low-income tenants.

Support Bridging the Digital Divide

Reliable broadband service continues to be a critical need in rural communities. It is critical that the Farm Bill provide robust funding to create scalable broadband networks, while providing programmatic flexibility that addresses the unique challenges of trying to provide service to hard-to-reach areas.

Support Value-Added Producer Grants and Rural Cooperative Development Grants

The USDA, through Rural Development, created the Value-Added Producer Grant and the Rural Cooperative Development Grant program to help farmers and co-ops develop new products and market opportunities, funded at \$35 million. Grant funding was eligible to be used for planning, working capital and marketing of value-added products produced by farmers and agriculture producer groups. Reauthorization of this program will help producers continue to develop new uses for raw agriculture commodities.

Provide Resources to Small Meat Processors

COVID-19 outbreaks in some large meatpacking plants in 2020 and the related disruption to meat processing showed the need for a diversified supply chain. The pandemic shifted consumer buying habits and created greater opportunities for farmers to sell meat and poultry products directly to consumers, but processing capacity at small- to medium-sized facilities remains a challenge. Congress should consider the benefits of expanding programs that were developed during the pandemic for small- to medium-sized meat processors and should create new programs based on constituent's feedback to increase market opportunities for these often-underserved livestock producers. Funding should focus on reimbursing applicants for consulting or other technical support services that directly support the development and maintenance of programs required to operate; professional employee training and educational services, the purchase of meat or poultry slaughter or processing equipment and equipment or supplies directly related to employee safety.

Support Rural Development for Community Facilities

USDA Rural Development programs have become an essential source of funding for vital community facilities, such as rural hospital and health care systems, but also libraries, senior centers, schools and other vital infrastructure. Increasing funding for direct and guaranteed loans for community facilities, along with increasing authorization for grant funds, will help rural communities better afford these important facilities.

Support Permit Modernization

Federal permitting requirements have expanded over the years, which often results in delays and added costs for rural electrical cooperatives. Longer waiting times often result in project delays and higher electricity bills as cooperatives build out projects. Improving the environment review process across USDA Rural Development for Rural Development's community-based programs, specifically for Rural Utility Service and Community Facilities projects, will speed up the process of delivering critical services to rural communities.

Title VII- Research, Extension and Related Matters

Why it's important

Research is the foundation that agricultural advancement is built on. So, it's critical for American agriculture to have a specific title related to advancing agriculture in the Farm Bill. Since the mid-1800s, the method of delivering fact-based scientific agriculture research to the farming community is through the Land Grant system and extension agents that work with farmers on the local level. We are grateful to have a strong partner in our land grant institution at Penn State University.

The research title supports agricultural research at the federal level and provides support for cooperative research, extension, and postsecondary agricultural education programs.

The 2018 Farm Bill reauthorized several existing programs and established new initiatives, such as a competitive research grants for indoor and urban agriculture. It also funded research into the specialty crop sector, which is an important component of Pennsylvania agriculture.

Our program request:

Support Urban, Indoor, and other Emerging Ag Production Research, Education and Extension Initiative

The 2018 Farm Bill established a grant program to support the development of urban, indoor, and other emerging agricultural production, harvesting, transportation, aggregation, packaging, distribution, and markets. Congress provided \$10 million in one-time mandatory funding. Urban agriculture can help produce food and fiber needed to feed increasing populations and help address supply chain challenges. Congress should not only maintain mandatory funding, but increase funding for the Urban Indoor and other Emerging Agricultural Production Research, Education and Extension Initiative and provide baseline mandatory funding into the future. Pennsylvania has been working to encourage the growth and development of urban agriculture and we are hoping to be able to leverage federal support with those efforts.

Support the Research Facilities Act

Seventy percent of public agricultural research and development is performed at Land-Grant Universities and other non-Federal entities. In 2022, USDA published data noting investment in US public agricultural R&D has fallen by one third over the last two decades. A study of infrastructure and deferred maintenance at agricultural schools across the nation found the deferred cost to be almost \$11.5 billion. Congress should reauthorize the Research Facilities Act and provide mandatory funding to prevent the U.S. from falling further behind in global agricultural scientific research, teaching, and development.

Improve the Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI)

Pennsylvania is a specialty crop state. SCRI awards competitive grants to support research and extension that address priority needs of the specialty crop industry nationally, including pest and disease threats, improving production and efficiency using precision agriculture and promoting new innovations and technologies including machine learning and digital imagery to inform management decisions. Congress should eliminate the matching funds requirement. Matching

requirements for fundamental research programs are unusual and present a significant challenge for public universities and commodities with lower quantities of production, such as fruits and vegetables. Congress should increase mandatory funding for SCRI. The funding level of \$80 million has not increased since FY 2014. SCRI is only funding about 20 percent of the applications.

Support Plant and Animal Biotechnology

A sustainable food supply depends on research on plant and animal genome structure and function, molecular and cellular genetics, and biotechnology. However, there is a gap between technology development and utilization that includes regulations that limit the translations of biotechnology solutions into marketable solutions. Congress should continue to emphasize plant and animal resilience using novel transformation methods as a priority under Agricultural Food and Research Initiative (AFRI) programs. The Farm Bill should include language that encourages private/public partnerships to more efficiently advance technology.

Establish a Master Watershed Steward Program

Non-point source pollution remains a huge water quality challenge. Government regulators cannot address all the challenges, and we need citizen engagement to advance water quality solutions. Penn State's Master Watershed Steward Program provides science-based training on conservation and environmental issues for community volunteers. Master Watershed Stewards partner with county conservation districts, watershed groups, and non-profits to identify and advance the region or local community's water quality priorities. Congress should authorize a pilot program for land-grant universities to implement Master Watershed Steward programs to support local water quality and conservation measures.

Increase Agricultural Supply Chains Research

COVID-19 devastated supply chains that led to food shortages in the United States. Research and extension efforts are needed to examine ways to strengthen supply chains, implement blockchain technology, work with industry on science-based solutions, and engage multiple layers of government in promoting efficient and effective agricultural supply chains. Congress should add "agricultural supply chains" to the priority areas for the Agricultural Food and Research Initiative (AFRI) authorization and to types of research projects eligible under the Federal-State Marketing Improvement Program (FSMIP).

Support One Health Approach

Research is instrumental in understanding interconnections across systems — people, animals, plants, and the environment — to enhance biosecurity, promote positive health outcomes, and sustain agricultural development. A One Health approach encompasses levels from soil health to the dynamics of human and animal diseases, addressing issues such as vector-borne pathogens, protecting against infections, decreasing disease incidence, and health through functional foods. Congress should authorize specific joint-agency funding between USDA, NIFA, and NIH for research focused on One Health.

Support International Agriculture

Land Grant Universities are globally recognized for their research, training, and extension of food production and safety advances. US leadership in this area has never been more important,

and additional funds are needed to maintain that leadership position. Under Title VII, PDA suggests Section 7123 (Partnerships) and Section 7124 (International Ag Science Education)—be combined into a single title totaling \$20 million for the NIFA Center for International Programs.

Title VII- Forestry

Why it's important

Forestry is an essential component of agriculture, especially in Pennsylvania, where our hardwood industry serves as an economic driver for our economy. The majority of forestland in Pennsylvania and the United States are owned by private landowners, so programs must continue to provide stewardship opportunities, while also further creating market opportunities for the industry.

The forestry title directs the U.S. Forest Service in the administration of programs specifically aimed at working forests (providing financial, technical, or other resources to promote forest ownership and stewardship), conducting research and the management of resources on federal forest lands. The 2018 Farm Bill authorized several programs including allowing for statewide forest reassessments.

Forestry has a \$39 billion economic impact in Pennsylvania, including more than \$1.1 billion in overseas trade. It is critical for Pennsylvania agriculture that programs under the forestry title meet the needs of the forest products industry and the landowners who manage these working forests.

Our program request:

Establish a Hardwood Products Access and Development Program

This program would support efforts to support the environmental and health benefits of hardwoods. Non-profit organizations, research organizations and universities would be eligible to conduct research related to the use of hardwood products, including the environmental benefits of wood. Pennsylvania uses its Hardwoods Development Council to help further grow the industry in the state and additional federal resources would help increase the utilization of sustainable wood products.

Implement Forest Action Plans

While states are required to complete a State Forest Action Plan, which examines the condition of the state's public and private forest lands, there is no funding for states to implement strategic solutions. Currently, the Forest Service can allocate \$40 million over the next five years to support state forest plan implementation. Pennsylvania supports codifying this State Forest Action Plan Implementation authority through the 2023 Farm Bill to ensure states have the resources to implement the highest priority forest management activities within their state.

Support the Good Neighbor Authority

The Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) program has allowed states to partner effectively with the Forest Service on federal forest restoration and management projects, advancing critical work to improve species habitat, enhance watersheds, reduce hazardous fuels, and mitigate wildfire risks. GNA was first authorized through the 2014 Farm Bill and in 2018 was expanded to permit counties to enter into agreements with the Forest Service. However, counties were not authorized to retain timber sale revenues that could be reinvested in conservation management projects. The 2018 Farm Bill also removed the ability for restoration services to occur off federal lands, lands which are essential to the health and productivity of national forests and landscape conservation efforts. Pennsylvania supports permanently authorizing the GNA and allowing for counties and Federally Recognized Tribes to retain and expend GNA-related revenues and allowing for such revenues to support conservation and forest management work on non-federal lands.

Support State-Established Forest Easement Programs for Working Forests

Most forest land in Pennsylvania is privately held and serves as a valuable source for hardwoods and timber products that fuel our rural economies. Conservation easements on these private forest lands provide important safeguards that protect these critical resources from development while allowing for the sustainable harvesting of valuable timber. Creating a dedicated funding stream for private forests, similar to those for agriculture conservation easements, will help landowners who want to protect their assets for generations. Pennsylvania supports the creation of a program, along with funding, to develop a forest-easement program for working forests in the Farm Bill.

Establish a Land Scale Restoration Program (LSR)

The 2018 Farm Bill codified the Land Scale Restoration Program but added a component to be instituted only in communities with fewer than 50,000 people. That requirement has eliminated the ability of states to leverage Urban and Community Forest program resources to work in larger communities. Reestablishing LSR as a flexible program will allow states to address high priority needs areas, especially those identified in the state Forest Action Plans, while still being able to assist rural communities.

Allocate Dedicated Funding for Wildfires

Programs authorized in prior Farm Bills have suffered at lower funding levels, or not launched at all, when resources have been redirected to combating forest fires. The Forest Service should have separate and distinct funding that can be used for forest fighting, without diminishing resources for other important forestry and hardwoods programs.

Title IX- Energy

Why it's important

Energy and agriculture go hand-in-hand. Running agriculture operations require significant amounts of power. But in addition, farms can provide practical solutions to our nation's need to produce additional sources of renewable energy. The Farm Bill energy title focuses on this intersection by looking at ways that agriculture can provide renewable energy solutions. Those

solutions include the production of biomass for energy feedstocks or encouraging farmers to look to renewable energy sources to power their farms. Encouraging the use of renewable energy and the production of biofuel products from agriculture sources are good for reducing the nation's dependence on foreign energy sources. In addition, it provides important economic stimulation in rural economies and can provide opportunities for farms and agriculture-related businesses to generate income.

Our program request:

Improve the Rural Energy Assistance Program (REAP)

Agriculture is an energy intensive enterprise. USDA's Rural Development administers the REAP program helps farmers better afford renewable energy projects through grants and loans. It's important to find ways to streamline the application process so that a wider array of farmers can participate, in particular small to medium-sized farms that likely lack the staff capacity to pursue these types of funding opportunities. Consideration should also be given to adoption of a rebate portion for well-established energy saving projects like more efficient lighting, heating and cooling.

Title X- Horticulture

Why it's important

The horticulture title provides broad support to specialty crops, which face their own unique challenges and market conditions, along with supporting organic agriculture production. Some of the issue areas impacting specialty crops are covered in other titles, like crop insurance, but the Horticulture Title ensures that research and marketing of these crops have their own stand-alone issue area. For instance, the 2018 Farm Bill made several changes to the USDA's National Organic Program and created regulatory framework around hemp production. Specialty crops are a valuable component of agriculture and often are an important point-of-entry into farming enterprises by young, beginning and small farmers. These crops face their own research, regulatory and disease protection standards and protocols.

Our program request:

Increase Funding for Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBG)

This program provides federal funding to specialty crop producers by giving state's Departments of Agriculture funding to perform research related to specialty crops in their area. This block grant approach gives state-based flexibility to focus on research areas with specialty crops that are important to individual states. For instance, a research trial in Pennsylvania found a variety of russet potato that grows well in our climate, creating a potentially new market opportunity for these varieties. It's important for Congress to dedicate funding to the program and for USDA to work with industry stakeholders on program metrics so that continuous improvement is made on the program. Funding for SCBG should increase by \$2 billion in this Farm Bill.

Different Hemp Standards Depending on Use

Farmers who want to participate in hemp production and processing face several challenges. Chief among them are rules that limit the amount of THC that can legally be present in plants. Hemp that is grown for CBD or other human uses needs to have a regulated amount of THC; those same rules are not necessary for hemp that will be used for feed or fiber—particularly hemp fiber that will go to building materials. Creating bifurcated standards for hemp, depending on the plants utilization, would help support the industry and create economic opportunities for farmers.

Increase Funding for Plant Pest and Disease Management

Plant pests and disease pose a significant threat to crops across Pennsylvania and across the country. Funding supports a wide variety of projects aimed at addressing the disease and insect pests impacting plants. The APHIS-PPQ PPA 7721 Plant Pest and Disease Management and Disaster Prevention Program provides annual funding for high priority pest survey, research, and mitigation projects. Additional funding would provide broader surveillance, allowing for earlier detection and more rapid response to high-impact pests. Funding should be increased by \$3 million per year for 5 years to keep pace with the increasing cost of work. Reserve funds should also be annually accruable.

Assistance with Spotted Lanternfly Regulatory Programs

Money for spotted lanternfly regulatory control operations, outreach, and research currently comes through several pots of money within USDA-APHIS-PPQ and requires states to make yearly applications for research, management, and outreach efforts. Pennsylvania and other states impacted by this invasive species are requesting \$40 million annually for five years be available to fund state management and regulatory operations, research into treatment and controls, and outreach for spotted lanternfly. Funding would come through the USDA's Plant Protection and Quarantine program. This would ensure yearly predictable funding that states could use.

Title XI - Crop Insurance

Why it's important

Federal crop insurance programs help farmers purchase insurance that acts as an important safety net for producers. Crop insurance payments are applied when producers suffer losses due to weather or unpredictable markets. Crop insurance subsidies are used to help encourage farmer participation in the crop insurance marketplace, rather than a reliance on disaster payments. About 62 percent of a farmer's total premium is paid for through this program according to the Congressional Research Service. Farmers then have the option of purchasing additional coverages depending on their business needs. Crop insurance is provided by private companies. Their policies cover row crops, including corn and soybeans, and also specialty crops such as apples, potatoes and other produce. Crop insurance provides farmers a level of protection against unexpected circumstances like weather or market forces. While crop insurance does not make producers whole, the insurance benefits triggered during a loss claim can help farmers move on

from a difficult year and prepare for the next planting season. Like all forms of insurance, making a claim means a loss has occurred. But having that insurance product provides an ability to rebuild and move on. This type of safety net is critical to agriculture because of the weather and market forces that farmers have to contend with. The programs, and structural support in the crop insurance title provides agriculture with a clear path to ride out unexpected hurdles.

Our program request:

Support Crop Insurance

Continue to provide access to crop insurance products and services. Federal crop insurance programs remain agriculture's best risk management tool. It is imperative that existing federal crop insurance programs remain available for producers. Specialty crops are important for PA's ag economy, and growers' access to crop insurance can vary. Congress should engage with specialty crop producers to make sure the crop insurance program is effective, such as expanding coverage to mushroom producers.

Restore Outreach Grants

The 2018 Farm Bill required the collection of data on outreach to underserved producers. This replaced previous efforts that directly supported outreach and educational programs to reach those producers. Restoring grants for crop insurance outreach will help us better served these producers.

Title XII - Miscellaneous

Why It's Important

The miscellaneous title provides an opportunity to address emerging policy issues that may not fall under any other issue area, allowing the Farm Bill to be responsive to the emerging needs of agriculture. Previous Farm Bills have addressed areas impacting beginning farmers, veteran farmers and socially disadvantaged producers. The miscellaneous title provides a “catch-all” locations for items that do not cleanly fit under other programmatic titles. Farm and food policy continues to evolve at the national level, such as the significant growth of the controlled environment sector of agriculture. This gives drafters of the Farm Bill flexibility to include important policy and legislative changes that does not neatly fit into other categories and allows Congress to be nimble as it charts the course of American agriculture over the next five years.

Our program request:

Supporting Controlled Environment Agriculture

Emerging technologies that allow for the production of plants indoors, under hydroponics systems, creates a layer of resiliency in our food supply. It also helps supply a source of fresh, local, foods throughout the year and irrespective of the outdoor growing season. This type of approach is also used by the mushroom industry, which continues to refine ways to grow fresh foods indoors on a year-round basis. Some of these systems can be expensive to implement.

USDA should consider different approaches for financial support to encourage the additional development of controlled environment agriculture.

Updates to Organic Food Production Act

Updates to the Organic Foods Production Act are necessary to provide a predictable timeline for the review and update of organic standards. These standards should be updated at least every five years. Additionally, there is need for USDA's National Organic Program (NOP) oversight of certifiers to ensure standards are consistent. Additional staff capacity is needed to help train additional certifiers to continue to ensure that nationwide standards are uniformly applied.

NOP is a voluntary certification program for producers and handlers that uses approved methods and standards. The program covers organically produced specialty crops, field crops, and animal products (e.g., meat and dairy products), as well as nonfood consumer products. The horticulture title of the 2018 Farm Bill primarily focused on addressing perceived shortcomings in USDA's organic certification by making changes intended to enhance enforcement, limit program fraud, and fund technology upgrades.

Improve Emergency Response for Animal Disease Outbreaks

The Miscellaneous title contains several initiatives to guard against disease outbreaks in the livestock industry and provides measures to respond to potential outbreaks and emergencies quickly and strategically. These include the establishment of the National Animal Disease Preparedness Response Program and the National Animal Vaccine and Veterinary Countermeasures Bank. The recent HPAI outbreak emphasized the need for increases in rapid response funding, and preparations for potential food-and-mouth disease (FMD) demonstrate a need for more large-animal vaccines in the vaccine bank. The 2023 Farm Bill should increase rapid response funding and expand what vaccines are available in the federal bank to allow for more versatility and access if a crisis occurred.

Expand RFID tags and digitization of tracking data

The \$34 billion animal agriculture industry in Pennsylvania is at risk of highly contagious animal disease outbreaks—such as FMD, African swine fever (ASF), and High Pathogenic Avian Influenza—that would disrupt production and exports. Every effort to prevent disasters in this industry should be exercised, including expanding the use and availability of radio-frequency identification (RFID) tags in livestock. Additional measures to digitize transfer records and eliminating paper transfer records should be explored, as paper records cause inefficiencies in tracing if an issue arises.

Creating Agricultural Workforce Training and Apprenticeships Programs and Assistance for Youth

Agricultural industries are experiencing severe workforce shortages, including both skilled and technical positions. Partnering with agricultural industries, land-grant universities should develop specific educational, training, and credential programs to meet industry workforce needs. Stackable credentials and apprenticeships can help train a skilled workforce by providing on-the-job experience and technical training. Congress should authorize and provide mandatory funding for an Agricultural Workforce Training and Apprenticeships program. One of the best ways to help attract a new generation of workers into agriculture, and help individuals learn of the exciting careers in the industry, is invest in national programs that specifically help youth gain an

appreciation for agriculture. Additional support for FFA and 4-H at the national level will help grow programs at the local level.