

Build a Better Farm Bill

2023 Farm Bill Marker Bills and Sign-on Letters

Updated Sep 12, 2023

What is a marker bill?

Marker bills are sponsored by members of Congress and introduced like any other bill, but they are not intended to pass as standalone legislation. Instead, marker bills are meant to elevate policy ideas and let lawmakers build grassroots support for their bills to demonstrate those policy ideas have broad support. The more active support a marker bill has among members of Congress, the more likely it is to be incorporated into an omnibus piece of legislation, like the farm bill, and get signed into law.

The more support we generate for our endorsed marker bills, the more likely it will be that our policy priorities will be enacted in the next farm bill.

Our marker bills generally fall into three buckets that capture Sierra Club's priorities:

- **[Climate-Forward Agriculture and Food Systems](#)**: Promote organic and regenerative farming and ranching, climate resilience, reduce water and air pollution, improve soil health, lower greenhouse gas emissions, support local and regional food systems and rural clean energy development;
- **[Public Investment for the Public Good](#)**: Help ensure that more land is used for nutritious food, *not* livestock feed, by redirecting funds away from polluting and extractive conventional agriculture and benefitting local foods and producers; and
- **[Equity and Food Security](#)**: Address equity issues by protecting and expanding SNAP, assisting BIPOC, small, urban, and new farmers and ranchers, and addressing environmental injustices and negative health impacts of harmful agricultural practices.

We've organized the following marker bills into these three buckets. You will find the bill's title, its sponsor(s), a bill summary, and other supporting materials to help prepare you for your meetings with members of Congress or their staff. We have also included information about [two efforts with partners](#) that address our priorities. For ease, we have also put asterisks around the names of bills that are among our top asks for Congress.

Climate-Forward Agriculture and Food Systems

****Agriculture Resilience Act of 2023****

Bicameral

Reintroduced 03/28/2023 (Senator Martin Heinrich, [D-NM]; Representative Chellie Pingree [D-ME-1])

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Bill number: [S.1016](#) ([H.R.1840](#))

[Martin Heinrich press release](#)

Sets a national goal of achieving net-zero agricultural emissions by 2040 through farmer and rancher-led, science-based initiatives prioritizing climate research and climate-smart practices.

This legislation will make investments focusing on six policy areas:

- 1. Increasing research:** Increase funding for USDA's Regional [Climate Hubs](#). Create a new [Sustainable Agriculture and Research \(SARE\)](#) Agricultural and Food System Resilience Initiative grant program to fund farmer and rancher-led projects.
- 2. Improving soil health:** Create a new soil health grant program. Offer performance-based crop insurance discounts. Expand the [National Agroforestry Center](#). Provide more USDA conservation program assistance and flexibility.
- 3. Protecting existing farmland and supporting farm viability:** Increase funding for the [Local Agricultural Market Program](#) to help keep local farms profitable and create a new subprogram for farm viability and local climate resilience centers to help farmers reach new markets.
- 4. Supporting pasture-based livestock systems:** Create a new program to support alternative livestock methane management strategies. Establish a new grant program to help small meat processors cover the costs associated with meeting federal inspection guidelines.
- 5. Boosting investments in on-farm energy initiatives:** Increase funding for the [Rural Energy for America Program \(REAP\)](#) to prioritize low-emissions electrification projects, including dual-use renewable energy and cropping or livestock systems (agrovoltatics).
- 6. Reducing food waste**

Local Farms and Food Act of 2023

Bicameral/bipartisan

Reintroduced 04/19/23 (Senator Sherrod Brown [D-OH]; Representative Chellie Pingree [D-ME-1])

Bill number: [S.1205](#) ([H.R.2723](#))

[Sherrod Brown press release](#)

[Chellie Pingree press release](#)

[NSAC outline](#)

Offers program reforms to remove barriers for applicants, increase infrastructural investments, and sustain impactful nutrition incentives through the [Local Agriculture Market Program \(LAMP\)](#), [Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive](#) (GusNIP), and [Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program \(SFNMP\)](#).

- **LAMP:** Supports direct producer-to-consumer marketing, local and regional food markets and enterprises, and [value-added agricultural products](#).
- **GusNIP:** Prioritizes nutrition security by funding competitive grants for projects to increase the purchase of and prescriptions for fresh fruits and vegetables by income-eligible consumers.

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- **SFNMP:** Provides low-income seniors access to locally grown fruits, vegetables, honey, and herbs.

Strengthening Organic Agriculture Research (SOAR) Act of 2023

Bipartisan

Introduced 04/19/23 (Dan Newhouse [R-WA])

Bill number: [H.R.2720](#) (no Senate version as of 09/12/23)

[Dan Newhouse press release](#)

[Organic Farming Research Foundation \(OFRF\) press release](#) & [one-pager](#)

This bill would increase investments into organic agriculture research and market analysis, supporting a rapidly growing organic food and agriculture market. The bill would bolster funding for two USDA organic-specific research programs, the [Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative \(OREI\)](#) and the Researching the Transition to Organic Program (RTOP), currently known as the [Organic Transition Research Program \(ORG\)](#), providing first-time Congressional authorization to the latter. The bill would also bolster funding for the Organic Production and Market Data Initiative (ODI), a joint initiative of three USDA Agencies: [Natural Agricultural Statistics Service \(NASS\)](#), [Economic Research Service \(ERS\)](#), and [Agricultural Marketing Service \(AMS\)](#). It also directs ERS to conduct a full, systematic evaluation of the economic impact of organic agriculture on rural and urban communities, taking into account economic, ecological, and social factors.

Agrivoltaics Research and Demonstration Act of 2023; bipartisan (no House version as of 07/30/23)

Bipartisan

Introduced 05/31/23 (Senator Martin Heinrich (D-NM)/Senator Mike Braun (R-IN))

Bill number: [S.1778](#) (no House version as of 09/12/23)

[Martin Heinrich press release](#)

[NSAC Blog](#)

This bill would provide funding for the Department of Energy (DoE) and Department of Agriculture (USDA) to jointly advance research on agrivoltaics (the co-location of solar panels on agricultural land used for growing crops or raising livestock) and demonstrations of the value of such systems. Agrivoltaic systems can enhance productivity and profit, reduce water loss, increase resiliency, and generate clean energy.

GusNIP Expansion Act

Bipartisan

Introduced 07/25/23 (Representative Dan Kildee [MI-08]/Representative Rick Crawford [AZ-01])

Bill number: [H.R.4856](#) (no Senate version as of 09/12/23)

[Dan Kildee press release](#)

[Alliance for National Nutrition Incentives \(ANNI\) press release](#)

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This bill would expand the [Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program \(GusNIP\)](#), which supports state and local programs offering nutrition incentives that subsidize the purchase of fruits and vegetables. The bill would increase the purchasing power of [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program \(SNAP\)](#) benefits and bolster the [GusNIP Produce Prescription Program](#). The provisions in the bill would 1) enable more partners to participate by reducing the funding match requirement, 2) scale up programs that make incentives available statewide, and 3) invest in training to help projects work better for participants. It would improve nutrition security while boosting income for local farmers who grow healthy food.

COVER Act

Bicameral/bipartisan

Introduced 05/18/23 (Senator Sherrod Brown [D-OH]; Representative Sean Casten [D-IL-6])

Bill number: [S.1690](#) ([H.R.3478](#))

[Sherod Brown press release](#)

[Sean Casten press release](#)

[Farm Action Fact Sheet](#)

[Endorsements](#)

This bill would provide a \$5/acre crop insurance discount to farmers who plant cover crops. Incentivizing farmers to plant cover crops, a critical conservation practice that improves the quality of soils, will reduce nutrient runoff, mitigate climate risk, and reduce dependence on synthetic fertilizers and agrichemicals. The bill also creates a soil health pilot program and provides technical assistance to help producers implement cover crops.

TSP Access Act of 2023

Bicameral/bipartisan

Introduced 05/02/23 (Senator Mike Braun [R-IN]; Representative Jim Baird [R-IN-4])

Bill number: [S.1400](#) ([H.R.3036](#))

[Jim Baird press release](#)

[CCL](#)

Technical Service Providers (TSPs) are certified to provide one-on-one assistance to producers, helping them access USDA conservation programs. A significant shortage of TSPs limits the participation of many farmers, ranchers, and forest owners in these programs. This bill would address the shortage by allowing organizations outside the federal government to certify TSPs and streamlining the certification process for people already holding specialty certifications.

Public Investment for the Public Good

Opportunities for Fairness in Farming Act of 2023

Bicameral/bipartisan

Reintroduced 02/28/23 (Senator Mike Lee [R-UT]/Senator Cory Booker [D-NJ]; Representative Nancy Mace [R-SC-1]/Representative Dina Titus [D-NV-1])

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Bill number: [S.557 \(H.R.1249\)](#)

[Mike Lee press release](#)

[Cory Booker press release](#)

[OFF Act Fact Sheet \(Farm Action\)](#)

[Checkoff reform \(Farm Action\)](#)

[Lansing State Journal op-ed](#)

[Agricultural research and promotion programs](#) (commonly known as checkoff programs) are supported by mandatory payments from producers of an agricultural commodity. In theory, the funding goes towards advertising campaigns and research that helps all farmers and ranchers. In reality, the money is often used for lobbying that influences legislation and government action, leading to anti-competitive practices. The end result is smaller, independent, and less well-resourced farmers and ranchers paying into a program that actively works against them. This bill prohibits unfair or unlawful practices and requires greater transparency, accountability, and oversight.

Farm System Reform Act of 2023

Bicameral

Reintroduced 02/02/2023 (Senator Cory Booker [D-NJ]; Representative Ro Khanna [D-CA-17])

Bill number: [S.271 \(H.R.797\)](#)

[Cory Booker press release](#)

Would 1) strengthen the [Packers & Stockyards Act](#) to crack down on the monopolistic practices of meatpackers and corporate integrators; 2) place a federal moratorium on large factory farms, sometimes referred to as concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) and support the transition to a more resilient food system; and 3) restore mandatory country-of-origin labeling requirements.

Industrial Agriculture Accountability Act of 2023

Bicameral

Reintroduced 02/02/2023 (Senator Cory Booker [D-NJ]; Representative James McGovern [D-MA-2])

Bill number: [S.272 \(H.R.805\)](#)

[Cory Booker press release](#)

This bill would:

1. Place the liability for responsible disaster mitigation, including emergency depopulation, on corporations and industrial operators and require those entities to register with USDA and submit disaster preparedness plans.
2. Strengthen animal welfare standards by restricting inhumane depopulation methods, ensuring the human treatment of animals during extreme weather events and transportation, mandating the inclusion of poultry in the [Human](#)

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- [Methods of Slaughter Act](#), and prohibiting the slaughter of and humanely euthanizing all downed animals.
3. Enforce minimum labor standards and compensate affected contract growers and other workers,
 4. Reform slaughterhouse operations by ending line-speed increases and meatpacker self-inspection programs for animal slaughter, and
 5. Enforce compliance.

Strengthening Local Processing Act of 2023

Bicameral/bipartisan

Reintroduced 02/09/23 (Senator John Thune, [R-SD]; Representative Chellie Pingree [D-ME-1])

Bill number: [S.354](#) ([H.R.945](#))

[John Thune press release](#)

Would help build local food systems in areas where livestock are being raised and support smaller producers (rather than national companies). Specifically, this bill would support small local meat and poultry processing facilities, including funding for training and technical assistance, helping smaller producers compete and get their products to market. Building local food systems will make the supply chain more resilient, lower prices, and create employment opportunities, revitalizing communities and delivering quality, locally-raised meat and poultry to restaurants, retailers, and consumers.

EQIP Improvement Act

Bicameral/Bipartisan

Introduced 03/06/23 (Senator Cory Booker [D-NJ]); 08/22/23 (Representative Jahana Hayes [D-CT])

Bill number: [S.658](#) ([H.R.5252](#))

[Cory Booker press release](#)

[Jahana Hayes press release](#)

[Bill summary](#)

[Endorsements](#)

The bill would ensure that more producers, particularly smaller farmers and ranchers, can participate in EQIP, funding the most effective conservation practices and giving states more flexibility in implementing the program. It would reduce the overall payment cap on EQIP contracts, reduce federal cost-sharing for practices that provide little or no environmental benefits, and eliminate a requirement that 50% of EQIP funding flow to livestock operators.

Equity and Food Security

Justice for Black Farmers Act of 2023 (NSAC)

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Bicameral

Reintroduced 01/26/23 (Senator Cory Booker [D-NJ]); 02/24/23 (Representative Alma Adams [D-NC-12])

Bill number: [S.96](#) ([H.R.1167](#))

[Cory Booker press release](#)

[Alma Adams press release](#)

In 1920, there were nearly 1 million Black farmers in the US. Today, due in large part to historic discrimination within federal farm assistance and lending at the USDA, there are estimated to be less than 50,000 remaining Black farmers. This bill would enact policies to end discrimination within the USDA, protect Black farmers from losing their land, provide land grants to encourage a new generation of Black farmers and restore the land base that has been lost. The bill provides substantial resources for [1890 Land-Grant Institutions](#) to help Black farmers and includes funding for all [HBCUs](#) to expand their agriculture research and courses of study.

Protecting America's Meatpacking Workers Act of 2023

Bicameral

Reintroduced 02/02/23 (Senator Cory Booker [D-NJ]; Representative Ro Khanna [D-CA-17])

Bill number: [S.270](#) ([H.R. 798](#))

[Cory Booker press release](#)

[Union of Concerned Scientists statement](#)

[United Food and Commercial Workers Union \(UFCW\)](#)

Would expand workplace safety and health protections for meat and poultry processing workers, ensuring safer line processing speeds and inspections, requiring adherence to OSHA standards, and ending punitive attendance policies. The bill includes meatpacking system reforms that crack down on monopolistic practices of large corporate companies, creating a fairer market that allows smaller independent farmers and ranchers and local food systems to thrive.

Opt for Health with SNAP (OH SNAP)

Bicameral

Introduced 06/15/23 (Senator Cory Booker [D-NJ]; Representative Lisa Rochester [D-DE])

Bill number: [S.2015](#) ([H.R.4149](#))

[Cory Booker press release](#)

This bill would significantly expand the successful [Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program \(GusNIP\)](#), which funds state/local governments and nonprofits to provide point-of-sale incentives for SNAP recipients to purchase fruits and vegetables (e.g., [Double Up Food Bucks](#)). The bill would scale up mandatory funding to \$3.5 billion over 5 years and authorize \$100 million in discretionary financing annually for 5 years. It would also eliminate the local cost-share requirement, which has prevented local implementers from being able to apply for and sustain the program. GusNIP positively impacts public health and local economies,

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particularly fruit and vegetable farmers, who benefit from reliable access to expanded local markets.

Even though the [Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#) recommend that 50% of a person's diet should be fruits and vegetables, less than 10% of current farm bill agricultural subsidies go to fruit and vegetable farmers. Instead, most subsidies go toward commodity crops like corn and soy, predominantly used in feed for animals, ethanol, or processed foods.

Increasing Land Access, Security and Opportunities Act

Bipartisan

Introduced 06/09/23 (Representative Nicki Budzinski [D-IL-13])

Bill number: [H.R.3955](#) (no Senate version as of 09/12/23)

[Nikki Budzinski press release](#)

[Young Farmers press release](#)

Would help young, beginning, and Black, Indigenous and other people of color (BIPOC) farmers gain access to land, capital, and markets, the biggest barriers for new and underserved farmers and ranchers. The bill would expand the USDA [Increasing Land, Capital, and Market Access Program](#), providing critical resources to implement farmland access, retention, and transition projects. The proposed \$100 million of annual funding over ten years would complement the USDA's existing farm production and conservation programs and be available to individuals and a wide variety of entities, such as tribes, municipalities, non-profits, and cooperatives.

Farmer to Farmer Education Act of 2023

Bipartisan

Introduced 07/27/23 (Senator Ben Ray Luján [D-NM]; Senator Jerry Moran [R-KS])

Bill number: [S.2614](#) (no House version as of 09/12/23)

[Ben Luján press release](#)

The bill would foster knowledge sharing by investing in farmer-led education networks—particularly in communities historically marginalized from existing systems—as a key strategy to increase the adoption of conservation practices. Specifically, the bill would authorize the National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to enter into cooperative agreements with community-based organizations in states to support established farmer-to-farmer education networks and build capacity for new ones. Young farmers can learn from trusted community members, ensuring they receive information relevant to their cultural farming and ranching practices.

Relief for Farmers Hit with PFAS Act

Bicameral/bipartisan

Introduced 03/09/23 (Senator Susan Collins [R-ME]; Representative Chellie Pingree [D-ME-1])

Bill number: [S.747](#) ([H.R.1517](#))

[Chellie Pingree press release](#)

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[Susan Collins website](#)

Authorizes grants for states to provide financial assistance to affected farmers, who through no fault of their own are at risk of losing their livelihoods, expand monitoring and testing, remediate PFAS, or even help farmers relocate.

SIGN ON LETTERS JOINED BY THE SIERRA CLUB

****Conservation Stewardship Program Funding****

[Robust Funding for the Conservation Stewardship Program in the 2023 Farm Bill](#)

Requests Congress to stair-step mandatory funding for the [Conservation Stewardship Program](#) (CSP) to \$4 billion annually in the 2023 Farm Bill. The CSP [generates far greater return on investment than other approaches to conservation](#), making CSP one of the most responsible places to invest public funds. However, it is underfunded and oversubscribed.

Asking for increased funding for CSP is one way to protect the \$20 billion in IRA climate-smart agriculture investments.

****Defeat EATS Coalition****

[Letter](#) *opposing* the Ending Agricultural Trade Suppression (EATS) Act

Coalition members include Sierra Club, Farm Action, ASPCA, Health Care Without Harm, NRDC, and many more.

Introduced 06/15/22 (Senator Roger Marshall [R-KS]); 06/30/23 (Representative Ashley Hinson [R-IA-2])

Bill number: [S.2019](#) ([H.R.4417](#))

Harvard Law School [legislative analysis](#)

The dangerous and overarching EATS Act, modeled after an amendment originally crafted by former Representative Steve King, would thwart states' ability to govern. States long have had authority to regulate the health, safety, and moral aspects of goods sold within their borders, regardless of their state or country of origin. The EATS Act could wipe out thousands of state laws and create a race-to-the-bottom when it comes to the production and sale of agricultural products. It mandates that if any state tolerates a preharvest production practice, no matter how hazardous, destructive, or inhumane to people or animals, other states must allow the sale of that product.