

August 15, 2023

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chair
U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition and Forestry
United States Senate – Michigan
Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Boozman
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on
Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry
United States Senate – Arkansas
Russell Senate Office Building Washington,
DC 20510

The Honorable Glenn “GT” Thompson
Chair
House Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives – Pennsylvania
Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable David Scott
Ranking Member
House Committee on Agriculture
U. S. House of Representatives – Georgia
Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow, Ranking Member Boozman, Chairman Thompson, and Ranking Member Scott:

The Agriculture Improvement Act or “Farm Bill” is the largest piece of legislation that shapes the United States food system.

As the nation’s medical professional society dedicated to promoting health and fighting chronic, diet-related diseases through the advancement of lifestyle interventions within and beyond the U.S. health care system, the [American College of Lifestyle Medicine](https://www.lifestylemedicine.org/) (ACLM) urges you to view the Farm Bill not only as an agriculture-focused bill, but also as a **human health, environmental protection, and climate bill**.

Your work on the Farm Bill has tremendous opportunity to improve individual and community health, prevent disease, reduce pollution, and advance US climate change mitigation, thereby protecting the mental and physical health of all Americans while lowering health care costs.

Prior Farm Bill laws have provided incentives for the production of select commodity crops like corn and soybeans, frequently intended for use as animal feed in extensive livestock operations and as primary components in unhealthy, processed food items. Beyond this, our existing industrialized agricultural system has resulted in significant pollution of land, water, and air. Additionally, the large-scale, industrial production of food significantly adds to the emission of greenhouse gases, fueling climate change and generating volatility in both food production and availability.

To address the threats to the health of individual Americans and our communities, the American College of Lifestyle Medicine offers the following priorities for inclusion in the 2023 Farm Bill. These priority areas are intertwined and interdependent, to fully realize a healthy, climate resilient, and just food system for all Americans.

The outlined priorities align with the Center for Disease Control's [One Health](#) approach and ACLM's position statement on the relationship of food to human and planetary health noted here for your reference:

"ACLM acknowledges that the leading cause of chronic disease and the leading cause of so many of our most pressing global sustainability issues is one and the same: our Western pattern diet.¹⁻³ Shifting to a whole food, plant-predominant dietary lifestyle is optimal in order to protect human health and fight disease.^{4,5} this dietary lifestyle pattern is also what is best for the planet, enabling us to preserve our precious natural resources, rein in greenhouse gas emissions, and feed what soon will be over nine billion people on the face of the earth."⁶⁻⁸

ACLM Farm Bill Priorities

1) Support Healthy Foods, Healthy People, and Healthy Communities

Though food is more affordable than ever, the cheapest and most accessible foods are often those with the poorest nutritional quality, and most associated with chronic disease, resulting in more than 14 million households still struggling with food and nutrition insecurity. At the same time, diseases like obesity and diabetes continue to skyrocket. Diet-related diseases have become the leading cause of poor health and preventable health care spending.

As a whole, the American population is overfed but undernourished, overweight but nutrient-starved, and tragically bearing the burden of chronic disease.

The CDC has found that more than 9 in 10 adults in the United States have unhealthy dietary habits, as measured by fruit and vegetable consumption. Over 60 percent of all US adults are struggling with at least one chronic disease, while over 40 percent have two or more.

The present system of crop insurance and commodity subsidies disproportionately benefits producers of commodity crops primarily utilized in animal feed, heavily processed foods, and the production of ethanol. Meanwhile, smaller and more diverse fruit and vegetable cultivators lack comparable assistance and support.

ACLM Suggestions

- Utilize the Farm Bill to serve as a blueprint for the production of foods recommended for a healthy diet and link subsidies with dietary recommendations.
 - For example, the Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend that half of the plate be filled with fruits and vegetables, but merely around two percent of American farmland is used to cultivate fruits and vegetables. In contrast, 59 percent of farmland is devoted to commodity crops.
- Invest in "Food is Medicine" (FIM) programs that tie healthy food access to "values-based" purchasing.
 - Increase funding for the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP), including the Produce Prescription Program (GusNIP Produce Prescription Program), Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP), Fresh Fruit and Vegetables Program, Double-Up Food Bucks Program, and Harvesting Health pilot.

- In collaboration with the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), authorize funding to pilot Food is Medicine programs, including medically tailored meals that include “values-based” food purchasing.
- Support inclusion of food as medicine curricula in medical and other health professional schools.

ACLM Supports the following recommendation from the Society of Behavioral Medicine as it relates to “Food Is Medicine” initiatives:

- Increase the number and amount of awards for produce prescription programs through GusNIP. Consider at least doubling allocated funds for produce prescription programs (\$50 million) compared to the 2018 Farm Bill (\$25 million cap for produce prescription programs).
- Establish systems to align federal efforts (e.g., GusNIP, National Institutes of Health) with state-funded initiatives (e.g., Medicaid waivers) to synergistically advance FIM initiatives. This will require funding allocated to convene relevant stakeholders for strategic planning and shared decision making to align goals/processes around federal and state-based efforts.

ACLM supports the following recommendations shared by the Medical Society Consortium on Climate and Health:

- Improve access to SNAP for those in need.
 - Improve and expand SNAP access for seniors, people with disabilities, working families, and college students, among other vulnerable groups.
 - Protect the Thrifty Food Plan and update SNAP to incorporate the Low-Cost Food Plan especially in areas with high-cost pressures.
- Increase support for grocery and corner stores and farmers markets to combat food deserts and improve access to healthy, nutritious foods with expanded support for programs such as the Healthy Food Financing Initiative, Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentives program, and Farmers Market Support Grants.
- Improve access to healthy foods through food banks and other emergency feeding programs.
 - Increase TEFAP Farm to Food Bank (FTFB) funding to at least \$25 million annually.
 - Increase The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) funding by indexing TEFAP to the Low-Cost Food Plan.
 - Fully fund Food Distribution Programs on Indian Reservations program.
- Strengthen food waste reduction strategies in order “multi-solve” to reduce food waste, food insecurity, and lower methane gas emissions from local organic waste streams.
 - Reform the date-labeling system with standardized, clear and precise labels.
 - Increase federal support for food recovery infrastructure, local composting, food waste prevention in schools.
 - Reduce hunger and food insecurity by incentivizing donations of edible excess food and strengthen and clarify the Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act, which protects food donors from liability.

2) Reduce Pollution & Support Healthy Farms and a Healthy Planet

The manufacturing of chemically enhanced and conventionally cultivated foods carries significant repercussions for both the environment and human health.

For example, expansive concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) lead to air pollution in nearby communities, contaminate drinking water sources, release substantial methane emissions, foster antibiotic resistance, and indirectly promote excessive consumption of red and processed meats, linked to conditions like heart disease and certain cancers.

Unfortunately, small-scale, diverse farms employing sustainable methods may struggle to compete financially with conventional production, as they lack the necessary support or supply chain framework granted to their conventional counterparts.

ACLM Suggestions

- Reallocate more Farm Bill funding to enable individual farmers to operate independently. Many farmers want to implement sustainable practices, or to transition a conventional farm into a modern, diverse, and ecologically enriching food production ecosystem. However, financial constraints often force them to consolidate with corporations.
- Invest in independent public research to advance the food production practices that focus on human and environmental health.

ACLM supports the following recommendations shared by the Medical Society Consortium on Climate and Health:

- Increase investment in conservation programs because current conservation programs are underfunded and oversubscribed.
 - Conservation programs are important because they help protect clean drinking water and protect against flooding, build soil health, create biodiversity, sequester carbon, and protect natural resources that support the long-term productivity and resilience of American agriculture.
 - Sustainable and organic agriculture and pest management reduce exposure to toxic chemicals from air, water, and soil pollution.
- Expand and structure resources to provide adequate and sustained funding and technical assistance to support and incentivize adoption of healthy and sustainable agricultural and food production practices.
 - For example, through expanded support for soil health, climate resilience, fruit and vegetable production, and organic agriculture, and reduced support for production practices associated with large methane and toxic pollutant emissions.

3) Prioritize Climate Change Action throughout the Farm Bill

American farming is both a contributor to and at great risk from unprecedented weather patterns associated with climate change. Natural disasters have the ability to wipe out entire crops and impact community health.

Specifically, conventional animal agriculture contributes 14.5 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions and numerous public health concerns such as antibiotic resistance and pesticide exposure as noted above.

ACLM Suggestions

- Prioritize a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by excluding Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) from federal assistance programs, redirecting those funds towards

expanding farms and ranches that prioritize regenerative agricultural practices, including multi-crop integrated grazing systems, particularly those of smaller and midsized scales.

- Incentivize diversified food production that actively promotes the natural capacity of soil to absorb atmospheric carbon.
- Support small- to mid-scale farms that produce a wider variety of foods in closer proximity to consumers, thereby reducing vulnerability associated with unforeseen weather events and associated food system instability.
- ACLM encourages review of the recommendations from the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC), a network of producers and food supply-chain stakeholders who have outlined a clear roadmap toward impactful policy transformations within Farm Bill programs, fostering improved production methodologies.
 - Increase funding for research on environmental nutrition and sustainable nutrition science. Amplify financial support for the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI), while expanding research funding for the Sustainable Agriculture Systems Program, specifically aimed at bolstering research concerning climate change adaptation and mitigation.
 - Introduce environmental nutrition or sustainable nutrition science as a novel research priority within AFRI.
 - Leverage the comprehensive "whole-of-government" strategy adopted by the Biden-Harris administration for environmental justice and climate change, disseminating the findings of environmental nutrition science across federal food programs for review and potential adjustments in alignment with climate change mitigation objectives.

The American College of Lifestyle Medicine respectfully request your consideration of these health-based recommendations. Thank you for your consideration. For questions or additional information please contact Jean Tips, senior director of communications and public affairs for the American College of Lifestyle Medicine at jtips@lifestylemedicine.org or via phone or text at (214) 240-1872.

References:

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CC:

USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack
Vice President Kamala Harris
President Joe Biden