



Worker Friendly Farm Bill

The Farm Bill is a large, multifaceted piece of legislation, renewed by Congress every five years, that shapes federal food and agricultural policy. Originally, the Farm Bill was mostly concerned with helping farmers stay in business, but it has grown far more complex, with sections addressing everything from international trade to school lunches to national forests. **Workers are integral to every section of the Farm Bill**—from the farmworkers who pick fruit and vegetables, to processing workers in poultry and meat slaughter plants, to food safety inspectors, to the state government workers who administer SNAP and WIC and the grocery store workers who sell us food and process SNAP benefits. With \$956 billion in investments, the Farm Bill affects all parts of our food system impacting more than 740,000 jobs and 41 million SNAP recipients every day.¹

As the union who puts food on America's tables, the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union (UFCW) knows that a safe and abundant food supply is good for our workers and good for the nation. Nearly one million UFCW members are employed in the food processing and retail food industries. UFCW is the largest food processing union in the AFL-CIO, with 250,000 members in meatpacking and food processing. Food safety, nutrition, and agricultural policies are important to all Americans, but especially to UFCW members. UFCW members are experts and should be considered partners in creating a safe and abundant food supply.

The Farm Bill is a vital piece of legislation with the ability to create good jobs for hundreds of thousands of American families. UFCW supports a worker-friendly Food, Farm, and Jobs Bill that supports value.

What is in a Worker Friendly Farm Bill?

UFCW supports the inclusion of the following programs and language in the next Farm Bill.

Support a resilient food supply chain.

- Fair labor standards in food procurement.
- Funding for the Farm and Food Worker Relief Grant Program.

End hunger

- Full funding for SNAP and improvements that ensure that online and delivery services support good jobs.

Support local and regional meat processing

- Meat processing line speed tied to worker safety.

¹ https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_stru.htm#45-0000
<https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/29SNAPcurrPP-4.pdf>

Other priorities include:

- Mandatory country-of-origin labeling.
- Protecting SNAP Choice and increasing SNAP benefits to meet the food needs of vulnerable families.
- Buy American in the National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, and all meat purchasing.
- Curtailing of predatory monopoly and monopsony power.
- Protect farmworkers' rights to organize.
- Reform of seasonal guestworker program.
- Worker-farmer-owned co-ops with a union contract.

Support a resilient food supply chain

- **Fair labor standards in food procurement**

Through procurement contracts, grants, loans, loan guarantees, and tax breaks, the federal government funds work performed by millions of people. The federal government's procurement contracts make it a major purchaser of a wide variety of goods and services across many industries including a significant percent of meat, poultry, and other processed food. While food procurement contracts account for a small portion of all federal procurement spending each year, those dollars represent significant income to food processing companies.

As the steward of our nation's taxpayers' dollars, the federal government has the obligation to ensure that federal funds are spent not only on quality products, but support quality jobs with high labor standards for workers. **UFCW supports using federal purchasing power to guarantee the federal government only does business with high road companies that respect workers' rights, pay living wages, provide a safe workplace, and treat their workers with dignity and respect.**

America benefits when the federal government supports a secure, resilient, and diverse food supply chain. This goal can only be achieved by purchasing from a diverse set of companies that meet safety and labor standards. Concentrating 12% of all food procurement dollars with three companies creates supply chain vulnerabilities. No single company should receive the majority of food procurement contracts. A larger number and variety of producers ensures redundancies and resiliency is built into the food system

Creating and enforcing labor standards in food procurement contracts will give the federal government the opportunity to encourage high-road practices among companies and ensure no contract is awarded to a firm that reports serious and willful violations of labor or civil rights laws.

Food processing is a high-hazard industry and workplace safety is a key concern. Labor standards create safe workplaces which will attract workers to what is considered a dangerous industry.

The USDA should also consider a Buy American requirement in federal meat procurement that requires domestic meat. For example, ground beef purchased by USDA should be U.S. beef, not as we see now which can be a mixture of trimmings from across the globe.

By conditioning contracts on labor standard requirements, the federal government can lift standards for all workers, while at the same time ensuring a safe, resilient food supply to nourish the nation.

- **Funding for the Farm and Food Worker Relief Grant Program**

To keep the food chain running smoothly, we must support the workers by providing them with funds when disaster strikes. In 2021, Houston grocery store workers went to work in the middle of an ice storm so their friends and neighbors could continue to get food and supplies. We must support our food chain workers because companies cannot be relied on to step up and provide the disaster support, they deserve. The pandemic reinforced the need for a continuous and predictable support for frontline essential workers along the food supply chain including those in grocery stores, as well as meat and poultry processing plants.

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the underlying fragility of the food supply chain under the current U.S. deregulatory approach. This experience drove home how susceptible the U.S. food supply chain – especially meat and poultry processing - are to shocks like a global health crises or extreme weather, and that vulnerability puts food supply chain workers' health, safety, and their lives, at risk.

The Farm and Food Worker Relief Grant Program (FFWR) was created to help farmworkers and meatpacking workers with pandemic-related health and safety costs. The first of its kind, the FFWR Program will distribute \$668 million in competitive grant funding to meat processing, grocery store, and farm workers for expenses incurred due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Workers should start receiving checks the summer of 2022. Unfortunately, the FFWR program is not fully funded. Food chain workers risked their lives during the pandemic and more funding is needed to support all grocery workers who apply.

UFCW urges Congress to appropriate \$500 million for the Farm and Food Worker Relief Grant Program (FFWR) to compensate grocery workers for personal protection equipment (PPE) expenses during the pandemic and future other disasters.

End hunger

- **Full funding for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and improvements that ensure that online and delivery services support good jobs**

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the largest budget item in the Farm Bill. SNAP plays a critical part in the food system, serving as a safeguard that protects families from the consequences of poverty and hunger in hard times. SNAP is effective and strengthens communities by reducing poverty, improving health and learning, elevating productivity, and creating jobs. SNAP's positive impacts are felt in all types of communities with estimates of poverty reductions by .8 percent in metro areas and 1.4 percent in rural areas.²

As the ability for consumers to purchase groceries online has evolved, so too has the means of delivery. There now exists a mixed system of online delivery options including both in-store employees and independent contractor/gig workers.

² <https://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/SNAP-Supports-Rural-Families.pdf?x91208>

UFCW strongly supports a baseline of safe food and safe workforce requirements for all workers, and the inclusion of safety guardrails in all online SNAP grocery purchases.

SNAP deliveries should be performed by employees of an authorized retailer or employees of an entity contracted by the retailer to perform the deliveries. All employees performing the deliveries should be paid no less than minimum wage, receive employer-provided health and safety training and be given appropriate food safety equipment. Establishing that online delivery be done by employees helps provide stronger workplace protections and benefits for all workers, from cashiers to delivery drivers.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, USDA rapidly expanded their SNAP online food purchasing program to meet the needs of Americans who could not shop in person. To maintain the safety and integrity of the food system, **UFCW supports the inclusion of safety guardrails in all online SNAP grocery purchases by third party application workers.** SNAP-eligible stores should require for the use of food transportation and delivery, appropriate food safety equipment and provide necessary food safety and handling training.

- **Protecting SNAP Choice and increasing SNAP benefits to meet the food needs of vulnerable families**

The COVID-19 pandemic revealed how vulnerable Americans are to food insecurity. Congress reacted appropriately by increasing Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits for all eligible recipients. Unfortunately, the benefits will go away once the declared COVID-19 national emergency officially ends, resulting in a decrease of \$82 per SNAP recipient per month. The decrease in SNAP benefits will make it harder for families to make critical decisions around healthcare, housing, and food. In addition, fewer dollars in the hands of SNAP recipients means less spent at grocery stores which means fewer hours and lower wages for grocery store workers.

The 2023 Farm Bill should expand benefit access to more Americans who are in need but typically do not participate.

Steps to close access gaps should include:

- Improve benefit amounts by replacing the Thrifty Food Plan with the Low-Cost Food Plan as the basis for calculating SNAP allotments.
- Remove work requirements for people attending college.
- Lessen or remove the hours-per-week work requirement so people searching for work can become eligible.
- Eliminate the 5-year waiting period for lawful immigrants seeking access to SNAP.
- Protect broad-based categorical eligibility (BBCE) from rollbacks and find ways to incentivize states not currently utilizing the policy so that states can adopt less restrictive income and asset tests to qualify for SNAP benefits.
- Access for felons which may decrease their propensity for recidivism.³

³ <https://www.clasp.org/publications/report/brief/no-more-double-punishments/>

The 2023 Farm Bill should protect food purchasing decisions for all families.

No clear standard exists in the federal government for defining food as either good or bad, healthy, or not healthy. More than 650,000 food and beverage products exist on the market today with thousands more introduced each year. Regulating or severely restricting what people can buy with their SNAP benefits would be a bureaucratic nightmare and create millions in increased government costs to identify, evaluate, and track the nutrition profile of thousands of products.

USDA should not be in the business of picking winners and losers when it comes to someone's diet. Implementing strict SNAP purchasing restrictions would end up favoring one company or food industry over another, instead of allowing the consumer to decide.

Support local and regional meat processing

- **Meat processing line speed tied to worker safety**

Food processing is a high-hazard industry and workplace safety is a key concern. Even at current line speeds, meat and poultry slaughter and processing workers face many job risks that can lead to severe injury, illness, and death. We deserve safe food, and America's meat and poultry slaughter and processing workers deserve safe workplaces.

Worker injury and illness is not inextricably linked with the production of safe and wholesome food. A century ago, President Theodore Roosevelt's commission to investigate conditions in meatpacking plants resulted in the Federal Meat Inspection Act's (FMIA's) mandate that the USDA should "supervise the methods of preparing [meat], and prescribe the sanitary conditions under which the work shall be performed."⁴ Today, there is widespread recognition that absent regulation, difficult working conditions in slaughterhouses are "a constant menace not only to [the workers'] own health, but to the health of those who use the food products prepared by them."

Having recognized that certain regulations are necessary to safeguard worker and food safety, the USDA has exercised its authority under the FMIA to ensure that food products are safe and unadulterated. For example, for more than thirty years, the USDA has set limits on slaughter line speeds. Indeed, the USDA Office of Inspector General has found that plants operating at faster speeds "may have a higher potential for food safety risks."⁵

The faster line speeds and the injuries that result from them could be correlated with worker shortages and a decrease in the food supply chain

A 2021 report from Chairman James Clyburn and the Congressional Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis found that meatpacking COVID cases were three times higher than previously estimated and non-union plants had some of the biggest safety failures.⁶ The report

⁴ 59th Congress, H.R. Document 873, Message from the President of the United States transmitting the report of Mr. James Bronson Reynolds and Commissioner Charles P. Neill, the Special Committee Appointed to Investigate the Conditions of the Stock Yards of Chicago, June 4, 1906, [rooseveltletter.pdf \(wp-cpr.s3.amazonaws.com\)](#)

⁵ <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/24601-0001-41.pdf>

⁶ <https://coronavirus.house.gov/news/reports/select-subcommittee-releases-data-showing-coronavirus-infections-and-deaths-among>

also highlights safety failures in non-union meatpacking plants where companies were less transparent, and workers had fewer protections.

UFCW supports the inclusion of the Protecting America's Meatpacking Workers Act (H.R. 6250 / S. 3285 in the 116th) in the Farm Bill.

PAMWA would modernize health and safety standards in our meat packing plants. The bill would restrict how USDA can issue line speed waivers, expand the number of safety inspectors as well as the scope of inspections, protect whistleblowers from employer retaliation, create new safety standards from the Department of Labor. The Act would also strengthen the antitrust provisions of the Packers and Stockyards Act and restore Country of Origin Labeling (COOL), providing fairer prices to farmers and ranchers.

Other priorities

- **Mandatory Country-of-Origin Labeling**

Country of Origin Labeling (COOL) laws require retailers to notify their customers about the source of certain foods. Consumers deserve the opportunity to know the source of their food; family farmers and ranchers should be able to differentiate their product; and meat processing workers should have quality, family sustaining jobs all of which would be supported by federal COOL laws.

Shrinking U.S. beef production continues to eliminate middle class jobs within the U.S. beef sector. Without COOL, thousands of workers in the U.S. food industry have suffered from job losses, and a lowering of labor standards.

Adoption of language included in the **American Beef Labeling Act (H.R. 7291/S.2716 in the 116th)** would reinstate the Mandatory Country of Origin Labeling (MCOOL) for beef. MCOOL would require beef sold at retail grocery stores to bear a conspicuous label informing consumers as to where the animal from which the beef was derived was born, raised, and harvested. MCOOL provides consumers the opportunity to know the source of their food; gives family farmers and ranchers the ability to differentiate their product; and provides meat processing workers with quality, family sustaining jobs.

UFCW supports the inclusion of MCOOL for meat products in the Farm Bill.

- **Curtailing of predatory monopoly and monopsony power**

Global agriculture and food manufacturing is highly concentrated with "increasing vertical coordination across the stages of the supply chain."⁷ In highly concentrated markets, workers may not receive competitive wages from monopsonist employers that unilaterally or coercively set wages in a labor market. Without strong antitrust reforms to prevent the big packers and big retailers from blocking market access and otherwise thwarting new businesses, efforts to support diversifying the industry will fail.

⁷ Tina L. Saitone and Richard J. Sexton, Concentration and Consolidation in the U.S. Food Supply Chain: The Latest Evidence and Implications for Consumers, Farmers, and Policymakers, p. 26, Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City, Economic Review, Special Edition 2017, available at https://www.kansascityfed.org/documents/764/Concentration_and_Consolidation_in_the_U.S._Food_Supply_Chain_The_Latest_Evidence_and_.pdf

The UFCW supports effective enforcement of antitrust laws like the Packers and Stockyards Act to promote competitive supply chains and competitive wage setting.

- **Buy American in the National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program and meat purchasing**

UFCW represents workers in school lunch supply chains coast to coast. This includes poultry processing members who produce chicken, a leading protein on school lunch menus nationwide. Whether it is Tyson Foods, Cargill, Hormel, or Dannon – it is the hard work of UFCW members behind the scenes that helps put some of our nation’s favorite foods on the kitchen table. We urge you to devote whatever resources are necessary at FNS and in the Child Nutrition Programs to make Buy America a reality in the school lunch supply chains.

We urge the Food and Nutrition Service to eliminate the “significant cost differential” exception and instead ensure that school lunch foods are bought from domestic sources. We believe that spending taxpayer money to purchase foreign sourced food products is inconsistent with the federal government’s push to Buy America/n. American families deserve to know that their taxes are being used to support U.S. jobs and businesses.

- **Acknowledge and protect farmworkers’ human rights to organize a union**

UFCW believes that workers’ rights are human rights and includes the right to organize a union as articulated in the UN’s Declaration of Human Rights. As such we support extending and strengthening current U.S. labor law protections to all workers, whether immigrant or non-immigrant. Political expediency exempted farmworkers (and domestic workers) from the original bedrock U.S. labor laws. UFCW opposes the exploitation of migrant workers and supports all workers’ rights, including all immigrants, to organize a union, as well as a path to citizenship for farmworkers in this country. Immigrants in the agriculture industry are some of the hardest-working members of our communities, and some of the most vulnerable. Farm workers deserve the protection of U.S. labor laws, and the assurance that they won’t be separated from their families in the middle of the night.

The H-2A Temporary Agricultural Workers program allows agricultural employers to hire nonimmigrant, foreign workers for agricultural jobs that last ten months or less. While many U.S. farmers depend on the H-2A program, it is riddled with problems. All these workers’ rights to organize a union should be protected under U.S. labor laws, which means all current exemptions should be terminated. Enactment of policies that would protect the human rights of all workers to organize a union in our immigration system would be a welcome addition to a Farm Bill that works for all Americans.

Until comprehensive immigration reform is achieved, a Farm Bill should take steps toward reforming our immigration system in ways that fit its purpose and authority. It should allow farmworkers who have worked in agriculture for a significant amount of time to earn a certificate permitting them to remain legally in the United States. These individuals who work for a sustained amount of time would then be eligible to apply for a green card, helping build communities rather than tearing them apart at the end of harvest season.

- **Reform of seasonal guestworker program**

UFCW represents hundreds of thousands of workers in grocery, meatpacking, and food processing, and these industries utilize the H-2B program to fill out their workforce. Unfortunately, the H-2B program is incredibly flawed and in need of reform. Current flaws within the system create opportunities to exploit foreign labor, bypass recruitment rules all while depressing wages for American workers. UFCW is uniquely impacted by this issue as we represent both U.S. workers and visa-holding workers, often working in the same facility or for the same employer.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shined an intensely bright light on how businesses blatantly misuse the H-2B visa program. For example, UFCW employers have continued to apply for these visas even though unemployment rates in those industries remained higher than the national average.⁸ Workers were and are available to be hired, but industry continues to exploit the lax rules around worker recruitment, to pad their bottom line, all while shutting out American workers.

The Farm Bill should aim to address deficiencies in the H-2B visa program that impacts thousands of workers integral to the countries' food supply system. Reforms empowering workers would lead to a more competitive labor market by untethering workers from their visas and increase wages by setting a wage floor and disincentivizing employers that break the law.

UFCW supports the Seasonal Worker Solidarity Act (H.R. 7549) because it fixes the structural flaws of the H2B program.

The bill would create a rights-based, pro-worker approach to the H2B guestworker visa program. The Seasonal Worker Solidarity Act creates a new framework for work visas that prevents discrimination and displacement, elevates labor standards, responds to actual labor market needs, ends captive employment, and ensures access to justice.

- **Worker-farmer-owned co-ops with a union contract**

Government at every level has a role to play in restoring the balance of power that has shifted too far in favor of agribusiness monopolies. UFCW supports economic development strategies that empower workers to bargain collectively for better wages and safer worker conditions. Empowering workers to get a fair wage is a trickle-up economic strategy because workers are more likely to spend that extra money with local businesses.

UFCW supports hybrid, multi-stakeholder union co-operatives (co-ops) which provide workers a first right of refusal to buy a company.

Worker-farmer co-ops were inspired by the Farmer-Labor Alliance that passed the New Deal. These co-ops support a worker's right to organize and a farmer's right to fair prices. Cincinnati, Ohio based UFCW Local 75's Our Harvest Worker-Owned Union Co-op is a model for a new democratic structure of hybrid co-ops. Hybrid co-ops bring benefits to both workers and farmers because farmers' commitment to neutrality and a union contract led to better wages, a healthier and safer workplace, training, and apprenticeships opportunities, as well as a path to ownership.

⁸ [A-31. Unemployed persons by industry, class of worker, and sex \(bls.gov\)](#)

Conclusion: Weaving Workers Throughout the Farm Bill

The last version of the Farm Bill consisted of 12 titles governing a wide range of policy areas related to food and agriculture. The Farm Bill's impact on workers is wide ranging and not limited to any one agency or any one title. The UFCW is not being prescriptive about how it gets done but recommends that worker friendly, labor provisions be explicitly added to the upcoming Farm Bill whether that is in every title or as a newly created stand-alone labor title.

The UFCW believes that protecting workers' right to organize a union, along with additional strong labor, health and safety standards will contribute to a more sustainable, healthy, and resilient food supply chain which is one of the ultimate goals of the Farm Bill.