

THE

“Required reading for anyone who cares about what we eat.”
— from the foreword by Marion Nestle

FARM BILL

A CITIZEN'S GUIDE



IF YOU EAT, PAY TAXES,
OR CARE ABOUT OUR
NATION'S FOOD SUPPLY,
THIS BOOK IS
FOR YOU.

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WITH CHRISTINA BADARACCO



The Farm Bill: A Citizen's Guide

By Daniel Imhoff and Christina Badaracco

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Annotated Table of Contents

Preface

How can we use the Farm Bill's precious funds to incentivize positive outcomes around public health, a vibrant and regenerative agriculture, protection of wild nature, and the creation of landscapes resilient to climate change? This book aims to inform and inspire readers to become policy champions in their own lives and communities. We gathered data and perspectives from partners throughout government, academia, non-profits, and other individual experts to create this simplified and visually attractive guide. This version represents a completely updated and revised primer on this critical matter, which is particularly timely as Congress prepares to pass the 2018 Farm Bill.

PART I Farm Bill Basics

Chapter 1 What Is the Farm Bill?

The Farm Bill is the primary mechanism for supporting the creation of an abundant food supply and ensuring that all citizens receive basic nutrition in the US. Corn currently receives more than one-third of crop subsidies, with about 40 percent going toward ethanol production and another 40 percent toward animal feed. Its predominance has unintended and very negative effects on clean water, international trade, obesity, and many other areas of society. Modifying, or better yet, overhauling, the Farm Bill is necessary to ensure we produce adequate, nutritious, and sustainable food—that doesn't bankrupt farmers or taxpayers in the process.

Chapter 2 Why Does the Farm Bill Matter?

US citizens pay for food three ways—at the market, taxes that are used to subsidize producers, and healthcare and environmental clean-up costs attempting to cover the numerous externalities resulting from our industrialized methods of food production. Our system of food production also impacts our lives every day, via its effects on climate change, food insecurity, loss of biodiversity, and many other areas. The term “boondoggle” comes to mind to describe the current magnitude of the policies and programs that grew out of

temporary support for farmers during the Great Depression and Dust Bowl. This chapter provides a list of pressing problems, driven in part by the Farm Bill, and proposed solutions to address them. The Farm Bill can be used instead to support research, access to healthy food, job creation, entrepreneurship, and wildlife habitat that are important for all Americans.

Chapter 3 Who Benefits from the Farm Bill?

Considered an omnibus legislation, the Farm Bill addresses food assistance programs, crop subsidies, and conservation all within the same bill. Who are the primary beneficiaries of these subsidies, how has this distribution changed over time, and what are the economic and social factors that drive this change? This chapter sets up such questions that will be further explored in subsequent chapters. A striking graphic of the breakdown of Farm Bill spending shows readers how funding is allocated. This chapter also includes a list of Farm Bill names throughout its history and its current titles, as well as a glossary of the predominant forms of crop subsidies.

Chapter 4 How Does the Farm Bill Work?

For the non-politicians in the audience, this chapter reviews the legislative process—and specifically as it relates agriculture. What happens to funding for programs that aren't deemed "mandatory," and how is it determined what gets cut first? Sadly, this process typically results in underfunding for conservation programs, despite high demand from the farming community. As we prepare to publish this book, the two houses of Congress will be preparing to reconcile the budget for the compromise created for the 2018 Farm Bill. Can anything be done to ensure that funding be prioritized for the production that benefits society?

PART II The History of Food Policy

Chapter 5 Origins of the Farm Bill

As hard as it may be to imagine today, farmers once dominated American society. Among other drivers, the Great Depression and Dust Bowl led to a decline in the farming population as industrialization and consolidation took over. As part of President Roosevelt's New Deal, the first Farm Bill passed in 1933 and sought to collect surplus crops and livestock during times of plenty to raise prices and hold on to food for when supplies were low. How did the early programs and policies transition to the nutrition assistance and crop subsidy systems we know today?

Chapter 6 The Changing Face of Agriculture

Mirroring the decline in the number of mid-sized family farms, the average US farm size has plateaued. This chapter focuses on the consolidation in agriculture over the past century in the midst of the Green Revolution. Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz was central in bringing about the yield-maximizing tactics and acreage expansion on farms of the past fifty years. How have payment schemes and the role of food and grain corporations changed over this time? And what have been the effects on animal agriculture and surrounding environment? A small degree of pushback inspired the early years of the organic movement, which continues to grow to this day.

Chapter 7 The Changing Face of Hunger

The early Farm Bills created a role for federal government to collect and distribute food to the needy. The original version of the food stamp program expanded to become a central component of the Farm Bill by the 1960s, after problems of domestic hunger attracted greater attention throughout society. How has the program evolved over time and how has this gargantuan food program contributed to the “nutrition” that now appears in its formal name, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program? Today, more than 40 million Americans rely on such benefits each year, but how they truly benefit remains a huge debate.

Chapter 8 The Conservation Era

The combination of drought and wetland draining in the 1970s stimulated the substantiation of the Conservation Reserve Program, which pays farmers to set aside land from production to prevent further degradation. Other programs that focused on protecting wetlands, wildlife habitat, and other areas emerged over subsequent decades. Can funding of these conservation programs keep up with demand today? And is it truly possible to feed a growing population while actually limiting land available for production, adding land use requirements, and diverting taxpayer dollars for these programs? This chapter includes a guide to conservation milestones throughout Farm Bill history, a breakdown of the categories of these programs, and an extra feature on how concentrated animal feeding operations have benefitted from Farm Bills over the years.

PART III Key Policy Issues

Chapter 9 Crop Subsidies

While “subsidies” are considered almost analogous with “Farm Bill,” the 1996 Farm Bill was the first to create the mammoth subsidy system, first known as Freedom to Farm—that we know today. It created “decoupled payments,” based on a particular piece of land’s farm subsidy history. The idea was to phase out farm subsidies but just the opposite happened. Overproduction led to falling prices, necessitating emergency bail-out payments. Those bail-out payments became direct payments under the 2002 Farm Bill. The failure of “Freedom to Farm” indicates the need to find a less-detrimental form of emergency payments as well as to fundamentally link conservation and land stewardship to subsidies. This chapter concludes with an article by Tennille Tracy formerly of the *Wall Street Journal* about crop insurance premium subsidies (i.e., the current dominant form of subsidies) and the problems it has created.

Chapter 10 Nutrition, SNAP, and Healthy Eating

Since the Great Recession, SNAP has consistently formed the largest proportion of Farm Bill funding, providing benefits for low-income Americans to buy food across the country. Recent Farm Bills have increased funding for or created new programs to support specialty crop producers or improve nutrition in our federal nutrition assistance programs. But these are dwarfed by the massive amounts of funds given to SNAP recipients (used to buy primarily unhealthy foods) and subsidies given to commodities, making processed foods as cheap as they are. As consumers demand more organic food, the Farm Bill has also adapted to support and simplify the certification process for interested farmers. This chapter concludes with an overview of organic advocates’ successful tactics as well as a discussion of the final end to the Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration, which was originally intended to maintain competition in the meatpacking industry.

Chapter 11 Agribusiness versus Family Farms

This chapter addresses the disparity between the current beneficiaries of subsidies and the need for supporting sustainable rural development and stable employment across the agricultural sector. Also, the top crops supported by subsidies (food grains, feed grains, oilseeds, and upland cotton) are often diverted for non-food uses and don’t form the basis of a healthy diet. Farmers of all sizes rely on subsidies to make a profit, particularly in this time of low commodity prices, but the biggest payments and the vast majority of funds go to the top 10 percent of producers. Wealthy individuals with little ties to farming have exploited the

system for years. The strategies discussed throughout this book to reward land stewardship, cap payments, and support local food production are also necessary to fundamentally shift the bulk of benefits away mega-farms and toward the farmers who actually produce the majority of the food we eat.

Chapter 12 Job Creation

The US is experiencing a troublesome decline in our farmer population in recent years, driven partly by consolidation and partly by an increasing desire for higher-paid, white collar jobs. The Farm Bill actively supports development of new, young farmers to fill the gap to prevent food shortages. These jobs are also a source of stable employment amidst growing poverty in much of rural America. The food hub is an emerging business model that supports small- and mid-sized farms and creates economically viable businesses, which receive some programmatic support through the Farm Bill. This chapter includes a glossary to guide the reader through beginning farmer programs in recent years. Finally, a personal tour of one such program at the Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association and an interview with an alumnus describe the amazing outcomes of this incubator program funded by the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program.

Chapter 13 Trade

Though the Farm Bill doesn't directly regulate trade, the systems that control production in the US have great impact on our trade relationships, and even the dietary preferences of countries around the world. In particular, US commodity subsidies that promote overproduction can drive down prices and reduce income for farmers in other countries. This chapter includes a timeline listing relevant events and decisions affecting agricultural trade since 2001. The World Trade Organization's Agreement on Agriculture, now more than two decades old, categorizes programs based on how much they distort trade; our subsidies are currently well below these limits, and yet impacts on cotton, corn, and other products continue. This chapter also addresses how the EU has set an example to convert its subsidies to "green payments," how the US abandoned the meat "Country of Origin Labeling" rules, and the beginnings of changes in international trade regulation under the Trump administration. The chapter concludes with an article about agricultural dumping by Sophia Murphy and Karen Hansen-Kuhn of the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy.

Chapter 14 An Alternative System

New Zealand offers a rare example of a country that overhauled its oppressive farm subsidy system. The combination of advocacy from the Federated Farmers of New Zealand and election victory by the Labour Party led to deconstruction of the agricultural safety net that had depressed prices and increased inflation. Various sectors became more efficient and a new wine industry emerged. How can the lessons learned translate to the US, particularly amidst evolving global food trade? This chapter concludes with the perspective of Honor Eldridge of the Sustainable Food Trust about the future of farm payments in the light of Brexit.

PART IV Reforming the Farm Bill

Chapter 15 Opportunities for Change

Looking back at major turning points in US food and farm policy can provide inspiration for future opportunities for real change. Working across sectors and parties is necessary to address so many of the problems both facing and caused by our current systems of food production. Tackling rising healthcare costs, government deficits, employment instability, and a range of other pressing issues can be, and should be, closely integrated with the Farm Bill.

Chapter 16 Public Health

To address the most pressing challenges to public health facing America today, our food system must adapt to prioritize healthy food. We spent about the same amount of money over the life of the 2014 Farm Bill as we do to treat chronic diseases—so much of which are preventable—each year. In addition to diabetes and obesity, exposure to dangerous chemicals and antibiotic resistance are huge drivers of disease that are receiving increasing attention in news and popular scientific research. Education from governmental programs and registered dietitians aim to improve the way Americans choose to eat, but fundamental changes to the ways food is produced, processed, and marketed—which drive the array of food available at the grocery store and the ever-increasing avenues to buy food in the US—are necessary to protect our health and ensure that our Dietary Guidelines for Americans align with our taxpayer-funded subsidy systems.

Chapter 17 Food Security

In food-insecure communities across the country, processed and fast foods that are more widely available than fresh produce are contributing to high rates of chronic disease among our most vulnerable populations. Over the course of the 2014 Farm Bill, spending on programs to make commodity crops cheap has been more than 50 times that for “specialty crops.” At the same time, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program accounts for the majority of spending in the nutrition title (and, in fact, in the whole bill), aiming to reduce the prevalence of food insecurity. But research fails to show it actually contributes to people’s *health*. Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive Grants, Healthy Food Financing Initiative grants, and other programs have been valid attempts to promote nutrition among such low-income communities. What additional steps can we take to make further inroads in reconnecting food to health among the 40 million-plus Americans reliant on federal assistance to eat each day?

Chapter 18 Ethanol

Amidst concerns about energy security, gluts of crops made cheap by decades of subsidies, and the need to meet demand driven by our Renewable Fuel Standard, farmers are eagerly growing crops for fuel. Biotechnology companies are genetically engineering crops of corn and soy that are optimally suited for production of ethanol and biodiesel, respectively. And yet, growth of these crops brings about a necessary reliance on chemical inputs and promotes creation of resistant “superweeds,” as well as concerns about concentration of plant gene patents and cross-contamination. Research into production of ethanol from cellulose, derived from inedible plants or agriculture waste, continues to try to find ways to lower costs to make such sources economically feasible. This chapter aims to expose readers to the many concerns associated with farm-based energy production and guide them in the direction of preferable alternatives.

Chapter 19 Energy and Climate Change

Food production exists to provide energy and nourishment to humans, and yet we have adopted production patterns that are extremely energy- and resource-intensive. Even worse, the amount of energy required to get food from the farm to our table is twice as much as it takes to grow it. The Farm Bill’s energy title aims to increase energy efficiency to reduce the necessary inputs and the conservation title also supports energy and resource conservation, such as generating on-farm renewable energy. While not yet addressed through the Farm Bill, reducing food waste could also reduce greenhouse gas production and the initial input of energy—particularly after USDA and EPA have set a national goal to reduce food waste by 50

percent by 2030. This chapter includes proposals for integrated energy solutions that range from funding for cover crops that reduce the need for energy-intensive nitrogen fertilizers to prioritizing production of grasslands and perennial polycultures.

Chapter 20 Conservation

Balancing conservation of wild flora and fauna with adequate food production is a difficult yet critical aspect of any sound farm policy. Biodiversity in both farms and wild habitat is important for overall landscape resilience and for delivering the ecosystem services on which we all rely. More than half a century ago, USDA began paying farmers *not* to farm in order to prevent the natural instinct to maximize their production (and income), which leads to increased land conversion and pollutants amidst this classic tragedy of the commons. Expanding existing reserve programs, further linking conservation compliance to crop insurance subsidies, and increasing stewardship incentives through the widely popular Conservation Stewardship Program must remain important components of current and future Farm Bills. This chapter includes a thorough glossary to the Farm Bill's various conservation programs.

Chapter 21 National Security

How is agriculture policy related to our national security? This chapter describes the relationship between the military and nutrition, with concerns shifting from focus on preventing undernutrition to addressing high rates of obesity. Sadly, depression and chronic disease affect a much higher proportion of veterans than the general population. Improving access to healthy food through organizations such as the Veterans Health Administration and even promoting therapy through farming can address much of this suffering experienced by our nation's military veterans. Agroterrorism could also pose a real threat to our food system, particularly the more concentrated and reliant on chemicals our food production remains. Like the victory gardens inspired by the effects of World War II, efforts to increase regional and home food production can increase food security at the individual and community levels.

PART V The Future of Food Policy

Chapter 22 Ecosystem-Based Agriculture

Our current monoculture production relies on chemical inputs to produce the cheap commodities so prevalent in our food system. The Land Institute posits goals of an opposing

system based on perennial crops that can maintain quality of soil, water, and air, while providing food for a growing population amidst increasing climactic uncertainty. Such a system starts by prioritizing the health of grass, recognizing that it serves as an important conduit for nutrients between the soil and livestock, while also maintaining soil quality for crops. Many scientists argue that a system based on agroecology, or the marriage of ecology and farming, can actually improve food output by increasing agricultural sustainability. Going forward, perennial grains are becoming an important area of research. How would a farm bill that looked at food production over the next 50 years, rather than just five years, establish different priorities for subsidies, conservation and research?

Chapter 23 Local Food

At a time when more Americans care about the source of their food than ever before, our Farm Bill must support the local food systems made up of family farmers, organic farmers, and urban farmers that allow for greater transparency. The number of farmers markets has more than tripled in two decades and national surveys suggest we have more than 300 food hubs serving as centers for storing, processing, and distributing foods grown in surrounding rural areas. Existing Farm Bill programs provide important funds to help programs that seek to shorten supply chains to get off the ground and ultimately return value back into local economies. Local organizations, producers, and consumers alike can all play a role in reducing the \$90 billion-worth of food wasted in the US each year. The popular Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food initiative, born out of the 2008 Farm Bill, has since dissolved as an officially sanctioned initiative, but future progress will require the return of such a similar structure.

Chapter 24 A Citizen's Farm Bill

Both as taxpayers and as consumers, American citizens are hugely influential on the food system and the policies that govern it. To turn the tide against a bill that supports large agribusinesses to produce cheap commodities and environmental degradation, we must align our purchases with our policy priorities and work with organizations and politicians seeking to improve the status quo.

Chapter 25 Twenty-Five Solutions

To summarize the key messages from the rest of the book, this chapter lists 25 key components for future Farm Bills. Tying crop insurance to conservation compliance, improving the “nutrition” in our federal nutrition assistance programs, setting true income eligibility

limits on farm supports, and many other ideas suggest how it can be improved to create a food system truly healthy for the people, animals, and environment.

Chapter 26 A Vision of Sustainable Food

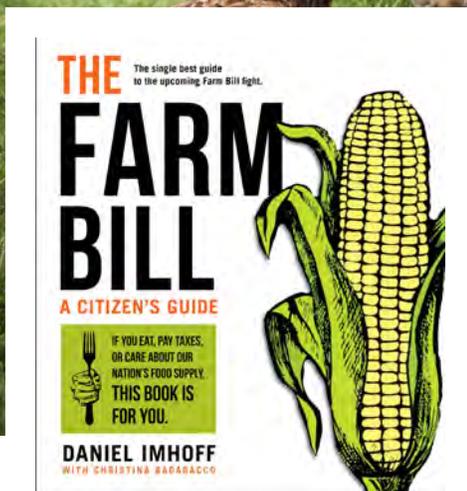
How could we change the Farm Bill today to change the trajectory of the American food and farming system? Big-picture changes, such as placing real limits on income eligibility for crop insurance and setting goals for increasing land covered by the Conservation Reserve Program, can redirect our country's focus. New titles to address labor, food waste, urban agriculture, and animal husbandry could also begin to address issues thus far overlooked by the Farm Bill.

Activist Tool Kit

This section provides guidance for advocacy as it pertains to working with politicians and educating the public about the Farm Bill. It includes a list of the USDA programs, distributed in its various agencies, which are funded by the bill. A list of recommended resources, such as the Environmental Working Group's subsidy database, connects readers to data both for their own information and advocacy efforts. An extensive list of the groups and institutions active in conservation, sustainable agriculture, healthy food systems, beginning farmer programs, international trade, renewable energy, government agencies, policy, and public health nutrition empowers readers to get involved. Finally, a list of the pertinent committees in Congress informs readers about opportunities to contact representatives about these issues.



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The Farm Bill

A Citizen's Guide

Daniel Imhoff with Christina Badaracco

The Farm Bill is one of the most important pieces of legislation the American president signs. Negotiated every five to seven years, it has tremendous implications for food production, nutrition assistance, habitat conservation, international trade, and much more. Yet at nearly 1,000 pages, it is difficult to understand for policymakers, let alone citizens. In this primer, Dan Imhoff and Christina Badaracco translate all the “legalese” and political jargon into an accessible, graphics-rich 200 pages. Readers will learn the basic elements of the bill, its origins and history, and perhaps most importantly, the battles that will determine the direction of food policy in the coming years.

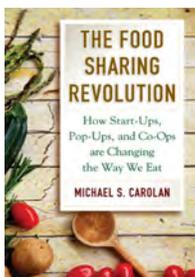
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Dan Imhoff is the author of multiple books about the food system, including *CAFO: The Tragedy of Industrial Animal Factories* (winner of the Nautilus 2011 Gold Prize for Investigative Reporting), *Farming with the Wild*, and *Farming and the Fate of Wild Nature* (with Jo Ann Baumgartner).

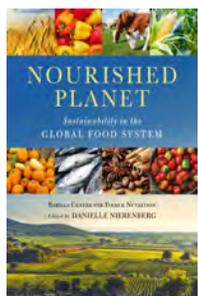
Christina Badaracco is a registered dietitian. She has done clinical nutrition research at the National Institutes of Health, menu planning and nutrition education at the Oakland Unified School District, and communications at the Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Water.

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