

Worker Friendly Farm Bill

January 2025



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 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, meat and poultry slaughter and processing and retail food industries. Food safety, nutrition, and agricultural policies are important to all Americans, but especially to UFCW members.

The Farm Bill is a vital piece of legislation with the ability to create good jobs for hundreds of thousands of American families. Worker voices and concerns deserve to be an essential part of agriculture policy, not ignored entirely. UFCW supports a Worker Friendly Farm Bill that keeps farmers farming, families fed, and rural communities and food workers strong.

What is in a Worker Friendly Farm Bill?

1. Full funding for SNAP
2. Reform of the seasonal guestworker program.
3. Protecting SNAP Choice.
4. SNAP improvements that ensure that online and delivery services support good jobs.
5. Mandatory country-of-origin labeling.
6. 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>

7. Buy American in the National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, and all meat purchasing.
8. Curtailing of predatory monopoly and monopsony power.
9. Fair labor standards in food procurement.
10. Creating a USDA office of Farm and Food System Workforce
11. Protect farmworkers' rights to organize.
12. Worker-farmer-owned co-ops with a union contract.
13. Funding for the Grocery, Farm and Food Worker Stabilization Grant Program.

1. Full funding for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) plays a critical part in the food system, serving as a safeguard that protects families from hunger and providing jobs for grocery store workers. SNAP's positive impacts are felt in every community with estimates of poverty reduction of .8 percent in metro areas and 1.4 percent in rural areas.² 80% of SNAP dollars are spent at traditional grocery stores where UFCW members work. These are predictable hours for our workers. Our members take great pride in feeding their community and providing skilled and respectful service to people spending SNAP dollars in their stores. More dollars in the hands of SNAP recipients means more money spent at grocery stores which means more hours and higher wages for grocery store workers. UFCW members support full funding for the SNAP program.

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

Steps to close SNAP access gaps should include:

- Removing work requirements for people attending college.
- Lessening or remove the hours-per-week work requirement so people searching for work can become eligible.
- Eliminating the 5-year waiting period for lawful immigrants seeking access to SNAP.
- Protecting broad-based categorical eligibility (BBCE) from rollbacks and finding ways to incentivize states not currently utilizing the policy to adopt less restrictive income and asset tests to qualify for SNAP benefits.
- Expanding access for felons which may decrease their propensity for recidivism.³

2. Reform the 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.

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

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

Businesses are blatantly misusing the H-2B visa program. UFCW employers have continued to apply for these visas even though unemployment rates in those industries remains higher than the national average.⁴ 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 country's food supply. Reforms empowering workers would lead to a more competitive labor market by untethering workers from their visas and increasing wages by setting a wage floor and disincentivizing employers that break the law.

UFCW supports a rights-based, pro-worker approach to the H-2B program that prevents discrimination and displacement, elevates labor standards, responds to actual labor market needs, ends captive employment, and ensures access to justice.

3. Protecting SNAP Choice

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, nor should it be implementing strict SNAP purchasing restrictions that would end up favoring one company or food industry over another, instead of allowing the consumer to decide. **UFCW supports a Farm Bill that protects the food purchasing decisions of all families.**

4. SNAP improvements that ensure that online and delivery services support good jobs.

Grocery consumers including SNAP recipients have access to a mix of in-store and online grocery delivery options which can be done by in-store employees or independent contractor/gig workers. Unfortunately, there are no health and safety standards for grocery delivery done by independent contractors. There are rules about food safety in production and processing, from production to store, in store and for store managed delivery. But there are no laws and regulations that cover the safety of food once it leaves the store by a third-party application.

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

⁴ [A-31. Unemployed persons by industry, class of worker, and sex \(bls.gov\)](#)

SNAP-eligible stores should be required to use in-store food transportation and delivery wherever possible and provide appropriate food safety equipment, food safety and handling training. 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 the minimum wage, receive employer-provided health and safety training and be given appropriate food safety equipment. Online delivery done by employees benefits workers, from cashiers to delivery drivers, and consumers.

5. 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.

UFCW supports the inclusion of Mandatory Country of Origin Labeling (MCOOL) for meat products in the Farm Bill. 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.

6. Meat processing line speed tied to worker safety.

Food processing is a high-hazard industry. 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.

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."⁵ 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 both safeguard workers and food, the USDA has exercised its authority under the FMIA to ensure that food products are safe and unadulterated but has failed workers. For more than thirty years, the USDA has set limits on

⁵ 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 \(wp-cpr.s3.amazonaws.com\)](http://www.amazonaws.com/rooseveltletter.pdf)

slaughter line speeds but always in the name of food safety, even though the USDA Office of Inspector General has found that plants operating at faster speeds “may have a higher potential for food safety risks.”⁶ It is past time to implement the Roosevelt Commission mandate to protect the safety of slaughterhouse workers and the safety of food.

UFCW supports the inclusion of meat processing worker safety provisions including:

- Restrictions on line speed waivers,
- Increase in the number of safety inspectors,
- Protections for whistleblowers and
- Research based worker safety standards determined in coordination with the Department of Labor.
- Grants to small and medium meat processors for employee training on food safety procedures

7. 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. The Food and Nutrition Service should ensure that the Child Nutrition Programs “Buy American” everywhere along the school lunch supply chain.

UFCW supports the elimination of the “significant cost differential” exception and a requirement 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.

The USDA should also consider a Buy American requirement in federal meat procurement. 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.

8. 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

⁶ <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/24601-0001-41.pdf>

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

retailers from blocking market access and otherwise thwarting new businesses, efforts to support diversifying the industry will fail. **The UFCW supports effective enforcement of antitrust laws like the Packers and Stockyards Act to promote competitive supply chains and competitive wage setting.**

9. 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 workers. 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 percentage 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 an 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 make the supply chain vulnerable. No single company should receive a majority of food procurement contracts. A larger number and variety of producers ensures redundancies and resiliency is built into the food system.

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.

UFCW supports requiring the Secretary of Agriculture to undertake a procurement study to examine barriers to and opportunities for commodity food purchases by the Department.

10. Strengthening the Farm and Food System Workforce

Our farm and food system workers feed the nation. Yet these workers have not had the proper representation within the federal government to adequately address their needs. The 2023 USDA Equity Commission Interim Report recommended that USDA fund and elevate roles for professional staff solely dedicated to workers' concerns and perspectives.

UFCW supports the establishment of an Office of the Farm and Food System Workforce within the USDA and a Deputy Secretary level position and to serve as a liaison for farm and food system workers, provide a platform for their concerns and interests, and develop recommendations and new initiatives for the agency.

In addition, the UFCW supports the creation of a Farm and Food System Workforce Interagency Council, comprised of representatives from various federal agencies, to improve coordination, planning, program development, and policymaking across cabinet-level leadership.

11. Protect farmworkers' right to organize a union.

UFCW believes that workers' rights are human rights and that 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 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. Farmworkers 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. Current exemptions to the right to organize should be terminated. Enactment of policies that would protect the human rights of all workers to organize a union 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.

12. 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 with 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. The Our Harvest Worker-Owned Union Co-op in Cincinnati, Ohio is represented by UFCW Local 75 and is a model for a new democratic structure of hybrid co-ops. Hybrid co-ops bring benefits to both workers and farmers because the farmer owners commit to union neutrality which can lead to

better wages, a healthier and safer workplace, training, and apprenticeships opportunities, as well as a path to ownership for workers.

13. Funding for the Grocery, Farm and Food Worker Stabilization Grant Program

To keep the food chain running smoothly, we must support the workers who pick, process, deliver and sell our food. In disaster after disaster, food workers go to work so that their friends and neighbors can eat. 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. After the fire in Lahaina, Hawaii, the local Safeway was one of the first businesses to reopen and grocery workers who had lost their homes went to work to provide food for their neighbors. In North Carolina after the devastating floods, restaurant workers became relief workers while they waited weeks for government support that may or may not help the small businesses they work for reopen. We must support our food chain workers during disasters because companies cannot be relied on to step up and provide the support they deserve.

The Grocery, Farm and Food Worker Stabilization Grant Program (FFWR) would provide small, one-time grants to grocery, farm and meatpacking workers for expenses incurred during a federally declared disaster.

UFCW urges Congress to appropriate \$50 million for the Grocery, Farm and Food Worker Stabilization Grant Program (FFWR) to compensate grocery workers and meat processing expenses during future disasters.

Farm Bill Marker Bills

UFCW urges our congressional leaders to ensure our hard-earned tax dollars support policies that will help create the good-paying jobs our families and communities need by supporting the following pieces of legislation. **We will be scoring co-sponsorship of the following pieces of farm bill-related legislation.**

1. The Agricultural Worker Justice Act (H.R. 4978 / S. 2601 in the 118th) would require major food companies to provide decent wages and safe working conditions to do business with the federal government.
2. The Food and Nutrition Delivery Safety Act (H.R. 8300 / S. 3824 in the 118th) would establish online and delivery labor standards for authorized SNAP retailers.
3. The Food Secure Strikers Act (H.R. 4845 / S. 2553 in the 118th) would allow striking workers and their households to receive SNAP benefits.
4. The Grocery, Farm, and Food Worker Stabilization Grant Program Act (H.R. 6720 / S. 3469 in the 118th) would create a grant program to provide stabilization payments to food workers in the case of a natural or other disaster.
5. The Protecting America's Meatpacking Workers Act (H.R. 798 / S. 270 in the 118th) would modernize health and safety standards in our meat packing plants.
6. The Supporting Our Farm and Food System Workers Act (S. 2703 in the 118th) would create the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Office of the Farm and Food System Workforce to serve as a liaison and a resource for farm and food system workers.

Conclusion: Weaving Workers Throughout the Farm Bill

The Farm Bill's impact on workers is wide ranging and not limited to any one agency or any one title. UFCW is not being prescriptive about how it gets done but strongly urges Congress to include worker friendly, labor provisions in the upcoming Farm Bill whether that is in every title or as a 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.



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