

A. Introduction

The Association of Northeast Extension Directors (NEED) represents the collective interests of Extension Directors and Administrators from the 16 Land-grant Universities that serve our 12 northeastern states and the District of Columbia (CT, DE, DC, MA, MD, ME, NH, NJ, NY, PA, RI, VT, WV). We present the following recommendations and considerations for the 2023 Farm Bill with the hope that this Farm Bill will strengthen the federal government’s commitment to food system viability and climate resilience, agricultural workforce development, and market access across farm size.

B. Northeast Extension and Northeast State Departments of Agriculture joint regional Farm Bill priority areas and desired outcomes

The following recommendations are organized by issue area. Whenever possible, specific programs are listed and clear recommendations for language within the Farm Bill are made. They were developed jointly by the Association of Northeast Extension Directors (NEED) and the Northeast Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NEASDA) and reflect the regional joint priorities of both organizations. They do not necessarily nor fully reflect the positions of any individual member institution.

ISSUE AREA 1: Food System Viability & Workforce Development

The 2023 Farm Bill should help ensure farm viability by providing business and entrepreneurship support to people who are currently employed within the food system and workforce development opportunities that encourage a next generation food system workforce that is gender, racially, and geographically diverse.

Highest Priority Outcomes and Actions:

1. **Increase Ag Education funding for k-12 programs (including 4-H, FFA, MANRRS) to encourage young people to enter agriculture related careers.** This can be done by:
 - a. Providing additional grants and incentives for high schools to offer an Agriculture Education program. Additional grants and incentives not only help breakdown financial barriers, but also help to promote agriculture literacy for students and their communities.
 - b. Expanding funding to enable schools to “sponsor” and pay for the credits a current undergraduate student looking to become a future agriculture teacher.
 - c. Providing funding to USDA to provide ag literacy resources to guidance counselors that will allow them to expand their current curriculum to include an active connection with agricultural employers in their community. With these resources, they could host field trips and career open days, create job advertising/marketing videos for different agricultural career paths, expose high-schoolers to the university of agriculture related jobs.

2. **Invest in university/extension educational programs for certificates, micro credentials, and apprenticeships that are valued by key agricultural employers and are open to both youth and older learners.** This can be done by:
 - a. Making grants available that encourage agreements/partnerships between land-grant institutions and community colleges.
 - b. Expand funding for Commercial Driver’s License (CDL) training to meet agricultural transportation needs.
 - c. Create an apprenticeship or pre-apprenticeship program that partners the USDA with the Departments of Education and Labor. This model has worked well for the trades sector

and provides new ways to train workers that complement the formal education system. This requires funding to help support capacity building of apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship sponsors, including support of staffing and equipment costs, curriculum development and more. Also, provide support to individual apprentices/pre-apprentices to support the cost of Related Technical Instruction (RTI) and supportive services they need to be successful such as transportation, childcare, and/or equipment for participants. Language would have to ensure that funding and policies around apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs consider the unique workforce needs of agriculture.

- d. Direct the Department of Labor and USDA to work together to administer agriculture career specific grants and scholarships for students studying agricultural sciences.
3. **Increase funding authorization levels and streamline application processes for Beginning Farmer block grants to states and to other existing federally funded or partnered training, courses, and resources in ag business management and entrepreneurship (finance, legal structures, farm succession planning) for diverse populations and first-generation farmers.** These farmers often need grant writing training and assistance, help navigating government systems, and support understanding regulatory structures.
4. **Provide funding to pilot and support new regional agricultural industry partnerships** that bring together employers in the industry, education partners, and the workforce and economic development systems.
5. **Direct NRCS, ARS, and USDA at large to provide adequate staff training related to basic agriculture practice, ag business, and workforce related questions** so that they can respond to questions from the field. These agencies are looking to Extension to provide this training and there's simply not enough capacity at Extension's current capacity (Smith-Lever & 1890 Extension) funding levels.

Additional Desired Outcomes and Actions:

1. Expand the H2A program to the dairy/livestock industries to be able to meet the unmet need and demand for year-round labor.
2. Create a state block grant for ag worker housing.
3. Support full funding for current USDA programs that improve food system viability and workforce development.
4. Reauthorize and increase funding for the Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network (FRSAN).

ISSUE AREA 2: Food System Viability & Market Access

The 2023 Farm Bill should, through funding authorization and program development, increase access for farms of all sizes to wholesale market channels to improve farm viability and support resilient localized food systems.

Highest Priority Outcomes and Actions:

1. **Authorize or direct investment in farming network infrastructure, including access to storage, transportation, food hub planning, build-out and expansions.** Permanent infrastructure is a barrier to market access.

2. The federal government must **promote market opportunities for small and medium sized farms**. This can be done by providing market access program training and funds to states, including investments in one-on-one technical assistance relating to market access, grant writing support, specifically for BIPOC farmers.
3. **Make investments in food systems related efforts that increase small farmer access to local, regional, and virtual food markets**. This can be done by:
 - a. Directing USDA to conduct targeted training around how to facilitate communication between farms and grocery/food access points, at all scales, to ease access of local products into stores.
 - b. Invest in expanded broadband coverage to improve access to web networks and the virtual market.
 - c. Use definitions of market access that include micro-level market penetration. Provide support for micro-aggregation to better reflect the existing food system in all communities.
 - d. Launch a grant program to fund projects that encourage community-level food business connections, specifically within environmental justice communities. Ensure that the grant program is easy to access with a simple application process.
 - e. Authorize permanent funding for the AMS Regional Food Business Centers concept to assist producers in market readiness and access.
 - f. Sustain full funding for current USDA programs that currently improve market access, specifically for regional and local food systems such as LAMP, REACH & Resiliency, and the LFPA.
4. **Support consumer demand research to demonstrate values placed on local production/food access that may influence retail markets served by wholesalers.**
5. **Create policies that support GAP certification for small, medium-size, and beginning farms.**
6. Increase authorized funding levels for the **Specialty Block Grant program**.

ISSUE AREA 3: Food System Viability and Climate/Economic Resilience

The nation at large, and the northeast specifically, needs resilient and accessible food systems. This means reducing food miles, having access to reliable and accurate risk management tools, access to grant programs that incentivize climate resilient practices, and insurances.

Highest Priority Outcomes and Actions within Title II

1. **Authorize funding to USDA offices such as FSA or the regional Climate Hubs to hire and train a Climate Officer to be a point of contact for farms on climate-related programs**. If there is a funded Climate Officer position at each Regional Climate Hub, we foresee the following outcomes:
 - a. Climate Officer would serve USDA RD, NRCS, FSA.
 - b. Climate Officer would collaborate with Extension and SDAs to provide hands-on technical assistance via the Regional Climate Hub.
 - c. Climate Officer to be a point of contact for farms on climate-related programs that can assist the farmer, i.e., drought mitigation, natural disaster, etc.
 - d. Climate Officers can, together, develop a collaborative model and outreach campaign to inform and educate stakeholders on climate-related funding opportunities, policies, and programs.

2. Authorize dollars to specifically **support grant programs and resources for states to provide education and technical support to producers on available climate- and ecosystem services-related programs.**
3. Direct USDA and other relevant departments to **streamline and, when possible, connect, applications for climate related programs** to increase access and transparency while decreasing the application burden on producers.

Highest Priority Outcomes and Actions within Title VII

1. Research: **Authorize dedicated funding for research at USDA to State Departments of Agriculture and Extension to identify and determine strategies, best practices, and scientific-based climate smart ag solutions.**
2. Funding: **Establish a dedicated funding stream to State Departments of Agriculture and Extension based upon research guidance to support the implementation of climate smart ag practices.** Potential for block grants, applied research, and continued efforts.

Other Desired Outcomes and Actions:

1. Direct the establishment of an interagency working group on local food systems and marketing channels, focused on building resilient connections across the relevant federal agencies currently working and interested this area.
2. Direct USDA to research and create federal guidance on establishing carbon markets and incentive systems for such practices. This guidance should clarify and level the national carbon credit playing field, so all players agree on what different activities are worth in terms of carbon credits.
3. Direct USDA to recognize and quantify the climate benefits of acquiring agricultural easements (farmland has much lower greenhouse gas emissions than developed).

ISSUE AREA 4: Technologies and Infrastructure Investment

The 2023 Farm Bill should encourage investment in appropriately scaled technologies that work for smaller farms in the densely populated northeast as much as for those that are applicable to the large acreage farms that cross open landscapes in the north central and northwestern United States.

Highest Priority Outcomes and Actions:

1. **Direct relevant agencies to conduct research that informs 21st-century agricultural practices** - for example greener farm vehicles (hybrid, electric tractors, etc.), research into technology that can assist in reducing methane and other byproducts that impact the environment and climate. This can be done by:
 - a. Title VII (Research, Extension, and related matters) -- Authorizing funds to create and incentivize labor-saving innovations (i.e., robotics); food product innovations, reduced waste and loss, better refrigeration, etc.
2. **Enhance programs that support access to and adoption of technologies that allow farms of all sized to meet climate objectives and mitigate production risks while increasing economic and managerial efficiencies.**
 - a. Strengthening funding for broadband and access. (Title VI - Rural Development)

- b. Incorporating financing (including loan guarantees) for 21st century technological tools: i.e., drones, track sensors, robotic milkers; climate related technologies; digesters, etc. (Title V - Credit)
 - c. Increase Extension's capacity (Smith-Lever capacity funds) to support the implementation of training on technology advances, application, and utilization. Also training on financial readiness to take on credit to acquire said technology. (Title VII - Research and Extension).
3. **Establish a formal partnership between FDA and Cooperative Extension to enhance food safety and modernization act compliance training.** This training is critical to the success of farm and food operations, and assistance is needed.

C. Association of Public and Land Grant University 2023 Farm Bill recommendations

The Association of Northeast Extension Directors also supports the 2023 Farm Bill Title VII Policy Recommendations as presented by the Association of Public and Land Grant Universities' Board on Agricultural Assembly. In summary, we support the following recommendations. The recommendations and justifications are available in full at <https://www.aplu.org/wp-content/uploads/APLU-Farm-Bill.pdf>.

Research

1. Hatch Act: Update the Hatch language to be in alignment with the Smith-Lever Act reference to State Extension directors and to align the statutorily responsible party with the modern execution of the program and with the Experiment Station directors' role in being accountable for its success, and, secondly, to allow Hatch funds to be used for graduate student tuition.
2. Agricultural Research at 1890 Land-Grant Colleges, Including Tuskegee University (Evans-Allen): Increase the Evans-Allen authorization to the equivalent of 40 percent of total Hatch appropriations; allow Evans-Allen funds to be used for graduate student tuition; and distinguish the agriculture research director from other roles on campus.
3. Capacity Building Grants for 1890 Institutions: Reauthorize the program.
4. Centers of Excellence at 1890 Institutions: Reauthorize the program.
5. Research Grants for 1994 Institutions: Reauthorize, remove partnership requirement, and allow for construction and facilities upgrades as eligible costs.
6. Agriculture and Food Research Initiative: Reauthorize AFRI at its current level of \$700 million and change new investigator criteria that specifies the applicants should be within 12 years of their terminal degree, with an allowance for medical leave or other extenuating circumstances, and do not already have extensive publication records.
7. Specialty Crop Research Initiative: Reauthorize and remove the matching requirement.
8. Capacity Building Grants for Non-Land-Grant Colleges of Agriculture: Reauthorize the program.
9. Sun Grant Program: Reauthorize the program.

Extension

1. Smith-Lever Sections 3(b) and 3(c): Protect the program as it is currently written.
2. Smith-Lever Section 3(d): Protect the program as it is currently written.
3. Extension at 1890 Land-Grant Colleges, Including Tuskegee University: Increase the 1890s authorization to the equivalent of 40 percent of total Smith-Lever 3(b) and 3(c) appropriations.
4. Extension Services at 1994 Institutions: Allow this program to fund facilities and construction and for funds to remain available until expended.

5. Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program: Reauthorize and remove the matching requirement.
6. Renewable Resources Extension Act of 1978: Reauthorize the program.

Education

1. Scholarships for Students at 1890 Institutions: Reauthorize the program.
2. Payments to 1994 Institutions (Tribal Colleges Education Equity Grants Program): Reauthorize and allow for construction and facilities upgrades as eligible costs.
3. New Beginnings for Tribal Students: Reauthorize and remove the matching requirement.
4. Grants and Fellowships for Food and Agriculture Sciences Education: Reauthorize and double the authorization of this program to \$80 million.
5. Education Grants Programs for Hispanic-Serving Institutions: Reauthorize the program.
6. Distance Education and Resident Instruction Grants Program for Insular Area Institutions of Higher Education: Reauthorize the program.

Infrastructure

1. Research Facilities Act: Reauthorize the program and \$5 billion in mandatory funding. Full justification available at <https://www.aplu.org/wp-content/uploads/APLU-RFA-leave-behind.pdf>.
2. Grants to Upgrade Agricultural and Food Sciences Facilities at 1890 Land-Grant Colleges, Including Tuskegee University: Reauthorize the program.
3. Grants to Upgrade Agriculture and Food Sciences Facilities and Equipment at Insular Area Land-Grant Institutions: Reauthorize the program.

Cross-Cutting Programs

1. Endowment for 1994 Institutions: Reauthorize the program.
2. International Agriculture Partnerships and Grants Program: Combine these two programs into one authority under the NIFA Center for International Programs and reauthorize them, together, for a total of \$20 million.
3. Urban, Indoor, and Other Emerging Agricultural Production Research, Education, and Extension Initiative: Reauthorize the program.
4. Food Animal Residue Avoidance Database Program: Reauthorize the program and increase the authorization from \$2.5 million to \$5 million.