

SUPPORTING FARMWORKERS IN THE 2023 FARM BILL

Farmworkers are the backbone of the U.S. food industry and a core constituency in agricultural policy. Congress should revamp and expand USDA programs to support workers and to invest in their well-being and advancement. An estimated **2.2 million**, and as many as **3.4 million**, farmworkers (crop and livestock) keep the nation fed. This number exceeds the 1.4 million producers who farm as a principal occupation.



ISSUE



SOLUTION

OVERSIGHT

The existing Farmworker Coordinator position has minimal public presence and wears many hats in the Office of Partnerships and Public Engagement.

Congress should elevate the Farmworker Coordinator role to an office with a full staff, expanded mandate, and public reporting requirements.

CAREER ADVANCEMENT

Farmworkers have often lacked the necessary support and training programs to obtain higher skilled jobs. The programs USDA currently administers like Agricultural Workforce Training Grants and the Beginning Farm and Rancher Development Program are limited in scope and funding.

Congress should:

- Establish a NIFA-administered competitive grant for land-grant institutions to implement projects developed in response to farmworker-identified needs and priorities.
- Increase funding for AWTC and the BFRDP and require that a portion of grant funds be set aside for projects specifically geared toward limited resource farmworkers.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Farmworkers face substantial losses when disasters disrupt farming. The Secretary of Agriculture has authority to issue emergency grants in such circumstances, but the authority is limited and underutilized.

Congress should expand this authority to cover a broader range of losses and direct USDA to clarify procedures for applying for and receiving such grants. USDA's disaster relief programs could also be expanded to authorize support for workers' lost wages.

Under the EPA's current workplace pesticide regulation regime, records of the use of federally restricted pesticides are not reported. Further, there are no federal requirements to monitor pesticide exposure levels for workers who handle commonly used pesticides.

Congress should:

- Broaden USDA's mandate in administering the Federal Pesticide Recordkeeping Program to include a national reporting system to monitor and research the effects of pesticide use and potential exposure.
- Direct USDA to establish an Interagency Working Group on Pesticide Exposures to coordinate collaboration between agencies on pesticide exposure monitoring and enforcement activities.

In 2018, Congress revamped the Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network (FRSAN) and authorized funds for mental health and suicide prevention services for farmers. Farmworkers are likewise deserving of increased and targeted mental health support.

Language access and culturally appropriate materials for farmworkers should be central to programs supported through the FRSAN.

Congress should:

- Expand the budget for grantees and require that applicants include a plan for working with and for farmworker communities.
- Commission an update of the Work Organization and Psychosocial Factors Supplement to the NAWS and make mental health questions a permanent addition.



For full recommendations and supporting background information, please visit FarmBillLaw.org/2023FarmBill/ or [click here](#) for the full-length **Farmworkers** report.

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DATA AND REPORTING

USDA supports new research and innovative projects both internally and externally but has failed to seriously focus on farmworker issues in many of these projects.

Congress should:

- Introduce a dedicated extramural program focused on farmworkers under NIFA.
- Amend the Economic Research Service's directive to include studying the characteristics, economic stability, economic contributions, job prospects, and quality of life of workers to evaluate the efficacy of existing programs and policies. It should also look at the H-2A program and its economic effects for the domestic workforce.

USDA-NASS collects important agricultural data, including through the Farm Labor Survey. The FLS provides critical data that USDA and DOL rely upon for many of their policies. NASS also collaborates with other federal agencies to collect key agricultural data.

Congress should codify the regular administration of the Farm Labor Survey and should require additional wage data verification mechanisms (beyond the employer-provided data).

Congress should give more resources to the ten NIOSH Centers for Agricultural Safety and Health to revive and expand the Farm Safety Survey (conducted in 2006 and 2011 in collaboration with NASS). NIOSH should also be funded and deputized to play a greater role in agricultural injuries and fatalities.

SUPPORT FOR COOPERATIVE BUSINESSES

Worker cooperatives offer one promising avenue for worker advancement in the agricultural sector, while countering industry consolidation by expanding farm-ownership opportunities for those who might not otherwise assume an owner role. Existing USDA cooperative and business development programs that focus on producer, but not worker, cooperatives could be adapted to target the development of worker cooperatives.

USDA-RD administers several programs to promote rural agriculture which could be used to promote worker cooperatives through training, investments, and technical assistance. Congress should set aside specific grant funding for promotion of worker cooperatives, especially for BIPOC workers.

Congress should adjust existing programs to provide greater access to farmworkers for cooperative ownership. Congress should modify the Transition Incentives Program and the Land Contract Guarantee Program (LCGP) to include worker cooperative conversions of land ownership. Congress should further direct USDA to update LCGP requirements to have a higher maximum purchase price and expand outreach to access more lands for purchase.

Congress should also:

- Direct the Interagency Working Group on Cooperative Development to study how federal law may hinder and how it could promote the development of worker cooperatives.
- Designate a position on the USDA's Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production's Federal Advisory Committee for a representative of worker cooperative farm interests.
- Make cooperatives a permanent part of the Economic Census and the Census of Agriculture.
- Make permanent the removal of the personal guarantee requirement for securing Small Business Association loans.

Congress can also support farmworker by:

- Restricting farm payments and subsidies for producers that repeatedly violate worker protection laws.
- Using USDA's procurement authority to promote fair labor practices.
- Establishing clear pathways to authorized work and residency status.
- Ending employment and labor law exemptions for farmworkers while providing on-ramps to support low-income farmers implementing heightened standards.