

U.S. agriculture policies should deliver programs that support rural development and promote sustainable agricultural practices that enhance conservation, diversification and equity. But today's misguided subsidies do not help America's farmers and rural America is struggling. Now is the time for change.

Reforming the 2007 Farm Bill



Although agricultural subsidies were created to alleviate the hardships caused by the Great Depression, their role is vastly different today. Massive and misguided subsidies for commodities such as corn, cotton and rice fuel the consolidation of land ownership by fewer and bigger producers in the United States. Through subsidies, taxpayers actually provide the funds that enable the biggest producers to drive land prices up, which makes it difficult for family farmers to afford to stay in business, and nearly impossible for a farmer who is just starting out to afford land to farm. Current commodity payments end up in the hands of less than a third of American farmers. Smaller farmers – particularly historically-discriminated groups – face even bigger challenges in trying to make a living from farming. Our taxpayer dollars could be better spent on programs that create more opportunities for ALL of America's farmers.

Since commodity producers are paid by the acre and by the bushel, producers are inclined to grow more than demand can absorb in order to maximize profits at the expense of the environment and sustainable farming. Other farm programs that would provide better incentives to protect water, soil and air, and make more careful use of fertilizer and pesticides have been largely unavailable to most farmers. Conservation programs help farmers reduce soil erosion, enhance water supplies, improve water quality, protect wildlife habitat, and repair damages caused by natural disasters. But such programs are not fully funded and cannot come close to meeting demand. As a result, three out of four farmers who sign-up are turned away.

Reforming US farm programs is also an issue of global fairness. US policies have impacts beyond US borders. Current US agriculture policies encourage overproduction of commodity crops, such as rice, cotton and soybeans, with the surplus dumped on international markets at prices well below the cost of production. This dumping undermines local production, threatens the livelihood of millions of farmers and deprives developing countries of earnings and market share. Simply put, family farmers all over the world are ready to lift themselves out of poverty through farming, but they are prevented from doing so by the policies of governments halfway around the world.

The Farm Bill must be reformed by shifting funds to support a sustainable, diverse and fair agriculture system.

Together, we can end poverty.

