



Join us as we urge Congress to include provisions in the 2023 Farm Bill to support small and mid-sized farmers and ranchers, improve local and regional food systems, and protect our national food security.

Below is a list of bills and proposals that FARFA is working to include in the Farm Bill, organized by topic. We have more information on each topic after the initial summary section.

- Choose the 2-3 issues that matter the most to you and share your story with your U.S. Representative and Senators.
- The bills that have a \* next to them also have a separate fact sheet available for you to print and leave with the legislative offices when you visit.
- Let us know if you want more information for one of the bills that does not have an attached fact sheet already.

### **Summary of FARFA 2023 Farm Bill Priorities**

**Meat Processing Reforms:** The lack of affordable, accessible slaughterhouses for small- and mid-scale farmers and ranchers is one of the biggest challenges facing us as we work to support local food systems. And since one of the fundamental pillars of regenerative agriculture is in livestock grazing, it ultimately impacts all types of sustainable food production.

1. **The Processing Revival and Intrastate Meat Exemption (PRIME) Act, H.R. 2814/ S.907,** would remove the federal ban on the intrastate sale of meat from custom processors. This would allow farmers to use these small, licensed processors, which are often far closer and more affordable than those which have an inspector on site.\*
2. **The Strengthening Local Processing Act of 2023, H.R.945/ S.354,** requires USDA to provide certain resources to help small and very small processors navigate the regulations. It also creates a grant program to help small processors, as well as funding training programs to address labor shortages.
3. **FARFA proposal to protect State meat inspection programs from USDA abuses of discretion:** We are proposing a bill to stop the USDA from revoking approval of state meat inspection programs based on USDA officials' whims or informal policy opinions.\*

**Addressing Corporate Consolidation and Abuses:** The free market doesn't work when there are a small handful of buyers and sellers who can control the system. Plus, the huge corporations use their political power to write regulations to benefit them and hurt small farms and ranches. We need to address consolidation and the policies that help drive it.

4. **Stop Mandatory Electronic Animal ID:** For decades, multinational meatpacking corporations and high-tech companies have pushed mandatory electronic identification for livestock. They claim it's an animal health and food safety measure, but that's not true. It's really about promoting international trade, thus maximizing the meatpacking companies' profits, while the high-tech companies will make millions selling tags, readers, and all the related infrastructure ... all at the expense of farmers and ranchers. In the spring, USDA proposed mandatory electronic ID for cattle, and appears intent to finalizing the rule in early 2024. We need Congress to step in and stop it.\*
5. **The Fairness for Small-Scale Farmers and Ranchers Act** (will be introduced soon) improves anti-trust enforcement and creates a process for undoing past Agribusiness mergers where appropriate. It restores mandatory Country of Origin Labeling (COOL) requirements for meat, so consumers know where their meat comes from. It funds programs to help new farmers get into agriculture. And it creates a pilot program to address one of the perpetual problems with USDA's meat inspection program, namely the shortage of inspectors, which has been a barrier for those facilities that want to obtain USDA-inspected status.
6. **The Opportunities for Fairness in Farming (OFF) Act, H.R.1227/ S.557**, would address the long-standing abuses under the so-called Checkoff Programs. America's farmers and ranchers are legally required to pay into Checkoff Programs, supposedly to promote their products – but much of that money goes into the pockets of nonprofits that represent the interests of the large corporations and that frequently lobby against the interests of the farmers. The OFF Act would bring much-needed transparency and accountability to these programs.\*

**Supporting Regenerative Agriculture:** Regenerative farmers and ranchers provide numerous benefits to our society and environment; government programs should help people learn these methods and support them in their implementation.

7. **The Naturally Offsetting Emissions by Managing and Implementing Tillage Strategies (NO EMITS) Act (soon to be re-introduced)** would create incentives for producers to adopt soil health cropping systems, so as to both increase farm productivity and reduce net carbon emissions. The bill would establish federal programs and funding directed specifically to healthy soils methods and establish a program to assist states in their own programs.
8. **The Training for Regenerative Agriculture in NRCS Programs Act (soon to be introduced)** is intended to address the government's under-investment in training in regenerative agriculture and biologically based soil health management systems. NRCS staff and their technical service providers would be provided with online and in-person education with the latest information and tools to help producers rebuild degraded lands, reduce reliance on inputs, and increase profitability and resilience to extreme weather like floods and droughts.\*

## Meat Processing Reforms

The problems with the consolidated meat supply system became apparent during the COVID meat shortages. The current, ongoing inflation in meat prices is also a result of the consolidation, as the mega meatpackers are free to raise prices and increase their profits, while both consumers and farmers suffer.

The problem stems from the fact that the federal regulations are prejudicial against small-scale processors. Recent USDA grant programs for small processors have had very limited impact because, in essence, they are paying people to roll a boulder up a mountain of ill-fitting regulations. That's not only an inefficient use of federal dollars, it means that the approach will never succeed in making the significant change we need because they are only able to give grants to a few dozen processors, not the thousands of small processors we need. FARFA thus believes that the first priority should be regulatory reform, such as the PRIME Act, and then multi-faceted support for rebuilding of local infrastructure.

### **1. The Processing Revival and Intrastate Meat Exemption (PRIME) Act, H.R.2814/ S.907\***

The PRIME Act would remove the federal ban on the intrastate sale of meat from custom processors.

In order to sell meat, even at a farmers' market, farmers must use a slaughterhouse that meets expensive USDA requirements and has an inspector on-site during processing. State inspection programs must use the same standards as the federal; the only real difference is who employs the inspectors. Because of the small number of such facilities, farmers may have to haul their animals several hours, increasing farmer expenses, consumer prices, and stress on the animals. Some farmers face up to a 2-year waiting period to get a slot at the nearest inspected facility.

There is another option: custom slaughterhouses. Custom slaughterhouses must meet federal regulations and are subject to inspection by state authorities. They must meet specific standards for their facilities, equipment, and processes. The key differences are that they do not have to have an approved Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) plan or have an inspector on-site during processing. Their track record for safety is excellent; in response to a FOIA request seeking information on any outbreaks since 2012, USDA's response was that no outbreaks have been reported.

But under the current law, meat from a custom facility cannot be sold. Instead, it can go only to the individual(s) who own the animal at the time the slaughter took place. This means that the customer(s) must buy the whole animal while it is still alive, which is not feasible for most consumers.

Passage of the PRIME Act would allow small farmers to use custom slaughterhouses, which are often far closer, more accessible, and more affordable. It thus supports small farmers who currently lack reasonable access to processing facilities, helping to re-localize food systems, build more resilient supply chains, and improve consumer access to locally raised meat.

## **2. The Strengthening Local Processing Act of 2023, H.R.945/ S.354.**

The Strengthening Local Processing Act takes a multi-prong approach. It provides some support on the regulatory side, by requiring USDA to provide specific resources and information to help small and very small processors navigate the regulations. It also expands the number of state-inspected processors whose products could be shipped across state lines. It creates a grant program for not only USDA-inspected processors, but state-inspected and custom-exempt processors. Last, it provides funding for training programs related to meat and poultry processing. This combination approach addresses several of the multi-layered challenges that small processors face.

## **3. Protect State meat inspection programs from USDA abuses of discretion\***

The power dynamic between the USDA and the States is a significant part of the problem. USDA is using its power to approve (or deny approval for) State inspection programs to require States to not only have the same regulatory standards for inspected processors, but to comply with every informal guidance and policy document and do so in whatever way they have been interpreted by local or regional staff. So, for example, when states have worked to pass “animal shares” bills that allow farmers and consumers to reach informed, mutually agreeable arrangement for processing, USDA threatens to pull approval of the State inspection program. Under FARFA’s proposal, States would have to show that they are complying with federal statutes and regulations; and once they do, the burden shifts to USDA to explain how the State’s program isn’t complying with the statutes and regulations.

## **Addressing Corporate Consolidation and Abuses**

The free market doesn't work when there are a small handful of buyers and sellers who can control the system. This impacts everything from the availability of inputs and supplies to processing to distribution and marketing options. And Big Corporations also mean big government influence, which is why so many regulations have been written in ways that work for big business and actively hamper small farms and ranches!

## **4. Stop Mandatory Electronic Animal ID\***

For decades, multinational meatpacking corporations and high-tech companies have pushed mandatory electronic identification for livestock. They claim it’s an animal health measure, with veiled claims that it also supports food safety, but neither is true. The real story is that it is to promote international trade, thus maximizing the meatpacking companies’ profits, while the high-tech companies will make millions selling tags, readers, and all the related infrastructure ... all at the expense of farmers and ranchers.

The proposal for electronic ID was defeated in 2010 by massive opposition, from organic farmers, conventional ranchers, livestock sale barns, horse owners, homesteaders, and consumers who want to buy from American producers. But Agribusiness and its allies in the USDA are now trying to bring it back.

Early this year, USDA published a proposed rule to mandate electronic ID for cattle. Despite the fact that the vast majority of comments the agency received were opposed to the proposal, USDA appears to be planning to finalize it early in 2024. We need Congress to take action to stop this meatpacker boondoggle.

FARFA sent a letter opposing the USDA's most recent plan, signed by 2,070 nonprofits, farms, ranches, livestock business, and individuals, which you can read [here](#).

#### **5. The Fairness for Small-Scale Farmers and Ranchers Act (soon to be introduced)**

The Fairness for Small-Scale Farmers and Ranchers Act would improve anti-trust enforcement and require the Department of Justice to look back at previous Agribusiness mergers to determine if any need to be undone. It also restores mandatory Country of Origin Labeling (COOL) requirements for meat, so consumers know where their meat comes from. It funds programs to help new farmers get into agriculture. The bill allows USDA Rural Development grants to be used to fund small meat and dairy processing facilities, and also creates a pilot program to address one of the perpetual problems with USDA's meat inspection program, namely the lack of inspectors.

#### **6. The Opportunities for Fairness in Farming (OFF) Act, H.R. 1227/ S. 557\***

The OFF Act would address the long-standing abuses under the so-called Checkoff Programs. America's farmers and ranchers are legally required to pay into checkoff programs supposedly to promote their products – but much of that money goes into the pockets of nonprofits that represent the interests of the large corporations and that frequently lobby against the interests of the farmers! For example, many of those groups have supported mandatory electronic Animal ID, while opposing Country of Origin Labeling and anti-trust enforcement.

The OFF Act would bring much-needed transparency and accountability to these programs:

- Prohibits checkoff programs from contracting with any organization that lobbies on agricultural policy.
- Prohibits employees and agents of checkoff boards from engaging in activities that involve a conflict of interest.
- Establishes uniform standards for checkoff programs that prohibit anti-competitive activity, unfair or deceptive acts, or any act or practice that may be disparaging to another agricultural commodity or product.
- Requires transparency through the publication of checkoff program budgets and expenditures.
- Requires periodic compliance audits by the USDA Inspector General.

## Supporting Regenerative Agriculture

### **7. The Naturally Offsetting Emissions by Managing and Implementing Tillage Strategies (NO EMITS) Act**

The No EMITS Act would create incentives for producers to adopt soil health cropping systems, so as to both increase farm productivity and reduce net carbon emissions. The bill, which was HR 2508 in the last Congress and is being re-introduced, would:

- Establish a Soil Health Transition Incentive Program under EQIP.
- Establish a State Assistance for Soil Health Program and provide \$100 million a year out of Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) funds for matching grants to States or tribes for state soil health programs.
- Carve out 1% of conservation funding to provide technical assistance.
- Double funding for the Conservation Innovation Grants On-Farm Trials from \$25 million to \$50 million.

Read more at [Gallagher, Huffman, Nunn Introduce Bipartisan Bill to Incentivize Use of Soil Health Cropping Systems | Congressman Mike Gallagher \(house.gov\)](#)

### **8. Train for Regenerative Agriculture in NRCS programs (TRAIN) Act**

Education and technical support are crucial for the successful implementation of conservation priorities in the US. Unfortunately, due to under-investment in training, as well as rapid advances in regenerative agriculture and biologically based soil health management systems, there is a knowledge gap that exists in supporting producers in building resilient and profitable agriculture systems. To ensure adequate technical assistance is available for farmers and ranchers, USDA personnel and third-party providers (referred to by NRCS as technical service providers, or TSPs) need access to the latest information and tools to help producers rebuild degraded lands, reduce reliance on inputs, and increase profitability and resilience to extreme weather like floods and droughts.

The Train for Regenerative Agriculture in NRCS Programs Act, which is expected to be introduced shortly, would provide NRCS staff and TSPs with the latest knowledge, tools, and innovations to help producers build soil health. As part of NRCS' Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA), and utilizing CTA funds, the program would develop cooperative agreements to create an online curriculum and hold in-person workshops to be made available to relevant NRCS staff and TSPs, followed by the development of soil health educational materials for producers accessing NRCS programs.