

POSITION STATEMENT:

Pass the Expanding Access To (EAT) Local Foods Act to promote Farm Viability and Nutrition Security

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SUMMARY STATEMENT

SBM supports passing the EAT Local Foods Act—a bill to promote economic opportunities for farmers and ranchers to strengthen local food supply chains, and to increase access to nutritious foods among households experiencing food insecurity and chronic disease risk.



THE PROBLEM

In 2022, 17 million U.S. residents experienced food insecurity (13% of the population).¹ The U.S. produces enough food to feed everyone, but millions of pounds of food (80 million tons of food) are wasted and adds to the food insecurity problem.² To prevent this issue from re-occurring, partnerships between organizations and local farms are needed to distribute as much farm food as possible to those in need.² Small-scale farms grow 50% of our food calories on 30% of U.S. agricultural land, and a primary producer of fresh and nutritious foods (i.e., fruits, vegetables, legumes, grains, and nuts, and seeds) to support guideline recommended dietary patterns.^{3,4} In 2022, family farms (where the majority of the business is owned by the operator and individuals related to the operator) of various types accounted for 97% of U.S. farms. Small-scale family farms accounted for 88% all U.S. farms but earned less than half of all income from commodity cash receipts, farm-related income, and Federal Government payments.⁵ When access to inputs and conditions are equal, small-scale farms tend to be more productive per 10,000 m² than much larger farms.³

Socially disadvantaged producers (i.e., BIPOC farmers, new farmers, women farmers) are predominantly underrepresented in small-scale farming and have been minoritized and tokenized in the agricultural sector.⁶ Such historical and contemporary manifestations of oppression compound in addition to the many challenges that BIPOC, new, and women small-scale farmers face, including structural barriers to land, capital, and market access,⁶ extreme weather exposure as a result of climate change,⁷ suboptimal labor conditions and low wages.⁸ As a result,

minoritized small-scale farmers are often not able to afford or consume the very food they produce,⁹⁻¹⁴ nor generate sufficient profit from their labor,⁸ all the while simultaneously navigating social injustices and managing chronic health conditions.¹⁵ As such, it is imperative to support historically marginalized producers and households experiencing food insecurity in complementary ways.

CURRENT POLICY

The COVID-19 public health emergency prompted an increase in community-based initiatives that provided income-eligible food assistance beneficiaries with farm fresh and nutritious products, while compensating farmers at a fair price.¹⁶ For instance, in 2021, Congress made \$900 million available for food purchasing efforts through the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)'s Local Food Procurement Agreement (LFPA). Using LFPA funds, states establish programs to purchase farm foods produced within 400 miles of delivery destination that is distributed through food banks, pantries, and other farm-to-community pathways to reach families experiencing food insecurity.¹⁶ A new bill was introduced last month by U.S. Senator Jack Reed (D-RI) entitled the Expanding Access To (EAT) Local Foods Act (S.3982) that essentially calls for LFPA to be codified into law to provide permanent funding for state and tribal governments to support farm-to-food assistance value chains.¹⁷

Although LFPA implementation has posed challenges,¹⁸ it has also yielded favorable results (i.e., millions of dollars in new local food purchased from socially disadvantaged

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farmers) in promoting farm viability and increasing nutritious food access. By drawing insights from early successes,^{19, 20} LFPAs are exhibiting untapped potential in its ability to address the needs of farmers and food-insecure households. Because one of the biggest challenges is lack of secure funding,¹⁷ the EAT Local Foods Act is a promising policy priority to promote farm viability and nutrition security in the U.S.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Pass the EAT Local Foods Act, which would provide permanent funding for state and tribal governments to connect regional and local farms with food assistance, emergency feeding programs (i.e., food banks, food pantries), and community-based organizations to provide farm food (at no cost) to individuals experiencing food insecurity.
2. Consistent with the USDA Equity Commission final report to advance equity for all, the USDA should expand LFA funding opportunities to ensure equitable land access, climate-smart resources, access to technical assistance, and supporting socially disadvantaged farmworkers and their families when participating in future LFA initiatives.²¹

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