

POSITION STATEMENT:

Increase Funding for Fruit and Vegetable Production in Farm Bill Reauthorization

(NOVEMBER 2017) Akilah Dulin-Keita, PhD, Brown University, Providence, RI; Lisa Quintiliani, PhD, Boston University, Boston, MA; Joanna Buscemi, PhD, DePaul University, Chicago, IL; Brooke M. Bell, BA, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA; Kim M. Gans, University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT; and Amy L. Yaroch, PhD, Gretchen Swanson Center for Nutrition, Omaha, NE

The Society of Behavioral Medicine recommends that reauthorization of the Farm Bill include funding allocations for increasing fruit and vegetable production, which can increase Americans' fruit and vegetable intake.



In the United States, 12% to 17% of all deaths in 2013 were attributable to inadequate fruit and vegetable (FV) intake.¹ Adequate FV intake is associated with lower risks for all-cause mortality and for chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease, stroke, and some forms of cancer.¹⁻⁴ Given the critical importance of FV for the prevention of chronic diseases, the 2015-20 Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend an individual on a 2,000-calorie diet consume 2½ cups of vegetables and 2 cups of fruits per day.⁵ However, the overwhelming majority of Americans do not meet that recommendation.⁵

While there are many factors (e.g., behavioral, economic, environmental) that contribute to lower FV intake,⁶ there are currently not enough FV in the U.S. food supply to meet the recommendations in the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.^{4,7,8} Analysis of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's databases indicates the availability of FV in the food supply are at half or less than half of what is needed to meet federal dietary recommendations.⁸ These estimates account for the loss of availability due to waste and spoilage.

The gap between recommendations and availability is a deep food systems issue that has persisted for more than 40 years.^{7,8} This critical and persistent gap is a barrier to achieving the federal dietary recommendations, to preventing chronic diseases, and to helping Americans live longer and healthier lives.

FARMING PROGRAMS DO NOT SUPPORT FRUIT AND VEGETABLE PRODUCTION

Subsidies and planting restrictions presently in the Farm Bill (2014 Agricultural Act) do not support increased production of specialty crops like FV. Crop commodity programs exist for price loss coverage (when market prices fall below a reference price) and agriculture risk coverage (for when crop revenue drops). However, these programs only cover certain commodities (e.g., soybeans, wheat, corn); specialty crops, including FV, are excluded.

- Farmers who participate in crop commodity programs receive reduced payments if they plant FV on base acres ("crop-specific acreage eligible to participate in

commodity programs").⁹⁻¹¹

- The planting and reimbursement restrictions on base acres led to decreased acres of farmland containing FV after implementation of the 1990 and 1996 Farm Bills.¹¹
- Planting restrictions are generally supported by FV farmers (because they help maintain higher FV prices). However, removing these restrictions would likely lead to increased FV production.¹¹

Crop insurance is one of the only safety nets for specialty crop farmers, but federal crop insurance programs are underutilized by such farmers.¹² Crop insurance has been a facet of U.S. agricultural policy since 1938, by providing government-subsidized policies to protect farmers if crop yields are lower than expected due to issues outside of their control (e.g., weather, price declines, yield declines based on a farmer's actual production history).¹²⁻¹³

- Historically, this insurance has been underutilized by FV farmers partly because it has not been tailored to the unique risks of specialty crop production.
 - Some risks are non-weather related such as food safety and contamination-related issues, small-acreage and production, complex farming practices, and difficulties in premium ratings.^{12,14,15}
- The current Farm Bill included pilot programs (e.g., Whole-Farm Revenue Protection Program) to increase insurance coverage for specialty growers like FV farmers.^{12,14}
 - Some specialty crop growers have lobbied against federal insurance coverage due to concerns that insurance products for their specialty crops may increase competition and drive down prices.^{12,14-16}
 - Given the opposition to insurance by some specialty crop farmers, the Senate-passed 2012 Farm Bill re-

quired new insurance products be developed in collaboration with groups representing these producers.¹⁵

- Current initiatives in the Farm Bill have focused on increasing products to support specialty crops including FV (e.g., resources for organic farmers, funding for pest and disease management).^{12,14,15,17}

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Society of Behavioral Medicine (SBM) recommends taking steps to increase FV production and intake, which may also stimulate more consumer demand for the production and consumption of FV.

1. Include funding allocations for increasing FV production in the upcoming reauthorization of the Farm Bill. This will directly increase FV production, support FV producers, and better align the U.S. food supply with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.
2. Include FV in commodity programs for price loss coverage and agriculture risk coverage.
3. Remove FV planting restrictions on base acres in crop commodity programs.
4. Provide additional crop insurance subsidies for producing FV. These products should account for the unique risks of FV production and, as described in the Senate-passed 2012 Farm Bill, should be developed in collaboration with specialty growers.
5. Increase funding for other existing FV initiatives to increase FV intake.
 - The Specialty Crop Research Initiative supports critical research and extension projects that provide resources to address the needs of specialty crop industries in food and agriculture.¹⁸
 - The Specialty Crop Block Grant Program enhances the competitiveness of specialty crops in domestic and foreign markets.¹⁹
 - The Farmers Market Promotion Program provides grants to "increase domestic consumption of and access to locally and regionally produced agricultural products."²⁰ This program has led to increased access to and consumption of FV as well as contributed to building local economies.^{21,22}
 - The Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program delivers fresh FV to schools and has been shown to increase school-children's FV intake.²³
 - The Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive (FINI) Grant Program increases purchase of FV by incentivizing FV at the point-of-purchase for participants in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).²⁴ A randomized controlled trial demonstrated that the pilot of FINI increased FV intake among SNAP participants.²⁵

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors gratefully acknowledge support from SBM's Health Policy Committee and Health Policy Council.

ENDORSEMENTS



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