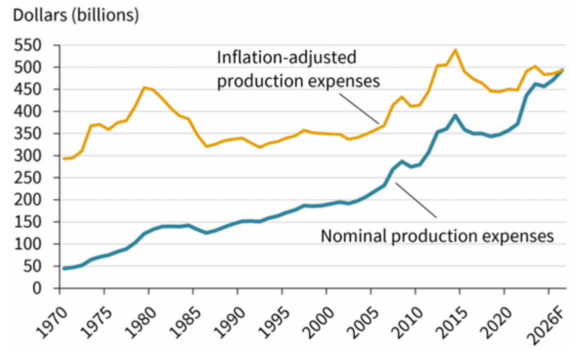
Family farmers are asking for a fair shake.

Congress has not reauthorized the farm bill since 2018, leaving farmers to rely on additional ad-hoc assistance to fill in the gaps outdated farm policy has left. While Congress made major updates to the farm safety net in the 2025 One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA), those changes were made at the expense of nutrition programs, threatening the farm bill's historic broad, bipartisan coalition of support and creating uncertainty for vulnerable families.

The farm bill that Congress is considering does not address the underlying problems in the farm economy, nor does it adequately patch the hole in nutrition funding. The farm safety net changes in the farm bill are so weak that Congress is considering yet another round of ad hoc assistance even as it debates the farm bill. The federal government has spent more than $100 billion – *on top of* existing farm program payments – in emergency economic and disaster assistance since 2016. But this is only a patch and doesn't do anything to fix the problem of prices that regularly fall short of the cost of production.

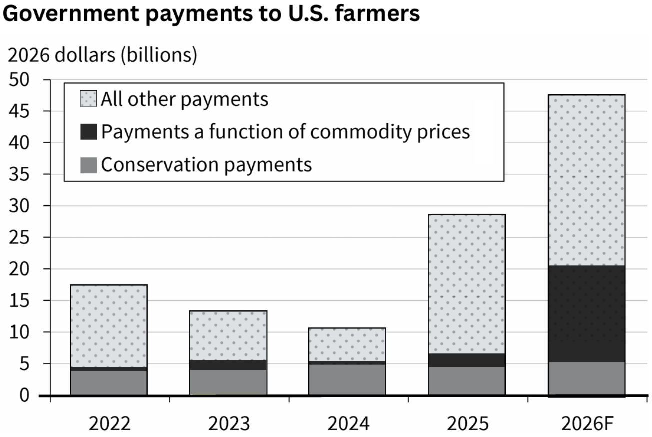
The farm economy remains under significant strain. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) forecasts that both net farm income and net cash farm income will decrease in 2026. In inflation-adjusted 2026 dollars, the respective forecast decrease is $9.1 billion (5.5%) and $4.6 billion (2.5%) compared to 2025. U.S. farm profits are forecasted to decline despite a sharp increase (nearly 70%) in expected federal payments to farmers, mostly from higher commodity program payments and ongoing supplemental and disaster assistance. Some crop receipts, especially corn (11%) and soybeans (10%), are expected to grow due to higher prices. The picture for specialty crops is mixed. While receipts for cattle are projected to continue growing in 2026 by 5%, overall livestock product receipts are forecast to decrease by about 5%. But high input costs dampen any benefit from higher commodity prices. Production expenses are expected to climb by 4.5%, with fertilizer (15%) and fuel and oil costs (30%) accounting for much of the projected increase.

U.S. farm production expenses



Source: USDA ERS

Government payments to U.S. farmers



Source: USDA ERS

The data show that too many family farmers and ranchers are struggling to earn a fair return from the marketplace. As the farm bill remains under consideration, Congress should rethink how the farm safety net functions and build something stronger that broadens the base of support and meets the challenges of today. Farm policy should move beyond short-term fixes and enact new policy tools that better address price volatility, rising costs, and supply and demand imbalances.

It's time for a farm bill that works for family farmers.

The current farm bill, the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018, was originally set to expire in September 2023. Since then, Congress has been unable to assemble the necessary coalition needed to pass a comprehensive, bipartisan farm bill reauthorization, resulting in three temporary extensions (so far) covering 2024, 2025, and 2026.

Congress has not been idle during this period. The House Agriculture Committee advanced a farm bill in 2024, and in 2026 the committee again passed a farm bill, which subsequently passed the full House in April. Senate Agriculture Committee leaders have also released legislative proposals. In August, the Senate Agriculture Committee held a markup of its version of the farm bill, but it failed to advance out of the committee, with the vote failing along party lines. With a slim, one vote majority for Republicans on the committee, the absence of Sen. Mitch McConnell (R-KY) prevented them from advancing their bill.

Several factors have contributed to the broader delay in enacting a comprehensive farm bill. Congress enacted portions of traditional farm policy through the party-line "budget reconciliation" process, which ultimately produced OBBBA. In this bill, significant changes were made to mandatory farm and nutrition programs. OBBBA increased farm program reference prices but made these changes at the expense of funding for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), with cuts of approximately $186 billion over ten years.

Historically, farm bills have depended on a broad coalition of interests, especially agriculture and anti-hunger interests. Enacting major farm and nutrition program changes through the budget reconciliation process altered the coalition and complicated the pathway to a bipartisan farm bill. As a result, we continue to operate largely under the framework of the 2018 Farm Bill, with a few programs updated through OBBBA, but most await a more comprehensive reauthorization.

While the farm bills currently under consideration by Congress would make some important updates, they fail to meet the moment to truly address the economic crisis facing family farmers and ranchers. The Senate version of the bill includes some key Farmers Union priorities: it would reinstate mandatory country-of-origin labeling (COOL), authorize and provide mandatory funding for local and regional food procurement, and authorize year-round, nationwide sale of E15. But neither version of the bill establishes a farm safety net that accounts for high input costs and persistently low commodity prices. The bill should also do more to fund voluntary conservation programs and provide real protections against corporate monopolies.

Farm policy is not working for family farmers and ranchers.

We are stuck in a broken system that we did not create and cannot fix alone.

A stronger farm bill can deliver real reform, strengthen the farm safety net, restore fairness to agricultural markets, and create more opportunities for family farms to thrive.

A farm bill that works for family farmers is achievable.

Reinstate mandatory COOL

American family farmers, ranchers, and consumers deserve honest, fair and transparent food labels. Our nation's ranchers produce the safest, highest-quality beef in the world, but without mandatory country-of-origin labeling for beef, meatpackers like the big four that control 85% of the U.S. cattle market are able to blend imported beef into products marketed as "Made in the USA," shortchanging U.S. consumers and American ranchers.

NFU supports the *American Beef Labeling Act* (S.421), which was introduced by Sens. John Thune (R-SD) and Cory Booker (D-NJ) in the U.S. Senate and the *Country-of-Origin Labeling Enforcement Act* (H.R.5818) , introduced by Reps. Harriet Hageman (R-WY) and Ro Khanna (D-CA) in the House.

Reinstate mandatory COOL	
House Bill:	**Not included.**
Senate Ag Cmte. Bill:	**Included:** Brought forward by Majority Leader John Thune (R-SD) as an amendment; adopted on a bipartisan vote.

Fund local food purchasing

Investing in local and regional food systems keeps family farms viable, strengthens rural communities, and gets fresh, local food into our schools and communities.

We know building stronger local and regional markets pays dividends in our communities: under USDA's Local Food Purchase Assistance (LFPA) and Local Food for Schools (LFS) programs, states, Tribes, and territories purchased approximately $850 million worth of locally grown food from more than 15,000 farmers and stimulated nearly $1.6 billion in economic activity. These programs were canceled and Farmers Union is working to bring them back.

The House and Senate farm bills would both authorize new local procurement programs and provide $200 million per year in discretionary funding for five years. The Senate version goes a step further by including schools and $200 million per year for two years in mandatory funding to help kickstart these programs with dedicated, upfront funding.

Fund local food purchasing	
House Bill:	**Authorized for five years but not funded.**
Senate Ag Cmte. Bill:	**Authorized for five years, funded at $200 million annually for two years.**

Protect and enforce Packers and Stockyards Act rules

The Packers and Stockyards Act (PSA) of 1921 is a federal law meant to promote fairness and competition in livestock markets. It is the primary policy protecting livestock producers from unfair practices by meatpackers and poultry companies. But the PSA is under attack by large meatpackers and poultry integrators. The current administration is trying to roll back recent updates that strengthened the law, and lawmakers are attempting to erode the law through the annual appropriations process.

Consolidation in meat processing means livestock producers only have a few buyers. The PSA is meant to ensure those buyers play by the rules. Strengthening and enforcing the PSA means cattle, hog, and poultry producers will receive fair treatment from the companies that buy their animals.

We can't let the meatpackers roll back PSA protections. Sens. Chuck Grassley (R-IA) and Cory Booker (D-NJ) filed an amendment to the Senate farm bill to codify the three PSA rules the administration is threatening to rescind. During the Senate Agriculture Committee farm bill markup in August, the amendment was not offered. There is still time for lawmakers to codify these rules during the 119th session of Congress.

Both House and Senate versions of the farm bill also include the *A-PLUS Act*, which would allow livestock auction owners to hold an ownership interest in, finance, or participate in the management of a meatpacking business. This is prohibited by the PSA. Both farm bills include the same slaughter thresholds for plants: for cattle and sheep under 2,000 animals/day or 700,000 animals/year, and for hogs under 10,000 animals/day or 3 million animals/year.

Protect and enforce Packers and Stockyards Act rules	
House Bill:	**Neither bill addresses the PSA rules.** However, both bills include the A-PLUS Act, which undermines the PSA.
Senate Ag Cmte. Bill:	

Secure year-round, nationwide E15

Farmers must pursue new opportunities for domestic consumption of our agricultural products, particularly as we continue to face disruptions to international trade. Authorizing higher-level blends of ethanol would provide a critical domestic market for corn.

The House passed a provision to allow nationwide year-round sales of E15, and the Senate Agriculture Committee is currently negotiating on similar language in its farm bill draft. Both the House and Senate proposals include exemptions from the Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS) requirements for certain small refiners.

E15 can provide American families valuable savings in the current affordability crisis. All Americans have seen a dramatic increase in the price of gas since the start of the conflict in Iran. Consumers choosing E15 would save around 25 cents per gallon of gas.

Secure year-round, nationwide E15	
House Bill:	**Not included,** but year-round, nationwide E15 passed the House as a separate, standalone bill.
Senate Ag Cmte. Bill:	**Included:** Authorizes year-round, nationwide E15.

Establish the Inventory Management Soil Enhancement Tool (IMSET) so farmers can respond to low commodity prices while building soil health

Policymakers must rethink the structure of the farm safety net to make it more effective and ensure it doesn't worsen the problem it's aiming to solve. One innovation Congress should consider is the Inventory Management Soil Enhancement Tool (IMSET). IMSET is a voluntary, flexible, farmer-focused risk management option that gives family farmers a practical way to respond to low commodity prices while investing in the long-term health of their land.

Under IMSET, producers of covered commodities may choose each year to enroll up to 20% of their cropland into conserving use for the season. In return, the producer would receive an enhanced reference prices on their remaining acres, helping improve returns when market conditions are weak.

By reducing excess production when prices are projected to fall below the cost of production, IMSET can help strengthen commodity prices, reduce reliance on government support programs, and improve soil fertility and long-term resilience of the land.

Economists at Texas A&M University's Agricultural and Food Policy Center found that, if imports are held constant, IMSET would provide strong risk management options while reducing government expenditures.

Establish the Inventory Management Soil Enhancement Tool (IMSET)	
House Bill:	**Not included in either bill.**
Senate Ag Cmte. Bill:	

Reverse cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

SNAP is the nation's largest anti-hunger and nutrition assistance program. It helps low-income households to purchase food, with increases in use during economic downturns. In the OBBBA, Republican lawmakers effectively cut $186 billion from SNAP by changing program eligibility criteria and shifting more program costs to the states. The situation with SNAP – also known as food stamps – has become a flashpoint in the farm bill debate.

Governors from both parties and a coalition of local, county, and state organizations have asked Congress to delay the cost shift to states. Congressional Democrats have been vocal in pushing for a two-year delay in the benefit shift.

The House-passed farm bill contains no such delay. The initial draft of the Senate farm bill released earlier this year contained no cost shift delay either, but a one-year delay was added by Chairman John Boozman (R-AR) during the committee markup. So far, this one-year delay, which contained some offsetting additional cost increases for certain states, was not enough to change the votes of Democrats on the Senate Agriculture Committee to support the bill.

USDA estimates that during a slowing economy, an increase of $1 billion in SNAP benefits increases the GDP by $1.54 billion. The same increase supports 13,560 additional jobs. The use of SNAP benefits also helps support family farms, because these benefits are used to purchase food at grocery stores and farmers markets.

The best option for farmers and people in our communities who need access to SNAP benefits is to reverse the cuts that were made to SNAP in 2025.

Reverse cuts to SNAP	
House Bill:	**Not included:** Maintains OBBBA's cuts to SNAP.
Senate Ag Cmte. Bill:	**Partially included:** One-year delay in cost-shift to states but increases state share of cost from 15% - 20% for states with payment error rates about 10%.

Bring down input costs

Rising input costs and low commodity prices are directly affecting family farmers' and ranchers' ability to continue farming. Higher prices for feed, fuel, and fertilizer are eroding farmers' ability to make a profit, with many thinking about what this means for their businesses in the immediate future. As many farmers enter harvest season, the sharp rise in fertilizer prices has already taken a huge financial toll. Since the end of February of just this year, many fertilizer components like urea and phosphate have already increased by 25%, forcing many farmers to buy now or risk supply chain challenges and higher prices later.

In March, Sens. John Thune (R-SD) and Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) introduced the *Fertilizer Transparency Act* (S.4152), which would create a USDA mandatory price reporting system that would allow farmers to make real-time fertilizer purchasing decisions.

Bring down input costs	
House Bill:	**Not addressed.**
Senate Ag Cmte. Bill:	**Included:** Requires USDA to collect and publish weekly fertilizer pricing data.

Fully fund voluntary conservation programs

USDA's voluntary, incentive-based conservation programs play a vital role in helping farmers manage soil, water, and other natural resources on their farms, while helping build financially and environmentally sustainable operations. These programs include the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), and the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP).

Congress passed the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) in 2022, adding nearly $20 billion in temporary additional agricultural funding across these programs – a massive increase. The OBBBA took most of the remaining, unspent funding and rolled about $10 billion of it into the permanent farm bill baseline, making that funding available farther into the future.

These programs have been historically oversubscribed and underfunded. Even with the additional funding, many farmers applying to these programs do not secure contracts. Yet the House and Senate versions of the farm bill both take some of this preserved conservation program funding and repurpose it. While much of this repurposing appears to be for either new conservation initiatives, or other conservation programs that lack permanent baseline ("orphan" programs), this reallocation of resources fails to ensure that farmers' conservation program needs are fully met.

Congress should fully fund voluntary, incentive-based conservation programs, rather than take from one pocket to put in the other.

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2">Fully fund voluntary conservation programs</th></tr>
<tr><td>House Bill:</td><td rowspan="2">Neither bill fully funds voluntary conservation programs.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Senate Ag Cmte. Bill:</td></tr>
</table>

Ensure dairy farmers receive a fair price for their milk

American family dairy farmers are struggling to stay afloat. Today, only 24,000 dairy farms remain in the United States, and federal dairy policy has fallen short of addressing the many issues affecting dairy farmers. From market consolidation in the dairy industry, dairy income losses due to the ongoing trade wars, high input costs, and leaving dairy out of the Farmer Bridge Assistance (FBA) program, the American dairy industry is in crisis.

Congress should pass dairy market reform legislation that would create a new Dairy Market Stabilization Program that would match national dairy production to national demand. This would also ensure that dairy producers receive a fair price for the milk they produce, all while instituting accountability mechanisms to ensure strong corporate exploitation and consolidation do not happen within the program.

Ensure dairy farmers receive a fair price for their milk	
House Bill:	**Not addressed in either bill.**
Senate Ag Cmte. Bill:	

Improve farmers' access to credit and provide debt relief

Both the House and Senate versions of the farm bill make some notable improvements that will improve farmers' access to credit. The problem is that given the challenges in the farm economy, these changes are inadequate.

First, the good: both farm bill versions increase Farm Service Agency (FSA) direct operating loan limits (to $750,000), guaranteed operating (to $3 million), direct ownership (to $850,000), guaranteed ownership (to $3.5 million), and microloans (to $100,000). Guaranteed loan limits will adjust for inflation. The bills also include a few new provisions that NFU championed, including establishing a new loan preapproval or prequalification process at FSA, and allowing distressed loans guaranteed by FSA to be refinanced into direct loans.

Given the challenges in the farm economy, NFU supports additional, commonsense reforms like flexible payment deferment options for farmers who become economically distressed, and the elimination of arbitrary loan eligibility term limits that kick farmers out of the FSA loan system even if they lack good private market credit options.

Improve farmers' access to credit and provide debt relief	
House Bill:	**Both bills make improvements to credit,** but greater reforms are needed to ensure farmers have reliable access to credit.
Senate Ag Cmte. Bill:	

Fully staff USDA

USDA must be well-funded and fully staffed to serve the needs of family farmers, ranchers, and our communities. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and FSA local and county offices serve as essential on-the-ground resources, providing direct assistance with conservation programs, disaster assistance, crop insurance coordination, farm loans, technical expertise, and program implementation.

Since 2025, USDA has lost over 20,000 employees, which is roughly one-fifth of the entire department. NRCS and FSA have each lost 21-23% of their respective staff levels, while FSA county offices have lost nearly 10% of their workforce. These agencies have also faced severe staffing shortages for multiple years. While NFU recognizes the need for efficiency across federal agencies, it must be pursued without jeopardizing the ability of the department to carry out federal programs.

Continued staffing reductions at local NRCS and FSA offices will inevitably result in longer processing times, delayed program delivery, reduced access to technical assistance, and fewer staff available to help producers navigate increasingly complex federal programs and disaster situations. Timely access to USDA staff and resources can directly impact whether farm operations remain financially viable during periods of economic stress or after weather-related losses.

Congress must ensure USDA is fully and adequately staffed to ensure these programs remain accessible and effective for farmers and ranchers nationwide.

Fully staff USDA	
House Bill:	**Not addressed in either bill.**
Senate Ag Cmte. Bill:	

Increase funding for the Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network (FRSAN)

Farmers Union has long advocated for resources to help farmers manage stressful times on the farm. NFU supports reauthorizing and increasing funding for FRSAN, which connects farmers, ranchers, and their families to stress assistance programs.

Farming is inherently stressful, and there are many persistent drivers of farm stress, including high financial risk, volatile markets, unpredictable weather, and heavy debt loads. These stressors are further exacerbated by the economic crisis in farm country. Furthermore, more than 60% of rural residents live in areas with mental health professional shortages. FRSAN plays an essential role in serving communities where the need is great, and resources are limited.

Enacting improvements to farm policy will help alleviate the root causes of stress for the future, but there is nevertheless a strong need for resources dedicated to helping farmers manage the effects of stress in the present.

Increase funding for the Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network (FRSAN)	
House Bill:	**Not included:** Maintains annual funding of $10 million.
Senate Ag Cmte. Bill	**Included:** Increases annual funding to $15 million.