



March 9, 2023

Widespread Support for Prioritizing Sustainability and Growing Healthy Foods in the Farm Bill

Survey results among 1000 nationally registered voters

To: Interested Parties

From: GQR

A recent national survey conducted on behalf of the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future (CLF) asked registered voters about their opinions on the U.S. Farm Bill, sustainable farming practices, specific farming policies, and general familiarity with farming practices. While most voters were unfamiliar with more technical terms such as agroecology and regenerative agriculture, they strongly supported these practices after hearing their definitions.

Entering 2023, rising costs is still at the top of voters' minds. Most blame a combination of increased government spending and disruptions from the COVID pandemic. But economic concerns do not change voters' priorities, and Americans believe the federal government should support small- and mid-sized agricultural producers and are in favor of incentivizing farmers and ranchers to implement sustainable, resilient agricultural practices.

Much like we saw in 2018, findings show that while voters' familiarity with the Farm Bill is low, over half of voters believe the government should increase funding for the Farm Bill. Specific policy proposals associated with the Farm Bill earn wide support, particularly when centered around sustainability and climate consciousness.

Sustainable agricultural practices are popular among voters, and they want the government to prioritize producing sustainable food. Investing in healthy food over large-scale animal feed production is clearly popular among voters nationwide. Voters are skeptical of supporting corporate agribusiness and producing commodities like corn and soybeans for export and there is firm support for prioritizing growing healthy, affordable food.

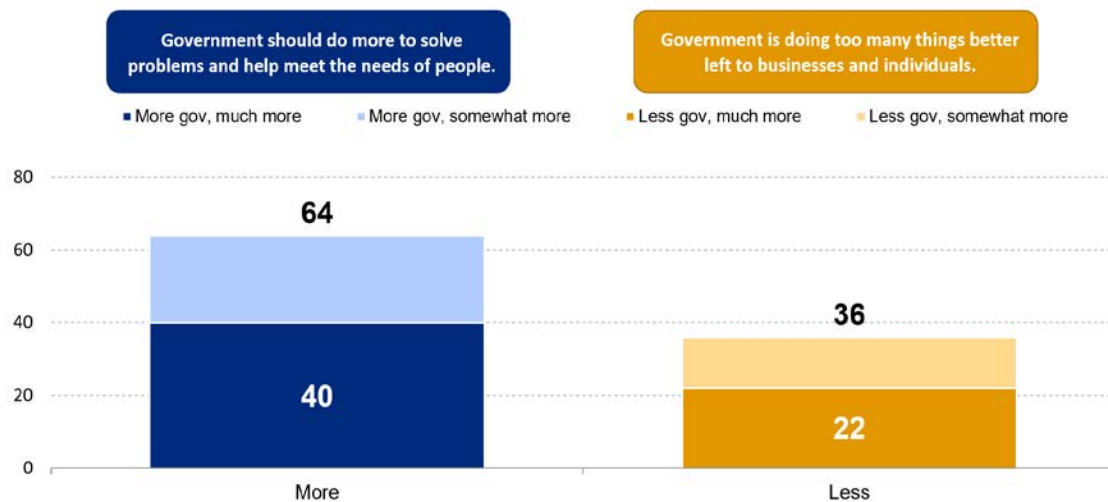
This memo is based on a phone survey of 1,000 nationally registered voters conducted from January 12, to 23, 2023. The data has been weighted to reflect the demographic composition of the registered voter population for the nation. Because the sample is based on those who initially self-selected for participation in the panel rather than a probability sample, no estimates of sampling error can be calculated.

Government Role and Support

According to recent public polling, inflation is at the top of voters' minds. We started this survey by gauging general responsibility for inflation and rising costs. Voters point to government spending (52 percent) and disruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic (50 percent) as most responsible, followed by corporations raising prices (47 percent). Farmers raising their prices were clear of blame.

Despite half blaming inflation on government spending, sentiments surrounding the government's role remain consistent with previous years of research. Most think government should be doing more to meet the needs of the people: 64 percent of voters think the government should be doing more while 36 percent think the government is doing too many things and needs to take a step back.

Figure 1: Views on the role of the government



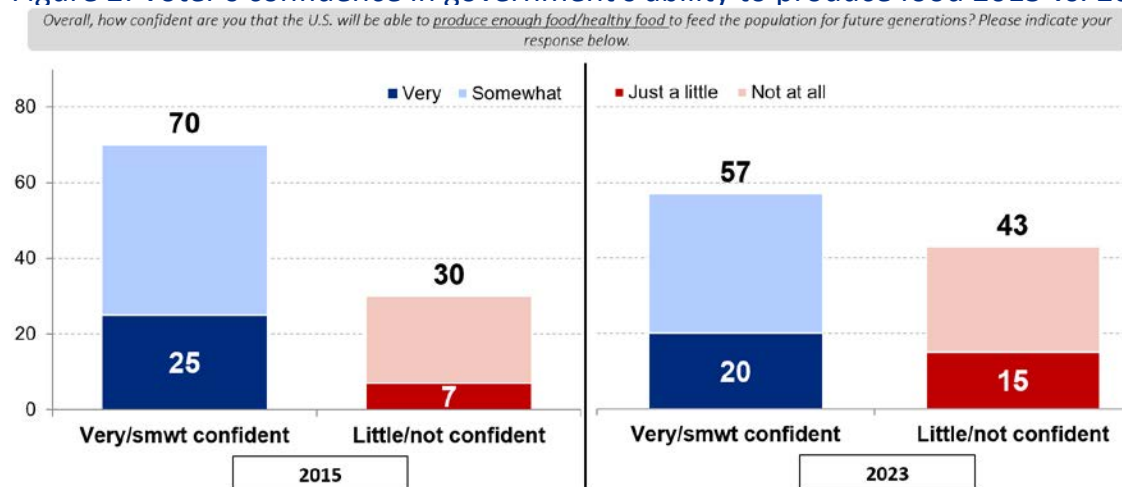
A majority of voters have generally positive views of the government's role in producing safe and nutritious food, but the key issues that voters feel the government is doing poorly on are more economic.

Nearly 60 percent rate the government's role in keeping food safe in the U.S. as excellent or good, while 50 percent rate their role in producing nutritious food as excellent or good. Conversely, nearly half of voters think the government is doing a poor job ensuring the prices of important foods do not drastically change from month to month and 30 percent think they are doing a poor job ensuring people with a low or modest income have enough money for basic food necessities. These findings are consistent with the survey from 2018¹.

1 Live interview phone survey among 1005 National Registered Voters from June 5 – 12, 2018. Margin of error for this sample is +/- 3.1 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level. Margin of error is higher among subgroups.

Voters' confidence in the government to produce food (both food in general and healthy food) is sufficiently high at 57 percent, but not stable. Once voters hear more information and how the U.S. imports one-third of its fresh vegetables and two-thirds of its fresh fruit, confidence drops by 10 points (47 percent). The largest shifts occur among seniors, college educated voters, and voters in the Northeast. In addition to movement within the survey, voters' general confidence has declined over time. In 2015, 70 percent of voters felt confident in the government to produce food compared to 57 percent today².

Figure 2: Voter's confidence in government's ability to produce food 2015 vs. 2023



In one of the last set of questions encompassing general government role, we tested how much support voters think the federal government should provide small and mid-sized agricultural producers and corporate agribusiness. Voters create a clear distinction; they firmly want to help agricultural producers and feel little responsibility for helping corporations.

Support is similar for both small and mid-sized agricultural producers (94 percent total agree), as well as for agricultural producers in general (92 percent total agree), and while 59 percent of voters think small and mid-sized producers should get more funding, only 32 percent of voters think the same for corporate agribusinesses.

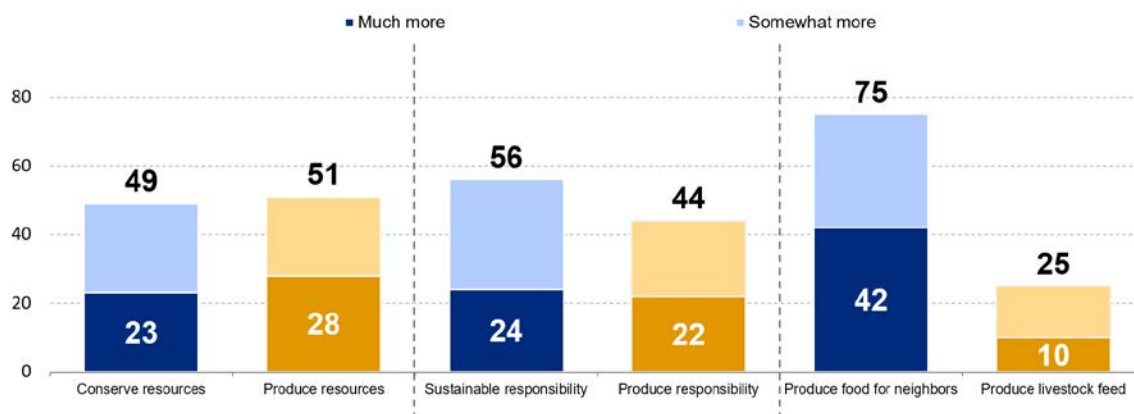
² Web poll conducted November 30 – December 4, 2015 among 800 national Gen Pop respondents. The sample is based on those who initially self-selected for participation in the panel rather than a probability sample, no estimates of sampling error can be calculated.

Food Policies and Priorities

For a large majority of voters (88 percent), producing food in a sustainable way is a high priority. It is particularly a high priority among more liberal voting blocs like Democrats, Hispanic voters, and Millennials, but also is high with conventionally more conservative groups like Republicans and non-college educated voters. Producing food sustainably is appealing to voters across the political spectrum.

Figure 3: Sustainability and Conservation Statement Pairs³

Next you will read some pairs of statements. For each pair, please indicate which statement is closer to your own view, even if it is not exactly right.



We tested the issues of producing food versus producing livestock feed ahead of the Food Not Feed Summit held in early February and found their general mission is extraordinarily popular among voters nationwide. Widespread support exists for encouraging producers to grow healthy, affordable food for their neighbors (75 percent) over encouraging producers to grow commodities like corn and soybeans for export (25 percent).

Voters also believe the agriculture industry has a responsibility to produce food in a sustainable way that ensures America will be able to produce healthy food for future generations (56 percent), compared to support for producing enough food and keeping costs down (44 percent). Even with inflation at an all-time high, voters continue to choose to prioritize sustainability over lowering costs. Still, we do see a difference compared to previous polls. And in 2018 (when inflation was not the dominating topic of concern), voters choose sustainability over producing 67 – 27 percent.

Voters are split on conserving versus producing more resources to save costs. Nearly half (49 percent) think the best way to ensure the availability of healthy food in the future is to develop agricultural and production practices that conserve resources. And the other half believes the agriculture industry needs to continue to produce more as the population grows. In 2018, conserving resources had the advantage (54 percent – 41 percent).

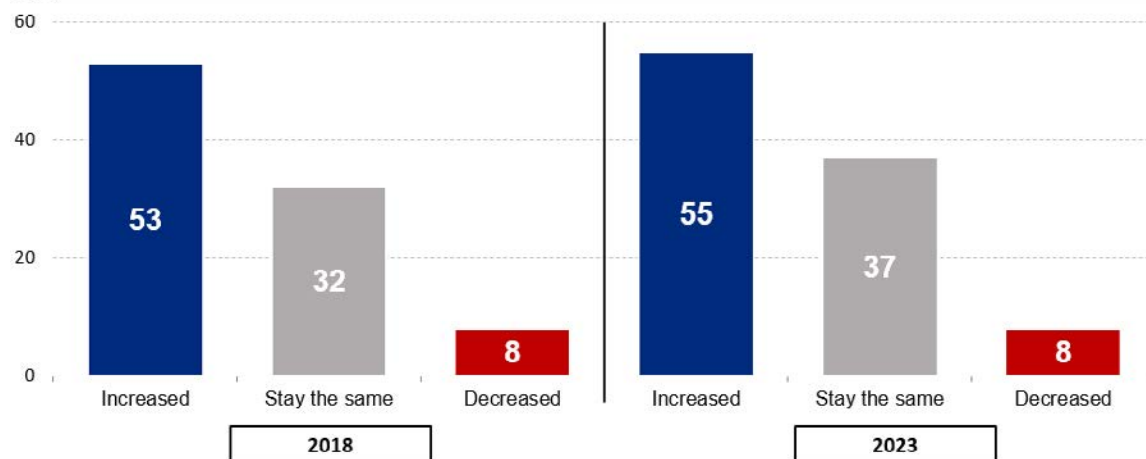
³ Check appendix for full messages.

Farm Bill

Voters are consistently not very familiar with the U.S. Farm Bill, and this year only 28 percent of voters are very or somewhat familiar. Despite this lack of familiarity, voters want more funding to the Farm Bill, which is consistent with previous years. In both 2018 and 2023, over half of voters think we should increase funding for the Farm Bill.

Figure 4: U.S. Farm Bill Funding Support

The U.S. Farm Bill is a set of policies covering a range of food and agriculture topics, including funding for crop insurance for farmers, conservation programs, support for new and beginning farmers, rural development initiatives, nutrition programs, and Food Stamps or SNAP. The U.S. Farm Bill needs to be reauthorized this year. From what you know, do you generally think funding for the Farm Bill should be (ROTATE KEEPING STAY THE SAME LAST) increased, decreased, or stay the same?



Voters express clear concerns about farming and farmers, which closely align with the concerns agriculture and food groups have. Over one-third of voters express concerns about the agricultural economy (39 percent), including the cost of maintaining farms, costs increasing for consumers, farms struggling to make a living, and corporate farms. An additional 18 percent say they have concerns about policy including not enough funding from the government or government policies being harmful to farmers. There are also concerns about climate change's impact.

Farm Bill proposals are largely popular, with voters strongly favoring almost all the proposals tested. Expanding crop insurance received the highest intensity of support, with 43 percent of voters finding it strongly favorable. Favorability was highest for proposals that directly impacted farmers, such as increasing opportunities for beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers, as well as incentivizing farmers to implement more sustainable agricultural practices.

Figure 5: U.S. Farm Bill Policy

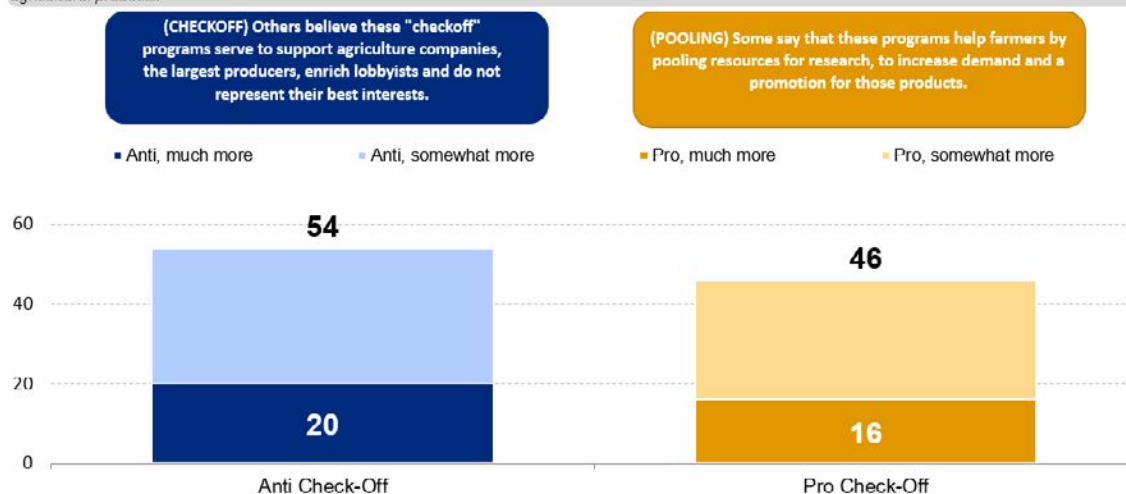
Total	Favor - Oppose
(SPLIT D) (EXPAND INSUR) Expand the list of crops eligible for crop insurance to include fruits, vegetables and nuts, as well as organic crops.	89-11
(SPLIT B) (SNAP WORK) Require people who receive SNAP or Food Stamp Benefits meet minimum work requirements in order to receive their benefits.	71-29
(SPLIT A) (NEW FARMS) Increase opportunities for beginning, socially disadvantaged, and veteran farmers and ranchers to participate in crop insurance and conservation programs.	84-16
(SPLIT B) (FOREIGN FARMS) Ban federal agriculture loans to foreign-owned farms on US land.	73-27
(SUSTAINABLE INCENTIVE) Support and incentivize farmers and ranchers to implement sustainable, resilient agricultural practices.	84-16
(SPLIT C) (INCREASE INSUR) Require farmers seeking crop insurance assistance to implement practices that protect our land, water and health such as improving water quality, reducing soil erosion and establishing vegetation buffers between farmland and waterways.	82-17
(CONTRIBUTION TO CLIMATE CHANGE) Address agriculture's contribution to climate change.	72-28
(CONTRIBUTION TO CLIMATE CHANGE) Address agriculture's contribution to climate change.	61-39
(PROTECT AGAINST CLIMATE CHANGE) Protect agricultural yields from climate change impacts.	80-20
(EQIP CAFO) Prohibit funding for all new and expanding Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations, which are industrial farms that produce and often release large amounts of animal waste into public waterways.	68-32
(PRIORITIZE HEALTHY FOOD) Prioritize healthy and sustainable food for Americans over feed for animals.	78-22
(SPLIT A) (FOREIGN ASSISTANCE) Increase funding for food assistance support to nations experiencing natural disasters.	70-30
(SOCIAL AND RACIAL EQUITY) Integrate a social and racial justice lens in food and farm policies to create equitable outcomes across the U.S. food system.	69-31

Total	Favor - Oppose
(SPLIT A) (SNAP CUTS) Reduce funding for the SNAP or Food Stamp program that provides food purchasing assistance for low-income families by billions of dollars over 10 years.	46-54
(PREEMPTION) Stop state and local communities from being able to pass health or safety regulations on farming or agricultural operations that conflict with other federal or state laws.	59-41
(INSUR LIMITS) Limit the total subsidies a farmer or agribusiness can receive from crop insurance programs to pay for insurance premiums to \$50,000 per year.	57-43
(CONSERVE FUNDING) Eliminate funding for conservation programs that help farmers and agricultural operations maintain environmental quality of their land and protect public health.	39-61

More voters believe checkoff fees serve agriculture companies, the largest producers, enrich lobbyists and do not represent a farmer’s best interests. This is true among all demographic groups, with the strongest support coming from women.

Figure 6: Checkoff Fees

Many farmers and ranchers must pay a "Checkoff" fee when selling livestock or crops. These fees administered by the federal government are used to promote those agricultural products.



Health and Sustainability

A vast majority of respondents prioritize policies and investments towards healthier food. Of priorities when buying food, quality and cost rank the highest (88 and 80 percent respectively) followed by nutrition (67 percent) then locally grown food (33 percent). Conscientiously sourced animal products (18 percent) and dietary restrictions (11 percent) were lower priorities.

88 percent support the production and consumption of healthier foods, while 83 percent think the farm bill should prioritize investments into the production of healthier foods.

Voters report they are also more likely to pay more for food that was grown locally or produced using preferred

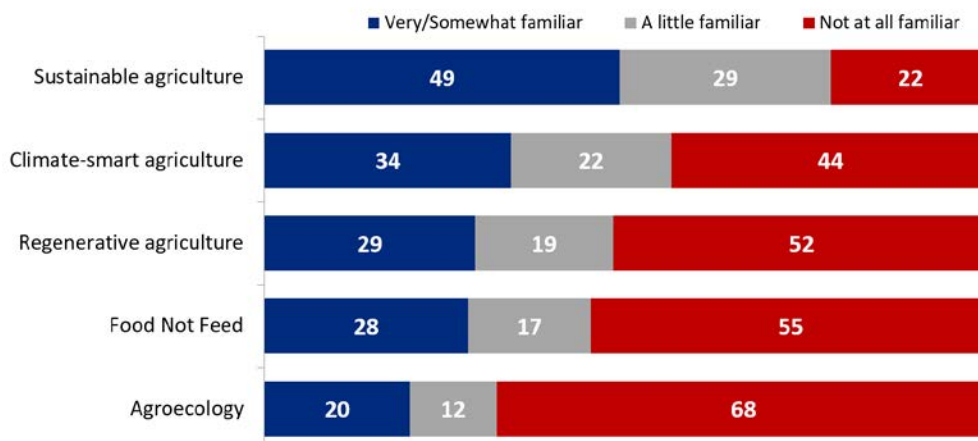
practices. Specifically, large majorities are willing to pay more for food if it was grown sustainably (68 percent), locally (77 percent), or if animals were treated more fairly (74 percent). Again, even with inflation as the top concern of 2022, voters value and are willing to pay more for food produced through these practices.

Agricultural Practices

Most voters are not familiar with specific agricultural practices, and those that are familiar do not have a deep understanding of the specific details. Understanding is quite weak across the board as is shown through the open ends, particularly for Food not Feed. You can find the coded open ends with the accompanying PowerPoint.

Figure 7: Familiarity with Agricultural Terms

Below is a list of terms, please indicate how familiar you are with each term: very familiar, somewhat familiar, a little familiar, or not at all familiar.



Once hearing more information about each practice, voters offer widespread support, with all the terms receiving 75 percent support or higher.

Conclusion

National voters prioritize healthy and sustainable farming methods and want more funding to be put towards these practices to ensure that farming can be sustained into the future. They decisively support for aligning agricultural policy with producing healthy food.

Appendix: Statement Pairs

(CONSERVE RESOURCES) The best way to ensure the availability of healthy food in the future is to develop agricultural and production practices that conserve resources.

OR

(PRODUCE RESOURCES) The best way to ensure the availability of healthy food in the future is to give the agriculture industry what it needs to continue to produce more as the population grows.

(PRODUCE FOOD FOR THEIR NEIGHBORS) When providing taxpayer assistance for farmers and ranchers, the federal government should encourage those producers to grow healthy, affordable food for their neighbors.

OR

(PRODUCE LIVESTOCK FEED) When providing taxpayer assistance for farmers and ranchers, the federal government should encourage those producers to grow commodities like corn and soybeans for export.

(PRODUCE FOOD FOR THEIR NEIGHBORS) When providing taxpayer assistance for farmers and ranchers, the federal government should encourage those producers to grow healthy, affordable food for their neighbors.

OR

(PRODUCE LIVESTOCK FEED) When providing taxpayer assistance for farmers and ranchers, the federal government should encourage those producers to grow commodities like corn and soybeans for export.

Appendix: Food Policy Messages

(EQIP CAFO) Prohibit funding for all new and expanding Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations, which are industrial farms that produce and often release large amounts of animal waste into public waterways.

(SPLIT A) (NEW FARMS) Increase opportunities for beginning, socially disadvantaged, and veteran farmers and ranchers to participate in crop insurance and conservation programs.

(SPLIT B) (FOREIGN FARMS) Ban federal agriculture loans to foreign-owned farms on US land.

(INSUR LIMITS) Limit the total subsidies a farmer or agribusiness can receive from crop insurance programs to pay for insurance premiums to \$50,000 per year.

(SPLIT C) (INCREASE INSUR) Require farmers seeking crop insurance assistance to implement practices that protect our land, water and health such as improving water quality, reducing soil erosion and establishing vegetation buffers between farmland and waterways.

(SPLIT D) (EXPAND INSUR) Expand the list of crops eligible for crop insurance to include fruits, vegetables and nuts, as well as organic crops.

(CONSERVE FUNDING) Eliminate funding for conservation programs that help farmers and agricultural operations maintain environmental quality of their land and protect public health.

(PREEMPTION) Stop state and local communities from being able to pass health or safety regulations on farming or agricultural operations that conflict with other federal or state laws.

Appendix: Food Policy Messages Cont.

(SPLIT A) (SNAP CUTS) Reduce funding for the SNAP or Food Stamp program that provides food purchasing assistance for low-income families by billions of dollars over 10 years.

(SPLIT B) (SNAP CAP) Place a cap on SNAP or Food Stamp benefits for households of 6 people or more.

(SPLIT A) (FOREIGN ASSISTANCE) Increase funding for food assistance support to nations experiencing natural disasters.

(SPLIT B) (SNAP WORK) Require people who receive SNAP or Food Stamp Benefits meet minimum work requirements in order to receive their benefits.

(CONTRIBUTION TO CLIMATE CHANGE) Address agriculture's contribution to climate change.

(SUSTAINABLE INCENTIVE) Support and incentivize farmers and ranchers to implement sustainable, resilient agricultural practices.

(SOCIAL AND RACIAL EQUITY) Integrate a social and racial justice lens in food and farm policies to create equitable outcomes across the U.S. food system.

(PRIORITIZE HEALTHY FOOD) Prioritize healthy and sustainable food for Americans over feed for animals.

(PROTECT AGAINST CLIMATE CHANGE) Protect agricultural yields from climate change impacts.