

April 27, 2023

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

Survey results among 1000 nationally registered voters

To: Interested Parties

From: GQR

In March 2023, the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future (CLF) fielded a follow-up poll to their January 2023 survey. Many of the questions were the same – looking at voters’ opinions on the U.S. Farm Bill, sustainable farming practices, specific farming policies, and general familiarity with farming practices. In some cases, data was compared to earlier studies as early as 2015.

Much like we saw early in the year, findings show that while voters’ familiarity with the Farm Bill is low, more than 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. This includes policies that:

- Prioritize healthy and sustainable food for Americans over feed for animals.
- Prohibit the USDA from labeling foreign imported meat products as “Product of USA” and restore mandatory country-of-origin labeling requirements for beef and pork and expand to dairy products.
- Create market transparency and protect farmers and ranchers from predatory purchasing practices.
- Support for additional protections for meatpacking workers.
- Hold corporate integrators responsible for pollution and other harm caused by CAFOs and place an immediate moratorium on new and expanding large CAFOs and phase out by 2040 the largest CAFOs.

Additional protections for farmers and workers, sustainable agricultural practices, and investing in healthy food over large-scale animal feed production are popular among voters.

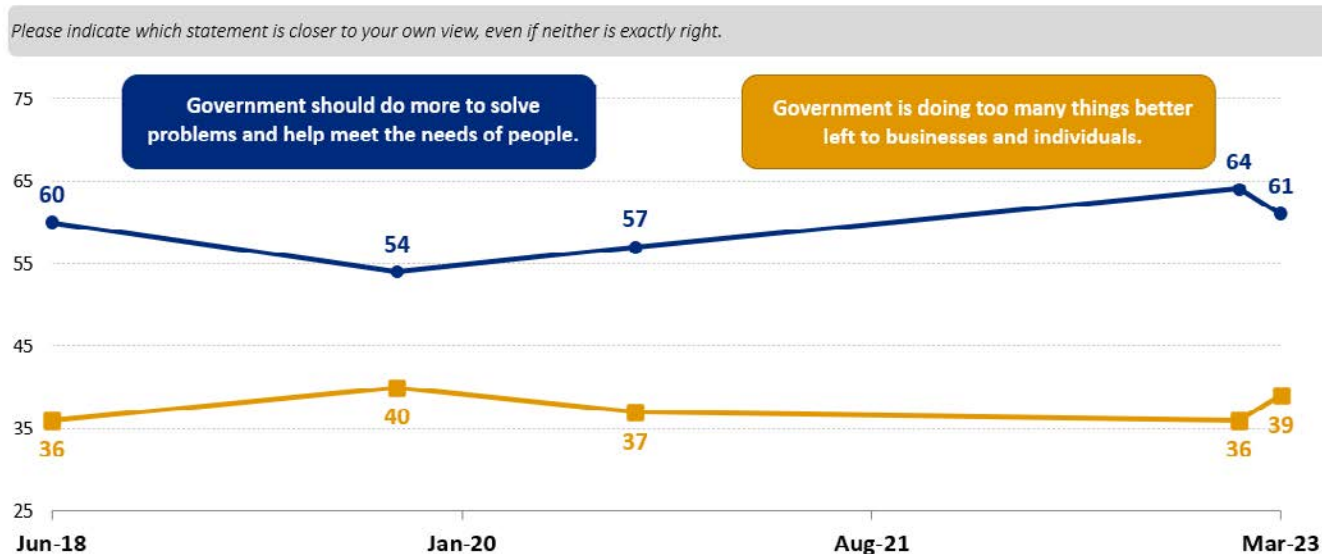
This memo is based on an online survey of 1,000 nationally registered voters conducted from March 8-14, 2023. The data has been weighted to reflect the demographic composition of the registered voter population for the nation. Because the sample is based on those who initially self-selected for participation in the panel rather than a probability sample, no estimates of sampling error can be calculated.

Government Role and Support

We started this survey by gauging general responsibility for inflation and rising costs, and voters are consistent with opinions from January. They point to government spending (from 52 percent in January to 51 percent March) and disruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic (from 50 percent to 54 percent) as most responsible, followed by corporations raising prices (from 47 percent to 46 percent). Farmers raising their prices are again clear of blame.

Sentiments surrounding the government’s role remain consistent with previous research dating back to 2018. Most think government should be doing more to meet the needs of the people: 61 percent of voters think the government should be doing more while 39 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.

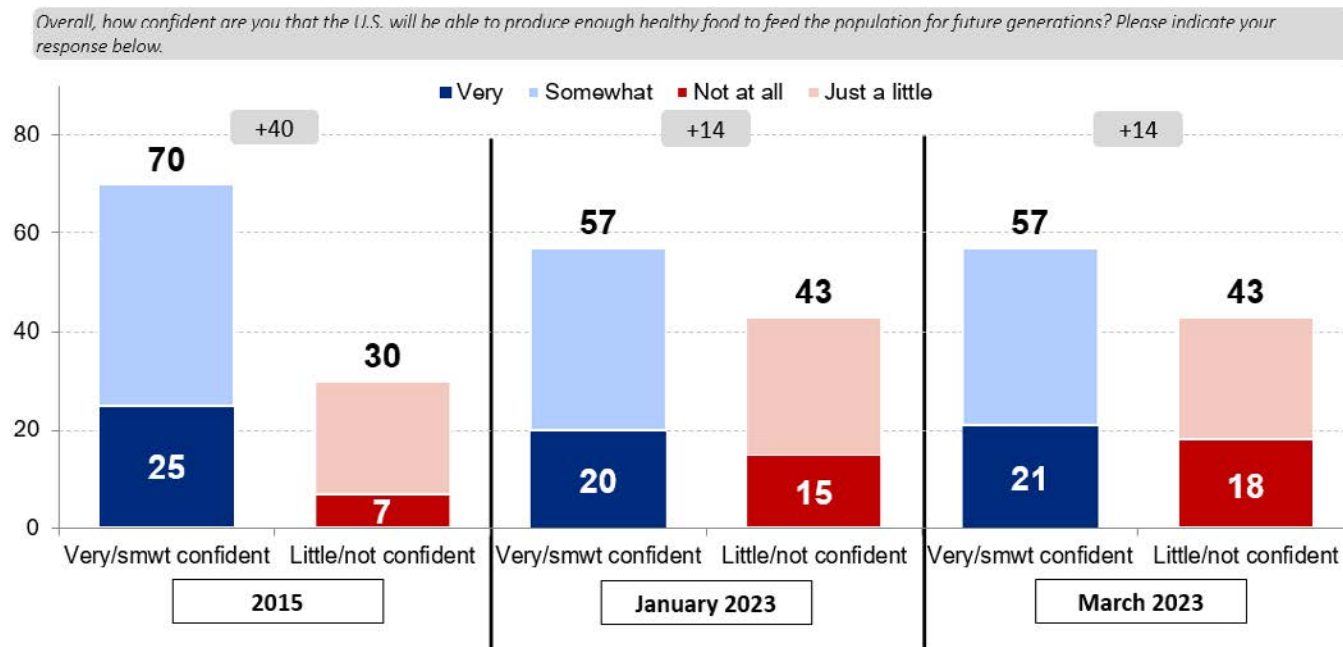
Over half (55 percent) rate the government's role in keeping food safe in the U.S. as excellent or good, and 52 percent rate their role in producing nutritious food as excellent or good. Conversely, nearly half of voters (43 percent) think the government is doing a poor job ensuring the prices of important foods do not drastically change from month to month and 27 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.

Voters' confidence in the government to produce food (both food in general and healthy food) is sufficiently high at 57 percent and 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 9 points (48 percent). Like the survey in January, the largest shifts occur among seniors 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.

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.

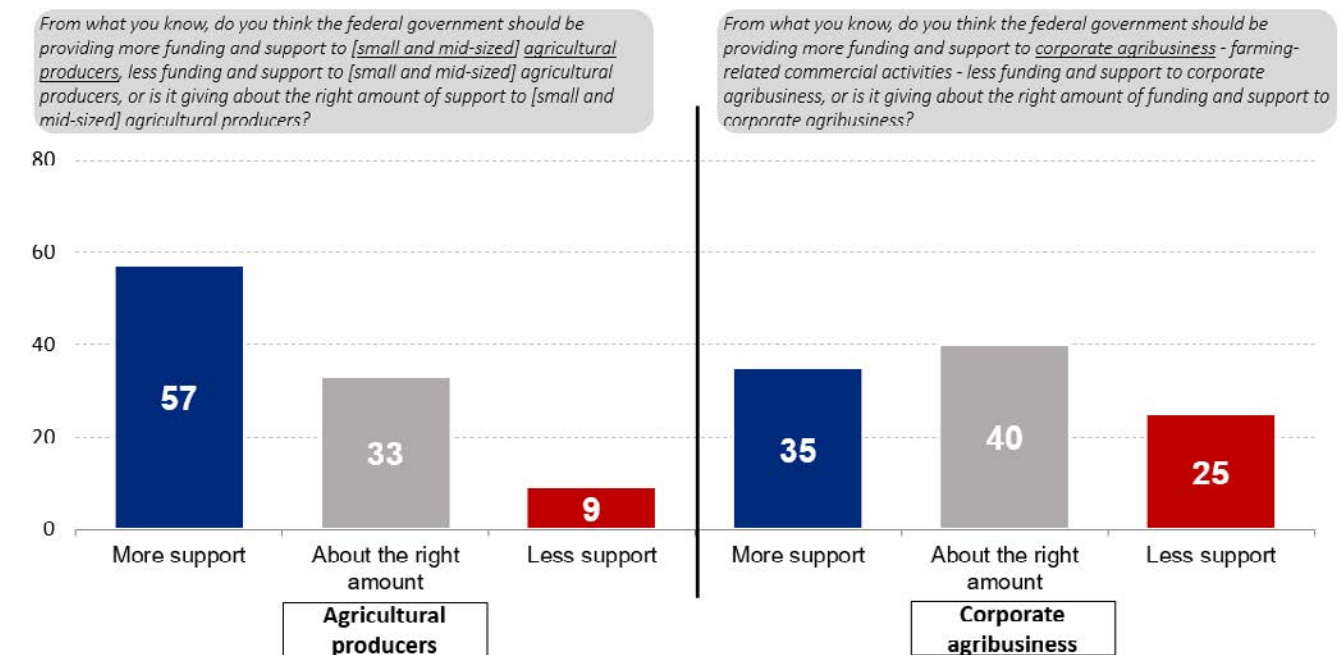
2 Web poll conducted November 30 – December 4, 2015 among 800 national Gen Pop respondents. As the sample is based on those who initially self-selected for participation in the panel rather than a probability sample, no estimates of sampling error can be calculated.

Figure 2: Voters' 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.

Figure 3: Voters want to support agricultural producers over corporate agribusiness



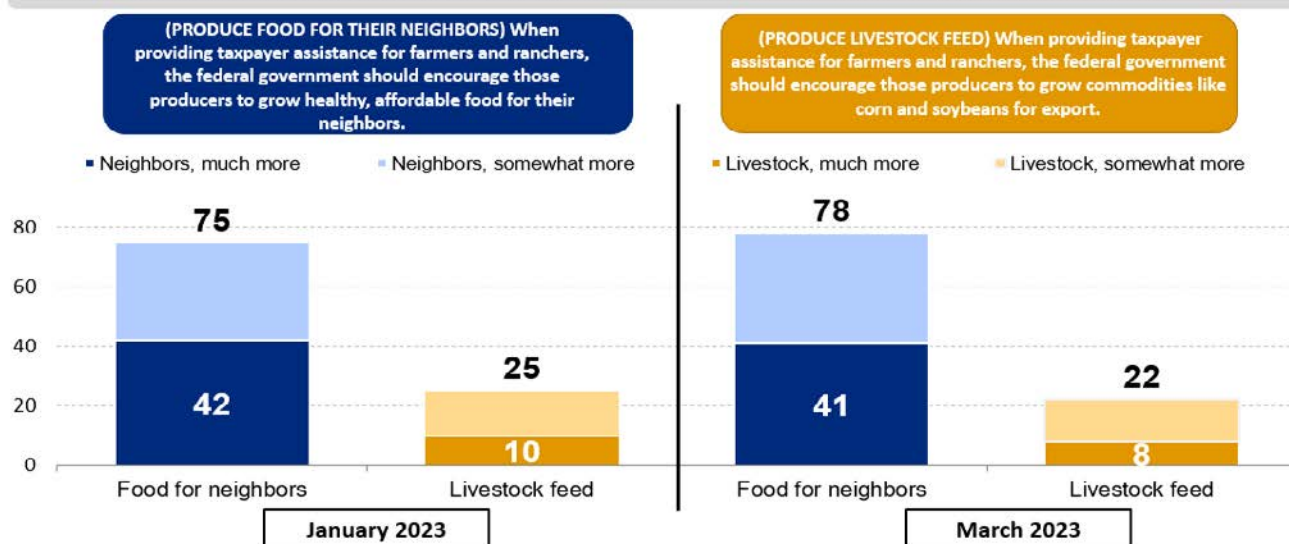
Food Policies and Priorities

For a large majority of voters (88 percent), producing food in a sustainable way is a high priority – identical to January 2023 results. Producing food sustainably is appealing to voters across the political spectrum.

In January, 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). Results held steady in March: 78 percent support producing food for their neighbors versus 22 percent support growing commodities for export.

Figure 4: Food not Feed 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.

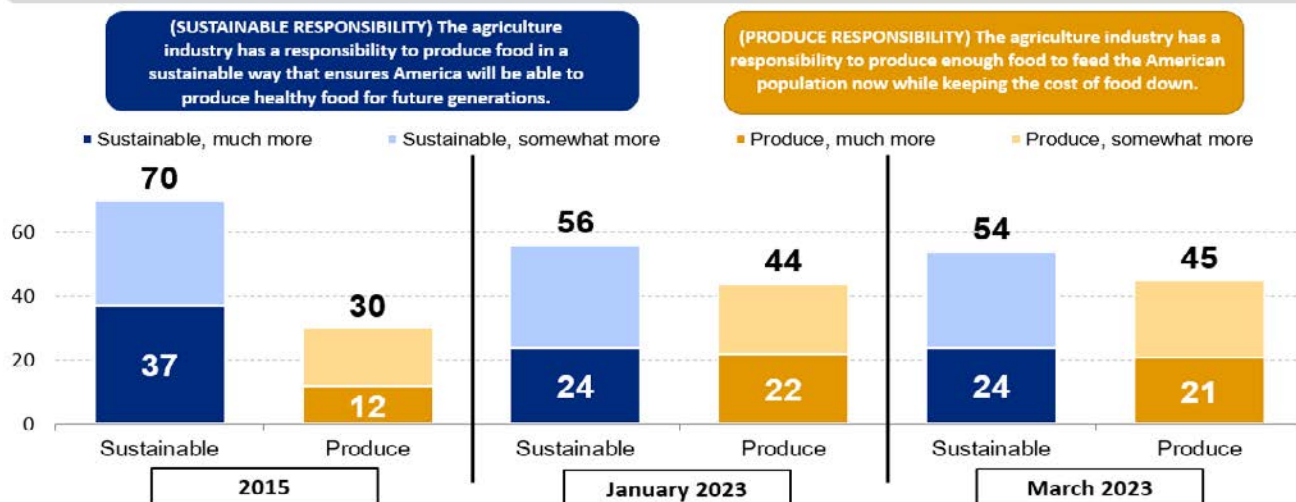


Voters also believe the agriculture industry has a responsibility to produce food in a sustainable way that ensures America will be able to produce healthy food for future generations (54 percent), compared to support for producing enough food and keeping costs down (45 percent). March results are consistent with January results. Even with inflation at an all-time high, voters continue to choose to prioritize sustainability over lowering costs. Still, in 2015 (when inflation was not the dominating topic of concern), voters choose sustainability over producing 70 – 30 percent.

³ Check appendix for full messages.

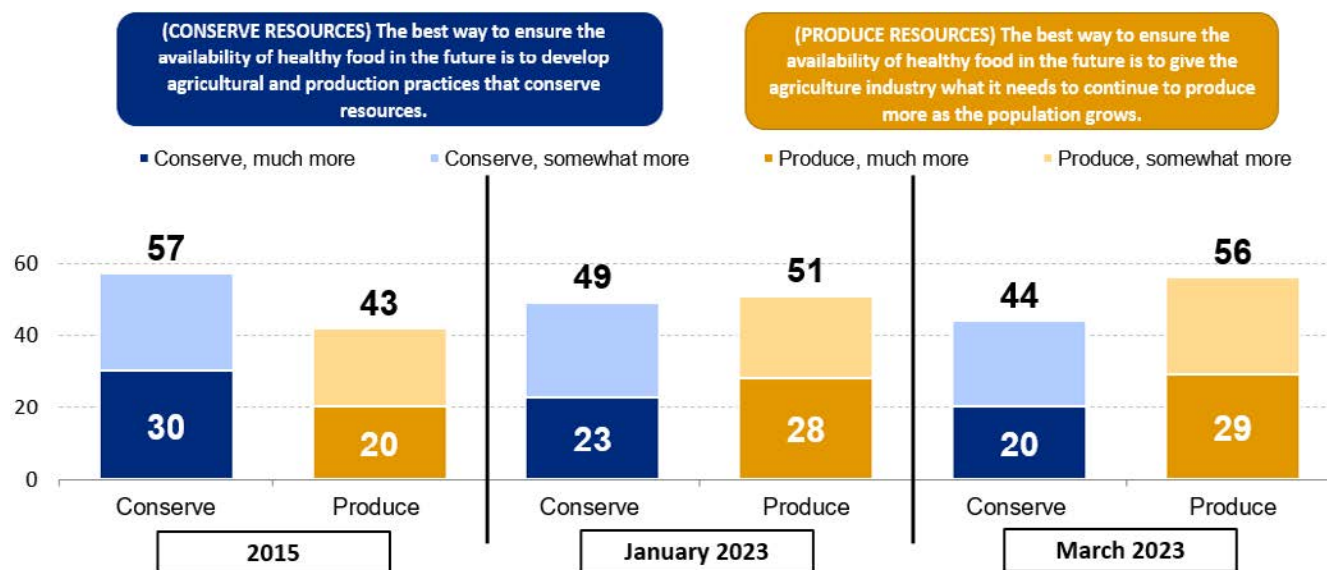
Figure 5: Sustainable vs. produce statement pairs⁴

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.



Voters are more split on conserving versus producing more resources to save costs. Forty four 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 while 56 percent believe the agriculture industry needs to continue to produce more as the population grows. In 2015, conserving resources had the advantage (57 percent – 43 percent).

Figure 6: Conserve vs. produce statement pairs⁵



4 Check appendix for full messages.

5 Check appendix for full messages.

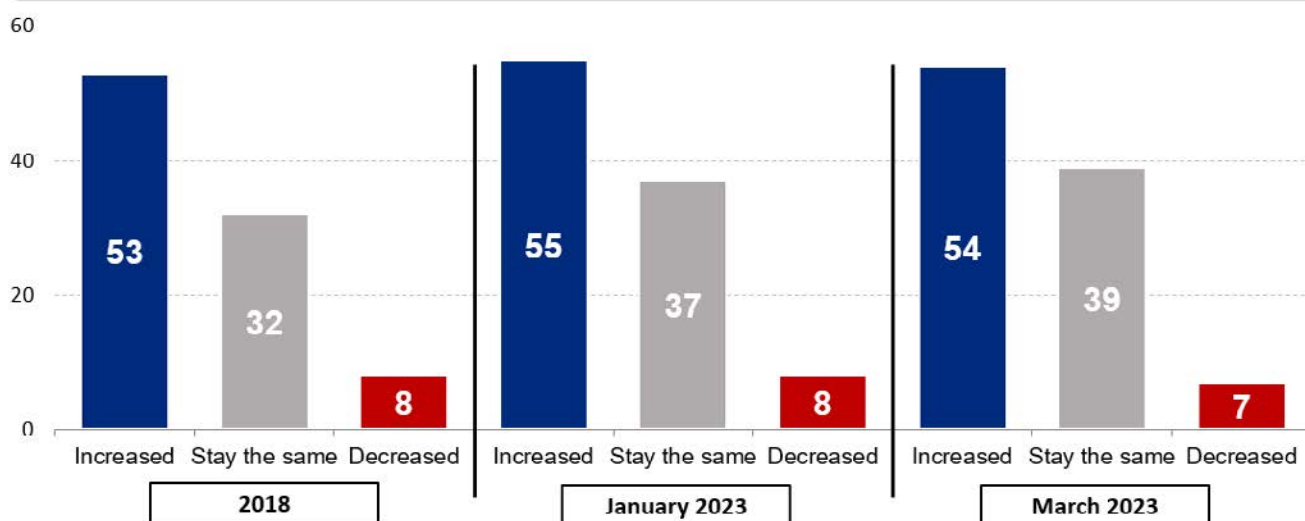
Farm Bill

Voters are consistently not very familiar with the U.S. Farm Bill, and this year only 27 percent of voters are very or somewhat familiar. Even with an increase in news and chatter around the upcoming bill, only 20 percent of voters say they have heard or read anything about the US Farm Bill recently.

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 7: 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 SNAP, formerly called Food Stamps. The U.S. Farm Bill expires this year. From what you know, do you generally think funding for the Farm Bill should be 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. Like we saw in the January poll, over one-third of voters express concerns about the agricultural economy (35 percent), including the cost of maintaining farms, costs increasing for consumers, farms struggling to make a living, and corporate farms. An additional 19 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. Correcting mislabeling, specifically prohibiting the USDA from labeling foreign imported meat products as "Product of USA" (62 percent strongly favor) and restoring mandatory country-of-origin labeling requirements for beef and pork and expanding to dairy products (54 percent strongly favor) were the strongest testing policy proposals.

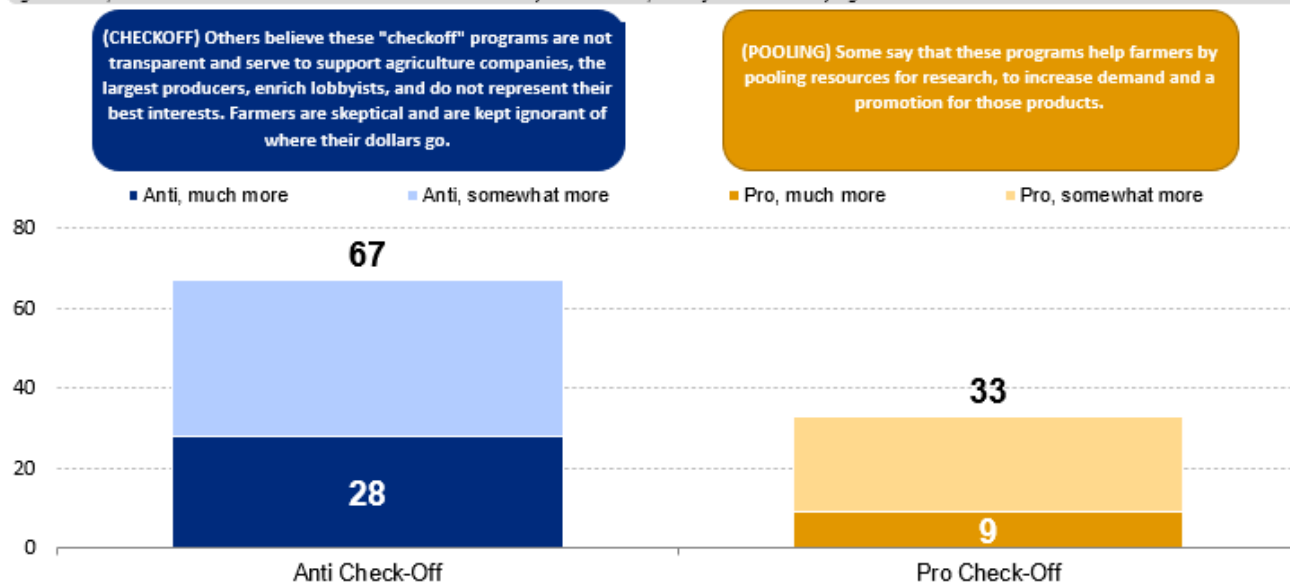
Figure 8: U.S. Farm Bill proposals

Total	Favor - Oppose
(PRODUCT OF USA) Prohibit the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) from labeling foreign imported meat products as "Product of USA."	85 – 15
(COUNTRY OF ORIGIN LABEL) Restore mandatory country-of-origin labeling requirements for beef and pork and expand to dairy products.	89 – 11
(MARKET TRANSPARENCY) Create market transparency and protect farmers and ranchers from predatory purchasing practices.	90 – 9
(HOLD CORP RESPONSIBLE) Hold corporate integrators responsible for pollution and other harm caused by CAFOs.	82 – 18
(PROTECT FARMERS) Protect livestock and poultry farmers from retaliation.	89 – 11
(SUPPORT FOR MEATPACKING WORKERS) Support for additional protections for meatpacking workers.	88 – 12
(UNFAIR SYSTEMS) Prohibit the use of unfair tournament or ranking systems for paying contract growers.	82 – 18
(PRIORITIZE HEALTHY FOOD) Prioritize healthy and sustainable food for Americans over feed for animals.	79 – 21
(CAFO MORATORIUM) Place an immediate moratorium on new and expanding large CAFOs, and phase out by 2040 the largest CAFOs as defined by the Environmental Protection Agency.	72 – 28
(VOLUNTARY BUYOUT) Provide a voluntary buyout for farmers who want to transition out of operating a CAFO.	73 – 27

More voters believe checkoff fees serve agriculture companies, the largest producers, enrich lobbyists and do not represent a farmer's best interests. The March 2023 survey specifically mentioned that farmers are skeptical of these programs and anti-check program sentiments rose from 54 percent to 67 percent.

Figure 9: 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. Please indicate which statement is closer to your own view, even if it is not exactly right.



Healthy Food and Sustainability

Ninety one percent of voters believe agricultural policies should be aligned to support the production and consumption of healthier foods, and 85 percent believe the U.S. Farm Bill should prioritize investments in the production of healthy foods like fruits and vegetables to help bring down healthcare costs for all Americans including the federal government.

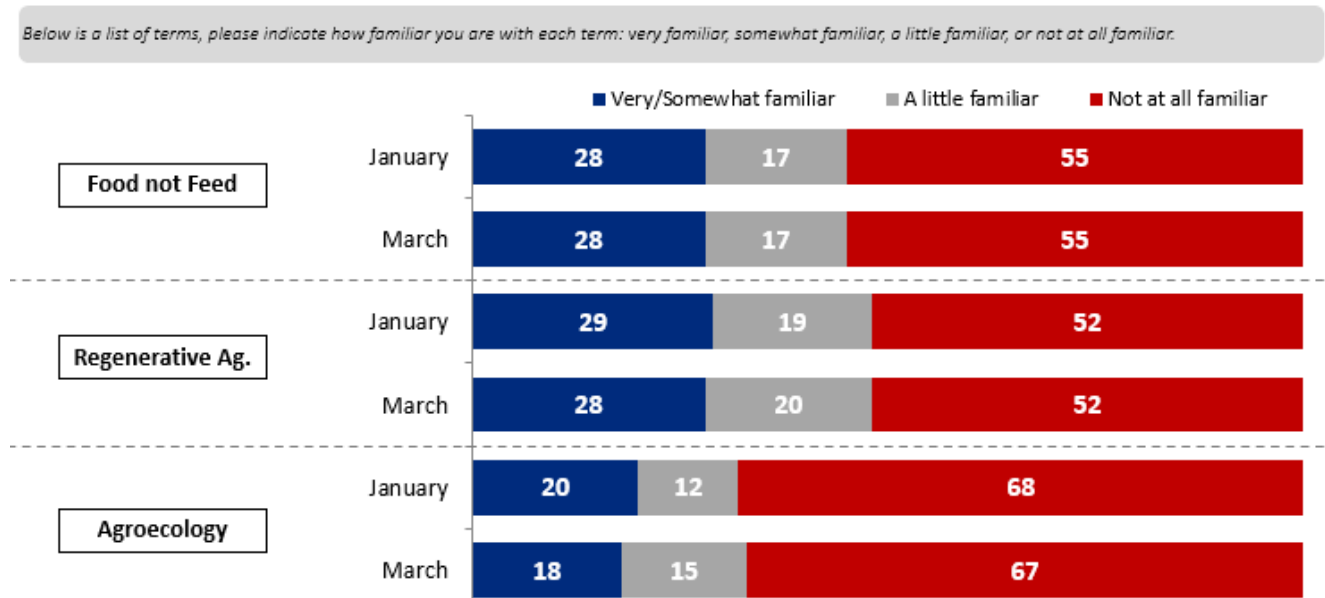
Priorities when buying food mirrored January 2023 results. Quality and cost rank the highest (87 and 77 percent respectively) followed by nutrition (67 percent) then locally grown food (36 percent). Conscientiously sourced animal products (19 percent) and dietary restrictions (13 percent) were lower priorities.

Voters continue to 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 (70 percent), locally (78 percent), or if animals were not raised in overcrowded conditions and instead on smaller, family-owned farms (75 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

Voters continue to be unfamiliar with specific agricultural practices. 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 10: Familiarity with agricultural terms



Once hearing more information about each practice, voters offer widespread support, with all the terms receiving 80 percent support or higher.

Conclusion

From January to March, national voters consistently choose to 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.

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

(PRODUCT OF USA) *Prohibit the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) from labeling foreign imported meat products as "Product of USA."*

(COUNTRY OF ORIGIN LABEL) *Restore mandatory country-of-origin labeling requirements for beef and pork and expand to dairy products.*

(MARKET TRANSPARENCY) *Create market transparency and protect farmers and ranchers from predatory purchasing practices.*

(HOLD CORP RESPONSIBLE) *Hold corporate integrators responsible for pollution and other harm caused by CAFOs.*

(PROTECT FARMERS) *Protect livestock and poultry farmers from retaliation.*

(SUPPORT FOR MEATPACKING WORKERS) *Support for additional protections for meatpacking workers.*

(UNFAIR SYSTEMS) *Prohibit the use of unfair tournament or ranking systems for paying contract growers.*

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

(CAFO MORATORIUM) *Place an immediate moratorium on new and expanding large CAFOs, and phase out by 2040 the largest CAFOs as defined by the Environmental Protection Agency.*

(VOLUNTARY BUYOUT) *Provide a voluntary buyout for farmers who want to transition out of operating a CAFO.*