

Federal policies for a healthy, just and ecologically regenerative food system

August 2019

For decades, United States food and farming policy, corporate power and agricultural science have been directed toward a narrow goal: producing as many calories as possible as cheaply as possible. The confluence of these forces has created a powerful river of toxic, energy-intensive, environmentally-destructive, inequitable industrial agriculture and factory farming. This system is eroding public health, worker safety, local economies, racial justice, animal welfare, a stable climate, biodiversity and the resilience of the ecosystems we depend on. To date, we have invested only small streams of funding and policy support in sustainable alternatives. For example, less than two percent of [U.S. public agricultural research funding](#) goes to organic and diversified farming. It is time to redirect the river as a whole.

The next president of the United States should support a **massive expansion of diversified, organic and ecologically regenerative farming systems**. These are based on practices that draw carbon out of the atmosphere and produce abundant, nutritious food using less energy and water. They create greater resilience to climate change and are healthier for people and the planet. We must also direct resources to create fair local and regional food systems that ensure good jobs and healthy food for all. This shift is essential and achievable. In particular, the next president should take actions to:

- Create a climate-friendly food system that is resilient and ecologically regenerative
- Create a healthy, sustainable, toxic-free food system by making organic for all
- Create an equitable food system from farm to table

1. Create a climate-friendly food system that is resilient and ecologically regenerative

We cannot avert climate chaos unless we support a rapid transition from large-scale, chemical-intensive food production toward diversified, organic and ecologically regenerative food systems. In order to meet our climate change goals, we must also drastically reduce the consumption of animal products and reduce food waste. These actions will reduce greenhouse gas emissions and help conserve water, soil and biodiversity, and will make farmland more resilient to floods, droughts and other climate events.

Friends of the Earth Action supports policies that:

- Replenish soils and sequester carbon, including strengthening conservation compliance so that all recipients of agricultural subsidies must implement key soil health management practices.
- Expand funding and support for the Conservation Stewardship Program and other conservation programs, research and technical assistance.
- Monitor and restrict emissions, air pollution and water pollution from concentrated animal feeding operations, or CAFOs.
- Help farmers reduce use of pesticides and chemical fertilizers.
- Ban subsidies for crop production on land that was recently converted from native habitats (e.g., prairie) to cropland.
- Enact nutrition and public food procurement policies that promote consumption of more plant-based foods and less meat and dairy, and that establish preferences for local, diversified organic producers.
- Support efforts to reduce the billions of tons of food wasted each year.

2. Create a healthy, sustainable, toxic-free food system by making organic for all

Pesticides are designed to be poisons. The properties that make them toxic to pests can also make them toxic to beneficial insects and other forms of life, including people. Health problems linked to pesticide exposure are on the rise, from cancers and learning disabilities to asthma and Parkinson's. Farmers, farmworkers and rural communities suffer greater exposure to pesticides and increased rates of chronic and life-threatening diseases. Researchers also warn that we are in the midst of a second silent spring — an “insect apocalypse” largely driven by industrial agriculture and pesticides, with insect numbers plummeting and 40 percent of insect species on the path to extinction. This is a dire problem because insects make up the basis of the food webs that sustain all life on Earth. Research shows that organic farming systems [help pollinators](#) and other beneficial insects flourish, [promote biodiversity](#) and protect the health of consumers, farmers and farmworkers by eliminating [the use of toxic pesticides](#).

Friends of the Earth Action supports actions to:

- Ban the use of pesticides that are toxic to people and pollinators with highest priority on neonicotinoids, glyphosate, dicamba and organophosphates.
- Massively expand funding and support for the National Organic Program, Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative, the Organic Certification Cost Share programs and organic transition programs.
- Use public food procurement contracts to purchase organic food and beverages.
- Increase enforcement and strengthen organic standards, especially as they apply to animal agriculture operations, including stronger animal welfare measures as proposed by the Obama administration.
- Enact a moratorium on new CAFOs and initiate a just transition away from industrial animal agriculture.
- Ban the routine use of antibiotics and growth hormones in animal agriculture.

3. Create an equitable food system from farm to table

While the food sector is one of our nation's largest employers, the current system is producing widespread poverty, inequality, hunger and public health crises, and an economic crisis in which rural farming communities are losing thousands of family farms each year. African American, Native American, Asian American, Pacific Islander, Latinx and other historically disadvantaged farmers have been displaced from their land or forced out of farming after a century of discrimination at the hands of USDA. Those farmers who remain are in particular need of public support. We must redirect policies to create millions of jobs and ensure a just transition to a sustainable future. America's farmers, ranchers, fishers and workers who feed the nation must be at the center of this policy agenda.

Friends of the Earth Action supports actions to:

- Ensure fair prices for farmers, ranchers, farmworkers and fishers through policies ensuring parity pricing (fair minimum prices for farmers and fishers), supply management and equitable access to land, credit and markets.
- Ensure fair, family-sustaining living wages and safe, dignified working conditions for farmworkers, fishers and other food industry workers.
- Equalize labor laws to provide farmworkers with full legal rights and ensure that all food system workers have a voice in food production, access to healthy food and the freedom to organize and unionize without retaliation.

- Redirect subsidies for wealthy agribusiness and commodities used mostly for fuel and livestock feed to support small and medium-sized farmers practicing organic and conservation methods.
- Limit corporate political contributions from Big Ag companies.
- Impose a moratorium on all future mergers in the food and agriculture sector, break up existing Big Ag companies in the food and agriculture sector, create data privacy protections for farmers to maintain ownership of their farm data and reverse the rapid loss of farmers and deterioration of farmland via enforcement and expansion of antitrust regulations.
- Invest in urban and rural food and agriculture programs and businesses that promote local and regional food security and community food sovereignty to ensure healthy food for all. When communities produce more of their own food, farming systems are more diversified and resilient in the face of economic and climate change.
- Expand local and regional food infrastructure — such as processing and distribution for local and regional markets — to promote the shift from monocrop commodities and industrial livestock operations to diversified and ecologically regenerative farming oriented to local and regional markets.
- Ensure that policies address economic and racial inequities endured by African American, Native American, Asian American, Pacific Islander, Latinx and other historically disadvantaged farmers.