



Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515-3222

May 24, 2023

The Honorable Glenn Thompson
Chairman
House Committee on Agriculture
1301 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable David Scott
Ranking Member
House Committee on Agriculture
1010 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Thompson and Ranking Member Scott,

The upcoming 2023 Farm Bill reauthorization is an invaluable opportunity to ensure federal policy prioritizes the needs of our farmers, foresters, agricultural producers, and rural communities. This reauthorization is even more important for New York farmers, who have been suffering under a new raft of state laws that are imposing costly burdens on rural communities, from restrictive overtime rules, onerous environmental regulations, and increasingly uncompetitive taxes. As the representative for the top agricultural and dairy district in the Northeast and the largest apple growing district outside of Washington state, I am continuing to advocate for solutions to support agricultural producers. In turn, I ask you to ensure that this year's Farm Bill includes policies that deliver for agricultural producers in New York's 24th Congressional District and addresses the many challenges they continue to face.

In April 2023, I held a Farm Bill Listening Tour, which included multiple roundtable events throughout New York's 24th Congressional District. In total, I heard directly from more than 100 farmers who produce dairy, beef, poultry, feed corn, alfalfa, onions, grapes, wine, maple syrup, apples, stone fruit, and more. The following were among their top asks for the 2023 Farm Bill, which I pass along for consideration as you work on drafting this critical legislation:

- Do not make any cuts to Farm Bill Programs. Ultimately, they are a small share of the federal budget but provide outsized support to our nation's rural communities and farmers. These programs are pivotal to the vitality of our agricultural economy.
- Federal Crop Insurance must be reformed to cover a wider range of items and better fit the needs of specialty crop growers.
- Congress should support funding for the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program, educational support for farmers, and the research and monitoring of invasive species. The funding provided through such programs is vital to many farmers in my region.
- Congress should seriously consider raising the Dairy Margin Coverage Tier 1 coverage level's 5-million-pound limit to better reflect the consolidation that has occurred in the dairy industry over the past five years. This request was echoed by nearly every dairy farmer I met with over the course of my Farm Bill Listening Tour.

- Ensure greater transparency with the profit margins of dairy processors to better inform dairy policy and allow negotiations between dairy producers and processors to occur on a more even playing field.
- There need to be greater flexibility in U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) cover crop rules, so New York farms are allowed to plant them later in the season.
- Continue to prioritize the cultivation and opening of foreign markets for U.S. agricultural goods and ensure fairer access to these foreign markets. As one example, India's tariff on American apples continues to have a devastating effect on producers in my district.
- Improve support for our nation's maple syrup industry, including by reforming the Acer Access and Development grant program to better incorporate input from farmers, classify maple syrup as a specialty crop, and boost the domestic market for maple syrup.
- Mandate the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) to expand its collection of grape production data from the top two states to the top five states nationwide so grape producers in New York have a better understanding of market trends.
- Include Wyoming County, New York as part of the Northern Border Regional Commission so these rural communities, which are under an hour from the Canadian border, can compete for these important federal grants and resources.
- Raise the minimum fixed broadband speed for USDA ReConnect and Rural Utilities Services programs to better meet the speed requirements for new medical, agricultural, educational, and business technologies.
- Address the loss of prime agricultural land to solar farms. The installation of these panels on arable farmland, oftentimes subsidized by federal taxpayers, should be limited to rooftops, parking lots, or otherwise unusable land. Our farmers are facing enough headwinds, they should not have to compete with a subsidized industry like solar to expand their operations, grow their crops, and feed our nation.

In addition, the farmers and agricultural stakeholders also had additional input for changes to federal policy that fall outside the scope of the Farm Bill. Nevertheless, their feedback on these vital issues is important to share for your awareness and consideration. This includes:

- The H-2A visa process for temporary farm workers must be reformed. The current process is far too bureaucratic, costly, and difficult to navigate for farmers. Further, it does not address the needs of the dairy industry. The Adverse Effect Wage Rate system also unfairly hurts farms in higher cost states like New York. We must enforce our immigration laws, secure the border, and put America First. As we do, we must also recognize the labor challenges our farmers are facing today and advocate for reforms to the H-2A program so it enables these small businesses to continue their operations.
- Address the truck driver shortage and supply chain issues impacting our farmers. Too many of our farmers are having to dump products because they cannot get them to market or are forced to wait weeks for essential equipment, parts, and materials.
- Push back against states that are setting unreasonable farm labor overtime thresholds. These rules are not compatible with the realities of farming and in the long run, they run the very real risk of undermining the competitiveness of American agriculture.
- Return us to the previous Trump administration Waters of the United States (WOTUS) navigable waterways definition. The current Biden administration rule is far too expansive and vague, allowing the federal government to regulate everything from

seasonal ponds to irrigation ditches. It also fails to definitively define these bodies, requiring landowners to wait for months to receive clarification.

- Provide relief for high energy costs. Around the country our farmers are struggling with high energy costs, which are making it unaffordable for them to run their business and afford necessary inputs such as fertilizer. It is important we boost domestic energy production while also re-shoring essential supply chains.

I thank you in advance for your consideration of these requests, and for your continued advocacy on behalf of America's farmers and agricultural stakeholders. As the House drafts and considers the 2023 Farm Bill, it is essential we continue gathering feedback from our farmers and rural communities to ensure the bill reflects their current realities as much as possible.

If you have any additional questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to me at my Washington, D.C. office at (202) 225-3665.

Sincerely,


CLAUDIA TENNEY
Member of Congress