FARM POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HEALTHY PEOPLE, HEALTHY FOOD, AND HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

As nurses, physicians, public health experts and health professionals, we understand that upcoming farm legislation presents an important opportunity to protect the health of our patients and communities. Our agricultural system has direct and indirect impacts on human health, from influencing diets, to altering the natural environment. While the U.S. provides food sources for the world, many at home are suffering from illnesses like diabetes, obesity, and heart disease, which are directly related to poor nutrition and food insecurity. Agricultural production contaminates water sources, and creates asthma-inducing air pollution, while farmworkers and rural communities experience health impacts associated with economic insecurity. Every day we see the profound health-harms associated with the many impacts of climate-related disasters including heat, drought, and flooding. To best promote the health of the communities we serve, we recommend the following policy priorities:

1. Support healthy foods, healthy people, and healthy communities:

Our current food and agriculture system subsidizes unhealthy, calorie-dense processed foods, while underinvesting in healthy produce. Robust funding for nutrition programs can potentially address obesity, food insecurity, and emissions. We recommend the following:

- Improve and expand access to SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) for those in need, including seniors, people with disabilities, college students, and individuals with felony convictions.

- Protect the Thrifty Food Plan and update SNAP to incorporate the Low-Cost Food Plan.

- Improve access to healthy foods through nutrition incentives and produce prescription programs

- Improve local food systems by enhancing the Local Agriculture Market Program (LAMP) to make SNAP more accessible at farmers markets. Support small producers through infrastructure investments and value-chain coordination.

- Reform the date-labeling system, and increase federal support for food recovery infrastructure, local composting, and food waste prevention in schools. Incentivize donations of edible excess food.
2. Support healthy farms and a healthy planet

Conservation is a human health issue. By building soil health, we can protect clean drinking water, reduce flooding, and sequester carbon pollution. Additionally, concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) pollute the air, contaminate drinking water aquifers, and emit methane gas, and should be regulated. We recommend the following:

- Expand and structure resources to provide funding and technical assistance to support the adoption of healthy and sustainable agricultural and food production practices.
- Expand support for soil health, climate resilience, fruit and vegetable production, and organic agriculture, and reduce support for production practices associated with large methane and toxic pollutant emissions.

3. Support a fair and just farm system:

Many rural communities are burdened with economic hardship, insufficient infrastructure, and related adverse health outcomes. There is also a long and well documented history of structural and institutional racism within USDA that has led to exclusion of Black people, indigenous people, and people of color from land ownership and opportunities to shape food systems. We recommend the following:

- Invest in socially disadvantaged farmers by improving credit access, credit assistance, and succession planning.
4. Support expanded research

Expanded funding for data and research is vitally important in ensuring that taxpayer dollars are effectively and equitably distributed. We recommend the following:

• Maximize funding for organic and specialty crop research.

• Support research on disease- and climate-resilient cultivars, sustainable and healthy pest reduction, and techniques to prepare for floods and droughts.

• Support research to reduce agricultural emissions.

• Invest in state-based food and nutrition security demonstration projects.

You can read our full letter with 40 health organizations who have signed on in support of these policy recommendations by scanning this QR code >>>>