



FAMILY FARMING AND MOVING FORWARD FROM COVID-19 2021 SPECIAL ORDER OF BUSINESS

For several years, family farmers, ranchers, and rural communities endured low crop prices, a global trade war, and extreme weather events. This past year, a global pandemic brought new challenges and compounded many of the difficulties farmers and rural communities were already facing. The crisis precipitated by the COVID-19 pandemic highlights the need for lasting, positive change and increased equity in our nation's farm, food, education, communication, and healthcare systems.

The pandemic resulted in severe supply chain disruptions, with farmers struggling to move excess crops and livestock, and consumers facing shortages and higher food prices. These disruptions have highlighted the extreme concentration in agricultural supply chains, where lax antitrust enforcement has allowed a small number of large corporations to dominate the markets farmers purchase from and sell to. It has also foregrounded the shortcomings of the processing sector with its small number of very large processing plants, the brittleness of "just-in-time" inventory and supply chain systems, and the lack of spot markets necessary for system resilience.

Rural communities have long lagged their urban counterparts in infrastructure, including access to healthcare and digital technology. Rural hospitals are chronically underfunded and understaffed, and more than 125 rural hospitals went out of business over the past decade. Ongoing impediments to mounting a swift and effective vaccination and public health information campaign point to the need to improve the entirety of our healthcare infrastructure. One-in-three rural Americans do not have a broadband connection at home. The pandemic underlined lack of access to high-speed broadband internet in rural areas, which is hampering pandemic recovery and weakening delivery of e-commerce, telemedicine, and distance learning opportunities for children and adults.

Furthermore, climate change is the single greatest long-term challenge facing family farmers, rural communities, and threatening global food security. Thus, while we focus on facing the present crisis, we must also look to the future to ensure farmers and ranchers have the tools they need to implement conservation practices and build soil health, reduce atmospheric carbon, and expand on-farm production of renewable energy and biofuels.

In addition to continuing to enact much-needed short-term COVID-19 relief, and ensuring its fair and equitable distribution, National Farmers Union calls upon Congress and the

Administration to take the following actions as first steps toward rebuilding our rural economy:

- Reform farm safety net programs to protect farmers and ranchers from deep market losses, which have caused a reliance upon short-term ad hoc disaster payments;
- Increase enforcement of antitrust laws to spur competition throughout the agricultural supply chain;
- Increase the resiliency and transparency of livestock, grain, dairy, and other food markets by incentivizing local and regional processing, permitting interstate shipment of state-inspected meat in compliance with federal standards, setting minimum weekly cash/spot market cattle purchases by larger packers, and reinstating and fully implementing mandatory Country-of-Origin Labeling;
- Support climate-smart agriculture by facilitating farmer participation in, and the development of cooperative-based solutions, provide resources and technical assistance for farmers to implement voluntary incentive-based conservation programs, ensure family farmers and ranchers have a seat at the table in the development of climate policies and programs, and increase the level of biofuels used in our nation's fuel supply;
- Create a national pandemic response plan and improve the Strategic National Stockpile to better prepare our nation for future crises;
- Expand comprehensive healthcare for all residents, ensuring multiple providers and insurers offer a broad range of services that are affordable and accessible no matter their geographic location;
- Ensure there is adequate funding and administrative support for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and child nutrition programs, strong support for emergency food providers such as food banks and nonprofit feeding organizations, and equity in the distribution of food and nutrition assistance;
- Continue to provide relief to small business, including farms, food businesses, and others, through programs administered by U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Small Business Administration, and other federal agencies as appropriate, to ensure these businesses can survive and navigate the continued disruptions caused by the pandemic;
- Increase and improve high-speed broadband Internet infrastructure and access in rural areas;
- Support the United States Postal Service and ensure prompt delivery and affordable rates in all parts of the country, including rural areas;
- Help rural schools adapt to current and prepare for future pandemic conditions;
- Encourage education and outreach through institutions of higher learning, secondary schools, cooperative extension, and other organizations to prepare citizens for disasters and to strengthen food security. Funding should be increased

for public agricultural research and extension, including support for land-grant colleges and universities;

- Remedy historical inequities in access to farm programs and other systemic barriers to succeeding in agriculture faced by socially disadvantaged groups, especially farmers of color;
- Ensure the right of essential workers to a safe working environment with access to personal protective equipment and sick leave, without the threat of employer retaliation;
- Enact immigration reform, including agricultural workforce reform, that includes a sensible path to legal status for undocumented workers, and that reforms the H-2A temporary agricultural worker visa program so that it serves the needs of workers and family farmers and ranchers;
- Prohibit the ability of foreign interests, including those acting through U.S.-registered entities (except families or individuals seeking U.S. citizenship), from acquiring U.S. agricultural lands, holding federal grazing allotments, commercial fishing privileges, food processing assets, feedlots or other means of food and fiber production; and
- Institute an hours-of-service waiver for truckers who are transporting essential supplies, including livestock, farm, food, and medical supplies.