



## PUBLIC HEALTH AND THE FARM BILL Issue Brief

### How the Farm Bill Affects Public Health

Public health professionals are taking an interest in the Farm Bill as a vehicle for improving health.<sup>1</sup> This interest is timely, because the 2008 Farm Bill is scheduled to expire on September 30, 2012.<sup>2</sup> This document will focus on four areas in which the Farm Bill affects health: nutrition, environmental health, emergency preparedness and community health. Reauthorization of the Farm Bill presents an opportunity to realize much more of its potential to contribute to public health.

#### Farm Bill Overview

The Farm Bill is a body of legislation that sets forth federal agricultural policy and it is renewed by Congress every four to six years. The 2008 Farm Bill included 15 titles, or parts.<sup>3</sup> Most titles included laws governing one or more federal agricultural or nutrition assistance programs. After a Farm Bill is passed, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) develops detailed regulations in order to implement the programs.

In addition to providing legal authority for farm and nutrition programs, the Farm Bill also provides funding authority. Some funding levels are designated in the Farm Bill itself, while others are subject to the annual appropriations process. In 2008, the Congressional Budget Office estimated that expenditures under the Farm Bill from 2008 through 2012 would total approximately \$284 billion for an average of about \$57 billion per year.<sup>4</sup> These expenditures increased under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (“ARRA”), also known as the stimulus bill.

#### Nutrition

The most obvious nexus between the Farm Bill and health is in the area of nutrition. The role of diet in prevention of chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, stroke and high blood pressure has become strikingly clear. The connection between farm policy and diet is growing clearer as well. In fact, the National Prevention Strategy’s discussion of healthy eating identifies the need to improve agricultural policies to better align with the nutrition goals of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans as a key action step for the federal government.<sup>5</sup> In general, the Dietary Guidelines for Americans encourage people to consume more fruits and vegetables, whole grains, lean meats and low-fat dairy products and to drink fewer sugary beverages.

Among Farm Bill provisions, the nutrition title and the farm programs have the most direct impact on diet. Nutrition assistance programs help reduce hunger and malnutrition in low-income communities, and may also support healthy diets. Farm programs established by Congress and implemented by USDA influence the crops that farmers grow, and as a result, they influence the foods that people eat. For example, an abundance of corn and soybeans provides both feed for livestock and poultry and ingredients for processed foods.



The obesity epidemic is an urgent national public health crisis. The Farm Bill can be part of the solution, if public health professionals, other stakeholders and policy-makers can generate creative ideas to align program efforts and funding to achieve multiple goals, such as providing a safety net for farmers and promoting healthy eating. Thus, the Farm Bill should be of interest to public health professionals who work in the areas of nutrition, healthy eating, food access, chronic disease prevention and maternal and child health.

## **Nutrition Programs**

It is a little known fact that at least two-thirds of Farm Bill funds are devoted to nutrition assistance programs. Over 90 percent of these funds are dedicated to the food stamp program, renamed the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in the 2008 Farm Bill.<sup>6</sup>

### **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)**

SNAP provides participants with benefits that they may use to purchase foods from stores and other eligible vendors. Historically, the food stamp program was most concerned with alleviating hunger and malnutrition. As its home in the Farm Bill might suggest, it also was seen as a means to expand the domestic market for agricultural products, and to provide customers for food processors and retailers as well. SNAP benefits are based upon the Thrifty Food Plan, which is intended to enable SNAP participants to purchase healthy foods consistent with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. New Dietary Guidelines were issued early in 2011, but adjustment of the Thrifty Food Plan has not yet occurred. Adjustments to the Thrifty Food Plan have often lagged behind changes in the Dietary Guidelines and economic conditions.<sup>7</sup> During the recent economic recession, participation in SNAP increased substantially. In 2010, about 45 million people participated in SNAP, with total program costs of about \$ 75 billion.<sup>8</sup>

The Healthy Incentives Pilot (HIP) is a demonstration project in Hampden County, Massachusetts that provides an incentive payment of 30 percent when participants in SNAP use their benefits to purchase fruits and vegetables. A number of Farm Bill provisions are aimed at making it easier to use SNAP benefits at farmers' markets. Other proposals to modify SNAP rules in order to increase support for healthy eating, most notably a request by New York City to be allowed to conduct a pilot program in which soda would not be eligible for purchase using SNAP benefits, have been controversial.<sup>9</sup>

### **SNAP Education (SNAP Ed)**

In addition to administering SNAP in their states, each state may offer nutrition education. The goal of SNAP Education (SNAP-Ed) is to help SNAP participants make healthy food choices consistent with the Dietary Guidelines, within a limited budget.

### **The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)**

Under The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), the federal government purchases surplus agricultural commodities and distributes them to states, which in turn distribute them to local emergency food providers such as food banks, food shelves and soup kitchens. Available commodities vary based upon agricultural markets and state preferences, but generally include canned vegetables, fresh and canned fruits, 100 percent fruit juices, peanut butter, nuts, dried fruit, rice, pasta products and meats.

### **Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP)**

The Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) is similar to TEFAP, but is targeted toward households including women, infants and children, or seniors who are at least 60 years of age.

### **Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations**

The Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) provides commodity foods to low-income households living on Indian reservations, and to Native American families residing in designated areas near reservations and in the state of Oklahoma. It is intended as an alternative to SNAP for persons living far from a SNAP office and far from food



retailers who accept SNAP. The 2008 Farm Bill included a provision to assess the nutritional value of the FDIIR food package.<sup>10</sup>

### **Community Food Projects**

Community Food Projects (CFP) provide grants and technical assistance to support initiatives to increase food self-sufficiency in both urban and rural areas with limited food access.

### **Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program**

The [Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program](#) provides cash assistance to senior citizens to purchase fruits, vegetables, herbs and honey at farmers' markets. (A similar program, the WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program, is authorized under the Child Nutrition Act.)

### **School Food Programs**

The primary legislation for the National School Lunch Program is contained in the Child Nutrition Act (most recently reauthorized as the Healthy, Hunger Free Kids Act of 2010.) However, the 2008 Farm Bill included several provisions that addressed school foods. One important provision allows schools to establish a preference for locally grown foods in their purchasing. This provision facilitates farm-to-school programs. In addition, the [Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program](#) was expanded under the 2008 Farm Bill. Under the program, USDA provides funds to states for schools to provide fresh fruits and vegetables for snacks in schools serving low-income children. The 2008 Farm Bill also authorized a pilot project to introduce whole grain products into school meals and a study evaluating the success of the pilot.

### **Food Desert Study**

The 2008 Farm Bill directed USDA to analyze the extent of "food deserts," or areas whose residents have limited access to affordable and nutritious food and to make recommendations to address the problem. The [resulting report](#) was published in 2009.<sup>11</sup>

## **Farm Programs**

One important goal of the Farm Bill is to provide a safety net for farmers. Due to weather-related perils and the nature of agricultural markets, farming involves substantial risks. Providing a safety net for farmers helps to ensure a stable food supply for the nation. This safety net is composed of a variety of programs, including commodity programs, crop insurance and disaster assistance programs and agricultural loan programs.

### **Commodity Programs**

Discussion of farm policy and the Farm Bill in the popular media is often focused on "subsidies" without a clear discussion of their role and the prospects for policy change. The commodity title of the Farm Bill provides for direct and counter-cyclical payments to farmers based on their historical yields of certain crops on farm acres enrolled in the program. These crops include cotton, corn, wheat, soybeans and rice, among others. Lentils and garbanzo beans became eligible under the 2002 Farm Bill. Direct payments are made every year without regard to agricultural market conditions. Counter-cyclical payments are made when prices are low.

The purpose of these programs is to correct basic market failures that resulted in boom and bust cycles that were disruptive to individual farm families and interfered with national goals of an abundant and stable domestic food supply. Yet many people believe that farm commodity programs today have a negative effect on public health by encouraging excessive production of crops such as corn and soybeans, which are then used as livestock feed in concentrated animal feeding operations or made into sweeteners and fats for highly processed foods.

Because of the current budget and political climate, it now seems likely that direct commodity payments will not be included in the next Farm Bill. In fact, the bill that passed the Senate Agriculture committee and was introduced on the Senate floor in late May would eliminate both direct and counter-cyclical payments.<sup>12</sup> This bill is subject to change. It is not



clear how eliminating commodity payments would affect the production levels and prices of commodities or the prices of the fast foods and processed foods into which many commodities are transformed.

### **Crop Insurance and Disaster Assistance Programs**

The 2008 Farm Bill included provisions making policy changes to crop insurance and authorized a number of disaster assistance programs for losses not addressed by crop insurance. Federal crop insurance is sold by private insurance providers, but the crop insurance premiums are subsidized by the federal government, and the crop insurance policies are reinsured by the federal government.

Many commodity farmer organizations have taken the position that if the direct commodity payments are eliminated in the next Farm Bill, the level of revenue protection available under crop insurance should be increased. This is an important policy debate for public and environmental health professionals for at least two reasons. One concern is whether crop insurance will be made available to farmers who grow fruits and vegetables and farmers who use organic methods on an equitable basis with farmers who grow commodities. The second concern is whether the crop insurance program can help encourage and promote adoption of farming practices that will increase conservation and resilience of the nation's farmland in the face of climate change. Currently, conservation compliance requirements related to highly erodible land and wetlands are a condition of participation in the commodity programs. If the commodity programs are eliminated, and some of their risk management functions are transferred to the crop insurance program, some stakeholders have argued that the conservation compliance requirements should also be incorporated into the crop insurance requirements.

### **Agricultural Loan Programs**

The 2008 Farm Bill authorized a number of agricultural loan programs. USDA offers direct loan programs (in which it is the lender) and guaranteed loan programs (in which it guarantees loans made by private or quasi-governmental lenders). Federal agricultural loan programs are an important source of credit for farmers who are not able to qualify for a loan from a commercial lender. For example, beginning farmers may be viewed as too risky by commercial lenders, but USDA offers a down payment loan program for beginning farmers and ranchers.

### **Farm Programs: A Cycle of Support**

The Farm Bill is a set of inter-related programs, which provide mutually reinforcing incentives, or disincentives, for farmers to grow certain crops. For example, farmers who participate in the commodity programs must report both their crop yields and how many acres they farm each year. Over decades of USDA's administration of farm commodity programs, this has created a rich set of data, which has facilitated development of crop insurance programs. The lack of comparable data for most fruit and vegetable crops has impeded development of crop insurance for those crops. The crop insurance policies together with the commodity payments have made it easier for commodity farmers to secure loans to buy land and equipment, because they are able to approach lenders with some assured income to demonstrate their ability to repay a loan, even in the event of natural disaster or market failure.

To the extent that the public health community is interested in using the Farm Bill as a vehicle for encouraging farmers to produce more healthy foods, the community needs to understand that no single program is likely to be sufficient to turn the tide. Moreover, numerous practical obstacles might prevent farmers who are currently growing corn and soybeans from easily shifting to growing green beans or strawberries. Thus, the most effective federal policies to encourage farmers to grow fruits and vegetables might not be to shift direct payments from commodities to fruits and vegetables, but to meet other needs of fruit and vegetable farmers. These needs might be better met through policies such as crop insurance and agricultural loan programs tailored to fruit and vegetable growers. Helpful policies might also support research, education and technical assistance on farming practices tailored for fruits and vegetables; support solutions for labor shortages on fruit and vegetable farms; and support assistance with marketing and distribution of healthy foods.<sup>13</sup>

## **Environmental Health**

Approximately half of the land base of the United States is dedicated to agricultural use.<sup>14</sup> As a result, farming practices involved in raising crops and livestock have a substantial impact upon the quality of the country's soil, air and water. For



example, a report of the Pew Commission on Industrial Farm Animal Production discussed the “growing public health threat” of intensive animal feeding operations, noting their contributions to antibiotic resistance, groundwater contamination, air quality degradation and respiratory problems for farmers, farmworkers and neighbors of livestock facilities.<sup>15</sup> The Environmental Protection Agency notes that, “Animal manure, excess fertilizer applied to crops and fields, and soil erosion make agriculture one of the largest sources of nitrogen and phosphorous pollution in the country.”<sup>16</sup> Practices used in growing and handling food can be determinative factors in food safety. Thus, the Farm Bill should be of interest to public health professionals who work in the areas of air quality, water quality, occupational health and food safety.

## Conservation Programs

The Conservation Title of the Farm Bill authorizes a range of programs to provide financial assistance (most commonly in the form of a cost-share reimbursement) and technical support to farmers who seek to implement conservation practices on land actively used for farming, or payments to keep environmentally sensitive land out of agricultural production. The 2008 Farm Bill directed USDA and its Natural Resources Conservation Service to ensure that conservation practices relevant to fruit and vegetable growers are included in the lists of eligible approved practices for conservation programs.<sup>17</sup> Conservation programs can assist farmers to take a number of steps toward conservation; for example, they can help farmers to reduce pesticide use (by adopting integrated pest management practices or transitioning to organic production), reduce agricultural runoff (by incorporating cover crops to fix nitrogen in the soil and reducing the use of synthetic fertilizers or by grazing livestock rather than confining them in feedlots or buildings) and extend the growing season (by installing high tunnels to capture solar energy to grow fruits and vegetables).

One important debate with regard to conservation programs relates to whether assistance ought to be targeted toward farmers with the highest risk of environmental harm, or those with the greatest potential to provide environmental benefits to the public. For example, since the 2002 Farm Bill, USDA has been required to dedicate 60 percent of funds under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) to livestock operations. Many of these funds have been used to build manure storage structures. Because there are consistently many more applicants seeking to participate in Farm Bill conservation programs than can be accommodated by the funds available, these debates are likely to continue.

Under the 2008 Farm Bill, USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service offers a number of opportunities for state and local governments and nonprofit organizations to partner with it in conservation efforts. These opportunities include the Agricultural Water Enhancement Program, the Conservation Innovation Grants Program and the Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative. In general, these programs do not provide financial assistance to participating governmental and nonprofit organizations, but they may still be attractive as sources for cost-share assistance to participating farmers, thus enabling the non-federal government and nonprofit entities to leverage their own commitments and attract more farmers to participate in coordinated projects that may have a broader health impact than isolated efforts on individual farms.

## National Institute of Food and Agriculture (Research, Education and Extension)

The National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) is the new name for the Cooperative State Research Education and Extension Service.<sup>18</sup> NIFA coordinates with researchers, educators and extension agents at universities and colleges and other entities in order to advance, collect and disseminate scientific knowledge in order to address issues related to agriculture, food, the environment and communities. NIFA administers the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI), a competitive grants program established under the 2008 Farm Bill that includes food safety, nutrition, health, food security, childhood obesity prevention, renewable energy and climate change among its research priorities and key challenges.<sup>19</sup> NIFA also administers the Specialty Crop Research Initiative, another competitive grants program under the 2008 Farm Bill, whose research priorities include plant breeding, threats from pests and disease and potential food safety hazards.<sup>20</sup>



## Meat and Poultry Inspection

The 2008 Farm Bill included a number of provisions that addressed meat and poultry inspection. It included a provision to facilitate shipment of state-inspected meat and poultry across state lines.<sup>21</sup> It also required that regulated establishments notify USDA of the entrance of misbranded or adulterated meat or poultry into the stream of commerce, and to prepare procedures for a recall.<sup>22</sup> Other provisions addressed a voluntary trichinae certification program and compensation to state governments and industry for taking certain steps to control low pathogenic diseases.<sup>23</sup>

## Food Safety Education and USDA

USDA agencies may support food safety education programs, including up to \$ 1 million of funding per year authorized under the 2008 Farm Bill.<sup>24</sup>

USDA's Risk Management Agency is largely concerned with helping farmers manage weather-related risks. However, RMA also supports farmers seeking to manage risk related to food safety and food handling. For example, RMA sponsors an effort to promote food safety among fruit and vegetable farmers by providing technical assistance to farmers, food safety professionals and agricultural extension specialists.<sup>25</sup>

USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service conducts audits of farms seeking certification intended to assure adherence to Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) or Good Handling Practices (GHP) with respect to fresh produce.<sup>26</sup> AMS also participates with the Food and Drug Administration in a produce safety alliance housed at Cornell University that provides education and technical assistance regarding GAP compliance.<sup>27</sup>

## Occupational Health for Farmers and Farmworkers

Farming is one of the most dangerous occupations in the United States. The dangers include risk of injury in handling farm equipment and livestock; risks from exposure to pesticides for pesticide applicators, farmers, farmworkers and their families; and risks associated with confined animal feeding operations, including respiratory conditions related to exposure to concentrated emissions of ammonia (poultry), hydrogen sulfide (hogs) and methane (cows). Agricultural safety and health are not addressed in detail under the Farm Bill. However, there may be opportunities for greater integration and collaboration between Farm Bill research programs and the nine Centers of Excellence in Agricultural Disease and Injury Research, Education and Prevention funded by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH).

Historically, laws governing agricultural labor have not been a focus of the Farm Bill, and the protections provided by other federal and state laws and private contracts have been incomplete at best.<sup>28</sup> However, the 2008 Farm Bill did address some issues related to farmworker health and safety. For example, it authorized research related to long-term exposure to pesticides and mitigation options related to air emissions from animal feeding operations.<sup>29</sup> It also authorized USDA to implement the Agricultural Career and Employment Program in order to make grants to eligible entities to assist agricultural employers and farmworkers by improving the supply, stability, safety and training of the agricultural labor force, including instruction in health and safety.<sup>30</sup> The ACE program is administered by USDA's Farmworker Coordination Program.

## Emergency Preparedness

The Farm Bill addresses issues relevant to emergency preparedness and recovery. As noted above, crop insurance assists farmers with risk management and recovery of financial losses due to weather. If current trends associated with climate change continue, disruptions to agricultural production are likely to intensify. Some advocates urge that crop insurance and disaster assistance programs should adopt compliance policies that would encourage farmers to become more diversified and to adopt farming practices that will make their farms more resilient in the face of natural disasters such as flooding and drought. In addition to impacts on crops, natural disasters may result in livestock mortality, requiring proper disposition of the bodies in order to prevent further adverse impacts. In some instances, an outbreak of infectious disease among livestock may invoke policies to require depopulation as one measure to prevent further spread of the disease. For these reasons, the Farm Bill should be of interest to public health professionals who work in the area of emergency preparedness.



## Small Business Administration's Disaster Loan Program

The 2008 Farm Bill included detailed provisions related to the small business disaster loan program.<sup>31</sup> Provisions addressed development and implementation of a comprehensive disaster response plan by the Small Business Administration, including coordination with other federal agencies as well as state and local agencies.

## National Institute of Food and Agriculture (Research, Education and Extension)

NIFA provides funding to support the [Extension Disaster Education Network](#), which provides a network for agricultural extension professionals to share research and information to assist farmers in emergency preparedness and recovery. As noted above, the extension service can be a critical resource and partner in researching and addressing questions related to environmental health, particularly food safety. For example, farmers whose fields have flooded may require guidance and technical assistance regarding the safety of their crops, and their customers (particularly including local restaurants and schools) may require guidance and technical assistance regarding the risks of purchasing, preparing and consuming such foods. The Extension service may also provide assistance with issues related to long-term recovery.

## Agricultural Biosecurity

The 2008 Farm Bill included a subtitle dedicated to agricultural biosecurity, which it defined as protection from an agent that poses a threat to (1) plant or animal health; (2) public health as it relates to adulteration of products; or (3) the environment, including agriculture facilities, farmland, air and water.<sup>32</sup> It authorized competitive grant programs to support teaching, advanced training, research and development related to agricultural biosecurity and the development of countermeasures.

## Emergency Conservation Program

The Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) provides cost-share assistance to farmers to rehabilitate land damaged by a natural disaster or to implement water conservation measures during times of severe drought. Because of the significant percentage of U.S. land that is agricultural land such measures can have dramatic impacts upon soil erosion and groundwater quality, and environmental health more generally. The Farm Bill may include funds for ECP, or Congress may appropriate funds for ECP in response to natural disasters and other emergencies.

## Community Health

The Farm Bill has substantial impacts on community health. The Farm Bill supports development of local and regional food systems, which can be an avenue for economic development in both rural and urban areas, and contributes to both economic and social relationships.<sup>33</sup> USDA has sometimes played a negative role in race and gender relations, but the 2008 Farm Bill included a number of measures to attempt to change that pattern.<sup>34</sup> When the farm economy struggles, it can take a toll on the mental health of farmers, farm families and their rural communities; the Farm Bill has unrealized potential to address these concerns. For these reasons, the Farm Bill should be of interest to public health professionals who work in the area of rural health, community health, community economic development, civil rights, health disparities and mental health.

## Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food Initiative

The [Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food Initiative](#) is not a Farm Bill program.<sup>35</sup> Rather, it is a USDA initiative to link programs throughout the department that may be utilized in rebuilding local food systems and increasing access to healthy food.<sup>36</sup> These programs may provide models, technical assistance or even funding for public health projects and programs.<sup>37</sup> This initiative provides a clearinghouse of information and resources to assist with economic development, which in turn contributes to community health.

The [Specialty Crop Block Grant Program](#) is a grant program to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops, which are defined as “fruits, vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, horticulture and nursery crops (including floriculture).” State departments of agriculture may partner with other government, nonprofit and private entities to apply to USDA for grants



to support projects that strengthen markets for specialty grants through a variety of means relevant to public health, including encouraging increased knowledge of nutrition and consumption of fruits and vegetables, promoting good agricultural and handling practices, enhancing food safety, expanding food access and establishing local and regional fresh food systems.

NIFA administers the [Community Food Project Grants Program \(CFP\)](#) in order to promote long-term, community-based solutions to address hunger and food insecurity in low-income communities. The [Healthy Urban Food Enterprise Development Center](#) provides information, technical assistance and grants to support CFP's in urban areas.

The [Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program \(BFRDP\)](#) is a competitive grant program administered by NIFA. It funds education, outreach and technical assistance for beginning farmers and ranchers. According to the 2007 Census of Agriculture, the [average age of U.S. farmers is 57](#). By focusing on supporting beginning farmers and ranchers, BFRDP may help to revitalize aging rural populations. Recent news accounts highlight efforts to provide community reintegration and meaningful work to returning military veterans as beginning farmers, noting that 45 percent of the military comes from rural areas.<sup>38</sup>

The [Farmers' Market Promotion Program](#) provides grants to local governments, public benefit corporations, economic development corporations, tribal governments, producer associations and other entities to improve direct marketing of agricultural products from producers to consumers.<sup>39</sup> At least 10 percent of funds are to be used to support use of Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) for SNAP at farmers' markets and in community supported agriculture.<sup>40</sup>

## Rural Infrastructure and Business Development

The 2008 Farm Bill authorized a variety of programs that provide support for rural infrastructure (such as water and wastewater facilities as well as energy and telecommunications, including broadband access) and businesses. It also specified that five percent of funds available through the Business and Industry Loan program be reserved for Local and Regional Food Enterprise Guaranteed Loans that support the renewal of local food infrastructure, including food processing, aggregation, storage, distribution and marketing.<sup>41</sup>

## Urban Agriculture

While one might assume that Farm Bill programs are focused on rural areas, many nutrition and farm programs also have applicability in urban communities. As part of the Know Your Farmer initiative, USDA prepared a memo setting forth a variety of ways that USDA programs might be used in support of urban agriculture.<sup>42</sup>

The Community Food Security Coalition provides ongoing leadership and coordination for Community Food Projects and other urban agriculture initiatives. Public Health Law and Policy provides a number of resources on how local food policy efforts may both be strengthened by and provide innovative models for the Farm Bill.<sup>43</sup>

## Civil Rights

The USDA has a troubled history with respect to civil rights.<sup>44</sup> In 1999, USDA settled a major class action lawsuit brought by African-American farmers alleging discrimination in implementation of Farm Bill programs, especially agricultural loan programs.<sup>45</sup> The 2008 Farm Bill directed USDA to resolve similar lawsuits brought by Native American, Hispanic and female farmers in an expeditious and just manner.<sup>46</sup> The 2008 Farm Bill also included a number of provisions to provide targeted assistance to racial and ethnic minorities and/or women, known in USDA terminology as "socially disadvantaged farmers." Relevant provisions include: outreach and technical assistance for socially disadvantaged farmers, targeted loan funds and targeted conservation program cost share payments and incentives.<sup>47</sup>

## Mental Health

Farm Bill programs provide an incomplete safety net for farmers. Oftentimes, the vagaries of the farm economy have a dramatic effect on the mental health of farmers, farm families and their rural communities as a whole.



Farmers frequently suffer from limited access to health care for at least two reasons. First, many farmers are self-employed, and unless one family member works “in town” in order to obtain health insurance, the premiums can be difficult to afford. Second, many farmers live in sparsely populated areas that are under-served by health professionals. These challenges in affordability and access to health care tend to reduce community health. In addition to these two general limitations, farmers in tight-knit rural communities may be reluctant to be seen seeking mental and behavioral health services.

The 2008 Farm Bill authorized a Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network to provide mental health services, including hotlines, for farm families, but funds have not been appropriated.<sup>48</sup>

## Conclusion

The Farm Bill has great, yet unrealized, potential to contribute to public health. A related Network for Public Health Law issue brief discusses ways for public health professionals to [get involved](#) in education and advocacy related to the Farm Bill.<sup>49</sup> Professional associations, such as the American Public Health Association (APHA), Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO), National Association of City and County Health Officials (NACCHO), National Association of Local Boards of Health (NALBOH), Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, and the National Organization of State Offices of Rural Health (NOSORH) may take policy positions or provide guidance related to their priorities for the Farm Bill, so interested public health professionals may want to contact the relevant professional association.

Many members of the public health community are focused on how the Farm Bill can reduce the high toll of diet-related chronic disease and make healthy eating easier. Ninety hunger, nutrition and public health organizations working in an informal coalition signed a [letter that set forth a series of nutrition priorities for the 2012 Farm Bill](#). [SNAP to Health](#) provides an online forum dedicated to exploring and exchanging ideas about how to strengthen the connection between nutrition assistance and health. To some extent, however, public health professionals may have different needs and priorities based upon their areas of focus within public health. For example, those concerned primarily with food access might find the listserv operated by the [Community Food Security Coalition](#) relevant, while those concerned primarily with environmental health and community health might be interested in the regular updates provided by the [National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition](#). A new effort aimed at creating a broad coalition concerned with public health and the Farm Bill is the Healthy Farms Healthy People Coalition.

The Farm Bill offers many opportunities to enact policies that will support healthier food systems at the local, regional, state and national level. Public health professionals have a role to play in informing themselves and others about the Farm Bill so that important issues related to population health are considered in the design and implementation of the next Farm Bill.

## Additional Resources

Jill Krueger, et al., *Planting the Seeds for Public Health: How the Farm Bill Can Help Farmers to Produce and Distribute Healthy Foods* (Farmers’ Legal Action Group 2010), available at <http://www.flaginc.org/topics/pubs/farmbill.php>.

Margaret Krome, et al., *Building Sustainable Farms, Ranches and Communities: Federal Programs for Sustainable Agriculture, Forestry, Entrepreneurship, Conservation, and Community Development* (USDA 2009), available at <http://www.sare.org/Learning-Center/Books/Building-Sustainable-Farms-Ranches-and-Communities>.

National Research Council, *Toward Sustainable Agriculture Systems in the 21st Century*, (National Academies Press, 2010), available at [http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record\\_id=12832](http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=12832).

Zachariah Baker, et al., *Grassroots Guide to the 2008 Farm Bill* (Sustainable Agriculture Coalition 2008), available at <http://sustainableagriculture.net/wp-content/uploads/2008/11/sac-farm-bill-guide.pdf>.

*Growing Change: A Farm Bill Primer for Communities*, (ChangeLab Solutions, 2012), available at [http://changelabsolutions.org/sites/changelabsolutions.org/files/GrowingChange\\_FarmBillPrimer\\_Final\\_20120514\\_0.pdf](http://changelabsolutions.org/sites/changelabsolutions.org/files/GrowingChange_FarmBillPrimer_Final_20120514_0.pdf).

## SUPPORTERS

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<sup>1</sup> For suggestions on how to get involved, see *Public Health Professionals and the Farm Bill: How to Get Involved* (Network for Public Health Law, 2012), available at <http://www.networkforphl.org/asset/2hj8f8/Farm-Bill-Get-InvolvedFINAL.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Jim Monke et al., *Possible Extension or Expiration of the 2008 Farm Bill*, (Congressional Research Service, March 26, 2012), available at <http://www.nationalaglawcenter.org/assets/crs/R42442.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008, Pub. L. No. 110-246, 122 Stat. 1651 (June 18, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> Johnson, et al., *The 2008 Farm Bill: Major Provisions and Legislative Action*, at CRS-16, Congressional Research Service Report for Congress (Oct. 3, 2008), available at <http://ncseonline.org/NLE/CRSreports/08Jun/RL33934.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> National Prevention Council, “National Prevention Strategy” (2011), available at <http://www.healthcare.gov/prevention/nphpphc/strategy/report.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> The Farm Bill does not authorize or fund either the National School Lunch Program or the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women Infants and Children (WIC). These are the other two largest federal nutrition assistance programs; they are authorized and funded in the Child Nutrition Act, most recently reauthorized as the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act.

<sup>7</sup> *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Benefits and the Thrifty Food Plan*, (U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of the Inspector General, 2009), available at [http://www.recovery.gov/Accountability/inspectors/Documents/27703-1-KC%20Final%20Report%20FOIA%20\(12-8-09\).pdf](http://www.recovery.gov/Accountability/inspectors/Documents/27703-1-KC%20Final%20Report%20FOIA%20(12-8-09).pdf).

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/SNAPsummary.htm>

<sup>9</sup> A forthcoming issue brief from the Network for Public Health Law will address this issue. Until then, see this blog post from the Network, [http://www.networkforphl.org/the\\_network\\_blog/2011/11/02/67/determining\\_foods\\_covered\\_under\\_nutrition\\_assistance\\_programs\\_is\\_not\\_always\\_a\\_snap/](http://www.networkforphl.org/the_network_blog/2011/11/02/67/determining_foods_covered_under_nutrition_assistance_programs_is_not_always_a_snap/).

<sup>10</sup> 7 U.S.C. § 2013.

<sup>11</sup> Michele Ver Ploeg, et al., *Access to Affordable and Nutritious Food: Measuring and Understanding Food Deserts and Their Consequences*, (Economic Research Services Report to Congress, June 2009), available at <http://www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/AP/AP036>.

<sup>12</sup> The Agriculture Reform, Food Jobs Act of 2012. S. 3240. See <http://www.ag.senate.gov/issues/farm-bill>.

<sup>13</sup> Johnson, et al., *Eliminating Fruit and Vegetable Planting Restrictions: How Would Markets Be Affected?*, Economic Research Report No. 30, ERS, USDA (Nov. 2006), available at <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/err30>.

<sup>14</sup> Nickerson, et al., *Major Uses of Land in the United States, 2007*, at 1, Economic Information Bulletin No. 89 (Dec. 2011), available at <http://www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/EIB89>.

<sup>15</sup> Pew Commission on Industrial Farm Animal Production, *Putting Meat on the Table: industrial Farm Animal Production in America*, (2008), available at <http://www.ncifap.org/images/PCIFAPSmry.pdf>.

<sup>16</sup> <http://epa.gov/nutrientpollution/sourcessolutions/index.html>.

<sup>17</sup> 16 U.S.C. § 3842(h), i(1).

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.csrees.usda.gov/>.

<sup>19</sup> 7 U.S.C. § 450i(b).

<sup>20</sup> 7 U.S.C. § 7632.

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<sup>21</sup> 21 U.S.C. §§ 472, 683.

<sup>22</sup> 21 U.S.C. §§ 612-613.

<sup>23</sup> 7 U.S.C. §§ 8304 note and 8308.

<sup>24</sup> 7 U.S.C. § 76755a.

<sup>25</sup> <http://onfarmfoodsafety.org/>.

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMsv1.0/ams.fetchTemplateData.do?template=TemplateN&page=GAPGHPAuditVerificationProgram>.

<sup>27</sup> <http://producesafetyalliance.cornell.edu/psa.html>.

<sup>28</sup> Bon Appetit Management Co., et al., *Inventory of Farmworker Issues and Protections in the United States* (2011), available at [http://www.bamco.com/uploads/documents/farmworkerinventory\\_0428\\_2011.pdf](http://www.bamco.com/uploads/documents/farmworkerinventory_0428_2011.pdf).

<sup>29</sup> 7 U.S.C. § 5925(e)(30) and (e)(38).

<sup>30</sup> 7 U.S.C. § 2008q-1.

<sup>31</sup> 15 U.S.C. §§ 631 et seq.

<sup>32</sup> 7 U.S.C. § 8901.

<sup>33</sup> Steven Martinez, et al., *Local Food Systems: Concepts, Impacts, and Issues*, Economic Research Report No. 97(USDA Economic Research Service 2010), available at <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/err97> .

<sup>34</sup> [http://www.ascr.usda.gov/cr\\_at\\_usda.html](http://www.ascr.usda.gov/cr_at_usda.html).

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/knownyourfarmer?navid=KNOWYOURFARMER>.

<sup>36</sup> A series of useful memos that describe USDA programs that may provide grants, loans, and other support to local and regional food systems is available at [http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?navid=KYF\\_GRANTS](http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?navid=KYF_GRANTS). The memos address programs administered by the Agricultural Marketing Services, Farm Service Agency, National Institute of Food and Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and Rural Development. See also, Kate Fitzgerald, et al., *Guide to USDA Funding for Local and Regional Food Systems* (National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, 2010), available at [http://sustainableagriculture.net/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/NSAC\\_FoodSystemsFundingGuide\\_FirstEdition\\_4\\_2010.pdf](http://sustainableagriculture.net/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/NSAC_FoodSystemsFundingGuide_FirstEdition_4_2010.pdf).

<sup>37</sup> USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service collects information related to regional distribution systems, or "food hubs" at <http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMsv1.0/foodhubs>.

<sup>38</sup> Patricia Leigh Brown, *Helping Soldiers Trade Their Swords for Plows*, N.Y. Times (Feb. 6, 2011).

<sup>39</sup> <http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMsv1.0/FMPP>.

<sup>40</sup> 7 U.S.C. § 3005(e).

<sup>41</sup> 7 U.S.C. § 1932(g)(9).

<sup>42</sup> See also *Building Sustainable Farms, Ranches and Communities: Federal Programs for Sustainable Agriculture, Forestry, Entrepreneurship, Conservation, and Community Development* (USDA 2009), available at [www.sare.org/Learning-Center/Books/Building-Sustainable-Farms-Ranches-and-Communities](http://www.sare.org/Learning-Center/Books/Building-Sustainable-Farms-Ranches-and-Communities).

<sup>43</sup> *Growing Change: A Farm Bill Primer for Communities*, (ChangeLab Solutions , 2012), available at [http://changelabsolutions.org/sites/changelabsolutions.org/files/GrowingChange\\_FarmBillPrimer\\_Final\\_20120514\\_0.pdf](http://changelabsolutions.org/sites/changelabsolutions.org/files/GrowingChange_FarmBillPrimer_Final_20120514_0.pdf); Christine Fry and Heather Wooten, 'Complete Eats' Legislation: *The Farm Bill and Food Systems Planning* (Planning & Environmental Law, April 2012), link available at <http://changelabsolutions.org/publications/complete-eats-legislation-farm-bill-and-food-systems-planning>; Heather Wooten and Amy Ackerman, *Seeding the City: Land Use Policies to Support Urban Agriculture* (ChangeLab Solutions, 2011), available at <http://changelabsolutions.org/publications/seeding-city>.

<sup>44</sup> [http://www.ascr.usda.gov/cr\\_at\\_usda.html](http://www.ascr.usda.gov/cr_at_usda.html).

<sup>45</sup> *Pigford v. Glickman*, 185 F.R.D. 82 (D.D.C. 1999).

<sup>46</sup> 2008 Farm Bill § 14011.

<sup>47</sup> 7 U.S.C. § 2279.

<sup>48</sup> 7 U.S.C. § 5936.

<sup>49</sup> For suggestions on how to get involved, see *Public Health Professionals and the Farm Bill: How to Get Involved* (Network for Public Health Law, 2012), available at [http://www.networkforphl.org/\\_asset/2hj8f8/Farm-Bill-Get-InvolvedFINAL.pdf](http://www.networkforphl.org/_asset/2hj8f8/Farm-Bill-Get-InvolvedFINAL.pdf).