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## Proactive Policies: Building the Farm Bill of the Future Through New Collaborations and Perspectives

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PROACTIVE POLICIES: BUILDING THE FARM BILL OF THE FUTURE  
THROUGH NEW COLLABORATION AND PERSPECTIVES

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## **Proactive Policies: Building the Farm Bill of the Future Through New Collaborations and Perspectives**

**Jennifer Zwagerman**

Consumers and agricultural producers have been linked in the Farm Bill for over 70 years, in various and evolving ways. While the Farm Bill has evolved and grown over the years, with numerous new programs added through subsequent farm bills and additional legislation, there is no denying that with its broad scope of programs impacting agriculture and nutrition, producers and consumers remain absolutely connected in today's Farm Bill as well.<sup>1</sup> However, this comprehensive, broad-based piece of legislation that impacts not just every American, but has a much more global impact, is contentious and involves much debate and political fighting each time it comes up for renewal.<sup>2</sup> I believe more can be done to bridge the many divides that occur when it comes to the Farm Bill, starting with a change in process and in mindset that will build more broad-based coalitions of support beyond the traditional agricultural block, while also helping remove some of the contentious debate that occurs every renewal cycle. A more broad-based view of the purpose and scope of the Farm Bill will also more accurately reflect the changing scope of agriculture, where agriculture means much more than just food production, and help agriculture and its many partners focus on long-term, sustainable solutions to issues that are intricately tied to agriculture, food, the environment, rural development, and more.

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<sup>1</sup> See Tom Vilsack, *The 2018 farm bill is so much more than farming — here's how it impacts all Americans*, BUSINESS INSIDER (Jan. 21, 2018), <http://www.businessinsider.com/heres-how-the-2018-farm-bill-impacts-all-americans-2018-1>.

<sup>2</sup> See Jeremy Bernfeld, *Out of Public Eye, A Bitter Farm Bill Fights*, HARVEST PUBLIC MEDIA (July 11, 2014), <http://harvestpublicmedia.org/post/out-public-eye-bitter-farm-bill-fights>.

## Consumers and Producers, and the Rural/Urban Divide

The origins of what we call the “Farm Bill” date back to the 1930s and the Great Depression, part of FDR’s New Deal, with a goal of helping farmers by boosting crop prices.<sup>3</sup> Despite a generally strong economy, the 1920s were not good to farmers and the farm economy, and the Great Depression made a bad situation even worse for agricultural producers.<sup>4</sup>

One way the 1933 legislation supported prices was by paying farmers to limit production.<sup>5</sup> This bill, the Agricultural Adjustment Act, provided the payments for non-production, allowed the government to purchase excess grain from producers, and provided for financing options, among other things.<sup>6</sup> This was an emergency declaration, stated to “cease to be in effect whenever the President finds and proclaims that the national economic emergency in relation to agriculture has ended.”<sup>7</sup>

For the purpose of this essay, the importance of this law lies in some of its goals: parity and avoiding a disparate impact on consumers. In the 1933 Farm Bill, parity was defined as “an equality of exchange relationship between agriculture and industry or between persons living on farms and persons not farms.”<sup>8</sup> The 1993 Act also stated an “intent to protect the consumers’ interest by readjusting farm production to a level that would not increase

<sup>3</sup> Michael X. Heiligenstein, *A Brief History of the Farm Bill*, SATURDAY EVENING POST (Apr. 17, 2014), <http://www.saturdayeveningpost.com/2014/04/17/culture/politics/a-brief-history-of-the-farm-bill.html>.

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> See e.g., Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933, Pub. L. No. 73-10, 48 Stat. 31, <http://nationalaglawcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/assets/farmbills/1933.pdf>; Heiligenstein, *supra* note 3.

<sup>6</sup> See e.g., U.S. DEPT. OF AGRIC., ECON. RES. SERV., HISTORY OF AGRICULTURAL PRICE-SUPPORT AND ADJUSTMENT PROGRAMS, 1939-84 3 (1984), [https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/41988/50849\\_aib485.pdf?v=42079](https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/41988/50849_aib485.pdf?v=42079); Agricultural Adjustment Act; Sara Menker, *Grains in Mali: More than Meets the Media*, LINKED IN (July 26, 2016), <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/grains-mali-more-than-meets-media-sara-menker>.

<sup>7</sup> Agricultural Adjustment Act §13.

<sup>8</sup> U.S. DEPT. OF AGRIC., ECON. RES. SERV., HISTORY OF AGRICULTURAL PRICE-SUPPORT AND ADJUSTMENT PROGRAMS, 1939-84 3 (1984), [https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/41988/50849\\_aib485.pdf?v=42079](https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/41988/50849_aib485.pdf?v=42079).

the percentage of consumers' retail expenditures" above the amount used as the financial baseline goal.<sup>9</sup> In short, the goal was to provide support to farmers, as the country saw value in a strong agricultural industry, while also ensuring that an improving farm economy and crop prices would not have an overly negative impact on consumers.<sup>10</sup>

The Farm Bill today continues, in many ways, to reflect those same goals, albeit on a much broader and larger scale. Programs have expanded to include not just those directed towards commodity support, but conservation, trade, nutrition, rural development, energy, and more.<sup>11</sup> The Farm Bill is legislation that has tremendous impact, is vital to supporting strong agricultural and rural communities, and ensures millions of Americans have access to food.<sup>12</sup> This legislation has unrealized potential to do great things, but it has to start with expanding the public's perception of agricultural production and its role in our society.

In order for the Farm Bill to grow, to modernize, and to reflect the current state of our country and needs, it is more important than ever that new coalitions of support be created to develop and support the Farm Bill. These coalitions need to more strongly reflect all voices, move beyond the "us vs them/urban vs rural" mentality, and reflect the changing environment and needs of the current economy and population. In doing so, I believe we will see not only stronger legislation addressing environmental, rural, nutritional, agricultural, and scientific needs, but find a path that will provide for a more collaborative and less contentious path moving forward.

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<sup>9</sup> *Id.* at 4.

<sup>10</sup> *What is the Farm Bill?* NAT'L SUSTAINABLE AGRIC. COAL., <http://sustainableagriculture.net/our-work/campaigns/fbcampaign/what-is-the-farm-bill/> (last visited Mar. 11, 2018).

<sup>11</sup> See Agricultural Act of 2014, Pub. L. No. 113-79, 128 Stat. 649, <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/BILLS-113hr2642enr/pdf/BILLS-113hr2642enr.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> See Vilsack, *supra* note 1.

### Changing Rural Economies and US Population Divides

At the time of the first Farm Bill, in the 1930s, rural Americans and those involved in agriculture made up a higher percent of the population than what we see today.<sup>13</sup> When the U.S. began collecting farm census data in 1920, the population was approximately 105.7 million, and the farm population was just over 30.2% of the total population.<sup>14</sup> As of 2016, less than 2% of the population was directly involved in agriculture,<sup>15</sup> and only 14% of the population resides in rural parts of the country (with continued downward population trends).<sup>16</sup> However, agriculture is 6% of the overall economy and 10% of US employment overall.<sup>17</sup> I do not expect that the number of farms will grow in the near future (the last USDA Census of Agriculture reported approximately 2.1 million farms in 2012, down from 2.2 million in 2007);<sup>18</sup> I do expect that agricultural-related employment will increase. Examples of growth areas include wind and solar energy, which are tightly connected to agriculture and continue to expand, even as we see industries like biofuel slow.<sup>19</sup> There

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<sup>13</sup> See U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, URBAN AND RURAL POPULATION 1900-1990 (1995), [HTTPS://WWW.CENSUS.GOV/POPULATION/CENSUSDATA/URPOP0090.TXT](https://www.census.gov/population/censusdata/urpop0090.txt) (identifying downward trends in rural population as a percentage of total population over time).

<sup>14</sup> *Farm Population Lowest Since 1850's*, N.Y. TIMES (July 20, 1988), <http://www.nytimes.com/1988/07/20/us/farm-population-lowest-since-1850-s.html>.

<sup>15</sup> *Employment Projections: Employment by major industry sector*, U.S. DEPT. OF LAB., BUREAU OF LAB. STAT., [https://www.bls.gov/emp/ep\\_table\\_201.htm](https://www.bls.gov/emp/ep_table_201.htm) (last visited Apr. 12, 2018).

<sup>16</sup> U.S. DEPT. OF AGRIC, RURAL AMERICA AT A GLANCE, 2017 EDITION 1 (2017) <https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/85740/eib-182.pdf?v=43054>.

<sup>17</sup> *Ag and Food Sectors and the Economy*, U.S. DEPT. OF AGRIC., ECON. RES. SERV., <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/ag-and-food-statistics-charting-the-essentials/ag-and-food-sectors-and-the-economy.aspx> (last updated Oct.18, 2017).

<sup>18</sup> U.S. DEPT. OF AGRIC., 2012 CENSUS OF AGRICULTURE, HIGHLIGHTS: FARMS & FARMLAND 1 (2014), [https://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2012/OnlineResources/Highlights/Farms\\_and\\_Farmland/Highlights\\_Farms\\_and\\_Farmland.pdf](https://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2012/OnlineResources/Highlights/Farms_and_Farmland/Highlights_Farms_and_Farmland.pdf).

<sup>19</sup> See Daniel Cusick, *Wind and Solar Growth Outpace Gas*, SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN (Jan. 12, 2017), <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/wind-and-solar-growth-outpace-gas/>; *Renewable Energy and Agriculture: A Natural Fit*, UNION OF CONCERNED SCIENTISTS, [https://www.ucsusa.org/clean\\_energy/smart-energy-solutions/increase-renewables/renewable-energy-and.html#\\_WtAc6YjwblU](https://www.ucsusa.org/clean_energy/smart-energy-solutions/increase-renewables/renewable-energy-and.html#_WtAc6YjwblU) (last visited Apr. 12, 2018) (providing four fact sheets on renewable energy and the natural synergy with agricultural and rural America); Daniel Cusick, *Farmers Find a New Cash Crop: Renewable Energy*, SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN (Nov. 26, 2014), <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/farmers-find-new-cash-crop-renewable->

is also growth, with the potential for much more, in the sciences and agricultural-related technology, as we seek means to address concerns such as climate change, water quality, and soil health.<sup>20</sup> Agriculture as a whole is an industry that matters for so many reasons and to different people for different reasons, yet Americans are increasingly removed from rural American and agricultural production,<sup>21</sup> leading to many misunderstandings and misconceptions about the impact of agriculture on our everyday lives. One of the most direct effects is the fact that Americans pay a lower percentage of household income on food than the rest of the developed world, in some cases much, much less.<sup>22</sup> That is due, at least in part, to our agricultural policies such as those in the Farm Bill.

However, the importance of agriculture to those not directly connected has waned over the years. Only 14% of the U.S. population resides in rural areas, despite almost 75% of

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[energy/](http://www.luxresearchinc.com/news-and-events/press-releases/read/global-biofuels-rise-67-billion-gallons-2022-next-generation); Michael Essery, *Global Biofuels to Rise to 67 Billion Gallons in 2022 as Next-Generation Technologies Take Over*, LUXRESEARCH (Feb. 14 2017), <http://www.luxresearchinc.com/news-and-events/press-releases/read/global-biofuels-rise-67-billion-gallons-2022-next-generation>.

<sup>20</sup> See ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, AGRICULTURE AND CLIMATE CHANGE 1 (2015), <https://www.oecd.org/tad/sustainable-agriculture/agriculture-climate-change-september-2015.pdf> (discussing use of technical solutions to help mitigate role of agriculture in climate change); David Austin & Molly K. Macauley, *Cutting Through Environmental Issues: Technology as a Double-Edged Sword*, BROOKINGS INSTITUTE (Dec. 1, 2001), <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/cutting-through-environmental-issues-technology-as-a-double-edged-sword/> (highlighting technology as a tool, but also a concern, when it comes to addressing environmental challenges related to climate and water quality, among others); KATHARINE GARVIN, WILTON PARK, CONFERENCE REPORT: GLOBAL FOOD SECURITY: THE ROLES OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY 1 (Oct. 2012), <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Global%20food%20security%20the%20role%20of%20science%20and%20technology.pdf> (identifying need to develop new and adopt emerging technologies that address many of the concerns related to food security worldwide).

<sup>21</sup> See Mike Maciag, *America's Rural-Urban Divide is Growing*, GOVERNING (Apr. 28, 2013), <http://www.governing.com/gov-americas-rural-urban-divide-is-growing.html>.

<sup>22</sup> See U.S. DEPT. OF AGRIC., ECON. RES. SERV., PERCENT OF CONSUMER EXPENDITURES SPENT ON FOOD, ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES, AND TOBACCO THAT WERE CONSUMED AT HOME, BY SELECTED COUNTRIES (2016); [https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/DataFiles/50606/table97\\_2016.xlsx?v=43019](https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/DataFiles/50606/table97_2016.xlsx?v=43019) (providing map highlighting expenditures by country); Alex Gray, *Which Countries Spend the Most on Food? This Map Will Show You*, WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM (Dec. 7, 2016), <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/12/this-map-shows-how-much-each-country-spends-on-food/>.



the U.S. land base considered rural.<sup>23</sup> The urban/rural divide is also seen in the composition of the elected officials who draft and debate the Farm Bill, with over 80% of our elected officials not representing rural parts of the country.<sup>24</sup> When some of the more modern battles over the Farm Bill began, nutrition support programs (formerly called food stamps) were combined with the more traditional agricultural support programs, making the bill more appealing to a broader audience.<sup>25</sup> Over time, though, that coalition of support has been waning, leading to prolonged battles each renewal cycle,<sup>26</sup> and I believe a process that has kept the Farm Bill from evolving in a way that more directly reflects and meets both our current and future needs in the agricultural sector.

That is not to say that there are not changes to the Farm Bill with each cycle. Some years those changes have been more profound than others.<sup>27</sup> I believe that, overall, the Farm Bill has maintained its status quo over the years in terms of the core types of programs and support, despite the addition of new or pilot programs or making changes to existing programs or payment types. It also demonstrates the strength of the coalitions that seek to help define two of the key aspects of the Farm Bill: commodity support (including direct support and crop insurance) and nutrition

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<sup>23</sup> U.S. DEPT. OF AGRIC., *supra* note 16.

<sup>24</sup> Christopher Doering, *As More Move to the City, Does Rural America Still Matter?*, USA TODAY (Jan 13, 2013), <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/01/12/rural-decline-congress/1827407/>.

<sup>25</sup> See Philip Brasher, *Lesson #4: Linking Farm, Food Programs is Crucial to Farm Bill Passage*, AGRIPULSE (Mar. 5, 2017), <https://www.agri-pulse.com/articles/8996-lesson-4-linking-farm-food-programs-is-crucial-to-farm-bill-success>; see Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP): A Short History of SNAP, U.S. DEPT. OF AGRIC., FOOD AND NUTRITION SERV., <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/short-history-snap> (last updated Nov. 28, 2017).

<sup>26</sup> See e.g., Sara Wyant, *Lesson #1, Every Farm Bill is Unique, The Last One Was a Doozy*, AGRIPULSE (Feb. 10, 2017), <https://www.agri-pulse.com/articles/8894-lesson-1-every-farm-bill-is-unique-the-last-one-was-a-doozy>.

<sup>27</sup> See e.g., RALPH M. CHITE, CONGRESSIONAL RES. SERV., THE 2014 FARM BILL (P.L. 113-79): SUMMARY AND SIDE-BY-SIDE i (2014), <http://nationalaglawcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/R43076.pdf> (highlighting significant changes to traditional commodity support payment programs); see generally Neil D. Hamilton, *The 2014 Farm Bill: Lessons in Patience, Politics and Persuasion*, 19 DRAKE J. AGRIC. L 1, 1-37 (2014) (identifying key elements and changes in the 2014 Farm Bill).

programs.<sup>28</sup>

It is in many ways necessary to keep the status quo though to maintain a core coalition of legislative support.<sup>29</sup> Despite changes on the surface of the law, certain new initiatives, and various attempts to modernize it, I believe the Farm Bill remains more reactive than proactive. It reacts to current market conditions and needs, and it primarily reacts to the current state of the industry and world.<sup>30</sup> While the Farm Bill is an important part of agricultural policy that provides support to many individual and organizations, it could do so much more by helping shape the future of the industry instead of focusing on the current state of the industry. A shift in focus, in long-term goals, and in the coalitions of legislators and organizations that help shape the Farm Bill, would provide an opportunity to draft a Farm Bill that would proactively lead and shape our food and agricultural industries for the future.

We must start from the premise that there is value in building and supporting a strong agricultural economy within the United States. However, we need to make sure that the programs and policies in effect to do so also support the rest of our food, environmental, and energy needs. Agriculture is not an insular industry. We need to ensure that farmers producing our food supply have forms of support to ensure our industry thrives. However, we also need to ensure that the agricultural

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<sup>28</sup> See *Agricultural Act of 2014: Highlights and Implications*, U.S. DEPT. OF AGRIC., ECON. RES. SERV., <https://www.ers.usda.gov/agricultural-act-of-2014-highlights-and-implications/> (last updated Mar. 19, 2018) (noting that crop commodity payments and nutrition make up the main expenditures of the current Farm Bill); Stephanie Mercier, *The Making of a Farm Bill*, 31 CHOICES 1, 4 (2016), [http://ageconsearch.umn.edu/bitstream/244572/2/cmsarticle\\_527.pdf](http://ageconsearch.umn.edu/bitstream/244572/2/cmsarticle_527.pdf) (discussing in part the formation of coalitions to support key elements of the Farm Bill).

<sup>29</sup> See *id.* at 2, 4.

<sup>30</sup> See generally Sara Wyant, *Lesson #1, Every Farm Bill is Unique, The Last One Was a Doozy*, AGRIPULSE (Feb. 10, 2017), <https://www.agri-pulse.com/articles/8894-lesson-1-every-farm-bill-is-unique-the-last-one-was-a-doozy> (noting that during the contentious debate surrounding the 2014 Farm Bill, net farm income peaked and legislators looked to the current environment and farm economy where prices, and spending, were high, stating that “From a political lens, some lawmakers said farmers were making too much money and didn’t need any more help from the government. And many commercial farmers and ranchers weren’t terribly interested in what the government, or more specifically, the farm bill, could do for them”).

support is done in a way that complements and supports other U.S. policy priorities and interests, including public health and environmental concerns.<sup>31</sup> If we do not separate agriculture from other interests, but instead think of them as a complementary and dependent pieces of a larger puzzle, can we start to ease some of the contention and divides when it comes to the Farm Bill? Perhaps we can then realize that the agricultural industry of the future is more than just commodity production, and that for agriculture to succeed, it needs to be deeply intertwined with environmental, energy, research, and rural interests. This can be done, with goals such as fighting climate change,<sup>32</sup> building stronger rural communities,<sup>33</sup> improving nutrition and access to healthy foods,<sup>34</sup> and in particular, harnessing the focus on STEM initiatives to support public research providing tools and solutions that will allow agriculture to thrive in the future both domestically and abroad.<sup>35</sup>

By developing a more holistic Farm Bill, and by building new coalitions with equal voices and input from numerous areas,

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<sup>31</sup> See generally NETWORK FOR PUBLIC HEALTH, ISSUE BRIEF: HOW THE FARM BILL AFFECTS PUBLIC HEALTH 1 (2011), [https://www.networkforphl.org/\\_asset/76kz89/Farm-Bill-and-Public-Health-FINAL.pdf](https://www.networkforphl.org/_asset/76kz89/Farm-Bill-and-Public-Health-FINAL.pdf) (noting four key areas “in which the Farm Bill affects health: nutrition, environmental health, emergency preparedness and community health” and identifying areas of opportunity for improvement).

<sup>32</sup> See Todd Edwards & Matt Russell, *Earth Friendly Agriculture for Soil, Water, and Climate: A Multijurisdictional Cooperative Approach*; 21 DRAKE J. AGRIC. L. 325, 339-40 (2016) (discussing how the Farm Bill could be used to create a market for environmental services, similar to that being done to create a market for farm products in the energy sector).

<sup>33</sup> See U.S. DEPT. OF AGRIC., REPORT TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES FROM THE TASK FORCE ON AGRICULTURE AND RURAL PROSPERITY 2-3 (2018), <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/rural-prosperity-report.pdf> (identifying over 100 recommendations for the federal government to consider in order to help improve life in rural America, centered around e-connectivity, economic development, innovation and technology, workforce, and quality of life).

<sup>34</sup> See CENTER FOR SCIENCE IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST, NUTRITION POLICIES FOR 2018 FARM BILL 1 (2017), <https://cspinet.org/sites/default/files/attachment/2018-farm-nutrition-bill.pdf> (PDF download available on webpage) (stating “recommendations to address hunger while improving nutrition and health, and to increase access to affordable, nutritious food, particularly for vulnerable populations” from numerous organizations).

<sup>35</sup> See Joyce E. Parker & David J. Wagner, *From the USDA: Educating the Next Generation: Funding Opportunities in Food, Agricultural, Natural Resources, and Social Sciences Education*, 15 CBE – LIFE SCIENCES EDUCATION 1, 1 (2016), <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5008903/pdf/fe5.pdf>.

there is also the potential to lessen, if not remove, the legislative strife that occurs every Farm Bill cycle.<sup>36</sup> The more that private and public industries and individuals can work together to get behind proactive and innovative policies, the more likely our politicians are to listen and provide support.

### **Shifting power of the consumer**

As we talk about building new coalitions and a broad base of support (and understanding) for future Farm Bills, we cannot overlook the role and power of the consumer in this process.

Consumers are increasingly exhibiting power over the agricultural sector.<sup>37</sup> You can often hear examples in the news, from increased demand to know how food is produced and where it originates,<sup>38</sup> to recently causing several of the world's leading food manufacturers to make major changes in agricultural inputs and ingredients.<sup>39</sup> Food manufacturers are showing an increasing inclination to respond to consumers when it comes to certain demands and concerns, and this has a direct impact on agricultural producers. If more and more major food companies decide to source sugar from non-GE sources, the market for

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<sup>36</sup> See Hamilton, *supra* note 27, at 2-5 (discussing the hotly debated, and delayed, process that went into crafting and passing the 2014 Farm Bill).

<sup>37</sup> See LABEL INSIGHT, 2016 LABEL INSIGHT FOOD REVOLUTION STUDY, HOW CONSUMER DEMAND FOR TRANSPARENCY IS SHAPING THE FOOD INDUSTRY 2 (2016), [https://www.labelinsight.com/hubfs/Label\\_Insight-Food-Revolution-Study.pdf?hsCtaTracking=fc71fa82-7e0b-4b05-b2b4-dc1adc992d333%7C95a8befe-d0cc-4b8b-8102-529d937eb427](https://www.labelinsight.com/hubfs/Label_Insight-Food-Revolution-Study.pdf?hsCtaTracking=fc71fa82-7e0b-4b05-b2b4-dc1adc992d333%7C95a8befe-d0cc-4b8b-8102-529d937eb427).

<sup>38</sup> *Id.*; see e.g., CENTER FOR FOOD INTEGRITY, PRESS RELEASE, MOST CONSUMERS SAY THEY LACK ACCESS TO INFORMATION ABOUT FOOD: HOW CAN THE FOOD INDUSTRY SATISFY THEIR APPETITES? 1, 1-2 (2016), <http://www.foodintegrity.org.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Consumers-Say-They-Lack-Access-to-Information-About-Food-CFI.pdf>; see e.g., Isaac Fletcher, *Food Producers: Consumers Demand Transparency*, FOODONLINE (June 6, 2014), <https://www.foodonline.com/doc/food-producers-consumers-demand-transparency-0001>.

<sup>39</sup> *Dannon Announces Breakthrough Sweeping Commitment for Sustainable Agriculture, More Natural Ingredients and Greater Transparency*, DANNON (Apr. 27, 2016), <http://www.dannon.com/the-dannon-pledge-on-sustainable-agriculture-naturality-and-transparency/>; Tom Meersman, *Hershey Dumps Sugar Beets Because of GM Concerns*, STAR TRIBUNE (Dec. 27, 2015), <http://www.startribune.com/hershey-dumps-sugar-beets-because-of-gm-concerns/363498311/>; Jane Lindholm, *Some Food Companies are Quietly Dumping GMO Ingredients*, NAT'L PUB. RADIO (July 22, 2014), <https://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2014/07/22/333725880/some-food-producers-are-quietly-dumping-gmo-ingredients>.

genetically-engineered sugar beets will be severely impacted. Farmers may seek alternative seed sources, but could find that there are not sufficient supplies of non-GE seeds available, or that those available may not respond as well to our current climate and volatile weather patterns. Consumers, with a demand for non-GE, non-organic products initiated this action which trickles down not only to the producer, but to the many industries and entities that are depending on that crop throughout the growing cycle: input suppliers, processing companies, the rural communities and towns where these entities are located, and the many employees that live and work in these communities. We cannot have a discussion about food and agricultural industry power dynamics and policy initiatives without including the consumer as a voice.

### **Conclusion**

As a colleague of mine told me, “Agriculture solves human problems.” Agriculture has the potential to solve many of our human problems, only one of which is how we feed a growing population. The more we think of the Farm Bill as a proactive tool for solving developing problems and designing the food and agricultural system of the future, and not just one supporting our current systems and policies, the better chance we have to expand and develop effective and efficient farm policies. If we continue with the status quo, with the same coalitions, the same fights, and ultimately, a newer version of essentially the same bill, that will not happen.

Change is not easy, nor does it come fast. Revamping our Farm Bill in a way to make it a proactive tool that can do everything we ask of it to do in its many Titles will take time, concerted effort, and the dedication and support of a broad group of coalitions and organizations. In our current political climate, I remain skeptical of any real success in this area. However, I remain hopeful that coalition-building in the private sector may start to occur and that rural and urban interests, environmental and agricultural interests, and those seeking to ensure there is a sufficient and nutritious food supply available to all, can start to

build relationships.<sup>40</sup> We need to move beyond our traditional camps and the entrenched interests and instead build relationships that can help build bridges, reduce misunderstandings and misconceptions, encourage education and cooperation, and better realize the potential of what food and agricultural policy, and the Farm Bill in particular, can be.

If we want to develop a strong agricultural industry, one built around strong rural communities and with policies in place that support environmental, energy, and public health goals, then it is time to come together. Agriculture is not an insular industry, and in order for it to succeed, it needs to be a partner in all ways with consumers and even opposing interest, to craft the Farm Bill of the future. Starting small and having these conversations on a local level, hoping to build upon them from there, is a good first step. These are big hopes and big goals, but there is real potential if we all come together in a constructive fashion to build a sustainable agricultural system that truly meets the needs of the country and the world, beyond all that it does now.

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<sup>40</sup>We are seeing many new voices emerge in the Farm Bill discussion and seek to have influence, but a key step is encouraging collaboration and not competition among the various groups, while ensuring groups with historically less impact on the process are heard as well. See D. Lee Miller, *A Seat at the Table: New Voices Urge Farm Bill Reform*, 127 YALE L.J. F. 395, 409 (2017) (discussing role of coalition of food law and policy professionals in advocating for Farm Bill reform); see *Our Mission*, PLATE OF THE UNION, <http://www.plateoftheunion.com/about/> (last visited Apr. 12, 2018) (announcing a new collaborative campaign for Farm Bill advocacy between a series of partners). See also, SUSAN SCHNEIDER, *FOOD FARMING AND SUSTAINABILITY: READINGS IN AGRICULTURAL LAW* 18 (2d ed. 2016) (stating that “development of agricultural laws and overall farm policy have traditionally been left to those involved in the industry... In recent years, however, a variety of voices outside of the agricultural industry have increasingly sought a place at the table in agricultural policy debates ... [and are] often critical of not only agricultural policies but food policies as well.”).