



Family
Farm
Action

BUILD BACK BETTER

Our Call to Action and
Roadmap for Rural America



(Lance Cheung and Preston Keres/USDA)

The “Biden/Harris plan for Rural America” lays a foundation for bringing economic vitality to rural communities in the face of racial injustice, economic decline, climate change, and a devastating pandemic.

The initiatives set out are broad-based and sweeping but it all boils down to *people*. Our plan to support the Biden Build Back Better initiative is laser-focused on *human connections on all sides of this equation*; those in need of a lift up, as well as those who can, in their work on the ground, strongly reaffirm the ideals of democracy working as partners to ease the suffering of these rural communities. Along the way, we hope America’s rural areas will thrive and concomitantly, we believe, too, a new stock of community leaders will develop in the process and pay it forward.

We Must do More than restore and revive. We must build a rural America where everyone has the opportunity to share in the prosperity they help build. For far too long, Black Farmers, Indigenous Farmers, and communities of color have been denied opportunity because of the historically deep rooted discrimination that has been America’s food and agriculture system.

We Must do More to end the stranglehold monopoly corporations have over our rural economies and end the wealth gap that exists. Today, a handful of corporations and their CEOs have the power to dictate who gets to farm, what they farm, and who gets to eat. If rural America is to be a thriving hub of economic opportunity for all, justice has to be brought to bear within the food and agriculture markets.

We Can do More; we can achieve these goals through enhanced, local partnerships with department personnel on the ground and virtually. We should strive to close, in new ways, the distance gap between Washington D.C. decision makers and rural communities.

We Can do More; we can create significant and inspiring “generational” change and therefore a brighter future for rural communities that actually fosters rather than hinders longevity. We want young folks to want to stick around their hometowns to build a life and a stronger community.

We Can do More; but only if the Biden Administration takes bold new steps. In the end, rural America needs a “moonshot” that is both aspirational and also grounded in reality. Most of all though, we must show the good that government can do without being onerous, but instead by respecting individual freedom and inspiring the notion of liberty and happiness for all.

The policies within this document are endorsed by:

Family Farm Action, People’s Action, American Grassfed Association, American Economic Liberties Project, Farm Aid, Socially Responsible Agriculture Project, Humane Society Legislative Fund, Center for Food Safety, Open Markets Institute, Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, RuralOrganizing.org Humane Society of the United States, Revolving Door Project, Food & Water Watch, Friends of the Earth, National Housing Law Project, and Climate Crisis Policy.

Our roadmap provides both policy and personnel suggestions focused on the initiatives needed for the first 100 days of the Biden Administration.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Challenges

Pg 4

KEY ISSUES

Building a Bench in Rural America

Pg 6

Rooting Out Systemic Racism and Creating Opportunity for All

Pg 9

Democratizing the Agrifood System

Pg 13

Combating Climate Change Through Rural Innovation

Pg 21

Modernizing Rural Infrastructure and Investing in Its People

Pg 27



Nuri Icgoren, with his wife Sofia, operate Urban Sprout Farms, a biodynamic, certified organic urban farm. (Preston Keres /USDA)



CHALLENGES

We all know the challenges rural America faces are significant:

- » Poverty rates are 30% higher than they are in urban areas
- » Population loss has eroded the tax base needed for infrastructure investment
- » Hospitals are hours away and constantly teetering on the brink of closing
- » Many schools only have funding to be open 4 days a week
- » Food, housing, and healthcare insecurity are just one unexpected bill away

Folks who live in small towns and rural areas are hard-working and tight-knit but in spite of their resilience, they've been left behind. In the absence of policymakers doing their job and showing up, a [small handful of corporations seized control of our farm and food system](#), broadband left the last rural mile out of the digital revolution, and new investments in its people have failed to materialize.

These difficulties were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Already struggling rural communities reeling from our broken system faced rising food costs, a lack of healthcare access, and even greater Postal Service delays carrying medicines, social security checks, and other vital products.



COVID-19 has laid bare the serious economic and social problems in rural America that must be addressed through an energetic Biden/Harris policy agenda.

Our roadmap provides both policy and personnel suggestions focused on the initiatives needed for the first 100 days of the Biden Administration.

This document is the result of input from a diverse group of organizations and individuals with decades of experience working in agricultural policy and rural economic development across the country to provide suggestions on how to rebuild a post-COVID rural America.

The personnel recommendations also come from many organizations who call rural America home and are dedicated to improving the lives of their friends and neighbors through sound policymaking. These initial hires will make great additions to the Biden Administration as it carries out its ambitious policy goals.

KEY ISSUES



1

Building a Bench in Rural America

2

**Rooting Out Systemic Racism
and Creating Opportunity for All**

3

Democratizing the Agrifood System

4

**Combating Climate Change
through Rural Innovation**

5

**Modernizing Rural Infrastructure
and Investing in Its People**

1 Building a Bench in Rural America

→ **Find solutions in rural America by involving rural Americans in the decision-making process.** Solicit input and solutions from the communities and individuals most directly affected by decades of neglect

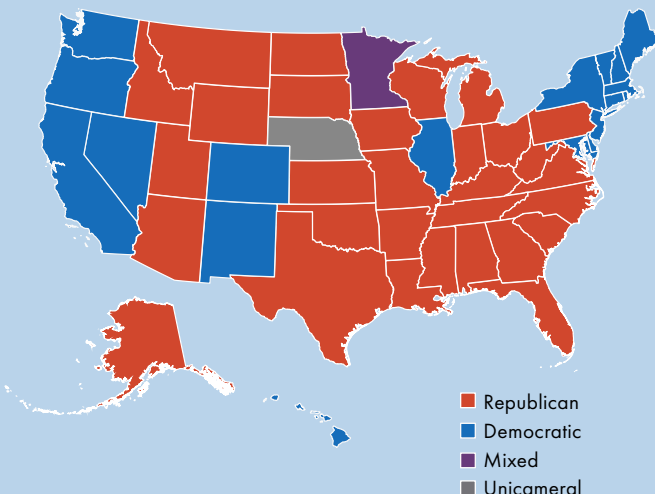
→ **Recruit talented and passionate individuals** who represent the rich diversity found in rural America, including young people who have served in the military, national service programs, and as Peace Corps Volunteers

→ **Identify talented and motivated professionals** for key political appointee positions who are ready to start the important work of the USDA on Day One. Rural America has always been willing to serve when asked (more than 40% of our enlisted hail from rural America) and the Biden Administration should attract the brightest minds from these communities to solve its toughest challenges

A NATION DIVIDED

In many states, urban-rural partisan divides leave legislatures heavily dominated by one party or the other.

[Click here to find out more.](#)



GOVERNING
THE FUTURE OF STATES AND LOCALITIES

“There are only two split legislatures in the entire country — Congress and Minnesota,” says Matt Walter, president of the Republican State Leadership Committee.

“Everyone else lives in a state that is either red or blue.”

Building a Bench in Rural America

Every bit as important as the policy path the Biden Administration chooses is the personnel selected to carry out the work of USDA. Traditionally, Schedule C political appointee positions have been stuffed with the well-connected in Washington D.C. We encourage a new approach which pulls from the vast talent pool across the country.

Furthermore, in an effort to give invaluable experience to the next generation of elected officials, it should be made a priority to employ the young and ambitious folks already steeped in rural policy and politics. This is, perhaps, the greatest legacy a President Biden can leave for a brighter, more progressive, future in rural America.

To ensure these new USDA employees are successful, they will need the support of those who have spent decades at the Department. The institutional knowledge held by longtime USDA employees is invaluable and efforts should be made to connect newly appointed employees with these individuals. These connections will provide a seamless transition and “planting the seed” of the next generation of rural advocates. Family Farm Action has submitted personnel recommendations to the Biden Administration’s agency review team. We will continue communicating further recommendations throughout the transition period.

(Preston Keres /USDA)



2 Rooting Out Systemic Racism and Creating Opportunity for All

- **Create opportunity for all in rural America by addressing systemic racism** in existing USDA programs and proactively ensuring that future agency efforts center on empowering marginalized communities
- **Build a system of trust and respect** between and among rural communities of color and predominantly white communities



FOOD INSECURITY, MAPPED

Food insecurity is worst in the parts of America with heavy concentrations of Black, Brown, and First Nations citizens.

[Click here to find out more.](#)



(Lance Cheung and Preston Keres/USDA)



(Lance Cheung/USDA)

Rooting Out Systemic Racism and Creating Opportunity for All

There is an underappreciated diversity in rural America. Areas that are majority minority include much of the Black population in the Southeast, Native Americans in the Great Plains and Pacific Northwest, and a large Latino population in the Southeast and Southwest. There are also huge portions of rural America with higher populations of foreign-born citizens who are integral to our food system at every level.

Even before COVID-19, [investigative reporting](#) showed that Black diabetics in rural Mississippi are significantly more likely to lose limbs than white and wealthy patients with the same disease. The New York Times' 1619 Project highlighted [stories like those](#) of June and Angie Provost who lost their ancestral farm lands to a discriminatory crop loan

system in Northern Louisiana. Without explicit policies tailored to meet the specific economic needs of these communities, we will continue to repeat the cycle of poverty that has left racial minorities in a relative caste system compared to their white counterparts.

The good news is that many effective policies to alleviate extreme poverty and racial inequities have the potential to enjoy broad support in rural communities. We envision an economy free of discrimination, worker abuse, wage suppression, and monopoly corporate power. Instead, the following policies will create an economic hub in rural America:

CREATE A CULTURE THAT SERVES THE INTERESTS OF MARGINALIZED FARMERS

Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) farmers have experienced a long history of discrimination in rural America at the hands of the USDA. We believe the best way to change the culture of the USDA, is to change its personnel. Leading by example, the Biden Administration should hire political appointees that reflect the diversity and cultural knowledge that exists in rural America.

FORM AN INDEPENDENT CIVIL RIGHTS OVERSIGHT BOARD

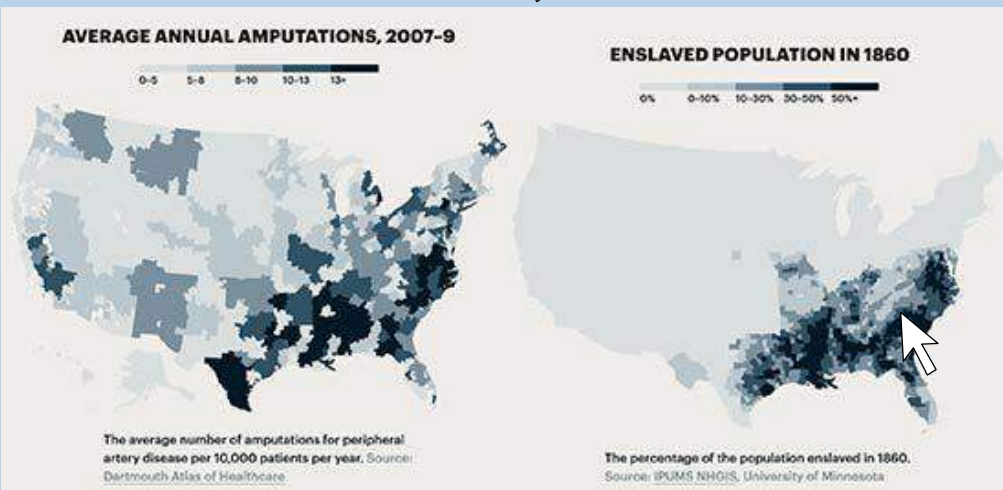
BIPOC farmers need a fair and independent process to defend their civil rights. We support restructuring the Office of Civil Rights to protect the rights of historically discriminated against farmers and ranchers. The Board would review appeal decisions made by the Office of Assistant Secretary of Civil Rights (OASCR) at USDA as well as conduct regular reviews to assess the office's compliance with applicable civil rights laws.

ESTABLISH AN EQUITY COMMISSION

USDA should conduct a top to bottom review of all programs to address inequities with the goal of ending the legacy of discrimination. Through the establishment of an Equity Commission, USDA can understand the barriers for racial minority farmers and find solutions to improve the status of these producers by ending systematic mistreatment, improving Farm Service Agency county committees, and addressing the unjust and racially motivated stealing of land from black owners and heirs.

REQUIRE STATES TO MEET FEDERAL MATCH FOR HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Congress established 21 Land Grant Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in 1890, creating the opportunity for Black students to attend colleges and universities. As with the Land Grant Universities established by law in 1862, the Federal government provides funds for agricultural research provided a non-federal source provides matching funds. While states fully meet the required match for Land Grant Universities, they have not met the 15% match for HBCUs resulting in a loss of key resources the HBCUs could be making in research and development. We support efforts to provide parity in the federal match between the HBCUs and the Land Grant schools.



SYSTEMIC RACISM DRIVES POOR HEALTH OUTCOMES

The legacy of slavery is evident today in subpar access to healthcare.

[Click here to find out more.](#)

INCREASE FUNDING FOR TRIBAL COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES (TCU)

It wasn't until 1994, that USDA created programs to provide federal grants to federally recognized tribal colleges. There are over 30 TCUs that provide not only higher education courses for students, but also programming for the communities they serve. These TCUs are perpetually underfunded having received nearly the same level of funding for the past 26 years. Unlike the Historically Black Colleges and Universities, there is no state or local government obligation to provide matching funding to the TCUs forcing them to make difficult choices on programming in order to educate students with few resources. We support increased funding for the TCUs to better serve Native students.



Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA) Research Assistant Kyle Kootswaytewa irrigates rows of corn and checks on the health of corn and black tomato crops in the IAIA Demonstration Garden, in Santa Fe, NM. Some of the produce will be available in the cafeteria. (Preston Keres/USDA)

CLYBURN 10/20/30

Persistent poverty is defined as a county where the poverty level has been 20 percent or higher over the past thirty years. The overall rate of poverty is higher in rural counties than metro counties and the highest rates of poverty are found in the Southeast, including the Mississippi Delta, Appalachia, Latino communities in the Southwest, and on Native lands. We support Congressman Clyburn and Senator Booker's 10-20-30 anti-poverty formula to require that a minimum of ten percent of federal funds of programs go to communities with "persistent" poverty. After initial success in a few programs at USDA, we believe the policy should be more broadly applied not only at USDA, but throughout the Federal Government. At USDA, rural communities would be targeted for new health care clinics, broadband internet access, and affordable housing.

REFORM THE FARM SERVICE AGENCY LOAN PROGRAM

Many individuals in rural America live in "credit deserts" or areas without access to a bank. There has been a dramatic increase in the number of banks that have left rural America that serve communities of color, and in particular, Native Americans. We recommend restructuring the loans so there is a long-term investment that grows with the 25 years or more farming career of the borrower. They should also provide for greater opportunity to think through future investments and infrastructure needs like environmentally friendly farming practices. Changes to the debt servicing needs should provide an opportunity for the principal on the loan to be reinvested in the community and with other agricultural producers to build long-term economic stability. Currently, loans are structured on a 3-4 year plan that does not provide the opportunity to think long term on climate mitigation strategies. Farmers are also required to transition out of FSA operating credit within seven years which limits their ability to make long term plans. When farmers are given the ability to think about the long-term health of their operations, we all prosper. Efforts should be made to reform the FSA to allow farmers and ranchers to set their operations up for long-term success.



Native American farmer and retired teacher Jerri Parker grew up on in agriculture, but now she operates her diversified farm in Cromwell, Oklahoma. With hoop houses, vegetables, 300 chickens, eggs and beef, she started sell to the public in 2004. (Preston Keres/USDA)

JUSTICE FOR FOOD CHAIN WORKERS

Food chain workers are vital to keeping our grocery store shelves stocked and food in the bellies of folks across the country. These workers are mostly Latino and immigrant workers with little political power and they need advocates at USDA. Their hard work in difficult situations in fields and meatpacking plants is largely unseen by Americans who rely on them to supply their food. Food chain workers need to be included in the conversation. Not only should their work be recognized with higher pay and earn paid time off, but efforts should also be made to address the harmful environments in which they work. We support programs to correct exposure to harassment and workplace hazards. We support a redesign of the Farm Labor Survey to create higher wages for farm laborers and efforts to address consolidation in the meatpacking plants that have resulted in suppressed wages for meat pack workers.

LEARN FROM NATIVE FARMERS

Native American farmers have been practicing regenerative and environmentally friendly agricultural production for centuries. USDA would be well served to listen to Indigenous farmers to develop technical assistance to support other farmers moving towards sustainable agriculture methods. The Biden Administration should instruct the next Agriculture Secretary to cultivate a relationship with Indigenous farmers in a way that builds relationships and institutional knowledge that will improve sustainable agriculture practices.

ENSURE WORKER SAFETY IN ANIMAL AGRICULTURE

Our current model of animal production incentivizes output at the expense of the health and safety of employees who come predominantly from Black, Latino, and immigrant communities. The speeds and methods used to process animals in slaughterhouses can often result in employees becoming ill or seriously injured, and over the last several years the USDA has increased the speeds at which these facilities can operate, despite outcry from workers. The Biden Administration should work to remedy this issue by revoking Trump Administration waivers granted to slaughter facilities that now operate at unacceptably dangerous speeds. Additionally, the Biden Administration should withdraw the New Swine Slaughter Inspection System rule promulgated by the Trump Administration, which eliminated maximum line speeds and allowed company employees, rather than federal inspectors, to take over inspections in hog slaughter facilities. The USDA should also require chicken slaughter plants to convert to "Controlled Atmospheric Stunning" to ensure that animals are humanely and adequately rendered unconscious before being sent to the slaughter line. This is both more humane for the animals and it significantly reduces the risk of injury as employees are dealing with unconscious animals in the light instead of having to shackle clawing, defecating birds in the dark.

3 Democratizing the Agrifood System

- **Monopolies** have devastated farm country over the past 40 years; it's time we step up antitrust enforcement and return the power of our food system to independent farmers and food chain workers
- **Establishing local and regional food systems will create new economic opportunities** that make our food system more resilient in the face of unexpected disasters
- **Support new and beginning farmers**, especially veteran, BIPOC, and female farmers to bring new voices and ideas to agriculture



↑ Veteran Travis Appel, his wife Ashley, and their three children on their farm in Springdale, Arkansas. The Appel family sells produce at local farmers markets and at a roadside store they recently opened on the farm. (Jessica Robinson Photography via USDA)



The New York Times

FOOD INSECURITY IN THE HEARTLAND

All sorts of communities are open to new ideas and policies to make rural life better.

[Click here to find out more.](#)

“...Communities tell me: We don’t want to use the term co-op,” said Sean Park, a program manager for the Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs. He has helped guide rural towns through setting up their own markets. “It’s ironic because it was farmers who pioneered co-ops. They’re O.K. with ‘community store.’ **They’re the same thing, but you’ve got to speak the language.**”



Democratizing the Agrifood System

Today, no greater concentration of corporate power, monopolistic practices, and exclusion of economic prosperity exists than in the food and agriculture markets.

Because our government has failed to do its job, a handful of transnational corporations and their overpaid CEOs control our farm and food system, driving family farmers off the land, abusing workers, degrading our environment, and leaving consumers without healthy and safe food choices.

These monopoly corporations focus almost entirely on their bottom line, abandoning their responsibility to be good stewards of those things under their control. This corporate consolidation has had a disproportionately negative impact on communities and farmers of color and has not delivered the benefits to the American consumer that was promised in a “get big or get out” economy. We believe the Biden Administration can level the playing field for our nation’s farmers and ranchers by supporting a [Farmers Bill of Rights](#) and these are a few places to start:



TOP: Green Bexar Farm at the Pearl Farmers Market in San Antonio, Texas. ABOVE: Farmers and ranchers herd cattle that survived the Atlas Blizzard in South Dakota. (Lance Cheung/USDA)

ENFORCE ANTITRUST LAWS AND REVIEW MERGERS

In addition to enforcement of the Clayton, Sherman, and Packers and Stockyards Act, the Biden Administration should order a moratorium on further big ag mergers and begin a review of the effects of concentration on our agrifood system. The current vertically integrated models have been proven to be a massive food and national security liability through the COVID-19 pandemic and more must be done to ensure a safe, vibrant, and equitable agrifood system that places the safety and economic prosperity of farmers and food chain workers above shareholder dividends.



ENABLE SCHOOLS TO BUY FRESH AND LOCAL

It's no secret that America faces a childhood obesity epidemic. Not only is this detrimental to their long term personal health, it damages military readiness, and increases average health care costs. Allowing and encouraging schools to purchase fresh, healthy, whole, local foods from nearby producers not only boosts local economies, it also helps improve the health of our children. This also provides producers with a new client and revenue stream that allows them to break free of the corporate control that plagues our agricultural system. We encourage the Biden Administration to support legislation, like Marcia Fudge's [Farm to School Act](#), that would allow school districts across the country to procure food from local producers.

REFORM THE FEDERAL COMMODITY CHECKOFF PROGRAM

Reform to the Checkoff tax is long overdue. The USDA requires farmers at operations of all sizes to participate in and pay into checkoff programs, funds from which are designed to promote certain commodities over others. Unfortunately, these funds are often misused by and appropriated by large corporations that have unfair access to checkoff boards, instead of benefiting the small, family farms that give up more by paying into them. A Biden Administration should help family farmers have fair access to markets by reforming the regulations surrounding the checkoff program to prohibit anti competitive behavior and to increase transparency and oversight of the program.



(Lance Cheung/USDA)

PROMOTE COMPETITION

Prior to the Reagan Administration, mergers and acquisitions were reviewed by following guidelines which prioritized competition and fairness in the marketplace. Now, potential mergers are reviewed by using a "consumer welfare" standard that evaluates final product prices for the consumer and potential efficiency gains for the company. This lens takes too narrow a focus and has led to an onslaught of agribusiness mergers that have driven millions of farmers out of business. We encourage the Biden Administration to return to rules which promote competition and fair markets. This requires no legislative action and can be done unilaterally through the executive branch. The restoration of these guidelines and accompanying competition will lead to increased innovation and higher wages for those throughout the food supply chain that will help rebuild a hollowed out middle class.

SUPPORT LOCAL AND REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEMS

Research published by the [Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis](#) demonstrated that if wealth is to be restored in rural America, an investment in local and regional food systems should be the priority. Additional research has shown rural communities' GDP increases through employment and sales generated by local food systems. Local and regional food systems include farmers' markets, food hubs aggregating and distributing locally produced food and food products, and community-supported agriculture networks ushering food items from farm to table. Unfortunately, many regulatory and economic barriers stand in the

way of rural America fully realizing the wealth creation of a developed local and regional food system that includes BIPOC farmers and communities. We recommend boosting support for Local Agriculture Marketing Programs (LAMP), Healthy Food Financing Initiative (HFFI), and the Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive (FINI) matching program to ensure local healthy food is accessible to all who live throughout rural America. With renewed investment in processing, manufacturing, local food retail, and acquisition of local food products through government buying programs, rural America will be at the forefront of building a resilient and nutritious local and regional food system.



↑ TOP LEFT: Cody and Natalie Scott started with a 10-acre pecan grove in 2017 and has since converted one acre for a wide variety of produce on micro irrigated beds outdoors and in three seasonal high tunnels installed with the technical and financial conservation assistance of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). TOP RIGHT: Micro-greens and sprouts thrive in a high tunnel greenhouse. The tunnels pack in seedlings and plants, which helps create a super-dense yeild, resulting in more than 1,300 plants in one high tunnel. BOTTOM LEFT: National School Lunch Program (NSLP) Seamless Summer Option's (SSO) alternative to traditional congregant feeding; this affords safe distancing with curbside distribution during the COVID-19 pandemic. BOTTOM RIGHT: Harlandale Independent School District's Armando Leal Jr. Middle School Child Nutrition Staff Alma Garcia is a blur of activity as she fills hundreds of cold meal bags (Lance Cheung/UDSA)



SOW A NEW CROP OF BEGINNING FARMERS WITH A FOCUS ON RACIAL AND GENDER DIVERSITY

The average age of an American farmer continues to increase so it only makes sense that we should be encouraging a new crop of young people to become farmers. Unfortunately, significant obstacles stand in the way of starting a farm if it's not already the family business. We support efforts to expand the USDA microloan program for new and beginning farmers, but more must be done to incentivize young people to enter agriculture. This should include eliminating student loan debt regardless of where they received their education, providing technical assistance on sustainable agriculture to get them started and banning foreign ownership of America's farmland to maintain domestic competitiveness for land and resources. These resources should be more acutely targeted at encouraging a diverse farm system where farmers of color and female farmers are given priority. Much like other sectors, strength is gained when we have diverse ideas and individuals contributing to the industry.



California Center for Cooperative Development (CCCD) Cooperative Developer, Seed Farmer, and Co-op Founder Mai Nguyen at their farm operation, on a small experimental plot, where they grow Ethiopian Blue Tinge Emmer, Canus, Hollis, Marquis, and Fortuna wheat, as well as some chickpea and Hunan popping bean, near Petaluma, CA. These varieties haven't been widely grown in California and little is known about how they fare as dry-farmed crops in these climates. Nguyen uses a cover crop of crimson clover to fix nitrogen and help the grains compete with the weeds. (Lance Cheung/USDA)

INCENTIVIZE DIVERSIFIED AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS

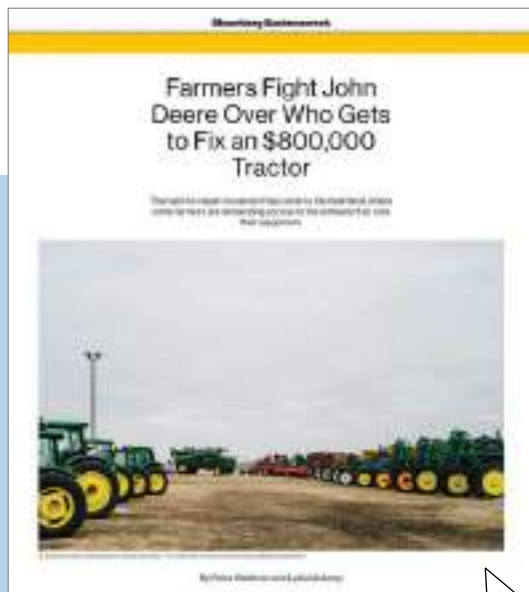
Increased concentration across the agriculture sector has squeezed small and medium sized farmers out of the business. This market consolidation promotes the overproduction of feed products that keep profit margins narrow to nonexistent for farmers who are forced to rely on government subsidies and crop insurance for their income. As the saying goes, "you don't put all your eggs in one basket." Unfortunately, this narrow investment focus puts farmers on a treadmill to bankruptcy and ravages the land when increased fertilizer usage and other poor practices are forced upon them so they can hope to break even. We support efforts to incentivize crop diversification so producers can provide their communities with healthy local foods while relieving them of the worries that accompany our current "all or nothing" system. This would also allow farmers to innovate and collaborate on a regional basis while making long-term plans that improve the land.

RESTORE GIPSA

Sonny Perdue has buried the Grain Inspectors, Packers, and Stockyards Act protections and rewritten the Farmers Fair Practice Rules meant to protect producers from corporate abuse and offer avenues of recourse for those who were harmed. This will continue the course of USDA giving competitive advantages to the largest producers and agribusinesses while squelching dissent among the rank and file. We recommend the next Agriculture Secretary restore GIPSA and scrap Sonny Perdue's rules to replace them with a new set of guidelines that protect smaller producers and independent farmers.

CREATE AN INDEPENDENT FARMER PROTECTION BUREAU

There can no longer be any dispersion of responsibility for our highly concentrated agrifood system. We support the restoration of the Packers and Stockyards Administration within the United States Department of Agriculture until such time as Congress adopts an Independent Farmer Protection Bureau (IFPB) modeled after the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. The IFPB must have the power to investigate and stop market power abuses, protect farmers' contract rights, and fully enforce the Packers and Stockyards Act. With a dedicated Bureau, we can begin remedying the financial pain caused by years of "get big or get out" policies much in the same way an effective CFPB has returned billions of dollars to consumers who were taken advantage of by a ruthless and reckless financial system.



Bloomberg Businessweek

LOCKED OUT

As technology gets more complex, major corporations have a structural advantage over farmers who cannot possibly be expected to become experts on their equipment.

[Click here to find out more.](#)



(Lance Cheung/USDA)

SUPPORT FARMERS' RIGHT TO REPAIR

Farmers can't farm without equipment. Not only do they rely on traditional farming equipment, they have embraced the digital age to help them become more efficient farmers. As the farming equipment has become more advanced, the big corporations that manufacture it have forbidden farmers to do any work to make small repairs or adjustments without voiding their warranty. These restrictions lead to costly visits to the service station to fix even the smallest repairs that farmers can do on their own. The Biden Administration should support efforts to enact a national "Right to Repair" law and amend the Digital Millennium Copyright Act to allow farmers to repair and maintain their own equipment and technology.

REINSTATE MANDATORY COUNTRY OF ORIGIN LABELING

Today, beef and pork products can be imported from abroad and repackaged with a coveted “Product of the USA” label after passing through a USDA inspected facility. Consumers deserve to know where their food comes from and farmers and ranchers deserve to have their products receive the pride and distinction that comes with our flag on their products. We encourage the Biden Administration to restore country of origin labeling on all beef and pork products. Correcting this rule will immediately boost cattle prices for struggling ranchers and restore trust in US labeling.

STABILIZE DAIRY PRICES

Our current federal farm policy promotes the expansive overproduction of commodities beyond what the market can bear. The negative economic consequences of this overproduction and the rapid development of mega-dairies drove over 800 family dairy farms out of business last year with no signs of slowing down. The Biden Administration can stem the hemorrhaging of these farms by supporting a Dairy Price Stability Program focused on independent family dairy farmers. This program should aim to maintain a fair price for milk that provides a reasonable expectation of profit for the hard work and dedication put into dairy farming without incentivizing the biggest players in the industry to overproduce at a rate that tanks prices and runs smaller outfits out of business.

PROMOTE SMALL RURAL BUSINESSES ABROAD

Rural small businesses create high quality products that are of great interest to global trading partners, but it is difficult for rural entrepreneurs to navigate the world of international trade. Most small businesses simply can’t sift through complex export laws, nevermind build an international branding and marketing campaign. Through the development of a “Made in Rural America” program, the Foreign Agricultural Service could create a program specifically tailored to rural small businesses. This program could connect rural business owners with these highly specialized markets and create new opportunities for growth in rural America.



Left: Black Angus cows and calves graze organic pastures, and for added nutrition and variety, they enjoy a daily feeding of sweet silage at Nick’s Organic Farm, owned by Nick Maravell, in Adamstown, MD. (Lance Cheung/USDA)

INCLUDE ANIMAL WELFARE STANDARDS IN ORGANIC LABELING

American consumers should have confidence that food labeled organic is produced with high standards which requires strong oversight in both domestic and imported organic products. The Organic Livestock and Poultry Practices rule would have set new specific animal welfare standards for domestic farmers that produce meat, milk, and eggs. When these products are labeled with the USDA Organic Label they are often packaged with bucolic scenes of open pastures, but this is hardly ever how their animals are truly actually raised. This is nothing short of consumer deception by corporations and should be remedied. The Obama Administration issued the final rule after decades of public input, extensive economic analysis, and serious consideration of the costs, benefits, and the longevity of the National Organic Program. This rule is vital to maintaining consumer confidence in the USDA organic label. The National Organic Program supports a market valued at over \$50 billion in sales. The USDA should move forward and reissue this rule that will begin to restore the integrity of this labeling.



(Lance Cheung/USDA)

UNITE RURAL AND URBAN AMERICA

Without rural America, urban America doesn't eat. Without urban America, rural America doesn't stay in business. Food is not the only way we can build bridges between urban and rural America, but it is the most obvious starting point. During the COVID-19 pandemic, our food system ground to a halt as shelves emptied and food prices skyrocketed. Consumers, fortunately, found a way around the industrialized supply chains by going directly to nearby farmers and ranchers for local, healthy, fresh food. These changes in consumer spending displayed a desire for food produced by smaller scale producers that should be supported by USDA in the future to keep money in the hands of local producers and Main Streets. The Biden

Administration should work to continue building these relationships by encouraging expanded farmers markets, local food hubs, transparent community markets, upgrades for agritourism, and investing in a greater number of Community Supported Agriculture programs. The administration should also encourage local school exchange programs where urban and rural students are given the opportunity to gather cultural knowledge and build connections with folks who live and experience the world differently. We believe President Biden's greatest strength is his ability to unite Americans and future citizens to come together with a renewed sense of pride in our nation. These steps can build upon that strength to bring us together again.

4 Combating Climate Change Through Rural Innovation

- **No industry is as well-equipped to combat climate change as agriculture**, converting to regenerative practices will begin to reverse its worst effects while bringing new opportunities to rural areas
- **Green manufacturing is a rapidly expanding industry** and rural America is primed to bring back the manufacturing industry with good paying union jobs



CLIMATE REFUGEES IN OUR FUTURE

Climate change threatens our most vulnerable populations most with apocalyptic flooding, fires, and agricultural problems.

[Click here to find out more.](#)



↑ Cody and Natalie Scott started with a 10-acre pecan grove in 2017, and has since converted one acre for a variety of produce on micro irrigated beds outdoors and in three seasonal high tunnels installed with the assistance of the USDA. Cody reports that the high tunnels improve winter growth, protect from frost and rain damage. (Lance Cheung/USDA)

Bloomberg CityLab

“...High-poverty Mississippi will contend with coastal flooding, variations in agricultural viability, and huge energy expenditure demands as a result of extreme heat.

As a result, many residents could become climate migrants.”



Workers at Mastronardi Produce in Michigan adjust the height of tomato vines to bring the fruit to an easily pickable height. The year-round operation of greenhouses produces tomatoes, peppers and cucumbers. The greenhouses use modern technology and sustainable growing practices to reduce the impact on the environment. Their second phase of greenhouses use diffused glass, energy curtains, grow lights to help in the winter, automated harvest carts for ergonomic harvesting, recycled water and fertilizer, and a rainwater irrigation system. (Lance Cheung/USDA)

Combating Climate Change through Rural Innovation

We need only to look out our back door to see that Mother Nature is changing dramatically. The traditional assumptions about annual rainfall, frost dates, floodplains, and more continue to fail us.

With stronger and more frequent hurricanes in coastal communities, more prolonged droughts or extreme floods in the heartland, and massive wildfires in the west, we must begin preparing ourselves for a new normal while we work to reverse our course.

Farmers and rural communities are at the forefront of this challenge and we believe the Biden Administration is poised to give rural America the tools it needs to combat climate change while creating tens of thousands of good-paying jobs needed in these communities starting with the following policies.

RURAL AMERICA COMBATING CLIMATE CHANGE

Rural Americans provide a unique perspective on how climate change is affecting the environment. Not only have extreme weather events like inland hurricanes and wildfires threatened their homes and livelihoods, but it has also compromised our entire food system. Unfortunately, current market concentration pushes farmers into practices that contribute to climate change, rather than help mitigate it. Rural voices need to be included and their concerns need to be addressed in plans to address climate change. There is enormous potential for rural America to lead in agricultural technology, advanced manufacturing in union factories, and agricultural innovations to address climate change. The Biden Administration's commitment to combating climate change is clear, and the knowledge and expertise in rural America can lead the charge.

SEQUESTER CARBON

There is enormous potential to counter the effects of climate change by using agricultural practices to remove carbon from the atmosphere. USDA needs to develop programs that provide financial support to farmers to transition from the current extractive industrial form of agriculture into a regenerative system of agriculture. This includes increased funding for Title II conservation programs to support farm income through payments based on methods to protect the environment like carbon sequestration. USDA should also fully support research and development to improve techniques that leverage technology and equipment in efforts to support farmers' work on carbon sequestration.



Nice Farms Creamery is a 201-acre dairy where cows are rotated between pastures daily to optimize their forage and nutrition. They plant seasonal grasses in their annual pastures and maintain perennial pastures. Because of these farming practices, this dairy sequesters carbon. (Preston Keres/USDA)

EXAMINE THE COMPLETE COST OF ENVIRONMENTAL DAMAGE CAUSED BY INDUSTRIALIZED AGRICULTURE

Every year it's another tragedy. Lake Erie filled with algae, scores of dead fish in the Gulf of Mexico, undrinkable water in rural communities, and unbearable stench driving out families from multigenerational homes. The financial burden of repairing the damage caused by chemically intensive farming and excess manure from CAFOs should not be placed on the taxpayers and rural communities who are already reeling from its destructive nature. USDA should initiate a comprehensive study examining the true and full costs of industrialized agriculture's environmental damage and force bad actors to pay for the cleanup.

PHASE OUT CONCENTRATED ANIMAL FEEDING OPERATIONS (CAFOs)

Large factory farms harm rural communities in many ways. They extract wealth from rural economies forcing producers to over leverage their operations and make them dependent on corporate agribusiness, threaten public health (with disparate impacts on communities of color), and they cause long term environmental damage as a leading contributor to greenhouse gas emissions in agriculture. The USDA should enact policies to transition away from carbon-intensive, industrial animal agriculture, and monoculture production with a moratorium on new Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) and large scale food and agriculture mergers while supporting regenerative, pasture-based, production of animal protein.



The New York Times

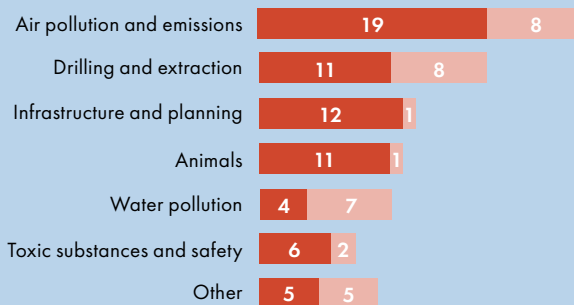
REGULATION ROLLBACKS

The Trump administration has gutted critical environmental protections.

[Click here to find out more.](#)

Trump Administration Reversed 100 Environmental Rules

Count of environmental rollbacks as of July 2020



■ Rollbacks completed
■ Rollbacks in process

[Graphic compiled by statista](#)



INVEST IN SUSTAINABLE FARMING RESEARCH

For decades, the overproduction of a handful of commodity crops and livestock has contributed to disproportionate research into chemically intensive and antibiotic rich industrial production. This narrow path has led to devastating environmental impacts and cratered small-town economies across the country. Investments should be made into researching the improvement of soil health, technical assistance, and cost-sharing to help farmers and ranchers be part of the solution. This includes reinvesting in land grant universities so new technologies are developed and owned by the American people rather than private companies so the focus in agriculture is on community prosperity, not corporate profits.

CREATE GREEN MANUFACTURING JOBS IN RURAL AMERICA

We applaud the Biden plan to create new green union manufacturing jobs in rural America. We believe the labor force in rural America is well-positioned to provide innovative research into bio-based technology because of its history in manufacturing and proximity to the agriculture products needed for this burgeoning industry. This will bring cutting-edge technologies in bio-based manufacturing to rural economies in need of new economic investments. Additionally, as rural America will provide the ideal locations for wind and solar energy production, efforts should be made to place union manufacturing and engineering opportunities within rural America.



Hmong-owned VH Produce grows several Asian specialty crops in Singer, CA, near Fresno. The owner, Vue Her, has worked with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) to implement many conservation improvements, including help replacing an old tractor for a more efficient lower emission tractor and installation of seasonal high tunnels.



TRANSITION TO CLEAN ENERGY FOR RURAL COOPERATIVES

Rural electric cooperatives provide affordable water, electric, and telecommunications services providing economic growth and improving the quality of life for rural residents. Unfortunately, the majority of their electric systems still rely on fossil fuels. These cooperatives need assistance to speed their transition to clean power sources without passing on high rates to their rural customers. USDA needs to support programs to forgive rural electric cooperatives' debt for fossil fuel plants on the condition that future funding is dedicated to investments in energy efficiency and clean energy.

INVEST IN WIND AND SOLAR ENERGY

Increased investments in wind and solar energy can continue to revitalize rural America while also contributing to environmentally friendly domestically produced energy sources. We support the Biden plan to grow wind and solar energy and want to ensure that rural Americans are included in the growth. These new methods of energy production in rural areas should contribute to the local economy through community ownership as a local utility if on public land.



105 solar panels are installed at Littlestown Veterinary Hospital in Littlestown, PA in mid September 2010. The Littlestown Veterinary Hospital in Littlestown, PA received a grant from the U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development (RD) Agency under the Rural Energy for America Program (REAP) to have solar panels installed to help reduce their carbon footprint and to have cost effective electric power for the hospital. (Lance Chung/USDA)

RESTORE AND PROTECT ENDANGERED ECOSYSTEMS

Over the last 70 years, we have lost over 50% of wildlife across the globe to habitat loss from climate change and human encroachment. This rapid loss of biodiversity has led to ecosystem collapse and places both human and environmental health at risk. The Biden Administration should push for the restoration and protection of fragile and diminishing ecosystems like coastal wetlands and tallgrass prairies. Investment in these initiatives will help restore endangered species, create jobs, and contribute to the cultural enrichment of our nation.



Natural disaster damage to rural America includes examples such as (clockwise from top-left): flood damage in West Virginia; damage from Hurricane Harvey in Texas; forest fires in Montana; flooding in Tennessee; tornado damage in Louisiana. (Lance Cheung/UDSA)

A JUST TRANSITION TO 100% REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE

The current industrialized agriculture model has wreaked havoc on our environment and our health. The high rate of chemical and antibiotic use as well as excess manure and extreme confinement have helped create the perfect storm of environmental degradation and health compromise. Confined Animal Feeding Operations and intensive methods of animal confinement, such as the use of battery cages for chickens and gestation crates for mother sows, also act as the breeding ground for the next global pandemic. What's worse is the increased incidence of negative health outcomes for poor communities and communities of color where

factory farms are located. The Biden Administration should take steps to fully transition away from industrialized agriculture and provide support for producers to convert to regenerative models that improve our soil, water, and air quality while breaking away from abusive corporate control. The current federal farm subsidies have locked farmers into monoculture agriculture practices that subsidize the monopoly controlled feed/meat complex, the federal subsidies should be redirected to support regenerative agriculture practices. A renewed independent agriculture movement will help rebuild local and regional food systems, while improving community health and expanding cultural knowledge.

5 Modernizing Rural Infrastructure and Investing in Its People

- **Modernize crumbling infrastructure and manufacture new products** in rural areas that support future generations of rural communities
- **Expand broadband** and thus, opportunity, in rural areas for the next generation of work
- **Support new and beginning farmers**, especially veteran, BIPOC, and female farmers to bring new voices and ideas to agriculture



(Lance Cheung/USDA)



BUILD BACK BETTER

Rural America has serious infrastructure needs. The Government should continue its long history of supporting these needs.

[Click here to find out more.](#)

Where America's Bridges Are Crumbling

U.S. states by number of structurally deficient bridges in 2018

State	Number of structurally deficient bridges	Share of total bridges
Iowa	4,675	19.4%
Pennsylvania	3,770	16.6%
Oklahoma	2,540	11.0%
Illinois	2,273	8.5%
Missouri	2,116	8.6%
North Carolina	1,871	10.2%
California	1,812	7.0%
New York	1,757	10.0%
Louisiana	1,678	13.0%
Mississippi	1,603	9.4%

Graphic compiled by statista



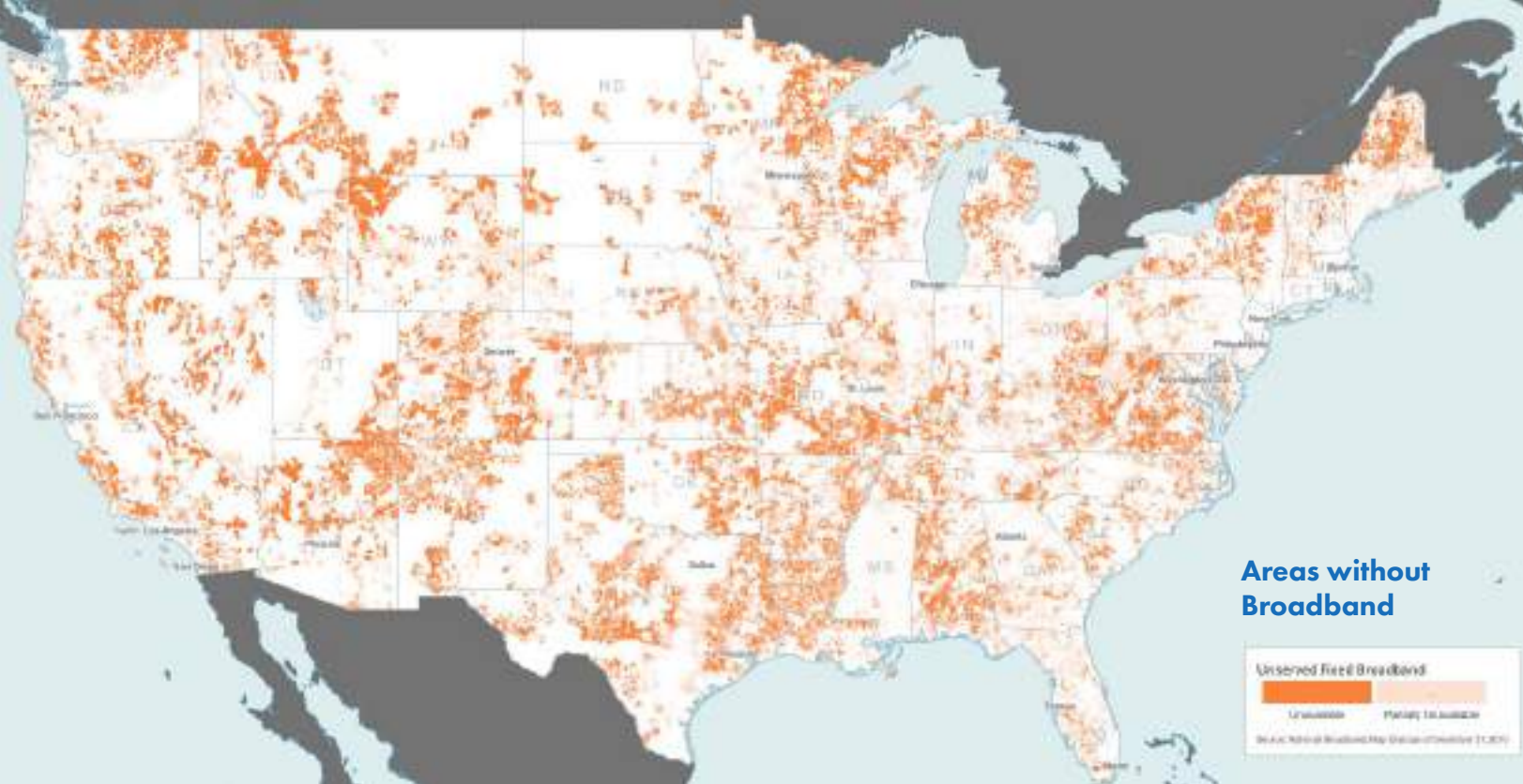
U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) helped Huerta del Valle (HdV) Co-Founder and Executive Director Maria Alonso obtain high tunnel hoop houses to extend their growing season and help nurture tropical trees such as the papaya to grow new roots into the soil wrapped around the branches at the 4-Acre organic Community Supported Garden and Farm in the middle of a low-income urban community. BELOW: Peaches picked that morning, were sold from the tailgate of Mary “The Peach Lady” Manley’s vehicle at the Bath County Agricultural Education and Marketing Center, Owingsville, KY, on Friday, July 15, 2011. The Center was the recipient of a \$400,000 Rural Business Enterprise Grant. (Lance Cheung/USDA)

Modernizing Rural Infrastructure and Investing In Its People

Our country is stronger when we are all experiencing a strong economy. People in rural places work hard to grow products that feed, clothe, and fuel the country.

We know a Biden Administration is committed to making key investments in a holistic rural economic development strategy to advance the quality of life for all rural Americans. The federal government and rural communities can partner to find ways to utilize the unique assets and make the entire country stronger.





(Federal Trade Commission)

EXPAND BROADBAND ACCESS

Access to reliable, affordable, high-speed internet is essential to conduct and grow business and to educate children in the 21st Century. There are still too many rural communities that do not have access to a fast and reliable internet connection and the Biden Administration should invest heavily in connecting rural America to the rest of the world. During the Great Depression, USDA provided electricity to rural Americans when the electric companies passed them over because they felt there was minimal profit opportunity. The USDA needs to think big again and support creative and innovative solutions within rural areas like allowing small towns and rural areas to build their own broadband networks in partnership with established rural electric cooperatives and service it like a public utility.

ESTABLISH A DIGITAL EXTENSION SERVICE

Modeled after the idea Senator Gillibrand has championed, we support the creation of a Digital Extension Service. This would improve the dissemination and sharing of new research and technologies to farmers. It enhances the digital economy in agriculture, e-commerce, telemedicine, and manufacturing through assisting and advising farmers, rural entrepreneurs, and community leaders to adopt digital technologies. Additionally, it promotes the application of STEM education by working through 4-H and Future Farmers of America (FFA) to inspire innovation in rural digital technologies.



(Jamie Welch Jaro/USDA)

MAKE ACCESS TO CAPITAL FAIR AND AFFORDABLE

Through the Community Reinvestment Act (CRA), banks are incentivized to lend or invest in Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs). This program results in billions of dollars in financing to underserved borrowers and communities nationwide. There should be efforts to bolster the work CDFIs perform in rural communities because the current system created a large gap between investments in CDFIs serving rural markets compared to urban markets. CDFIs play a key role in providing capital and banking services to “credit deserts” where poverty is baked into the community. We believe access to capital should be fair and affordable in rural areas, especially in racial minority communities that have borne the brunt of this lack of credit access and CDFIs have an important role to play in addressing the solution.

INVEST IN COMMUNITIES WITH FARM CREDIT SYSTEM PROFITS

The Farm Credit System is a federal government sponsored program founded over a century ago with the intent to bring affordable credit access to farmers. This program now brings in an annual profit of ~\$5 billion while farmers hold more debt than ever before and are going bankrupt at rates not seen since the Farm Crisis of the 1980s. With a focus on supporting new/beginning and BIPOC and female farmers, the Farm Credit System should set aside 10% of annual profits for regional lending programs that support environmentally sustainable agriculture.



Leonardo Aguila checks the dragon fruit plants on his 6.3-acre farm in Fallbrook, CA. Born in the Philippines, Aguila immigrated to Guam, a United States territory, as a young man and promptly enlisted into the U.S. Navy. He served in the military for 17 years and dedicated another 17 years as a civilian employee for the Department of the Navy. (Lance Cheung/USDA)



SUPPORT A 21ST CENTURY POST OFFICE

Rural Americans rely on the United States Postal Service (USPS) to deliver everything from prescription medicines to baby chicks. These communities need the USPS because commercial delivery services often stop at the city limit sign where costs go up and profit margins fall. Fortunately, the USPS still delivers to these Americans through rain, sleet, or snow. While every small town has a post office, not all have a bank to provide even the simplest services. By providing banking services through the USPS, rural residents can conduct simple banking transactions like deposits, withdrawals, and bill payments in their community rather than driving miles away to the nearest bank. A revamped Postal Service should be a valuable tool in bringing rural America into the 21st century.



TOP: A localized thunderstorm dumps rain and hail at the Days Creek Post Office in Days Creek, OR, an unincorporated community with a population of 272. (P. Sighting) BOTTOM LEFT: A young chick. Baby chicks may be delivered through the USPS. (Larry Rana/USDA)



The New York Times

NECESSITIES IMPERILED

The Postal Service provides critical support for farmers. Delays and unreliable deliveries can severely impact rural residents.

[Click here to find out more.](#)



UTAH OPIOID
MISUSE ROUND
TABLE: U.S.
Department of
Agriculture Assistant
to the Secretary for
Rural Development
(RD) Anne Hazlett,
along with rural
leaders, participate in
a Rural Opioid Misuse
Roundtable in Salt
Lake City, Utah. (Lance
Cheung/USDA)

INVEST IN RURAL HEALTH CARE

Every American has a right to health care no matter where they live. However, rural America faces unique challenges in providing health care to all its residents due to the sparse population. Rural communities are losing access to quality health care because of rural hospital closures and a shortage of health care professionals. This has led to worse health outcomes on average and dire situations as rural America is gripped by the opioid crisis. Investments should be made in rural hospitals, a rural health care workforce, telehealth capacity, and technical assistance for rural health care providers. We encourage the next secretary of the USDA to invest heavily in building innovative community health centers that build back rural health care.

PROVIDE MENTAL HEALTH AND DRUG TREATMENT IN RURAL AMERICA

While farming is a dangerous job that can result in terrible accidents, it is nowhere near the leading cause of devastation in our rural communities. Billboards plastered with suicide hotlines and step-by-step instructions on how to use Narcan litter sides of highways with unnervingly high frequency. No child, spouse, sibling, or friend should happen upon a loved one who has succumbed to suicide due to dire economic circumstances and a lack of accessible treatment. The Biden Administration should make it a top priority to support mental health and drug treatment facilities in rural areas that provide affordable high-quality services to stem the tide of suicides and drug overdoses that tear at the seams of the tightly woven community fabric.

INVEST IN RURAL HOUSING

Rural America faces a shortage of affordable housing options which leads people to be homeless or live in unsafe and unhealthy conditions. Immediate investments need to be made in funding shelters and houses for those in rural America who are experiencing homelessness. Investments to support long-term solutions in affordable housing options through the Rural Housing Service need to be funded to meet the need in these communities. Programs to provide safe and affordable rental units for rural citizens in persistently poor rural counties need to be a priority. In addition to expanding rural rental housing access, efforts should be made to provide low-interest loans to rural residents who will live in and operate businesses in these communities to buy or build homes that stabilize these economies.

EXTEND THE USDA'S COMMUNITY FACILITIES RELENDING PROGRAM

In an effort to increase access to financing in rural communities experiencing high or persistent poverty, USDA created the Community Facility Relending Program in 2016. The program adds an intermediary or re-lender to work with rural communities to obtain loans to build schools, health clinics, and other community-based buildings. The re-lenders, including many Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs), identify eligible projects and prepare the applicants for USDA financing. They also originate, underwrite, and close the loans. Projects have been identified, but the implementation of the program has been delayed. We support efforts to extend the program to allow re-lenders more time to access the funding made available through the program.

CONCLUSION

Since the founding of this nation, the promise of the American Dream has been out of reach for too many. The Biden Administration has both the opportunity and obligation to change course. The goal is to lend a firm hand to those who work so tirelessly with often little reward, to help build our country's prosperity and, in so doing, create a clear path for them to be strong and long lasting stakeholders in the middle class.

The mission is not only to create a broader bandwidth of good paying jobs but also a renewed sense of patriotism that is inclusive and recognizes the need to make amends for the sins of our racist history.

This roadmap to "Build Back, Better" will unlock doors of opportunity long blocked for Blacks, Indigenous, and People of Color. With a focus on rooting out systemic racism, combating climate change, democratizing the agrifood system, and modernizing rural infrastructure our nation can and will live up to its promise.

We extend our deepest thanks to all the individuals and organizations who provided their insight in the development of this document. Their expertise and passion for rural America guided us as we considered the key policy and personnel recommendations to help us fulfill our vision. We have submitted the first slate of nominees to the USDA agency review team and will continue to provide recommendations on political appointees as the process continues.

For more information contact:

Joe Maxwell

President, Family Farm Action

joe@farmaction.us

573 • 721 • 0927



**Family
Farm
Action**