

Executive Summary: Congress' Guide to the Farm Bill in the Community

Introduction

The federal, omnibus Farm Bill impacts all stakeholders and components of the U.S. food system and beyond. With such vast implications across Vermont communities, it is vital for the Farm Bill policy development process to include the greatest number of Vermonters. In addition to drafting, debating, and voting on the legislation in Washington, D.C., Vermont's congressional delegation plays an important role here in the state—it is imperative to encourage and be attentive to the needs and feedback of communities members regarding food, agricultural, and environmental policies.

Community Research

There are many ways to advocate for policy changes. This study was conducted as part of a research project within the University of Vermont's Food Systems Masters degree program. Seeking to understand the strategies, challenges, barriers, and opportunities for Farm Bill advocacy in Vermont, this research interviewed two congressional staff members and twelve community organizations in Vermont relating to dairy, nutrition assistance, rural development, and environmental conservation.

Based on experiences and input shared by interviewees, The Vermonter's Guide to the Farm Bill was written to inform Vermonters on the current state of federal Farm Bill advocacy in Vermont. Considering that members of Congress and their staff play a large role in the policy development process in conjunction with community members and organizations, Congress has the ability to help facilitate a more inclusive process and help to dismantle some of the barriers faced when advocating for Farm Bill policy.

Key Advocacy Findings

The following practices are suggestions from various Farm Bill stakeholder groups in Vermont to voice their feedback to Congress regarding food, agriculture, community, and the environment.

- **Educate** individuals and organizations about the implications of Farm Bill legislation on communities. Although the Farm Bill impacts all stakeholders of the food system, many citizens are not familiar with the bill and its comprehensive nature.
- **Encourage** collaboration across groups and organizations representing a variety of Farm

Bill interests. This research found that there are no major differences in the ways that organizations across titles advocate, although it was found that rural development organizations are less likely to advocate, and many nutrition assistance stakeholders organized and advocated as a coalition. A unified Vermont voice sharing Farm Bill feedback either through a cross-sector coalition or statewide collaboration can help streamline more coalesced state priorities.



Photo by Olivia Peña, Peppers at a Farmers Market

- **Promote** the importance of community members and groups sharing feedback and input for federal policy. There are many ways to advocate in Vermont for federal policy, but some interviewees expressed facing challenges when advocating included discouragement to participate due to the scope of federal policy. Additionally, some organizations expressed that they are reluctant to advocate to due potential conflicts of interest surrounding the receipt of federal funding.

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