

Executive Summary: Community Members' Guide to the Farm Bill

Introduction

The Farm Bill is a collection of national laws and programs that is rewritten about every five years. With topics covered in the bill including the environment, food access, farming, and support for rural communities, this broad set of policies impacts the entire food system, and anyone who participates in it. This involves what and how food is produced, the amount of food available, the cost of food, the money earned by farmers, and the development of rural and farming communities—this is just a sample of the effects of the Farm Bill.

Congress is in charge of writing the Farm Bill. Vermont's congressional representatives consist of two senators, Senator Patrick Leahy and Senator Bernie Sanders, and one member in the House of Representatives, Congressman Peter Welch. All community members have the power to contact their congressional representatives to voice their opinions.

Community Research

There are many ways to advocate for policy changes. A research study conducted through the University of Vermont Food Systems department aimed to understand the ways that Vermonters are currently interacting in Farm Bill development and advocacy. The study identified community groups across the state based on their involvement in dairy, nutrition, rural development, and/or conservation work, which are all impacted in some way by the Farm Bill. Twelve organizations and two congressional staff members were interviewed to learn about the current state of advocacy for Farm Bill policy.

The research resulted in a guide to highlight strategies that are currently used by Vermonters to participate in shaping policies that are included in the Farm Bill.

Advocacy Strategies

The following methods are suggestions from various community groups with a stake in the Farm Bill for community members to voice their input to Congress regarding food, agriculture, community, and environment.

- **Understand** what the Farm Bill is and the impacts of the rules included in the bill – education is vital for powerful advocacy. Learn more on the House and Senate Farm Bill websites:
 - <https://agriculture.house.gov/farmbill/>
 - <https://www.agriculture.senate.gov/2018-farm-bill>
- **Identify** fellow community members or organizations that have similar goals or targets as you for Farm Bill policies. The Vermont Farm to Plate network provides an extensive list of food and agricultural related organizations, though this does not include every group in the state. Express interest in a particular area(s) of policy.
 - <http://www.vtfarmplate.com/network>
- **Attend** meetings or join in events that serve as a platform to share input. Have a plan or a “pitch” for the priority areas. Offering an example or personal

story of the impacts of a policy can help to leverage credibility.

- **Share** policy or program feedback with the congressional delegation—all community members have the ability to contact their Vermont representatives through meetings, phone calls, letters, or e-mails. Vermont's congressional representatives can be contacted at the following phone numbers:
 - **Senator Patrick Leahy:** (p) 802-863-2525 or 800-642-3193 (toll free)
 - **Senator Bernie Sanders:** (p) 802-862-0697 or 800-339-9834 (toll free)
 - **Congressman Peter Welch:** (p) 802-652-2450 or 888-605-7270 (toll free)



Photo by Olivia Peña, Vermont Cheesemakers Festival

This research was carried out in partial fulfillment for the Masters degree in Food Systems at the University of Vermont. For more information regarding this research, please contact Olivia Peña, the project author, at Olivia.Pena@uvm.edu or Dr. Meredith Niles, the project research advisor, at Meredith.Niles@uvm.edu.