



THE US FARM BILL

Corporate Power and
Structural Racialization
in the United States
Food System

The **US Farm Bill** has been the cornerstone of food and agricultural legislation since its inception in 1933. Its legislative outcomes are implemented by numerous institutions that shape and influence all stages of the US food system.

This report provides an **in-depth analysis** of the US Farm Bill with a particular focus on how Farm Bill policies are shaped by corporate power and how such policies affect the lives of marginalized communities.

In order to support coalition-building efforts for the growth of an inclusive, broad-based movement in the United States, this report provides a thorough analysis, a set of comprehensive policy interventions, and **a vision for a food sovereignty movement** that puts belonging at its center.

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This report was produced by researchers in the Haas Institute's Global Justice Program, whose focus is on cross-sectoral themes that connect the local to the global. Global Justice researchers frame their work with the question of how to successfully build inclusive, democratic, and culturally diverse societies within a global context, promoting mechanisms and tools that can build the power of marginalized groups to influence action at local, national, and international levels.

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PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

Provide a comprehensive critique of the Farm Bill and its role in the production and maintenance of structural barriers to socio-economic well-being for communities of color and low-income communities.

Locate the Farm Bill—and its role in the relations of food production, processing, distribution, service, and consumption—within the larger context of corporate influence in the US and globally, and identify how exactly the Farm Bill is beholden to, and constituted by, such interests.

Impart historical background on the relationship between the Farm Bill and corporate influence, and on the relationship both have to structural racialization, poverty, labor, immigration, and environmental degradation.

Contribute a comprehensive analysis of the expected outcomes of the Farm Bill and its limitations with regard to what is required for a fair and equitable food system.

Put forth a set of short term policy interventions that promote racial/ethnic, gender, and economic equity, and uplift all peoples against structural racialization and corporate control of the food system.

Assess the utility of the Farm Bill as a strategic, long term rallying point for addressing persistent racial/ethnic, gender, and economic injustice within and outside the food system; investigate the contradictions built into Farm Bill legislation that complicate such efforts.

Help identify points of convergence for building a broad-based food sovereignty movement by offering tools and resources to communities, advocates, practitioners, and researchers from across anti-austerity, feminist, environmental, climate, food justice, labor and immigration, food system workers, and human rights movements that collectively work toward racial/ethnic, gender and economic justice.

GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

AGRIBUSINESS: A term that refers to large-scale businesses that encompass farming and farming-related commercial activities, as well as operations that engage in the production, processing, and distribution of agricultural products, and the manufacture of farm machinery, equipment, and supplies. The term also includes large business entities that produce and sell agrichemicals including pesticides, insecticides, and herbicides, and may include the production of synthetic fertilizers, hormones, and other chemical growth agents.

BIOFUELS: Energy sources made from living things or the waste that living things produce. Biofuels can come from a wider variety of sources and can roughly be divided into four categories or “generations.” First generation biofuels are made from sugars, starches, oil, and animal fats; second-generation biofuels are made from non-food crops or agricultural waste; third-generation biofuels are made from algae or quickly growing biomass sources; and fourth-generation biofuels are made from specially engineered plants or biomass.

CORPORATE CONSOLIDATION: Horizontal Consolidation: ownership and control within one part of the food system, such as production, processing, or distribution. Vertical Consolidation: consolidation of firms at more than one part of the food chain, such as upstream suppliers or downstream buyers.

CORPORATE CONTROL: Control of political and economic systems by corporations in order to influence trade regulations, tax rates, and wealth distribution, among other measures, and to produce favorable environments for further corporate growth.

FARM BILL: A multi-year omnibus bill that establishes and maintains federal support for agricultural production, nutrition programs, conservations programs, rural development programs, and more. These programs are operated in large part through the US Department of Agriculture (USDA).

FINANCIALIZATION: A term used to describe a broad set of changes in the relation between the “financial”—financial capital, financial services, and financial markets—and “real” sectors of an economy—manufacturing, agricultural, and service sectors. Financialization is the outcome of sophisticated and complex socio-technological interventions and networks such as information technologies, analytic techniques, and standardized representations of economic realities that facilitate the transmission and processing of information within the global economic system. Financialization is best understood as a force that enables the creation of new “non-real money” assets, and its ability to restructure these assets in ways to affect their monetary value to generate profits from such dynamic.

FOOD SECURITY: Having consistent access to nutritious and culturally appropriate food to maintain a healthy and active life.

FOOD SOVEREIGNTY: The right of people to determine their own food and agriculture systems, and their right to access affordable, nutritious, healthy, and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods.

FOOD SYSTEM: All of the practices, processes, and infrastructure required to feed a population, including agricultural production, harvesting, processing, packaging, distribution, consumption, and disposal, as well as the inputs required and outputs produced at each stage.

META-NARRATIVE: A meta-narrative is a set of mutually reinforcing elements that reflects a meta-analysis of how society operates and how it must change. A meta-narrative seeks to take command of how a debate or issue is framed in public discourse. More fundamental, durable, and broadly relevant than any set of messages, it must also resonate and make sense to popular audiences and have the potential to be widely adopted and applied. The power of a meta-narrative is that it bolsters any debatable issue and can be drawn upon to shape the message(s) around it.

MIDPOINT ACREAGE: A measure of cropland consolidation in which half of all cropland acres are on farms with more cropland than the midpoint, and half are on farms with less. Midpoint acreage is more informative than either a simple median or the simple mean.

NEOLIBERALISM: A new period of capitalism, inaugurated in the late 1970s, and characterized by unparalleled global reach of financial institutions and extensive economic liberalization, such as massive privatization of public enterprises, fiscal austerity, international trade agreements, and deregulation. Contemporary stage of neoliberalism have been facilitated by a mix of high-tech globalized financial systems and labor markets, corporate control over the public sphere, increased commodification of human heritages (e.g. community lands, seeds, water, etc.), and increased consumerism.

SNAP: Short for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, SNAP is the largest federal food assistance program. At \$756.43 billion in projected spending over the next decade, it is the largest program funded under the 2014 Farm Bill. Formerly known as food stamps, SNAP offers nutrition assistance to millions of eligible, low-income individuals and families, and provides economic benefits to communities. SNAP is administered by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA).

STRUCTURAL RACIALIZATION: Refers to the set of practices, cultural norms, and institutional arrangements that are reflective of, and help to create and maintain, racialized outcomes in society—reinforcing group-based advantages and disadvantages.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE UNITED STATES FOOD SYSTEM AND THE OUTCOMES generated by the US Farm Bill are characterized by widespread social, economic, political, and environmental inequity. These outcomes are characteristic of a society that produces inequity in every domain—social, economic, political, and environmental.

This report finds that inequity within the food system—such as limited access to nutritious and affordable food, high quality land, or farmers support program benefits—cannot be addressed without addressing inequity within society as a whole, such as low income and limited employment benefits, unfair treatment by state and federal institutions, and limited democratic influence and access to positions of power. As such, corporate control and structural racialization within the US food system and society as a whole are of central concern within this report.

Specifically, corporate control refers to control of political and economic systems by corporations in order to influence trade regulations, tax rates, and wealth distribution, among other measures, and to produce favorable environments for further corporate growth. Structural racialization refers to the set of practices, cultural norms, and institutional arrangements that are reflective of, and help to create and maintain, racialized outcomes in society, with communities of color faring worse than others in most situations.

In this light, the production of racial/ethnic, gender, and economic inequity in the United States is more so a product of cumulative and structural forces than of individual actions or malicious intent on behalf of private or public actors.

In order to challenge and eliminate corporate control and structural racialization in the United States, therefore, it is necessary to analyze the ways that public and private institutions are structured.

It is also necessary to analyze how government programs are administered and operate in ways that reproduce outcomes that marginalize low-income communities, women, and communities of color in terms of health, wealth, land access, power, and degree of democratic influence. Additionally, as this report aims to do, it is crucial to analyze the genesis and formation of critical institutions and structures themselves.¹

Therefore, the US Farm Bill—the flagship piece of food and agricultural legislation since its inception in 1933, which informs the heart of public and private policies that make up much of the US food system—is the subject of this report.

This report is of particular importance now for two reasons. First, the Farm Bill will be under consideration again in 2019, yet there is no comprehensive critique of the Farm Bill that addresses its underlying contradictions, particularly with regard to racial/ethnic, gender, and economic

inequity. Second, it is imperative that campaigns by grassroots, community, and advocacy organizations—generally most active during the period of Farm Bill negotiations in Congress—have enough time to gather adequate information and conduct in-depth analysis for targeted yet comprehensive policy change.

As such, the timing of this report is also imperative for coalition-building efforts and the growth of an effective broad-based food sovereignty movement.

PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

This report aims to provide the following:

- Provide a comprehensive critique of the Farm Bill and its role in the production and maintenance of structural barriers to socio-economic well-being for communities of color and low-income communities.
- Locate the Farm Bill—and its role in the relations of food production, processing, distribution, service, and consumption—within the larger context of corporate influence in the US and globally, and identify how exactly the Farm Bill is beholden to and constituted by such interests.
- Impart historical background on the relationship between the Farm Bill and corporate influence, and on the relationship both have to structural racialization, poverty, labor, immigration, and environmental degradation.
- Contribute a comprehensive analysis of the expected outcomes of the Farm Bill and its limitations with regard to what is required for a fair and equitable food system.
- Put forth a set of short term policy interventions that promote racial/ethnic, gender, and economic equity, and uplift all peoples against structural racialization and corporate control of the food system.
- Assess the utility of the Farm Bill as a strategic, long term rallying point for addressing

persistent racial/ethnic, gender, and economic injustice within and outside the food system; investigate the contradictions built into Farm Bill legislation that complicate such efforts.

- Help identify points of convergence for building a broad-based food sovereignty movement by offering tools and resources to communities, advocates, practitioners, and researchers from across anti-capitalist, feminist, environmental, climate, food justice, labor and immigration, food system workers, and human rights movements that collectively work toward racial/ethnic, gender and economic justice.

KEY FINDINGS OF REPORT

Corporate Consolidation and Corporate Control

Corporate consolidation and control have become central features of the US food system, and of the Farm Bill in particular. As of 2014, large-scale family-owned and non-family-owned operations account for 49.7% of the total value of production despite making up only 4.7% of all US farms. As of 2013, only 12 companies now account for almost 53% of ethanol production capacity and own 38% of all ethanol production plants.² As of 2007, four corporations own 85% of the soybean processing industry, 82% of the beef packing industry, 63% of the pork packing industry, and manufacture about 50% of the milk. Only four corporations control 53% of US grocery retail, and roughly 500 companies control 70% of food choice globally.³

Food System Worker Disparity

At every level of the food chain, from food production to food service, workers of color typically earn less than white workers.⁴ For example, a majority of farm workers who receive “piece-rate” earnings (i.e., per unit of work), and many

of whom are migrants from Mexico, frequently earn far less than minimum wage—an exploitative practice deeply tied to immigration policy, as elaborated upon below. On average, white food workers earn \$25,024 a year while workers of color make \$19,349 a year, with women of color, in particular, suffering the most. Furthermore, few people of color hold management positions in the food system, while white people hold almost three out of every four managerial positions. One result of this racial disparity in food system labor is that non-white workers experience a far greater degree of food insecurity than their white counterparts.

Food Equity and Nutrition

Food insecurity in the US disproportionately affects low-income communities and communities of color, and these communities are overrepresented in the lowest-paying sectors of the labor market. For example, as of 2013, 14.3% of US households—17.5 million households, roughly 50 million persons—were food insecure.⁵ The report also found that the rates of food insecurity were substantially higher than the national average among Black and Latino/a households, households with incomes near or below the federal poverty line, and single parent households.

Land Access

Racial/ethnic inequity with regard to land access is a defining feature not only of the corporate-controlled food system, but also of the US government itself, which, even years after emancipation, has made it nearly impossible for Blacks and other communities of color to acquire and keep land in substantial numbers. For example, in 1920, 926,000 US farmers were Black and they owned over 16 million acres of land, and by 1997, fewer than 20,000 US farmers were Black and owned approximately 2 million acres of land.⁶ While white farmers were losing their farms during these decades as well, the rate that Black farmers lost their land has been estimated at more than twice the rate of white-owned farm loss.

Farm Labor and Immigration Policy

Though the Farm Bill itself does not deal directly with immigration, the impact of the Bill on farmworkers cannot go unnoticed. The combination of an immigration system easily exploited by employers, and workers' low (and withheld) income, limited formal education, limited command of the English language, and undocumented status, greatly hinders farmworkers from seeking any retribution or recognition of their rights. With limited legal aid, many agricultural workers fear that challenging the illegal and unfair practices of their employers will result in further abuses, jobs losses, and, ultimately, deportation. Given the fact that the Farm Bill supports many of those companies that employ farmworkers, connections must be drawn to highlight how the Farm Bill upholds and perpetuates structural injustice among farmworkers.

Climate Change

In the US, exposures to environmental hazards have disproportionately impacted low-income communities and communities of color.^[i] As a major contributor to global climate change and the racialized distribution of its impacts, conventional agricultural production practices, in particular, have been instrumental in maintaining and upholding these disparities. Furthermore, low-income communities and communities of color in the United States bear the burden of the impacts caused by climate change. For example, these populations breathe more polluted air than other Americans, suffer more during extreme weather events, have fewer means to escape such extreme weather events, and disproportionately experience greater hardship due to rising energy, food, and water costs.

^[i] See studies done by Brown P. (1995) Race, Class, and environmental health: a review and systematization of the literature; Mohai, Pellow, and Roberts (2009) Environmental Justice; and Chakraborty, Maantay, and Brender (2011) Disproportionate Proximity to Environmental Health Hazards: Methods, Models, and Measurement.

Corporate Power, Structural Racialization, and Limitations of the Farm Bill

This report found a number of structural barriers to addressing these racial/ethnic, gender, and economic inequities. First, the Farm Bill itself is increasingly imbricated in, and ultimately functions as a pillar of, neoliberalism.^{7[iii]} The long term shift from the subsidization of production and consumption to the subsidization of agribusiness has structurally positioned low-income communities and communities of color on the losing side of such shifts. This population has also been given fewer options for recourse, given the ways in which the Farm Bill has been designed to be insulated from democratic influence, particularly by way of countless layers of congressional committees.

Second, under the current Farm Bill, supporting public nutrition assistance programs and fighting poverty and racial/ethnic inequality, are antithetical to one another, despite the evidence that suggests otherwise. Specifically, while such public assistance programs do provide support to some of the most marginalized communities, they ultimately maintain structural inequity, particularly in terms of wealth, by channeling profits to corporations such as Walmart and other large retailers, which benefit greatly from distributing benefits such as SNAP. Many of these corporations are then able to funnel profits back to their corporate headquarters outside their respective retail sites, while still paying workers low wages and granting few benefits at every level of the food system.

Finally, this report found that supporting the inclusion of producers of color into current payment schemes, and fighting poverty and racial/ethnic

inequality, are also antithetical to one another, despite recent gains in terms of USDA Civil Rights settlements and slowly increasing participation in such programs by such producers. Specifically, while such disparities may be addressed in part by better outreach and assistance, these payment programs, and even crop insurance, ultimately maintain structural inequity, particularly in terms of wealth and land access. For example, producers, be they of any racial or ethnic background, are forced to cut costs wherever possible, which includes: deploying environmentally destructive practices and unjust hiring practices, cutting farmworkers' pay and working conditions, and relying upon troubling international economies of migrant agricultural labor collectively, which result in regressive racialized outcomes.

THIS REPORT presents several short term policy interventions and long term strategies for changing the Farm Bill, the food system, and society as a whole. It argues for a strong and united movement that is capable of organizing and mobilizing at the state and national levels, and that ultimately aims to produce conditions that would guarantee food sovereignty, including food access, health equity, fair and living wages, land access, just immigration policy, restraints upon corporations, non-exploitative farm labor conditions, and environmental well-being, among others, in particular, and racial/ethnic, gender, and economic justice more broadly.

^[iii] Neoliberalism is a new period of capitalism, particularly since 1970s and 1980s, characterized by unparalleled global reach of economic liberalization, open markets, free trade, and deregulation. Such changes have been facilitated by a mix of high-tech globalized financial systems and labor markets, speculative financial markets, corporate control over the public sphere, increased commodification of human heritages (e.g. community lands, seeds, water, etc.), and increased consumerism.



INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

THE US FOOD SYSTEM IS DEFINED as all the practices, processes, and infrastructure required to feed the US population, including agricultural production, harvesting, processing, packaging, distribution, consumption, and disposal, as well as the inputs required and outputs produced at each stage.

Socially, economically, politically, and environmentally, the US food system has become characterized by widespread inequity. While corporations control agricultural production and prices, and enjoy record profits, many farmers cannot make a living, are increasingly vulnerable to price fluctuations, and struggle for market access in increasingly concentrated commodity markets. While corporations reap the benefits of an overworked and underpaid work force, both on and off the field, many consumers, including food system workers themselves, do not have access to nutritious and affordable foods. Additionally, soil degradation, water pollution, and global climate change continue to advance, in part due to large-scale industrial agriculture.

The US food system today, however, is not only characterized by social, economic, political, and environmental inequity. It is also characteristic of a society that itself produces inequity in every domain of life. Our research indicates that inequity within the food system—such as limited access to nutritious and affordable food, high quality land, or farmers support program benefits—cannot be addressed without addressing inequity within society as a whole, such as low income and limited employment benefits, unfair treatment by public institutions, and limited access to positions of power. Of central concern within this report, therefore, are **corporate control** and **structural racialization** within the US food system and society as a whole.

Significantly, the production of racial/ethnic and economic inequity in the United States, particularly in terms of wealth, land access, access to positions of power, and degree of democratic influence, is more so a product of cumulative and structural forces than of individual actions or malicious intent on behalf of private or public actors. To challenge and eliminate corporate control and structural racialization in the United States, it is necessary to analyze the ways that public and private institutions are structured, and how government programs are administered and operate in such a way that that reproduces outcomes that marginalize low-income commu-

CORPORATE CONTROL

The control of political and economic systems by corporations in order to influence trade regulations, tax rates, and wealth distribution, among other measures, and to produce favorable environments for further corporate growth.

STRUCTURAL RACIALIZATION

Refers to the set of practices, cultural norms, and institutional arrangements that are reflective of, and help to create and maintain, racialized outcomes in society—reinforcing group-based advantages and disadvantages.

nities and communities of color. Additionally, it is crucial to analyze the genesis and formation of institutions and structures themselves.⁸

THE FARM BILL

The US Farm Bill has been the flagship legislation of food and agriculture since its inception in 1933 and is at the heart of policies implemented by public and private institutions that comprise most of the US food system. As such, structural change requires a strong and united movement that is capable of organizing and mobilizing at the state and national level, and that aims to produce conditions required for food sovereignty, including food access, health equity, fair and living wages, land access, just immigration policy, restraints upon corporations, non-exploitative farm labor conditions, and environmental well-being, among others, in particular, and racial/ethnic, gender, and economic justice more broadly. It also reflects a prime opportunity to address corporate structural racialization at multiple scales: from the scale of the food system to that of society itself. As such, structural change requires a strong and united movement that is capable of organizing and mobilizing at the national level, and that aims to produce the conditions that would guarantee food sovereignty, including food access, health equity, fair wages, land access, just immigration policy, restraints upon corporations, non-exploitative farm labor conditions, and environmental well-being, among others. Such a movement would thus need to encompass grassroots and advocacy organizations that are anti-capitalist, new economy, anti-racist, and feminist, and that are oriented toward environmental justice, labor rights, immigration rights, food justice, climate justice, and human rights, among other strategies and goals. Toward this end, the US Farm Bill is a challenging, yet promising, target for structural change within such a movement.⁹

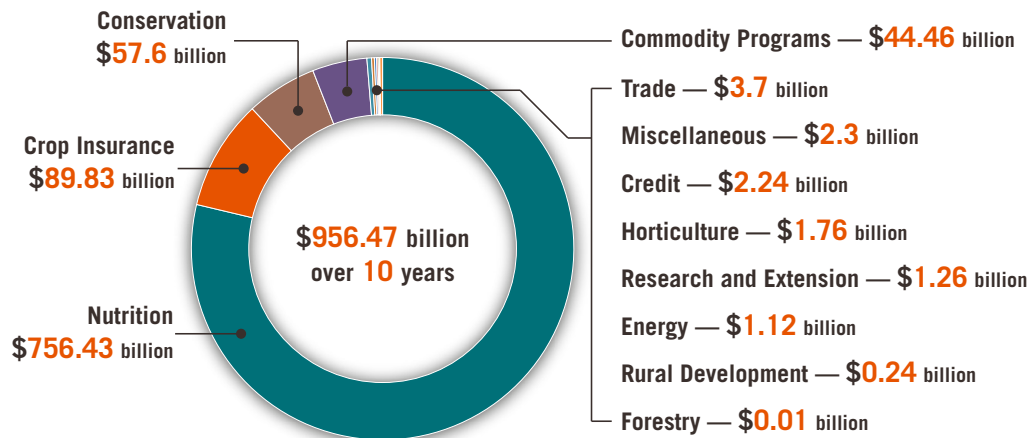
This report is of particular importance for two reasons. First, the Farm Bill will be under consideration again in 2019, yet there is no comprehensive critique of the Farm Bill that addresses its underlying contradictions, particularly with regard to racial/ethnic, gender, and economic inequity. Second, it is imperative that campaigns by grassroots, community, and advocacy organizations—generally most active during the period of Farm Bill negotiations in Congress—have enough time to gather adequate information and conduct in-depth analysis for targeted yet comprehensive policy change. As such, the timing of this report is also imperative for coalition-building efforts and the growth of an effective broad-based food sovereignty movement.

UNDERSTANDING THE FARM BILL

The Farm Bill is a multi-year omnibus bill and the preeminent piece of food and agriculture legislation in the United States. The Farm Bill establishes and maintains federal support for agricultural production, nutrition programs like SNAP,^[iii] conservation programs, rural development programs, and more. These programs are then operated in large part through the US Department of Agriculture (USDA). On February 7, 2014, President Obama signed into law the Agricultural Act of 2014, also known as the 2014 US Farm Bill.

[iii] Unless referencing the Food Stamp Act of 1968 and its predecessors in particular, this report will refer to the Farm Bill's preeminent nutrition assistance program as SNAP.

2014 US Farm Bill Spending by Title



In terms of structure, the food and agricultural provisions and programs of the Farm Bill are divided into overarching categories called “titles.” These titles are not static and can change between Farm Bills during the re-authorization process. The 2008 Farm Bill had 15 titles, for example, while the 2014 Farm Bill has 12 titles: commodities, conservation, trade, nutrition, credit, rural development, research, forestry, energy, horticulture, crop insurance, and miscellaneous. In terms of scale, the 2014 Farm Bill provided \$489 billion in mandatory spending for all titles over the next five years and \$956 billion in mandatory spending until 2024. Among the titles of the 2014 Farm Bill, programs under the nutrition title are the largest, accounting for 80% of spending. Nutrition is followed by crop insurance, which accounts for 8% of spending; conservation, which accounts for 6% of spending; and commodity programs, which account for 5% of spending. The remaining 1% of spending includes trade subsidies, rural development, research, forestry, energy, livestock, and horticulture/organic agriculture.

Finally, in terms of the process itself, the Farm Bill comes up for renewal approximately every five years. Congressional negotiations on the composition of the bill typically take between two to three years. Many interest groups and corporations shape the Farm Bill by way of lobbying, campaign donations, and other such efforts. Though they vary greatly by their degrees of influence, such actors include large retailers and food manufacturers (e.g., Walmart and Coca-Cola), suppliers and manufacturers of agricultural inputs (e.g., Cargill, Monsanto, DuPont), members of government and special interest groups (e.g., key industry groups include the American Farm Bureau Federation, the National Corn Growers Association, and the International Dairy Foods Association), as well as a diverse set of advocacy organizations (e.g., the Center for Rural Affairs, the Environmental Working Group, and the Food Research and Action Center, among others). Typically, it is corporate interests and actors that have had the greatest influence in pushing for specific language and policies that advance their respective interests in the Farm Bill.

FARM BILL TITLE AND PROGRAM FUNDING: 2014 VERSUS 2008

Title I: Commodity Programs

\$44.5 billion over 10 years—\$14.3 billion less than existing law

The commodity title includes several programs that aim to protect farmers against sharp fluctuations in prices on primary commodity crops (e.g., corn, wheat, soybean, cotton, rice, peanut) and to keep production relatively profitable. In previous years, the commodity title was primarily geared towards providing large “direct payments” to farmers regardless of how much they actually planted or for how much they would sell their crops. The 2014 Farm Bill cut most of these direct payments by about \$19 billion over 10 years, which was the most drastic policy change in this current Farm Bill. Much of this money has gone into other types of farm aid, particularly disaster assistance for livestock producers, subsidized loans for farmers, and the crop insurance program. For example, the 2014 Farm Bill abandoned the 70-year-old practice of setting minimum prices for milk, cheese, and butter, and instead invested in insurance for dairy farmers to protect themselves against price volatility or rising feed costs. Significantly, the shift toward crop insurance programs has largely benefitted private insurance corporations, banks, and the largest producers more than small and mid-sized farmers.¹⁰

Title II: Conservation Programs

\$57.6 billion over 10 years—\$4 billion less than existing law

The conservation title includes programs to help farmers protect against environmental degradation (e.g., soil erosion) and maintain their means of production through the use of sustainable management practices. The conservation title also includes programs that pay farmers to retire some of their land, such as the Conservation Reserve Program, the largest land retirement program in the United States. The \$4 billion cut in the conservation title in the 2014 Farm Bill marks the first time Congress has voted to reduce conservation spending since the title first entered the Farm Bill in 1985. In every Farm Bill since then—1990, 1996, 2002, and 2008—funding for the conservation title has increased.

Title III: Trade Programs

\$3.57 billion over 10 years—similar to existing law

Trade funding is used to promote US commodity crops and food aid abroad as well as technical assistance to farmers in developing countries. Although President Obama suggested an overhaul of the food aid program—aiming to replace the processes of selling US-produced food to developing countries with direct payments to developing countries—such reform efforts did not take hold and Congress kept the food-aid program intact. The lack of change in the trade title reflects the maintenance of a global trade structure produced by and designed to benefit transnational agribusiness corporations as well as US influence abroad.

Title IV: Nutrition Programs

\$756.4 billion over 10 years—\$8.7 billion less than existing law

The nutrition title has long been the largest title in the Farm Bill and continues to account for more than two-thirds of Farm Bill spending. Several nutrition assistance programs are authorized in the Farm Bill, such as SNAP, the nation’s largest and most significant domes-

tic anti-hunger program. Although the newest 2014 Farm Bill reauthorized SNAP, Congress cut \$8.7 billion from the program, reducing benefits for 48 million people—including more than 21 million children—in 850,000 households across the United States. Households affected by the \$8.7 billion cut will lose an average of \$90 per month in benefits. The SNAP cuts come at a time when 49 million people—about 14.5% of all US households—are food insecure.¹¹ These cuts would impact the country's most marginalized populations: women, who are almost twice as likely as men (23% vs. 12%) to have received SNAP benefits at some point in their lives; Blacks, who are over twice as likely as whites (31% vs. 15%) to have received SNAP benefits; and Native Americans (26%) and Latinos/as (22%), both major SNAP recipients as well.¹²

Title V: Credit Programs

\$2.24 billion over 10 years—similar to existing law

The 2014 Farm Bill made relatively small adjustments to the permanent statutes of the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) and the Farm Credit System (FCS), two types of farm lenders. The Farm Bill gave the USDA the ability to recognize non-conventional legal entities to qualify for farm loans. It also eliminated term limits for guaranteed operating loans, increased the maximum size of down-payment loans, and increased the percentage of guaranteed conservation loans. Finally, the 2014 Farm Bill included an additional lending priority for beginning farmers, and facilitates loans for the purchase of highly fractionated land in Native American reservations, among other changes.

Title VI: Rural Development Programs

\$240 million over 10 years—similar to existing law

Under the rural development title, an important poverty alleviation title, there are provisions for rural equity capital development, regional economic planning and development, essential community facilities, water and wastewater infrastructure needs, value-added agricultural development, broadband telecommunications development, and more. Since 2008, many local food promotion and organic food promotion monies were put here. The 2014 Farm Bill, in particular, expands high-speed broadband access in rural areas, creates a new rural energy savings program, establishes a program for strategic economic and community development, and consolidates several existing business development grants into a broader program of business development grants.

Title VII: Research & Extension Programs

\$1.26 billion over 10 years—\$120 million less than existing law

The USDA is authorized to conduct federal-level agricultural research, and to provide state-level support for research, extension, and agricultural education programs. The 2014 Farm Bill reauthorizes funding for these activities yet amended authority so that only competitive grants can be awarded under certain programs. Additionally, mandatory spending for the research title increased for several programs, such as the Organic Agricultural Research and Extension Initiative and the Specialty Crop Research Initiative, and continued for other programs, such as the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program.

Title VIII: Forestry Programs

\$10 million over 10 years—similar to existing law

Past Farm Bills have included provisions addressing forestry assistance, especially on private lands. The 2014 Farm Bill generally repeals, reauthorizes, and modifies existing programs and provisions under two main authorities: the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act (CFAA), as amended, and the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003 (HFRA), as amended. Many federal forestry assistance programs are permanently authorized, and thus do not require reauthorization in the Farm Bill. The bill also includes provisions that foster improved management of the National Forest System, such as the authorization of the designation of areas within the National Forest System that are of deteriorating health and require treatment.

Title IX: Energy Programs

\$1.1 billion over 10 years—\$120 million less than existing law

This is the third time the energy title has appeared in the Farm Bill since its introduction in 2002. The primary programs from this legislation include the Biomass Crop Assistance Program, which partners with farmers to develop new biofuels; the Biorefinery Assistance Program, which supports biofuels research and development by assisting US companies in securing more than \$450 million in private capital for biofuel projects; and the Renewable Energy for America Program (REAP) that aims to support renewable energy jobs in rural parts of the country.

Title X: Horticulture Programs

\$1.76 billion over 10 years—similar to existing law

The horticulture title of the Farm Bill deals primarily with marketing and promotion; data and information collection; food safety and quality standards; pest and disease control; as well as support for local foods. The most significant programs that support specialty crop producers in particular are the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program and its Plant Pest and Disease Prevention Programs; data collection and Market News compilations; as well as the Farmer's Market and Local Food Promotion Program. Significantly, this title also includes the USDA's flagship National Organic Program and other provisions that benefit certified organic agriculture producers. However, most boosts to organic agriculture under the 2014 Farm Bill—from the \$100 million of mandatory research funds dedicated towards projects tailored specifically to organic agriculture, to the additional \$30 million over a decade in subsidies for organic certification—took place under other titles.

Title XI: Crop Insurance Programs

\$89.8 billion over 10 years—similar to existing law

The primary purpose of the federal crop insurance program is to offer subsidized crop insurance to producers who purchase a policy to protect against losses in yield, as well as crop revenue and whole farm revenue. Significantly, more than 100 crops are insurable. The 2014 Farm Bill increased funding for crop insurance, primarily for two new insurance products: the Stacked Income Protection (STAX) for cotton (in part because cotton is not covered by the counter-cyclical price or revenue programs established in Title I) and the Supplemental Coverage Option (SCO) for other crops. Ultimately, with the decline in projected spending for Title I

(Commodities), and the increase for Title XI (Crop Insurance), the 2014 Farm Bill underwent a decline of \$8.59 billion in spending on the farm “safety net.”

Title XII: Miscellaneous programs

\$2.36 billion over 10 years—\$950 million more than existing law

Under the Farm Bill, the miscellaneous title includes various provisions affecting research, jobs training, and socially disadvantaged and limited resource producers, as well as livestock production and oil heat efficiency, among other provisions. The 2014 Farm Bill extended authority for outreach and technical assistance programs for socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers, expanded support for military veteran farmers and ranchers, and created a research center to develop policy recommendations for socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers. Finally, it reauthorized funding for the USDA Office of Advocacy and Outreach for socially disadvantaged and veteran farmers and ranchers, and mandated receipts for service or denial of service in order to increase transparency.

REPORT OUTLINE

Each part of this report addresses a key element of the US food system and the Farm Bill in terms of corporate control, structural racialization, and social, political, economic, and environmental inequity. The report is structured along the following sections.

- Part I addresses corporate power in the US food system, and outlines the Food Bill’s long term shift from the subsidization of production and consumption to the subsidization of agribusiness itself. It also addresses how low-income communities and communities of color have fared during the shift, and how they have fared with regard to US food and agriculture policy more broadly.
- Part II examines the relationship between food insecurity, public assistance, poverty, and structural racialization. It focuses on the value of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), particularly during times of economic hardship, and considers the long term viability of SNAP as an anti-poverty tool.
- Part III focuses on how low-income communities and communities of color have fared with regard to three federal rural and agricultural support programs: Farm Service Agency (FSA) lending programs, Farm Bill commodity programs, and Farm Bill rural development programs.
- Part IV examines both the effects of global climate change on low-income communities and communities of color, as well as the impact that conservation and sustainable agriculture programs have inadvertently had on such communities. It focuses on four federal rural and agricultural support programs: the Conservation Reserve Program, Environmental Quality Incentives Program, organic agriculture programs, and outreach and assistance programs—as well as recent corporate-backed trends in increased biofuel production.
- The conclusion posits short- and long term interventions, and presents a call for a broad-based food sovereignty movement to push for transformative change of the food system as well as of society itself.



PART I.

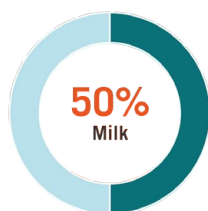
CORPORATE POWER

AT-A-GLANCE CORPORATE POWER

Four corporations own



and manufacture



Corporate Consolidation can take two forms.

Horizontal—consolidation of ownership and control within one part of the food system, such as production, processing, and distribution.

Vertical—consolidation of ownership and control within more than one part of the food chain, such as upstream suppliers or downstream buyers.

Corporate Control refers to the control of political and economic systems by corporations in order to influence trade regulations, tax rates, and wealth distribution, among other measures, and to produce favorable environments for future corporate growth.

- While 95.3% of US farms are small and midsize family-owned operations, large-scale operations dominate the production of the US food system. For example, a mere 4.7% of US farms account for 49.7% of the total value of agricultural production in the United States.¹³ Furthermore, twelve companies now account for almost 53% of ethanol production capacity and own 38% of all ethanol production plants.¹⁴
- As of 2007, four corporations owned 85% of the soybean processing industry, 82% of the beef packing industry, 63% of the pork packing industry, and manufacture about 50% of the milk, while five corporations control 50% of grocery retail.¹⁵ Globally, fewer than 500 companies control 70% of food choice.¹⁶
- As of 2011, the large majority of corporate directors of Fortune 500 companies were white men (74.4%) white women (13.3%), although white men and women make up 72.4% of the US population.¹⁷ Despite making up 12.6% of the US population, only 3.1% of the corporate directors were Latinos/as (2.4% Latino men, 0.7% Latino women). Finally, only 6.8% of corporate directors were Black, despite making up 13.6% of the US population (5.3% Black men and 1.5% Black women).¹⁸

PART I.

Corporate Power

CORPORATE POWER HAS LONG PLAYED A ROLE in the institutions, processes, practices, and infrastructure that make up the US food system: how food is produced, processed, distributed, and consumed.

Part I provides a snapshot of the state of corporate consolidation and control in the US food system (above) then addresses the history of the US food system with regard to the relationship between the federal government, corporate consolidation and control, and structural racialization: first, from the 1930s to the 1950s with the Great Depression and New Deal farm programs; and second, from the 1950s to the late 1970s with the erosion of such programs. It then addresses the emergence of neoliberal economic and political restructuring in the late 1970s and early 1980s—characterized by privatization, free trade, deregulation, and cuts in government spending in favor of the private sector—and the emergence of the neoliberal corporate-controlled food system.

Part I then elaborates upon two major domains within which corporate influence under neoliberalism remains particularly salient. The first domain is that of food production, processing, distribution, and service—with such influence exerted by way of commodity support and crop insurance programs, labor regimes, and international food aid. The second domain is that of education, research, and development—with such influence exerted by way of lobbying efforts, private funding, strategic mergers, and the “revolving door” between corporate employees and government officials. Significantly, corporations continue to exert such influence via lobbying efforts, private funding, strategic mergers, and the “revolving door” between corporate employees and government officials. Ultimately, Part I argues that the Farm Bill, from the first Farm Bill in 1933 to the Farm Bills of the 1980s onward, is defined by the long term shift from the subsidization of production and consumption to the subsidization of agribusiness, and that low-income communities and communities of color have been structurally positioned on the losing side of such shifts.

It is important to note that corporate consolidation and corporate control are two related, yet different, phenomena. Corporate consolidation can take the form of horizontal consolidation, which refers to the consolidation of ownership and control within one part of the food system, such as production, processing, or distribution; or vertical consolidation, which refers to the consolidation of firms at more than one part of the food chain, such as upstream suppliers or downstream buyers.^[iv] The term “agribusiness” is often deployed in reference to corporations that exhibit one or both sets of processes within the food system.

[iv] For example, ConAgra, a corporation that owns and runs grain elevators, distributes seed, chemical fertilizers, and pesticides; manufactures animal feed; and raises and processes chickens for sale.

Corporate control, however, refers to the control of political and economic systems by corporations in order to influence trade regulations, tax rates, wealth distribution, among other measures, and to produce favorable environments for further corporate growth. It should be noted that corporate consolidation is a prerequisite to corporate control. In other words, it can be looked at as a two-part process: once corporate consolidation has been achieved, corporations are much better suited to assert their control over political and economic systems as they have little competition in their respective sectors and industries. Thus, as Susan George states: “It is not just their size, their enormous wealth and assets that make the [corporations] dangerous to democracy. It is also their concentration, their capacity to influence, and often infiltrate governments, and their ability to act as a genuine international social class in order to defend their commercial interests against the common good.”¹⁹

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

A New and Changing Farm Bill: Toward Low Prices and Big Buyers

The period of agricultural policy between the 1930s and the 1950s was greatly informed by the Great Depression—a consequence of the stock market crash of 1929. The crash marked the disruption of capital accumulation in every sector of the economy, including agricultural production.²⁰ During the 1930s, the massive drought and soil erosion that characterized the Dust Bowl intensified the impact of the Depression upon agricultural production and had far-reaching social, economic, and environmental consequences. The Dust Bowl affected over 100 million acres and prompted the largest migration in US history within a short period of time.^[v] Approximately 3.5 million people moved out of the Great Plains states in search of work between 1930 and 1940.²¹

Pressured by the need to support remaining farmers and thwart massive farm loss, Congress passed the New Deal-era 1933 Agricultural Adjustment Act, which aimed to raise the value of crops and reduce crop production and surplus. The 1933 Farm Bill reduced agricultural production by paying farmers subsidies not to plant on part of their land and to kill off excess livestock. However, the goal of agricultural policy did not remain tied to the support of production. Rather, by the end of the 1940s, “doctrine of parity” set standards for commodity prices and undergirded the 1941 Steagall Amendment, the Agricultural Acts of 1948 and 1949, and the permanent funding of the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC). The goal of agricultural policy had shifted from support of production to the support of commodity prices.^{22[vi]}

For the next few decades, particularly between the 1950s and 1970s, agricultural production was characterized by high-yielding varieties of a few cereals (wheat, maize, rice), the heavy use of

[v] It is important to note that the Dust Bowl was in fact caused by industrial agriculture and a poor understanding of the local and regional ecologies of the Midwest. Farmers destroyed the Great Plains, whose deep-rooted grasses had trapped top soils and acted as natural defenses to high winds and drought. Once farmers plowed through these grasses, the drought of the 1930s had a tremendous impact, causing huge billows of dust to travel across the sky, reaching the East Coast of the US, which also, as mentioned previously, rendered many farmers jobless.

[vi] The doctrine of parity held that US agriculture should be as profitable as it was between 1909 and 1914, when food prices and farm incomes were particularly high. The doctrine of parity grounded agricultural price control efforts beginning in the 1920s in order to restore the “terms of trade” of those few years as farming and food price declined. It was long critiqued, however, for ignoring changes in agricultural productivity and for setting an artificial standard. Bordo, Michael D., Claudia Goldin, and Eugene N. White. *The Defining Moment: The Great Depression and the American Economy in the Twentieth Century*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007.

subsidized fertilizers, pesticides, irrigation and machinery, and their global proliferation under the “Green Revolution.”²³ Furthermore, from 1952 onward, the “parity” farm programs of the New Deal era were eroded, as price floors were lowered and supply management was reduced.²⁴ Beginning in 1973, policy changes during the Nixon Administration precipitated the drastic deregulation of the corn market in particular by dismantling New Deal era supply management policies, selling off federal grain storage reserves, and implementing “fencerow to fencerow” planting, ultimately promoting overproduction and the consolidation of farm operations.^[vii]

Simultaneously, the system of loans and land idling schemes that supported farmers was replaced with a system of direct subsidies that supported low prices for corporate purchasers by encouraging farmers to sell crops at any price and ensuring that direct payments from the government would make up the difference.²⁵ Ultimately, these changes not only reflected and upheld corporate consolidation and control, they also resulted in massive farm loss: the number of farms decreased from 7 million in 1935 to 1.9 million in 1997, with the greatest drop occurring from 1935 to 1974.²⁶

The Farm Bill and Corporate Profit

The changes from both the 1930s to the 1950s, and the 1950s to the 1970s, were tied to corporate power, as reflected by several key moments in the history of the Farm Bill. First, the money for production subsidies under the 1933 Farm Bill was originally generated by way of an exclusive tax on corporations that processed farm products. Yet, according to the 1938 Supreme Court case, *United States v. Butler*, the act’s tax provision unfairly targeted corporations and was thus deemed unconstitutional. Subsequently, under the 1938 Farm Bill, the federal government, and not a processor’s tax, would finance such subsidies, thus relieving corporations of any responsibility to maintain high commodity prices or profitable farms. Significantly, this funding structure was held in place during the shift in agricultural policy from the support of production to the support of prices by way of the doctrine of parity.

The ongoing erosion of the doctrine of parity from 1952 onward, which included the lowering of price floors and reduction of supply management practices, sent farm prices crashing and ushered in a period of agricultural policy driven by agribusiness. Specifically, corporations such as Archer Daniels Midland (ADM) and Cargill were instrumental in helping replace New Deal-era loan programs and land-idling arrangements with direct subsidies that supported low prices for corporate purchasers themselves. Anticipating the 1973 Farm Bill, for example, and alongside Secretary of Agriculture, Earl Butz, Cargill and the Farm Bureau argued that crashing farm prices would be a plus. They argued that not only would greater exports and new uses such as ethanol and sweeteners remedy the drop in price, but also that farms would remain profitable with the support of government subsidies.²⁷ The winners and losers were clear under such policies: corporate buyers could acquire commodity crops for record low prices that were subsidized by the federal government while farmers continued to lose their lands and their income. Such policies, furthermore, constituted part of the larger trend in corporate growth, not limited solely to agribusiness. For example, according to a 2013 Bureau of Economic Analysis, corporate profit (after tax) as a percentage of GDP more than doubled between 1980 and 2013, rising from less

[vii]“Fencerow to fencerow” was a phrase coined by Nixon’s Secretary of Agriculture, Earl Butz. During this period, and under this production regime, the USDA asserted that “free trade” would negate any potential issue of overproduction.

than 5% to over 10%; before tax, corporate profit, as a percent of GDP, rose from less than 8% to over 12.5% between 1980 and 2013.²⁸

A Project of Racial Exclusion: Federal Agricultural Policy and Program Administration

Both periods, from the Great Depression and New Deal farm programs, to their erosion over the following decades, were characterized by structural racialization. Although New Deal-era legislation was geared toward pulling Americans out of poverty, it was itself a project of racial exclusion, with Black communities and other communities of color systematically barred from such supports.²⁹ Southern committee members in Congress, for example, blocked efforts to include agricultural workers and domestic workers in the Social Security Act—the New Deal’s centerpiece legislation—largely because of the high concentration of black workers within those lines of work. In the 1930s, 60% of Black workers held domestic or agricultural jobs nationally while, in the southern United States, domestic and agricultural occupations employed almost 75% of Black workers, and 85% of Black women.³⁰ Furthermore, although the National Recovery Administration set wages within the cotton industry at \$12 a week, many Black workers had jobs

“The Big 10” generate more than \$450 billion per year



that were not covered by the law and thus had their wages reduced by employers so that white workers could be paid more.³¹ Finally, Black agricultural workers were also left out of New Deal-era agricultural union programs—namely the National Labor Relations Act, enacted and signed into law on July 5, 1935—while Black landowners in particular were excluded from federal farm support under the Agricultural Adjustment Administration.³² Significantly, the distribution of federal support during this period resulted in the dramatic decrease in the number of Black farms, from about 900,000 in 1930 to 682,000 in 1939.³³

Although these programs were slowly eroded over the next few decades, farmers of color continued to face great hardship relative to white farmers. The period of agricultural mechanization and industrialization after World War II, marked by the widespread adoption of scientific and technological innovations (e.g., the mechanical cotton-harvester, the new herbicides, pesticides, and hybrid seed) is usually credited with weeding out supposedly “non-productive, inefficient” farmers.³⁴

Yet farmers of color and particularly Black farmers, in the context of the uneven application of New Deal era supports and years of discriminatory practices, were at a great disadvantage during this period because they were prevented from attaining the requisite access to capital and thus economic stability for such a transition.³⁵

Historian and USDA Economic Research Service analyst Joel Schor recounts several other major factors that caused Black-owned farm loss during this period, including: “*the vulnerability of small-scale farms*,” which were the type Black farmers most frequently operated; “*the lack of knowledge about tax and credit policies, inheritance transfer mechanisms, eminent domain, and legal instruments for maintaining or acquiring land*”; and, the failures of agricultural policies and programs to reach Black farmers, whether “*due to ineffectiveness, discrimination in implementation, poor design, lack of funding, or other unintended shortcomings*.”^{[viii]36} While in 1939 there were still 682,000 Black farms, by 1978 only 6,996 Black farms remained.³⁷

CORPORATE CONTROL AND THE FARM BILL

The Emergence of the Neoliberal Corporate Food System

From the late 1970s and early 1980s until today, corporations have taken on a new and more deeply entrenched set of relationships within the food system. In short, this period is defined by neoliberal capitalist expansion and corporate control that began with the global economic shocks of the 1970s and 1980s.³⁸ During the 1980s, and working for the interests of multinational corporations in securing markets abroad for agricultural commodities produced domestically, **Structural Adjustment Programs** (SAP) broke down foreign tariffs, dismantled national marketing boards, and eliminated price guarantees in the Global South.³⁹ Alongside this destructive guarantee of foreign markets, the 1950s-onward trend of dismantling domestic safety net programs for farmers, guaranteeing low prices for commodity purchasers (i.e., corporate buyers), and making up the potential loss for farmers with government direct payments continued. Such trends culminated in the 1996 Farm Bill—the “Freedom to Farm” bill. This Farm Bill eliminated the structural safety nets that had long protected producers during lean years. Corporate buyers and groups such as the National Grain and Feed Association, composed of firms in the grain and feed industry, pushed the 1996 Farm Bill to completely eliminate price floors, the requirement to keep some land idle, and the grain reserves that were meant to stabilize supplies and therefore stabilize prices, while simultaneously encouraging farmers to plant as much as possible.⁴⁰

The 1996 Farm Bill thus marked the culmination of the shift from the federal government subsidizing production and consumption to diminishing price supports and the subsidization of agribusiness itself. The dismantling of such price controls drove prices down and allowed corporate buyers to profit off heavily subsidized commodities while securing their power over producers. Specifically, deregulation left farmers increasingly vulnerable to market fluctuations

Five corporations control



[viii] These are two major points that will be discussed in further detail in Part III.

caused by speculation, price volatility, and the profit-motives of corporate buyers. The shifts under the 1996 Farm Bill were deemed a failure by both farmers and legislators, and by 1997, rapidly falling farm prices resulted in direct government emergency payments to farmers, despite the fact that the legislation was designed to completely phase out farm program payments.⁴¹ Between 1996 and 1998, expenditures for farm programs rose dramatically, from \$7.3 billion to \$12.4 billion. They then soared to \$21.5 billion in 1999 to over \$22 billion in 2001.⁴² From 1996 to 2001, US net farm income dropped by 16.5% despite these payments.⁴³ Rather than address the underlying cause of the price drop—overproduction—Congress voted to make these “emergency” payments permanent in the 2002 Farm Bill.⁴⁴ As outlined below, neoliberal corporate influence remains particularly salient within two domains: the first is food production, processing, distribution, and service, and the second is education, research, and development.

Strategies of Neoliberal Corporate Influence

A. Food Production, Processing, Distribution, and Service

Commodity Supports: One major way corporations continue to profit and exert their influence on food production, distribution, and consumption is through commodity support programs. Once the safety nets of the New Deal farm programs were cut back during the 1980s and 1990s, and completely eliminated in the 1996 Farm Bill, farmers began to produce much more corn, soybeans, wheat, and other commodity crops. Specifically, the 1996 Farm Bill eliminated the requirement to keep some land idle, which encouraged farmers to plant far more than they had before. As a result, the higher supplies of these crops brought down their prices, which drastically hurt farmer incomes and greatly increased the profits corporate purchasers reaped from purchasing even cheaper commodities.

These low prices undermined the economic viability of most crop farms in the late 1990s, and subsequently, Congress provided a series of emergency payments to farmers. Furthermore, because continued oversupply kept prices from recovering, Congress eventually made such payments permanent in the 2002 Farm Bill.⁴⁵ The dismantling of direct payment support for farmers thus ushered in another form of federally subsidized cheap commodities for corporate buyers that still leaves farmers themselves relatively vulnerable: disaster assistance programs and other emergency aid. The 2014 Farm Bill in particular cut funding allocated to direct payments by about \$19 billion over 10 years—the most drastic policy change in this Farm Bill—with much of this money going into other types of farm aid, including disaster assistance for livestock producers, subsidized loans for farmers, and, most significantly, the crop insurance program.^[ix]

Crop Insurance: As fundamental as direct payments and emergency payments have been for subsidizing agribusiness profits, under neoliberal political and economic restructuring, crop insurance has surpassed them as the most egregious and expensive subsidy for agribusiness. For decades, farmers have been able to buy federally subsidized crop insurance in order to protect against crop failure or a decline in commodity prices. However, private insurance corporations and banks that administer the program, such as Wells Fargo, benefit the most from crop insurance subsidies. In 2011, these corporations received \$1.3 billion for administrative expenses with \$10 billion in profits over the past decade.⁴⁶ In order to help cushion the blow from the

[ix] Part IV addresses in greater detail how exactly such commodity support programs disadvantage low-income communities and communities of color in particular.

reduction of direct payments, under the 2014 Farm Bill, \$90 billion over 10 years will go toward crop insurance, which is \$7 billion more than the previous farm bill. However, much of this money will go to private insurance corporations and banks instead of farmers.⁴⁷

On the production side, the increase in government support will be directed toward the deductibles that farmers have to pay before insurance benefits begin. In other words, unlike non-farm insurance policies (i.e., home, business, etc.), crop insurance insures not only the crops, but also the expected revenue from selling those crops. Thus, Agricultural Risk Coverage and Price Loss Coverage only pays out when prices drop below a certain threshold.^[x] As of early 2015, corn crops have already reached this threshold.⁴⁸ There exists a risk that this insurance program could cost far more than expected depending on how crop prices continue to shift: therefore, this is one of the more contentious aspects of the 2014 Farm Bill. Another contentious part is the uneven distribution of benefits. A 2014 report by the Environmental Working Group estimates that 10,000 policyholders receive over \$100,000 a year in subsidies, with some receiving over \$1 million, while the bottom 80% of farmers collect only \$5,000 annually.^{49[xi]} In short, under the guise of cutting subsidies by repealing unpopular direct payments to farmers, the 2014 Farm Bill instead increases more costly crop insurance subsidies.

Globally, **500** companies control



Food Chain Workers:^[xii] The pressure for corporate profit and the history of corporate consolidation with regard to the food system, both vertical and horizontal, has driven corporations to continue to lower wages for millions of food system workers and accumulate more wealth. A 2011 national survey of over 630 food system workers conducted by the Food Chain Workers Alliance found that the median hourly wage was \$9.65 per hour. More than 86% of food system workers were paid poverty wages while 23% of food system workers were paid less than the minimum wage.⁵⁰ Despite their significant role in every part of the food system—from production to processing to distribution and service—food system workers experience a greater degree of food insecurity than the rest of the US workforce. For example, according to the Food Chain Workers Alliance report, food system workers use SNAP at more than one and a half times the rate of the remainder of the US workforce.⁵¹ Additionally, as of 2014, twice as many restaurant workers were food insecure compared to the overall US population; as of 2011, in Fresno County, the country's most productive agricultural county, 45% of farmworkers are food insecure. The situation is even worse in

[x] Thus, a producer could have a sizeable harvest yet still receive an insurance payment if the amount they sold it for is less than what was established under the policy, which is generally the historical average.

[xi] Although under current law, the names of individual businesses receiving support are withheld, a provision that maintained in the 2014 Farm Bill.

[xii] While labor is generally under the purview of the US Department of Labor, the Farm Bill's role in helping increase corporate consolidation and influence with regard to the US food system highlights the importance of labor as major line of inquiry within this report.

Average Annual Income Corporate CEO and Food Chain Worker



other parts of the country: in 2011, 63% of migrant farmworkers in Georgia were food insecure.⁵²

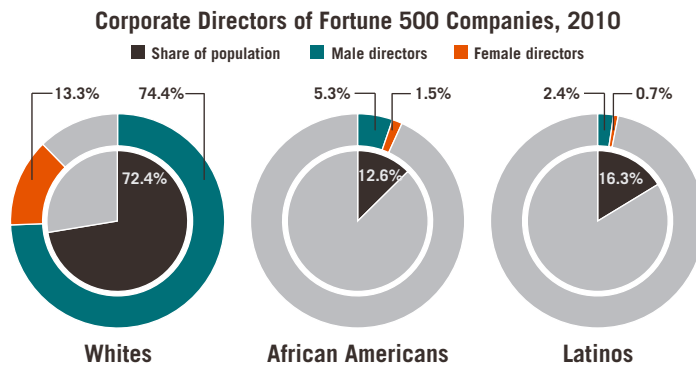
Women and people of color disproportionately feel the economic pressure experienced by food system workers as a result of corporate consolidation. A comprehensive 2011 study of food workers and economic disparity found that people of color typically make less than whites working in the food chain.⁵³ It found that half of white food workers earn \$25,024 a year while workers of color earn \$19,349. The study found that women of color in particular suffer the most, earning almost half of what white male workers earn.⁵⁴ Furthermore, workers of color experience wage theft (i.e., the illegal withholding of wages or the denial of benefits) more frequently than white workers. More than 20% of all workers of color reported experiencing wage theft, while only 13.2% of all white workers reported having

their wages misappropriated.⁵⁵ Significantly, the study found that such discrepancies exist in all four sectors of the food system: production, processing, distribution, and service.⁵⁶ Furthermore, such trends hold across the overall workforce. As of 2012, 11.8% of executive and senior level officials and managers, and 21% of all first- and mid-level officials and managers were people of color, despite people of color comprising over 25% of the US population.⁵⁷

Agricultural workers in particular experience ongoing and widespread violations of the limited protections afforded to them by federal law. This is oftentimes the result of competing producers aiming to drive down their costs by not complying with employment laws. Between 2010 and 2013, for example, among agricultural employers, the Department of Labor found 1,901 violations of the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), which sets the federal minimum wage, overtime pay, child labor rules, and payroll recordkeeping requirements.⁵⁸ A 2009 survey of approximately 200 farmworkers paid by “piece-rate” (i.e., pay per unit of work) in Marion County, Oregon, found that workers experienced extensive violations of the state’s minimum wage law. Almost 90% of workers surveyed reported that their “piece-rate” earnings frequently amounted to less than minimum wage, averaging less than \$5.30 per hour—37% below hourly minimum wage.⁵⁹ Furthermore, a 2013 survey of farmworkers in New Mexico found extremely low wages and high levels of wage theft: 67% of field workers surveyed were victim to wage theft within the year prior to the survey; 43% stated that they never received the minimum wage, and 95% said they were have never been paid for the time spent waiting each day in the field to begin working.⁶⁰

The combination of employers’ exploitation of the immigration system, and workers’ low (and withheld) income, limited formal education, limited command of the English language, and undocumented status, greatly hinders farmworkers from seeking any retribution or recognition of their rights. For example, as of 2009, the National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS) found that 78% of all farmworkers were foreign born, with 75% born in Mexico; 42% of farmworkers surveyed were migrants, with 35% of migrants having traveled between the United States and

another country, primarily Mexico. Furthermore, 44% said they couldn't speak English "at all" and 26% said they could speak English only "a little"; and the median level of completed education was sixth grade, with a large group (38%) of farmworkers completing fourth to seventh grades.⁶¹ With limited legal aid, many agricultural workers fear that challenging the illegal and unfair practices of their employers will result in further abuses, jobs losses, and, ultimately, deportation. Worse yet, few attorneys are available to help poor agricultural workers, and federal legal aid programs are prohibited from representing undocumented immigrants.⁶²



The exploitation of migrant agricultural workers begins long before they reach the United States, and this migration has largely been driven by US trade and foreign policy in Central and Latin America. Specifically, most agricultural workers are in the United States as part of the H-2A Temporary Agricultural Workers program, which allows US employers to bring foreign nationals to the United States to fill temporary or seasonal agricultural jobs. However, nearly all such employers rely on private recruiters to find available workers in their home countries and arrange their visas and transportation to the fields. US agricultural employers thrive and rely upon an immigration system and recruitment network that provides "cheap" labor (i.e., exploitable laborers), and, as such, this recruitment network outside US borders remains unregulated and highly exploitative.

Among the most grievous of such practices, for example, is the collection of fees from workers as a prerequisite to being hired. Many growers are willfully ignorant of recruiters' activities, despite recently revised regulations that require growers to promise that they have not received any such fees. With many potential workers striving to escape poor conditions in their respective homelands, there is much incentive for recruiters to charge "recruiting fees" for personal profit, leaving H-2A workers with a great deal of debt upon their arrival to the United States. While some have paid upwards of \$11,000 for such opportunities to work, others have given the deed to their house or their car to recruiters as collateral so as to ensure "compliance" with the terms of their contract. Many fear for their physical safety and safety of their family members if they are not able to repay their debts. Many farmworkers been deceived about their wages and working conditions (e.g. crops to be picked, length of their visa, and type of housing), and, to make matters worse, many workers are tied to one employer and therefore have no choice but to work regardless of the low pay and abysmal working conditions of their employers. Ultimately, the H-2A program and US labor market creates conditions ripe for debt-peonage.⁶³

Furthermore, although H-2A program regulations require employers to give job preference to qualified US workers, in practice the H-2A program ultimately puts US workers out of work

given the seeming cost benefits of employing H-2A workers.^[xiii] Toward this end, employers go to great lengths to unlawfully exclude qualified US workers in favor of H-2A workers, many of whom have themselves migrated to the United States during prior seasons. For example, employers schedule interviews at inconvenient times or locations; hire too early in the season, lead workers to arrive for work when there is none; limit their hours in order to discourage them from continuing to work; use employment contracts that demand that workers forfeit their right to sue a grower for lost wages and/or other illegalities; and impose productivity quotas and other unrealistic work demands on employees. These practices greatly discourage US workers from applying to these jobs, which then allows employers to “legally” hire H-2A workers.

Additionally, the profits reaped by large agricultural employers and by corporations at all levels of the food system not only come at the expense of the food system worker’s livelihoods and US job loss, but are also subsidized by taxpayers themselves. For example, Walmart, which sells 25% of all the groceries in the United States and is the largest employer in the US and world, has among the lowest wages across the retail industry.⁶⁴ Walmart workers cost US taxpayers an estimated \$6.2 billion in public assistance that would counteract the consequences of their low wages, including SNAP, Medicaid and subsidized housing.⁶⁵ Because 58% of food system workers surveyed reported having no health care coverage, more than one-third of workers surveyed have used the emergency room for primary care, which taxpayers help cover.⁶⁶

Finally, corporations like Walmart are able to determine wages and benefits for workers throughout their entire supply chain, given their massive procurement power and ability to dictate purchasing prices to its suppliers. This pressure and influence forces suppliers to lower their worker’s wages, multiplying the number of workers robbed of fair and livable wages and taxpayer subsidization of corporate profits. In short, when food system workers require public assistance, the onus rests on taxpayers and the federal government, rather than on those that are responsible for creating these unhealthy outcomes—corporations.^[xiv]

B. International Food Aid and Domestic Supports

After over thirty years of liberal trade policies beginning in the late 1970s and early 1980s, many developing countries have been left with a great dependence on the global market for basic food and grains. Developing countries had yearly agricultural trade surpluses of \$1 billion in the early 1970s. Yet by 2000, the food deficit in such countries had grown to \$11 billion per year. At the height of the 2007–2008 global food price crisis, Low-Income Food Deficit Countries import bills reached over \$38 billion for basic cereal grains.⁶⁷ Such systemic vulnerability is, in part, a result of international finance institutions, structural adjustment, free trade agreements, and a broader divestment of the state from agricultural development.⁶⁸ Furthermore, not only are overproduction and US food aid to blame, but also corporate actors use such international crises as oppor-

[xiii] According to a 2012 report by Farmworker Justice, there are several reasons why agricultural employers use guest workers in particular: (1) Foreign workers are economically desperate, as most H-2A workers come from home countries plagued by economic crises and poverty, the result, in part, of US foreign policy itself; (2) temporary workers lack full rights and cannot stay in the US beyond their work term with a particular employer; (3) employers can “hand-pick” a certain demographic of workers (mostly young men removed from daily family obligations), wherein US anti-discrimination laws do not apply to H-2A recruitment efforts abroad; (4) H-2A employers are exempt from paying Social Security and unemployment taxes on guest workers’ wages; (5) employers can avoid the wage demands of the labor market. Newman, Etan, Bruce Goldstein, Adrienne DerVartanian, Weeun Wang, Virginia Ruiz, and Jessica Felix-Romero. No Way to Treat a Guest: Why the H-2A Agricultural Visa Program Fails U.S. and Foreign Workers. Washington, D.C.: Farmworker Justice, 2012.

[xiv] Part II addresses in greater detail the subsidization of corporate profit vis-à-vis SNAP and other public assistance programs.

tunities to make additional calls for emergency aid coupled with further trade liberalization and increased investment in agricultural productivity.⁶⁹

The Farm Bill in particular has been instrumental in establishing and maintaining such systemic vulnerability. For example, although the 2014 Farm Bill authorizes \$80 million annually for the Local and Regional Procurement Program, which encourages greater use of food that is locally or regionally grown for food aid, it pales in comparison to the \$1.75 billion Food for Peace Title II through which United States Agency for International Development (USAID) provides food assistance. Furthermore, foreign economies are undermined not only by such efforts that directly shuttle surplus and heavily subsidized commodities—produced for the benefit of corporate entities—to developing countries, but also by production support programs themselves, such as commodity payments or crop insurance. For example, a 2012 International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development report found that the shift from direct payments to crop insurance support for farmers is likely to have far reaching effects on global trade and prices because of the anticipated change to cropping patterns. Specifically, the likelihood that the new programs will influence planting decisions is greatly enhanced because payments in all the new programs are calculated using actual planted acreage. Ultimately, if planting decisions are influenced enough, then program-induced changes in US crop acreage will be reflected in trade flows that have the potential to harm farmers in developing countries and cause fluctuations in global food prices.⁷⁰

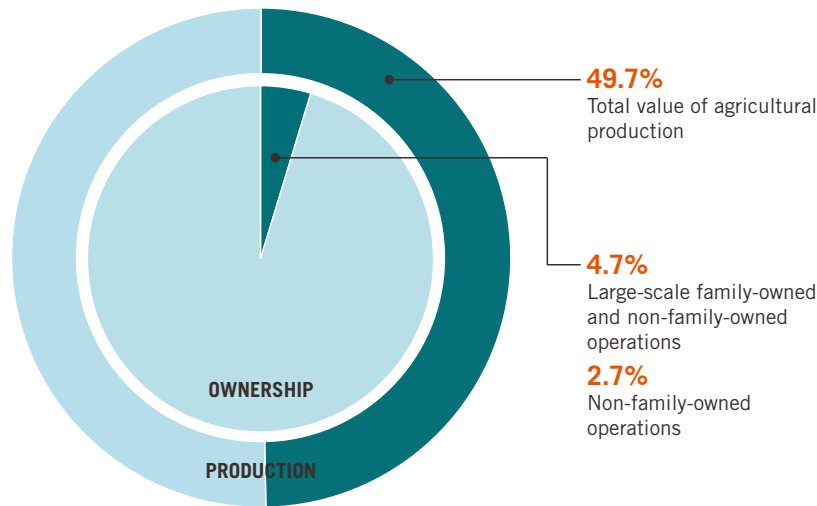
C. Education, Research, and Development

Academic Research and Development: One major way corporations profit and exert their control with regard to education, research, and development is their influence over academic research and development. Agricultural research in the United States is carried out primarily by three entities: the federal government, largely through the US Department of Agriculture; academia, primarily through land-grant universities; and the private sector. Over the past several decades, corporate interests have co-opted publicly-oriented agricultural research and land-grant university research efforts in particular. The federal government created land-grant universities in 1862 by deeding tracts of land to every state to pursue agricultural research to support agricultural production in the United States. Although public investments have maintained agricultural research since the creation of these universities, over recent decades public funding has stalled, prompting land-grant universities to appeal to agribusiness to remedy such financial shortcomings.

Significantly, the landmark 1980 Bayh-Dole Act pushed universities to take this particularly entrepreneurial role, generating revenue through producing patents from which the private sector could profit.⁷¹ The Bayh-Dole Act, as part of the neoliberalization of science and academic research itself, prompted greater industry influence over land-grant research, as university research agendas became oriented toward the needs of corporate partners.⁷² Major agribusiness donors to land-grant universities across the United States, including Syngenta, Monsanto, PepsiCo, Nestle, Dow Agroscience, Chevron, DuPont and others, now push research carried out by faculty and students toward developments in biofuels, commodity crops research, genetically engineered foods, and other areas of interest. Land-grant universities today not only carry out corporate-directed research but also depend on agribusinesses to underwrite research grants, endow faculty chairs, sponsor departments, and finance the construction of new buildings.⁷³

Corporate Consolidation & Composition

U.S. Farms, 2011



Even USDA research and USDA-funded research itself reflects corporate interests. The USDA spends roughly \$2 billion per year on agricultural research, which goes toward funding USDA researchers and researchers at land-grant universities.⁷⁴ This money, however, is largely directed toward a corporate-friendly industrial agriculture research agenda: the National Academy of Sciences found that USDA research prioritizes commodity crops, industrialized livestock production, technologies geared toward large-scale operations, and capital-intensive practices.⁷⁵ The Farm Bill does not prioritize funding for more sustainable farming programs, with programs such as the Organic Agriculture Research and Education Initiative and Specialty Crop Research Initiative accounting for only 2% of the USDA's research budget. Most research funding is directed toward commodity crops research.⁷⁶ In 2010, for example, the USDA funded \$204 million to research all varieties of fruits and vegetables, and spent \$212 million to research just four commodity crops: corn, soybeans, wheat, and cotton.⁷⁷

Seed Patents: Another major way private industry continues to profit and exert their influence vis-à-vis relations of education, research, and development, is seed research and patents. Since the early 1980s, the global seed industry has grown substantially and is now worth an estimated \$44 billion and is expected to grow to an estimated \$85 billion by 2018. The cumulative effect of seed legislation has facilitated the massive consolidation of corporate power, thus securing corporate control of one of the most crucial agricultural inputs. This history of seed legislation began shortly before the New Deal, beginning with the US Plant Patent Act of 1930 and continued with the 1970 Plant Variety Protection Act.⁷⁸ Significantly, seed legislation did not move into the judicial system until the 1980 Supreme Court decision *Diamond v. Chakrabarty*, which laid the legal groundwork for the privatization and commodification of the genetics of seeds.⁷⁹

In 1985, *Ex Parte Hibberd*, an administration decision by the US Patent and Trademarks Office, extended property rights to the individual components of organisms, including genetic information, thus anticipating some of today's contentious Genetically Modified Organism (GMO)

debates. Ten years later, *Asgrow Seed v. Winterboer* denied the rights of farmers to save and resell patented seed products, marking the continuation of a series of legislation that progressively placed power in corporate hands.⁸⁰ In 2001, *J.E.M. AG Supply v. Pioneer Hi-Bred International*, a legal dispute between a large seed company and small seed supply center, affirmed that newly developed plant breeds are covered by expansive utility patents. In 2013, furthermore, *Bowman v. Monsanto* held that patent “exhaustion doctrine” does not cover farmers’ reproduction of patented seeds through planting and harvesting without the patent owner’s permission, further reflecting and securing corporate profit and influence.⁸¹

D. Lobbying, Private Funding, Strategic Mergers, and the “Revolving Door”

Lobbying: Although inadequate disclosure laws make it difficult to determine the exact amount expended on the Farm Bill and on other pieces of legislation, during the two years preceding the passage of the Farm Bill on February 7, 2014, at least 600 companies spent over \$500 million in lobbying. The largest spenders ranged from Fortune 500 leaders in banking, trade, transportation and energy to non-profit organizations.⁸² A joint investigation by Harvest Public Media and the Midwest Center for Investigative Reporting found that the top 18 corporations and groups spent at least \$5 million each in total lobbying from 2012 to the First Quarter of 2014. These corporations and groups include: the US Chamber of Commerce, Exxon Mobil, Du Pont, the American Bankers Association, Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America, Grocery Manufacturers Association, Wells Fargo, AARP, Monsanto, Independent Community Bankers of America, Coca-Cola, Association of American Railroads, Nestle, Nextera Energy, BNSF Railway Company, PMI Global Services Inc., Bayer Corporation, and American Forest & Paper Association.⁸³

The commodities support programs outlined above make up one major set of Farm Bill issues influenced by such lobbying efforts. These direct payments have long received the attention of growers groups and other interest groups that are beholden to corporate interests. Specifically, alongside the Farm Bureau, the Farmers Union, and other general farm organizations, all major agricultural commodities (e.g., corn, cotton, rice, beef, pork, poultry, and dairy) are represented by a lobbying organization that aims to keep the Farm Bill’s commodity programs intact as per the supposed interest of the producers of such commodities. These organizations include: the National Cotton Council, the Sugar Association, and the National Corn Growers, among others.⁸⁴ While indeed all industries are represented by lobbying organizations, the relative political and economic strength of actors within the US food system that are already oriented toward large-scale production, processing, distribution, and service—such as those above—highlights their significance, particularly concerning contemporary campaign finance reform efforts.

Crop insurance programs are also highly influenced by corporate lobbying efforts. With the change to crop insurance as the safety net centerpiece, banks and insurance companies spent at least \$52.6 million in lobbying the 2014 Farm Bill and other issues in the two years prior to its passage. For example, Wells Fargo, the fourth-largest US bank, spent approximately \$11.3 million in lobbying efforts, signaling the potential gain to be had by the company’s Rural Community Insurance Services, the largest crop insurance provider in the country. The American Bankers Association, another group that will benefit most from the boost to crop insurance, reported spending \$14 million on lobbying, including advocacy for crop insurance and other rural lending plans. Other lobbyists for crop insurance included Independent Community Bank-

ers of America, ACE INA Holdings and Zurich (both global insurance companies), the National Association of Professional Insurance Agents, and Deere & Co., the large equipment manufacturer that also has a crop insurance arm.⁸⁵

Private Funding: Private sector spending on agricultural research has risen steeply since the 1970s and 1980s, exceeding public sector spending on agricultural research. From 1970 to 2006, private agricultural research expenditures—both in-house research and donations to land-grant universities—rose from \$2.8 billion to over \$8 billion, in inflation-adjusted 2014 dollars.⁸⁶ Yet total public funding—directed toward land-grant universities and the USDA—rose from \$3.1 billion to \$6.1 billion in that same period. Federal funding of land-grant universities in particular reflect such trends: by the early 1990s, industry funding had already surpassed USDA funding of agricultural research at land-grant universities and by 2009, private sector funding had soared to \$822 million, compared to \$645 million from the USDA.⁸⁷ Significantly, the economic recession substantially restricted research funding. Yet USDA land-grant university funding dropped twice as fast as private funding between 2009 and 2010, from 39.3% and 20.5%, respectively, reflecting the increasing dependence of university research on corporate funds, particularly during economic downturns.⁸⁸

Strategic Mergers: During the 1990s there were numerous mergers between agricultural, pharmaceutical, and chemical firms tied to the global seed industry that aimed to take advantage of potential synergies (becoming “life science” firms) and secure even greater corporate profit and strength. Because the mergers took place within the globalized market where most seed industry markets exist beyond one nation-state, however, these expected synergies were not realized and resulted in the spinoff of numerous agricultural divisions: Monsanto, for example, merged with Pharmacia and Upjohn before a new Monsanto division, now focusing on agriculture, separated to form a new entity. Syngenta began with the merge between the agribusiness divisions of Novartis and Zeneca. However, AstraZeneca, which focuses on pharmaceuticals, remains a separate company. Bayer acquired the agribusiness operations of Aventis, yet Sonofi-Aventis remains a financially distinct pharmaceutical company. By 2009, six companies with pharmaceutical and chemical origins held control over 67% of the global seed industry.⁸⁹

“Revolving Door”: Collectively, in addition to the lobbying strength they exert and the private funding they funnel into public institutions, corporations have also been effective in translating their economic power into political power by way of the “revolving door” between corporations and the government.⁹⁰ In 1999, for example, Monsanto was described as a “virtual retirement home for members of the Clinton administration.”⁹¹ The outcome of such tight relationships between corporations and governments is readily apparent in federal legislation that upholds agribusiness power. The “Farmer Assurance Provision,” for example—a provision of a bill that was signed into law in March 2013 by President Obama, yet only remained in effect for six months—undermined the Department of Agriculture’s authority to ban genetically modified crops, even if the court ruled that such crops posed human and environmental health risks. Significantly, Republican Senator Roy Blunt worked directly with Monsanto employees to draft the initial provision. Although supporters stated that the provision was necessary to protect farmers from endless legal complaints by opponents of GMOs that hold up critical research, the Farmer Assurance Provision would have ensured a lack of corporate liability.⁹²

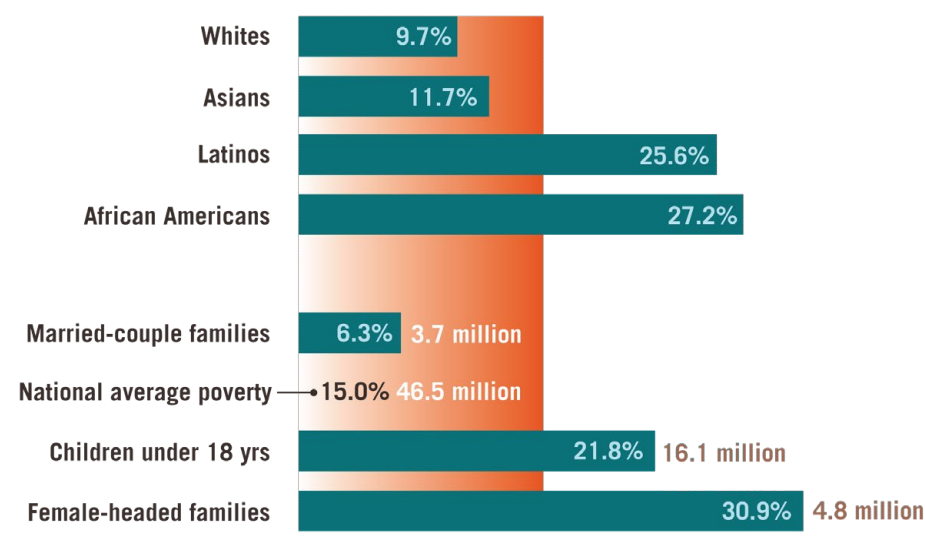
PART II.

**POVERTY,
FOOD INSECURITY,
AND PUBLIC
ASSISTANCE**

AT-A-GLANCE

POVERTY, FOOD INSECURITY, AND PUBLIC ASSISTANCE

Poverty Rates, 2012



Structural Racialization

- In 2012, the national average for poverty was 15%—over 46.5 million people—yet poverty rates are strongly associated with race/ethnicity and gender: while the poverty rate for whites was only 9.7%,⁹³ the poverty rate was 26% for Native Americans, 27.2% for Blacks, 25.6% for Latinos/as, and 11.7% for Asian Americans. At 30.9%, family poverty is highest among those headed by single women.⁹⁴
- Communities of color frequently overrepresented in lowest-paying jobs. In 2012, 26% of Blacks and 26% of Latinos were employed in service—a notoriously low-paying industry—while only 17% of whites and 18% of Asian Americans were employed in service.

Food Insecurity

- In 2013, 14.3%, or 17.5 million, of households were food insecure at least some time during the year.⁹⁶ As with poverty, food insecurity is strongly associated with race/ethnicity. In 2013, 10.6% of white households were food insecure, while 26.1% of Black households, 23.7% of Latino/a households, and 23% of Native American households were food insecure.⁹⁷
- The number of households experiencing food insecurity in the United States rose from 11.1% before the start of the recession began in 2007 to 14.6% in 2008 to a high of 14.9% in 2011.⁹⁸

Public Assistance

- At \$764 billion in projected spending over the next decade, and 95% of all nutrition title spending, SNAP is the largest program funded under the 2014 Farm Bill

and the largest federal food assistance program. In 2013, SNAP supported an average of 47.6 million people per month, over 15% of the US population, with an average of \$133 per person per month.

- SNAP primarily benefits low-income people and people in poverty. In 2014, about 92% of SNAP benefits went to households with incomes below the poverty line, and 57% went to households below half of the poverty line (about \$9,895 for a family of three).⁹⁹
- When measured as income, for example, SNAP kept 4.8 million people out of poverty, and lifted 1.3 million children above half of the poverty line, in 2013.¹⁰⁰

PART II.

Poverty, Food Insecurity, and Public Assistance

THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION defines food security as having consistent access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life.¹⁰¹ At its core, however, food insecurity is a matter of income and poverty.^{102[xv]} As such, programs that aim to remedy food insecurity—most notably, the Farm Bill’s Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)—hold potential not only as key nutrition assistance programs, but also as part of the anti-poverty programs and safety net to support historically marginalized communities in the United States, including low-income communities and communities of color. This is especially the case during times of economic hardship. In this context, Part II first provides a brief snapshot of the state of poverty, food insecurity, and public nutrition assistance in the United States (see [At-A-Glance](#)). It then addresses the origins of SNAP and its supposed concretization as an anti-poverty program in the 1970s, while tracing key periods of the erosion of the program tied to corporate influence and larger trends in public assistance reform. It then addresses in greater detail ongoing corporate influence and gain, particularly in the context of neoliberal economic and political restructuring since the late 1970s and early 1980s, and the myths against public assistance that undergird such gain: anti-poor and racist “culture of poverty” stereotypes, and the stereotype that people on SNAP are “not in a hurry to get off.”

Finally, Part II further challenges these and other myths against public assistance and investigates the relationship between SNAP and Unemployment Insurance (UI), another major safety net program, by highlighting their role during the global recession that followed the 2007–2008 financial meltdown. The 2007 subprime mortgage crisis that triggered the “Great Recession” was caused in part by intense financialization: relaxed lending standards and problematic federal housing policies, massive household debt, and the infamous real-estate bubble, among other factors.^[xvi] By exploring the racialized impacts of this decline in economic activity as well as the support available to low-income communities and communities of color—most notably SNAP and UI—this part argues that safety net programs have become essential for such communities. These communities use most of their total expenditures on food and other basic necessities, and

[xv] Although strongly related, food insecurity and poverty are not the same. Poverty, which is measured in terms of household income, is one of several factors associated with food insecurity in the United States. Other factors—all of which are related—include higher unemployment, lower household assets, and race/ethnicity.

[xvi] Financialization is a term used to describe a broad set of changes in the relation between the “financial” and “real” sector of an economy. Financialization, or financial capital and markets, are very different from the traditional profit-making cycle in the marketplace prior to the 1980s when neoliberalism emerged as an economic ideology in the global capitalist system.

are the hardest hit during such economic downturns. While it also argues that such safety net programs, particularly SNAP, are an important strategy in preventing and alleviating poverty in the United States, Part II ultimately argues that the strong ties between SNAP and corporate control undermine **long term** and **structural** work against poverty and structural racialization.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Emergence and Growth as an Anti-Poverty Program: From the 1930s to the 1970s

The Food Stamps Program, which was later renamed the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), originated in the rural relief and commodity support policies of the New Deal era and, in the wake of the Great Depression, was just as much a farm price support program as an anti-poverty one. As part of the 1933 Agricultural Adjustment Act, the Federal Surplus Relief Corporation facilitated farmer and consumer support by allowing the federal government to distribute farm commodities, purchased at reduced prices, to state and local hunger relief agencies.¹⁰³

Spearheading President Lyndon B. Johnson's "War on Poverty" was the 1964 Food Stamp Act, which gained notoriety as a national anti-poverty program. Under the Food Stamp Act, food stamp benefits were financed by the government and administrative costs shared with states. Only with the 1977 Food and Agriculture Act enacted under President Jimmy Carter was SNAP directly incorporated as part of Farm Bill legislation.^[xvii] Before then, despite the work of the Federal Surplus Relief Corporation, the Farm Bill had long been geared primarily toward commodity support programs. During a decade that saw Black unemployment rise from less than double that of whites to 2.5 times that of whites (from 1970 to 1979), this move by the Carter Administration was generally hailed as their principal anti-poverty achievement.^{104 [xviii]} Toward this end, in the 1970s alone, federal expenditure on food support grew by about 500%.¹⁰⁵

SNAP Cuts and Neoliberal Political and Economic Restructuring: From the 1980s to 1996

In 1981, a series of corporate- and government-driven cuts to public assistance began, with SNAP undergoing severe budget cuts of about \$1.8 billion, or 16% of its budget, along with cuts to other food and agriculture support programs under the Farm Bill. President Ronald Reagan, who ushered in the era of neoliberalism, made "welfare queens" an epithet, and turned SNAP into a symbol of the ills of big government, made severe cuts to SNAP and other domestic spending, which coincided with the deep recession of the early 1980s. Subsequently, food insecurity in the United States rose during the 1980s and poverty peaked with 15.2% of the population living under the poverty level, the highest since the end of the 1960s.¹⁰⁶ These cuts also facilitated the rapid growth of food banks and grassroots hunger relief agencies—rather than

[xvii] At the time School lunch and several other federal food assistance programs are covered under a separate bill, the Child Nutrition Act, signed on October 11, 1966 by President Lyndon B. Johnson.

[xviii] Carter's "lean and austere" program, however, overshadowed many such efforts, particularly with regard to communities of color who rightfully accused Carter of "callous neglect." Dumbrell, John. *The Carter Presidency: A Re-Evaluation*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995.

federal public assistance programs—as an appropriate response to the rise in hunger: more than 80% of pantries and soup kitchens currently operating came into existence between 1980 and 2001.¹⁰⁷^[xix] Significantly, these cuts mirrored the broader trends in the corporatization of the food system, as outlined in Part I, including scaling back of federal efforts to stabilize prices for farmers and cushion the impact of market volatility, corporate growth, consolidation, and influence in the food system more broadly.^[xx]

In order to combat the growing hunger crisis in the United States, funding was partially restored to SNAP in 1988 and 1990.^[xxi] Funding increases were accompanied by efforts to not only streamline administration of SNAP with an early form of the Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card, but also to expand eligibility for low-income communities.¹⁰⁸ Yet SNAP's growth in the early 1990s was countered in the mid-1990s with the conversion of funds into block grants to the states, and the enactment of more strict requirements on SNAP usage and eligibility.¹⁰⁹ Although more aid was still provided to the public in terms of volume, in conjunction with the wave of cuts in federal spending in the mid-1990s, private sector aid (e.g., food banks and pantries) became the fastest growing form of food assistance and had overtaken SNAP and other public aid.¹¹⁰



Applicants for food stamps line up before a window in the Food Stamp Division Office in Rochester, New York, the first city the Federal Food Stamp Plan in 1939. Photo Courtesy National Archives and Records Administration.

SNAP, the “Freedom to Farm” Bill, and Onward: From 1996 to Today

The 1996 Farm Bill represents the culmination of neoliberal-oriented public assistance reform that ramped up in the early 1980s, and marked the ongoing reallocation of tax dollars from public support programs to corporations themselves. This bill drastically reduced and reshaped

[xix] The rise of the emergency food assistance system in the US is characterized by two main periods. The first period, the “emergency period,” beginning with the Great Depression, marked the establishment of soup kitchens and food banks and pantries in response to growing rural and urban poverty. Significantly, these programs were primarily small, extensions of faith-based community projects, and intended to be temporary. The second period, the “institutional period,” from 1980 to the present, is characterized by the great proliferation of emergency food providers and changes in the demographics of emergency food assistance recipients. More than 80% of pantries and soup kitchens currently operating came into existence between 1980 and 2001, while less than 18% of such agencies existed before then. Hunger in America 2001, National Report. Chicago: America's Second Harvest, 2001. O'Brien, Doug, Erinn Staley, Stephanie Uchima, Eleanor Thompson, and Halley Torres Aldeen. “The Charitable Food Assistance System: The Sector's Role in Ending Hunger in America.” Chicago: America's Second Harvest, 2004.

[xx] See: Fisher, Andy. “The Anti Hunger-Industrial Complex.” Civil Eats, September 5, 2013. <http://civileats.com/2013/09/05/the-anti-hunger-industrial-complex/>.

[xxi] In 1988 by way of the Hunger Prevention Act of 1988, and in 1999 by way of opposition to proposed federal block grants to states that might result in decreases in SNAP and other assistance programs.

federal food and agricultural support. SNAP in particular was cut by \$26 billion over six years in the 1996 Farm Bill, a central part of Clinton's campaign pledge to reform the public assistance system that consolidated Reagan's neoliberal program of small government, tax cuts, deregulation, free trade agreements, and monetarist financial policies at the expense of low-income communities and communities of color.¹¹¹ Although SNAP was reauthorized in the 1996 Farm Bill, major changes to the program were enacted in conjunction with the concurrent Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunities Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA), framed as a supposed "reassertion of America's work ethic." Most significantly, the 1996 Farm Bill and the PRWORA together eliminated SNAP eligibility for most legal permanent residents (LPR) and placed a time limit on SNAP receipt for able-bodied adults without dependents who are not working at least 20 hours a week (or participating in a work program).

Following the concurrent cuts to federal aid under the 1996 Farm Bill and the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunities Reconciliation Act, substantial changes were made to SNAP in the early 2000s. These cuts, in part, caused a dramatic rise in hunger, and loss of support for low-income communities and communities of color. The 2001 Farm Bill restored SNAP eligibility to an estimated 148,000 households, including LPRs. However, eligibility was restored to only about two-thirds as many families as would have been affected by a full restoration to pre-1996 support, which was extended to all legal immigrants, regardless of length of US residency or age.¹¹² Over the course of the decade, SNAP spending grew from \$21 billion in 2000 to \$80 billion in 2012. The financial crisis of 2007 and 2008, and the recession it precipitated, was responsible for a significant part of this increase. The budget for SNAP was substantially bolstered in 2009 as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, with an additional \$45.2 billion authorized over four years that allowed SNAP to temporarily maintain and increase monthly benefits for low-income communities and communities of color.¹¹³

FOOD INSECURITY, SNAP, AND CORPORATE POWER

Low Wages, Public Assistance, and Corporate Subsidization

Neoliberal political and economic restructuring from the late 1970s and early 1980s has promoted corporate profiteering from public assistance programs such as SNAP, albeit at the expense of low-income communities and communities of color. The Economic Policy Institute's 2012 "The State of Working America" report maintains that low wages are caused by low minimum wage and weakened unions, as well as the effects of globalization, driven in large part by neoliberal economic policy.¹¹⁴ Thus, highlighting how corporations stand to benefit from keeping wages low, Jan Hatzius, chief US economist at Goldman Sachs stated, "The strength (in profits) is directly related to the weakness in hourly wages."¹¹⁵

Toward this end, according to a 2015 University of California, Berkeley Labor Center Study, "real hourly wages of the median American worker were just 5% higher in 2013 than they were in 1979, while the wages of the bottom decile of earners were 5% lower in 2013 than in 1979."¹¹⁶ Significantly, according to the National Employment Law Project, the majority of low-wage workers are actually employed by large corporations, with 57.4% of workers employed by the

food services industry—among the largest job sectors in the United States.^{117[xxii]} In short, the federal government picks up the tab for corporations with programs such as SNAP. According to the same UC Berkeley Labor Center study, “when jobs don’t pay enough, workers turn to public assistance in order to meet their basic needs.” Overall, the study found

that between 2009 and 2011 the federal government spent \$127.8 billion per year on SNAP, Medicaid/CHIP, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) for working families, and that the states collectively spent \$25 billion per year on Medicaid/CHIP and TANF for working families for a total of \$152.8 billion per year.

In all, \$280.6 billion, or 56% of combined state and federal spending on public assistance goes to working families.¹¹⁸ The SNAP program in particular had 10.3 million working families receiving assistance, comprising 36% of the total program enrollment and \$26.7 billion in costs, or 38% of total federal expenditures on this program.¹¹⁹ Significantly, SNAP and these other programs provide vital support to millions of working families whose employers pay less than a livable wage. Overall, higher wages and employer-provided health care would not only lower state and federal public assistance costs, and allow all levels of government to better target how their tax dollars are used, but it would also rightfully hold corporations accountable to their employees and thus challenge the status quo of federal and state subsidization of corporate profit.¹²⁰

Federal Expenditure of SNAP



Public Assistance, Corporate Profit, and Structural Racialization

Beginning in the late 1990s and early 2000s, as part of the larger shift toward privatizing public assistance systems and putting SNAP benefits on ATM-style Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards, large banks themselves have also benefitted from SNAP and other safety net programs. They have done so, in part, by way of the contracts they hold with states to help administer benefits.^{121[xxiii]} Specifically, regardless of the actual effectiveness of EBT-based benefits, J.P. Morgan Chase and other banks cover none of the operating and equipment costs, which are instead covered by and split evenly between states and the federal government, while reaping the benefits of large contracts, interest collected on federal reserve money held for government programs, and user penalties including EBT card loss, out-of-network-use, and balance inquiries.^{122 [xxiv]} According to the Government Accountability Institute, for example, J.P. Morgan Chase made more

[xxii] Corporate profits are also garnered by wage theft. The US Department of Labor Wage and Hour Division reported in 2012 that of more than 1,800 restaurant investigations it conducted on the West Coast over several years, it found violations in 71%. U.S. Labor Department’s Wage and Hour Division Launches Enforcement and Education Initiative Focused on Los Angeles Area Restaurants. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Labor Department, Wage and Hour Division, April 18, 2002.

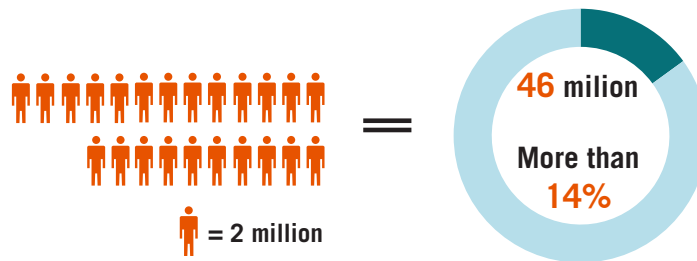
[xxiii] SNAP is the most well-known program delivered via EBT. Yet EBT cards also carry payments for Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF), Women, Infants and Children (WIC), state general assistance, childcare subsidies, and other programs.

[xxiv] J.P. Morgan also collects several fees and penalties from benefit recipients: \$5 to replace a lost EBT card, \$0.40 for each balance inquiry, \$0.50 each time their cards are declined for insufficient funds, and \$1.50 per withdrawal if they use ATMs to get cash more than once a month. Eubanks, Virginia. “How Big Banks Are Cashing In On Food Stamps.” The American Prospect, February 14, 2014. <http://prospect.org/article/how-big-banks-are-cashing-food-stamps>.

than \$500 million between 2004 and 2012 from the transaction fees of government benefits to US citizens. In New York alone, J.P. Morgan Electronic Financial Services (EFS) has a nine-year EBT services contract with the State Office of Temporary and Disability Services (OTDA) worth \$177 million.¹²³

Furthermore, according to a 2012 study entitled “Food Stamps: Follow the Money,” the characteristics of such contracts provide other key indices of banking power and profit.^[xxv] The study found that J.P. Morgan Chase held contracts for EBT in 21 states, Guam, and the Virgin Islands, signaling significant market power and a relative lack of competition. Contract terms varied widely among states, thus indicating a lack of efficiency and standards as well.¹²⁴ Collectively, and perhaps most significantly, banks profits from government programs during both bad and good economic times: during times of economic hardship because more people enroll in assistance programs, and during times of economic strength because rising interest rates mean more profit on the money they hold to distribute to beneficiaries.¹²⁵

US population supported by SNAP per month, 2014



Furthermore, corporate and banking control and windfall profits—enhanced and secured by neoliberal restructuring—have affected the socio-economic well-being, and thus food security, of low-income communities and communities of color beyond the struggle over wages. The trend toward biofuels in particular—shown in Part I to be predominantly a corporate-controlled affair—has had a direct impact on the cost of food. A 2011 Food and Agriculture study concluded that the expansion of biofuels production, particularly in the United States with corn-based ethanol, and in the EU with biodiesel, is at fault for the demand shock for cereals since 2000.^{126 [xxvi]} Such control of demand has had a large impact on tight commodity markets, such as corn. US ethanol, for example, consumes 40% of the country’s corn, and 15% of global corn production.^[xxvii] While estimates vary on the impacts, the National Academy of Sciences concluded that 20 to 40% of the global food price increases in 2008 and the growth widespread hunger were due to

[xxv] Although the USDA collects data on how much money retailers make on SNAP, the USDA does not collect national data on how much money banks make on SNAP.

[xxvi] Thus rising demand for meat-based protein, particularly in China and India, is not the main cause of recent price increases. A Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) study found that cereals demand rose quicker before 2000 than after. While demand in China and India may have grown, therefore, it did not create a “demand shock” that precipitated more recent price surges. Price Volatility and Food Security. Rome: The High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition, Committee on World Food Security, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), July 2011.

[xxvii] It is important to note, however, while ethanol does affect cropland, feed corn, fuel corn, and corn for human consumption are entirely different crops.

biofuels expansion.¹²⁷ Furthermore, other studies have found that each billion-gallon increase in ethanol production yields a 2 to 3% increase in corn prices.¹²⁸

Finally, although the Farm Bill originally intended to stave off food insecurity and support the economy, the result has been detrimental to public health.^[xxviii] Specifically, the continued subsidization of commodity crops, and re-entrenchment of this system of supports under neoliberal political and economic restructuring, has helped produce the obesity epidemic in the United States^[xxix] As of 2012, for example, 96% of US cropland was dominated by grain and oilseed commodity crops. Between 1995 and 2010, \$16.9 billion in federal subsidies went to companies and organizations that produced and distributed corn syrup, high fructose corn syrup (HFCS), cornstarch and soy oils.^{129[xxx]} In this light, as of 2012, the United States has the highest global per-capita consumption of HFCS at a rate of 55 pounds per year. Furthermore, as of 2013, 54% of the oil consumed by Americans is soy oil primarily in the form of cooking oil, baked good, and frying fats.¹³⁰ As can be expected from mass consumption of these products, the rates of diabetes and obesity in the US have reached alarming levels: more than a quarter of the US population, or approximately 90 million people (more than a quarter of the US population) are obese, and 21 million have diabetes. Moreover, these food-related health challenges disproportionately impact communities of color as follows: Black adults have 47.8% obesity, Latinos/as have 42.5% obesity, and Asian Americans have 10.8% obesity.¹³¹ Significantly, the combination of ease of access, low cost, and negative health impacts of such foods, further harms low-income communities well-being while corporations themselves continue to profit.^[xxxi]

Structural Racialization and Myths Against the “Safety Net”

Conservative politicians and news pundits have maintained an assault on federal anti-poverty and safety net programs, and on SNAP in particular. The attacks on federal anti-poverty and safety net programs have consistently targeted the use of SNAP by such communities by relying upon anti-poor and racist “culture of poverty” stereotypes (crystallized, for example, in the “welfare queen” epithet) that readily blame marginalized communities for their social and economic conditions. Leading up to the passage of the 2014 Farm Bill, for example, House and Senate Republicans—both House Republicans inside and outside the House Agriculture Committee—aimed to impose new work requirements on SNAP recipients, under the assumption that those that receive public assistance have no incentive to work; to allow states to require drug testing for SNAP beneficiaries, under the assumption that low-income people and people of color are

[xxviii] The New Deal-era Federal Surplus Relief Corporation under the 1933 Farm Bill was the first federal contribution to the school lunch programs that would eventually become the National School Lunch Program.

[xxix] Policymakers have given limited attention the upstream determinants of public health, including the connection between obesity and agricultural production thus failing to acknowledge the ways in which agricultural policies dictate what crops receive federal support. In turn, agriculture policy dictates what crops U.S. farmers grow, and the prices of those crops, and thus guides private and public commodity commissions. Therefore, addressing the policies that determine food production and availability may be an effective preventative measure to address the obesity epidemic from upstream. Thuy Nguyen, Phuong Lan. “Influencing Agricultural Policy: A Call for Intersectoral Collaboration to Reduce Obesity and Climate Change.” *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 46, no. 3 (March 2014).

[xxx] Between 2005 and 2014, furthermore, harvested acres of soybeans increased by nearly 12 million acres to 83 million acres, and harvested acres of corn, another contributor to obesity, increased by 8 million acres to 83 million acres. Newton, John, and Todd Kueth. “Corn and Soybean Production and Potential Implications in 2015.” *farmdoc daily* 5, no. 42 (2015).

[xxxi] CDC Diabetes data) <http://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/statistics/prev/national/figpersons.htm>. CDC Obesity data for adult and children <http://www.cdc.gov/obesity/data/adult.html>; <http://www.cdc.gov/obesity/data/childhood.html>

likely to use that money to purchase drugs, or that their substance abuse is the primary cause of their hardship, not vice-versa; and to ban ex-felons from ever receiving nutrition assistance, under the belief that ex-felons no longer deserve the support of society. Although the underlying set of beliefs remains deeply embedded within society, many of these provisions were ultimately stripped from the bill and none of those measures were included in the 2014 Farm Bill.¹³²

The most pervasive myth is that people on SNAP are “not in a hurry to get off,” primarily because of the supposed lack of incentive to work and the ease of profiting off federal support. On the contrary, most SNAP recipients remain in the program for a short period of time until they become financially stable and are able to transition to self-sufficiency, with half of all new participants leaving SNAP within nine months and many others leaving the program once their immediate need has passed.¹³³ Moreover, as of 2011, many SNAP beneficiaries are already working: nearly 10.3 million working families receive assistance, comprising 36% of the total program enrollment, with more than three times as many SNAP households working as those that rely solely on public assistance for their income.¹³⁴ Moreover, according to a 2012 Congressional Budget Office report, SNAP usage is expected to decline between 2012 and 2022, reflecting a potentially improved economic situation and declining unemployment rate.¹³⁵ Finally, despite sustained claims of fraud that accompany efforts to cut SNAP benefits, SNAP continues to have one of the lowest fraud rates among Federal programs. According to a 2013 USDA Food and Nutrition Service report, the rate of SNAP fraud has declined from 4% of benefits down to about 1% over the last 15 years.¹³⁶

POVERTY, THE SAFETY NET, AND THE GREAT RECESSION

The Great Recession and the Racialization of SNAP Need and Participation

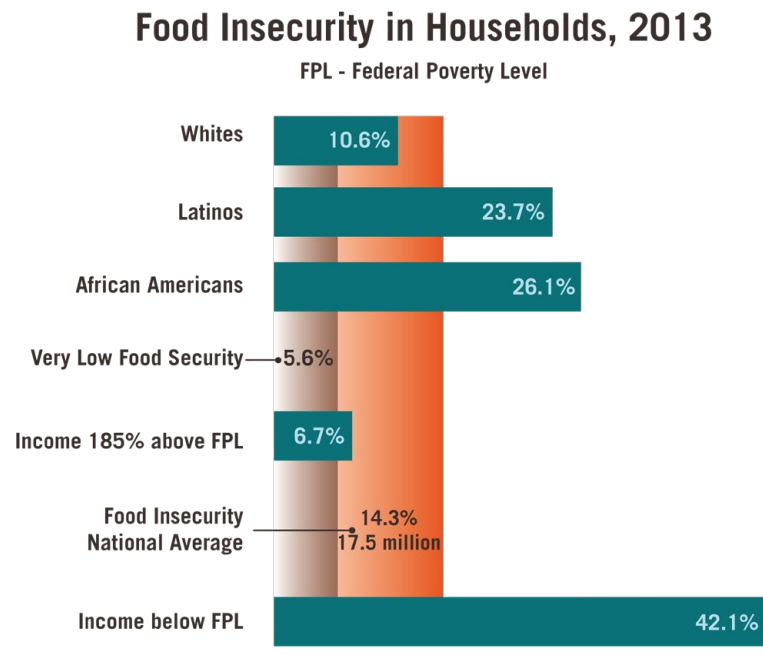
SNAP is among the most widely used anti-poverty programs in the United States and, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, the second most responsive federal program during economic downturns, only behind Unemployment Insurance (UI).¹³⁷ The percentage of the population with income below 130% of the federal poverty line—the income limit for SNAP eligibility—increased substantially during the period of the Great Recession, from 54 million in 2007 to 60 million in 2009, and 64 million in 2011. During this period, the rate of SNAP participation rose among eligible households from 65% in 2007 to 75% in 2010, up to 83% in 2012, with the program expanding at a record pace of 20,000 people per day.¹³⁸ By the end of 2014, more than 46 million people, over 14% of all Americans, were using SNAP.¹³⁹

SNAP eligibility and use, however, varies significantly by race/ethnicity, with communities of color experiencing the highest rates of eligibility for, and use of, SNAP, particularly during economic downturns. For example, by end of 2009, SNAP was used by 12% of the US population (36 million people), 28% of all Blacks and 15% of Latinos/as nationwide were using SNAP. On the other hand, only 8% of whites were using SNAP, substantially below the national average.¹⁴⁰ Such trends follow racial/ethnic and economic geographies as well, with SNAP use greatest where poverty and racial/ethnic stratification runs deep. Across the ten core counties of the Mississippi Delta, for example, 45% of Black residents receive SNAP support, while in larger cities such as St. Louis, with a population of 353,064, the percentage of Black residents receiving SNAP support rises to 60%.¹⁴¹ Even in the largest cities, those with over 500,000 people, such trends re-

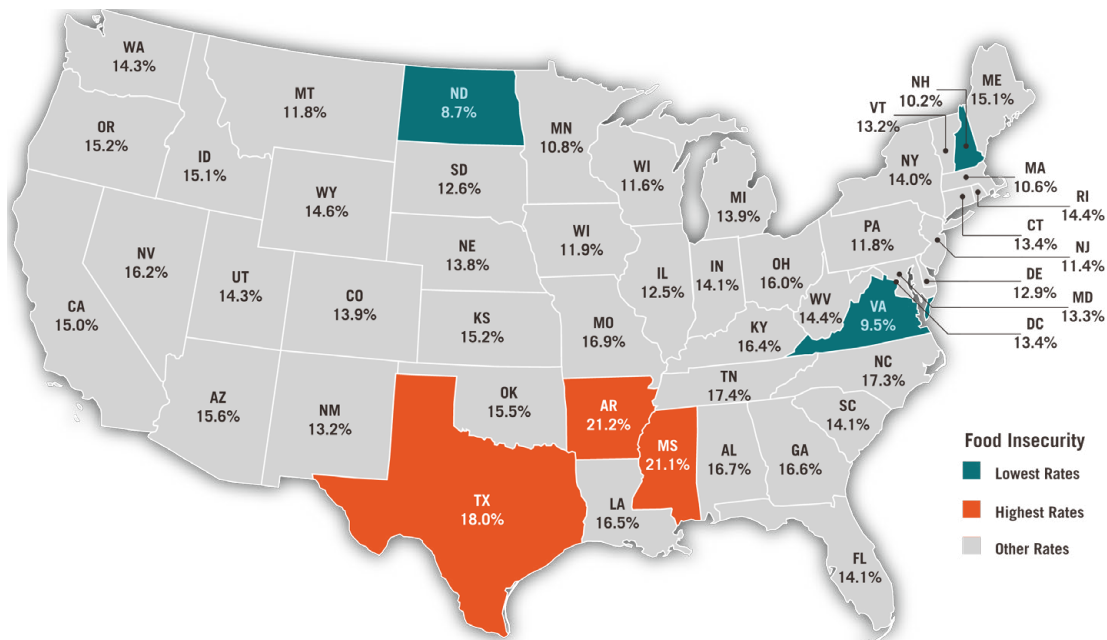
main: white SNAP use peaks at 16% in the Bronx, New York for example, while Black SNAP use peaks at 54% in Kent, Michigan.¹⁴² Significantly, there are 20 counties across the United States where Blacks are at least 10 times as likely as whites to be SNAP beneficiaries, and 26 counties in the United States where over 80% of Blacks were SNAP recipients. Conversely, there are only 5 counties with more than 39% of white receiving SNAP benefits.¹⁴³ The growth of SNAP use amidst the Great Recession has been especially rapid in locations worst hit by the housing bubble burst, and particularly in suburbs across the United States where SNAP use has grown by half or more in dozens of counties.¹⁴⁴ Furthermore, this is the first recession in which a majority of low-income communities and communities of color in metropolitan areas live in the suburbs, giving SNAP and other federal aid new prominence there.¹⁴⁵

The increase in SNAP eligibility and use thus mirrors the impacts of the crisis in housing and employment, and the racialized distribution of impacts of such crises. Specifically, SNAP use was found to have increased by the greatest amount in places characterized by increased poverty, increased unemployment, more home foreclosures, and increased Latino/a populations.¹⁴⁶^[xxxii] A 2012 Congressional Budget Office report confirmed such findings and estimated that although 20% of the growth in SNAP spending was caused by policy changes, including the temporarily higher benefit amounts enacted in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA), the housing crisis and weak economy were responsible for about 65% of the growth in spending on benefits between 2007 and 2011, with the remainder caused by other

[xxxii] Increased SNAP eligibility and use for Latino populations reflects the impact of the US subprime mortgage crisis and Great Recession on the construction sector, a part of the labor market where Latino labor factors prominently, as well as the disproportionate impact of the downturn on Arizona, California, and Nevada and other states with major Latino/a populations. Slack, Tim, and Candice A. Myers. "The Great Recession and the Changing Geography of Food Stamp Receipt." Population Research and Policy Review 33, no. 1 (2014): 63–79.



Average Level of Food Insecurity in the U.S. Between 2011-2013



factors, including higher food prices and lower incomes among beneficiaries.¹⁴⁷ Such has been the case historically: when unemployment rose, SNAP use always did too, signaling how SNAP use has long played a role in alleviating periods of economic distress.¹⁴⁸

As such, SNAP is heavily focused on the poor. According to a 2015 Center on Budget and Policy Priorities report, about 92% of SNAP benefits go to households with incomes below the poverty line, and 57% go to households below half of the poverty line (about \$9,895 for a family of three in 2014).¹⁴⁹ Because families with the greatest need receive the largest benefits, and because households in the lowest income bracket use twice the proportion of their total expenditures on food than do those households in the highest income bracket, SNAP is a powerful anti-poverty tool.¹⁵⁰ SNAP, when measured as income, kept 4.8 million people out of poverty in 2013, including 2.1 million children, and lifted 1.3 million children above half of the poverty line in 2013.¹⁵¹ Furthermore, SNAP is also effective in reducing extreme poverty. A 2011 National Poverty Center study found that SNAP, when measured as income, nearly halved the number of extremely poor families with children in 2011 by 48% (from 1.65 million to 857,000) and cut the number of children in extreme poverty by more than half (from 3.6 million to 1.2 million).¹⁵²

The Great Recession and the Racialization of Wealth Distribution

That the increase in SNAP eligibility and use during the start of the Great Recession mirrored larger trends in the economy—and was patterned after long-standing racial and economic inequality—signals the need to again assert that the experience of food insecurity is one part

of a larger structure that continues to affect the most historically marginalized populations. A 2010 Census Bureau report found that the recession not only grew the wealth gap between rich and poor; it also exacerbated the gap between different racial/ethnic groups. Between 2007 and 2009, the wealth gap between whites and Blacks nearly doubled, with whites having 22 times as much household wealth as Blacks and 15 times as much as Latinos/as. By 2010, the median household net worth for whites was \$110,729 while for Blacks it was \$4,995 and for Latinos/as it was \$7,424. Between 2005 and 2010, furthermore, median household net worth for Blacks, Latinos/as, and Asian Americans fell by roughly 60%, while the median net worth for white households fell by only 23%.¹⁵³ These patterns mirrored the effect of the housing and job crisis on people of color as well. Many people of color were pushed into bad mortgages by the nation's biggest banks, while the loss of 600,000 public sector jobs during the recession also had a significant impact on communities of color, as Black and Latino/a workers are more likely to hold government jobs than their white counterparts.¹⁵⁴

The “Safety Net:” SNAP and Unemployment Insurance

Although the current slow economic recovery is not unusual, the cumulative and sustained impacts of unemployment, income loss, and housing loss disproportionately experienced by low-income communities and communities of color signal the value of a safety net that protects such marginalized communities from sustained poverty and food insecurity. Two major parts of the recessionary safety net are the USDA's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and the Unemployment Insurance program of the US Department of Labor, which provides financial support to workers who become unemployed through no fault of their own. As with SNAP, expenditures for UI generally expand during economic downturns and shrink during times of economic growth, primarily because economic downturns result in wider eligibility and participation.¹⁵⁵

Significantly, households that participate jointly in both SNAP and UI can improve their ability to sustain food expenditures, nutrition, and overall standard of living during times of economic challenge and are an indicator of the strength of the recessionary safety net itself. Toward this end, a 2010 USDA study found that the recession not only increased the number of SNAP households but also increased the extent of joint SNAP or UI households: an estimated 14.4% of SNAP households also received UI at some point in 2009—nearly double that of 7.8% in 2005.¹⁶² Moreover, an estimated 13.4% of UI households also received SNAP at some point in 2009, an increase of about one-fifth over the estimate of 11.1% from 2005.¹⁶³ Significantly, people of color, hardest hit during the economic downturn, benefitted the most from the safety net. In 2009, the estimated joint SNAP and UI use for Blacks and for Latinos/as exceeded joint use by whites by about 16.6 and 9.8%, respectively.¹⁵⁸ Together, SNAP and UI help sustain aggregate household spending and national production in economic downturns, making the impact of such downturns less severe than they would be in the absence of the programs. Such benefits are particularly pronounced for communities of color who not only experience relatively greater degrees of poverty, but also are hardest hit during economic downturns.

Expanding the Safety Net: Economic Instability and Economic Growth

In April 2012, the Congressional Budget Office estimated that temporarily higher benefit amounts enacted in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) accounted

for about 20% of the growth in SNAP spending during the Great Recession. New legislation can thus affect safety net programs such as SNAP or UI and provide additional support for household spending and national production. Historically, there has been some form of federally financed SNAP and UI benefit extensions during recessions that build upon the benefits they already provide.¹⁵⁹ In 2008, for example, national legislation provided a temporary increase in SNAP benefits for all SNAP participants and expanded eligibility for jobless adults without children.¹⁶⁰ Similarly, UI benefits were extended by the Emergency Unemployment Compensation 2008 (EUC) program. Together, such efforts highlight the potential benefit of strategic program extensions, particularly during pronounced times of need for communities that are already marginalized. Along with the federally financed temporary benefit extensions, these programs have the potential to have a substantial impact in cushioning the negative effects of recessions on the US population and economy.

Ultimately, however, such program expansions are neither a long term nor a structural solution. While SNAP and other federal safety net programs are useful during times of economic hardship and pronounced food insecurity, or as potential anti-poverty tools, such programs only superficially act as efficient and effective forms of local economic stimulus. According to the USDA, for example, SNAP spending yields a substantial local multiplier effect, with every \$1 of SNAP benefits spent in a community generating an additional \$1.80 in local spending.¹⁶¹ Yet because many larger grocery retailers have non-local corporate headquarters, sales revenue is transferred outside the community, a phenomenon called “leakage.” For example, in 2008, the City of Oakland, CA estimated that approximately \$230 million in grocery store spending is leaving the city.¹⁶²

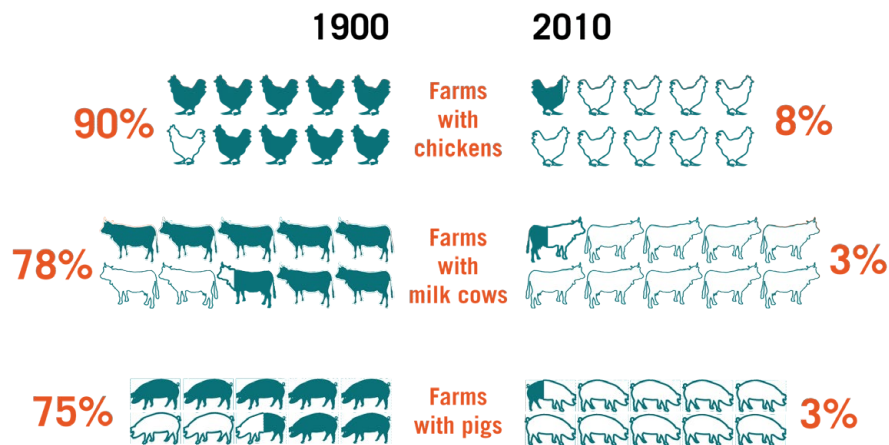
Thus, although it has the potential to help millions of Americans feed their families during economic crises and keep many out of extreme poverty, investing in SNAP is a questionable long term economic stimulus policy and social and economic equity tool because of the benefits accrued by corporations, and the injustices such corporations perpetuate with regard to the exploitation of their employees. Despite these limitations, however, both SNAP and UI have indeed had positive effects on both Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and on job growth, as well as long term effects on beneficiaries.¹⁶³ Research has shown, for example, that access to SNAP in childhood leads to a significant reduction in the incidence of obesity, high blood pressure, and diabetes, and, for women, on the other hand, an increase in economic self-sufficiency.¹⁶⁴ Thus, such costs and benefits ultimately beg the question of whether SNAP, and the Farm Bill more broadly, are the best long term approach to challenging structural poverty, particularly as it is perpetuated by corporate control itself.

PART III.
**FARMLAND AND
FEDERAL SUPPORT**

AT-A-GLANCE

FARMLAND AND FEDERAL SUPPORT

Farmland Consolidation, 1900-2010



Farm Size and Consolidation

- The “midpoint acreage” for US cropland nearly doubled between 1982 and 2007, from 589 acres to 1,105 acres. Furthermore, certain crops exhibit higher susceptibility to consolidation: midpoint acreages doubled in each of 5 major field crops (corn, cotton, rice, soybeans, and wheat) and increased by 107% in 35 of 39 fruit and vegetable crops.¹⁶⁵

Farmland Ownership

- As of 1999, of all private US agricultural land, white people accounted for 96% of the owners (3.2 million people), 97% of all agricultural value (\$1.16 trillion), and 98% of the acres (856 million acres). Conversely, Blacks, Native Americans, Asian Americans, and Latinos/as together accounted for 4% of the owners (146,703 people), 3% of all agricultural value (\$44 billion), and 2.8% of the acres (25 million acres) of agricultural land.¹⁶⁶

Government Payments

- 97.8% of all government payments are given to white farmers. White farmers who receive farm payments receive an average of \$10,022 per farm, while Black farmers who receive payments receive an average of \$5,509 per farm.

- As of 2009, 50% of commodity payments went to farms operated by households earning over \$89,540, 25% went to farms operated by households with incomes greater than \$209,000 and 10% went to farms operated by households with incomes of at least \$425,000.

Cropping Patterns and Specialization

- Trends in farmland consolidation have been accompanied by greater specialization in both farm type and cropping patterns.
- In 1900, 90% of all farms had chickens, 78% had milk cows, and 75% had pigs, yet by 2010 that number dropped to 3% for pigs and milk cows, and 8% for chickens.¹⁶⁷
- Agricultural policy, increased mechanization, fertilizer use, genetic modification, and corporate control, have pushed farmers to specialize in only a few products.
- The proportion of cropland devoted to corn, for example, has expanded greatly: from a nearly 100 year low of 60.2 million acres in 1983, to 80 million acres in 2010.¹⁶⁸

PART III.

Farmland and Federal Support

THE STRUCTURE OF US AGRICULTURE determines and reflects the challenges faced by US farmers and rural communities. This includes farm size, type, cropping patterns, and ownership. Moreover, the federal food and agricultural policies, including the Farm Bill, affect the structure of US farmland through multiple forces and drivers, including taxes, lending programs, environmental and safety regulation, rural development programs, research and development funding, and commodity programs.¹⁶⁹

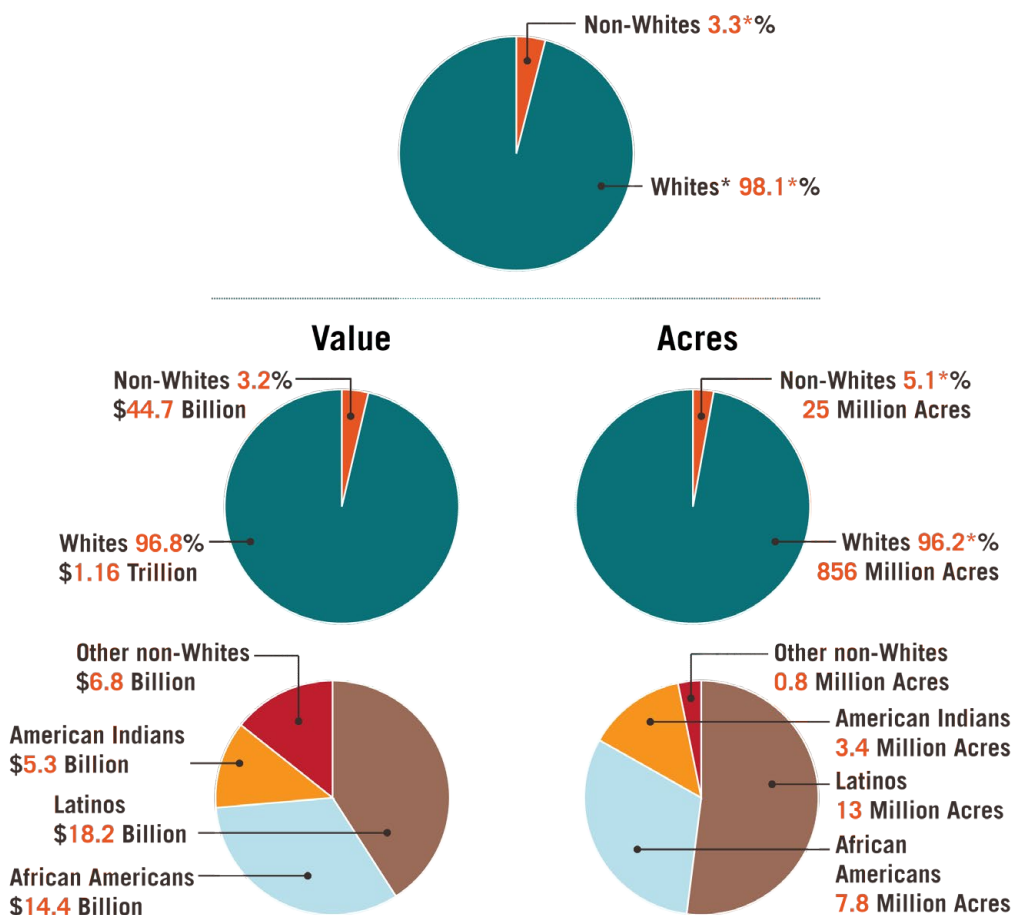
In this light, Part III examines how such programs have shaped the structure of US farmland and, in turn, how they have affected the socio-economic well-being of low-income farmers and communities, as well as farmers and communities of color. It does so, first, by providing a snapshot of the structure of US farmland, including the outcomes of structural racialization with regard to farmland ownership and government payments (see At-Glance). It then outlines the historical significance of change in the structure of US agriculture over the 20th century, and examines three federal rural and agricultural support programs in particular: Farm Service Agency (FSA) lending programs, Farm Bill commodity programs, and Farm Bill Rural Development (RD) programs.

Ultimately, Part III argues that such programs have historically undergirded white farmland ownership at the expense of farmland ownership by people of color. Significantly, these programs also highlight how white agricultural land ownership was held up amidst, and by way of, increasing consolidation and specialization, with farmers of color on the losing side of such shifts in the structure of US farmland. In the push for the dismantlement of corporate control and structural racialization, such trends thus require greater attention with regard to their role in intensifying marginality that low-income communities and communities of color face in terms of wealth, access to program benefits, and land access.¹⁷⁰

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

One of the most significant changes in the US economy since the beginning of the 20th century is the national abandonment of farming as a household livelihood strategy. This “agricultural transition” is marked by a number of characteristics: the move away from farming by most Americans and the challenging conditions that remaining farmers experience; the decline in the number of farms and farm population; the growth of larger farms vis-à-vis acreage, sales, and real estate capitalization; and the gradual replacement of family with hired labor.¹⁷¹ The post-World War II period ushered in perhaps the most rapid transformation, particularly by way of New Deal interventions, and their reformulation and erosion over the next few decades.¹⁷² Between 1940 and 1980, for example, the farm population declined ten-fold, the farm numbers declined by more than half, acreage more than doubled, and real average sales increased

Private US Agricultural Land Ownership

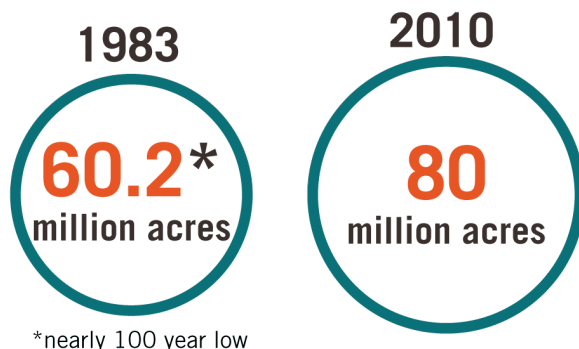


*Racial percentages are calculated based on the racial totals for all owners and all owner acres (3,345,521 and 872,807,000). The U.S. total is greater than the sum of the races because it includes corporate and other non-individual owners that do not have racial characteristics, plus some individuals who did not answer or did not receive a racial identifier.

six-fold.¹⁷³ Farmers also experienced periodic crises during key moments within such long term structural change, such as those that took place during the 1980s and in the mid-1990s.¹⁷⁴

Such shifts were linked to the polarization of production.¹⁷⁵ For example, between 1939 and 1987, the market share of sales by the largest 5% of producers increased from 38.3% to 54.5%.¹⁷⁶ Agricultural firms have expanded not just through vertical and horizontal consolidation, as outlined in Part I, they have also done so through production contracts, wherein a farmer raises or grows an agricultural product, including livestock, for such firms. While only about 8.9% of farms operated under production contract in 2012—up from 3% only a decade earlier—they produced 96% of all

Cropland devoted to corn



*nearly 100 year low

poultry, 43% of all hogs, and around 25% of all cattle.¹⁷⁷ Contract farming carries with it numerous risks that compromise the long term well-being of producers themselves.^[xxxiii] Furthermore, most farms cannot fully employ or sustain families.¹⁷⁸ To survive in farming, families have taken off-farm jobs. As of 2013, for example, 87% of farmers' median household income came from non-farm sources. The median farm income for operations that specialize in grains, rice, tobacco, cotton, or peanuts, 23% of income came

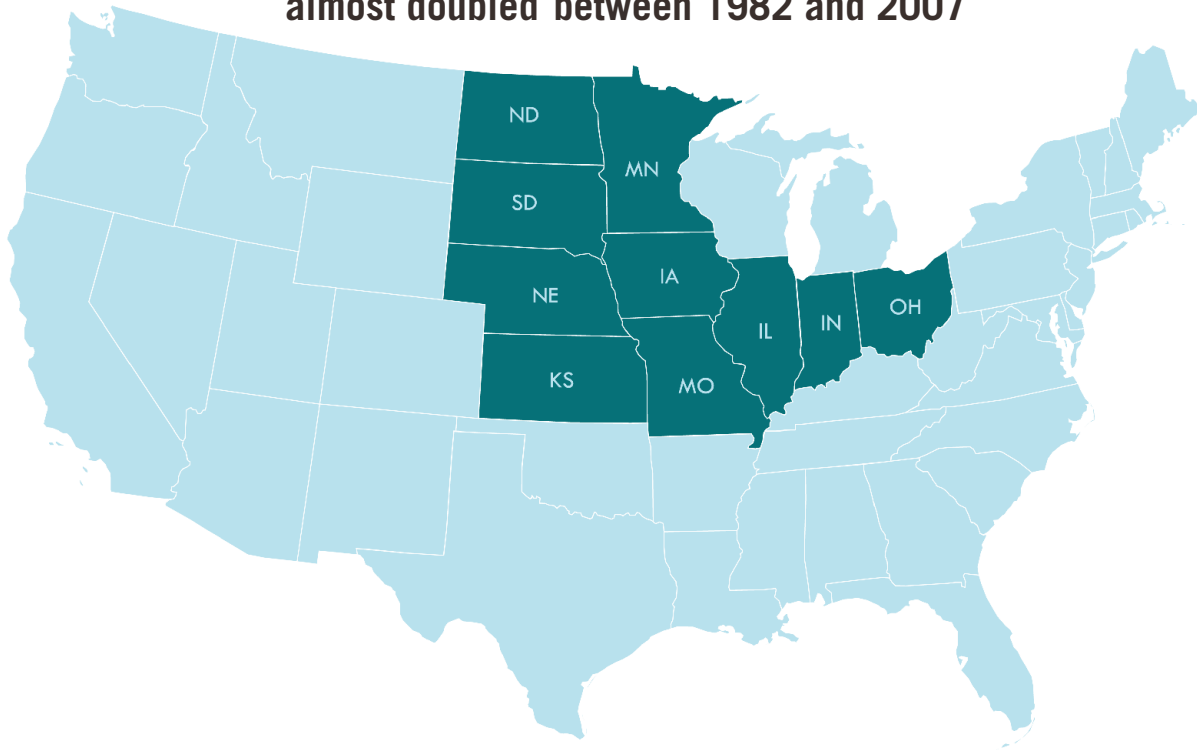
from on-farm sources. Conversely, livestock operations, apart from dairy, have generally not had a positive income from farming.¹⁷⁹ That is, without income garnered by way of off-farm sources, such operations would go negative. As outlined below, the complete lack of profitability of such operations, and the relatively great profitability of grain and other commodity crop operations, cannot be understood as separate from the racialized distribution of operation types, with white producers generally running more profitable grain and other commodity crop operations, and producers of color running less profitable livestock operations.

Shifts in agricultural production were tied not only to the polarization of production but also to racial, gender, and economic polarization. For example, although Blacks were able to establish a foothold in southern agriculture post-Emancipation, rural Blacks were virtually uprooted from farming over the next several decades. In 1920, 14% of all US farmers were Black (926,000, with all but 10,000 in the South), and they owned over 16 million acres. By 1997, however, fewer than 20,000 were Black, and they owned only about 2 million acres.¹⁸⁰ While white farmers were losing their farms during these decades as well, the rate that Black farmers lost their land has been estimated at two and a half to five times the rate of white-owned farm loss.¹⁸¹ Furthermore, although between 1920 and 2002, the number of US farms shrank—from 6.5 million to 2.1 million, or by 67%—the decline was especially steep among Black farmers. Specifically, between 1920 and 1997, the loss of US farms operated by Blacks dropped 98%, while the loss of US farms operated by whites dropped 65.8%.¹⁸²

As outlined above, such shifts have been attributed to the general decline of small farms, land erosion, boll weevil infestations of cotton, New Deal farm programs geared toward white landowners, postwar cotton mechanization, repressive racial and ethnic relations, and the lure of jobs and relative safety in the North.¹⁸³ Remaining Black farmers were not only older and poorer

[xxxiii] There are several ways in which contracts carry numerous risks for producers: the potential early termination of contracts; when companies require producers to make improvements yet at the producer's expense; the manipulation of inputs; unprofitable contracts; under-weighting of products by buyers; the withholding of payments; false rankings; potential retaliation for complaining or organizing; being stuck with one company; and grading problems. Roth, Randi Ilyse. Contract Farming Breeds Big Problems for Growers. Legal Action Report. Farmers' Legal Action Group, 1992.

The “midpoint acreage” of the Corn Belt and Northern Plains states almost doubled between 1982 and 2007



than others, they also continued to disproportionately face structural discrimination with regard to land ownership and access to federal support, whether because of ineffectiveness, discrimination in implementation, poor design, lack of funding, or unintended shortcomings.¹⁸⁴ The following section focuses on three sets of Farm Bill programs in particular and elaborates upon the history of each as they relate to racial and economic inequity, particularly in terms of income and wealth, access to program benefits, land access, access to positions of power, and degree of democratic influence.

FEDERAL RURAL AND AGRICULTURAL SUPPORT PROGRAMS

Farm Service Agency (FSA) Lending Programs and the Farm Bill

Discrimination by the USDA and FSA Loan Distribution Program is among the most significant causes of limited access to, and loss of, farmland by people of color. Specifically, lending program discrimination has undermined the economic capacity of farmers of color to anticipate and respond to rapid consolidation and specialization, such as limited capacity to adopt scientific and technological innovations in agricultural production, and greater vulnerability to price volatility.¹⁸⁵^[xxxiv]

[xxxiv] Mid-size farmers (500 acres) have also been particularly vulnerable to price, cost, yield, and asset value shocks, a trend

Toward this end, allegations of unlawful discrimination against farmers of color in the management and local administration of USDA lending programs—and the USDA’s limited response to such allegations—have been long-standing and well-documented.^[xxxv] For example, in 1965, the US Commission on Civil Rights found evidence of discrimination in the USDA’s treatment of employees of color and in its program delivery.¹⁸⁶ Furthermore, in the early 1970s, the USDA was found intentionally forcing farmers of color off their land through its loan practices.¹⁸⁷ In 1982, the US Civil Rights Commission again found evidence of continued discrimination actively contributing to the decline in minority farm ownership.¹⁸⁸ Despite such findings, in 1983, only one year later, President Reagan pushed for budget cuts that ultimately eliminated the USDA Office of Civil Rights, the primary body for addressing such claims of discrimination.¹⁸⁹

Even after the USDA Office of Civil Rights was restored in 1996 during the Clinton Administration, discrimination in the lending programs continued for years.^[xxxvi] Although the USDA officially prohibits discrimination, the structure for the election of FSA county, area, and local committees that decide who receives loans and under what terms facilitates continued racial discrimination.^[xxxvii] Toward this end, a 1997 USDA Office of Civil Rights report observed that FSA county committees operate as closed networks and are disproportionately comprised of white men, noting that, in 1994, 94% of the county farm loan committees included no women or people of color.¹⁹⁰ As of 2007, such trends continue, with just 90 Black committee members among a total 7,882 committee members around the country, slightly over 1%.¹⁹¹ Decades of discrimination and lack of access to such crucial positions have sparked several class-action lawsuits by women farmers and by various groups of farmers of color.^[xxxviii]

Only recently has the Farm Bill attempted to address a major cause of racially discriminatory FSA lending program outcomes by targeting the lack of people of color within FSA committees. Specifically, it was not until a provision, Section 10708(b), in the 2002 Farm Bill that the com-

has been termed “loss of the middle.” Li, Shasha, and Michael Boehlje. “Financial Vulnerability of Midwest Grain Farms: Implications of Price, Yield, and Cost Shocks.” Purdue University, Department of Agricultural Economics, 2013.

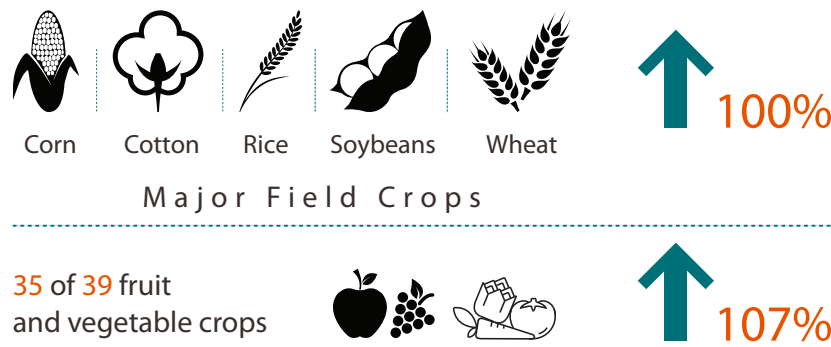
[xxxv] The USDA was one of the last federal agencies to racially integrate and one of the last to include women and people of color in leadership roles. Civil Rights at the United States Department of Agriculture. Washington, D.C.: USDA Civil Rights Action Team, 1997.

[xxxvi] The USDA Office of Civil Rights reopened in 1996 in part because of another USDA report that confirmed the findings of widespread discrimination. With data from 1990 to 1995, the report, found that “minorities received less than their fair share of USDA money for crop payments, disaster payments, and loans.” When the USDA Office of Civil Rights re-opened, Dan Glickman, Secretary of Agriculture, ordered the suspension of government farm foreclosures pending the outcome of another investigation into racial discrimination in the agency’s loan program. The 1997 USDA Civil Rights Action Team report found the agency’s system for handling civil rights complaints was still severely lacking. Cowan, Tadlock, and Jody Feder. *The Pigford Case: USDA Settlement of a Discrimination Suit by Black Farmers*. Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, 2008. Civil Rights at the United States Department of Agriculture. Washington, D.C.: USDA Civil Rights Action Team, 1997.

[xxxvii] Discrimination on the part of the USDA and FSA was therefore possible not only by the actions of a few people but also by the particular structure of decision-making and loan disbursement by the FSA committees themselves, with more than 8,000 county committee members that serve more than 2,400 FSA offices nationwide. Locally elected FSA committees decide who receives loans from USDA, the kind of loan they receive, and the terms of the loan. A 2013 report by the Congressional Research Service states, “Because of their authority to make decisions regarding the extension or denial of credit, it is possible for loan officers at county committees to reduce competition for favored groups and individuals. Thus, to favor certain groups and deny other individuals on the basis of group attributes, county committees could, over time, indirectly dispossess minority and other disfavored farmers of their land and equipment.” Feder, Jody, and Tadlock Cowan. *Garcia v. Vilsack: A Policy and Legal Analysis of a USDA Discrimination Case*. Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 2013.

[xxxviii] Following on the heels of the first Pigford vs. Glickman case for Black farmers, for example, came a class action case by women farmers (*Love v Vilsack*), Latino/a farmers (*Garcia v Vilsack*), and Native American farmers (*Keepseagle v Vilsack*).

The Midpoint acreages doubled in each of **five** major crops and increased by **107%** in **35** of **39** fruit and vegetable crops



position of FSA county, area, and local committees were required to be “representative of the agricultural producers within the area covered by the county, area, or local committee,” and to accept nominations from organizations representing the interests of socio-economically marginalized communities. Furthermore, a provision, Section 1615, of the 2008 Farm Bill required county or area committees that are themselves undergoing rapid consolidation to develop procedures to maintain representation of farmers of color on such committees.¹⁹² It was not until early 2012, however, that federal regulations were made consistent with legislative changes.¹⁹³^[xxxix]

Because of the historic discrimination against farmers of color, and other structural barriers to land ownership for people of color, the population of agricultural producers is already heavily skewed toward white men. Thus, such measures to guarantee FSA committees are representative of agricultural producers in any particular region fall short in their attempts to address the acutely historical causes and outcomes of structural racialization that have upheld white land ownership in particular.

Commodity Support Programs and Structural Racialization

The second major channel among the Farm Bill and other federal food and agricultural policies that have played a historic and ongoing role in structural racialization is the Farm Bill’s commodity programs, which have undergirded white farmland ownership at the expense of farmland ownership by people of color. While the FSA lending programs have upheld white farmland ownership amidst increasing consolidation and specialization, the Farm Bill commodity programs uphold white farmland ownership by way of increasing consolidation and

[xxxix] Specifically, the USDA finalized federal regulations that granted the Secretary of Agriculture greater authority in ensuring fair representation and participation of women and people of color on local Farm Service Agency (FSA) committees, increased transparency and accountability in the committee election process, and clarified requirements for committee membership.

specialization. Specifically, increasing agricultural specialization and consolidation—due in part to federal agricultural policy and corporate control, and increased mechanization, fertilizer use, and genetic modification—have upheld white farmland ownership because of both the historic access to prime farmland afforded to white farmers as well as the commodity support programs that are most applicable to the crops grown on such farmland. Limited access to prime farmland, and thus limited access to commodity support programs in conjunction with limited access to federal lending programs as outlined above, has compromised the possibility of farmland ownership for people of color.

Historically, people of color were not only excluded from land ownership, but when land ownership was in sight, access to the best farmland was largely out of reach.^[xli] After Emancipation, for example, chronic indebtedness kept the primarily Black population of sharecroppers tied to the same land, neither able to resist the demands and directions of their employers nor able to accrue enough wealth to buy their own land. Although some were able to garner the financial means to break such predatory cycles of debt and purchase their own land, few Blacks could afford to achieve ownership of land with the richest soil, including the notorious “Black Belt” itself, between Georgia and Arkansas. Rather, most Black-owned farms were on more marginal lands in the upper and coastal South, where Black farmers often had to supplement the low yields and profits with sharecropping on more substantial white-owned lands or with outside labor.¹⁹⁴ The best opportunities available to farmers of color, Black or otherwise, on such land tended and remain to be specialty crops and livestock.¹⁹⁵ As of 2012, for example, 63.6% of Asian American farmers, compared to only 8.5% of white farmers, grew fruits and vegetables. Moreover, as of 2012, 46.8% of Black farmers, compared to 29.1% of white farmers, raised beef cattle. Conversely, as of 2012, white farmers grow 98.6% of all grain and oilseed crops.¹⁹⁶

Furthermore, livestock and specialty crops, including fruits and vegetables, are not eligible for these commodity programs, leaving farmers of color with less government support.¹⁹⁷ Specifically, the current agriculture funding structure, from research funding to crop subsidies, and to conservation programs, as will be outlined in Part IV, is heavily weighted to support the large-scale production of commodity crops—among them, wheat, corn, soybeans, and others—crops that are primarily grown by white farmers on the highest quality farmland.¹⁹⁸ Thus, as a result, as of 2012, 40% of white farmers receive government payments while only 30% of Black farmers receive government payments.

Furthermore, white farmers that do receive payments receive an average of \$10,022 per farm, while Black farmers that receive payments receive an average of \$5,509 per farm. Farmers of color, and new immigrant farmers in particular, often grow high-value, labor-intensive horticultural products on small plots of land, which also receive less government support.^[xlii] In 2012, small-scale farmers received an average of \$5,003 per farm while large-

[xli] It is worth noting that marginal farmland has, of course, not only been limited to farmers of color. High crop prices beginning in the late 1970s, for example, called forth greater supplies, as many farmers—including many white farmers—intensified production and farmed more marginal acres. Danbom, David B. *Born in the Country: A History of Rural America*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006.

[xlii] Scholars have also shown that such farmers are also particularly vulnerable to regulation intended to protect farmworkers on larger scale farms. Sowerwine, Jennifer, Christy Getz, and Nancy Peluso. “The Myth of the Protected Worker: Southeast Asian Micro-Farmers in California Agriculture.” *Agriculture and Human Values*, January 13, 2015, 1–17.

scale farmers received an average of \$47,732 per farm.¹⁹⁹ Perhaps most significantly, as of 2012, 97.8% of all government payments are given to white farmers.²⁰⁰

According to a 2012 USDA Economic Research Service study, the distribution of commodity-related payments—including federal crop insurance indemnities—to US farmers has shifted toward larger farms as part of the trend of increasing consolidation of farming operations, ensuring that those who have historically benefited from exclusionary practices benefit further.²⁰¹ Significantly, because the operators of larger farms (as owners, renters, etc.) generally have higher incomes than those of smaller farms, the shift of commodity-related payments to larger farms led to a shift of payments to higher income households. For example, in 1991, households with incomes over \$54,940 received 50% of commodity payments, households with incomes greater than \$115,000 received 25% of commodity payments, and households with incomes over \$229,000 received 10% of commodity payments. Since then, the distribution of payments has increasingly favored higher income households: by 2009, households earning over \$89,540 received 50% of commodity payments, households with incomes greater than \$209,000 received 25% of commodity payments, and households with incomes of at least \$425,000 received 10% of commodity payments.²⁰² Significantly, such payments are not entirely mitigated by higher rental payments for land. That is, the potential for profit is still great, with only 25% going toward rent, and with only 64% of farmland itself rented.²⁰³

Finally, increasing corporate influence, which has further entrenched and profited off large scale, specialized, and commodity crop-oriented production—and ensured that it does so by way of federal commodity support programs—subsequently exacerbates such trends in wealth accrued by white farmland owners. That is, corporate influence, which has pushed for increasingly specialized and large-scale commodity crop production on prime farmland, has facilitated and secured further accumulation of wealth by whites, particularly by way of plentiful government payments. Thus, despite the widely experienced loss of farmland by way of consolidation and specialization, such trends ultimately undergird white land ownership and wealth in the United States, and exacerbate the marginality that people of color face in accumulating wealth in relation to white people.

Rural Poverty, Rural Development, and Structural Racialization

The third major channel within the Farm Bill and other federal food and agricultural policies that has played a historic and ongoing role in structural racialization is the Farm Bill's Rural Development programs, which are intended to help strengthen small communities by investing in water systems, housing, new businesses, infrastructure, and similar projects. Because many farms owned by people of color are in counties with little wealth and limited opportunities for non-farm employment, and because many rural and small town communities of color are faced with persistent poverty, Rural Development programs have the potential to promote socio-economic well-being for people of color and other historically marginalized communities.²⁰⁴ As of 2012, there is a larger percentage of whites in rural communities (78%) than in urban communities (64%). Yet, within rural communities, people of color face higher rates of poverty: while only 14% of rural whites live in poverty, 34% of rural Blacks live in poverty. Additionally, as of 2010, Latinos/as, Blacks, and Pacific Islanders have the lowest homeownership rates (between 50 and 55%) compared to homeownership rates for whites (75%).²⁰⁵ Thus, it is unsurprising that, according to a 2013 Tuskegee University study, farmers and rural communities of color have had

particularly high participation rate in three major Rural Development programs: Rural Housing and Community Facilities; Rural Business; and Rural Utilities.^{206[xlii]}

Even though the Farm Bill's Rural Development programs hold great potential for farmers of color and rural communities of color, barriers to participation reflect those that characterize other Farm Bill programs, marking how such support programs actually contribute to structural racialization. The Tuskegee University study, for example, found that regarding the delivery of such programs, farmers of color experience five major barriers: lack of program knowledge, impersonal workplace environment, "facially neutral eligibility requirements" that do not address the historic and systemic exclusion, remote locations, and sub-par outreach efforts.^{207[xliii]} The Value Added Producer Grant (VAPG) program, for example, is a major Rural Development program that supports innovative marketing and product development strategies for the added processing of agricultural goods that can generate additional income. The VAPG program could be of great benefit to producers of color who grow a variety of non-grain and oilseed crops with value-added potential.²⁰⁸ Yet despite the Farm Bill itself requiring the USDA to prioritize projects by socio-economically disadvantaged farmers, a short application period and complex application form, and a requirement that recipients provide 1:1 matching funds, puts the VAPG program out of reach for some farmers of color.²⁰⁹

Finally, insufficient funding has long marked the Farm Bill's rural development title and programs. Although, overall program spending within the 2014 Farm Bill averages \$95.6 billion per year for the next ten years, the rural development title will receive less than 0.024% of that, only \$22.8 million per year. The Value Added Producer Grant program, in particular, although originally authorized in 2000 to receive \$20 million per year in funding, has been cut to \$12.5 million annually under the 2014 Farm Bill. Collectively, such barriers limit the potential benefit of the Farm Bill's Rural Development programs with regard to the dire situation many farmers of color and rural communities of color face. Ultimately, they highlight the central contradiction that farmers of color face with regard to such commodity support programs and other support programs for farmers and rural communities: inclusion in the benefits of such programs does little to destabilize the historic and structural outcomes that they have reinforced, to undergird the wealth of whites in the United States, and to ensure that it is white communities that fare best regardless of what happens to the structure of US agriculture.

[xlii] Rural Housing and Community Facilities programs offer loans, grants, and loan guarantees to build or improve housing and essential community facilities in rural areas. Rural Business programs offer loans, technical support, educational opportunities, and entrepreneurial skills in order to help rural residents start and grow businesses or access jobs in agricultural markets. Rural Utilities programs provide needed infrastructure or infrastructure improvements to rural communities.

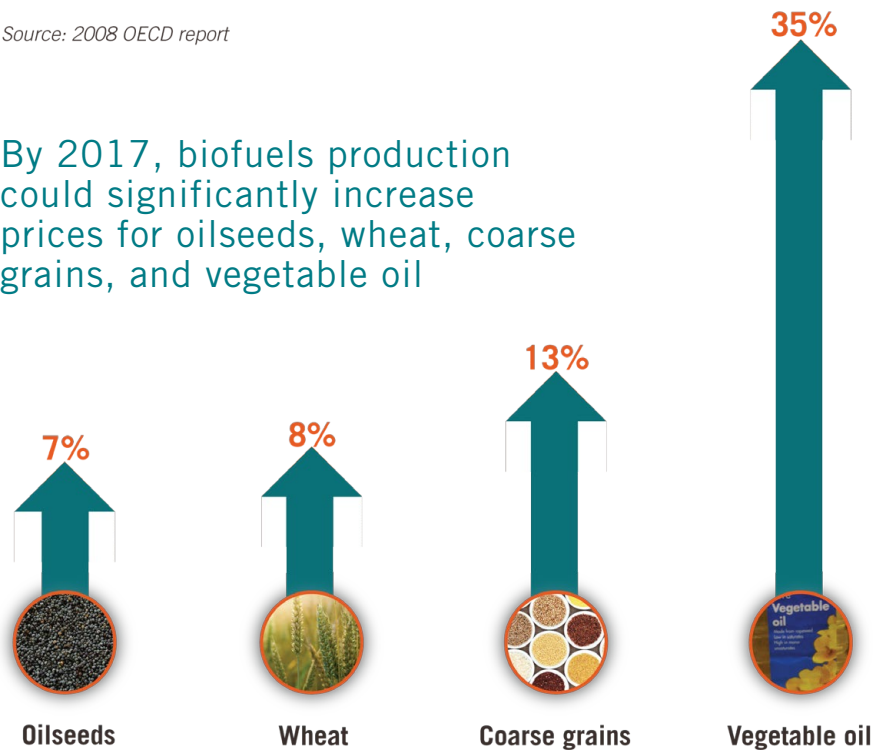
[xliii] Limited outreach and assistance efforts for farmers of color are a major part of the FSA's discriminatory practices that ultimately impede access to key commodity programs and conservation programs. As such, it receives further attention in Part IV.

PART IV.
**CONSERVATION
AND CLIMATE**

AT-A-GLANCE CONSERVATION AND CLIMATE

Source: 2008 OECD report

By 2017, biofuels production could significantly increase prices for oilseeds, wheat, coarse grains, and vegetable oil



Conservation Programs

- Although statistics based on race/ethnicity are unavailable with regard to conservation programs, studies have found that white landowners are more likely to have land qualified for the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and have more incentives to participate due to the economies of scale and tax savings, and received more favorable program outreach and assistance.²¹⁰ Studies have also found that farms on Native American reservations are less likely to be enrolled in other conservation programs, such as the Environmental Quality Initiatives Program (EQIP), than non-reservation farms. Reservations account for about 9.3% of farms and 7.7% of operated farmland, but only about 4.2% of EQIP contracts and 6.2% of EQIP funding in 2006.²¹¹

Climate Change

- The agricultural sector is the largest contributor to global anthropogenic non-CO₂ Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions. Specifically, agriculture accounted for 56% of emissions in 2005, while in 2013 the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) reported that greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture accounted for approximately 9% of total US greenhouse gas emissions—an increase of approximately 17% since 1990.²¹²

Biofuel Production

- Between 20 and 40% of the global food price increases in 2008 were caused by biofuels expansion.²¹³ A 2008 OECD report projected that by 2017 biofuels production could increase prices for wheat, coarse grains, oilseeds and vegetable oil by 8%, 13%, 7%, and 35%, respectively.²¹⁴

PART IV.

Conservation and Climate

PART III OUTLINED HOW LENDING, commodity, and rural development programs have historically undergirded white farmland ownership at the expense of people of color farmland ownership, and how long term changes in the structure of US farmland—the consolidation and specialization of agricultural production, in particular—have exacerbated such trends. Part IV continues this line of argumentation regarding the structure of US farmland and examines how programs geared toward supporting supposedly environmentally sustainable management practices also shape the socio-economic well-being of and farming and rural communities of color relative to white farming and rural communities. First, this part does so by providing a snapshot of the racialized distribution of costs and benefits regarding programs under the conservation title of the Farm Bill (see At-A-Glance above). It then outlines the significance of the historical continuity between environmentally-oriented programs and commodity support programs. Finally, it outlines the significance of four federal rural and agricultural support programs in particular—the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), organic agriculture programs, and outreach and assistance programs—as well as recent corporate-backed trends in increased biofuel production.

Part IV argues that, because of their inseparability from commodity crop production, and the consolidation and specialization of agricultural production, and despite the countless environmental benefits they produce, Farm Bill programs under the conservation title also undergird white farmland ownership at the expense of farmland ownership by people of color. Ultimately, they do so by funneling benefits primarily to white large-scale landowners on high quality land and keeping even low quality white-owned farmland profitable—an inadvertent result of the history of farmland ownership in the United States that cannot be seen as separate from the history of racial discrimination. This part argues, furthermore, that this is the case not only with commodity crop and acreage-based conservation programs (i.e., the Conservation Reserve Program), but that management practice-based conservation programs (i.e., EQIP and EQIP Organic) have similar effects. Furthermore, a fourth program, the Outreach and Assistance for Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers and Veteran Farmers and Ranchers Program, contributes to the social and economic inequities that characterize commodity and conservation programs alike, yet holds great potential as a strategic rallying point against structural racialization. Finally, Part IV then addresses the relationship between structural racialization, industrial agriculture, environmental degradation, and climate change, and argues that farmers of color and communities of color bear the brunt of such environmental change.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Conservation programs within the Farm Bill not only emerged from and remain tied to commodity crop production, but also maintained white communities as the primary benefactors of such modes of production in terms of both wealth accumulation and land ownership. The Farm Bill began by joining the re-establishment and maintenance of farm income at fair levels with the promotion of soil conservation and profitable use of agricultural resources.²¹⁵

The first Farm Bill, the 1933 Agricultural Adjustment Act, for example, aimed to restore the purchasing power of agricultural commodities by encouraging voluntary acreage reduction of such crops through agreements with producers as well as the use of direct payments for participation in acreage control programs.²¹⁶ Five years later, the 1938 Farm Bill was significant for a number of reasons: it secured these acreage restrictions; included new provisions where the federal government—and not corporations—would pay farmers who planted “soil-conserving” crops instead of “soil-depleting” crops (e.g., corn and wheat); and it established a series of credit programs that provided farm storage facility loans, purchases, and income support payments.²¹⁷

By the mid-20th century, conservation programs were not only tied to, but also upheld, commodity crop production. Years of acreage reductions offset by increased farm productivity after World War II led to the 1956 Farm Bill’s Soil Bank program, a key conservation measure that set aside 4.9 million acres of select commodity crops.^[xliv] The land that the Soil Bank program was applied to, however, was already low-productivity land.²¹⁸ In this light, with white landowners holding the vast majority of grain and oilseed farmland, the Farm Bill’s premier conservation program upheld white land ownership by keeping even the least productive grain and oilseed farmland profitable. Later programs, such as the Feed Grains Act of 1961, continued such trends, with farmers often diverting the least productive acres and realizing higher yields on those planted acres.^{219[xlv]} By the 1970s and 1980s, acreage reduction programs were all but abandoned as farmers began planting “fencerow to fencerow” to meet growing domestic demand for grain, precipitating massive environmental degradation and low prices that bolstered corporate profit.^[xlv] These changes ultimately prompted a new approach to conservation over the next two decades: starting with the introduction of the conservation title and programs in the 1985 Farm Bill; the addition of the Wetland Reserve Program and the Agricultural Water Quality Program in the 1990 Farm Bill; and the eventual separation of commodity programs from conservation programs in 1996 Farm Bill.^[xlvii] These programs, as

[xlv] The first part of the Soil Bank Program was an acreage reserve program and the second part was a ten-year conservation reserve program. The Soil Bank program, however, did little to advance the primary goal, commodity surplus reduction because the lands that such programs were applied to were already low productivity. McGranahan, Devan A., Paul W. Brown, Lisa A. Schulte, and John C. Tyndall. “A Historical Primer on the U.S. Farm Bill: Supply Management and Conservation Policy.” *Journal of Soil and Water Conservation* 68, no. 3 (2013).

[xlv] The Feed Grains Act of 1961, however, was somewhat succeed in its goal of offsetting grain surpluses and protecting soil. In this program, farmers would receive payments for diverting corn acreage into soil-conserving uses. Rasmussen, Wayne D., Gladys L. Baker, and James S. Ward. “A Short History of Agricultural Adjustment, 1933-75.” *Agriculture Information Bulletin*, 1976.

[xlv] The massive domestic demand for grain during this time was driven by the “Russian Grain Robbery” of July and August 1972 when 440 million bushels of wheat produced in the United States were sold to the Soviet Union: for approximately \$700 million. Luttrell, Clifton B. “The Russian Wheat Deal—Hindsight vs. Foresight.” *Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis Review*, 1973.

[xlvii] Furthermore, the 1996 Farm Bill not only expanded conservation programs and created the Environmental Quality Incentives Program. It also removed acreage restrictions for commodity crops, thereby allowing farmers to plant what they believed to be their most competitive crops.

outlined below, however, maintain the structural benefits historically afforded to whites while keeping people of color at a structural disadvantage.

FEDERAL CONSERVATION, ORGANIC AGRICULTURE, AND OUTREACH PROGRAMS

Land Retirement: The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)

One major Farm Bill conservation program that has undergirded white farmland ownership at the expense of farmland ownership by people of color is the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). The CRP is the largest federal, private-land retirement program in the United States, with 27.5 million acres covered at a cost of \$20 billion over the next 10 years. It provides financial compensation for landowners to voluntarily remove land from agricultural production for 10 to 15 years in order to improve soil and water quality and create wildlife habitat.²²⁰ Acres enrolled in CRP have indeed shown a number of environmental gains, including reduced soil erosion, water quality improvements, and wildlife population improvement. However, a number of factors shape the purpose the CRP serves and for whom: first, enrollment is considered to be undesirable by some land owners, primarily because of the cost of compliance and the potential loss of farm income due to the prevention of the use of such land for agricultural production.²²¹ Thus, as with the 1956 Soil Bank Program from which the CRP grew, it is the least productive land and lowest income households that are often enrolled and kept profitable.²²²^[xlviii] Second, studies have shown that conservation compliance does not present a strong economic deterrent for landowners who want to crop former CRP acreage after the CRP term is over, thus highlighting the potentially temporary nature of such economic relief.²²³^[xlix] Third, and perhaps most importantly, only lands planted with commodity crops, especially, corn and wheat are eligible for CRP and not fruits or vegetables, or lands used for livestock.

Because white farmers have historically owned large-scale grain and oilseed farmland while farmers of color have been relegated to smaller, non-commodity crop farmland, the Conservation Reserve Program potentially undergirds white farmland ownership, both during times of economic hardship and on marginal land. A 2005 Texas A&M University survey study, for example, found that white landowners were more likely to have land qualified for reserve programs—as well as programs such as the Stewardship Incentives Program (SIP) and the Forestry Incentives Program (FIP). Such landowners not only received more favorable program outreach and assistance, as will be addressed below, they also had more incentives to participate due to the economies of scale and tax savings.²²⁴ Toward this end, the study found that white landowners, on average, were enrolled in the CRP longer and signed up more acres (an average of 119 months and 69 acres) than landowners of color (92 months and 69 acres).²²⁵

[xlviii] However, even for land-retirement programs, a significant percentage of payments go to high-income households. In 2009, for example, 10% of land-retirement payments went to farms operated by households with incomes over \$203,000. White, Kirk, and Robert Hoppe. *Changing Farm Structure and the Distribution of Farm Payments and Federal Crop Insurance*. Washington, D.C.: USDA Economic Research Service, February 2012.

[xlix] Specifically, although conservation compliance increases the costs of production on very highly erodible land, it has little effect on the moderately erodible and no effect on the non-erodible land. Thus, studies have found that conservation compliance may not present a strong economic deterrent for cropping most CRP acreage Garrison, Carl O., Michael R. Dicks, Brian D. Adam, and others. “Estimating the Impact of Conservation Reserve Program Contract Expiration on Corn and Wheat Prices.” *Agricultural and Resource Economics Review* 23, no. 1 (1994).

Environmental Sustainability: The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

Another Farm Bill conservation program that secures white farmland ownership more so than farmland ownership by people of color is the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). EQIP underwrites part of the cost when farmers and ranchers implement environmentally sound practices tied not only to wildlife habitat but also to nutrient runoff, pest control, water irrigation, and livestock grazing.²²⁶ Eligible land includes cropland, rangeland, pasture, non-industrial private forest land, and other farm or ranch lands, with 60% of total EQIP funding set aside for livestock operations at the national level.²²⁷^[i] EQIP holds greater potential to support farmers of color than the Conservation Reserve Program because it is based not on commodity crops and acreage, and does not seek to retire land from production. Rather, it is based on management practices, including those tied to livestock operations.

EQIP seemingly holds greater potential for farmers of color than the CRP, primarily because farmers of color have more of the marginal and degraded lands that qualify for these programs, and hold a large share of livestock operations, statistics on participation by race/ethnicity are not attainable.²²⁸^[ii] Studies have thus had to rely on geographic indicators in order to measure how farmers of color fare with regard to conservation supports.²²⁹ A 2006 USDA Economic Research Service (ERS) study found that farms on reservations were less likely to be enrolled in EQIP than non-reservation farms, and that while reservations accounted for about 9.3% of farms and 7.7% of operated farmland, they only accounted for 4.2% of EQIP contracts and 6.2% of EQIP funding.²³⁰ Moreover, the USDA ERS study found that reservation farms that are enrolled in CRP and EQIP, though relatively less than non-reservation farms, tend to enroll more of their land, marking the potential benefit of conservation programs for farmers of color who can access such programs.²³¹

Toward this end, studies have marked significant factors that have limited farmer of color participation in EQIP. The first major barrier identified is limited technical assistance and the lack of awareness of such incentive programs on behalf of farmers of color due to inadequate outreach. Specifically, more landowners of color than white landowners were dissatisfied with the information and service received, a topic discussed further below.²³² Second, a critical barrier to participation has historically been the inability of farmers of color to afford the cost-share of such programs, although some gains have been made as of the 2008 Farm Bill. Farmers of color became eligible for EQIP cost-share rates that were at least 25% higher than would otherwise be applicable, covering up to 90% of the cost of implementation.²³³ Third, the program initially allocated 5% of funding to small farms and socio-economically disadvantaged producers. However, because the 2014 Farm Bill subsequently broadened eligibility for these funds in particular to include larger farms as well veterans, competition for program benefits has greatly increased.²³⁴ Finally, whereas EQIP provides financial incentives through

[i] The duration of EQIP contracts range from 1 to 10 years while management practice agreements include incentive payments for up to 3 years. A producer can receive up to \$300,000 in payments for all contracts held over a 6-year period. Nickerson, Cynthia J., and Michael S. Hand. *Participation in Conservation Programs by Targeted Farmers: Beginning, Limited-Resource, and Socially Disadvantaged Operators' Enrollment Trends*. Washington, D.C.: USDA Economic Research Service, 2009.

[ii] Although it is not possible to identify socially disadvantaged farmers in the EQIP contract data, participation in EQIP can be measured for farms operated by beginning farmers and limited-resource farmers. Nickerson, Cynthia J., and Michael S. Hand. *Participation in Conservation Programs by Targeted Farmers: Beginning, Limited-Resource, and Socially Disadvantaged Operators' Enrollment Trends*. Washington, D.C.: USDA Economic Research Service, 2009.

voluntary conservation implementation, the 2014 Farm Bill requires conservation compliance on highly erodible land in order for such land to be eligible for crop insurance, thus placing an additional, and albeit environmentally crucial, financial hurdle for farmers of color who disproportionately own and work such land.²³⁵

Organic Agriculture: The EQIP “Organic Initiative”

Under the 2014 Farm Bill, the USDA’s largest organic agriculture programs—among them, the National Organic Certification Cost-Share Program, the Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative, the Organic Production and Market Data Initiatives, and the National Organic Program, all their funding was increased.^[lii] Research on the relationship between structural racism and organic agriculture programs under the Farm Bill, however, remains limited. However, some organic agriculture programs do exhibit similar restrictions as those that characterize other commodity support and conservation programs. The EQIP Organic Initiative, which provides assistance to organic and transitioning-to-organic farmers and ranchers, and is among the USDA’s smaller organic agriculture programs for example, maintains a few critical barriers that have limited access to and benefit of such programs by farmers of color. Specifically, although the 2008 Farm Bill included new language to address the unique conservation needs of socio-economically disadvantaged producers, the EQIP Organic Initiative established a separate payment limitation on organic transition assistance and created a number of burdensome bureaucratic requirements for transitioning-to-organic producers thus hindering enrollment.²³⁶ While such trends are troublesome, substantive research needs to be carried out to better understand the relationship that farmers of color hold to organic agriculture programs in particular.

Ultimately, regardless of whether such incentive programs reach their intended recipients, organic agriculture itself does not operate outside of what Julie Guthman calls “the punishing logic of conventional agricultural production.” That is, she argues, payments to land (i.e., rent, property taxes, etc.) for organic growers effectively reinforce preexisting patterns of agricultural production and ensure that they must compete as nominally capitalist enterprises in order to survive.²³⁷^[liii] For this reason, organic growers not only tend to replicate many aspects of conventional production, but they are also similarly vulnerable to processes of structural racialization. This is especially true with regard to problematic use of labor contractors, few improved labor practices, and similar wages for farm labor.²³⁸ As of 2013, for example, 1.5% of the largest organic farms account for 25% of all organic sales. Furthermore, 10% of all organic farms account for 75% of total sales, while for agriculture as a whole only 6% account for 75% of total sales.²³⁹

[lii] The National Organic Certification Cost-Share Program funding was increased from just over \$5 million annually to \$11.5 million annually, the Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative was again granted \$20 million per year, the Organic Production and Market Data Initiatives was granted \$5 million over five years, and the National Organic Program received \$5 million for technology upgrades.

[liii] While such trends are particularly true for California, there are indeed other parts of the United States where producers respond to these pressures not by intensifying, but by going deeper into the alternative organic model, forging more direct and local relationships along the value chain and embracing principles of the organic movement. See: Guptill, Amy. “Exploring the Conventionalization of Organic Dairy: Trends and Counter-Trends in Upstate New York.” *Agriculture and Human Values* 26, no. 1–2 (November 26, 2008): 29–42. doi:10.1007/s10460-008-9179-0.

Outreach and Assistance: The 2501 Program

A fourth program, the Outreach and Assistance for Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers and Veteran Farmers and Ranchers Program, is vulnerable to reproducing the same inequities that characterize commodity and conservation programs alike, particularly in terms of program access and benefits accrued. Also known as the 2501 Program, the Outreach and Assistance for Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers and Veteran Farmers and Ranchers Program is authorized under the miscellaneous title and distributes support to entities that work with farmers of color and other socio-economically disadvantaged producers. However, a number of troubling trends limit the potential gains of outreach and technical assistance for such producers. Among the most significant is the decreased budget for the 2501 program. According to a 2007 Oxfam report, the 2501 program has received significantly less money than Congress has authorized: between 1994 and 2007, for example, the 2501 Program has received about \$69 million—only 27% of the authorized amount of \$255 million.²⁴⁰ The target of 2014 Farm Bill cuts, furthermore, funding for the 2501 program has dropped from \$75 million to \$50 million since 2008.²⁴¹

Furthermore, although the 2501 program originally aimed to support socio-economically disadvantaged farmers and ranchers—particularly Black, Native American, Asian American, and Latino/a farmers and ranchers—there are several barriers to fully supporting such groups. Just as with EQIP, for example, the most recent Farm Bill expands the program to also serve returning military veterans entering farming, yet does so without increased funding, thus limiting outreach and technical assistance for farmers of color, and pitting such groups against one another.²⁴² The expansion of the 2501 program, therefore, compounds the impact of the funding cuts outlined above and further undermines the potential of the program itself for farmers of color.²⁴³

Finally, when farmers of color are told they are not eligible for a particular program, they are left off the Farm Service Agency list of people to receive newsletters and other information about USDA benefits. Since most other USDA agencies use this list for outreach, failure to include farmers of color also leaves them ill-informed about deadlines for the purchase of crop insurance and disaster protection, or about the availability of conservation benefits.²⁴⁴ Efforts such as the Minority Farm Register, however, reflect some positive steps toward such structural issues, yet the Minority Farm Register itself is voluntary and farmers of color may not be aware of it.²⁴⁵

CORPORATE INFLUENCE AND CONSERVATION

Biofuel Production: Socio-Economic and Environmental Impacts

According to a 2007 ETC Group report, corporations and governments across the world are waging an intense campaign to present biofuels as an environmentally friendly alternative to fossil fuel use that could help combat climate change.²⁴⁶ All corporations that were producing transgenic crops at the time of the report—Syngenta, Monsanto, DuPont, Dow, Bayer, BASF—had investments in crops designed especially for the production of biofuels (i.e., ethanol and biodiesel) and have agreements with such transnational corporations as Cargill, Archer Daniel Midland, Bunge, which control the global grains trade. However, according to the ETC Group, the impulse behind biofuel production is not to abandon fossil fuels, nor to change the growth and consumption patterns that contribute to climate change. Rather, it is to create new sources

of business by promoting and subsidizing the industrial production of crops that would supposedly serve these goals.²⁴⁷ Research has since shown that the environmental impact of industrial cultivation of biofuels largely negates its potential conservation benefits.²⁴⁸

Furthermore, biofuel production disproportionately affects farmers of color, and communities of color more broadly, particularly with respect to its impact on production, food prices, and corporate consolidation. Specifically, as outlined in Part II, by 2017, biofuels production could increase prices for wheat, coarse grains, oilseeds and vegetable oil by 8%, 13%, 7%, and 35%, respectively.²⁴⁹ Furthermore, biofuel economies reflect similar trends in consolidation of ownership as non-biofuel agricultural production that have undermined the socio-economic well-being of communities of color.²⁵⁰ In terms of biofuel refining, although farmers once owned most ethanol plants, as of 2014, there are only 12 companies that account for almost 53% of ethanol production capacity.²⁵¹ Moreover, in terms of production, biofuel crops largely mirror concentration of non-biofuel production; as of 2014, 40% of the nation's corn was harvested for fuel.²⁵² Finally, according to the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), mitigation efforts focused on land acquisition for biofuel production show negative impacts on the lives of poor people in many low- and medium-income countries, including dispossession of farmland and forests, particularly for indigenous peoples, women, and smallholders farmers.²⁵³

According to a 2008 World Bank report, the increases in biofuels production in the United States and other major biofuel producing countries have been driven by subsidies and mandates, which span food and agriculture policy as well as energy legislation.²⁵⁴ The 2002 US Farm Bill became the first Farm Bill to explicitly include an energy title, which has since helped develop the biofuel industry through research, grants, and loans.²⁵⁵ As of 2008, the United States has a tax credit available to blenders of ethanol of \$0.51 per gallon and an import tariff of \$0.54 per gallon, as well as a biodiesel blenders tax credit of \$1 per gallon.²⁵⁶ Furthermore, separate energy bills in 2005 and 2007 created expanded mandates for biofuel use. For example, in the 2005 Energy Policy Act, the federal government mandated 7.5 billion gallons of renewable fuels by 2012, the first renewable fuel volume mandate in the United States.

In the Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007, the mandate was raised to 15 billion gallons of ethanol from conventional sources (corn) by 2022 and 1.0 billion gallons of biodiesel by 2012—thus doubling ethanol production and tripling biodiesel production.²⁵⁷ Significantly, these mandates work by requiring fuel retailers to blend gasoline (90%) and ethanol (10%), or requiring retailers to pay into a convoluted subsidy system. Thus, despite the issues outlined above, as well as the higher price of ethanol (\$2.43 per gallon of ethanol vs. \$1.73 per gallon of gasoline, wholesale) and its lower mileage (roughly two-thirds that of gasoline), the federal government continues to force motorists to purchase it. Ultimately, consumers not only get hit at the grocery store, where biofuels continue to drive up food prices, but also at the pump, where they pay an extra \$10 billion per year, more than a quarter of the \$38 billion raised by the federal gasoline tax.²⁵⁸

Agriculture and Climate Change: Causes and Consequences

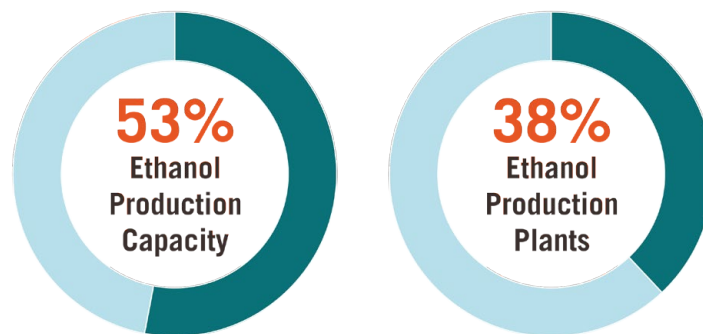
Conventional agricultural production practices, which are encouraged by major food and agriculture policy, including the US Farm Bill, are major contributors to global climate change. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and US Environmental Protection Agency, the agricultural sector is the largest contributor to global anthropogenic

non-CO2 GHGs, accounting for 56% of emissions in 2005.²⁵⁹ In 2013, furthermore, the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) reported that greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture accounted for approximately 9% of total US greenhouse gas emissions—an increase of approximately 17% since 1990.²⁶⁰ Industrial or conventional agricultural practices in particular—characterized by use of high-yielding plant and animal varieties, large-scale monocrops, high stocking densities and confined animal feeding operations (CAFO), decreased or absent periods for land to lay fallow, high levels of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides, high degrees of mechanization—have the largest impacts on climate change.²⁶¹ Furthermore, these practices are themselves made possible through the corresponding use of fossil fuels to power the production of agro-chemicals, agricultural machinery, and increased levels of irrigation.²⁶²

Climate change is disproportionately affecting low-income communities and communities of color in the United States. These communities already breathe dirtier air than other Americans, a problem that climate change will likely only worsen. In Birmingham, Alabama, for example, low-income people and people of color account for 34% of the population yet 65% of the health risk.²⁶³ Additionally, low-income communities and communities of color suffer more during extreme weather events, as they are more likely to live in urban centers with less tree cover to reduce heat and more concrete and pavement to trap it. A 2013 University of California, Berkeley study, for example, found that across the United States, Blacks were 52% more likely, Asian Americans 32% more likely, and Latinos/as 21% more likely to live in conditions with increased heat related risk as compared to whites.²⁶⁴ Furthermore, low-income people and people of color are also less likely to have air conditioning. In the Los Angeles-Long Beach Metropolitan Area, for example, approximately twice as many Blacks do not have access to air conditioning compared to the general population.²⁶⁵ The cumulative impact of such circumstances is that Blacks in Los Angeles are twice as likely to die from a heat wave as other residents. Significantly, Blacks and other communities of color are also less likely to own cars to escape extreme weather events: nationally, 19% of Blacks reside in households without a single car, compared to 13.7% of Latinos/as and 4.6% of whites.²⁶⁶

Furthermore, climate change will lead to higher prices for energy, food and water, exacerbating the fact that low-income communities and communities of color already spend a greater portion of their income on basic necessities. Households in the lowest income bracket use more than twice the proportion of their total expenditures on electricity, and twice the proportion of their total expenditures on food, than do those households in the highest income bracket.²⁶⁷ Finally, due to climate change, low-income communities and communities of color will have fewer or shifting job opportunities. Low-income people of color hold the majority of jobs in sectors that

12 companies now account for



will be significantly affected by climate change, such as agriculture and tourism. In California, as of 2014, for example, there were 739,000 agriculture laborers, 49.2% of whom were Latinos/as.²⁶⁸ Workers in these industries, particularly agricultural laborers, would be the first to lose their jobs in the event of an economic downturn due to climatic troubles.²⁶⁹ Additionally, people of color already own the most marginal farmland and benefit the least from support programs, thus leaving certain producers themselves at greater risk due to climate change.

Corporations, furthermore, stand to benefit by way of the impacts of climate change and a Farm Bill that serves corporate interests. In the 2014 Farm Bill, the crop insurance program expanded to cover specialty crops and account for the higher value of organics. Due to extreme weather, however, the program's costs have grown even without changes to the Farm Bill. After the 2012 drought, for example, the Federal Crop Insurance Program paid out \$17.3 billion in losses, the highest ever, breaking the earlier record set in 2011, yet taxpayers covered nearly 75% of the payouts, minimizing any cost to crop insurance corporations.²⁷⁰^[liv] The public thus subsidizes not only the destructive type of agriculture but also the insurance payouts themselves caused in part by such destructive methods—a resilient arrangement that leaves corporations benefitting the most.

[liv] Furthermore, the federal crop insurance program subsidizes 62% of all premium costs, as of 2014. In 2013 these subsidies added up to \$14 billion, almost 7 times more than in fiscal 2000. Shields, Dennis A. Federal Crop Insurance: Background and Issues. Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, 2015.



FINDINGS & INTERVENTIONS

Findings and Interventions

FINDINGS

As this report found, the US food system and the outcomes generated by the Farm Bill in particular are characterized by widespread social, economic, political, and environmental inequity. Furthermore, such inequity was found to be characteristic of a society that itself produces inequity in every domain of social, economic, political, and environmental life. Thus, this report found, inequity within the food system—such as limited access to nutritious and affordable food, high quality land, or farmers support program benefits—cannot be addressed without addressing inequity within society as a whole—such as non-living wages, widely unequal dispersion of limited employment benefits, unfair treatment food chain workers by many institutions, and uneven democratic influence and access to positions of power across many sectors of society. Toward this end, the remainder of this report summarizes our findings: first, with regard to the US food system, corporate power, and racial/ethnic, gender, and economic disparities that the Farm Bill has helped produce and secure; and second, with regard to corporate power, structural racialization, and the limitations of the Farm Bill itself with regard to structural change. It then poses several short term policy interventions and long term strategies for changing the Farm Bill, the food system, and society as a whole. Finally, it argues for a strong and united food movement that is capable of organizing and mobilizing at the state and national level.

The US Food System, Corporate Power, and Racial/Ethnic, Gender, and Economic Disparities

Corporate Consolidation and Control: Corporate consolidation and control have become central features of the US food system, and the Farm Bill in particular. As of 2014, large-scale family-owned and non-family-owned operations account for 49.7% of the total value of production despite making up only 4.7% of all US farms.²⁷¹ As of 2013, only 12 companies account for almost 53% of ethanol production capacity and own 38% of all ethanol production plants.²⁷² As of 2007, four corporations own 85% of the soybean processing industry, 82% of the beef packing industry, 63% of the pork packing industry, and manufacture about 50% of the milk. Only four corporations control 53% of US grocery retail, and roughly 500 companies control 70% of food choice globally.²⁷³

Food System Worker Disparity: Racial and economic inequity is a central feature of the industrial and corporate-controlled food system. At every level of the food chain, for example, from food production to food service, workers of color typically make less than white workers.²⁷⁴ On average, white food workers earn \$25,024 a year while workers of color make \$19,349 a year. Significantly, women of color in particular suffer the most, earning almost half of what white male workers earn. In some contexts, a majority of farm workers who receive “piece-rate” (i.e., per unit of work) earnings frequently earn far less than minimum wage—an exploitative practice deeply tied to immigration policy. Food insecurity is one major effect of such disparity in wages. For ex-

ample, as of 2014, twice as many restaurant workers were food insecure compared to the overall US population; as of 2011, in Fresno County, California, 45% of farmworkers were food insecure, and in the state of Georgia, 63% of migrant farmworkers were food insecure.²⁷⁵ Beyond wages, few people of color hold management positions in the food system, with white people holding almost three out of every four managerial positions in the food system. As of 2012, 11.8% of executive and senior level officials and managers, and 21.0% of all first- and mid-level officials and managers in 2012 were people of color.²⁷⁶ One result of this disparity is that non-white food system workers experience greater food insecurity.

Food Equity and Nutrition: Food insecurity in the US continues unabated, affecting low-income communities and communities of color in particular. As of 2013, 14.3% of US households—17.5 million households, roughly 50 million persons—were food insecure.²⁷⁷ The report also found that the rates of food insecurity were substantially higher than the national average for Black and Latino/a households, households with incomes near or below the federal poverty line, and households with children headed by single women or single men. Within this social, political, and economic climate, recent cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistant Program (SNAP, formerly named “food stamps”) and other meal support programs continue to disproportionately hurt communities of color, as they are frequently overrepresented in the lowest-paying sectors of the labor market.²⁷⁸

Land Access: In 1920, 14% of all US farmers were Black (about 926,000, with all but 10,000 in the South). By 1997, fewer than 20,000 US farmers were Black, and they owned only about 2 million acres.²⁷⁹ While white farmers were losing their farms during these decades as well, the rate that Black farmers lost their land has been estimated at two and a half to five times the rate of white-owned farm loss.²⁸⁰ Furthermore, between 1920 and 1997, the number of US farms operated by Blacks dropped 98%, while the number of US farms operated by whites dropped 65.8%.²⁸¹ Although in 1982 the US Commission on Civil Rights concluded that the USDA was the primary reason Black farmers continued to lose their land at such astonishing rates. In 1983 President Reagan eliminated the division of the USDA that handled civil rights complaints. The USDA Office of Civil Rights would not re-open until 1996 during the Clinton Administration.²⁸² The increasing influence of corporations inside and outside the food system since the early 1980s exacerbated such trends for communities of color, and marked the complex ties between the federal government and corporate interests.²⁸³

Farm Labor and Immigration Policy: The Farm Bill itself does not deal directly with immigration. However, the combination of an immigration system easily exploited by employers, and workers’ low (and withheld) income, limited formal education, limited command of the English language, and undocumented status, gives such farm laborers little opportunity for recourse within—or options outside of—the unjust working conditions that the Farm Bill has helped make possible. For example, as of 2009, 78% of all farmworkers were foreign born; 70% said they could not speak English “at all,” or could only speak “a little”; the median level of completed education was sixth grade; and 42% of farmworkers surveyed were migrants, a third of whom having traveled between the United States and another country, primarily Mexico.²⁸⁴ Significantly, many agricultural workers fear that challenging the illegal and unfair practices of their employers will result in further abuses, loss of their job, and, ultimately, deportation. Worse yet, few attorneys are available to help poor agricultural workers, and federal legal aid programs are prohibited from representing undocumented immigrants.²⁸⁵ Ultimately, corporate control of the

food system secures and exacerbates the unjust treatment of the predominately non-white and migrant agricultural workforce of the United States.

Climate Change: In the United States, the relationship between disparity in exposures to environmental hazards and socio-economic status has been widely documented.^[lv] As a major contributor to global climate change and the racialized distribution of its impacts, conventional agricultural production practices, in particular, have been instrumental toward this end. In 2013, for example, the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) reported that greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture accounted for approximately 9% of total US greenhouse gas emissions—an increase of approximately 17% since 1990.²⁸⁶ Low-income communities and communities of color in the United States experience the brunt of the effects of climate change than other Americans: they breathe more polluted air, suffer more during extreme weather events, and have fewer means to escape such extreme weather events.^[lvii] Rising energy, food, and water costs also disproportionately effect low-income communities and communities of color, as such communities already spend a greater portion of their income on basic necessities than white communities.²⁸⁷ Finally, low-income communities and communities of color hold the majority of jobs in sectors that will be significantly affected by climate change, such as agriculture and tourism.²⁸⁸ Workers in these industries would be the first to lose their jobs in the event of an economic downturn due to climatic troubles.²⁸⁹

Corporate Power, Structural Racialization, and Limitations of the Farm Bill

Significantly, this report found a number of structural barriers to addressing these racial/ethnic, gender, and economic inequities.

Part I found that the Farm Bill—from its inception in 1933 to the Farm Bills of the 1980s onward—is defined by the long term shift from the subsidization of production and consumption to the subsidization of agribusiness itself. In this light, low-income communities and communities of color have been structurally positioned on the losing side of such shifts, and of US food and agriculture policy more broadly. They have also been given few options for recourse, given the ways in which the Farm Bill has been designed and re-designed to be insulated from democratic influence, particularly by way of countless layers of committees.²⁹⁰

Part II found that, despite the benefits of joint SNAP and Unemployment Insurance (UI) for low-income communities and communities of color, such of the benefits of both during the recession precipitated by the 2007–2008 financial crisis, supporting public nutrition assistance programs and fighting poverty and racial/ethnic inequality, are antithetical. Specifically, while such public assistance programs do indeed support, in some ways, the most marginalized communities, they ultimately maintain structural inequity by way of the major profits that corporations such as Walmart and other large retailers reap by distributing such benefits. These corporations are the same ones that funnel profits back to their corporate headquarters, outside

[lv] See studies done by Brown P. (1995) Race, Class, and environmental health: a review and systematization of the literature; Mohai, Pellow, and Report (2009) Environmental Justice; Chakraborty et. al. (2011) Disproportionate Proximity to Environmental Health Hazards: Methods, Models, and Measurement.

[lvii] Seth B. Shonkoff et al., “The Climate Gap: Environmental Health and Equity Implications of Climate Change and Mitigation Policies in California: A Review of the Literature,” *Climatic Change* 109, no. 1 (2011): 485–503.

their respective retail sites, and that force low wages and poor working conditions onto workers at all levels of the food system.

Finally, Part III and Part IV found that supporting the inclusion of producers of color into current payment schemes and fighting poverty and racial/ethnic inequity are also antithetical, despite recent gains in terms of USDA Civil Rights settlements and slowly increasing participation in such programs by such producers. Specifically, while such disparities may be addressed, in part, by way of more representative Farm Service Agency committees—or by better outreach and assistance such payment programs, and their successor, crop insurance programs—ultimately they maintain structural inequity. They do so, for example, by re-entrenching existing property regimes that consistently push producers, be they of any racial/ethnic background, to cut costs where possible. Specifically, while these disparities may be addressed, in part, by way of more representative Farm Service Agency committees—or by better outreach and assistance—such payment programs, and their successor, crop insurance programs, they ultimately maintain structural inequity. Furthermore, such property regimes set the stage for corporations to fare best, and to grow in size, profit, and influence by way of the multiple mechanisms outlined in both Part III and Part IV.

SHORT TERM POLICY INTERVENTIONS

This report posits several short term policy interventions:

1. Statistics

We call on the US Department of Agriculture to improve data collection of farmland ownership and farmland quality, and to address ahistorical and inadequate racial/ethnic representation baselines.

- **Frequent and accessible farmland ownership statistics:** First, a more frequent Agricultural Economics and Land Ownership Survey (AELOS)—conducted every 5 years, rather than 10—would help identify land ownership trends and rates among different racial/ethnic groups. It would also prove more informative than operator statistics, which are the focus of the USDA Census of Agriculture and are often used to report on racial/ethnic disparity in agriculture. Such statistics, for example, indicate increasing diversity among farm operators as of late, yet elide the actual distribution of wealth and access to land. Collecting AELOS ownership data more frequently, and making such data easily accessible, would be an important first step.
- **Farmland quality statistics:** Second, statistics on trends in ownership regarding the quality of land owned (e.g., Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, Unique Farmland, Farmland of Local Importance) would be useful in further analysis and contestation of structural racialization in the US food system. Specifically, such statistics could help undergird efforts to ensure that farmers of color have access to prime farmland as well—land that such farmers have historically been excluded from in numerous ways.

- **Representation baselines:** Third, measures that seek to ensure Farm Service Agency (FSA) committees are representative of the county, area, and regions within which they exist are inadequate, in that they do not account for the historic exclusion of people of color from farmland ownership, and thus from an economic foothold in the countryside. Thus, such measures should be accompanied by efforts to ensure FSA committees reflect national racial/ethnic demographics and not take for granted the geographies of racial/ethnic exclusion from the countryside.

2. Production Policies

Change the agricultural production practices to benefit all people at all levels of the food system.

- **Restore minimum prices:** The 2014 Farm Bill abandoned the 70-year-old practice of setting minimum prices for milk, cheese, and butter, and instead invested in insurance for dairy farmers to protect themselves against price volatility or rising feed costs. Rather than continue the shift toward crop insurance, disaster assistance, and subsidized loans for farmers, which further bolster corporate profits, efforts should be taken to restore and maintain price floors for dairy and other industries.
- **Reduce high food prices by eliminating biofuels crop payments:** While not entirely separate apart from the dynamics that characterize the production of other commodity crops, efforts should be taken to challenge biofuel production by opposing biofuel crop payments, such as crop insurance, and ultimately working to abolish the mandated targets. Doing so would have a measurable effect on high food prices and global climate change, and would thus be of particular benefit for communities of color who are hit hardest by both.
- **Increase Department of Labor funding to enforce protection of migrant and seasonal agricultural workers:** Studies have shown that the Department of Labor's (DOL) enforcement of the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), the Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Protection Act (AWPA), and the H-2A agricultural guestworker program has improved following the additional funds and the hiring of 300 new DOL investigators.^[lvii] Such successes should be built upon with further improvement in the quality of enforcement and number of investigators, thus providing the most exploited farmworkers with tools to address wage, health, and housing violations, and to deter their employers from committing such violations. Funding for such improvements should be supported within the Farm Bill, in particular, by redirecting funding from satisfying corporate interests to guaranteeing farmworkers' rights.
- **Improve access to financing of land and water for new farmers, low-income farmers, and farmers of color:** There should not only be a dedicated pool of funds for farmers of color (including new farmers of color) but also a dedicated program for farmers of color. Typically, programs that have supported marginalized farmers (e.g., the 2501 program, addressed above) are spread so thin among groups that continue to have difficulty ac-

[lvii] "U.S. Department of Labor Enforcement in Agriculture: More Must Be Done to Protect Farmworkers Despite Recent Improvements" (Washington, D.C.: Farmworker Justice, 2015), <http://www.farmworkerjustice.org/sites/default/files/FarmworkerJusticeDOLenforcementReport2015%20%281%29.pdf>.

cessing land and water (e.g., small farmers and people of color, and, as of the 2014 Farm Bill, larger farms as well as veterans) that the benefits that any one group receives are marginal. Farmers of color are among such groups that are at the greatest disadvantage when benefits become scarce.

3. Outreach and Assistance

Outreach and assistance efforts should go hand-in-hand with efforts to improve financing for land and water access.

- **Improve outreach and assistance to farmers of color:** Because most other USDA agencies use the Farm Service Agency list for outreach, the denial of ineligible farmers—oftentimes farmers of color—for FSA programs leaves them ill-informed about deadlines for other programs, including the purchase of crop insurance and disaster protection, or the availability of conservation benefits. Efforts such as the Minority Farm Register, while aimed to address such shortcomings, are also still limited in that they are voluntary and may simply be another program that such farmers are not entirely aware of. Data collection on race/ethnicity in conjunction with improved financing for land and water access, and directed and mandatory outreach initiatives, would be crucial in addressing such barriers to program access and support. The Minority Farmer Advisory Committee, which was authorized under the 2008 Farm Bill and first convened in 2011, was established in order to advise the Secretary of Agriculture on implementation of outreach and assistance programs. Such efforts should therefore be strengthened in order to address the potential shortcomings in existing outreach and assistance programs outlined above.
- **Continue and expand cash advances to Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP):** There were gains in the 2014 Farm Bill regarding increases in the amount of an Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) contract that a farmer can receive in advance, from 30 to 50%. This advance payment can be used to cover the up front costs of a project for the purposes of purchasing materials or contracting services, which is crucial for many new farmers and farmers of color with relatively limited cash flow. Continuing and expanding such measures would help mitigate the historical and structural barriers disproportionately faced by farmers of color and low-income farmers.
- **Increase support to rural development strategies:** Increase funding to relatively successful rural development strategies such as the Value Added Producer Grant (VAPG) program while ensuring that their limitations, such as inadequate community-specific outreach and assistance, are addressed. Programs geared toward rural development are significant because they address issues both on and off the farm, and thus hold great potential as effective anti-poverty programs.

4. Research and Development

Research priorities must be reoriented toward more socially and environmentally just initiatives.

- **Redirect federal research agenda to support public interest initiatives:** The Farm Bill's research title provides a major opportunity to bolster USDA research funding and redi-

rect federal research agendas away from corporate-backed initiatives toward fair and just, local, sustainable, and democratically-determined production priorities and practices that uphold the well-being of food system workers and consumers alike. Challenging corporate-backed research funding structures, however, does not guarantee non-industrial agricultural production. Challenging corporate-backed research funding structures, however, does not guarantee non-industrial agricultural production on its own, though it does expand the possibility for farming in the United States to reflect public interests and ultimately support the network of researchers and practitioners who would put such visions into practice.

- **Increase funding for renewable energy research and not biofuels projects:** The primary programs under the energy title of the Farm Bill include the Biomass Crop Assistance Program, which partners with farmers to develop new biofuels; the Biorefinery Assistance Program, which supports biofuels research and development by assisting US companies in securing more than \$450 million in private capital for biofuel projects; and the Renewable Energy for America Program (REAP) that aims to support renewable energy jobs in rural parts of the country. Such funds should instead be geared toward research and development on renewable energy programs (e.g., solar and wind) and not on biofuel, which has largely benefitted agribusiness corporations thus far.

5. Public Assistance

Public assistance programs must be grounded in anti-poverty principles.

- **Monitor and reduce corporate influence and gain from SNAP:** Given the potential that public nutrition assistance programs hold in alleviating poverty and boosting local economies, programs such as SNAP—the largest program under the Farm Bill—should be challenged in order to decrease corporate influence and corporate gain, including the profits accrued by large retailers as well as banks. In agreement with the groundbreaking report entitled, “Food Stamps: Follow the Money,” among the first steps taken should be: pushing the USDA to disclose retailer redemptions on SNAP; requiring that the USDA regularly report on these numbers to Congress; pushing for Congress to mandate that the USDA collect and make public product purchase data; and requiring that the USDA collect data on bank fees to assess, evaluate, and publically share national costs. ^[lviii] Additionally, efforts should be taken to stem sales tax leakage, wherein tax on items purchased at large retailers is funneled away from local economies back to the site of their corporate headquarters, thus negating the “multiplier” effect of SNAP celebrated by the USDA.

LONG TERM STRATEGIES & THE FUTURE OF THE FARM BILL

These short term policy interventions must be aligned with the long term strategy of challenging the structural and racialized barriers to a fair and sustainable food system, and thus the existing social, political, and economic frameworks that make such barriers possible. That is because structural change must arguably begin with the tools that are available at

[lviii] Michelle Simon, “Food Stamps: Follow the Money” (Oakland: Eat Drink Politics, 2012).

the moment, in this case the US Farm Bill, in order to address the most immediate needs for some. Yet, history has shown that such tools can **only** address the needs of some. While the condition of some women, communities of color, and low-income communities, for example, has improved in some regards, such communities ultimately still experience the brunt of an unjust food system, particularly in terms of wealth, land access, access to positions of power, and degree of democratic influence.

Thus, given both the racial/ethnic, gender, and economic inequities found, and the structural barriers to addressing such inequities found, this report also posits a couple long term strategies from which to envision a new life for the Farm Bill in particular, and food and agriculture policy in general. The first, for example, concerns Farm Bill programs that have the potential to be effective anti-poverty programs, such as SNAP. One approach could be overhauling such programs so that they stay beyond the influence of corporate interest groups and lobbying efforts. This, in essence, would require removing such programs from the Farm Bill, redesigning them primarily as anti-poverty and economic stimulus programs, and recovering, in part, their original potential. Another, for example, concerns the Farm Bill's remaining titles that have somewhat improved the conditions of marginalized communities, such as its Rural Development programs. One approach could be keeping programs geared toward rural development within the Farm Bill while giving them a more central role, thus uplifting farmers as well the communities in which they live and work. Ultimately, given such short term and long term strategies, this report neither calls simply for minor reforms to the Farm Bill, nor calls for throwing it out and doing something different. Rather, it calls for a combination of both.

BUILDING A MOVEMENT FOR FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

The US Farm Bill reflects a prime opportunity to challenge corporate control and structural racialization from multiple angles: social, political, economic, and environmental. It also reflects a prime opportunity to address corporate control and structural racialization within multiple time frames and at multiple scales: from the scale of the food system to that of society itself. Yet such attempts at structural change will have little traction unless such demands come from a very powerful social movement. That is, structural change requires a strong and united movement that is capable of organizing and mobilizing at the state and national level, and that ultimately aims to produce conditions required for food sovereignty, including food access, health equity, fair and living wages, land access, just immigration policy, restraints upon corporations, non-exploitative farm labor conditions, and environmental well-being, among others, in particular, and racial/ethnic, gender, and economic justice, more broadly. Such a movement would thus need to encompass grassroots and advocacy organizations that are anti-capitalist, new economy, anti-racist, and feminist, and that are oriented toward environmental justice, labor rights, immigration rights, food justice, climate justice, and human rights, among other strategies and goals.

The food sovereignty movement itself already embodies much of this coalitionary work and is carried forth by a wide ranging group of organizations including, among others: La Via Campesina, The Network of Farmers and Agricultural Producers Organizations of West Africa (ROPFA), Eastern Africa Farmers Federation (EAFB), Eastern and Southern Africa Farmers' Forum, We Are the Solution, and other agrarian-based farmers' movements; the International Planning Committee on Food Sovereignty; ATTAC; We Are the Solution; World March of Women; many food justice and rights-based movements; and indigenous peoples movements in North America and

elsewhere that engage with the particular histories of colonialism in their respective regions. This movement necessarily calls for food systems change on the basis of entitlements, structural reforms to markets and property regimes, and class-based, redistributive demands for land, water and resources.²⁹¹ Demands for food sovereignty are frequently anti-imperialist, anti-corporatist and/or anti-capitalist. In this framework for social, political, and economic change, the Farm Bill then is a barrier to true structural change, as it itself has become a pillar of neoliberalism, and has long impeded democratic influence with layers of committees.²⁹²

However, although the food sovereignty movement, broadly, is oriented towards a number of critical issues (e.g., dismantling corporate agri-foods monopoly power, recovering parity, redistributive land reform, community rights to water and seed, regionally-based food systems, democratization of food systems, sustainable livelihoods, protection from dumping and over-production, and the revival of agroecologically-managed agriculture, collectively geared toward resource redistribution), there exists a gap that this report has aimed to address.²⁹³ That is, still lacking from the core of such efforts—particularly as they take shape in the United States—is an anti-racist critique that acknowledges and aims to address the underlying racial logic and history of not only the Farm Bill, but of all domains of life—social, political, economic, and environmental—including neoliberalism, and thus corporate control, itself. Such a movement must not be afraid to mark this racial logic and history as that of white supremacy, and its concomitant logics and histories as those of heteropatriarchy and colonialism and imperialism, visible, at the very least, in all the ways outlined in this report.

In short, a just and democratic food system is not simply the end goal. Rather, it is also a strategic means to challenging the structures that impede the possibility of a just life for all peoples in all domains of life. Only when the agenda and work of the broad-based food sovereignty movement upholds a meta-narrative that takes into account wealth, race/ethnicity, and gender, can the struggle that low-income communities, communities of color, and women face with regard to the food system be connected to the struggles they face elsewhere—including labor, employment, health, housing, the school-to-prison pipeline, and police violence. Only then can such a movement truly strive for a just society that upholds the dignity for all peoples. ■

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