



FACTS & FINDINGS

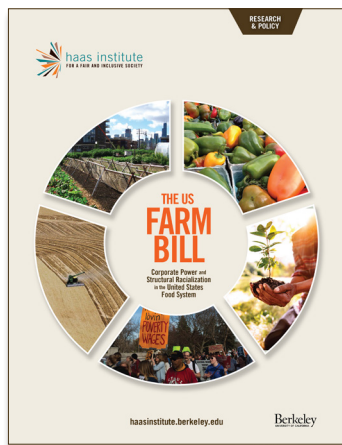
FROM OUR REPORT ON

THE US FARM BILL

A Research Brief on the US Farm Bill and
Corporate Power and Structural Racialization
in the United States Food System

This research brief is distilled from a research and policy report published by the Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society entitled *The US Farm Bill: Corporate Power and Structural Racialization in the United States Food System*.

The full report can be accessed at diversity.berkeley.edu/farmbillreport



HAAS INSTITUTE FOR A FAIR AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY

The Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society brings together researchers, community stakeholders, policy-makers, and communicators to identify and challenge the barriers to an inclusive, just, and sustainable society and create transformative change. The Institute serves as a national hub of a vibrant network of researchers and community partners and takes a leadership role in translating, communicating, and facilitating research, policy and strategic engagement. The Haas Institute advances research and policy related to marginalized people while essentially touching all who benefit from a truly diverse, fair, and inclusive society.

This research brief was produced by researchers in the Haas Institute's Global Justice Program, who 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.

THE WORK OF THE HAAS INSTITUTE IS GENEROUSLY SUPPORTED BY THE FOLLOWING:

The Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund
The California Endowment
The W.K. Kellogg Foundation
The Ford Foundation
The Kresge Foundation
The Northwest Area Foundation
The Levi Strauss Foundation
The Annie E. Casey Foundation
Linked Fate Fund for Justice at The Tides Foundation
The University of California, Berkeley

AUTHORS

Hossein Ayazi is a graduate research assistant at the Haas Institute's Global Justice Program where his work addresses food and agriculture policy, structural racism, and economic inequity. He is a PhD candidate in Society and Environment in the Department of Environmental Science, Policy & Management. His dissertation investigates the historical and institutional operations of the "US agrarian imaginary," and is entitled, "Future Farmers of America: The Agrarian Life of Religion, Race, and US Colonialism, 1928–Present."

Elsadig Elsheikh is the Global Justice Program Director at the Haas Institute. Elsadig's research and writings are on the themes and social dynamics relating to Africa's large-scale land deals, financialization, global food system, global health, human and indigenous peoples rights, state and citizenship, and structural racialization.

SPECIAL THANKS

This research brief was distilled by Research Fellow Kemi Bello.

CHARTS & INFOGRAPHICS

Samir Gambhir

DESIGN & LAYOUT

Rachelle Galloway-Popotas
Ebonye Gussine Wilkins

COPYEDITING

Sara Grossman

Report Citation

Ayazi, Hossein, and Elsheikh, Elsadig.
"The U.S. Farm Bill: Corporate Power and Structural Racialization in the United States Food System." Berkeley, CA: Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society, University of California, Berkeley, 2015.
<http://diversity.berkeley.edu/farmbillreport>.

CONTACT

460 Stephens Hall
Berkeley, CA 94720-2330
510-642-3011
haasinstitute.berkeley.edu



@haasinstitute

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Glossary of Key Terms	4
Purpose of the Farm Bill Report.....	6
Understanding the Farm Bill.....	7
Farm Bill Title Spending: 2014 v. 2008	8
Corporate Power & Structural Racialization	12
Key Findings.....	13
Corporate Power and Structural Racialization.....	13
Poverty, Food Insecurity, and Public Assistance.....	14
Farmland and Federal Support	15
Conservation and Climate	16
Structural Barriers.....	17
Short Term Policy Interventions	18
Long Term Strategies and the Future of the Farm Bill	21
Building a Broad-Based Food Sovereignty Movement	22



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 manufacturing 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.



PURPOSE OF THE FARM BILL 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.



UNDERSTANDING THE FARM BILL

The Farm Bill—a multi-year omnibus bill—is the preeminent piece of US food and agriculture legislation in the United States.

The Farm Bill establishes and maintains federal support for agricultural production, nutrition programs like SNAP, 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.

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, 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, Coca-Cola), suppliers and manufacturers of agricultural inputs (e.g., Cargill, Monsanto, DuPont), members of government and special interest groups (e.g., 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).

Increasingly, however, 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. Furthermore, this power that corporations hold has worsened the racial, gender, and economic inequity that has long characterized the food system, and society more broadly.



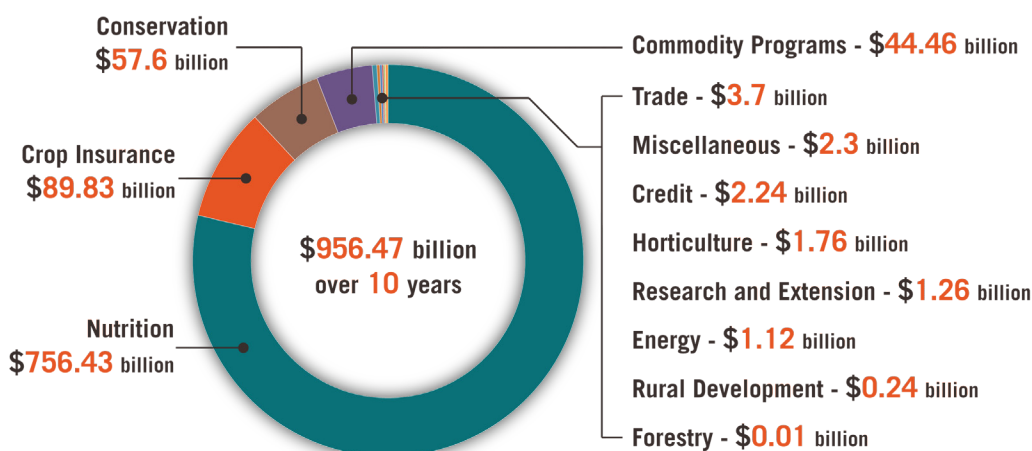
FARM BILL TITLE SPENDING: 2014 V. 2008

Title I: Commodity Program

\$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.

2014 US Farm Bill Spending by Title



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 domestic 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.

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 million 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.



CORPORATE POWER & STRUCTURAL RACIALIZATION

Our Framework

Socially, economically, politically, and environmentally, the US food system is 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. While corporations reap the benefits of an overworked and underpaid workforce, many consumers—including food system workers—do not have access to nutritious and affordable food of their choosing. While industrial agriculture continues to increase at massive scale, the resulting pollution of soil and water contributes to global climate change.

Additionally, the US food system today 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 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. To challenge these structural forces of racial and economic inequity, it is necessary to analyze how the outcomes that marginalize low-income communities and communities of color are (re)produced, including: the ways that public and private institutions are structured; how government programs are administered and operate; and the genesis and formation of critical institutions and structures themselves.

Why Now

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.

CORPORATE CONTROL

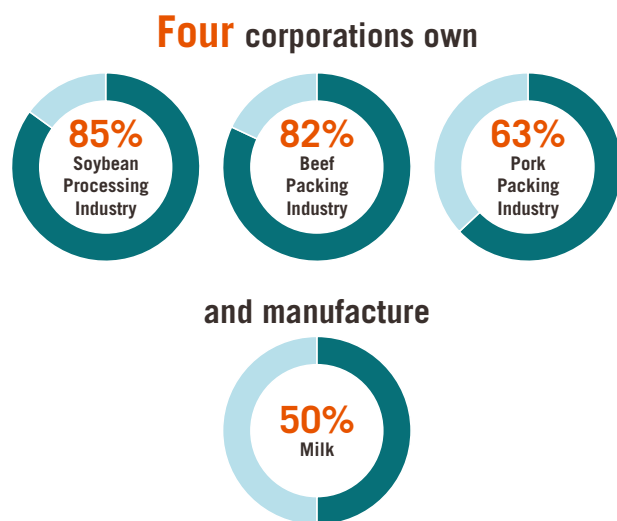
The control of political and economic systems by corporations in order to influence trade regulations, tax rates, and wealth distribution, among other measures, and to produce favorable environments for further corporate growth.

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.



KEY FINDINGS: CORPORATE POWER



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.

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.

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.

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. Globally, fewer than 500 companies control 70% of food choice.

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. 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).



KEY FINDINGS:

POVERTY, FOOD INSECURITY, AND PUBLIC ASSISTANCE

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%, 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.

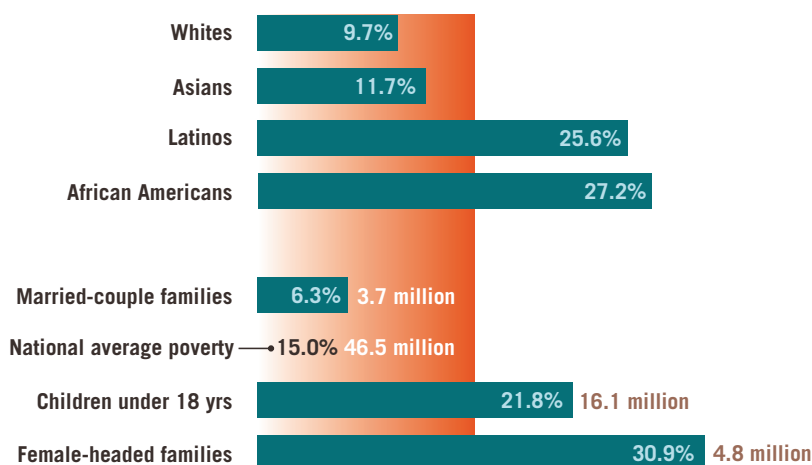
Communities of color frequently overrepresented in lowest-paying jobs. In 2012, 26% of Blacks and 26% of Latinos were employed in service—a notoriously low-paying industry—while only 17% of whites and 18% of Asian Americans were employed in service.

FOOD INSECURITY

In 2013, 14.3%, or 17.5 million, of households were food insecure at least some time during the year. 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.

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.

Poverty Rates, 2012



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).

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.



KEY FINDINGS: FARMLAND AND FEDERAL SUPPORT

FARM SIZE AND CONSOLIDATION

The “midpoint acreage” for cropland nearly doubled from 1982–2007, 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.

FARMLAND OWNERSHIP

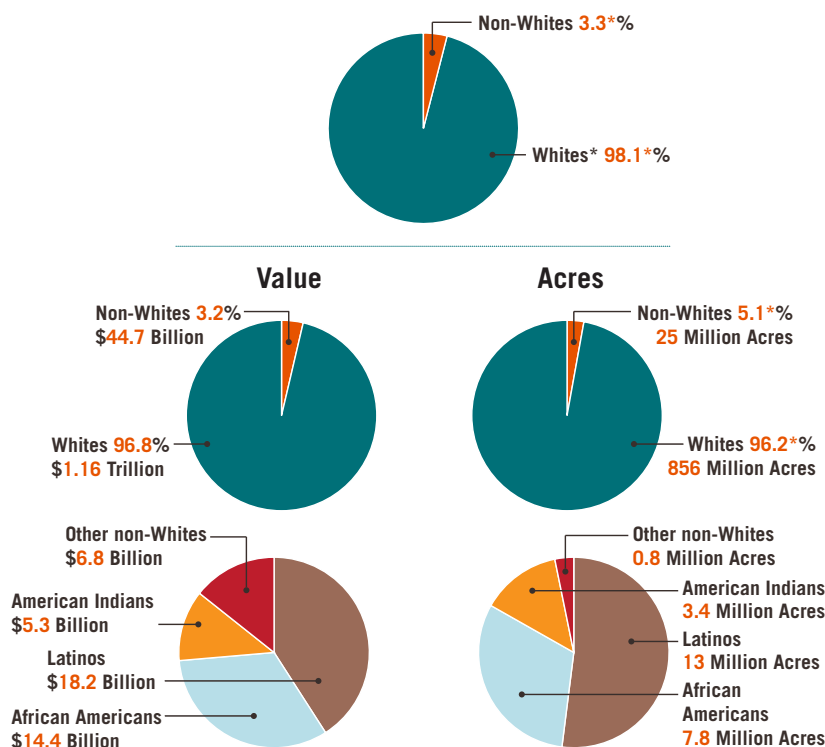
As of 1999, of all private US agricultural land, white people accounted for 96% of the owners, 97% of all agricultural value, and 98% of the acres. Conversely, Blacks, Native Americans, Asian Americans, and Latinos/as together accounted for 4% of the owners, 3% of all agricultural value, and 2.8% of the acres of agricultural land.

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.

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.

CROPPING PATTERNS & SPECIALIZATION

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.

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 has expanded greatly: from a nearly 100 year low of 60.2 million acres in 1983, to 80 million acres in 2010.

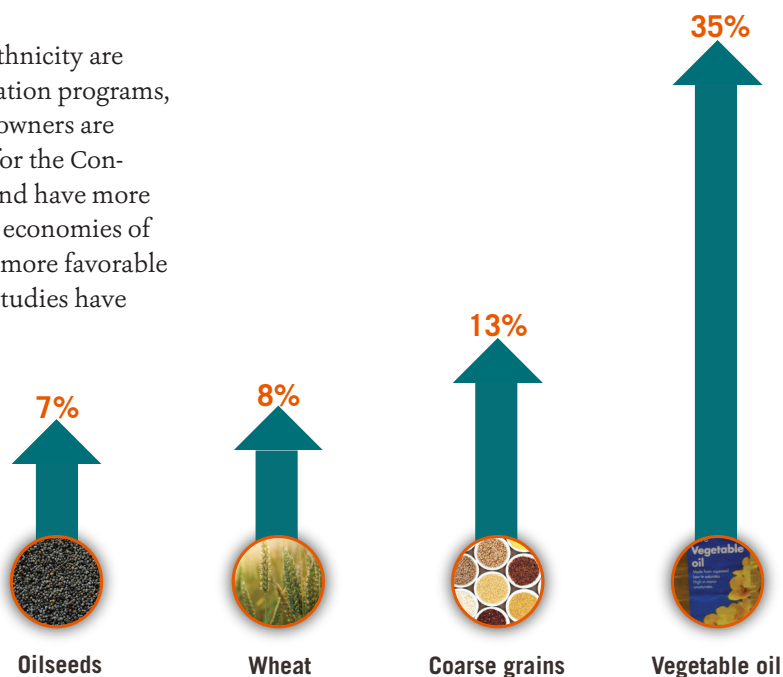




KEY FINDINGS: CONSERVATION & CLIMATE

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. 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.



Source: 2008 OECD report

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.

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

BIOFUEL PRODUCTION

Between 20 and 40% of the global food price increases in 2008 were caused by biofuels expansion. 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.



STRUCTURAL BARRIERS

There are three major hurdles to addressing the racial/ethnic, gender, and economic inequities perpetuated by the policies within the Farm Bill.

1. **The Farm Bill itself is increasingly imbricated in, and ultimately functions as a pillar of, neoliberalism. 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.

2. **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 head- quarters outside their respective retail sites, while still paying workers low wages and granting few benefits at every level of the food system.

3. **The inclusion of producers of color into current payment schemes, and fighting poverty and racial/ethnic inequality, are also antithetical to one another.**

This is the case despite recent gains in terms of USDA Civil Rights settlements and slowly increasing participation in such programs by such producers. 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.



SHORT TERM POLICY INTERVENTIONS

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.

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. 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 accessing 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.

OUTREACH AND ASSISTANCE

Outreach and assistance 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.

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 redirect 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.

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. 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 AND 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 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.

Given both the racial/ethnic, gender, and economic inequities found, and the structural barriers to addressing such inequities found, this report also posits a few 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 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 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. 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 therefore need to encompass grass-roots 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.

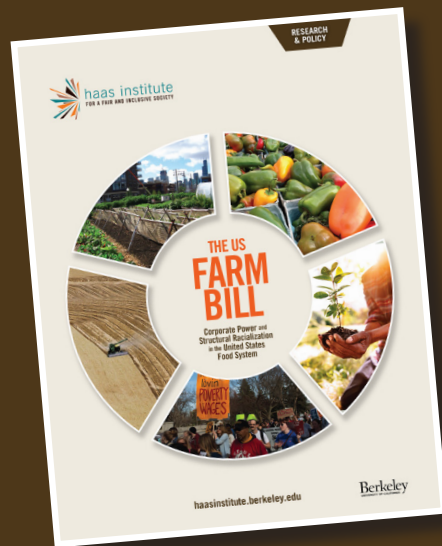
The food sovereignty movement itself already embodies much of this coalitionary work and is carried forth by a wide ranging group of organizations including: La Via Campesina, The Network of Farmers and Agricultural Producers Organizations of West Africa (ROPPA), Eastern Africa Farmers Federation (EAFB), Eastern and Southern Africa Farmers' Forum, We Are the Solution, and other agrarian-based farmers' movements; the International Planning Committee on Food Sovereignty; ATTAC; 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. 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.

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 overproduction, and the revival of agroecologically-managed agriculture, collectively geared toward resource redistribution), there exists a gap that our longer research report (see diversity.berkeley.edu/farmbillreport) has aimed to address and that we lift up in this research brief as well. 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 addresses the underlying racial logic and history of not only the Farm Bill, but of all domains of life—such as social, political, economic, and environmental—in an overarching effort to challenge neoliberalism and 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 we have outlined.



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.ⁿ





This research brief is distilled from
*The US Farm Bill: Corporate Power
and Structural Racialization in the
United States Food System*,
a report published by
the Haas Institute
for a Fair and Inclusive Society
at UC Berkeley.

Find both reports online at
diversity.berkeley.edu/farmbillreport

Join the conversation online
[#foodsystemjustice](https://twitter.com/foodsystemjustice)

