Trade deals should not undermine the food sovereignty of farmers and eaters here and abroad. Instead, trade with foreign nations should strengthen our economy and create jobs, while preserving the environmental, labor, health and safety standards that Americans depend upon.

Reining in Corporate Control

A handful of corporations control our food from farm to fork. Their unbridled power grants them increasing political influence over the rules that govern our food system and allows them to manipulate the marketplace, pushing down the prices paid to family farmers and driving them out of business. Below are some of the policies Farm Aid advocates for to rein in corporate power in our food system:

- **Stop mega mergers** occurring throughout the food and agricultural sector, particularly in the seed sector where the “Big Six” seed and agrichemical firms are consolidating into the Big Three.
- **Enact comprehensive pricing reform in the dairy industry** and expose corporations’ price manipulation on the Chicago Mercantile Exchange. Institute supply management programs to stop the overproduction of milk.
- **Reissue and finalize the USDA Farmer Fair Practice Rules** to increase market transparency, establish fair contracts and protect the First Amendment rights of livestock and poultry growers.
- **Reform federal checkoff programs** that tax cattle ranchers, hog producers, dairy farmers and other farmers on their goods in order to fund marketing campaigns that tend to benefit corporate agribusiness.
- **Reinstate Country of Origin Labeling (COOL)** and other programs that increase transparency in the food system and allow eaters to support American farmers and ranchers.
- **Preserve local control laws** and defend the rights of local communities to stop the growth or expansion of factory farms that threaten their air, water, soil and quality of life.
- **Advance food sovereignty** and limit the role corporations play in writing our trade deals.

**What Farm Aid is Doing**

Farm Aid started in the midst of the 1980s Farm Crisis, a time when the farm economy contracted severely and pushed hundreds of thousands of family farmers off the land. The core strategies of Farm Aid’s work that emerged during that time — raising awareness, providing support for farmers in crisis and advocating for policies to create a more fair and just agricultural system — have remained to this day.

Farm Aid works with local, regional and national organizations to promote fair farm policies and coordinate campaigns designed to defend and bolster family farm-centered agriculture. We’ve worked side by side with farmers to protest factory farms and inform farmers and eaters about issues like genetically modified food and growth hormones. By strengthening the voices of family farmers, Farm Aid stands up for the people who we all depend on. Our Action Center allows concerned citizens to become advocates for farm policy.

In 2019, Farm Aid is collecting the data and stories we hear from farmers over our hotline and through our partners to highlight the urgent need to bolster our nation’s farm economy: we’re advocating for critical emergency measures to support farmers immediately; and we’re working to secure long-term policies that provide farmers with fair prices and fair, competitive markets. We also are strengthening our Farm Aid hotline, resource network and Farm Advocate Link, a national network of Farm Advocates who work with farmers to increase their ability to stay on the land and succeed.

Join us and stand with farmers — let the USDA know you want strong safeguards to give farmers a fighting chance against corporate power. Sign our petition today.

**RESOURCES FOR FARMERS**

If you’re a farmer who needs to talk to someone (or someone who is worried about a farmer), we are here to listen. You can call our farmer hotline at 1-800-FARM-AID (1-800-327-6243). Farm Aid staff answers the Farm Aid hotline Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. ET.

Check out Farm Aid’s Resource Guide for some of our favorite resources on topics we get contacted about the most, such as farm financing and legal issues in farming.

If you are considering suicide, please call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline to talk to someone 24/7 at 1-800-273-TALK.

**SIGN OUR PETITION TODAY**

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and repay their short-term debt obligations. The current level of working capital available in the farm sector is $83 billion, by far the lowest level seen since the USDA started directly reporting the ratio in 2009.9

• Alongside weak farm income, bankers indicate that farmers are struggling to repay their debts. Farm loan repayment rates are low, and the number of loan renewals and extensions is higher.10

Bankruptcies Tick Up in Key Sectors

Facing multiple years of losses that have whittled away equity, many farmers are making hard choices. Some are selling off land, livestock or equipment in an effort to hold on. Others are finding off-farm employment to supplement farm income. Some farmers are choosing to retire early. And still others are declaring bankruptcy in an effort to keep their farm. These tough choices are raising concerns that we are on the cusp of a slow but huge wave of farm losses not seen since the 1980s.

Chapter 12 bankruptcy, a class of bankruptcy created during the 1980s Farm Crisis specifically for family farmers and fishermen, offers one indicator of extreme stress in the farm sector. In 2018, Chapter 12 filings totaled 548, down by 1% from 2017, but up nearly 32% since 2014 (361 filings).11

In dairy income among dairy farmers, as well as wheat and corn growers have been particularly severe, and states that rely heavily on these farms for the majority of their agricultural output are also hard-hit. Trends in agricultural prices have a disproportional effect on farming-dependent counties, which accounted for nearly 20% of all rural counties and nearly 10% of the nation’s farmers in 2017.12

As farmers are forced into bankruptcy or foreclosure, a ripple effect on farm service providers, input manufacturers and local purchasers and processors manufacturing and agricultural service providers. In 2019, the combination of depressed farm prices and punishing weather conditions that have left many farmers unable to plant is causing a documented strain on Midwestern farm economies, particularly those dependent on corn and soybean production.13

As the farm economy continues to falter, the stress family farmers face is having demonstrable impacts on the health of rural Americans. In 2018, Farm Aid saw a 90% spike in contacts (via phone and email) to our farmer hotline, the majority of them from farmers in crisis who exhibited acute signs of stress.

Farm Aid has worked to bring awareness to the issue of farm stress and advocated for increased federal resources to address the challenge of caring for the mental health of rural residents, farmers and those working in agriculture. Farm Aid is working to show farmers they are not alone, and there is help. In fact, managing farm stress is just as important as managing the farm.

In fact, last fall the National Climate Assessment, a federal survey of climate change and its effects on the American landscape, detailed the extreme changes that climate change has already brought to the Midwest. Springs have already grown wetter and more humid, creating longer seasons for pests and pathogens. By the middle of the century, the report notes, rains will wash metals and sulfur out of soils.

The report warns that extreme weather will increase in frequency and intensity and “Based on projected climate change impacts in some areas of the United States, agricultural systems may have to undergo more transformative changes to remain productive and profitable in the long term.”15 But without access to credit and equity for their farms, many farmers will struggle to make those investments in new technologies and practices. As farmers have been blindsided to just hold on to the farm, there is no money to make these changes — and thus, the downward cycle will continue.

In addition to economic concerns

Extreme weather events over the last three years have continued to compound the precarious situation for farmers across the nation. This year alone, historic flooding in the Midwest this spring left millions of acres of farmland unworkable and destroyed crops that farmers were storing for when the markets recovered.

To nurture their crops and sustain their livestock, family farmers depend on soil, water and air — factors that are greatly impacted by the changing climate. Situated on the frontlines, family farmers are all too familiar with extreme weather events caused by climate change. Across the country the challenges vary: in the West, severe drought and raging wildfires have the potential to destroy some of our most productive farmland and the effects of climate change will have a grave impact on productivity. In other areas of the country, record flooding has pushed farm businesses to the brink and even forced some farmers to leave the farm altogether. Taken together, these climate-related challenges hold the potential to create a seismic shift in U.S. agriculture.

In order to be competitive in the face of reality. While many blame the current economic downturn for the severe challenges that farmers face, the underlying issues have been bled dry to just hold on to the farm. (something the last Administration took strides to rectify), where black, Latino, Native American and other socially disadvantaged farmers have advocated for parity pricing for farmers, which helps them recover their cost of production plus a little more — so they don’t just break even, but actually make a profit. The idea of parity pricing is comparable to the concept of living wages.

Farmers Need Equitable Access to Credit and Fair Trade

Agriculture doesn’t fit neatly into most economic curves. As a sector, farming is relatively inelastic; with farmers and eaters both unable to alter their consumption or production dramatically in any given year. People must eat and what they eat only shifts marginally in a given period of time, no matter how much farmers produce. Farmers, meanwhile, are also incentivized to produce as much as possible to squeeze a profit from their land and build a cushion for the tough times that will inevitably come. The greater the supply of a particular crop on the market, the lower the prices go.

Since consumers are buying more or less the same amount of food from week to week, a farmer can actually make less money when production is high.

There are many ways we can secure fair farm prices. Historically this has been done through a mix of supply management programs like grain reserves, and by setting floor prices — comparable to the minimum wage for other jobs. These programs ensure that the people who grow our food can at least recover their cost of production for the goods they produce. Many have advocated for parity pricing for farmers, which helps them recover their cost of production plus a little more — so they don’t just break even, but actually make a profit. The idea of parity pricing is comparable to the concept of living wages.

Farm Aid also supports food sovereignty, the right of communities and nations to determine their own food and agriculture policies and the broader democratization and food systems. Opening up trade through free trade agreements, especially when large corporations write the rules, often leads to weakening hard-fought environmental protections, worker protections, farm safety standards and financial regulations. Far too often, our rural communities are hit hard as trade deals undermine supply control and price support policies that intend to keep prices stable for family farmers.