

August 11, 2023

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chairwoman
U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition and Forestry
United States Senate –
Michigan Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Boozman
Ranking Member U.S. Senate Committee on
Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry
United States Senate – Arkansas
Russell Senate Office Building Washington,
DC 20510

The Honorable GT Thompson Chairman
House Committee on Agriculture U.S.
House of Representatives – Pennsylvania
Cannon House Office Building Washington,
DC 20510

The Honorable David Scott
Ranking Member U.S. House Committee on
Agriculture United States House of
Representatives – Georgia Cannon House
Office Building Washington, DC 205

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow, Ranking Member Boozman, Chairman Thompson, and Ranking Member Scott:

Enclosed, please find recommendations on farm policy from U.S. health and medical professionals for your consideration. We represent physicians, nurses, health care and public health experts, and community health professionals across the nation.

Every day, we see the impacts of the current food and farm system on our patients and our communities. While the U.S. provides food sources for the world, many at home are suffering from chronic diet-related illnesses, including diabetes, obesity, and heart disease, all of which are associated with poor nutrition and food insecurity. Children miss school due to asthma related to air pollution from animal agriculture and are exposed to contaminated water from agricultural runoff. Farmworkers and people in rural communities experience a wide range of health impacts associated with economic insecurity, heat stress, and pesticide exposure. Agriculture and our food systems contribute to 11% of emissions causing climate change, and every day we see the profound health-harms associated with climate-related disasters, including drought and flooding.

The 2023 farm policy discussions provide an unparalleled opportunity to improve the health of communities in the U.S. today, and to provide opportunities for health and well-being for ourselves and our children and grandchildren in the future. The undersigned health groups have identified four key areas for investments and policy change, as outlined below.

Support healthy foods, healthy people, and healthy communities: Our current food and agriculture system subsidizes unhealthy, calorie-dense processed foods and red meat, while underinvesting in healthy fruits, vegetables, legumes and nuts. Poor diet and nutrition are now the leading cause of illness and death in the U.S., and are associated with diabetes, obesity, heart disease and some cancers. The COVID-19 pandemic and inflation have led to rising food prices and increased food insecurity — a risk factor for poor nutrition that drives higher chronic illness rates in low-income communities, communities of color, and rural areas. Climate change impacts threaten crop yields and nutritional quality. Farm and food workers are at high risk of heat illness and live in poor living and working conditions that drove up COVID rates. We urge you to ensure robust funding for food and nutrition programs, to increase access to and incentivize the purchase of healthy foods, and to take steps to protect the health and well-being of farm and food workers.

- Improve access to SNAP for those in need
 - Improve and expand SNAP access for seniors, people with disabilities, working families, college students, and individuals with felony convictions
 - Protect the Thrifty Food Plan and update SNAP to incorporate the Low-Cost Food Plan especially in areas with high-cost pressures
- Increase investments to improve access to healthy and nutritious foods:
 - Expand successful nutrition programs such as GusNIP (Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentives Program), GusNIP Produce Prescription Program, Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP), Fresh Fruit and Vegetables Program, Double-Up Food Bucks Program, and Harvesting Health pilot
- Make local and regional food systems a priority by enhancing the Local Agriculture Market Program (LAMP) to ensure funds can make SNAP more accessible at farmers markets and supporting smaller producers through infrastructure investments and value-chain coordination
 - Expand existing programs such as the Local Agricultural Market Program, Local Food Purchasing Program, and Farmers Market Promotion Program that support smaller producers
 - Support local and regional food production systems like Local Foods for Schools Cooperative Agreement Program (LFS) and Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement Program (LFPA)
- Increase support for grocery and corner stores and farmers markets to combat food deserts and improve access to healthy, nutritious foods with expanded support for programs such as the Healthy Food Financing Initiative, Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentives program, and Farmers Market Support Grants
- Improve access to healthy foods through food banks and other emergency feeding programs.
 - Increase TEFAP Farm to Food Bank (FTFB) funding to at least \$25 million annually
 - Increase The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) funding by indexing TEFAP to the Low-Cost Food Plan

- Fully fund Food Distribution Programs on Indian Reservations program
- Strengthen food waste reduction strategies. Reduce food waste, food insecurity, and methane gas emissions from local organic waste streams:
 - Reform the date-labeling system with standardized, clear and precise labels
 - Increase federal support for food recovery infrastructure, local composting, food waste prevention in schools, and food waste TA
 - Reduce hunger and food insecurity by incentivizing donations of edible excess food and strengthen and clarify the Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act, which protects food donors from liability

Support healthy farms and a healthy planet: Conservation programs are important because they help protect clean drinking water and protect against flooding, build soil health, create biodiversity, sequester carbon, and protect natural resources that support the long-term productivity and resilience of American agriculture. Current conservation programs are underfunded and oversubscribed.

Sustainable and organic agriculture and pest management reduce exposure to toxic chemicals from air, water, and soil pollution. Large, concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) pollute the air in neighboring communities, contaminate drinking water aquifers, emit large amounts of methane gas, and contribute to antibiotic resistance, and indirectly encourage the over-consumption of red and processed meats associated with heart disease and some cancers. Current crop insurance and commodity subsidies favor growers of commodity crops used primarily for animal feed, highly processed foods, and ethanol production, while smaller and more diversified fruit and vegetable growers struggle.

- Expand and structure resources to provide adequate and sustained funding and technical assistance to support and incentivize adoption of healthy and sustainable agricultural and food production practices, for example through expanded support for soil health, climate resilience, fruit and vegetable production, and organic agriculture, and reduced support for production practices associated with large methane and toxic pollutant emissions

Support a fair and just farm system: Many rural communities are burdened with economic hardship, insufficient infrastructure, poor access to broadband (and telehealth), and related adverse health outcomes. A long and well documented history of structural and institutional racism has led to exclusion of black indigenous and people of color from farm/land ownership and from opportunities to shape food systems.

- Upcoming farm policy offers opportunities to invest in rural communities (e.g., funding for rural water, wastewater, and broadband infrastructure), redress long-standing inequities in our farm system, and invest in socially disadvantaged farmers through greater access to credit and technical assistance

Support expanded research: Expanded funding for data and research is vitally important to provide the information we need to use taxpayer dollars equitably and effectively. Research provides valuable tools to make our food and farm system healthy, sustainable, and resilient in the face of climate change, and in enhancing nutritional quality and food security.

- Increase and prioritize research to prepare for the impacts of a changing climate and reduce agricultural methane and other climate emissions
- Expand organic and specialty crop research
- Invest in state-based food and nutrition security demonstration projects to evaluate strategies that can promote nutrition
- Formalize a valid measure of nutrition security

We respectfully request and appreciate your consideration of these health-based recommendations. For questions or additional information, please contact Dr. Lisa Patel, Executive Director of the Medical Society Consortium on Climate and Health, lpatel9@stanford.edu.

Signed,

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| ● <i>Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environment</i> | ● <i>Health Professionals for a Healthy Climate</i> |
| ● <i>American College of Lifestyle Medicine</i> | ● <i>Healthy Climate Wisconsin</i> |
| ● <i>American College of Physicians</i> | ● <i>Idaho Clinicians for Climate and Health</i> |
| ● <i>American Society of Cataract and Refractive Surgery</i> | ● <i>Interfaith Public Health Network</i> |
| ● <i>Association for Humanistic Psychology</i> | ● <i>Maine Medical Association, Public Health Committee</i> |
| ● <i>Association of Academic Psychiatrists</i> | ● <i>Massachusetts General Brigham</i> |
| ● <i>Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America</i> | ● <i>Medical Society Consortium on Climate and Health</i> |
| ● <i>Carolina Advocates for Climate, Health, and Equity</i> | ● <i>Medical Society of Delaware</i> |
| ● <i>Children's Environmental Health Network</i> | ● <i>Medical Society of Northern Virginia</i> |
| ● <i>Climate Health Now</i> | ● <i>Medical Students for a Sustainable Future</i> |
| ● <i>Endocrine Society</i> | ● <i>Michigan Clinicians for Climate Action</i> |
| ● <i>Florida Clinicians for Climate Action</i> | ● <i>Mississippi Health Professionals for Climate and Health Equity</i> |
| ● <i>Global Climate and Health Alliance</i> | ● <i>Montana Health Professionals for a Healthy Climate</i> |
| ● <i>Global Consortium on Climate and Health Education</i> | ● <i>National Environmental Health Association</i> |
| ● <i>Health Care Without Harm</i> | |

- *National Medical Association*
- *NH Healthcare Workers for Climate Action*
- *Physicians for Social Responsibility: Maine Chapter*
- *Radiologists for a Sustainable Future*
- *Society for Reproductive Endocrinology and Infertility*
- *Society of Behavioral Medicine*
- *Society of General Internal Medicine*
- *Union of Concerned Scientists*
- *Virginia Clinicians for Climate Action*
- *Western Montana Clinic*
- *Yale Center on Climate Change and Health*



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Healthy Environments



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Carolina Advocates
for Climate, Health, and Equity

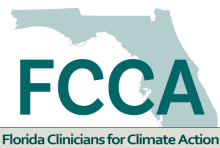


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— formerly known as —
Wisconsin Health Professionals for Climate Action

ENDOCRINE
SOCIETY

ICCH

Idaho Clinicians for Climate and Health



Florida Clinicians for Climate Action



Mass General Brigham



Maine Medical Association



Medical Society of Delaware



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FOR A HEALTHY CLIMATE



National Environmental
Health Association



National
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Association



Medical Students for
a Sustainable Future



MiCCA

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Creating Value for Patients



Western Montana Clinic



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