



***A Local Voice at
the National Table***

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NEFU Farm Bill Platform

The New England Farmers Union works to improve the economic well being of family farmers, fisherman, foresters, nursery growers and consumers in all six New England States. Our 1,400 and growing members include cranberry growers and commercial, small boat fishermen in Cape Cod, dairy farmers in Vermont, potato farmers in Maine, greenhouse growers in Connecticut, consumers, farm organizations and food and farm businesses throughout the region.

The federal farm bill is increasingly important to our region. Agricultural research, investments in a strong local and regional food system, a safety net for our small and mid-sized dairy farmers, farmland conservation, and support for organic agriculture, are all authorized, funded and fundamentally shaped by this all encompassing piece of federal legislation.

Reauthorized every 5 to 7 years, the current farm bill expires in September 2012 and NEFU will be fully engaged in the debate. The policy positions around the 2012 Farm Bill that follow come from NEFU members.

1. Local and Regional Food Systems

New England's diversified agriculture and fisheries provide many opportunities for regional economic development. NEFU supports efforts to grow, process and distribute agricultural and fish products for local and regional consumption, which may include community-supported agriculture, community supported fisheries, local feed supplies and farmers markets, co-operative processing, as well as medium-scale value-chains that support producer-consumer relationships.

Investments in the local and regional food system can open new markets to small and mid-sized farmers, create new jobs and

improve access to fresh fruits, fish and vegetables for consumers. This farm bill should:

- Require the Food and Nutrition Service to support Electronic Benefit Transfer access for farmers markets, CSAs, CSFs, and farm stands to the same extent it does grocery and retail stores;
- Allow schools to use 15% of their commodity dollars for purchases of local and regional foods in lieu of commodities;
- Encourage the adoption of double value benefits for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program at farmers markets;
- Provide Farm Services Agency credit to farmers and ranchers producing for local and regional food markets, to mid-tier value chains, and to local and regional food producers engaged in value-added enterprises;
- Direct Farm Credit Services to implement a program of credit for farmers and ranchers producing for local and regional markets and to invest 10 percent of Farm Credit System profits in local and regional food producers;
- Mandatory funding for the Value Added Producer Grant Program at a level of \$30 million a year;
- Mandatory funding for the Farmers Market Promotion Program at a level of \$50 million; include new assistance for producers scaling up;
- Increase mandatory funding for the Specialty Crop Block Grant program to \$90 million and allocate \$30 million to local and regional farm and food system specialty crop development within each State for producers and qualified service providers; include maple syrup, cereal grains produced for human consumption and seafood in the definition of a specialty crop;
- Provide Community Facilities Grants and loans for community and non-profit local and regional food system facilities including kitchens, farm stores, food hubs, distribution center services;
- Support expansion of local meat processing facilities and provide scale appropriate technical assistance to small and very small meat processing plants;
- Increase investment in research, marketing and risk management targeted toward specialty crop production with a focus on sustainable practices and local and regional distribution systems;
- Allow flexibility under commodity crop programs to allow occasional fruit and vegetable production on no more than 50 acres for local and regional consumption on program acres without penalty;
- Allow rural development funds to be used in urban and periurban locations as long as the primary beneficiaries are rural.

We strongly support the Local Farms, Food, and Jobs Act (Pingree, Brown) and urge its inclusion in the 2012 Farm Bill.

2. Dairy

The current system of dairy pricing mechanisms and the safety net must be improved to maintain the family farm dairies so vital to our New England economy, food security and landscape. H.R. 3062, the Dairy Security Act of 2011 (DSA), includes several provisions that will help in that effort, including a step toward supply management in the Dairy Market Stabilization Program. We support this provision and will work to strengthen it. The DSA, however, must also ensure that dairy policy reforms will not result in further consolidation and vertical integration of the dairy industry.

We oppose the use of forward contracting in the dairy industry. The DSA, in its most recent form, will likely encourage the use of forward contracts. Similar to what has occurred in the poultry and swine sectors, increased use of forward contracting by dairy processors will impose a heavy cost upon farmers and rural communities. Without a program that will help smaller dairy producers, the use of forward contracting should be prohibited in order to prevent the further consolidation and vertical integration of the dairy industry.

An alternative safety net option to the DSA's revenue insurance program needs to be part of the legislation for those who choose not to participate. We urge the agriculture committees to include a program in the DSA that will provide an economical base of support for family dairy farmers.

3. Conservation

New England farmers work hard and take great pride in providing a safe and healthy product while contributing to the health of our region through their care of the land. We support working lands conservation programs that help farmers to improve soil and water quality, reduce energy consumption and the use of pesticides. This farm bill should:

- Maintain the Conservation Stewardship Program as a green payments program that recognizes the ongoing and multifunctional environmental benefits of sustainable and organic agriculture and is appropriate to our region and scale of farming;
- Maintain a regional equity provision that establishes a minimum allocation to each state for conservation program spending;
- Maintain mandatory funding for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and conservation technical assistance with increased emphasis on management intensive grazing and organic transition; maintain funding for the organic initiative;
- Maintain mandatory funding for the Farm and Ranchland Protection Program and carve out a priority for projects that create new farming opportunities, and that utilize an OPAV, or that include a farm succession plan; if consolidation of

conservation programs is necessary, FRPP should be consolidated with other working lands programs;

- Reauthorize the Sustainable Agriculture and Education Program (SARE);
- Maintain the Biomass Crop Assistance Program as a means of transitioning biofuel production towards more cellulosic feed stocks including forestry products;
- Maintain the Renewable Energy for America Program.

4. Organic Agriculture

NEFU recognizes the importance of organic farming. It is not merely based on a list of acceptable or prohibited materials or practices. Organic farming is a management-intensive approach designed to emulate natural systems as much as possible in producing crops and livestock, and should be maintained as a distinct market. This farm bill should:

- Provide mandatory funding for Organic Certification Cost Share at a level of \$30 million per year and raise the payment cap from \$750 to \$1,000;
- Eliminate premium and price discrimination for organic producers in crop insurance programs;
- Increase funding for the Organic Research and Extension Initiative to \$30 million annually;
- Provide \$5 million in mandatory funding for the Organic Data Initiative;
- Authorize cooperative agreements between the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and qualified non-governmental organizations to provide training in organic practices to NRCS staff;
- Fund a major new research initiative to develop public seeds and breeds that are locally adapted to address regional needs and the climates of each region;
- Any review of the federal milk marketing order process should consider whether organic dairy should have its own milk marketing order.

5. Beginning Farmers

The future of agriculture in New England will be shaped by the opportunities we provide today to new farmers. This farm bill should:

- Increase investment in research, marketing and risk management targeted toward specialty crop production with a focus on sustainable practices and local and regional distribution systems;
- Reauthorize the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program and increase mandatory funding levels; include support to educate non-farming and absentee landowners;
- Increase authorization levels for direct and guaranteed Farm Services Agency lending programs; re-emphasize technical assistance to beginning farmers;
- Extend eligibility for farm viability services to beginning farmers;

- Encourage greater involvement and investment and more secure tenure agreements through tax incentives or disincentives and/or other measures;
- Reward or prioritize farm operators with succession plans who are applying to programs such as public and private purchase of development rights or farm viability programs;
- Direct NASS to conduct a new Agricultural Economics and Land Ownership Survey (AELOS) or enhance the Agricultural Resource Management Survey (ARMS) to gather contemporary data on farmland ownership and tenure;
- Authorize FSA to make intermediate, flexible micro loans to new producers;
- Provide mandatory funding for the Beginning Farmer Individual Development Account Pilot Program.

We strongly support the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Opportunity Act.