

POLICY FOCUS

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Saving the American Family Farm

By Mandy Gunasekara, Director of Center for Energy and Conservation

HIGHLIGHT

Activist-led farming policies are a recipe for famine and unrest. International ultimatums have forced farmers to slaughter their herds or shut down. Revolts in the Netherlands and Sri Lanka have captured headlines. Branded as “climate-smart ag,” Team Biden is promoting these bad ideas in the United States. From pushing vegetarian diets to mainstreaming bugs for dinner, we examine the implications and present a better approach.

INTRODUCTION

Under the banner of climate change, nations around the globe are targeting their agriculture sectors. Activist-led farming policies are a recipe for famine and unrest, as we've seen in the [Netherlands](#), [Ireland](#), and [Sri Lanka](#). Extreme policies are forcing farmers to kill off their herds, shut down farms, and step away from livelihoods that have brought generations of pride and prosperity to entire communities while also feeding the globe. All this is occurring as international organizations are [sounding the alarm](#) on food shortages and growing food insecurity.

Climate policies, not climate change, are making matters worse. Instead of working with farmers, international leaders prefer to simply **shut them down**. This ignores the reality that farmers are the original environmentalists as their livelihoods depend on balancing the productive use of land and livestock while also protecting these resources.

Unfortunately, these bad ideas have not stopped at the U.S. borders. Branded as “climate-smart ag,” many of them are being **pushed** by Team Biden. In the next few months, congressional leaders will draft, debate, and pass a new Farm Bill, which will define U.S. agricultural policy for the next five years. **Will it incorporate sound food policy informed by our nation’s farmers that work on the ground every day? Or will it reflect the demands of activists that produce harmful policies across the globe?**

From farming practices to forced consolidation to consuming bugs, this policy focus assesses the implications of “climate-smart ag” and other “green” ideas on farmers, the American diet, and the environment.

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SETTING THE TABLE: A SNAPSHOT OF AMERICAN FARMING

During the 20th century, American agriculture experienced a significant transformation. The progression of new practices and technology shifted the industry from numerous small farms to fewer large farms. According to the **U.S. Department of Agriculture** (USDA), the number of U.S. farms peaked at 6.8 million in 1935 with an average size of **154 acres** per

farm. In contrast, there were 2 million farms in 2022 with an average of **446 acres** per farm. American farms continue to be extremely efficient, and each farm, on average, feeds **166 people** per year. Even with the consolidation of farms, 98 percent are family owned, and it’s normal practice for **three generations** to be working side by side. Overall, the food and agriculture industry supports nearly **46.2 million** U.S. jobs, which is about 14 percent of U.S. employment, and contributes over **\$1 trillion** to U.S. gross domestic product.

Farming today requires the wearing of many, increasingly complex hats. One must not only understand and apply time-tested farming practices, but also how to integrate modern technologies, keep up with the ever-evolving spate of regulations, and maintain a keen eye towards agronomics as well as the broader economy. Despite a long-term success rate at fulfilling these roles while feeding the world and protecting the environment, the industry has come under increased scrutiny with the proliferation of extreme environmentalism. Specifically, the **quest for net zero**, lauded by the Biden administration, has **garnered**

disdain for our nation’s farmers and put them under the scope of climate activists.

INSTEAD OF TRUST THE “SCIENCE,” LET’S TRUST THE FARMERS

Farmers are America’s original environmentalists. Their livelihoods depend on balancing the production *and the protection* of lands or livestock. There has been some trial and error in perfecting this balance,

but travel to any farm today and there will be clear signs of responsible stewardship in action. There is a built-in incentive to make productive use of everything on a farm, from fertilizers and fuel to animal waste and crop residue. Even so, **extreme environmentalists** have long agitated to transform the agriculture sector.

Farming accounts for **10 percent** of total greenhouse gas emissions in the U.S. Globally, agriculture accounts for 33 percent of emissions. More recent criticisms of the industry ignore the significant progress already made. Since 1990, farmers have cut Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions while increasing overall production. One **analysis** found that farmers today are producing 80 percent more pork, 48 percent more milk, and 18 percent more beef. Over the same 30-year history, farmers have cut GHG emissions per unit of food by 24 percent. Most farmers will admit there is room for improvement, but a wholesale transition for this industry is unjustified.

Nonetheless, the public will continue to hear calls for transitioning to “healthier, more sustainable food systems,” which is derived from an effort at the United Nations, referred to as the **Food System Transformation**. While the **plan** itself is short of specifics, it makes grandiose claims of “nature-positive production” and “advancing equitable livelihoods” to create greener and fairer food systems. The effort also includes the establishment of an **International Panel for Food System Science** (IPFSS)—akin to a global food police—which would “provide support in justifying difficult or controversial decisions,” like shutting down livelihoods, for example. A future IPFSS would also be charged with reducing “misinformation” online to force acceptance by limiting dissent.



DID YOU KNOW

The Old Farmers Almanac has proved **much more reliable** in predicting seasonal weather patterns than modern climate models at **NOAA** and the **IPCC**. Yet, the scientists behind the supercomputing assessments, and the affiliated activists, want to tell farmers how to do their job better.

CLIMATE POLICIES, NOT CLIMATE CHANGE, ARE CREATING PREVENTABLE CRISES

The push to slash emissions from the agriculture sector on strict timelines stands to cause more harm than good. Many international groups are projecting that current global hunger and malnutrition will only get worse. One group **revealed** that food insecurity levels have more than doubled since 2020. Yet at the same time, they are pushing policies that will force a reduction in supply and make the price of food increase.

For example, the Netherlands is the **second-largest agricultural exporter** in the world, the largest exporter of **meat** among all EU nations, and the third-largest **dairy** exporter in the world. Climate proposals pushed by the European Union would force the closure of **30 percent of their livestock farms** and force farmers to **kill off livestock**, which will significantly limit meat and dairy production. Sri Lanka, after banning the use of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides, saw rice production drop by 20 percent and tea production decline by 18 percent. This policy led to a complete internal government collapse fueled by resulting widespread hunger.

Even more problematic than food-focused net-zero policies are the ones aimed at restricting the use and development of fossil fuels. This not only makes the cost of farming go up, but it also inhibits the production of fertilizers and pesticides. One international farming expert **made clear** that half of the world's calorie needs are met by the consumption of "rice, wheat, and maize, that require a lot of fertilizer to grow" and that "without the use of fertilizers, we would not be able to produce enough food to feed the current population."

WHAT IS CLIMATE-SMART AG?

Despite increasing evidence that these international efforts to transform the agriculture industry are causing more harm than good, these same ideas are being pushed by top Biden administration officials have seen recent fertilizer shortages as an **opportunity** to "hasten transitions that would have been in the interest of farmers to make eventually anyway" such as "natural solutions like manure and compost." This mentality has led to the creation of **Climate-Smart Ag**, a U.S. Department of Agriculture initiative that promises to cut U.S. agriculture emissions while keeping up production.

USDA will be spending **\$3.1 billion** to pay third-party groups that promise to help achieve the goals of climate-smart ag. These actions include adaptation and mitigation measures as well as the creation of new luxury, climate-friendly product labels. The farming-specific policies include efforts to sequester carbon by reducing or eliminating tilling of the soil, planting "cover crops," improving how farmers use fertilizer and manure, and planting trees. As a result, the program promises to cut **60 million metric tons** of carbon dioxide equivalent, which amounts to taking 12 million gas-powered vehicles off the road.

Rosy promises aside, some scientists have **warned** these projections are likely

overstated as the science has not yet proven these climate-smart programs will actually reduce GHGs. Other **reports** have found that cover crops don't absorb as much carbon as previously thought and diminish crop yields. Even the head of USDA's Energy and Environmental policy **admits** the science behind climate-smart ag is a work in progress. Despite this uncertainty of environmental effectiveness, Congress allocated \$20 billion through the Inflation Reduction Act to expand climate-smart programs.

STATE SNAPSHOT



California too has been pushing its own version of climate-smart ag and focused on organic farming mandates to meet state climate rules. One of the state agencies is requiring 20 percent of acreage to be used for organic farming by 2045. More organic food may sound nice, but according to one **agriculture expert**, fertilizers and pesticides derived from biological or natural sources "are less effective than the synthetic products" and require much more to control the same pests and weeds ultimately making the costs of food in general more expensive. He further warns that "competing policy objectives between organic and conventional farming will splinter the agricultural system, confuse consumers, provide a false sense of environmentalism and set targets that are impractical." Costly regulatory and reporting will make it especially difficult for family farms to continue operating.

For all the taxpayer investment, climate-smart programs make a lot of promises that recent research suggests will have little, if

any, meaningful impact on the climate. It is crucial to differentiate between the ambitious promises and the actual impact of these programs on the environment. The uncertain efficacy of various measures, combined with substantial taxpayer investments, warrants a cautious approach towards adopting these initiatives, much less expanding them.

GREEN NEW DEAL DIET

In the quest to transition the ag sector, extreme environmentalists are also keen on transforming what we eat. A key focus is reducing meat consumption, either by convincing people to become vegan or by purposefully limiting supply to consumers so that meat becomes cost-prohibitive. These efforts coincide with the growth of the alternative meats market. While pitched as plant-based and better for the environment, a deeper dive into these meat alternatives reveals they don't quite live up to the promised hype.

Holding the line against these bad ideas will be vital to maintaining food security, rural economic development, and the continued success of our American family farms.

Lab-grown meat, which is made from animal cells that are cultivated in a lab, was the subject of a recent lifecycle greenhouse gas assessment. Researchers [found](#) that the lab-grown meat's environmental impact is likely to be "orders of magnitude" higher than retail beef based on current and near-term production methods. This is in large part due to the energy-intensive process of growing the meat using pharmaceutical-grade ingredients. This also reveals another issue as to whether lab-grown or rather "cultivated" meat should be designated a pharmaceutical or food for purposes of consumption.

There are also efforts to create protein or meat alternatives from bugs, including a push to make [eating crickets](#) mainstream. Ontario, Canada, will soon be home to the world's largest insect farm owned by a company that

[cites](#) the bugs as "an excellent-value protein at a fraction of the environmental impact."

THE 2023 FARM BILL: AN OPPORTUNITY TO PROTECT AMERICAN FARMING FROM BAD IDEAS

The 2023 Farm Bill presents a crucial opportunity to safeguard American farming from detrimental policies stemming from extreme environmentalism. Based on what we've seen abroad, transitioning the agriculture sector to "greener" or more "natural solutions" on arbitrary timelines comes with a host of consequences. A prudent approach for supporting family farms while enhancing environmental stewardship in the Farm Bill should include the following:

- Prioritize evidence-based solutions that strike a balance between environmental protection and economic viability.
- Require precise and accurate assessments of programs like "climate-smart ag" to ensure they actually work before expanding them.
- Prohibit any voluntary climate programs from becoming mandatory.
- Support research and innovation within the agricultural sector.
- Reject any subsidies for energy derived from any programs otherwise subsidized by the federal government.
- Resist policies aimed at diet manipulation—if consumers want to endorse alternative meat or protein sources, let the market dictate those outcomes.

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WHAT YOU CAN DO

Get Informed

Learn more about farming policies. Visit:

- “[2023 Farm Bill](#),” U.S. House Committee on Agriculture.
- “[Food and Farm Facts](#),” American Farm Bureau Federation for Agriculture.
- “[Dutch Farmers Mobilized To Defend Science, Farming, and ‘Food for the Future.’](#)”
- “[Pro-farmer party wins big in Dutch elections after protests of emissions regulation.](#)”

Talk to Your Friends

Help your friends and family understand these important issues. Share this information, tell them about what’s going on and encourage them to join you in getting involved.

Become a Leader in the Community

Start an Independent Women’s Network chapter group so you can get together with friends each month to talk about a political/policy issue (it will be fun!). Write a letter to the editor. Show up at local government meetings and make your opinions known. Go to rallies. Better yet, organize rallies! A few motivated people can change the world.

Remain Engaged Politically

Too many good citizens see election time as the only time they need to pay attention to politics. We need everyone to pay attention and hold elected officials accountable. Let your Representatives know your opinions. After all, they are supposed to work for you!

Connect with IWF! Follow us on:

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Please visit us on our website iwf.org to get more information and consider making a donation to IWF.

ABOUT INDEPENDENT WOMEN’S FORUM

Independent Women’s Forum (IWF) is dedicated to building support for free markets, limited government, and individual responsibility. IWF, a non-partisan, 501(c)(3) research and educational institution, seeks to combat the too-common presumption that women want and benefit from big government, and build awareness of the ways that women are better served by greater economic freedom. By aggressively seeking earned media, providing easy-to-read, timely publications and commentary, and reaching out to the public, we seek to cultivate support for these important principles and encourage women to join us in working to return the country to limited, Constitutional government.