

# Executive Summary: Organizations' Guide to the Farm Bill

## Introduction

The Farm Bill is a collection of national laws and programs that is rewritten approximately every five years. This federal policy includes rules about the environment, food access, rural community development, and agricultural production, and has significant impacts on Vermont's food system and communities. For example, this involves what and how food is produced, how much U.S. produced food is available in local and foreign markets, the price of food, farmer incomes, and the programs focused on rural communities.

Congress is tasked with writing the Farm Bill; however all community members and stakeholders can share their opinions and encourage policy changes. Vermont's congressional representatives consist of two senators, Senator Patrick Leahy and Senator Bernie Sanders, and one member in the House of Representatives, Congressman Peter Welch.

## Community Research

There are many ways to advocate for policy changes. A research study was carried out through the University of Vermont Food Systems department to understand the ways that Vermonters are currently partaking in Farm Bill development and advocacy. Groups across the state were identified based on their interest in dairy, nutrition, rural development, and/or conservation work, which are all impacted in some way by the Farm Bill. Twelve organizations and two congressional staff members shared their views to inform about the current state of advocacy for Farm Bill policy.

As a result of the research, a guide was created to outline strategies that are currently used by Vermonters to participate in the shaping of the policies that are included in the Farm Bill.



Photo by Olivia Peña, view from Mount Elmore

## Advocacy Strategies

The following practices are suggestions from various Farm Bill stakeholder groups in Vermont to voice their feedback to Congress regarding food, agriculture, community, and the environment.

- **Identify** the impacts of Farm Bill policy on the community or constituent base by evaluating the success of programs, in addition to recruiting feedback through meetings or surveys. Learn more about Farm Bill policies on the House and Senate websites:
  - <https://agriculture.house.gov/farmbill/>
  - <https://www.agriculture.senate.gov/2018-farm-bill>
- **Create and maintain** a working connection with the congressional delegation and their staff. This is important in order to ensure open communication about priorities and actions taken by the organization, in addition to receiving policy updates from Congress. Vermont's congressional representatives can be contacted at the following phone numbers:
  - **Senator Patrick Leahy:** (p) 802-863-2525 or 800-642-3193 (toll free)
  - **Senator Bernie Sanders:** (p) 802-862-0697 or 800-339-9834 (toll free)
  - **Congressman Peter Welch:** (p) 802-652-2450 or 888-605-7270 (toll free)
- **Form** partnerships with state, regional, and/or national organizations with similar policy goals. A Vermont based, holistic Farm Bill coalition does not currently exist. There is strength in numbers, and power in coalitions.
- **Consider** which organizations may be partners, and do not advocate or cannot advocate. This provides an opportunity to represent their voice in Farm Bill discussions.

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