

# FARMERS FIRST

AGENDA

#### **FARMERS FIRST VISION:**

The America First Policy Institute's (AFPI) Farmers First Agenda is foundational to our prospective rural policy work. Uniquely crafted by individuals with real-world farming and policy experience, the Farmers First Agenda provides rural Americans with peace of mind that AFPI has their best interests at heart.

AFPI is working to ensure rural America is prosperous and healthy again, which is important because our rural communities are responsible for providing a reliable, abundant, and affordable domestic food supply to our great Nation and the world.

# President Abraham Lincoln once said that "no other human occupation opens so wide a field for the profitable and agreeable combination of labor with cultivated thought as agriculture"

#### - Lincoln, 1859

Agriculture and subsistence farming are synonymous with the United States. As we approach the 250th anniversary of American Independence in 2026, we are reminded that agriculture and subsistence farming are foundational to the United States, as these were primary professions at the time of our Nation's founding. As the population expanded into the great American frontier, farmers and smallholders rose to the occasion by both fulfilling demand in the domestic market and by generating exports, especially after Industrialization. Farmers faced excruciating hardship when the Dust Bowl coincided with the Great Depression, serving as the major impetus for establishing programs that protect highly erodible soil and conserve water. Modernizations in farming techniques, along with new agricultural policies in Washington, D.C., have afforded our farmers more prosperous future decades. In a sentence: The faith, grit, adeptness, and determination of the American farmer have always carried the profession forward.

Today, farmers, ranchers, growers, foresters, fishery workers, agribusinesses, conservationists, and rural communities continue to embody the American dream and remain critical to U.S. food security. Today, rural America covers 74 percent of the country's land surface, and about 46 million people, or 14 percent of the U.S. population, live in rural counties (Farrigan et al., 2024). These numbers show how important it is that the government be additive, and not adversarial, to the American farmer.

Unfortunately, a reversal of pro-rural policies has taken place. Over the past four years, we saw much overregulation and an infusion of social policies into traditional farm programs, particularly at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), among other federal agencies. Further, we failed to see new trade agreements and, therefore, new export opportunities for U.S. agricultural products.

The good news is that AFPI, guided by the Farmers First Agenda, will work to achieve rural prosperity. It will restore and reorient how the federal government thinks about farmers and rural communities. Importantly, it will serve as a central policy hub for farmers, inspired by farmers and their real-world experiences. In other words, our policies will be derived "from the ground up" and will reduce the cost of production, bring down the cost of food for consumers, and ultimately achieve greater prosperity and healthy outcomes for all Americans. AFPI will work with state and local partners on the frontlines when developing related policies.

#### THE CURRENT STATE OF RURAL **AMERICA**

Working from sunup to sundown to provide our Nation and world with food, fuel, and fiber, the American farmer is the embodiment of our country's societal values of hard work and patriotism. However, farming—an industry filled with uncontrollable variables—has never been considered easy. And now, U.S. agriculture is facing a myriad of complex issues that pose a major threat to our domestic food supply and our broader goal of exporting to our global consumers.

The farm economy collapsed over the past four years due to a combination of perils, including but not limited to, a lack of export opportunities, overregulation, and various natural disasters. The 2024 agricultural trade deficit was roughly \$32 billion and is projected to hit a record \$49 billion in 2025 (Kenner et al., 2024). Commodity prices plummeted from 30-year highs (with the exception of 2012) between 2022 and 2024. Specifically, corn prices fell by 37 percent, soybeans by 29 percent, cotton by 22 percent, wheat and sorghum by 36 percent, japonica rice by 46 percent, medium and short rice by 40 percent, long rice by 13 percent, and barley prices by 15 percent (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2025). Since October 2024, more than 40 million layers and pullets have been depopulated due to the avian flu (Rollins, 2025). Further, input costs rose by 30 percent, and families and consumers saw grocery prices skyrocket by double digits (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2025). In sum, these statistics do not reflect policies supporting the American farmer.

#### WHY A FARMERS FIRST AGENDA IS **ESSENTIAL**

Farm country spoke out in opposition to the aforementioned status quo via the November 2024 elections (Felder, 2024). This shows strong support for America First policies of greater and fairer trade deals, less regulation, greater innovation in agriculture, and programs that incentivize the dignity of work and healthier habits.

AFPI has always brought experts to the table, but our heightened rural policy work will be unique in that it will be led by individuals originating from farm country who also have experience working on rural policy in and outside government. In line with AFPI's guiding ethos, our rural policy work will be independent of firms, special interests, and other organizations that may prioritize their own interests first. Rather, AFPI will focus on the core issues on the minds of rural Americans and farmers—policies that deliver rural prosperity, right-size and reorient government, change mindsets on how we view work, and lessen instances of chronic diet-related diseases.

AFPI's Farmers First Agenda is highlighted below, as well as our implementation and strategic approaches.

## Farmers First Agenda

AFPI's Farmers First Agenda's rural policy goals are broken into three categories: Drive Rural Prosperity, Right-Size and Reorient Government, and Generate Responsible Nutrition Policy.

#### **Drive Rural Prosperity**

President Abraham Lincoln originally signed an act of Congress into law establishing USDA in 1862, among other legislation promoting farming. However, rural policy has especially been a major focus of the federal government since 1932, when the Federal Emergency Relief Administration began aiding rural families with low incomes and low living standards resulting from the Great Depression. In 1955, the Eisenhower Administration began a rural development program to assist low-income farmers, and the War on Poverty in the 1960s led to additional debates on rural policy. Rural policy remained a focus across the federal government throughout the 1980s farm financial crisis and is still top of mind in Washington, D.C., today. Because agriculture began as a foundational economic driver of America, it continues to be vital to U.S. food policy. Further, as "returning to the rural way of life" has become increasingly idealized in modern times, agriculture and rural life continue to drive Washington, D.C. rural policy debates.

The following are specific actions policymakers could take to drive rural prosperity:

- ★ Reduce administrative burdens and apply greater accountability within existing federal rural economic development programs, including those at the USDA. USDA administers the greatest number of rural development programs and has the highest average of program funds going directly to rural counties, about 50% (Cowan, 2016). A central, senior-level point of contact at USDA should meticulously review these programs and coordinate reviews of related programming across other departmental mission areas. This individual should work to strengthen coordination, drive measurable results, and reduce duplicative programming across the federal government as well.
- ★ Explore opportunities for greater exports of American agricultural products abroad, utilize policy tools like reciprocal tariffs to eliminate other countries' tariff and non-tariff trade barriers, and hold existing trade partners accountable for prior purchasing commitments.
- ★ *Monitor our competitors' use of market-distorting tactics* and promote a more level playing field globally.

#### USDA programs to be reviewed might include those related to:

- ★ Rural Housing
- ★ Rural Broadband
- \* Rural Childcare
- Rural Electric and Energy
- ★ Rural Water, Waste and Disposal
- ★ Rural Hospitals
- ★ Rural Schools
- ★ Rural Business Programs

- **Encourage greater domestic manufacturing** and purchasing of American agricultural products to support job growth in rural America.
- **Ensure the timely distribution** of the 2024 congressionally mandated \$21 billion in natural disaster aid, designed to offset producer losses due to a variety of perils. All eligible producers should receive the same payment factor, regardless of race or gender.
- \* Address current workforce challenges faced by our Nation's agricultural producers.
- **\*** Strengthen programs that support young and beginning entrants to farming and agribusiness.
- **Explore opportunities for value-added agricultural production**, processing, and on-farm entrepreneurship. This includes agritourism and direct sales.
- **Encourage policies that protect** and defend our farmland from the control of foreign adversaries
- ★ *Combat the presence of fentanyl* and other dangerous drugs and substances in rural America.
- ★ *Modernize dated USDA IT systems* and prioritize customer service across USDA.
- ★ Leverage activities of the White House Task Force on Celebrating America's 250th Birthday to shine light on the historic successes of, and current challenges facing, small towns and rural communities.
- ★ Pass a multi-year farm bill that reduces regulatory burdens and makes significant improvements to the farm safety net.
- **Pass pro-growth, pro-America tax policies** that incentivize greater investment in rural America and enhance the ability for family farms and small rural businesses to be passed from one generation to the next.

#### Right-Size and Reorient Government

In addition to promoting the elimination of burdensome regulations on rural America, AFPI will prioritize a reorientation of federal programming away from the pre-existing social policy agenda that skewed program effectiveness.

The following are specific actions policymakers could take to right-size and reorient government:

- **\*** Continue implementing a bold deregulatory agenda and make government more efficient.
- ★ End the Green New Deal "Climate Smart" and diversity, equity, and inclusion slant to all federal programming.
- **Make food prices more affordable** by lowering input costs, ensuring energy independence by promoting domestic fuels, and improving the management of animal disease outbreaks.
- **Ensure all farms**, including small and medium-sized farms, are especially protected with respect to any future regulations.
- **Remove government policies** that impede competition and free-market solutions.

- **Ensure traditional federal conservation programs** are not so restrictive that they eliminate opportunities for future U.S. food production.
- ★ *Address hurdles associated with public land access*, particularly with respect to cattle grazing, timber harvests, mining, recreation, and other multiple uses.
- **Ensure private property rights are protected**, not encumbered, when landowners apply for permits.
- ★ Eliminate administrative barriers to active forest management, including workforce improvements, in order to focus on mission-critical land management activities. Identify additional pathways to accelerate forest management to reduce the threat of catastrophic wildfires. Further, agencies, including the Forest Service, should coordinate with state and local governments to ensure federal actions are consistent with local plans and policies.
- ★ *Ensure timely approvals* of safe, innovative crop protection and biotechnology tools intended for agricultural production, so as to bolster U.S. food security and economic growth.
- **Encourage innovation in farming.** This includes precision agriculture and practices that improve productivity, sustainability, and the nutritional integrity of American made foods.
- **Ensure food safety regulations** and policies implementing food safety laws are based on the best available science.

#### Generate Responsible Nutrition Policy; Make America Healthy Again

The Farmers First Agenda continues and strengthens AFPI's existing work to reform and improve federal nutrition programs.

The following are specific actions policymakers could take to generate responsible nutrition policy:

- ★ *Ensure USDA nutrition programs* promote the dignity of work and a gradual weaning of federal benefits, rather than long-term dependence on the government, to help American families thrive outside of government assistance. This may include a review of work requirements.
- **Work with states** to reduce instances of fraud throughout USDA nutrition programs.
- ★ *Reform nutrition programs* to incentivize healthier eating habits and work to eliminate diet-related chronic diseases.
- ★ *Support* parents who seek to provide their children with healthy choices.
- ★ *Grow more of our fruits and vegetables on U.S. soil*, and boost employment from production to distribution. This will provide consumers with greater access to domestically grown safe, abundant, and affordable nutritious foods, including produce.

When appropriate, encourage states, our laboratories of democracy, to test run these policy goals.

#### IMPLEMENTATION APPROACH

AFPI will work to implement the Farmers First Agenda through:

Developing a national roadmap to rural prosperity that is bold, transformative, and measured and that looks to the future of agriculture.

Keeping well-known problems at the forefront to incentivize bold action and evidence-based solutions.

Recognizing strong rural policy encompasses a variety of subjects and topics.

Creating actionable metrics that will measure and evaluate the effectiveness of policy changes.

Engaging with stakeholders to ensure our policies are additive to farmers and rural communities.

Restoring individual agency and full control of government programs, especially within nutrition programs.

#### STRATEGIC APPROACH

In order for government programs to return to their primary mission of uplifting agriculture and rural America, research and policy development must focus on putting farmers and rural Americans first.

#### Federal Policy

For federal policy matters, including legislative and/or regulatory, AFPI will engage with policy experts and stakeholders to advance shared goals. We will also use our resources and networks to ensure that improvements to the rural way of life remain top of mind for decision-makers.

#### State Policy

States are change agents and considered strong laboratories of democracy for federal policy changes. Therefore, AFPI will dedicate significant time towards working with state and local lawmakers and stakeholders on the Farmers First Agenda. State level model policies, based on our research and stakeholder engagement, might also be applied in multiple states.

#### **Private Sector**

A key aspect of policy optimization is borrowing from lessons learned from the farming community and private sector. As appropriate, our policy teams will engage with farmers and related agricultural and rural private sector organizations.

#### Public Engagement

AFPI will educate all Americans through events and initiatives that demonstrate how our policies will impact the everyday lives of rural Americans.

#### WAY FORWARD

AFPI is dedicated to uplifting farmers and all rural Americans. Rural communities represent the American dream and embody our country's founding and heritage—our country that we continue to steadfastly love. It is therefore our responsibility at AFPI to defend and grow these communities through research, policy and advocacy.

However, we recognize there is no silver bullet solution to helping rural America; an all-of-the-above approach to rural policy is required. While many organizations might focus on one or two aspects of the many issues facing rural America, AFPI recognizes that various topics must be tackled collectively for true long-term results and enhanced rural prosperity. Because the challenges facing rural America vary significantly—from natural disasters to workforce issues to childcare, AFPI will strive to be dynamic and agile in rural policy. We will engage the best and brightest minds across the country on a variety of matters. Further, our rural policy experts will collaborate with AFPI's other experts, including those in health policy, to learn from and build on their work. Finally, and arguably most importantly, our policy recommendations will be guided by those with real-world experience in rural America, which is calibrated differently from other populations. We will not lean significantly on "inside the beltway experts" but rather from state partners in farm country. Our policies will deliver lasting results through this approach—they will restore long-term rural prosperity, lower input costs, and reduce chronic diet-related disease.

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# Leadership Biographies



Christie Mullin is a lifelong Oklahoman, a passionate business owner, mother, and wife of 27 years to Oklahoma Senator Markwayne Mullin. Christie and Markwayne were high school sweethearts, and after taking over his father's small plumbing operation as teenagers, Christie and Markwayne grew that company, Mullin Plumbing, from four employees to over 300 employees - establishing it as one of the largest service companies in the region while supporting rural economies in the area.

Together, Christie and Markwayne have founded numerous successful businesses, including Mullin Environmental, Mullin Properties, and Mullin Ranch, where they manage a cattle operation focused on quality breeding and responsible ranching practices. For over 25 years, Christie has dedicated herself to her community, serving as a youth ministry sponsor at the Coweta Assembly of God Church, coaching girl's gymnastics, supporting the family farm and leading self-defense classes for young women as a 2nd degree blackbelt in karate.

Yet despite these accomplishments, Christie will be the first to tell you her proudest accomplishment and biggest joy is her family: her husband, Markwayne, and six loving children, Jim, Jayce, Andrew, Larra, Lynette, and Ivy are the center of her world.

#### FORMER AMBASSADOR KIP TOM, AFPI Vice Chair of **Rural Policy**

Kip Tom is a lifelong advocate for American agriculture, a pioneering agribusiness leader, and a champion for policies that strengthen U.S. farmers. With deep roots in production agriculture, his family has farmed in Northern Indiana since 1837. Under his leadership, Tom Farms has grown into one of the nation's largest seed producers and a leading grain operation, while his expansion into agri-business ventures like CereServ and GlobalAg has driven innovation in food production and technology.

Appointed by President Donald J. Trump and confirmed by the U.S. Senate, Kip served as Ambassador to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Agencies in Rome (2019-2021). There, he advanced an "America First" agenda, exposing fraud, promoting self-reliance in developing nations, and expanding global trade opportunities for U.S. farmers.

A recognized leader in agricultural technology and policy, Kip has served on corporate boards, advised global agribusinesses, and played a key role in shaping the future of food security. He continues to advocate for pro-farmer policies and recently chaired the Farmers and Ranchers for Trump 47 Coalition, engaging rural communities nationwide.

#### SARAH FREY, AFPI Senior Advisor for Rural Policy

Sarah Frey is the founder and CEO of Frey Farms, an Agribusiness headquartered in South Florida. Sarah oversees the diverse operations of the Frey family of companies, including land acquisition, regenerative agriculture initiatives, raw ingredient manufacturing, and a fully integrated beverage business. Spanning seven states, Frey Farms is a leading U.S. grower, shipper, and marketer of fresh fruits and vegetables and is best known as America's largest producer of fresh watermelons and pumpkins. As a teenager, Sarah fearlessly expanded her mother's summer produce delivery route from 12 independent grocery stores to over 150,

saving her family's struggling small farm. She defied rural poverty, running her fulltime business while attending high school and college. At age 19, Sarah's negotiation with Wal-Mart, securing fresh produce contracts, was a turning point that led to expansive growth into national retail. Her business negotiation strategies became the subject of a Harvard Business case study. Sarah's four older brothers returned to the farm and joined her in growing the business. Today, the Frey Family proudly feeds America 200 million servings of fresh produce annually. Distributed across the U.S. from over 200 cold-chain distribution centers and 35,000 retail grocery and food service locations. Her entrepreneurial ventures led to the development and production of Tsamma, America's first bottled, nationally distributed watermelon juice. Penguin Random House published Sarah's best-selling book, The Growing Season: How I Built a New Life and Saved an American Farm. Sarah also serves as coexecutive producer of the optioned film rights to The Growing Season.

Frey serves on the board of FMI, The Food Industry Association, which advocates for the retail grocery industry to advance a safer, healthier, and more efficient consumer food supply chain. Frey has held industry appointments by both Democratic and Republican administrations. As one of the most influential women in agriculture, serving in bipartisan Ag Advisory roles for multiple members of the US Congress. Sarah is a highly skilled and persuasive communicator who has provided congressional testimony on key issues affecting the US food supply, including the Ag guest worker program reform. Frey is an appointed Advisor of the NCAC, U.S. Representative and House Committee on Agriculture Chair Glenn "GT" Thompson's National Agriculture Advisory Council. Sarah provides the Committee with fruit and vegetable commodity-specific expertise to inform agriculture policy and strategy on the upcoming Farm Bill. Sarah passionately advocates for better health initiatives, nutrition policies, and economic opportunities for underserved rural communities. Frey Farms proudly partners with food banks and actively works to improve the lives of those in rural poverty. Her companies provide financial support, professional college advisory assistance, and internships to students interested in pursuing higher education in business and agriculture, demonstrating their commitment to the future of these communities. Sarah attributes her American success story to humble beginnings, hard work, and strong family bonds.

#### TATE BENNETT, AFPI Director of Rural Policy

Elizabeth "Tate" Bennett has become a mainstay in U.S. agriculture policy, currently serving as Director of Rural Policy at the America First Policy Institute. She previously served as Special Assistant to the President on Agriculture, Trade, and Food Assistance at the National Economic Council under Director Larry Kudlow during the first Donald J. Trump Administration. She also served at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in senior roles during the first Trump Administration, including as the Agriculture Adviser to the Administrator and the Associate Administrator for the Office of Public

Engagement and Environmental Education. Bennett has extensive legislative experience, having worked in both the U.S. House and Senate for various Members of Congress, where she negotiated provisions of the 2014 Farm Bill.

Tate holds a master's degree from Georgetown University and a bachelor's degree from Centre College. Tate grew up in rural Shelbyville, KY, where her parents grew a successful horse farm. Her late grandparents ran a dairy, hog, and corn operation, as well as a local restaurant chain. She is a third-generation horsewoman and holds 20 world, national, and international titles in the American Saddlebred horse industry. She still competes on the county fair circuit with her son each summer.

#### ABOUT AMERICA FIRST POLICY INSTITUTE

America First Policy Institute advances policies that put the American people first. AFPI's guiding principles are liberty, free enterprise, national greatness, American military superiority, foreign policy in the American interest and the primacy of American workers, families and communities. Several AFPI national leaders have been selected by President Trump to serve in his cabinet or other important roles, including AFPI chair Linda McMahon, secretary of education; AFPI CEO Brooke Rollins, secretary of agriculture; Pam Bondi, attorney general; Doug Collins, secretary of veterans affairs; Scott Turner, secretary of housing and urban development; Lee Zeldin, administrator of EPA; Lt. General Keith Kellogg (Ret.), special envoy to Ukraine and Russia, Kash Patel, director of the federal bureau, among others.

For more information and policy recommendations, check out AFPI's website today!

**LEARN MORE** 





#### **PRESS RELEASE**

## America First Policy Institute Launches Farmers First Agenda

**Washington D.C.** – Today, the America First Policy Institute (AFPI) launched the <u>Farmers First Agenda</u> that includes policies to protect and advance U.S. farmers and ranchers. More broadly and moving forward, AFPI will play a key role in developing bold policies in support of the American farmer and rural communities.

Specifically, The Farmers First Agenda calls for restoring long-term rural prosperity, increasing trade and export opportunities, rightsizing and reorienting government, restoring the dignity of work, working to end diet-related chronic diseases, and other issues. AFPI previewed related Farmers First priorities and recommendations in its <u>The State of the Farm Economy as of January 2025</u> fact sheet published on National Agriculture Day.

AFPI has recruited a strong bench of patriots hailing from rural America with firsthand farming experience to stand behind the Farmers First Agenda and drive strong rural policy. Leading the policy effort behind AFPI's Farmers First Agenda is Christie Mullin, who will serve as Chair of Rural Policy, Former Ambassador Kip Tom as Vice Chair of Rural Policy, Sarah Frey as Senior Advisor for Rural Policy and Tate Bennett as Director of Rural Policy.

Mrs. Christie Mullin, the spouse of Senator Markwayne Mullin (R-OK), has years of experience running Mullin Ranch's cattle operations and multiple other small businesses. She is the embodiment of rural prosperity, and AFPI is fortunate to have her at its helm as a chief advocate for farmers and the rural way of life.

"I'm thrilled to take on this opportunity on rural policy at AFPI. As the mother of six beautiful children, and the spouse of a U.S. Senator representing a deeply rural state like Oklahoma, I understand the important role policy plays in shaping lasting solutions to help the future generations thrive in our fields, on our ranches, and throughout our farms," said Mrs. Mullin.

Ambassador Kip Tom has grown corn and soybeans for decades at Tom Farms in Leesburg, Indiana. He has extensive agricultural policy leadership experience from his previous role as U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Agencies for Food and Agriculture under President Donald J. Trump. As Vice Chair, Ambassador Tom's extensive background in farming and his relationships on the global stage equip him with unmatched expertise and dedication to co-lead AFPI's rural policy work.

"The American farmers serve as the essential foundation of our nation by delivering food, fuel, and fiber globally," said Tom. "AFPI and its Farmers First Agenda will promote policies that empower our farmers and provide them with essential resources and support to excel in today's global economy."

AFPI will issue rural policy products on an ongoing basis covering a variety of topics.

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