U.S. Food Policy Partnership

Towards a Just & Sustainable Food Policy for the USA

Concept Note

October 2020
Urgent action is needed to address the deep structural inequities in U.S. food and farming systems. While our food system has managed to provide affordable and abundant calories for many, it has come at significant social and environmental cost. Fundamental changes are required across the food and agricultural system to address these challenges, but current policy and business approaches have been slow – and often resistant – to change.

The COVID-19 pandemic and economic recession have only further exposed the need for urgent and systemic change – with impacts landing disproportionately and catastrophically on low income and BIPOC communities. Before the pandemic, 40 million Americans fought hunger, but the current crisis has thrown millions more into food insecurity, despite a multi-trillion dollar bail-out.

Our current food system is governed by a patchwork of uncoordinated policy frameworks and federal departments: agriculture, health, environment, energy, social security, labor, education. Policies made at different levels of governance (e.g. municipal, state, tribal, federal) are also often contradictory or disconnected from one another, leading to missed opportunities to support the innovative local and regional food system initiatives already happening on the ground.

A U.S. Food Policy could bridge existing policy gaps and contradictions by creating a coherent, coordinated, and integrated framework for all sectors affecting the food system. It would go beyond the U.S. Farm Bill and other food-related policies, with the aim of fostering food systems capable of ensuring a safe and sustainable future for those who work the land, the health of our land and waters, and access to healthy and nutritious foods for all Americans. By linking agriculture policies, urban and rural planning, transportation, retail, processing, worker rights and health systems, a U.S. Food Policy would support the development of the equitable, agroecological, regenerative, and sustainable food system we need.

While some may have a historical basis to believe that dominant “business-as-usual” interests are unassailable, and that a broad-based coalition would have too many structurally divergent interests to come together to present a sustainable alternative to that system, it’s not only possible: it’s already happening.
Calls for an American food policy have been made for decades and have been resurgent in recent years. Rooted in existing efforts and movement building, IPES-Food’s American team is hoping to foster a process through which civil society, tribal nations, the private sector, researchers, and policymakers could align their efforts to make sustainable food and farming systems a reality. The aim of our U.S. Food Policy Partnership (USFPP) is to break the mechanisms that perpetuate the status quo by convening a wide range of stakeholders to identify the strategies most likely to lead to the long-term policy reforms we need. Galvanizing new and existing forces into a broad and unified sustainable food movement is not only the means to build an American food policy, but also an end: the process of co-construction, of bringing together existing community engagement efforts on U.S. food systems reform, and of creating new and unlikely alliances, can be the fundamental mechanism for transforming our food systems over the long term.

We aim to collectively foster a shared understanding of the U.S. food and agriculture policy landscape; build on organizational successes in bringing about food systems change; identify opportunities to reform the 2023 Farm Bill and related policies; and collaboratively work towards a U.S. Food Policy for an equitable, agroecological, regenerative, and sustainable food system.

GET IN TOUCH

IPES-Food’s U.S. Food Policy Partnership hopes to rely on extensive collaboration with a range of actors and organizations across the U.S. Partnerships with a variety of actors are taking different forms and are seeking to complement the work many organizations are already doing. New partnerships and collaborations are always welcomed. All of those wishing to know more, to suggest or to explore partnership opportunities are invited to contact Chantal Clement at chantal.clement@ipes-food.org.