

Confronting Climate Change and the Farm Crisis:

A Call for a Just Transition

The Farm Crisis and the Climate Crisis Are Linked

Farmers and rural workers in the United States are increasingly threatened by the devastating impacts of climate change as well as by the impacts of the farm crisis, leading to the loss of family farms and the deepening economic decline of rural areas. These crises are mutually reinforcing.

The same factors that are driving the farm crisis – the increasing concentration of corporate power and pro-agribusiness farm policies that encourage chronic overproduction and squeeze family farmers with low prices – are also the factors driving the climate and environmental crises, because they have expanded monoculture crop production that relies on chemicals and fossil fuels and the contract-based model of factory farm livestock production.

Overproduction is a major reason why agriculture contributes to the climate crisis and is also a major reason why there is so much economic pressure on family farmers to ‘get big or get out.’

We can’t address one crisis without confronting the other.

Because these crises are linked, they must be addressed together: transitioning to a model of agriculture that is good for the climate means ensuring that family-scale farms can flourish, and protecting and investing in rural communities will mean little without a just transition to a regenerative, agroecological model of agriculture.

A just transition in agriculture would prioritize the right to food and shift economic and decision-making power back to food producers, ensuring fair prices and fair wages. Food production would be based on principles of ecology, like diversity, which must be practiced at a smaller and more local scale, but to achieve this goal, rural, frontline, and agricultural communities must be at the policy-making table.

As part of an international development and human rights organization, ActionAid USA recognizes that ultimately, we need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in our food and agriculture system by supporting more people to take care of the land and water on diversified, family-scale farms. This will only happen when we economically and politically empower farmers and historically marginalized communities as leaders in the climate crisis.

The following principles to ensure equity and justice in the transition away from the corporate, industrial, extractive model of agriculture should be at the core of our work to transform food and farming systems in the United States:

1. Base farming on ecological principles like biodiversity and resilience, as well as traditional and indigenous knowledge and practices. Policies support smaller-scale farms producing a diversity of crops and raising animals for local and regional markets, not extractive models of monocropping and factory farming which deplete, rather than regenerate, resources.

2. Ensure food producers earn a fair livelihood through fair prices and fair wages that bring “more hands onto the land.” Economic justice and access to land and resources for farmers and workers requires dismantling corporate control in agriculture and reining in chronic overproduction, which encourages unsustainable consumption and drives low prices and low wages that are the basis of “Get Big or Get Out” agriculture.

3. Repair the disproportionate injustice done to, and recognize the leadership and solutions coming from, black, indigenous, and people of

color communities. Ending racial oppression in the food system and addressing its ongoing legacies begins with respect and dialogue to elevate the leadership of the communities most directly affected.

4. Root policies and programs in human rights, especially the human right to food, in order to democratize the food and agriculture system and rebalance power in the economy. The food system must fulfill people’s rights to healthy food, to culture, to fair and meaningful work, and to sustainable ecosystems and economies.

5. Support real solutions that challenge the root causes of the climate and farm crises. Climate schemes like Bioenergy with Carbon Capture and Storage, carbon pricing, and carbon offsets rely on untested technological fixes and market-based mechanisms. Farm policies that rely on increased exports, free trade, and technology only entrench the global agribusiness model that has decimated family farmers.

