



2026

U.S. JUST FOOD TRANSITION ROADMAP

From Industrial Livestock  
Production to Equitable, Humane,  
and Sustainable Food Systems





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# Acknowledgments

This roadmap was primarily authored by the Center for Biological Diversity and World Animal Protection US, in consultation with more than 20 other U.S.-based labor, environmental, public health, and food advocacy organizations.

The *U.S. Just Food Transition Roadmap* shares the vision of *The Just Transition from Industrial Animal Production to Equitable, Humane, and Sustainable Food Systems* global white paper and roadmap, which was developed in consultation with more than 120 people representing 72 organizations from youth, women, farmer and worker constituencies across 35 countries. This roadmap and its endorsers join a growing, diverse network of more than 100 organizations around the world with a shared vision for food system transformation, working in support of the communities, coalitions, and activists who have been fighting for a just food system for decades.

Learn more at [www.JustFoodTransitionNetwork.com](http://www.JustFoodTransitionNetwork.com).

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# Introduction

The current U.S. food system is dominated by industrial operations fueling overproduction and high consumption of meat and dairy at the expense of workers, independent farmers, rural communities, public health, animals, biodiversity, and the climate. The enormous influence of industry lobbyists over decision-makers has created a policy landscape that favors corporate profits over the common good. This inequitable, inhumane and unsustainable system is driving our most urgent environmental and social crises, from food insecurity and worker exploitation to climate disasters and biodiversity loss.

There's a better food future for people, animals and the planet.

**We envision a U.S. food system that prioritizes sustainable, nutrient-dense food production with greater dependence on and support for whole and minimally processed plant foods at all levels; provides everyone access to adequate nutritious, affordable and culturally appropriate foods; supports fair prices for farmers; adheres to strong sustainability and worker-protection standards; strengthens food sovereignty; protects animal welfare through the Five Domains framework, including nutrition, environment, health, behavior, and mental well-being; and significantly reduces the number of animals killed for food and wild habitats destroyed for agricultural production.**

This roadmap provides a framework for collaboration across movements to transform our food system. It is intended to reflect a range of ambitious and necessary public policy changes, including some that may not yet be available, to engage food policy stakeholders (including farmers, food system workers, policymakers, local communities, nonprofits and others) in advancing our shared vision.

The just food transition primarily applies to addressing industrialized production and agribusinesses. As such it does not assert parameters, frameworks or restrictions on the role of culturally appropriate animal-based protein consumption; the economic, social, nutritional and cultural roles of Indigenous methods of hunting, fishing and herding; or traditional small-scale, low-impact animal agriculture in certain contexts and communities. Food must be produced humanely, equitably and within planetary boundaries, not as a global perpetuator of the status quo as it currently stands.

A just food system ensures workers' rights as human rights, including the rights to freedom of association, to organize a union, and to bargain collectively free from reprisal.

This roadmap focuses on the role of governments and public policy in accelerating the just food transition. In addition to the key stakeholders who must be involved in food policy decision-making and leadership, there's an important role for scientists, civil society, academia, philanthropy and the media in ensuring an informed public and political environment for policy action. By joining forces, farmer, labor, environmental, health and animal advocates can build power and momentum for a just food transition.

# Definitions

Adapted from *The Just Transition From Industrial Animal Production to Equitable, Humane, and Sustainable Food Systems* white paper, available at [JustFoodTransitionNetwork.com](http://JustFoodTransitionNetwork.com).

**Agroecology** (La Via Campesina Definition)<sup>1</sup> refers to a way of life that supports life-enriching systems and opposes life-alienating systems. It works together with nature and not against it, cherishing synergies between living beings and prioritizing traditional farmer knowledge and participatory, transgenerational, and experiential learning processes. Agroecological principles are based on solidarity, circular, and regional economies within ecological boundaries that are truly beneficial for communities. It prioritizes the rights of small-scale food producers and forms a movement toward equality and social justice for all people worldwide.

**Alternative proteins** refers to engineered proteins that are plant-based, cultivated, or fermentation-derived.<sup>2</sup> These products are intended to taste the same as, or better than, conventional animal products and to provide similar nutritional value while costing the same or less. This term covers a wide variety of emerging products. Some currently rely primarily on monoculture crops.<sup>3</sup> Some of these products are available to consumers today, including numerous plant-based and biofermentation-derived (using microorganisms to produce large amounts of protein-rich biomass) options. They may be produced by small, independent businesses or accessible to smaller-scale operations. Others, such as cultivated meats and precision fermentation (genetic engineering of microbes to produce specific, high-value ingredients), remain primarily in development, with a few products commercialized in the United States to date.<sup>4</sup> While they have potential, these technologies may prove capital-intensive and inaccessible to all but the largest food companies. It is important to note, also, that the full health and environmental impact of these new products will depend on several factors, including the energy sources used, the efficiency and sustainability of production methods, the scalability of the technology, and the overall lifecycle analysis of the process.<sup>5</sup>

**Diets within planetary and social boundaries** refers to balanced diets with low environmental impacts that contribute to food and nutrition security and to the health of present and future generations. Diets within planetary and social boundaries are protective and respectful of animal welfare, biodiversity and ecosystems. They are culturally acceptable, accessible, economically fair and affordable, nutritionally adequate, safe and healthy, and optimize natural and human resources. Diets within planetary and social boundaries prioritize plant-based foods such as whole grains, fruits, vegetables, nuts and legumes. Meat and dairy produced in ways that are protective of workers, animals and biodiversity may still be included, but make up a smaller portion of the overall diet compared to plant-based foods.

**Diversified protein system and protein diversification** refers to moving away from over-reliance on animal protein from industrial systems to a system based on varied proteins with lower impacts on animals and the environment. This should prioritize the production and consumption of plant-based proteins, particularly beans, lentils, nuts, seeds and minimally processed plant-based food and small amounts of food of animal origin (dairy, eggs, meat and fish) from equitable, humane and sustainable systems.

**Five Domains Framework** refers to a model that comprehensively and systematically identifies different forms of welfare issues across animals' nutrition, environment, health, behavior, and mental state.<sup>6</sup>

**Just transition** (Just Transition Alliance definition)<sup>7</sup> refers to a principle, a process and a practice. The principle of just transition is that a healthy economy and a clean environment can and should coexist. The process for achieving this vision should be a fair one that should not cost workers or community residents their human rights, health, environment, jobs or economic assets. Any losses should be fairly compensated. The practice of just transition means that the people who are most affected by pollution — the frontline workers and the fenceline communities — should be in the leadership of crafting policy solutions and have the right to challenge any entity that commits labor, economic or environmental injustices.

**Plant (or plant-based) food**<sup>8</sup> refers to fruits, vegetables, legumes, grains, nuts and seeds; their derived processed counterparts such as breads, pasta, breakfast cereals, cooked and fermented vegetables and legumes, and fruit purées, juices and jams; and their derived ingredients such as oleaginous seed-derived oils,

sugars, and some herbs and spices.

**Plant (or plant-based) protein** refers to protein derived from plants. Plant-based proteins include protein-rich whole plant foods such as pulses, nuts and seeds, and minimally processed plant-based foods such as tofu, tempeh and seitan.

**Plant-rich diets/system** refers to a diet or food system that is primarily centered on a diversity and abundance of plant foods but may include some animals and/or animal products.



# The need for a just transition away from industrial animal production in the United States

The United States is a hub for corporate control of the food system<sup>9</sup> and the development and global expansion of factory farming.<sup>10 11</sup> Giant agribusinesses operate with little regulation and benefit from enormous direct and indirect subsidies that enable them to generate massive profits and monopolize the industry at the expense of independent farmers, workers, animals, public health and the environment.

Agriculture policy, from Farm Bill subsidies and agency-directed financial assistance to research and technical assistance, heavily favors industrial animal production and commodity feed crops. This entrenches the current system and all of its harms while disincentivizing producers from transitioning to healthier, more resilient crops.

Most U.S. farmers have very little autonomy or agency. Vertical integration leaves them vulnerable to manipulation and abuse from corporate contractors while more farmland is increasingly bought up by landlords and institutional investors who have no direct involvement in farming.<sup>12 13</sup> This funnels profits to corporations while driving up prices for farmers and consumers. Combined with a history of discriminatory policies, this has caused the displacement and dispossession of smaller farmers, minorities, and Indigenous communities.<sup>14</sup>

Food- and farmworkers face an equally unjust work environment. Nearly 50% of farmworkers lack legal work authorization, leaving them subject to exploitation from their employers.<sup>15</sup> Agricultural workers are exempted from protections under several major federal labor laws, preventing them from unionizing or even earning minimum wage in some cases.<sup>16</sup> Food- and farmworkers experience some of the most difficult and hazardous work conditions, with scant access to healthcare or workplace safety protections.

Over 99% of farmed animals in the United States are raised in Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) with zero federal laws regulating their treatment in these facilities.<sup>17</sup> Animals are crammed into tiny, unsanitary spaces, given growth hormones and antibiotics, and often never see the sun or the outdoors. As a result, factory farms and meat processing facilities are hubs for zoonotic disease emergence and spread.<sup>18</sup>

Public health and nutrition in the United States are in crisis. Chronic diet-related diseases affect between a third to half of all Americans.<sup>19</sup> Yet U.S. meat consumption, a leading cause of many of these diseases, has continued to increase exponentially.<sup>20</sup>

Big agribusinesses continue to be leading contributors to pollution, environmental degradation, biodiversity loss, and climate change with little accountability for their environmental impacts.

Meanwhile leading climate researchers have highlighted reducing meat consumption as a critical climate strategy for more than a decade.<sup>21 22</sup> Food systems are responsible for about one-third of all greenhouse gas emissions worldwide,<sup>23</sup> with animal agriculture playing a disproportionate role, accounting for at least 16.5%.<sup>24</sup>

Farmers and food and agriculture workers in the United States are feeling mounting ecological pressures. Droughts, flooding, and other extreme weather events increase health risks for workers and cause crop losses and animal deaths.<sup>25</sup> Unstable temperatures create unpredictable growing seasons, while soil erosion and biodiversity loss reduce yields and productivity. This all results in economic losses, supply chain vulnerabilities and threats to food security.<sup>26</sup>

**It is critical that the United States urgently transform its food system to safeguard the health and wellbeing of its communities, ecosystems, and economic future.**

Economic and political priorities must be shifted away from industrial agriculture and overproduction of animal products and feed crops toward increasing corporate accountability, promoting agroecological practices, and

advancing sustainable, plant-rich diets.

This is necessary to empower local and regional food movements, support worker-driven social responsibility models, and level the playing field in developing, scaling up, and making agroecologically produced plant foods more accessible and affordable.

This will make it unnecessary and untenable for industrial animal facilities to continue operating and dispel the myth that the model is necessary to feed a growing population. Rapidly deploying a variety of policy, market and cultural changes is the only way to achieve sustainable production at scale in the United States and support food sovereignty while avoiding the worst harms of the climate emergency.

Reducing industrial meat production and consumption must be prioritized in a U.S. just food transition. The 2025 Scientific Report of the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee, based on a systematic review of the latest nutrition science, called for Americans to reduce overall protein consumption, particularly red and processed meat, while prioritizing plant proteins.<sup>27</sup> These recommendations, although not carried into the 2026 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, reflect the prevailing evidence and advice of nutrition experts.

Plant proteins such as beans, peas, lentils, nuts and seeds as well as tofu, tempeh and seitan have rich cultural traditions in U.S. foodways and play an important role in a healthy, equitable, humane, and sustainable food system. However, there's currently a predominance of meat and dairy in American food culture<sup>28</sup> and an overwhelming influence of industrial meat and dairy corporations and their trade groups over the country's food system.

As such, alternative proteins produced with a fraction of the environmental impacts and without the slaughter of farmed animals may also have a role in the short term as part of the strategy to shift the U.S. from intensive meat and dairy, but only if certain conditions are met to ensure equity and justice. However, there's a wide variety of these products using a range of technologies and inputs, including some that rely primarily on monoculture crops, some that are accessible to smaller-scale production, and some that are not yet commercialized in the United States. The development and deployment of alternative proteins must prioritize public benefit, transparency (including full safety testing of any novel technologies or ingredients) and community-centered production to prevent the sector from further entrenching corporate-controlled, exploitative industrial systems.

While this roadmap primarily focuses on land-based agriculture, the industrial fishing and aquaculture industries must also be acknowledged. Land and marine food systems are interrelated, as feed crops are used in aquaculture and fish meal is used in feed for land animals. Industrial fishing and aquaculture production are responsible for significant harms such as decreased ocean biodiversity and ecosystem functioning,<sup>29</sup> water and energy waste, and GHG emissions.<sup>30</sup> Many of the policy principles outlined in this roadmap can also be applied to industrial seafood production and consumption, along with others to address policy issues specific to the sector. For example, trade policy that ensures stringent social and environmental standards for foreign seafood is necessary, as most U.S.-consumed seafood is imported.

The United States is already home to a rich diversity of traditional and Indigenous foodways<sup>31</sup> as well as a strong history of civil society and community-based groups implementing food system solutions that work for people, animals and the planet. Building on this foundation — in tandem with an economic transition that moves away from the current corporate-controlled structures toward more decentralized cooperative frameworks — can grow equitable, humane and sustainable food systems across the country.

*A detailed look at the historical and political context of the U.S. food system is available in the supplementary resource [Understanding the U.S. Food System to Catalyze Change](#).*

## **The U.S. influence on a global just food transition**

The U.S. food system, its supply chains, and the highly processed, meat- and dairy-heavy “Standard American Diet”<sup>32</sup> have been exported around the world, wreaking havoc on local food systems, economies, public health and the environment, particularly in the Global South.<sup>33 34 35</sup>

The United States is one of the world's biggest producers of beef, chicken and pork.<sup>36</sup> Americans are among the top per capita meat consumers in the world, with the average American eating three times the global average.<sup>37</sup>

The United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change not only identified dietary shifts — including meat reduction — as a vital climate-mitigation strategy needed to meet emissions reduction targets, but also emphasized the urgency to act.<sup>38</sup>

Additionally, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework reaffirms the need to reduce animal consumption and production.<sup>39</sup> Reducing animal protein is specifically named in the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Global Species Action Plan to achieve the Kunming-Montreal goals.<sup>40</sup>

An analysis of the Paris Agreement, the Sustainable Development Goals, the Global Methane Pledge, and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework found that a just food transition is a critical part of achieving nearly every target and goal in these agreements, even where food and agriculture are not explicitly named.<sup>41</sup>

With its outsized influence on the environment, nutrition, and global economy, a just food transition in the United States would help accelerate shifts toward equitable and sustainable food consumption and production worldwide.



# The U.S. Just Transition Roadmap

To achieve a just food transition, governments, public and private financial institutions, and key food industry stakeholders must commit to developing, incorporating and implementing just transition policies, programs and practices. They must also work to ensure everyone has access to safe, nutritious and affordable food produced and consumed in a way that contributes to the ability of all beings to thrive. This is only feasible by moving away from factory and industrial farms toward worker-driven, community-based sustainable agriculture.

The financial responsibility for this transition should be carried by large agribusinesses — which have long externalized the health, environmental and social costs of their operations — and governments. It should *not* be borne by workers, small-scale producers, and consumers.

This will happen in stages, starting with increased recognition and public commitments for a just transition. This includes policymakers and other stakeholders standing up to unjust and unsustainable food system governance and corporations committing to food justice as a core value.

These public commitments will continue to grow until they become a core consideration in food policy, programs and commitments over the next decade. Redirecting government subsidies and other forms of public assistance from industrial animal and feed crop production toward diverse, small- and medium-scale, local plant production is critical to accelerating these changes.

It also requires a commitment to collaborative systems change, recognizing that workers' rights, environmental protection, animal welfare and public health are deeply intertwined in our food system. Although many of these issues are currently siloed in public policy, stakeholders must continue to build connections across movements and agencies to address potential tradeoffs and unintended consequences that do not support a just food transition.

Ultimately, the just transition will become a core consideration in food policy, programs and commitments, with widespread adoption of justice-centered language and frameworks that advance corporate accountability, democratized ownership, access to financing and land for independent and historically marginalized farmers, workers' rights, nutritious diets, reduced greenhouse gas emissions, healthy ecosystems and animal welfare.

## Steps Toward a Just Food Transition in the United States

Food system transformation requires action at all levels — from governments, major food industries, public and private financial institutions, and key stakeholders — in partnership with food system workers, farmers and rural communities.

Policy changes and commitments to a just transition must simultaneously remove barriers to change and support conditions for a just food system to grow.

### **Stage One (Years 1-3): Narrative and cultural shifts increase demand and lay groundwork for policy change.**

- Nongovernmental organizations endorse the just transition vision, work in partnership with frontline labor and farmer groups, and begin to integrate the just transition into their advocacy work.
- Just food transition language and frameworks are integrated into proposed and reintroduced legislation and policy, particularly at the local and state levels.
- Candidates adopt just food transition priorities as part of their platforms.

### **Stage Two (Years 3-5): Policy change influences legal and economic structures, shifting power from corporations to farmers, workers and communities.**

- Legislation and policies are introduced at federal and state levels to enforce existing governance and close loopholes that allow corporations to exploit workers, animals, and the environment.

- False solutions such as carbon offsets are widely rejected, recognizing that they entrench corporate control, disadvantage smaller producers, pollute vulnerable communities, and increase harm to Indigenous peoples.
- Adoption of just food transition policies, programs and funding at the state and local level increases.

### **Stage Three (Years 5-10): A just food system begins to take root, grounded in farmer and worker empowerment, public health and protecting animals and the environment.**

- Financing and technical support undergo significant shifts, including direct and indirect subsidies, away from industrial animal production to support smaller-scale, independent and specialty crop production, including cooperatively owned models and transitional farms.
- Recognition, adoption, and prioritization of worker-led labor agreements increases throughout the food system, including worker-driven social responsibility models.
- Dietary guidance, nutrition policy, and procurement prioritize plant-rich diets and support fair prices for farmers and regional procurement from independent producers, cooperatives, and producers with strong worker-led labor agreements.

A just transition from industrial animal agriculture can only be achieved in partnership with small- and medium-scale farmers, food and farmworkers, Indigenous peoples, and frontline and fenceline communities to ensure the transition occurs in ways that address inequality, end exploitation and achieve food sovereignty that meets food security needs.

It must focus on social, racial and gender equity and address the multiple intersecting forms of discrimination such as sexism, racism and ableism. Gender-based solutions and racial equity strategies that acknowledge the specific impacts experienced by women and people of color and their crucial role in agriculture are essential. It must prioritize policies and practices that enhance social justice, public health, climate stability, biodiversity and animal welfare standards.

To achieve the transition, we must pull three key levers of change, which mirror the global roadmap:

- **Strengthen food system governance.** We need to challenge the dominance of the food system by multinational corporations and put policies in place to foster transparency and hold them accountable for their social and environmental harms. At the same time, we should support environmentally and socially responsible companies and protect and elevate traditional and local food systems.
- **Promote agroecological practices.** A just food transition necessitates embracing agroecology to promote human rights, environmental protection and animal welfare, and to ensure food sovereignty meets food security needs while providing dignified and sustainable livelihoods. This includes supporting farmers and workers currently in the industrial animal agriculture system to transition to plant production and smaller-scale, diversified agroecological farming methods.
- **Shift toward plant-rich diets within planetary and social boundaries.** Countries with high per capita consumption of animal-based products must shift toward plant-rich diets with reduced meat and dairy to stay within planetary and social boundaries. This shift will benefit public health and free up land and resources to support diversified agroecological production systems.

## **Facing the challenges of the current political landscape**

The U.S. federal government plays a central role in addressing both production and consumption of industrial animal-based foods. Unfortunately the U.S. Department of Agriculture, or USDA, has a long history of favoring big agribusinesses and the overproduction and overconsumption of industrial meat and dairy.

In the past decade, as the unsustainability of industrial animal production has become undeniable, the USDA has relied on false solutions. These include feed additives, which have minimal impact in reducing emissions and aren't scalable; direct and indirect subsidization of feed grains and other commodities instead of fruits,

vegetables and grains for human consumption; and biogas (such as anaerobic digesters), which further entrenches industrial-scale operations and worsens the problem of pollution and greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>42</sup>  
43 44 45

Ignoring the role of policy in driving consumption and dietary shifts creates an ineffective and weak climate response.<sup>46 47</sup>

Although political challenges to achieving a just transition in the United States are not new, they have grown exponentially under the second Trump administration. Nearly all Trump's promises, rhetoric, and actions are antithetical to a just transition.

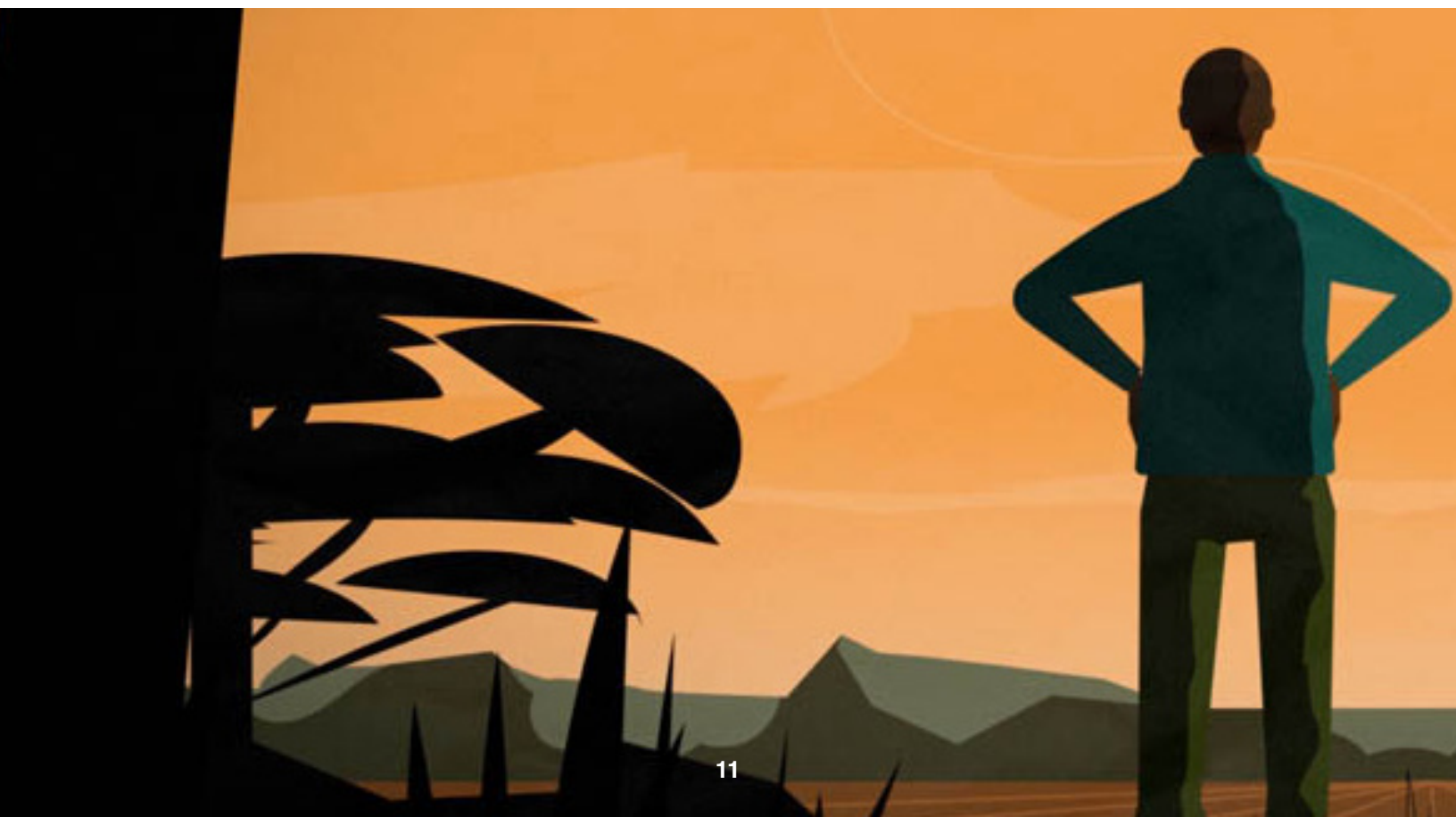
His administration's cruel and draconian immigration policies violate workers' human rights and dignity, shatter families and rural communities, and put the entire food system at risk. Data from recent years shows that 68% of crop farmworkers in the United States are immigrants and 42% are undocumented immigrants.<sup>48</sup> Nearly 38% of animal slaughtering and processing workers in the United States are immigrants and nearly 27% are undocumented immigrants.<sup>49</sup>

The significant role of immigrant workers on farms and in processing plants means that threats of deportation pose a real and imminent risk to U.S. food production, which in turn would destabilize the entire food system and the supply chain and raise prices for consumers.

Meanwhile, the Trump administration has continued to relax standards in ways that harm workers, animals and public health. For example, proposals to increase the speeds at which processing plants can slaughter animals magnify risks of serious injuries to workers, cruel treatment of animals being processed, and increased pollution from wastewater and carcasses.<sup>50</sup>

It has also delayed protections for contract poultry growers from unfair payment systems, cut off programs to help new farmers access land, rejected nutrition science in its protein-centered dietary guidance, approved harmful new pesticides, and countless other actions that undermine a healthy, just and sustainable food system.

In the first year of its second term, the Trump administration defunded, froze, weakened, or canceled more



than a dozen programs that support conservation, local food production and underserved producers in part or completely. This includes programs that made it easier for schools to purchase local food, provided essential information to nutrition assistance recipients, funded conservation practices on farms, and increased access to land, markets and funding for underrepresented farmers.

The loss of these programs is devastating for independent producers, food-insecure children and families, local economies, and many others who depend on our food system. It has also made it harder for producers to adopt and maintain environmentally sustainable practices that reduce greenhouse gas emissions, conserve water, protect biodiversity, and increase the resilience of their farms.

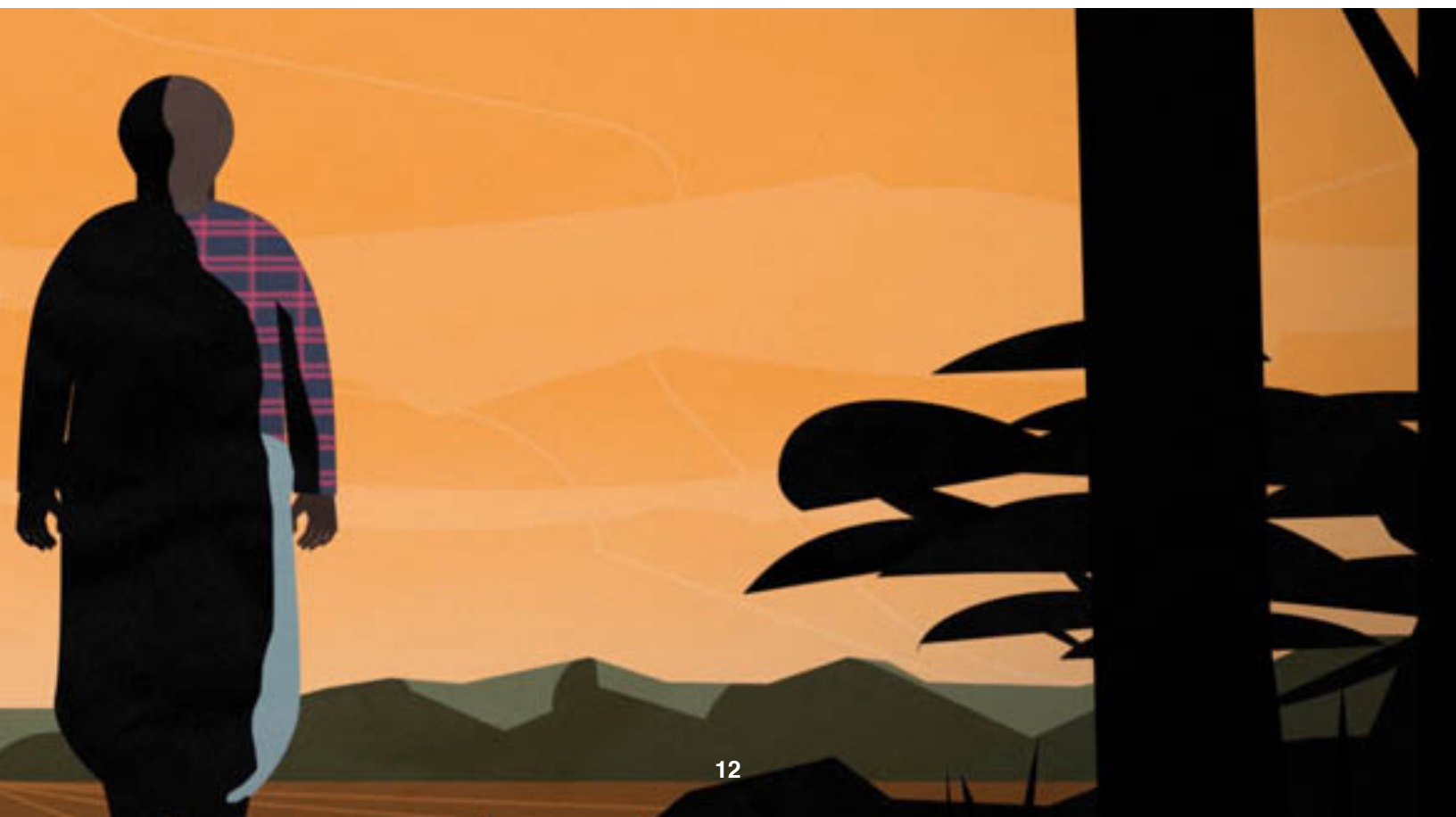
These programs should be immediately reassessed and either replaced with stronger programs or reinstated with changes that eliminate the influence of agribusinesses and advance the three key levers of change.

**While a federal government that favors corporate profits over workers' rights, public health, environmental sustainability and animal protection presents significant barriers to an equitable, humane and sustainable food system, it does not stop the just transition.**

Actions to hold corporations accountable, shift power to community-based democratic models, promote agroecological practices and advance plant-rich diets can and do take place at the state and local levels. Community efforts and corporate initiatives have a strong role to play in that landscape.

In this roadmap, we've identified key policies that can support a just transition long-term, including those that are viable with or without the support of the federal government.

The just transition away from industrial animal agriculture is urgent, but it is also a journey that will continue beyond the current administration. Meaningful progress at the state and local levels has historically underpinned social and environmental movements in the United States.



## **Public policy priorities**

The policy recommendations in this roadmap align with the three key levers of change and provide an overview of how legislators and government officials can approach food system transformation in the United States.

The corporate control dominating the U.S. food system must be dismantled to make an equitable, democratized system grounded in agroecology possible. Furthermore, because the average U.S. dietary pattern is defined by high consumption of industrial animal products and ultra-processed foods, shifting diets can have a large global impact on public health, animals and the environment.

The just food transition requires a strong commitment and inclusive process from government at all levels with deep engagement with civil society and those most affected by the transition. There must be policy coherence that aligns food and agriculture with social, environmental, health and labor goals and commitments. Any exploitation of people, communities, workers or the planet is not a just transition.

No single policy can address the complex interconnections of a just transition on its own. It remains critical to focus on food, agriculture and public health policy architecture as a whole. Strengthening corporate accountability and public transparency, preventing conflicts of interest, and increasing democratization of food system governance should be central to any political conversation on these issues.

These public policy priorities are not intended to represent a comprehensive policy platform, but to identify necessary interventions to remove barriers to the just transition, such as corporate accountability, finance, land access and trade. It also highlights policies that are needed to enable and grow a just food system, including pathways to help farmers, workers and rural communities transition out of industrial animal production toward plant production and smaller-scale, diversified agroecology.

These policy priorities demonstrate how we can create a future that supports worker empowerment, local and cooperative ownership, smaller scale and independent farmers, food sovereignty, healthy diets and nutrition security, environmental sustainability and animal welfare.

Achieving these policy changes will require a coordinated, strategic effort. Recognizing the current U.S. political challenges to advancing a just transition at the federal level, these recommendations also identify where action can be taken at the state or local level to make meaningful changes.

Although the sequence of policies identified here would be particularly influential in transforming the U.S. food system, they don't need to happen in the exact order that they are listed, nor should changes that are easier to achieve and implement wait for the more challenging structural changes to occur.

Many of these policies can and should be implemented concurrently and at different levels to continue advancing the just transition and protect workers, independent farmers, communities, animals, the environment, public health and food sovereignty.

*A more detailed list of policies with specific examples of legislation can be found in the supplemental Policy Pathways document.*

## **Policy priorities to remove barriers to a just food transition**

### **Corporate Accountability**

Agribusiness corporations must be held accountable for the safety and treatment of workers, air and water pollution, animal cruelty and paying their fair share of taxes. This will only be possible by addressing conflicts of interest, such as the revolving door between industry groups and government positions, and other corporate interference in government policy.

Policy examples include:

- **Enforce existing laws:** Agencies and programs that oversee and enforce worker, environmental and animal welfare protections must be fully staffed, funded and empowered to levy fines, revoke permits and take other appropriate liability actions and sanctions. Antitrust rules must be strengthened and enforced to limit the market share of large food and agriculture companies and prevent anticompetitive behavior. Corporations that engage in unfair labor practices, animal cruelty, and environmental violations must be prevented from government funding and contracts, including procurement, bailouts, and loans.
- **Close loopholes:** Exemptions that allow industrial animal producers to exploit workers, animals and the environment must be removed. For example, Congress should equalize labor laws to make sure all food chain workers are covered by worker protection and fair wage laws, including the right to medical care, protection from smoke and other climate-related impacts, paid leave and the right to collective bargaining. Congress should also remove the poultry exemption from animal welfare laws and close Clean Water Act loopholes that allow CAFOs to be exempt from permitting requirements. Fiscal loopholes that allow corporations to avoid paying their fair share of taxes must also be closed.
- **Prevent corporate interference in government policy:** Congress should pass legislation to restrict lobbying and corporate spending; improve reporting transparency and end the revolving door between federal agencies and the agriculture industry. It should strengthen the process to assess and address corporate influence over scientific research that is conducted by or used in government institutions or agency regulations.
- **Reject false solutions:** Carbon and biodiversity offsetting schemes must be rejected in all food and agriculture policies, and those doing harm to Indigenous peoples and other vulnerable communities through these schemes must be held legally liable. Government funding should also be directed away from practices such as biogas conversion and feed additives that further entrench industrial production, have significant harmful tradeoffs, or lack evidence. Instead, funding should be directed toward science-based solutions that are proven to be effective, feasible and beneficial for animals, the environment, and smaller scale producers.

## Finance and Land Access

Access to financial capital, land and other types of government funding must be redirected from the current preferential treatment given to industrial animal producers toward supporting small- and mid-scale independent producers, Black, Indigenous and other farmers of color, cooperative ownership models, plant and transitional farming, agroecological practices and other producers that align with the just food transition. This should apply to all government funding mechanisms, including direct and indirect subsidies, loans, bailouts, surplus purchases and procurement contracts.

Policy examples include:

- Reform direct and indirect agricultural subsidies to shift away from multinational corporations, animal agriculture, feed crops and commodity crop insurance toward making agroecological practices and plant foods and products more widely accessible and affordable.
- End government-supported promotion programs of industrial animal proteins, such as the industry-funded “checkoff programs” administered by USDA to promote commodities like beef, pork, and dairy.
- Increase funding for land access and ownership for underrepresented farmers, including Indigenous peoples, ethnic minorities, women and people of color.
- Defund false climate solutions, including carbon offset and “carbon farming” schemes.

## Trade

Trade policies need to be aligned with just transition goals. This would include ensuring that policies supporting less emitting, more climate resilient production aren’t undermined by a flood of imports that may be damaging the planet or challenges to domestic standards by foreign investors. Trade policies should support the United States and other countries that want to implement supply-management systems that prevent overproduction and provide farmers a fair price.

Policy examples include:

- Strengthen and enforce corporate accountability and liability rules in trade agreements and implement supply chain duty of care mechanisms with mandatory disclosures.<sup>51</sup>
- Restrict agricultural imports tied to deforestation, along with providing resources to help countries meet this standard.
- Work with trading partners to establish carbon tariffs tied to imports of fertilizer.
- Reinstate mandatory Country of Origin Labeling (COOL) for all meat products.

## **Policy priorities to grow a just food system**

Government policy must enable the just transition through investing in the people on the frontlines of food production and solutions that advance healthy and just models, practices and programs.

The following categories work together to create community-based systems that meet regional needs and support diverse producers and communities. Simultaneously advancing these efforts while addressing structural issues will help build a food system where workers, farmers, rural communities, animals, and the environment can thrive.

Policy examples include:

### **Worker Empowerment**

- Congress should pass legislation requiring corporations to move from contractor to employer relationships for growers and food chain workers and protect the right to collective bargaining with worker-led agreements.
- Protect all immigrant food and farmworkers, regardless of legal status, from unfair treatment by immigration enforcement officials and pass legislation to create easier pathways for those who are undocumented to obtain legal status.
- Require transparent information sharing for all food and farmworkers, including through right-to-know laws.

### **Shifting Production**

- Provide incentives, market opportunities and technical support to help animal agriculture producers shift to sustainable plant production.
- Incentivize and invest in plant agriculture and specialty crop production and markets.
- Establish regulatory frameworks for alternative protein investments to ensure the sector supports local and smaller scale producers; addresses safety, nutrition and accurate labeling; and prioritizes domestic production and open-source communal properties.

### **Local And Cooperative Ownership**

- Increase support for local food systems and community-driven and farmer-led economic models such as food and land co-ops.
- Increase access to fresh food in low-income, low-access neighborhoods by removing barriers, such as restrictive covenants that ban new grocery stores from replacing closed grocery stores in the same location, and offering tax incentives to build food resources and hubs. That should include independently owned grocery stores and food co-ops in communities where they're needed most.
- Increase support for local food policy councils — including underrepresented stakeholders, farmworkers, food chain workers and cooperative businesses — with collective decision-making powers.

### **Small and Independent Farmers**

- Reinstate strategic grain reserves and a modern supply-management system for commodity crops to replace cheap feed subsidies and stabilize prices. The system should have a price floor that protects farm income for small- and mid-size producers and a price ceiling to protect consumers from climate volatility.
- Expand public and private funds that support farmers to implement agroecological practices.
- Provide incentives and technical support to help animal agriculture producers shift to sustainable plant production.

## **Food Sovereignty**

- Increase support for urban agriculture, including access to land for community gardens and removing barriers to growing food.
- Provide financial support for entrepreneurs and small businesses in rural areas.
- Develop gender-sensitive training programs to improve access to diverse, polyculture, plant-based agriculture for women farmers.

## **Healthy Diets**

- Adopt evidence-based, sustainable Dietary Guidelines for Americans.
- Incentivize healthy diets within planetary and social boundaries by integrating them into federal food and nutrition programs.
- Update government procurement policies across all levels and agencies to emphasize plant-rich diets, food waste reduction and purchasing culturally appropriate foods.

## **Environmental Sustainability**

- Establish clear, evidence-based biodiversity and conservation metrics for federal food and agriculture policies and programs, including strong reporting requirements for greenhouse gas emissions associated with the industrial animal and feed crop supply chain and consumption-based emissions for food.
- Pay producers to retire and restore ecosystems on land previously used for industrial meat and dairy production.
- Expand environmental and nutrition education programs in schools.

## **Animal Welfare**

- Prevent the federal government from usurping states' rights to more strictly regulate on-farm standards and prevent states from pre-empting local governments' ability to regulate agriculture in their areas, such as siting of CAFOs or slaughterhouses.
- Strengthen federal laws regulating animal production, such as restricting antibiotic usage in animal production, reducing slaughter line speeds, setting minimum standards for outdoor access and maximum stocking densities, and improving reporting requirements for industrial animal agriculture facilities and other public health responses to zoonotic diseases.
- End "ag-gag" legislation to protect all whistleblowers revealing cruel and/or illegal activities in animal agriculture operations.

# **Conclusion**

The U.S. food system urgently needs a just transition from the factory farm model and the overproduction and high consumption of animal products in the United States to an equitable and sustainable food system that supports healthy and affordable plant-rich diets. This roadmap for a just food transition builds on work that's already being done. Communities of color have been fighting for food justice and workers' rights for generations. Civil society groups have long advocated to stop the environmental, health and social harms of industrial animal operations while increasing access to nutritious, affordable, plant-rich foods.

Accelerating this transition within the next decade is necessary to end a significant source of animal suffering, improve the safety and rights of food-chain workers, support farmers facing ecological and economic instability, mitigate climate pollution, ensure community food security, protect public health, reduce threats to biodiversity, and address myriad other related environmental and social problems.



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