

A woman with short brown hair, wearing a white tank top and a plaid shirt, is sitting in a garden. She is holding a small potted plant with green leaves. The background is filled with various plants and flowers, including a large white hydrangea bush. The overall scene is bright and natural.

2022

**WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE
ON HUNGER, NUTRITION AND
HEALTH**

**LISTENING SESSION REPORT
AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

PREPARED BY

**RURAL COALITION
AND PARTNERS**

www.RuralCo.org

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*As organizations with decades of experience in the food and farm system, Rural Coalition with Alianza Nacional de Campesinas, Slow Food USA, Farm Action, National Family Farm Coalition, North American Marine Alliance, Slow Fish North America, One Fish Foundation, HEAL Food Alliance, World Farmers, Inc., Family Farm Defenders, and Wallace Center responded to the invitation of the White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition and Health. In our listening sessions in June and July, 2022 we engaged our grassroots partners to discuss the intersectional realities of hunger, nutrition, and health, making recommendations to create systemic changes. The findings as summarized in our report - [**The Realities of Hunger in Our Rural, Agricultural, Urban and BIPOC Communities**](#) -point to collective opportunities to address the longstanding consequences of interconnected issues including broken food and healthcare systems, inadequate infrastructure, an extractive economy, and the undervaluing of workers in many of our communities. We have asked other allies to join us in urging policy-makers to utilize the findings from these listening sessions to enact direct, holistic, and community-driven solutions, which present our nation with promising opportunities to address our many long-standing problems.*

STATEMENT ON THE WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE FOR HUNGER NUTRITION AND HEALTH

We, the undersigned organizations, call upon the White House and all federal, state and local policy makers to utilize these findings to catalyze direct and systemic change to end hunger, and build nutrition and health within rural and urban communities. We support the following analysis and recommendations made by Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (BIPOC) communities with a special focus on rural areas.



THE COMPLEX REALITIES OF HUNGER, NUTRITION, AND HEALTH

Food inaccessibility and unaffordability drive hunger in our communities. The demand for healthy, affordable food in many communities far exceeds its supply across the United States. The Ma-Chis Lower Creek Indian Tribe of Alabama reported that the nearest grocery store to tribal land is often 15 miles or more away and fails to offer fresh, quality fruits and vegetables. They also explained how service providers of housing, health care, and nutrition assistance refuse to address the needs of members of many state-recognized tribes.

To make matters worse, 20 states impose an unconscionable sales tax on groceries, deepening income and racial inequalities.[1] Participants in Alabama discussed how taxes on food can be as high as ten percent, depending on the county, and have a harmful impact on individuals and families. Perpetuated by an extractive economy in rural areas, many participants reported that their low wages are inadequate to cover the rising prices of food, gas, rent, and other essential bills. Increased household expenses and the cost of transportation to worksites inhibits the ability of farmworkers and food chain workers to afford quality and nutritious food for themselves and their families. As the pandemic has expanded virtual work opportunities, it has also increased migration to small towns, intensifying an affordable housing shortage.

Many rural communities reported inadequate infrastructure with deleterious effects that exacerbate health inequalities. The water systems in employer-provided farmworker housing in the Coachella Valley of California is contaminated with arsenic, making it unsafe for washing hands, drinking, cooking, or mixing baby formula. Impoverished rural families in the southeast struggle with aging, substandard housing that is poorly maintained, unsafe and largely left out of development initiatives, disaster assistance, or loan programs that would fund improvements or connect them to new infrastructure. Many of these homes lack adequate and safe cooking and food storage facilities, including refrigeration, and protection from pests. The communities in many locations reported that the loss of waivers allowing expansion of child nutrition programs are also hurting families.



Members from Alabama described how these issues are compounded by the growing preponderance of absentee farm and timberland ownership, which decreases land value and the resulting property taxes needed to fund public roads, water and sewer systems, hospitals, and schools. These factors increase poverty [2] and the need for food assistance.

Rural families are also overburdened with higher energy costs and lack broadband to access higher-paying virtual jobs and quality telehealth systems. Participants from New Mexico explained how wildfires and evacuations have delayed planting, devastated natural and ancestral resources, and caused a current loss of farm and ranch land in excess of 600,000 acres. [3]

However, despite the realities of hardship that rural communities endure, community-based organizations continue advancing work to address the effects of our broken system. Alianza Nacional de Campesinas and Lideres Campesinas continue to host monthly regular drive-through food and water distribution events in communities where they are active, using U-Haul trucks to provide bottled water, fresh fruits, and vegetables to at least 500 families per event. Kansas Black Farmers Association’s educational camps for ages 10-17 teach youth how to grow food for themselves. Cottage House, Inc. in Alabama engages local school children in their predominantly Black and Hispanic community in growing food both during the school year and in intensive summer activities reaching upwards of 100 children each year. These organizations continue to need funding to support and expand their community-based responses.



OPPORTUNITIES FOR POSITIVE SYSTEMIC CHANGE



The complex realities of hunger in our communities require comprehensive solutions and investments. As the White House builds out its action plan for addressing the hunger crisis and its effects, the administration should immediately adopt the following interconnected policy interventions. We further call on policy makers to enact such statutory changes necessary to eliminate hunger and build the health of our communities and children.

PILLAR 1

IMPROVE FOOD ACCESS & AFFORDABILITY

- **Income:** Provide a federal living wage and restoration of the enhanced child tax credit.
- **Provide and enforce fair wages and working conditions for farm and food workers:** Assure that employers of farm workers and food system workers meet all fair wage and working condition standards and that workers receive compensation that allows them to live in dignified housing and access nutritious, quality food.



PILLAR 1

- **Food assistance:** Remove barriers for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) participation based on immigration status, full-time higher education, prior criminal conviction, and work status; base SNAP benefits on the Low Cost Food Plan.
- **Universal free school lunches:** Advocate for permanent adoption of universal free school lunch in the child nutrition reauthorization;
- **Healthy school lunches:** Incentivize procurement of fresh, locally produced, minimally processed and culturally meaningful and healthful foods; increase good food education and school gardens support, support “scratch cooking” through cafeteria and kitchen equipment upgrades and staff training, and increase children’s time to eat school meals, thereby reducing food plate waste.
- **Child nutrition waivers:** USDA should continue to use its available authority to extend COVID-19 initiated waivers to states and other partners that provide meals for children at school and all year long through the school meal, after school, child and adult care, and summer meal programs, working with Congress to extend the funding of these waivers.
- **End unfair food taxes:** Provide data to local and state governments on how local and state taxes on groceries and prepared food disproportionately negatively impact low-income communities, and work for the repeal of these taxes.



PILLAR 1

● **Rural development:** Provide financial assistance to develop retail access to nutritious, healthful foods in underserved communities; and increase infrastructure support and programs with higher cost share for underserved and persistently poor areas.

● **Farmer equity:** Immediately implement new authorities in the Inflation Reduction Act to speed loan modification assistance and discrimination financial assistance for small and mid-scale diversified farmers and ranchers, tribal communities, and fishers, including compensation for food provided directly to communities and families who need it.

● **Farm and food network:** Provide structural assistance, grants, loans, and price support sufficient to maintain the food supply and support transportation, processing, distribution, and storage of goods with a focus on local food systems, regenerative production practices, and underserved communities.

● **Farmworkers (landless farmers) to farmers:** Modify requirements in beginning farmer and rancher programs to specifically recognize the skills of farmworkers with respect to eligibility for these programs and provide additional USDA programs to assist farm workers to transition to owners of farms and ranches.

● **Zoning laws and rental restrictions:** Develop model laws to allow the cultivation of fresh fruits and vegetables everywhere possible, and to allow people to raise chickens and other small livestock in urban areas. Develop incentives for landlords to allow container gardening in public and farmworker housing.

PILLAR 2

INTEGRATE NUTRITION AND HEALTH

- **Expand healthcare coverage:** Advocate for affordable healthcare coverage for everyone, regardless of immigration status or employment, including through full Medicaid expansion.
- **Affordable and safe housing:** Work with the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Department of Agriculture’s Rural Development agency to address inequities in availability, affordability, and quality of rural housing, including housing for farm workers. The goal is to provide safe and clean water for cooking, drinking, and bathing, as well as adequate food preparation, refrigeration and storage facilities in each home.
- **Safe drinking water:** Work with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to improve and enforce rights to clean drinking water for all with particular emphasis on rural America and farm worker communities.



PILLAR 3

EMPOWER ALL CONSUMERS TO MAKE AND HAVE ACCESS TO HEALTHY CHOICES

- **Immigrant farm labor protections:** Advocate for extending fair labor standards to farmworkers, including living wage, the right to organize, overtime pay, sick leave, access to protective gear, protection from heat stress and pesticide exposure, and protection from workplace violence; provide an optional path to citizenship for undocumented farm workers and their families.
- **Resilient and equitable rural economies:** Prioritize and incentivize governmental and institutional value-based procurement of locally sourced foods; prioritize and incentivize farm to school purchases of locally or regionally sourced foods; remove administrative barriers to local and regional meat processing; and strengthen and enforce antitrust and anti-competition laws and prohibit further consolidation of agricultural processing, seed, equipment sectors; ensure infrastructure investments are equitably distributed to the most underserved communities.



PILLAR 4

SUPPORT PHYSICAL ACTIVITY FOR ALL

● **Enforcement of Application Exclusion Zones:** Children are unable to safely use school playgrounds for physical activity in the many places where they are contaminated by agricultural pesticides and herbicides. The EPA Application Exclusion Zones need to be fully enforced.

● **Adequate income:** A federal living wage and restoration of the enhanced child tax credit and fair wages and working conditions for farmers and ranchers. Improving incomes and working conditions are needed to meet basic needs, as well as reduce unnecessarily long work hours and reduce the time and distance traveled for work. Such changes provide time for recreational activities.

● **Integrate recreation with improved infrastructure:** In the Coachella Valley of California, farmworker women were told by the local town about the new recreation area the town was building. “That’s very nice,” noted the women, “but what about our water?” The water in the farmworker housing where they reside is contaminated with arsenic. Workers should not have to choose between recreation and meeting their essential needs. Getting safe drinking water was a first priority, before money spent on recreational facilities.



PILLAR 5

ENHANCE NUTRITION AND FOOD SECURITY RESEARCH

- **Tribal Consultation:** Assure Tribal consultation in policy and decision making throughout administrative agencies to support and protect access to ancestral agricultural land and sea resources and traditional foods and foodways and to honor obligations to sovereign tribal entities.
- **Pesticides:** Prioritize EPA review of pesticide safety (including the ongoing review of glyphosate) to reduce harmful impacts on farm workers and their families, protect consumers, assure water quality, and improve soil health.
- **Water and housing infrastructure:** Establish a process to immediately report, address and mitigate reported public health hazards, including arsenic, lead, or other toxins in drinking water with a special focus on manufactured/mobile homes and farm labor housing.
- **Environmental quality and soil health:** Direct the USDA to invest in and incentivize transition to regenerative and organic farming including through technical assistance, cost-sharing, and supporting community-based organizations doing this work. Incentivize and prioritize restoring and rebuilding soil health including capacity to sequester carbon, hold water, and reduce nutrient runoff.

CALL TO ACTION

We are grateful for this historic opportunity to help move our nation forward by addressing the longstanding challenges and perpetuating intricacies of the hardships communities face, especially BIPOC communities, related to hunger, nutrition, and health.

As the White House completes this historic examination of hunger, nutrition, and health, we contribute these accounts of the complex realities and recommendations presented here and in our [comprehensive report](#) for your thorough consideration.

The undersigned organizations urge policymakers to create and enact holistic, community-driven solutions to catalyze direct and systemic change to end hunger, and build nutrition and health within rural and urban communities. We pledge to join and support you in this effort which presents our nation's most promising opportunity to address this long-standing problem to the benefit especially of the Black, Indigenous and People of Color Communities who most need it.

Sincerely,

Rural Coalition
Alianza Nacional de Campesinas
Slow Food USA
Farm Action
National Family Farm Coalition
North American Marine Alliance

Slow Fish North America
One Fish Foundation
HEAL Food Alliance
World Farmers, Inc.
Family Farm Defenders
Wallace Center

21st Century Youth Leadership Movement
Alabama State Association of Cooperatives
American Federation of Government Employees Local 3354
American Indian Mothers INC
Campaign for Family Farms and the Environment
Campeños Unidos
Compañeras Campesinas
Cottage House Inc.,
Dakota Rural Action
Farm to Table - New Mexico
Grupo Amor
Indiana Farmers Union
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy
Kansas Black Farmers Association
La Mujer Obrera
Land Stewardship Project
Latino Farmers of the Southeast
Missouri Farmers Union
National Latino Farmers & Ranchers Trade Association
National Young Farmers Coalition
NOFA-VT
Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance
Oklahoma Black Historical Research Project Inc.
Operation Spring Plant
Rural Advancement Fund of the National Sharecroppers Fund, Inc.
Rural Development Leadership Network
RuralOrganizing.org Education Fund
Sierra Club
Socially Responsible Agriculture Project
Springfield Food Policy Council
Union of Concerned Scientists
WhyHunger



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