

Rep. Jim Costa

Member Day Testimony before the House Committee on Agriculture

December 10, 2025

Good morning Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member Craig, thank you for the opportunity to speak for Member's Day. On behalf of California's 21st District, I look forward to giving testimony and hearing from my colleagues here in Congress on their priorities as we look towards reauthorizing the Farm Bill and important matters under the jurisdiction of the Committee.

The first Farm Bill, the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933 was a key part of the New Deal to support our nation in a time of dire need.¹ Since 1933, the Farm Bill has become known as the bill that is vital to America's production of food and fiber. The twelve title Farm Bill that we have come to know today did not appear overnight but was shaped by the unique periods of time in American history. From the Great Depression to World War II, the Civil Rights Movement to the Cold War, and from Y2K to the 2020s. Throughout each of these time periods, our nation went through periods of difficult challenges, which tested the will of our democracy and the will of the American people. The twelve titles in the Farm Bill are viewed as America's safety net with each title containing pertinent programs that contribute towards building a stronger food supply network, improving the livelihood of our nation, reducing food insecurity, and taking meaningful steps in combatting climate change. As I have always stated, food security is national security. Any attempt to cut our food safety net is an attempt to cut our national security.

California's 70,251 farms and ranches are remarkably productive given their average size: 70% of these farms are less than 100 acres, and 89% are less than 500 acres. California produces 50% of the nation's fruits, nuts, and vegetables; 20% of our nation's milk supply; and more than 400 different agricultural commodities. This food production goes towards supporting nearly 5 million Californians who rely on SNAP,² who are a part of the 47.4 million plus who are food insecure. Our farmers, ranchers, and dairymen and woman want to provide for their neighbors and communities, not cut them off from accessing America's dinner table. When our communities cannot afford food, it means our neighbors have one less tool to help in their daily life. The not-so-Beautiful Bill took food assistance away from nearly 5 million Californians. In my district alone, there are nearly 30% of households who rely on SNAP – over 67,000 out of 230,000 homes. Among these households – 60% include a child, 34% include an elderly person, and 46% include someone living with a disability. When it comes to WIC – it is estimated about 43,000

¹<https://www.loc.gov/ghe/cascade/index.html?appid=1821e70c01de48ae899a7ff708d6ad8b&bookmark=Farm%20Bills>

² <https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/california.department.of.social.services/viz/CFdashboard-PUBLIC/Home>

families rely on it – combining WIC and SNAP – it equals 256,000 people who are reliant on Food Safety Net Programs, which is 33% of California's 21st District. We must ensure to work together to strengthen and improve such programs, not cut them when Americans are struggling with the high cost of food. The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated SNAP still needs additional strengthening – such as including my bill, the Dairy Nutrition Incentives Program Act of 2025 which aims to enhance access to dairy products for SNAP recipients by providing incentives for the purchase of protein dairy items such as milk, yogurt, and cheese. Additional improvements include adding hot foods to SNAP, ensuring college students are eligible for SNAP, and ensuring our Veterans have continued access for their families.

California produces \$61 billion annually at the farm gate and has a total export value of \$22.4 billion. Out of the \$22.4 billion, 24% of those exports (\$5.4 billion) go to Canada and Mexico. With many of those specialty crops and dairy coming from my district, it is critical we continue to prioritize our trading relationships with our North American partners and other allies globally to ensure sustained market access. Tariffing our allies and partners is not a conducive way to gaining market access. Crops cost more than ever to produce – it is critical market access sustains and are not eliminated because of this Trump administration's decisions to continue to impose tariffs on our longstanding trade partners and allies. I have consistently led the charge on ensuring the Market Access Program, Foreign Market Development Program, and Food for Peace Program, continues to have dedicated funding in the Farm Bill and will continue to do so.

It also is imperative to ensure no more further cuts are made by USDA regarding agriculture research. Funding in the Farm Bill must reflect continued investment in programs such as the Specialty Crop Research Initiative and the Specialty Crop Block Grant. Farm Bill funding must expand USDA's participation and research support through the University of California System, California State University system, and minority-serving institutional agricultural research programs. Funds must be sustained for these research programs, and investments must be made for programs that showcase the future of agricultural research and technology. These programs are critical towards enhancing the future workforce for farms and ranches as we continue to ensure farm workers are able to use the best and safest available technology. These programs are also key to USDA plant pest and disease prevention research and inclusion of a waiver of matching fund requirements would allow for enhanced research. Additional investments in supporting organic research and a robust specialty crop insurance program is critical for producers throughout the State.

Since the enactment of the 2018 Farm Bill, California has continued to experience record wildfires and drought. Conservation programs, hazardous fuels reduction, and managing our forests effectively continues to be a top priority for California. My priorities include the Conserving Our Waste Sustainably (COWS) Act, the Headwaters Protection

Act, and the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) Improvement and Flexibility Act. Each of these bills would strengthen existing programs and add new conservation practices. The COWS Act aims to add a list of new alternative manure management practices to the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and ensure carbon and nitrous oxide reductions are prioritized. The Headwaters Protection Act would reform and increase authorization for the Water Source and Protection Program to allow for further public and private partnerships in forestry and watershed management. The CRP Improvement and Flexibility Act would increase the annual CRP payment limitation and provide a cost-share for establishment of grazing infrastructure, reinstate mid-contract management cost-share payments, and permanently establishes State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) practices. Such enhancements are needed and necessary to ensure our sustainable groundwater goals and greenhouse gas reductions.

The Good Neighbor Authority program is also a key tool in wildfire risk reduction and can be more effective in providing jobs in rural and tribal communities. Reform to the program must center around increased funding that promotes benefits for California as a whole. These benefits include access for counties and tribal partners to retain and expand Good Neighbor Authority timber sales revenue, in addition to reducing wildfire risk while providing jobs to rural and tribal communities. Stewardship contracts should be considered as a vital tool to help encourage partnerships towards critical projects. Lastly, reduction of hazardous and additional biomass materials helps provide for long-term ecological sustainability of our forests while sequestering carbon and providing material for new sustainable products.

It is beyond unfortunate that my colleagues across the aisle had moved forward with the not-so-Beautiful Bill. I still am in disbelief, but we must work to strengthen and improve our safety net programs, conduct appropriate oversight, ensure our farmers, ranchers, and dairy men and woman have the tools to feed our nation and the world, and ensure Americans have continuous access to America's dinner table with no interruption. I want to remind my colleagues that we have a duty to defend the Constitution, represent our constituents, and protect our nation. Gutting our food security is leaving our national security vulnerable.