



HOUSE SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE
CLIMATE CRISIS

Opening Statement of Chair Kathy Castor
Hearing on “Climate Smart from Farm to Fork:
Building an Affordable and Resilient Food Supply Chain”
May 24, 2022

As prepared for delivery

Year after year, families are able to put food on the table thanks to the farmers, growers, and ranchers who produce it, as well as the factory workers, truckers, and retailers who transport and distribute it. But the climate crisis is increasingly challenging their ability to stock food shelves across the country. Just last year, major disasters left \$12.5 billion in damages to U.S. crops and rangelands, according to the American Farm Bureau Federation. The losses are widespread. In North Dakota, persistent drought damaged over 2.4 billion dollars’ worth of wheat, soybeans, corn, and other crops. Texas lost about \$2 billion in the aftermath of a winter storm, a hurricane, and a combination of other disasters. And California lost about half a billion dollars worth of fruit and nut crops like almonds and grapes. Things will worsen if we don’t address these climate impacts – and the costs and consequences will be passed on to consumers.

That’s why Congress must invest in a climate-smart food system, one that lowers costs for consumers and ensures food security for generations to come. Each step in the food supply chain presents an opportunity for innovations – like updating laws around food donation and food labelling; strengthening procurement policies for sustainable school lunch programs; and increasing access to technical assistance for underserved producers. And every American along the food chain – from producers to consumers and everyone in between – can help make our food supply chain more sustainable.

As farmers, ranchers, and other producers integrate climate-smart agricultural practices into their operations, Congress must take significant steps to expand solutions from farm to fork. That means supporting urban agriculture and other innovative means of production. It means improving food distribution at the local and regional level. And it means working to reduce food waste and loss.

Many of these solutions can have an immediate impact. And the urgency of action cannot be understated. The food supply system makes up nearly 30% of global heat-trapping pollution, and it’s a significant driver of biodiversity loss, deforestation, degraded soils, desertification, and water scarcity. That’s why our Climate Crisis Action Plan emphasized the importance of transforming the food supply chain in our fight to limit global temperatures. Proper regenerative grazing techniques, for example, can improve the soil’s ability to sequester carbon. Reducing food waste can help cut methane pollution. And helping farmers use innovative feed additives – like seaweed, fats, or oils – can greatly reduce methane emissions from livestock.

With the support of President Biden and his American Rescue Plan, we've been able to make progress. That law invested \$3.6 billion to support food distribution in response to the COVID pandemic, while also investing in programs to expand local and regional food systems and support historically disadvantaged farmers. We also made progress through this year's government funding legislation, which included \$8.5 million for the Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production Program; \$4.5 million for researching alternative proteins; \$12 million for Farm to School grants; and more than \$20 million for the Local Agricultural Market Program. The Biden-Harris Administration also invested more than \$10 billion for USDA and USAID to make our food system more resilient and equitable. And in February, USDA announced its billion-dollar Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities opportunity, which will support farmers, ranchers and forest owners who use climate-smart practices in order to create market opportunities for agricultural products.

Now it's time to make more progress. Investing in a resilient and climate-smart food supply chain will drive down costs while reducing pollution and emissions. And it will create a food system that works for all Americans, ensuring access to safe, healthy food for generations to come.