

A call to

PRESIDENTIAL ACTION

★ Elevating Food and Agriculture as a National Priority ★



Our food and agricultural system from “farm to fork” is vital to the health of our nation, but facing a period of enormous transition. Presidential leadership is critical. The right policies can directly improve the health of America’s farms, families, economy and the environment.

So far, farmers and ranchers have overcome challenges with market volatility, drought, floods, pathogens, and pests, enabling the food and agriculture system to contribute roughly five percent of GDP¹ and employ more than 12 million people.² But, American agriculture is under great threat and its continued success depends on targeted research and improved policies.

Far beyond the farm, the right food and agriculture policies and program investments can improve health and nutrition nationwide, and reduce hunger. More than 1 in 6 Americans are food insecure and face challenges accessing and affording nutritious food.³ Poor diets put

86 million American adults at risk for type 2 diabetes,⁴ a disease that cost \$245 billion in 2012.⁵ Better diets and adequate nutrition will benefit individuals and the national budget.

The health of our land and water is also threatened as climatic conditions put crops and our environment at risk. The drought cost California agriculture \$1.84 billion in 2015.⁶ Water quality issues have led to drinking water bans and lawsuits in Ohio and Iowa: warning signs that must be heeded. New approaches to conservation are crucial to improving water quality and soil health.

Since 2011, [AGree](#) has engaged more than 2,000 of the best minds in food and agriculture to identify key issues and opportunities. We have developed consensus recommendations that will drive positive change, as highlighted below with links to in-depth insight.

A HEALTHY ECONOMY

Food- and agriculture-related industries contributed \$878 billion to U.S. GDP in 2013.⁷ **Smart changes** to food and agricultural policies can help revitalize our economy.

Firing-up the engine of innovation through Research & Innovation

Research drives innovation, which powers the economy. Strong leadership is needed to sharply focus food and agricultural research on critical challenges, from drought and weather volatility to obesity and water quality. We must address chronic underfunding of this research, which limits innovation and U.S. competitiveness. [more](#)

Ensuring a stable workforce through Immigration Reform

Agriculture is hamstrung by an unreliable labor supply. We must create a system through which citizenship can

be earned by undocumented immigrants currently in the U.S. and develop a simple, efficient, and fair guest worker program that allows producers to hire seasonal foreign workers. [more](#)

Empowering the Next Generation to ensure a safe and affordable food supply

The average age of a U.S. farmer is 58,⁸ and new entrants face enormous challenges. Our economy depends on a reliable food supply, so we must address land and equipment acquisition barriers faced by new entrants and provide training that enables them to produce affordable food. [more](#)

HEALTHY FAMILIES

More than 35 percent of American adults are obese.⁹ The healthcare costs of obesity are estimated to range from \$147 billion to nearly \$210 billion per year.¹⁰ Meanwhile, more than 48 million Americans suffer from food insecurity,¹¹ bringing the number of food insecure worldwide to nearly 800 million people.¹² **Smart changes** will improve the health of Americans and address hunger worldwide.

Improving Americans' health and reducing health costs through Food & Nutrition

Systemwide changes are needed to address hunger and improve nutrition. The federal safety net for vulnerable seniors, families, and individuals must be maintained and continue to evolve to maximize impact. Public policy must also support the scaling of innovative efforts across the country to address hunger as well as improve health by more directly linking food and diet to disease treatment and prevention. [more](#)

Responding to changing consumer demands through Local Food

Local food is a growing part of American agriculture, and

public policies must be balanced to better serve local and regional systems. Supporting local market development can contribute to local job creation, environmental sustainability, and improved nutrition, health, food access, and equity. [more](#)

Addressing global hunger and malnutrition through International Development

Global agricultural development is a proven strategy for reducing hunger and poverty in developing countries, contributing to self-sufficiency, regional stability, and development of markets for U.S. goods. We must support U.S. legislation that brings permanency to food security programs, with a focus on smallholder agriculture. [more](#)

A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

Soil erosion and nutrient loading are contributing to impaired water quality, while drought threatens key agricultural areas and floods threaten others. Harmful algal blooms result in an estimated economic impact of at least \$82 million annually in the U.S.,¹³ threatening commercial fisheries, sport fishing, and tourism that contribute billions annually to coastal and inland communities.¹⁴ **Smart changes** will protect our soil, water and coastal resources for future generations, while improving agricultural productivity.

Strengthening Risk Management policies and practices

Federal crop insurance strengthens our agriculture sector and supports producers as they implement new practices; it is also a costly program that will continue to come under political scrutiny. We must reshape risk management programs to appropriately balance risk protection and costs while also leveling the playing field for producers who adopt conservation practices. Integration of data on soil, yield risk, and conservation practices is needed.

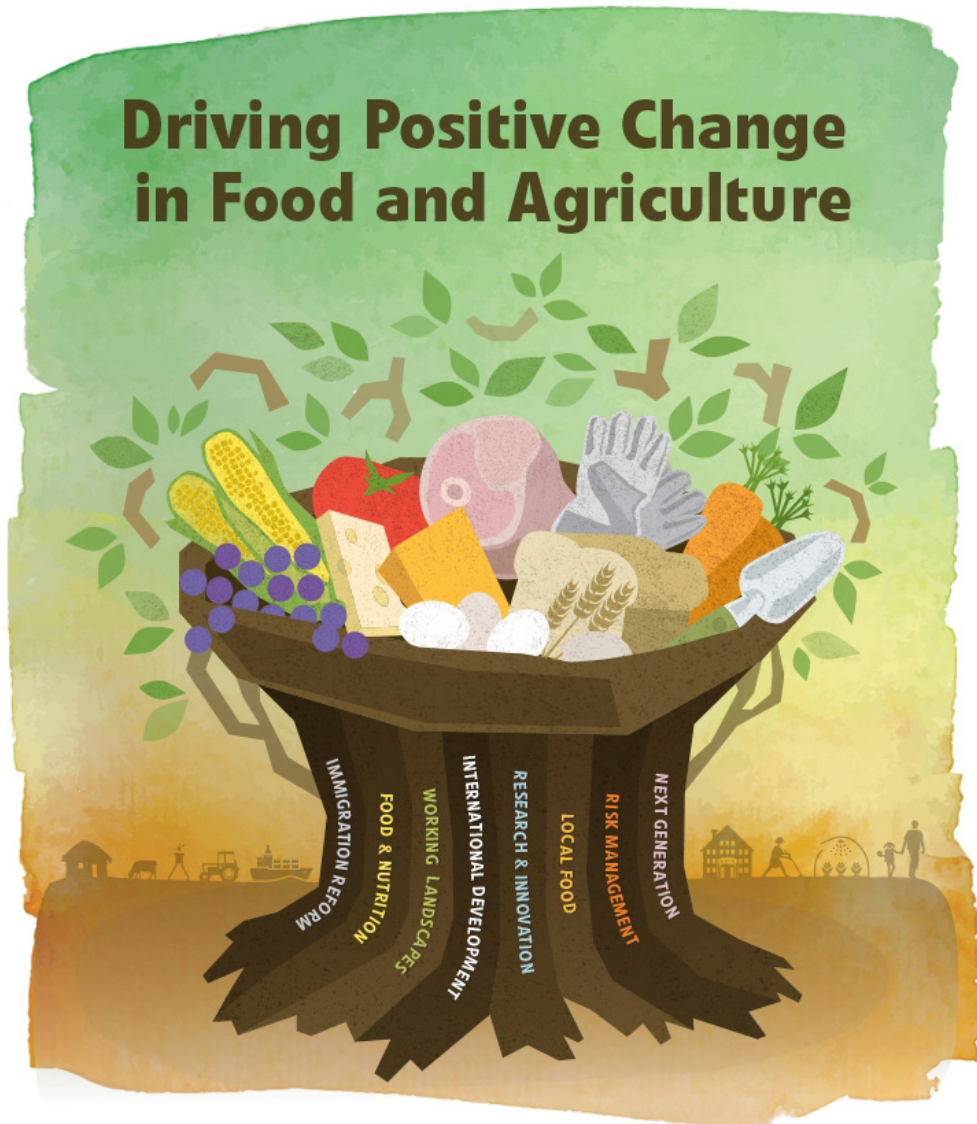
Bolstering conservation and Working Landscapes

Regulations alone cannot ensure the landscape-level actions needed to manage water supplies, sustain soil health, and preserve natural habitat. New models are needed. We must adopt policies that encourage producer-led, watershed-scale efforts that involve the supply chain and demonstrate effectiveness and a measurable return on investment. [more](#)



AGree has forged unprecedented common ground between farmers and ranchers, companies, researchers, environmentalists, doctors and nutritionists, and other experts who understand that food and agriculture underpin the very wellbeing of our nation.

We are committed to finding solutions and stand by to serve as a resource to candidates interested in spurring transformative change.



Questions and meeting requests can be directed to Deborah Atwood, AGree Executive Director, at (202) 354-6447 or datwood@merid.org. Also available for consultation are AGree's bipartisan group of Co-Chairs, former U.S. Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman, former U.S. Agriculture Deputy Secretaries Jim Moseley and Kathleen Merrigan, and former U.S. Agency for International Development Assistant Administrator Emmy Simmons.



End Notes

¹ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. [“What is agriculture’s share of the overall U.S. economy?”](#) Value Added by Industry Series. U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis, 07 May 2015; U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. [“Marketing Bill Dollar 2013.”](#) Food Dollar Series, 2015; Chanil, Debra, Joan Driggs, and Jim Dudliceck. [Stretching Consumer Spend.](#) Progressive Grocer’s 67th Annual Consumer Expenditures Study. Progressive Grocer, July 2014; World Bank. [GDP \(current US\\$\).](#) World Bank National Accounts and OECD National Accounts data, 2015. Websites Accessed 8 December 2015. *Note: calculated by adding agriculture’s share of the U.S. economy in 2013 (\$789 billion) to the value added by supermarkets in 2013 (13.1 percent of total supermarket food and beverage sales of \$683 billion). This number was divided by total GDP in 2013 (\$16.8 trillion) to find the percentage contribution.*

² Bureau of Labor Statistics. [Employed persons by detailed occupation and age.](#) Current Population Survey. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 12 February 2015. *Note: calculated by adding together the number of employees in all of food- and agriculture-related industries as listed in the 2014 population survey.*

³ Coleman-Jensen, Alisha, Matthew P. Rabbitt, Christian Gregory and Anita Singh. [Household Food Security in the United States in 2014.](#) U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, September 2015.

⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. [National Diabetes Statistics Report, 2014: Estimates of Diabetes and Its Burden in the United States.](#) Department of Health and Human Services, Atlanta, GA, 2014. *Note: 2012 data. Risk for Type 2 Diabetes is defined as incidence of prediabetes among people aged 20 years or older.*

⁵ American Diabetes Association. [Economic costs of diabetes in the U.S. in 2012.](#) Diabetes Care 36.4 (2013): 1033-1046.

⁶ Howitt, Richard E., Duncan MacEwan, Josué Medellín-Azuara, Jay R. Lund, and Daniel A. Sumner. [Economic Analysis of the 2015 Drought for California Agriculture.](#) Center for Watershed Sciences, University of California–Davis, 17 August 2015.

⁷ See end note 1.

⁸ U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistics Service. [Preliminary Report Highlights: U.S. Farms and Farmers.](#) 2012 Census of Agriculture, February 2015.

⁹ National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases. [“Overweight and Obesity Statistics.”](#) U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, October 2012. Accessed 8 December 2015.

¹⁰ The State of Obesity. [“The Healthcare Costs of Obesity.”](#) Trust for America’s Health and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Accessed 8 December 2015.

¹¹ Coleman-Jensen, Alisha, Matthew P. Rabbitt, Christian Gregory and Anita Singh. [Household Food Security in the United States in 2014.](#) U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, September 2015.

¹² Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. [“The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2015.”](#) Accessed 8 December 2015.

¹³ National Ocean Service. [“Harmful Algal Blooms.”](#) National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, 11 August 2014. Accessed 8 December 2015.

¹⁴ National Ocean Service, NOAA, and Gulf of Mexico Alliance. [Gulf of Mexico at a Glance.](#) U.S. Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Washington, DC, June 2008.