

Sustainability

Building a Healthy, Equitable, and Sustainable Food System via the Farm Bill

Food systems depend on natural resources to meet current and future demand. Indeed, for the sake of future generations, **how we produce our food today matters as much as what we produce.**

Land, water, climate, and biodiversity are the building blocks of all food systems. But not all food systems are created equal when it comes to their environmental footprints. Food systems that rely primarily on **industrial-scale production practices are more harmful to the environment.**

In the United States, many of the industrial agricultural practices used today—the dominant form of production in our food system—are **a leading cause of ecosystem destruction**, and this only becomes worse over time as natural resources are depleted and cannot regenerate.



Food systems are one of the major contributors to global climate change. Carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide are the primary emissions produced in food systems. The majority of carbon dioxide emissions in U.S. agriculture come from soil management.¹ Healthy soils are not only crucial to sequestering carbon, but also supply seeds, and in turn crops, with more nutrients. In other words, climate change is reducing the nutritional content of food itself.



Floods, storms, heatwaves, droughts, and other climate-related weather events are coming faster and harder, evidence of the intensifying effects of climate change. **Climate change pushes tens of millions of people in dozens of countries into hunger each year**, and scientists warn that hunger crises on a much larger scale are right around the corner, depending on how the global community responds now and over the next decade.²



The international and intergenerational inequities of climate change are why it is referred to as a “**climate justice**” issue. People who did the least to cause the problem are suffering most, and very few of today’s government decisionmakers will be alive after mid-century, but nearly all children will be and forced to grapple with the effects of the lack of urgency that today’s leaders are treating the climate crisis.

Climate scientists consider reducing food loss and waste to be one of the most effective climate change solutions.³ **About one-third of all the food produced in the United States each year goes to waste.** Compared to many of the other actions essential to address climate change, reducing food loss and waste is one in which substantial progress can be achieved quickly.

Not only does food loss and waste contribute to global climate change, it results in vast amounts of lost nutrition. U.S. annual food waste and loss is currently between **73 million and 152 million metric tons**, which, according to the Environmental Protection Agency, is enough calories to feed more than **150 million people, or “all the food insecure people in America nearly four times over.”**⁴ Moreover, the largest share of U.S. food waste is fresh produce, the healthiest, most nutrient-rich foods inaccessible to most families receiving SNAP. As Bread for the World has often explained,⁵ food security and environmental sustainability are always interconnected.



¹ https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/USDA_Conservation_Trends.pdf
² <https://www.oxfamamerica.org/explore/research-publications/hunger-in-a-heating-world/>
³ <https://www.wastedive.com/news/project-drawdown-climate-change-zero-waste-number-one/573660/>
⁴ <https://www.reuters.com/markets/commodities/despite-pledge-us-still-wastes-more-than-third-its-food-epa-2021-12-02/>
⁵ <https://www.bread.org/article/climate-change-is-a-hunger-issue/>

