

2025 RURAL POLICY ACTION REPORT

Roadmap for Rural Progress

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We talk. We act. We get it done.

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Six Action

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Our Roots Run Deep

New Rural Project

Rural Organizing .org

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Contributing organizations provided important ideas in their policy area of expertise but may not have positions on every aspect of the report.



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View the report online at RuralPolicyAction.us



Maine People's Alliance

Our Call to Action

Rural America must lead in building a more prosperous, sustainable, and just future for the entire country. Rural people demonstrate fundamental American values like defending working people, investing in locally driven solutions, protecting core freedoms, and respecting our close connection to the land. Yet our rural communities are often ignored or actively harmed by the policy choices of elected leaders and the unchecked power of corporations and the ultrawealthy. The Rural Policy Action Report is a roadmap to build momentum for policies that deliver for rural people.

The policies outlined in this report are popular. (**See page 41**.) More than that, they also reflect meaningful and urgent needs informed by rural leaders and their communities.

A broad coalition of organizations and local elected officials contributed to the report. These groups represent diverse geographies, issue expertise, and constituents. Together, they form a cornerstone of a governing majority coalition, giving rural people power to influence the decisions that impact their lives.

When rural people have a seat at the policy-making table, we build an economy from the bottom up and middle out, not the top down. For instance, last year, Missourians organized a ballot initiative and voted to raise the statewide minimum wage and establish paid sick leave. **This pro-worker ballot initiative was more popular than any statewide candidate, and you can read more about it on page 15.**

Rural people face significant challenges, and we work with our neighbors to overcome them. The government should invest in these rural-led solutions. In one successful example, the community in Yakutat, Alaska, utilized federal funding to repair a failing municipal heating system. This investment kept the school in session and created energy efficiency that will save millions while reducing greenhouse gas emissions. **Read more and watch the video on page 36.**

The federal government should learn from and replicate these success stories by partnering with rural communities. Yet the 2024 success story in Yakutat is much more difficult today, because politicians in Washington cut programs and diverted funds to the ultrawealthy and giant corporations.



New Hampshire Youth Movement

The cuts to programs we rely on go deeper. The massive cuts to health care will raise prices, kick people off of insurance, cause hospitals and health care infrastructure to close, and disrupt rural economies — **see page 21 to learn about how cuts to federal funding will harm health care in rural Appalachia.**

Meanwhile, the federal government is spending billions on a cruel immigration policy that is causing chaos and harming all of us. **On page 29, we share how immigrants, small business owners, and farmers near Marshalltown, Iowa, are working together to build up their community.**

Government policy has a significant impact on the tools and resources available to hard-working rural people to improve our communities. Since our 2021 Rural Policy Action Report, we've achieved major victories, proving when we organize we can make change. However, many of those successes have been reversed in 2025, and new policies create barriers and harsher obstacles. **The Policy Scorecard on page 6 describes the policy landscape, including a detailed accounting of our previous priorities.**

In the face of long-standing challenges and recent setbacks, rural people need hope — a practical vision for how things can get better. And our champions need a positive agenda that can improve rural people's lives and deliver promised lower costs, higher wages, and freedom to make choices about their own lives.

This report is full of rural people and the policy actions they dream of for a better life for themselves and generations to come. Join this committed coalition of rural advocates taking action.

This report is full of rural people and the policy actions they dream of for a better life for themselves and generations to come. Join this committed coalition of rural advocates taking action. With sustained engagement from political and nonprofit leaders, rural communities will help create this future for us all.



Sarah Jaynes,
Rural Democracy Initiative



Northern Plains Resource Council members gather for area water well monitoring.

The Rural Policy Scorecard 2021-2025

Rural people are ready for solutions that support workers and exercise the power to shape decisions about the towns and rural areas we call home. In 2021, rural groups from across the country identified the most pressing and popular policies, which we published in previous versions of the Rural Policy Action Report. In the years following, we successfully advocated for many of these policies.

The biggest policy progress was in 2021 and 2022 with significant investments in farm conservation, rural renewable energy, economic development, and relief for farm families discriminated against by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Policy gains stalled with the 2023-2024 Congress, and progress was almost exclusively from the Executive Branch and at the state level. Examples from those two years include the new Packers and Stockyards rules that begin to rein in corporate meatpackers. We also saw progress at the state level with ballot initiatives to pass minimum wage and paid sick leave in states like Missouri, and numerous states are making progress on people's right to repair their own property. Some of the most significant achievements are multi-year projects with the full results yet to be realized. One challenge is that many of the changes were technical and lacked trusted champions to demonstrate their impact on people's lives. Even with these gains, corporations and the ultrawealthy still have too much power over our lives, with working people struggling to make ends meet.

Now in 2025, many of our recent policy gains are being rolled back. Unfortunately, working people face new barriers and harsher obstacles. Early in 2025, several federal programs were frozen and contracts necessary to rural communities were canceled, frozen, or rescinded. These included funding to purchase food directly from farmers to provide healthy meals for school kids in their communities, support for rural infrastructure improvements, and so much more. Additionally, rules that hold corporations accountable and keep people safe were ignored or reversed, such as rules for the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Labor. In the summer of 2025, Congress cut health care, diverted federal funds away from public schools, and disrupted other critical programs so the wealthy can have tax breaks. The law will kick millions off their health care, take food off the table of those with the least, and increase the cost of everything from health insurance to electric bills for working people.

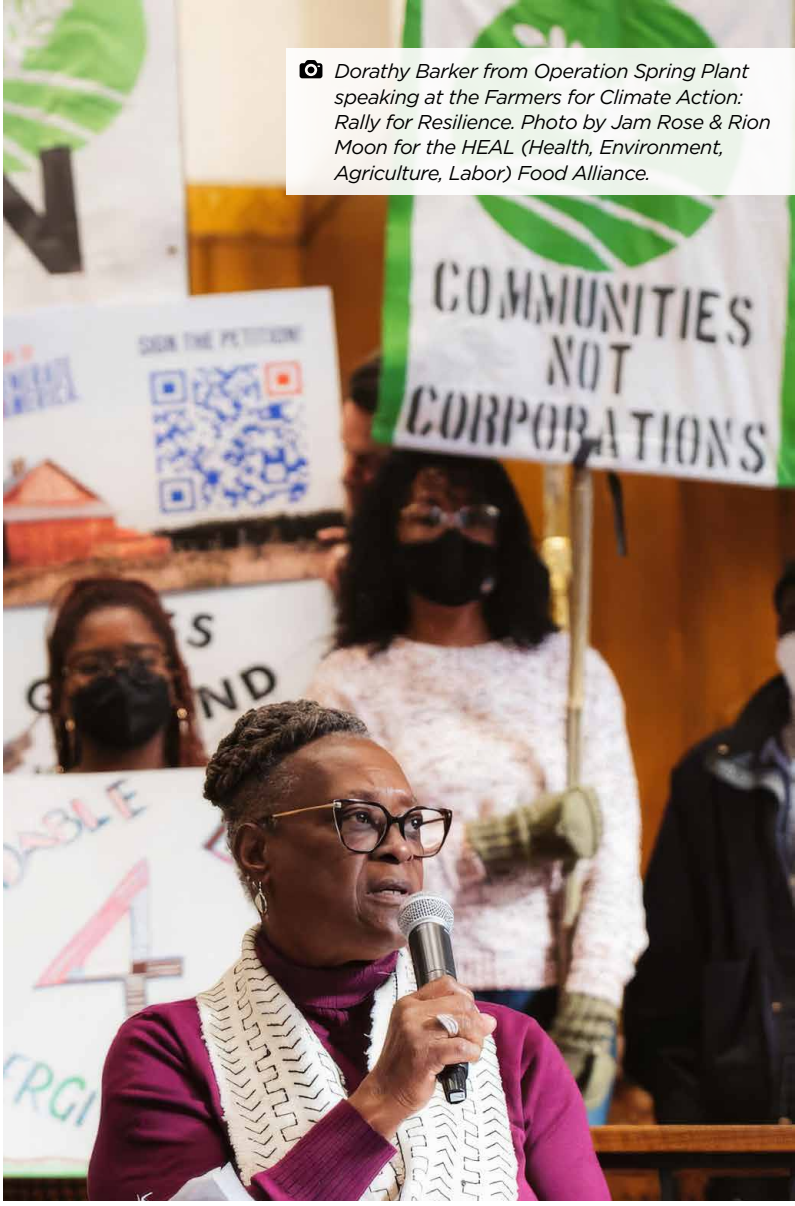
Yet rural people remain committed to practical solutions that deliver for everyday people. Read below for a look back on the policy progress and rollbacks prior to September 2025. See the rest of the report for a look ahead at the biggest policy priorities right now for rural America.

PILLAR ONE SCORECARD

Rein in corporate greed and support workers, small businesses, and farmers

Biden's order on Competition in the American Economy directed agencies across the federal government to rein in giant corporations that have unfairly monopolized markets, hurting small businesses and driving up costs for America's families. While this was an important and unprecedented order, agencies often moved slowly. Examples of progress include the USDA finalizing three rules that will improve fairness for producers, particularly those who grow livestock under contract. It supported poultry farmers to get better pay by effectively ending a deeply anti-competitive payment scheme from one of the world's largest poultry processors. It also established a Chief Competition Officer and opened the Cattle Contracts Library Pilot Program. The USDA proposed a fourth rule to establish criteria for fair and competitive markets in the livestock, meat, and poultry industries, yet the rule wasn't completed. During the Biden Administration, we did not accomplish nearly as much as many had hoped in revising the Packers and Stockyards Act. We made significant progress, but only a small step towards combating corporate power.

Trump revoked the 2021 order on Competition in the American Economy.



Dorathy Barker from Operation Spring Plant speaking at the Farmers for Climate Action: Rally for Resilience. Photo by Jam Rose & Rion Moon for the HEAL (Health, Environment, Agriculture, Labor) Food Alliance.

Biden's Department of Justice (DOJ) and Federal Trade Commission (FTC) opened a wide range of investigations. The DOJ's lawsuit and proposed consent decree to prohibit Koch Foods from imposing termination penalties for its chicken grower contracts removes an anticompetitive tool used by abusive meatpacking corporations. It also launched a new enforcement effort with state attorneys general to address anticompetitive and anti-consumer practices in food and agricultural markets.

After the Trump Administration removed two FTC members, the FTC voted to drop the suit.

DOJ and FTC's new merger guidelines help restore competition in the economy to the benefit of farmers, consumers, and small businesses. The 2021-2022 Congress increased funding for antitrust enforcement by passing the Merger Filing Fee Modernization Act, which increases the fees companies pay when they propose mergers. This act gives antitrust enforcers the resources they need to ensure that corporations don't hurt working people and small businesses and play by the rules.

Right-to-repair laws have seen significant progress, including the FTC's 2024 investigation and subsequent collaboration with several states in a lawsuit against John Deere's anticompetitive practices. Colorado also became the first state to enact laws guaranteeing the right to repair farm equipment, with many more states considering similar enactments.

Rural workers won big at the ballot box in 2024, with minimum wage and paid sick leave initiatives winning in Alaska, Nebraska, and Missouri.

But workers' rights remain under attack by the Trump Administration with threats to dismantle essential agencies like the National Labor Relations Board, efforts to eliminate dozens of worker safety rules, rescinding an important overtime rule, and unprecedented federal immigration raids at work sites across the country.

88% of rural voters support cracking down on meat processing monopolies and ensuring local businesses can compete.

The Biden Administration cracked down on misleading 'antibiotic-free' meat and poultry labeling that stunts the growth of our local and regional food systems. It updated the requirement that the agency's red meat purchases must come from animals born, raised, and slaughtered in the U.S. The FTC adopted transparency rules governing "Made in the USA" labeling, and the USDA finalized a rule closing the loophole so that only meat, poultry, and eggs that are born, raised, and processed in the U.S. can be labeled "Product of USA."

The 2021-2022 Congress invested $20 billion in voluntary conservation programs to reduce emissions and mitigate climate change. In a rare victory, these funds did not include the typical 50% requirement for livestock operations — an important step in reducing taxpayers' funding of Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations.

The 2025 One Big Beautiful Bill Act increases subsidies for the largest commodity crop farms without funding dozens of programs that support smaller farmers and those selling food to their neighbors through local and regional markets.



Nevada state legislators on an agriculture tour hosted by State Innovation Exchange and local farmers.

PILLAR TWO SCORECARD

Invest in foundational infrastructure for thriving communities

After calls to better support rural communities, President Biden directed his administration to prioritize rural communities in funding decisions, issuing a Rural Playbook and piloting rural-focused programs at rural.gov.

The Biden administration made significant investments in rural communities. The 2021 American Rescue Plan directly supported millions of Americans, including working people in rural communities, in the form of payments, tax credits, and small business support. The 2022 RECOMPETE Pilot Program authorized $1 billion in new investments to distressed communities, nine out of ten of which are rural. Tribal governments were included as eligible entities for this funding.



Farmer grant writing workshop with Western Colorado Alliance

Fixing the unfair two-tier tax system is a consistent priority for rural communities. The 2021- 2022 Congress required large corporations that make over $1 billion annually to pay a corporate minimum tax and finally required wealthy households making over $400,000 annually to pay what they owe in taxes after years of tax-dodging. But these gains were overshadowed by the massive tax breaks for corporations and the wealthy in 2025.

The 2021-2022 Congress improved health care access and empowered Medicare to negotiate prescription drug prices and save taxpayers money. The number of uninsured dropped in 2021 - 2023, while enrollment in the Affordable Care Act (ACA) marketplaces reached record highs in early 2025.

The 2025 One Big Beautiful Bill Act cuts $1 trillion in federal Medicaid spending over the next decade, which is projected to disproportionately affect rural areas. This health care cut poses an existential threat to the viability of hundreds of rural hospitals already operating on precarious financial margins. The law also cuts billions from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which will lead to rural people going hungry and produce adverse ripple effects throughout local rural economies, including reducing revenue for local grocers.

92% of rural voters support ensuring rural hospitals receive the essential funding they need to stay open & cracking down on drug companies that are price gouging for essential medicines.

The 2022 Postal Service Reform Act guaranteed the United States Postal Service can remain an essential point of connection for families across the country, no matter where they live. Unfortunately, the United States Postal Service is currently prioritizing distribution consolidation following a corporate model that is leading to slower and less reliable service for all Americans, but particularly rural communities, often far from distribution operations.

2021-2022 Congress funded $65 billion to ensure that every household in America is connected to high-speed internet. In addition, it funded unprecedented state and local government resources to support connectivity for school children, health care, and other institutions. But the pace of the infrastructure build-out has been slow and relied heavily on private telecommunications businesses, resulting in criticism that the industry is choosing to expand projects with higher population density and leaving most rural communities behind.



With support from the Local Food Purchase Assistance Program, Skenandore Farm provided food to 11 Tribal nations in Wisconsin.

The Biden Administration took action to strengthen local food systems and get healthy, locally grown food to communities by creating new programs like the Local Food Purchase Assistance Program (LFPA) and the Local Food for Schools Program (LFS).

The Trump Administration canceled the Local Food Purchase Assistance Program.

The 2021-2022 Congress expanded work-based learning and apprenticeships that will help prepare more rural students for today's in-demand jobs.

The 2025 One Big Beautiful Bill Act diverts billions from public schools to private schools. The voucher tax credit could cost taxpayers up to $51 billion a year, more than the federal government spends on all public K–12 education.

The Trump administration disrupted or canceled thousands of federal contracts, leaving rural communities that had outlayed critical resources in a financial jam.

> "We need public investment that strengthens rural infrastructure, safeguards good union jobs, and stops the wave of privatization and closures that threaten the very heart of our communities."
>
> –Melissa Cropper, Ohio Federation of Teachers

PILLAR THREE SCORECARD

Protect People's Freedom to Live and Work Safely and Without Discrimination

The 2021-2022 Congress recognized the long history of discrimination in USDA lending. Nearly $5 billion was appropriated to forgive loans for Black, Indigenous, and people of color farmers and launch an equity commission. When conservative organizations and judges blocked this policy, Congressional champions went back to work and amended the law to ensure distressed borrowers didn't lose their farms.

But the Trump administration is dismantling programs that further equity and diversity, firing personnel and ending programs that use words like discrimination, Black, or minority.

> "Across race and place we share more in common than what might seem different. We all deserve a say in policy that impacts the people and places we love."
>
> –Lisa Whelan, Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement



Black Appalachian Coalition's Storytelling and Policy Summit

The 2021-2022 Congress invested over $31 billion to ensure Tribal communities have the tools to thrive, including land and water protections as well as high-speed internet. The Biden Administration expanded the Small Business Lending Company (SBLC) program — the first time in more than 40 years. Each of the three new SBLC license holders will focus on historically underserved markets, including small businesses in Native, rural, and low-income communities. The USDA took significant steps to make farm lending more flexible and accessible in late 2024.

Yet the improvements to access to credit are unlikely to have a serious impact due to the Trump Administration's restructuring and reduction in force at federal agencies like the Small Business Administration, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, and the USDA.

The Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade, opening the door for state governments to infringe on personal freedom and the ability to make health care decisions. Voters in several states responded by passing ballot measures to protect reproductive health care decisions.

While cutting vital health care programs, the Trump Administration is spending billions on detaining hardworking immigrants, separating families, and sending people to places where they are likely to be tortured.

FOUR SCORECARD

Stewarding our Land and Natural Resources for a Prosperous and Sustainable Future

The Biden Administration made the largest direct investments in rural electrification in history, strengthening rural electric cooperatives to accelerate the clean energy transition that will save rural people money, create rural jobs, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The 2021-2022 Congress made renewable energy development on public lands and waters contingent upon continued oil and gas development.

The Biden Administration made significant progress in expanding renewable energy production on federal lands and requiring oil and gas companies to take responsibility for their cleanup.

The 2025-2026 Congress chose to roll back incentives for renewable energy projects and make it much more expensive to develop a renewable energy project on public lands, likely resulting in higher energy bills for most rural Americans. In addition, the Trump administration changed rules to prevent small businesses and farmers from accessing federal programs to build cost-cutting solar and wind projects. These funds will instead benefit big business and giant agricultural operations.

While we protected much of the conservation funding established in previous years, in 2025 we lost important climate-smart agriculture guidelines.

The Trump Administration and the 2025-2026 Congress have weakened environmental review and public comment for federal projects, including exempting certain projects from environmental review, limiting the timeline for public participation, and reducing the timelines and scale of review for all projects. Companies who "pay to play" get special treatment to rush through public review and exemption from judicial review.



With federal investment, Yakutat, Alaska fixes a failing heat system and saves on energy costs. See page 36 for more.

Rural Policy Action Summit



Rural leaders convene to take action on federal and state policy to benefit rural America.

Rural leaders and advocates gathered in Des Moines and Marshalltown, Iowa for the 2025 Rural Policy Action Summit. People from over 50 organizations, from as far as Maine, Florida, Arizona, and Washington, convened in the Heartland for the third bi-annual event. Participants noted the resourcefulness, ingenuity, and commitment of people in rural communities and small towns. They called for federal and state governments to remove barriers and invest in our communities, and expressed frustration about corporate consolidation and the undue influence of the ultrawealthy. The summit was hosted by Rural Democracy Initiative, Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement, American Federation of Teachers, Black Appalachian Coalition, Native Organizers Alliance, Northern Plains Resource Council, State Innovation Exchange, and Wisconsin Farmers Union.

> “Rural people are leading with creativity, grit, and vision. This summit showed what’s possible when we come together to fight for the future we all deserve.”
>
> –Caitlin Cromwell, Director of Organizing at the Northern Plains Resource Council







Photos from the 2025 Rural Policy Action Summit which brought together rural champions from more than 50 grassroots organizations.



Federal Policy Action for Rural Communities

The federal government should pass policies that provide rural people with the tools and opportunities we need to build a good life. Our country runs on the work and innovation of working people. But for decades, big corporations and the ultrawealthy have shaped the government to give them special treatment and put up barriers for the rest of us. It's time to reshape the government for working people.

In rural communities across the country, people are working hard to care for our families and our neighbors. The government can support us with timely, popular, and meaningful policies. We've organized policies into four pillars — the key ingredients for thriving rural communities.

THE FOUR PILLARS TO RESHAPE GOVERNMENT FOR WORKING PEOPLE

1 REIN IN CORPORATE GREED AND SUPPORT WORKERS, SMALL BUSINESSES, AND FARMERS

ISSUES Empower Workers • Lower Costs • Limit Corporate Power • Support Rural Economies • Fair Trade

2 INVEST IN FOUNDATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE FOR THRIVING COMMUNITIES

ISSUES Fair Taxes • Credit • Child Care • Education • Job Training • Infrastructure • Health Care

3 EVERYONE GETS A FAIR DEAL

ISSUES No Cruelty on Taxpayer's Dime • Health Care • Native Nations • Labor Protections • Citizenship • Healthy and Safe Communities • Equal Rights • Voter Access

4 STEWARDING OUR LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES

ISSUES Conserve Our Natural Resources • Public Lands • Renewable Energy Plan • Clean Air and Water

RURAL SPOTLIGHT

Missouri Workers Go Big and Bold (and Win)

By investing in rural organizing, 21 rural counties voted to raise wages and enact a paid sick policy



In a meeting to decide how to proceed on a ballot measure, the sentiment was clear: workers were tired of being told to compromise before they even got to the table. So, Missouri workers went big. They packaged two ambitious worker priorities into a single ballot initiative. Detractors said it was too complicated and would galvanize the opposition.

Workers had a hunch that a broader worker agenda would inspire supporters and overpower any challenges created by stacking the two together. They were right, and in 2024, Missouri voters passed Prop A by a definitive 15 points.

The campaign, led by groups such as the Missouri Jobs with Justice, Missouri Organizing and Voter Engagement Collaborative, and Missouri Workers Center, demonstrates the power of being bold in what we fight for. In doing so, they raised the minimum wage to $13.75 in 2025 and to $15 an hour in 2026 and allowed employees to earn one hour of paid sick leave for every 30 hours worked.

"We've shown the rest of the world, the rest of the country, that regardless of what's going on outside of our state, we're able to come together and win," Terrence Wise of the Missouri Workers Center told Kansas City Public Radio. "We felt that we have the power as everyday Missourians to come together and make our lives better."

Though Missouri groups saw a path to winning Proposition A by focusing on the densest parts of the state, they decided a rural strategy was important for this campaign and future fights.

Taney, a deep red county that sits at the Southern tip of the state, has never supported a progressive ballot initiative. But that changed in 2024. In Taney and other rural communities, workers organized drive-thru signature-gathering events, landed opinion pieces and letters to the editor in local papers, knocked on doors, sent postcards, presented at union meetings and church fish fries, and tabled at county parades and festivals.

The effort paid off. A majority of voters came out in support of the initiative. It was one of 21 counties of less than 100,000 that voted yes on Prop A.



Like Missouri, voters in Nebraska voted to enact paid leave. The ballot measure passed in 89 of 93 counties and was more popular than any statewide candidate. Photo courtesy of Nebraska Appleseed Action Fund.

The effort paid off. A majority of voters came out in support of the initiative. It was one of 21 counties of less than 100,000 that voted yes on Prop A.

In August 2025, statehouse Republicans voted to repeal the paid sick portion of the measure, reversing the will of the people. Because organizing groups in the state went big, they have a bigger base of support and more confidence as they enter the next fight. That power was on display on September 10, when thousands of Missourians filed into the State Capitol, pushing back on a Republican-led effort to do mid-decade redistricting and make voter-led ballot measures harder to pass.

This kind of turnout would be impossible if not for running campaigns that inspire workers and bringing so many new people into worker and community organizations. Though this show of force was in resistance to a power grab, those who showed up did so with a belief that "we can win," because they have, in fact, won.

Organizers in Missouri have a lot to teach:

1) Go big and inspire more people to join, fight, and vote in your favor;

2) Invest in rural, for the present fight and the long haul; and

3) Economic populist solutions resonate with voters across party lines.

We should all keep our eye on the state as their battle for the rights of workers and a democracy that honors the will of the people could provide valuable lessons for the rest of us.



Farmers in mid-Michigan share their stories and outline policy actions to ensure that independent farmers and ranchers can continue their livelihoods. Watch the Progress Michigan video.

PILLAR ONE

Rein in corporate greed and support workers, small businesses, and farmers

ISSUES EMPOWER WORKERS • LOWER COSTS • LIMIT CORPORATE POWER • SUPPORT RURAL ECONOMIES • FAIR TRADE

We need to build an economy that respects hard-working people. When we have what we need — like good-paying jobs with benefits — we are all better off. But for a generation, the federal government has supported big corporations to hoard profits and consolidate land ownership. Wages are too low, and costs keep rising, leaving families struggling. People risk their health from dangerous working conditions, unaffordable prescription drugs, and polluted water. These harms aren't random — they are business decisions, often with government permission. But if the federal government protected us from corporate abuse, then working people would have a safe and level playing field to grow the economy, support thriving local businesses, and drive demand so we can all have a good life.

EMPOWER WORKERS

Rural workers earn less, are less likely to have benefits like paid leave, and are more likely to be injured on the job. But when workers are valued and have more money in their pockets, they can continue to drive demand, support businesses, and keep local economies strong. Workers should be free to:

- Join a union and negotiate wages and working conditions through collective bargaining — without fear of workplace retaliation.[1]
- Work in a safe jobsite — with explicit safety protections from heat, dangerous machinery, and toxins. Potentially dangerous worksites such as meat and poultry facilities, should be checked regularly by OSHA and have clear safety rules for workers.[2]
- Increase the minimum wage nationally to $17/hour by 2030 to ensure no worker earns a poverty wage.[3]
- Work safely without fear of being targeted on the job because of their immigration status or the perception of their immigration status based on their race, ethnicity, culture, or industry.
- Take sick and family leave so workers can take care of themselves and their families.[4]
- Change jobs and avoid abusive non-compete requirements.[5]

For more on labor, see Close the Labor Abuse Loopholes, Pillar 3



MAKE ESSENTIALS AFFORDABLE AND ACCESSIBLE

Everyone should be able to afford groceries, medicine, and other essentials. That means lowering prices and also supporting local businesses so people have access to necessities. This commitment would keep more money in Americans' pockets and help us stay healthy.

- People are struggling to keep up with necessary medications while drug companies walk away with huge profits. The federal government should lower prescription drug prices and improve rural access to medicines.[6]
- Restore funding to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).[7]

1 See the PRO Act and Public Service Freedom to Negotiate Act.

2 The Protecting America's Meatpacking Workers Act expands workplace safety and health requirements. It addresses dangerous workplace conditions and safety for meat and poultry processing facilities by hiring additional OSHA inspectors and expanding protections for workers who exercise their rights under occupational safety laws. The Workplace Violence Protection Act requires the Occupational Safety and Health Administration to develop an enforceable safety standard for health care and social service workers to protect the workers in our communities. The Public Service Worker Protection Act expands the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970 to include public sector workers under its defined safety protections on the job, filling the gap to ensure workers are protected on the job and can come home at the end of the work day. Also see the Farmworker Smoke and Excessive Heat Protection Act of 2025.

3 See the Raise the Wage Act.

4 The Healthy Families Act creates a national standard for earned paid sick days; the FAMILY Act, creates a national standard for paid family leave; Schedules That Work Act protects workers' rights to negotiate hours, location, and scheduling of their work; and the Part Time Workers Bill of Rights Act expands part-time workers' opportunities for becoming full time and makes them eligible for family and sick leave.

5 The Workforce Mobility Act prohibits using noncompete agreements in the context of commercial enterprises, except under certain circumstances.

6 See Strengthening Medicare And Reducing Taxpayer Prices Act, the Lower Drug Costs for Families Act, and reform rural-specific programs like 340B. For more on health care, see "Health Care Access" and "Reproductive Health Care."

7 The 2025 One Big Beautiful Bill Act cut billions from SNAP which will lead to rural people going hungry and reduce revenue for local grocers, threatening even more grocery store closings.

- Ensure access to grocery stores and affordable healthy food in every community, including support for farmers' markets, publicly owned grocery stores, and competition among retailers.[8]
- Establish a rural energy plan to reduce energy prices.[9]
- Lower costs for child care, education, housing, and broadband.[10]

REIN IN UNCHECKED CORPORATE GREED

Giant corporations use their outsized power to push out small businesses, drive down wages, and extract our resources. All the while, corporations get more powerful, and when they make more profit elsewhere, they often disinvest, move operations, and leave our communities to clean up the mess. This overreach is only possible because the government turns a blind eye, or in many cases, actively gives corporations unfair advantages. The government needs to rebalance who has decision-making power and should:

- Ensure fair competition by enforcing and strengthening antitrust policy.[11] Stop incentives for corporate executives from profiting off of harming workers and limit stock buybacks.[12]
- Stop requiring farmers to pay corporate agribusiness lobbying groups that oppose rural priorities. Reform Checkoff Programs and de-fund corporate agribusiness lobbying groups that stand in the way of independent producers.[13]
- Reshape crop insurance and other programs for smaller farms and farms with diverse agricultural operations. Prioritize smaller farms rather than line the pockets of big insurance companies or incentivize corporate investors to drive up farmland prices.
- Empower people to fix their equipment and property through a strong right to repair policy.[14] Corporations have used their market power to take away this right by creating restrictive contracts and denying independent repairers access to critical information. Fixing your own car or tractor or opening a small shop to work on your neighbors' equipment is a long tradition in rural America that corporations shouldn't take away.
- Prevent corporate lobbyists from overruling state and local decisions that shape land use, natural resources, health and safety protections, and food systems.[15]
- Stop the giveaways of public lands and publicly owned natural resources, and oppose the use and expansion of eminent domain for private gain.



Wisconsin Farmers Union

8 For more on supporting local food systems, see "Use Federal Dollars to Support Rural Economies." Furthermore, the 2023 Rural Policy Action Report noted how big box retailers push out local pharmacies and grocery stores, raising prices and hurting access.

9 See "Establish a Rural Energy Plan."

10 See "Child Care" and "Education." For more on housing and broadband, see "Invest in Rural Infrastructure."

11 The Food and Agribusiness Merger Moratorium and Antitrust Review Act is an important model towards dealing with extreme levels of monopolization in the agriculture sector. Enforcement standards and rules related to Robinson-Patman Act and Packers and Stockyard Act are also key mechanisms for fair competition.

12 See the Reward Work Act.

13 See the Opportunities for Fairness in Farming Act.

14 See the Agriculture Right to Repair Act.

15 Protect local decision making power and reject preemption efforts such as The Food Security and Farm Protection Act. Formerly called the EATS Act, if passed it would strip states and local governments of their ability to enact laws on agriculture, food safety, and animal welfare. This federal overreach undermines rural communities' rights to self-determination and threatens a wide range of protections tailored to local needs. The Act has been rebranded as the Food Security and Farm Protection Act and there are attempts to include portions of it in the Farm Bill and other megabill packages.

- Make corporations and the ultrawealthy pay their fair share of taxes.
- Defend the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau and other agencies responsible for making sure corporations don't rip off consumers.

USE FEDERAL DOLLARS TO SUPPORT RURAL ECONOMIES

Use our funding to support rural and locally owned businesses rather than giant corporations.

- Update federal procurement rules to prioritize buying local and from small businesses and companies that provide good jobs.[16]
- Invest in local and regional food systems, small-scale meat processing grants, and programs like the Local School Food Purchasing Program.



- Implement the 10-20-30 where agencies invest at least 10% of appropriated funds in persistent poverty counties where 20% or more of the population has been living below the poverty line for the last 30 years.[17]
- Treat Tribal governments with equality and fairness, ensure Tribal members have better access to federal programs and increase available resources for Tribal infrastructure and economic development, consistent with the federal trust and treaty responsibility. This includes enacting reforms to explicitly include Tribal parity in all aspects of the Farm Bill and expanding opportunities for Tribal communities to self-govern.
- Use federal resources to avoid and mitigate disasters, as well as support rural areas to recover and rebuild.

ENACT TRADE POLICY THAT PRIORITIZES WORKERS, FARMERS, AND SMALL BUSINESSES

Trump's tariffs are wreaking havoc on main streets across America. Our trade policy should:

- Ensure that trade negotiations don't create market chaos and that they focus on the interests of independent farmers and workers, not corporate profits.
- Ensure small businesses aren't hit with unexpected exponential price increases.[18]
- Use tariffs strategically to enforce strong labor, environment, and health standards and to develop industries vital to economic and national security.
- Close loopholes that allow giant corporations to evade tariffs and inspections.
- Strengthen food labeling. Multinational corporations use lax country-of-origin labeling requirements to manipulate and mislead consumers while taking advantage of American farmers and ranchers. Families have a right to know where their food comes from, and it should be easy to identify the American farm products at the grocery store.[19]

16 See the Federal Good Food Purchasing Coalition, Local Agriculture Market Program, Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement Program, Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure Program, and the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program.

17 Eighty-six percent of persistent poverty counties have entirely rural populations. While some federal funding programs use this practice, passing the Targeting Resources to Communities in Need Act of 2021-2022 would expand its use across agencies.

18 See the Small Business Liberation Act, which would have exempted small businesses from the April 2, 2025 tariffs. The U.S. Trade Representative, the Departments of Commerce and the Treasury and the Small Business Administration should work together to develop comprehensive education and resources to help small businesses navigate exemption requests and stay compliant with evolving tariff regulations.

19 Passing the American Beef Labeling Act of 2025 reinstates mandatory "Country of Origin Labeling" on beef and pork.

RURAL SPOTLIGHT

Medicaid Saves Lives

Appalachian advocates draw on personal experience

In the Summer of 2025, Congress and the president cut over a trillion dollars from Medicaid health insurance. Marcia Dinkins wants everyone to understand the life-and-death consequences.

This year, Dinkins' adult daughter in rural Michigan was hospitalized multiple times with a raging infection of her pancreas, spleen, and gallbladder.

Surgery saved her daughter's life. That surgery was possible because of Medicaid.

Dinkins is a parent and grandparent who does everything possible to protect the health and safety of her loved ones. When her kids were young, poor air quality and environmental hazards caused the family physical, mental, and financial anguish. Now, her three adult children have serious medical issues, including seizures and pulmonary embolisms.

The Dinkins family isn't the only one impacted by federal healthcare policy. She founded the Black Appalachian Coalition to close race and gender health disparities. Through her work in the Bluegrass region of Kentucky, she met Linda Brown. Like Dinkins, Brown is a staunch advocate for affordable health care, driven by personal experience.

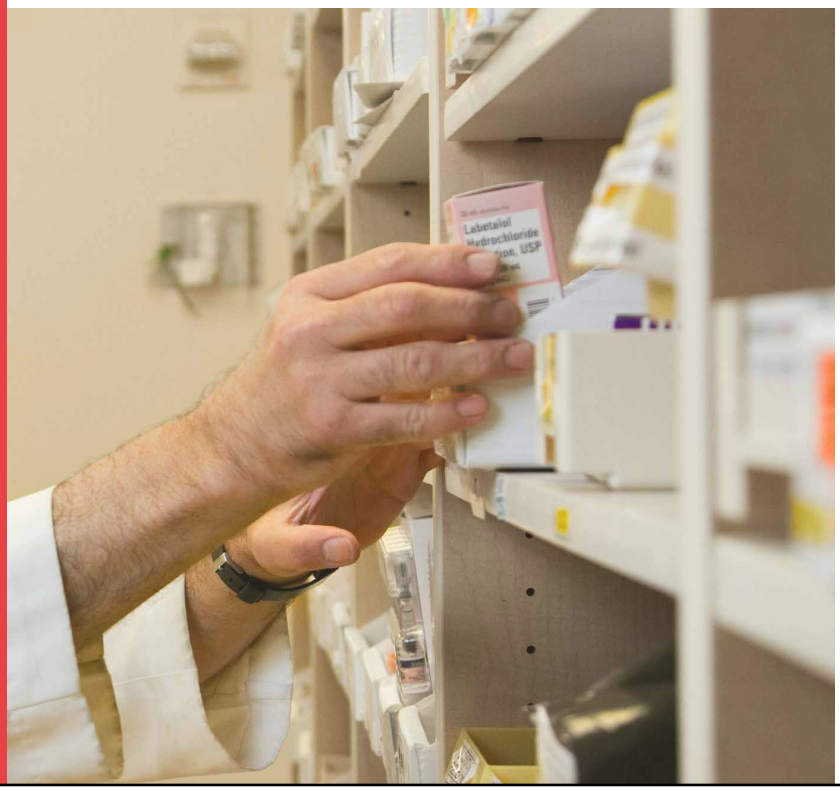
Brown had a medical emergency and spent nine days in the hospital. "I didn't

Dinkins is a parent and grandparent who does everything possible to protect the health and safety of her loved ones. She isn't the only one impacted by federal healthcare policy.



know if I would live, yet I never had to wonder how I would pay. Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act saved my life," she said. "[Affordable health care] let me focus on healing, on breathing, on being a mother, instead of drowning in fear of medical bills."

> **"The current attacks on Medicaid are not just policy choices. They are signing people's death certificates before they ever see a physician, denying them the prescriptions and care that could save their lives."**
>
> -Marcia Dinkins, Black Appalachian Coalition



As Brown recovered, she felt hopeful. She could take care of herself and her son, and help others in the community.

Now, she's a Black Appalachian Coalition trainer and supports people to share their story and point us towards solutions. Ten million Americans will lose health care coverage because of the federal cuts. Without medical coverage and funding for health care institutions, people will lose access to maternal health care, mental health and drug treatment, and preventative and primary care. Health care providers will cut services or shut down.

"We will see an increase in emergency room visits, and the burden of the costs will be shifted to already stretched communities," she said. Dinkins notes that hospitals rely on Medicaid payments to remain open. Rural areas already experience slow care, but with the cuts, we will have no care, she continued.

Rural residents are demanding that Congress reverse cuts, expand coverage, lower prescription drug prices, and ensure access to health care. "The current attacks on Medicaid are not just policy choices," Dinkins said. "They are signing people's death certificates before they ever see a physician, denying them the prescriptions and care that could save their lives."



In Perry County, Ohio, improvements supporting students and families helped raise the graduation rate from 78% in 2018 to 92% in 2023. Photo courtesy of American Federation of Teachers.

PILLAR TWO

Invest in foundational infrastructure for thriving communities

ISSUES FAIR TAXES • CREDIT • CHILD CARE • EDUCATION • JOB TRAINING • INFRASTRUCTURE • HEALTH CARE

Innovation and progress come from everyday people — workers, farmers, and small business owners. When the government invests in us and we have access to education, health care, and other necessary resources, then we have the foundation to drive real economic progress.

FIX THE UNFAIR TWO-TIER TAX SYSTEM

Corporations and the ultra-rich have manipulated the federal tax code to drain money from the economy, reduce investments in rural communities, and look the other way as corporations get richer. We've suffered from years of tax breaks to the wealthiest households and largest corporations, and we're facing a more and more extreme two-tiered tax system in which billionaires and some corporations pay lower tax rates than middle-class workers. Funding for our communities starts by requiring the ultrawealthy to pay their fair share.



Evera Ivy in Pembroke Township, Illinois runs her family farm and advocates for policies that level the playing field. Photo courtesy of Small Business Majority.

- Require billionaires to pay a minimum tax, raise corporate tax rates, end tax breaks for offshoring jobs, and reverse the giveaways to the ultrawealthy in the 2025 tax policy, including outrageous deductions and lowered corporate tax rates.
- Provide tax breaks for small businesses and prioritize middle-class and working-class businesses.[1]
- Social Security has been a vital source of income for families across the country. It's a promise that every generation makes. We take care of our older adults, and when it's our time, we expect to get the same care. We can support today's seniors and the next generation by making the wealthy pay their fair share and eliminating the payroll cap. Furthermore, we need to ensure rural recipients have easy access to their benefits. Local Social Security offices and phone lines need be properly staffed by people, not artificial intelligence.

EXPAND CREDIT AND LENDING

Make sure rural small business owners have access to credit so they can grow their businesses, hire workers, and grow the economy.

- Require the Farm Credit System to place a portion of profits in a community mandate fund for grants and loans to support rural small businesses, mid-tier food system businesses, and young, beginning, or historically underserved farmers and ranchers.
- Improve access to USDA farm loans by eliminating the cap on the number of times a borrower can receive a direct operating or direct farm ownership loan, increasing the microloan limit from $50,000 to $100,000, and revising the beginning farmer definition to include entities composed of non-related individuals. Require lenders to disclose lending practices for small business loans and credit products to protect the most vulnerable small businesses from predatory lending practices.[2]
- Support new and growing businesses, especially those in rural areas, with attention to companies owned by women, people of color, and underrepresented

1 The Mom and Pop Tax Relief Act focuses 199A tax relief to small business owners with adjusted gross incomes less than $400,000 for joint filers and less than $200,000 for single filers. In the status quo, the wealthiest businesses get significantly more of a tax break than the typical business. For example the wealthiest 5% of businesses receive 74% of the total 199A tax break funds. Claimants with Adjusted Gross Incomes of less than $100,000 took home an average deduction of just under $2,000 while the wealthiest taxpayers took home average deductions of over $1 million.

2 See the Small Business Lending Disclosure Act, which extends federal Truth in Lending Act (TILA). Also see the New Producer Economic Security Act.

entrepreneurs. Strengthen and increase funding for both the Community Development Financial Institutions Fund and Minority Business Development Agency.[3] Improve the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) to serve our communities better.[4]

- Because of health care gaps, many rural people have medical debt, which often snowballs with additional fees. This debt can hurt our credit ratings, making it harder to find housing or jobs, and raising prices on things like phone service and insurance. Relieving medical debt now, and capping health care costs going forward, would provide a boost for millions of working Americans and benefit our entire economy.[5]

SUPPORT CHILD CARE

Caregiving is essential rural labor, and we need to support parents, grandparents, and kinship caregivers who sustain families and communities. Child care in rural America is extremely limited, with a gap of 35%. Limited access prevents parents from entering the workforce, creates barriers for businesses to hire staff, and reduces tax revenues.

- Cap child care costs so rural families are not forced out of the workforce.
- Subsidize rural child care providers, including small businesses and Tribal entities. This will help close the access gaps and maintain the availability of child care centers. Protect and expand federal food programs to ensure that providers can offer nutritious meals and that rural children do not go hungry.[6]
- Support rural child care workers with fair wages, training, and benefits so they can remain in the workforce and sustain high-quality care.



American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten visits the Cory-Rawson School in Ohio.

STRENGTHEN PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND EDUCATION

Rural communities depend on public schools and colleges so that students can acquire the skills and knowledge to be ready to seize their future. In the face of attacks on public schools, teachers, students, and parents, we need to support our schools to be successful hubs for learning, care, and engagement for the entire community.

- Provide Universal Pre-K.
- Provide critical funding for public schools and ensure students have properly funded schools regardless of their ZIP code.[7] Ensure kids receive critical speech services,

3 These agencies were gutted with an Executive Order in March 2025.

4 Protect and increase funding for the SBA entrepreneurial development programs and USDA Rural Development Rural Business-Cooperative Service programs that drive economic and small business growth in rural communities. The Coordinated Support for Rural Small Businesses Act improves coordination between the SBA and USDA.

5 Rural people are more likely to suffer from medical debt and the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau issued a rule, but was blocked by a Federal Court, requiring Congressional action. The rule had banned the inclusion of medical bills on credit reports used by lenders and prohibited lenders from using medical information in their lending decisions. The CFPB found that medical debts provide little predictive value to lenders about borrowers' ability to repay other debts, and consumers frequently report receiving inaccurate bills or being asked to pay bills that should have been covered by insurance or financial assistance programs.

6 See the Child Care for Every Community Act. The Expanding Child Care in Rural America Act directs USDA rural development to prioritize child care businesses and facilities in existing programs. Support the USDA's Child and Adult Care Food Program.

7 See the Secure Rural Schools Program. Also, fully funding Title I offsets costs for our school districts, so every public school receives adequate funding to educate all students.

reading support, and other assistance. Quality public education must be accessible for kids with disabilities.[8]

- Stop the giveaway of public resources to private schools. Voucher programs add stress to public schools and force these community institutions to spread the same costs for facilities, transportation, administration, and instruction over a smaller revenue stream. Furthermore, voucher programs don't meet the accountability, transparency, and community-input standards of public schools.[9]
- Fund educator recruitment and retention in rural communities to address the significant staff shortages.[10]
- Schools are central hubs for rural communities and serve more than just students. Funding Full-Service Community Schools is an effective way to expand community resources and opportunities.[11]
- Make it more affordable for students in rural communities to access and succeed in college and in-demand vocational career pathways — including students who are the first in their family to attend. Support rural colleges and universities and provide rural development grants.[12] Provide direct support to students by funding federal student loans, affordable repayment and forgiveness plans, and Pell grants.



Mike Kane, courtesy of RuralOrganizing.org Education Fund

OFFER JOB TRAINING FOR GOOD JOBS

Provide job training so workers have the necessary skills to get jobs, enabling employers to grow their workforce and rural people to stay in their communities.

- Support job training, apprenticeships, career and technical education, develop a rural workforce, and strengthen high-quality career pathways. Increase access to programs by providing financial support for students' out-of-pocket expenses such as tuition, resources, and certifications.[13] Reinstate and grow programs, such as AmeriCorps and the Civilian Conservation Corps.
- Invest in career and technical education programs to grow the workforce in key fields such as health care, advanced manufacturing, traditional trades, auto repair, and technology.

8 Fully Fund Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Schools need federal funding to meet federal mandates, such as Individualized Education Programs, to ensure quality public education is accessible for all kids with disabilities.

9 See the National Coalition for Public Education resource: Vouchers Don't Work in Rural Areas.

10 See Preparing and Retaining Education Professionals (PREP) Act and the Grow Your Own program. The Rural Education Achievement Program (REAP) provides dedicated federal funding to our rural schools to address the teacher shortage, purchase education technology, expand extra-curriculars and more.

11 See the Full-Service Community School Expansion Act.

12 Appropriate full funding for Act Q under title VIII of the Higher Education Act.

13 See 2023 Department of Education Memo on the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006, as amended by the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21 st Century Act (Perkins V).

INVEST IN RURAL INFRASTRUCTURE — FROM LOCAL GOVERNMENT TO HOUSING TO THE POST OFFICE

Invest in the infrastructure and institutions that help a community thrive.[14]

- In 2025, farmers, small businesses, and rural organizations had their government contracts canceled without warning or cause. Many farmers had already made large investments, and then the federal government failed to uphold its end of the bargain. The federal government needs to meet its contractual obligations and support farmers and rural small businesses with predictable and standard contracts.[15]
- Expand rural economic development and job creation by investing in programs that complement local efforts.[16]
- Increase access to reliable and fast broadband internet for rural communities, providing better opportunities for education, employment, and entrepreneurship.[17]
- Many rural communities face a severe housing crisis. People often pay over half their income on housing, have to live in unsafe homes, and risk having their lives upended when a property owner changes the terms of the lease. We can create safe, stable, affordable housing by funding programs for home purchase and home repair for low and moderate-income people. Use investment incentives to boost local capacity to establish and maintain affordable rental units and develop new housing.[18]
- Protect and Strengthen the United States Postal Service (USPS). The postal service is an essential part of rural life, delivering everything from prescription drugs to mail-in ballots. But plans to privatize put consistent service at risk. Guarantee rural service and expand USPS services to address local needs such as banking services and fishing licenses.[19]



14 See "Yakutat School Fixes Failing Heat System and Saves on Energy Costs."

15 See the Honor Farmer Contracts Act, which prohibits the USDA from canceling or suspending active contracts with farmers except under narrow and justifiable conditions. This legislation ensures that USDA honors its contractual obligations to producers. It also creates new standards for transparency, accountability, and enforcement to protect farmers.

16 The Rebuild Rural America Act establishes a $50 billion grant fund, creates federal training and technical support, establishes a state-by-state rural innovation and partnership administration to coordinate efforts, and creates a "Rural Future Corps" to support essential development.

17 The Rural Internet Improvement Act streamlines and bolsters USDA Rural Development broadband programs and ensures their funding is targeted to rural areas that need it the most. The bill merges and codifies the Rural e-Connectivity Pilot Program — a program designed to target rural communities with no connectivity — with USDA's traditional broadband loan and grant program. It limits funding to areas where 90 percent or more of households don't have consistent broadband access.

18 The Rural Housing Service Reform Act improves USDA's method of determining eligible income requirements. The bill also protects homeowners and ensures some USDA-owned properties stay affordable. Furthermore, the bill updates the rules for a home repair loan program to make it less burdensome to get smaller loans and fund the USDA's ability to process loans more quickly. The bill also expands an existing USDA pilot program to provide home loan assistance to Native borrowers. Increase low-interest homeownership direct loans authorized under section 502 of the Housing Act of 1949, including funding a Single-Family Housing Relending demonstration program for Native American communities.

19 See the Access to No-Fee Accounts Act and language in the 2022 Financial Services and General Government Appropriations Bill directing USPS to meaningfully pilot non-bank financial services at scale. Repeal language in the 2006 Postal Accountability & Enhancement Act that prohibits USPS from offering new services.

PROTECT HEALTH CARE ACCESS

People living in rural communities struggle to get quality health care. It's too expensive, there aren't enough health care workers and hospitals nearby, and fewer people have health insurance. We need to reshape our healthcare policy to support rural people.[20]



People's Action event to Upgrade Medicaid

- Support rural hospitals to stay open and provide quality care with a broad range of services. Rural hospitals provide essential health care, including emergency services, access to specialists, and alcohol and drug treatment. However, in 2023, half of rural hospitals were operating at a loss, and that was before the federal government cut over 1 trillion in funds for health care.[21]
- Reverse recent cuts, and make it easier for rural people to access health care and elder care through Medicaid,[22] Medicare, and the Affordable Care Act. Expanding Medicaid and increasing Medicare reimbursement rates are important ways to deliver improved quality of care in rural communities. Additionally, reforms that increase health care access for rural populations should be prioritized, such as making family elder and disability care reimbursable.
- Ensure the Rural Health Transformation Program is implemented to minimize rural hospital closure and is not a giveaway to the most consolidated hospital systems.[23]
- People are struggling to keep up with necessary medications while drug companies walk away with huge profits. The federal government should lower prescription drug prices and improve rural access to medicines.[24]
- Rein in private equity's takeover of health care in rural areas.[25]
- Ensure our nation's agricultural communities have access to critical mental health support by funding stress assistance programs and ensuring access to behavioral health clinics, health centers, rural health clinics, and critical access hospitals.[26]

For more on health care, see Reproductive Health Care, Pillar 3

20 See "Medicaid Saves Lives."

21 The Save Rural Hospitals Act preserves access to rural health care by ensuring fairness in Medicare hospital payments, creates opportunities for rural critical care facilities, and invests in rural health care services. The Rural Hospital Stabilization Act provides critical financial support to help struggling rural hospitals keep their doors open. The Workplace Violence Protection Act will help with health care staff retention and requires the Occupational Safety and Health Administration to develop an enforceable safety standard for health care and social service workers.

22 Instead of pursuing harmful cuts to Medicaid to fund trillions in tax breaks, Congress should lower health care costs and save money. See the Lower Costs More Transparency Act. Implement site-neutral payment reform for Medicare. Establish billing transparency and increasing oversight into hospital and health care systems including requiring hospitals to establish off-campus billing practices and reviewing hospital consolidation and its role in driving up costs of care throughout our entire health system.

23 The Rural Health Transformation Fund was created to offset the harms to rural health care by the 2025 One Big Beautiful Bill Act. However, the fund isn't nearly large enough and the funding requirements are vague.

24 See Strengthening Medicare And Reducing Taxpayer Prices Act, the Lower Drug Costs for Families Act, and reform rural-specific programs like 340B.

25 See the Stop Wall Street Looting Act.

26 The Farmers First Act reauthorizes and expands the Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network.

RURAL SPOTLIGHT

Small Business Momentum in Marshalltown, Iowa

Will Washington Help or Hinder?

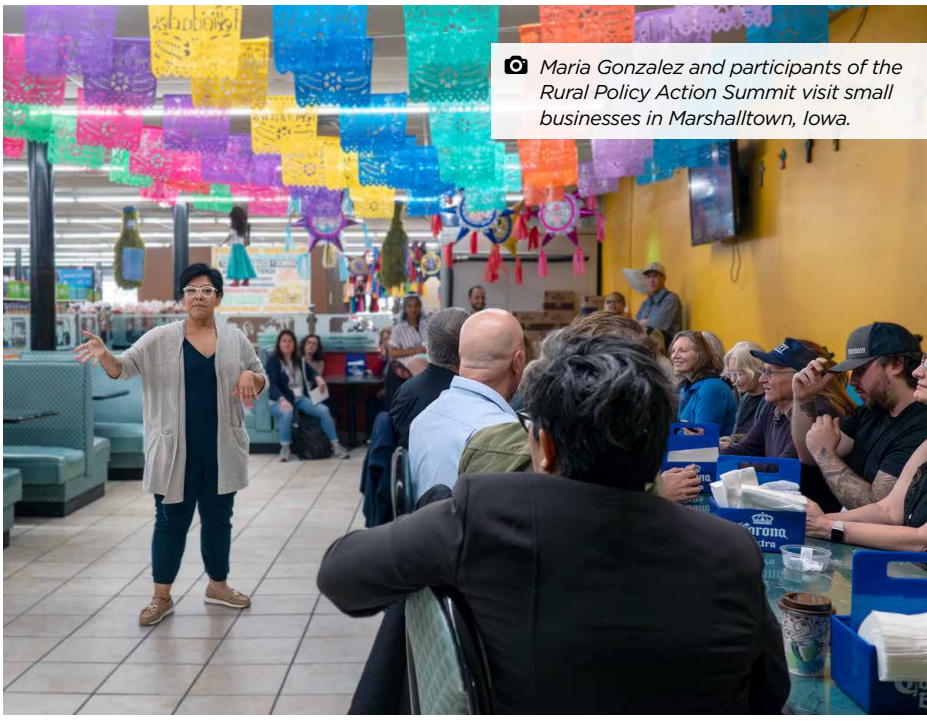
In Marshalltown, Iowa, the spirit of American entrepreneurship is alive and well. Residents have opened businesses, among them a grocery store offering fresh food that has created over 20 jobs. These establishments improve quality of life and boost the local economy. "These are people that we recognize from the community," says Maria Gonzalez, a community organizer with Iowa Migrant Movement for Justice. "You go into the stores, they know who you are, and they ask, 'How are the kids?' You get that family feeling."

People in Marshalltown are forging something special, but the crucial question looms: will Washington stand with them or will misguided policies get in the way?

Facing the Storm

In 2020, a 99-mph windstorm tore through town. Gonzalez initiated a cleanup that quickly grew into a weeks-long, town-wide project. Neighbors showed up with chainsaws, passersby stopped to join, a devoted aunt cooked meals, and a wrestling team even volunteered one day.

But when a town faces destruction this massive, it needs higher-level support. They rallied to secure disaster recovery aid. These resources ensured that working families and small businesses had the necessary resources.

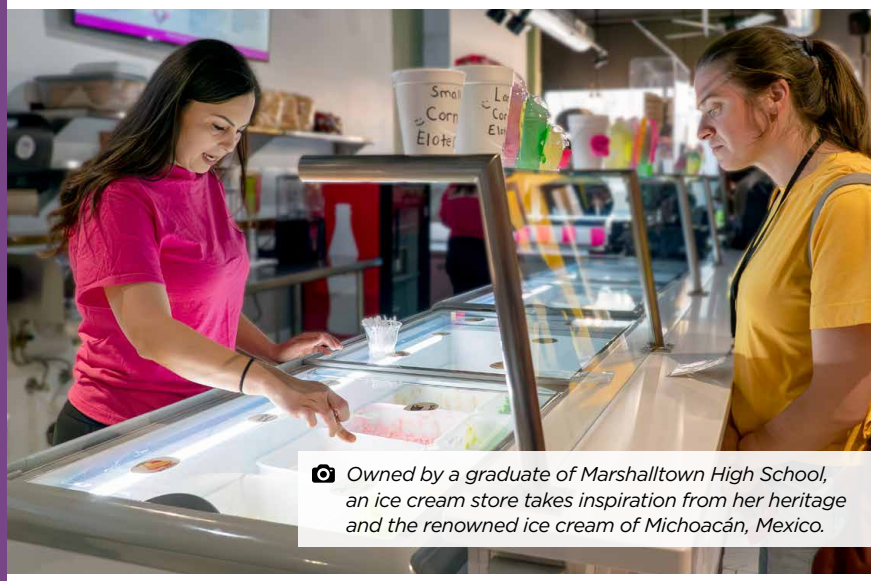


Maria Gonzalez and participants of the Rural Policy Action Summit visit small businesses in Marshalltown, Iowa.

"The community decided to show up for each other. We have seen the good of the people of Marshalltown, and we want to keep going and growing," Gonzalez recounts.

The federal government did its job, providing vital disaster

recovery and partnering with area people so they can get back on their feet. Many new businesses now occupy storefronts rebuilt with these funds.



Owned by a graduate of Marshalltown High School, an ice cream store takes inspiration from her heritage and the renowned ice cream of Michoacán, Mexico.

Cruel Policy Hits Marshalltown

In 2006, Marshalltown faced a different kind of crisis. The federal government conducted a massive immigration raid on employees at the town's largest employer, a meatpacking plant.

Gonzalez was just 17 at the time. Federal authorities detained her mom, leaving Maria to take care of herself and her siblings. Eventually, they secured their mom's release, but the scars remained.

"After the raid, we were so emotionally drained that it was hard to think or process anything," she recalls. "My mom is here, but other people's family members were deported. We felt a survivor's guilt."

This wasn't just a hit to individual families; it torpedoed the town's social fabric and economy. As then-Mayor Gene Beach put it, the disruption "set us back 10 years forming a real community." Latino businesses saw sales plummet, and overall sales tax revenue declined. It's a stark reminder of how federal policies can harm American communities.

Contrasting Federal Priorities

Larry Ginter, a family farmer and member of Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement, called the raid a "huge tragedy." It's a cruel action that also hurts the economy. He stresses the vital link between farmers and the workers in nearby towns and cities. "It's got to be affordable. You've got to have a living wage. The farmers got to have a good price. Otherwise, it's not going to work."

Today, 19 years after the raid, 5 years after the windstorm, Marshalltown has momentum. Immigrants who persevered through hardship now run businesses. People have come together to look out for each other and contribute to the economy.

Gonzalez affirms: "It's the values of community and family and love. And that's why I'm trying to stay here. We are Iowans."

Marshalltown's story presents a clear contrast of how federal policy can affect a community. Government can supercharge the hard work of people like Gonzalez, Ginter, and small business owners. Or it can cause immense disruption and send us backwards.



Wisconsin Public Education Network

PILLAR THREE

Everyone gets a fair deal

ISSUES NO CRUELTY ON TAXPAYER'S DIME • HEALTH CARE • NATIVE NATIONS • LABOR PROTECTIONS • CITIZENSHIP • HEALTHY AND SAFE COMMUNITIES • EQUAL RIGHTS • VOTER ACCESS

As rural people, we take care of each other. Everyone should have the freedom to live and work safely without discrimination.

In the first two pillars, we outlined key policies to reshape the government for working people and invest in our communities. This should apply to everyone. Our communities are stronger when people have the freedom to live the life they choose.

STOP THE CRUELTY ON TAXPAYER'S DIME

Our elected officials are spending billions on detaining hardworking immigrants, separating families, arresting people based on their skin color and profession, and sending people to places where they are likely to be tortured. No cruelty is ever okay on the taxpayer's dime. But what's even worse is that these harms are happening at the expense of health care, veterans' benefits, child care, and schools. Taking billions from seniors and families to pay for harm and cruelty doesn't put Americans first, it puts us last.[1]

PROTECT ACCESS TO REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH CARE

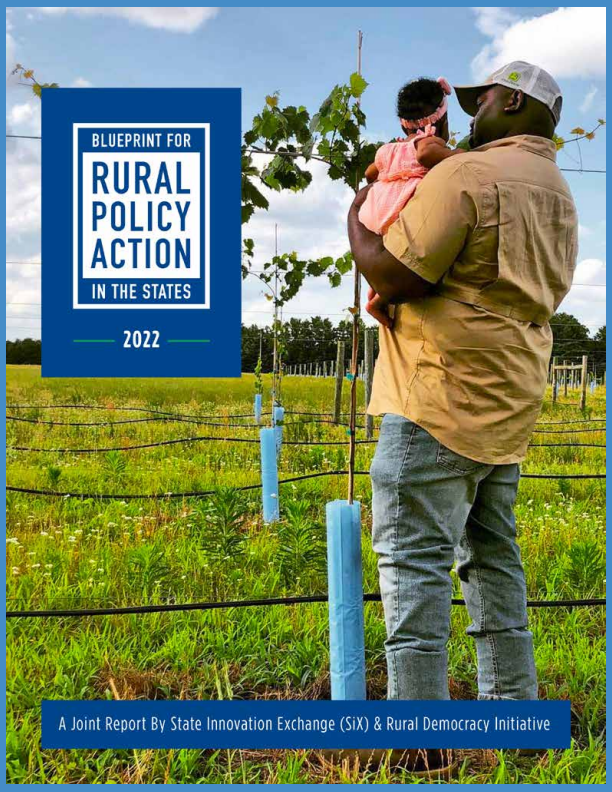
Rural women are more likely to die from pregnancy-related complications. Black, American Indian, Alaska Native, and Hawaiian Native women face racial disparities that cause even higher pregnancy-related mortality rates.

We travel longer distances for all types of medical care, and many rural counties don't have a practicing OB-GYN, labor and delivery services, or even a health care facility. For this reason, restrictions that limit access to a full range of reproductive health care are particularly burdensome to rural women, creating negative health and economic consequences for women and their families.

- Support access and funding to health care facilities, birthing centers, midwifery practices, postpartum care, and the full range of reproductive care. Reduce the barriers that require additional travel and delays in treatment, enable virtual appointments, and ensure prescriptions by mail.[2]
- The government should not prevent a woman from making health care and abortion decisions.
- Fund workforce development programs for midwives, doulas, nurse practitioners, and community health workers through federal grants to build a sustainable rural reproductive health workforce.

For more on health care, see Affordable Prescription Drugs and Health Care Access, Pillar 2

> **"The gutting of critical programs at the federal level is further harming rural communities that have already seen decades of disinvestment. In this time of federal chaos, state policymakers can work alongside rural leaders to support investment in rural health care, education, farmland, and everything else that make rural communities great places to live and work."**
>
> –Siena Chrisman, State Innovation Exchange



For examples of strategic and popular policies that can be enacted at the state level, see the Blueprint for Rural Policy Action in the States.
Rural.StateInnovation.org

1 See "Small Business Momentum in Marshalltown, Iowa."

2 The Women's Health Protection Act prohibits unnecessary medical visits that create barriers to abortion access as well as cumbersome credentialing for providing abortion services.

RECOGNIZE NATIVE NATIONS AND HONOR TREATIES

When Tribal nations are thriving, the whole region thrives. The U.S. Constitution recognizes Tribal nations, and we must honor our treaties. The federal government should engage in nation-to-nation consultation with Tribal governments on federal projects and rulemakings in a manner consistent with the United Nations Declaration on Indigenous Peoples, acknowledging their right to "free, prior, and informed consent."[3]

- Ensure that Tribes and Native landowners have the freedom and resources to manage land in ways that improve it for future generations.
- Respect Tribal sovereignty over Tribal resources and the right to generate revenue.
- Prevent the dramatic sell-off of federal lands to wealthy investors and corporations.



Lorraine Herder and Edith Simonson, elders from Dzil Yijiin, protect waters that have sustained the Diné.

END THE CRISIS OF MISSING OR MURDERED INDIGENOUS PERSONS

American Indian, Alaska Native, and Hawaiian Native people experience appallingly high levels of violence, murder, human trafficking, and loved ones going missing. Fully fund the federal response to missing or murdered Indigenous persons by increasing coordination among federal, state, Tribal, and local law enforcement agencies.[4]

CLOSE THE LABOR ABUSE LOOPHOLES

We need to build an economy that respects rural working people, and the federal government needs to protect workers' freedom across industries.

- Expand and strengthen overtime protections.[5]
- Recognize farmworker rights and end the federal law that exempts agricultural workers from basic workplace protections. Ensure farmworkers have equal rights to overtime pay and minimum wage standards. They should be safe on the jobsite with explicit safety protections from exposure to heat and smoke.[6]
- Workers should be confident that they can work safely without fear of being targeted on the job because of their immigration status or the perception of their immigration status based on their race, ethnicity, culture, or industry.
- Protect children from labor abuse and dangerous jobs. Enforce child labor laws.[7]

For more on labor, see Empower Workers, Pillar 1

3 Update federal law to negate the Supreme Court's ruling in Carcieri v. Salazar, which held that the U.S. Department of the Interior could not take land into trust for a specified Tribe because that Tribe had not been under federal jurisdiction at the 1934 enactment of the Indian Reorganization Act. Pass A Bill to Amend the Act of June 18, 1934, to Reaffirm the Authority of the Secretary of the Interior to Take Land into Trust for Indian Tribes, and for Other Purposes. The bill applies the Indian Reorganization Act to all federally recognized Indian Tribes, regardless of when a Tribe became recognized.

4 See Savanna's Act.

5 The Overtime Pay Act of 2025 restores the regulation that expanded and strengthened overtime protections for up to 29.3 million workers.

6 See the Fairness For Farmworkers Act and the Farmworker Smoke and Excessive Heat Protection Act of 2025.

7 The Child Labor Exploitation Accountability Act ensures USDA contractors comply with labor laws, expands child labor laws to independent contractors, and increases penalties for child labor law violations.

CREATE A PATH TO CITIZENSHIP

In rural places, we have close ties to each other. We know our neighbors, and we see how immigrants are part of our communities and economies. Too many of us have experienced the pain of seeing hardworking neighbors separated from their families, tax-paying residents harassed and profiled by government authorities, and local businesses harmed because of a cruel immigration policy. We need an immigration system that has a safe, reliable, and functional path to citizenship. That's good for our economy, and good for us all.

Citizenship is the great equalizer: it enables people who've lived and worked in this country for years, paid taxes, and contributed to their communities, to enjoy the same rights and privileges as those born in the United States. That deepens their ties to this country, opens up new opportunities, and enables them to contribute even more.[8]

DON'T POISON US, SUPPORT HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

We must end the targeting of rural communities as sites for polluting industries, which disproportionately harm people of color. Everyone should have safe access to the outdoors, clean water, air, and soil.

- Communities should have early and meaningful involvement in projects that impact their health and community. We should be able to negotiate terms and shape projects to ensure safe communities and community benefits. Federal agencies should have mandates to give rural people a seat at the table.
- Ensure that communities have legal avenues to hold polluters accountable.[9]

Also see Clean Air, Water, and Soil, Pillar 4

SECURE JUSTICE FOR BLACK FARMERS AND OTHER FARMERS OF COLOR

All family farmers, no matter where they live or the color of their skin, work hard and overcome never-ending challenges to put food on the tables of American families. Because of discrimination, Black farmers and other farmers of color face unfair obstacles. Black farmers are more likely to be denied USDA support and private bank loans. Racism has pushed farmers into debt and forced many to give up farming entirely. To ensure small farmers have the opportunity to continue, we need to create protections for Black, Indigenous, and people of color farmers. The alternative is big business as usual, which will lead to the loss of farmland, weakening of local economies, and disruption of supply chains. We all benefit when we support small farmers to sustain their businesses.



8 Rural communities urgently need updates to decades-out-of-date immigration laws to create stability for longtime neighbors, employers, and critical services and infrastructure. Immigrant community members contribute important work across industry, including health care, elder care, agriculture, education, construction, hospitality. The Farm Workforce Modernization Act creates a path to American citizenship for immigrant agricultural workers. Other important bills include: The Dream and Promise Act creates a way for community members who have grown up in local communities or lived here for decades to transition from temporary status to residency, and the Renewing Immigration Provisions of the Immigration Act of 1929 ensures long-time community members have a way to apply for residency.

9 See the A. Donald McEachin Environmental Justice For All Act.

- Ensure access to credit and establish loan forgiveness programs and support so that farmers who have faced discrimination don't lose their farms.[10]
- Improve federal support for programs that help heirs' property owners hold onto their property. This support should include reducing barriers to access federal programs, loans, and tax benefits.
- Expand funding for land access and market growth.[11]



Photo by Mike Kane, courtesy of RuralOrganizing.org Education Fund

END DISCRIMINATION BY SEXUALITY AND GENDER

Every person deserves a fair chance to succeed in and prepare for their future — including people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and two-spirit. Whether at school, work, or in our community spaces, everyone should be treated fairly and equally so they can fully and safely participate in community life.[12]

SUPPORT VOTERS' DECISIONMAKING POWER

Our looks or bank account balance shouldn't determine whether we have a voice in our elections, policies, and government rulemaking. Yet billionaires can buy tickets to White House dinners and congressmembers make millions from stock trading, but ordinary voters have to jump through the bureaucratic gauntlet just to vote. America is stronger when more people vote, and when people can cast ballots conveniently with confidence that their ballot will be counted.

- Expand rural Americans' ability to cast their vote, reduce the influence of big money in politics, and end unethical practices like congressional stock trading.[13]
- Rural voters are more likely to live far from their local elections office and their polling place. Allow all American voters to vote at home, provide pre-paid envelopes to return ballots, and automatically register citizens to vote at DMVs.[14]
- Ensure Native Americans' status as U.S. citizens is protected, and they have the right to vote and their vote counts fairly.
- Support fair election districts and stop the attempts to take away the voice of Native communities and rural people of color through gerrymandering and rigged election districts.

10 See the Justice for Black Farmers Act.

11 See the Increasing Land Access, Security, and Opportunity Act.

12 The Equality Act would amend the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity in employment, housing, public accommodations, federally funded programs, credit, and jury service.

13 See the For the People Act.

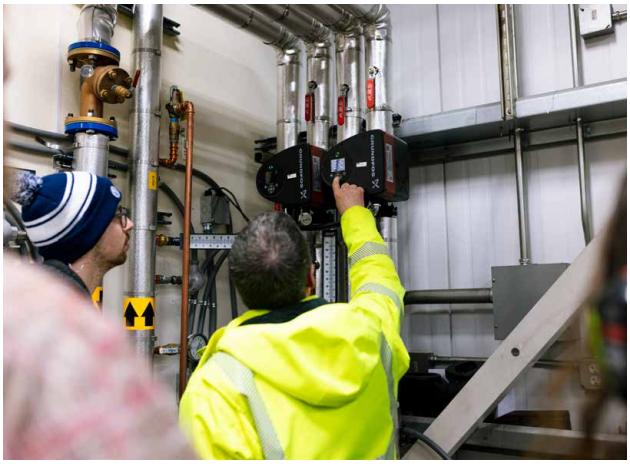
14 See the Vote at Home Act.

RURAL SPOTLIGHT

Yakutat School Fixes Failing Heat System and Saves on Energy Costs

Federal funding crucial component for community project







For years, the school heating system in Yakutat hadn't been working right. This problem had chilling consequences.

"Our children were actually cold," said Rhoda Jensen, Yakutat Tlingit Tribe executive director.

When Katya Karankevich of Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC) investigated, she found 30-year-old pipes leaking glycol onto the ground. The system was in danger of total failure.

If that happened, water pipes would freeze and burst, damaging the school building. "The situation was incredibly dire," Karankevich said. "We knew we had to spring into action and fix it."

To heat the school, Karankevich championed building a modern heat recovery system from the community's diesel power plant. Instead of releasing the byproduct heat into the air from burning diesel to make electricity, heat is piped underground to warm the school. It could also be extended to other vital infrastructure: the public safety building and the Community Health Center, which is the only medical clinic in Yakutat.

"Being able to heat them with basically little cost at all to the community is vital," said Casey Mapes, Yakutat Power Plant manager and Chief of Yakutat Volunteer Fire Department.

Many partners joined the effort: the Alaska Energy Authority, the Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust, the Yakutat Tlingit Tribe, the City Borough of Yakutat, ANTHC and the Alaska Village Electric Cooperative (AVEC).

Even with all the partnerships enacted in Yakutat, they didn't have the resources to bring heat recovery to the Yakutat Community Health Center. To do this, they needed federal dollars. They sought the support of the Indian Health Service, which funded one million dollars through the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act — an essential contribution to the project's success.

At the health center, patients and health care workers now benefit from recovered heat. Less money spent to heat the building means more money can be spent on care.

Furthermore, the 2024 expansion to the health center reduces diesel use by more than 18,000 gallons annually. "Now that the health center is added on to that recovered heat loop from the power plant, they're saving about $100,000 per year," Karankevich said.

All of Yakutat benefits, and the children have a warm, safe place to learn. "Children are the center of everything and everything we do in Yakutat," Jensen said.

The school saves $300,000 annually in what they would have spent to heat the buildings with heating fuel. In total, the project is expected to save about $9.25 million over the 25-year life of the system.

These savings can be re-invested in education, public safety, health and Tribal services, ensuring that Yakutat can continue to thrive for generations to come.



Watch the video at ruralpolicyaction.us/yakutat

All of Yakutat benefits, and the children have a warm, safe place to learn. "Children are the center of everything and everything we do in Yakutat," Jensen said.



Photo by Tim Crawford, courtesy of Northern Plains Resource Council

PILLAR FOUR

Stewarding our land and natural resources

ISSUES CONSERVE OUR NATURAL RESOURCES • PUBLIC LANDS • RENEWABLE ENERGY PLAN • CLEAN AIR AND WATER

We are passionate about the places where we live and are deeply connected to the land that makes each of our communities unique. Our natural resources are a vital part of our economy, culture, and recreation. We need the federal government to partner with us and support our commitment to be responsible stewards and to grow our economy for the long term.

CONSERVE OUR NATURAL RESOURCES

Policies for a healthy rural environment are critical not just for rural residents but also to protect the natural resources on which everyone depends: clean water and air, healthy soil, and thriving biodiversity are important for all of us, and these start in rural areas.

- Boost farmer income and create good jobs by funding conservation practices, farm and small business renewable energy, tree planting, wetland restoration, and the Civilian Conservation Corps.[1]
- Protect water quality and confront the impacts of climate change on American farms. Stop the attacks on climate science and fully fund research on climate change, mitigation, and on-farm renewable energy. Improve climate-related crop insurance and the effectiveness of voluntary conservation programs with compliance requirements.[2]



At Christensen Farm in Lyons, Nebraska, RegeNErate Nebraska uses renewable energy sources and regenerative agricultural practices to save money and reduce emissions.

STEWARD PUBLIC LANDS

Public lands matter to people all across the country. They provide recreation and family memories. They are also key for wildlife habitat, clean water, and economic activity.

- Establish stable, reliable funding for rural public lands and education.
- Protect public lands and parkland and stop land sell-offs. End the giveaways that benefit fossil fuel companies at the public's expense, and ensure a fair return for the use and development of public resources.[3]
- Support local and state governments that have public lands and provide consistent and sustainable funding.[4]
- Ensure that companies that develop resources on public lands mitigate impacts and restore sites when their operations are complete, including by posting financial assurance that covers the full cost of reclamation.

ESTABLISH A RURAL ENERGY PLAN

Support working families, small businesses, and farmers to utilize clean energy to reduce prices, create rural jobs, and benefit our communities.[5]

- Help local governments establish community benefits agreements to shape projects and improve potential projects. One place of particular concern is the rapid rise of data centers, which will mean increased energy costs, straining the electrical grid, and massive use of water.
- Support farmers to generate revenue and protect farmland with responsible renewable energy projects.
- Reinstate renewable energy tax credits and unlock investment in clean energy production.
- Invest in rural electric cooperatives (RECs), and ensure all future renewable energy tax credits treat RECs fairly. Ensure tax-exempt organizations can elect direct

1 See Climate Stewardship Act. The EQIP Improvement Act sets lower payment limitations for Environmental Quality Incentive Program recipients, shifting conservation program subsidies away from large concentrated animal feeding operations, which often receive the majority of funding. It also makes more funding available for small farms across the country.

2 See Agricultural Resilience Act.

3 The One Big Beautiful Bill Act reduced royalty rates for federal coal, oil and gas, and set new leasing mandates that will lead to long-term harm and reduced revenue for federal, state and local governments.

4 The Forest Management for Rural Stability Act creates a permanent endowment fund. It appropriates initial money for the fund and would be further funded by commercial revenue generated on national forests, Bureau of Land Management-administered land in Oregon and California, and Fish and Wildlife refuges. The bill would prevent underpayment or nonpayment of federal obligations to local governments through annual appropriations shortfalls, as well as preventing federal lands extraction due to county government shortfalls.

5 See "Yakutat School Fixes Failing Heat System and Saves on Energy Costs."

payment of the same credit benefits afforded to other for-profit utilities.[6]

- Improve energy affordability for families and small businesses by preserving ENERGY STAR, restoring incentives for energy efficient upgrades and supporting adoption of inclusive utility investment for all money-saving energy upgrades.[7]

PROTECT CLEAN AIR, WATER, AND SOIL

Corporations should be responsible for meeting standards designed to protect clean air, water, and soil, and to remediate and restore these resources.

- Safeguard rural communities by ending the proliferation of overcrowded, polluting concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs). USDA should stop subsidizing and unfairly propping up industrial livestock farms with guaranteed loans, and instead support family farmers who are responsible stewards of the land and help more farmers transition to more regenerative livestock production systems.
- Ensure polluters are responsible for the cleanup of PFAS, a dangerous forever chemical. Cleanup now falls on farmers and rural utility systems, who are already stretched to the breaking point. Congress and the administration must invest in robust testing and hold the companies that profited from PFAS accountable for the environmental harms to land and drinking water.
- Protect the right of all Americans, including farmers and farmworkers, who are harmed by toxic chemicals, to take legal action against agrichemical corporations.[8] In addition, protect local decision making power to pass policies that safeguard the health of their residents and natural resources from toxic chemicals and other environmental dangers.
- People should have a say in the decisions that impact them, and local people have expertise on how a change in land use will impact the land and people in the area. Before making land use decisions, federal agencies should inform the public, collect comment, and involve them in considering environmental impacts, long-term uses, and alternatives to the proposed action.[9]
- Require developers to cover long-term risks and ensure taxpayers and landowners aren't forced to foot the bill. For example, a new mining project that requires reclamation should post a bond covering land restoration costs.

Also see Don't Poison Us, Pillar 3



Larry and Diane Marquardt's Wisconsin farmland is gaining new life. With federal support from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, they now have a solar field seeded with prairie plants and students are learning how solar energy can be generated alongside agriculture.

6 See the GREEN Act. Expand on the historic support for Empowering Rural America Program (New ERA), the Powering Affordable Clean Energy Program (PACE), Rural Energy for America Program (REAP), and the historic funding in the Inflation Reduction Act.

7 Support inclusive utility investments, such as PAYS.

8 See the Pesticide Injury Accountability Act.

9 Preserve and protect the National Environmental Policy Act. Also, help people make informed decisions with better testing and reporting of toxic chemicals that connects air, land, and water impacts. Federal agencies should expand air quality monitoring, including but not limited to annual public reporting of PM1, PM2.5, and PM10. This will provide rural communities with transparent data to safeguard their health and advocate for stronger protections.



Polling and Popular Support

Rural voters are economic populists, support personal freedoms, and know the importance of investing in working families. Rural Democracy Initiative conducted two polls in 2024 of likely rural voters in battleground states. The polls showed strong support for the policies outlined in this report.

76% Support requiring rich people and corporations to pay their fair share of taxes to invest in tools and opportunities for working people.



88% Support cracking down on meat processing monopolies and ensuring local businesses can compete.



87% Support expanding broadband internet access to all communities in the United States.



92% Support ensuring rural hospitals receive the essential funding they need to stay open & cracking down on drug companies that are price gouging for essential medicines.



74% Agree that decisions around abortion should be made by women and doctors, and politicians should stay out of it.



87% Believe in protecting our air, water, and natural resources from corporate and agricultural polluters and runoff.





RURAL DEMOCRACY INITIATIVE

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