

## Adams, Booker, Strickland, McGovern Introduce Bicameral Legislation to Ensure Equitable Access to USDA Programs for Small Farms



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Hello Sarah,

## Adams, Booker, Strickland, McGovern Introduce Bicameral Legislation to Ensure Equitable Access to USDA Programs for Small Farms

**WASHINGTON, D.C.** (June 8, 2023) – **Congresswoman Alma Adams (NC-12), U.S. Senator Cory Booker (D-N.J.) and U.S. Representatives Marilyn Strickland (WA-10), and Jim McGovern (MA-02)** introduced the bicameral *Office of Small Farms Establishment Act*, legislation to create a new Office of Small Farms at the US Department of Agriculture. The Office would directly serve small farmers with grants and technical assistance and ensure that all USDA programs are designed to meet the needs of small farmers.

Small acreage farms—those with fewer than 180 acres—make up 70 percent of all farms in the US and are vital to rural economic growth, food security, and local food supply chains. They also produce more value per acre than large farms. Despite their substantial contributions to the U.S. economy, they only receive 12 percent of federal payments to farms. USDA programs should serve all farmers equally, but they often favor large-scale operations. This can be traced to staff shortages, program design, and resource gaps that disadvantage small farms.

For instance, only 7 percent of small farms currently utilize crop insurance, demonstrating the program's limitations for these operations. Additionally, programs such as the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP) fail to account for the higher prices small farms receive for selling directly to consumers or producing specialized products. These barriers, along with a lack of financial resources and limited time, make it difficult for farms conducting smaller-acreage operations to access essential USDA support.

To address these issues and ensure equitable access to USDA programs for small farms, the *Office of Small Farms Establishment Act* proposes the creation of an Office of Small Farms within the USDA. This office would serve as a central hub for small farms, ranches, and forest operations, providing them with comprehensive support and enabling them to benefit from available USDA programs. The Office would issue grants to small farmers, provide technical assistance, recommend improvements to service delivery to small farmers in programs throughout the USDA, and provide a hotline for farmers to report issues with accessing USDA programs. This proposal would make USDA programs more accessible and beneficial to small farms, which would help the Department fulfill its mission, help small farmers thrive, and strengthen the food system for everyone.

“Almost 2 million farms and ranches in the United States are operated by small family farmers,” **said Representative Adams, a senior member of the House Agriculture Committee.** “The Office of Small Farms Establishment Act would empower these famers with the tools they need to make the most of USDA’s grant and assistance programs. Small family farms often lack the resources to apply for the very programs that could help them the most, and historically underserved farmers are more likely to operate their farms at a smaller scale. I’m proud to join my colleagues in sponsoring the Office of Small Farms Establishment Act to preserve our shrinking family farmland, and preserve our sources of food, nourishment, and agriculture far into the future. All North Carolina farmers – rural and urban; small, medium, and large – deserve better than a one-size-fits-all approach.”

"Small farms are the heart and soul of our agricultural landscape, contributing to our economy, food security, and the resilience of our local food supply chains," **said Senator Booker.** "It's time we do more to ensure that all farmers, regardless of the size of their farms, have equitable access to the support they need to flourish. This bill will create an office dedicated to serving the needs of small farmers and helping them access USDA services including loans, technical assistance, and critical conservation programs. We must build a future where even the smallest farm has equal opportunities to succeed and contribute to a sustainable and thriving food system."



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