

Position Statement on the 2024 Farm Bill

December 2024

Policy Position

The Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska urges the strengthening of rural development efforts within the Farm Bill and recognizes those efforts cannot be successful without strategic attention to rural child care.

Federal Recommendation

Working with the Nebraska congressional delegation, support reauthorization of the Farm Bill, including adoption of the three-year rural child care initiative approved by the House Agriculture Committee.

Nebraska Recommendation

Strengthen rural child care by:

- Utilizing the Buffett Early Childhood Institute child care needs and gaps analysis in the “[6 Regions, One Nebraska](#)” initiative, economic development regions develop plans to ensure sufficient child care is available for each local region.
- Working in partnership with the Nebraska Chamber of Commerce & Industry, local businesses, philanthropy, Communities for Kids, and state government officials, support expansion of child care in rural communities.

Background

Agricultural business and rural communities are vital to the national economy—and to Nebraska’s. While farming and ranching often conjure images of a sweet and straightforward way of life, rural issues are complex, requiring serious and strategic solutions. Rural communities are often isolated and face declining populations. People, especially young rural families, are central to rural economic and community well-being. Attracting and retaining young families is the largest and most critical obstacle facing rural communities today.

Young families need child care. The largest employers in rural areas include education, health care, government, retail, manufacturing, and farming. This variety of rural employers often calls for child care during both traditional and nontraditional hours. At the same time, child care shortages are greater for rural families than for families in urban areas. One survey found that 48% of rural parents had to call out or miss a shift due to difficulty securing child care, and 38% had to leave the workforce altogether.¹

¹ <https://savethechildrenactionnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/SCAN-Rural-Voters-Key-Findings.pdf>

The National Children’s Center for Rural and Agricultural Health surveyed rural families and found that 97% of parents are concerned their child could get hurt on the farm. Every day, 33 children are seriously injured in agricultural-related incidents, and every three days a child dies on a farm. The largest number of injuries are among children under age 10.² Rural parents, like parents everywhere, want safe and enriching child care options.

To help support rural communities, the Farm Bill, which authorizes most programs administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), provides farmers with a range of programs to help stabilize their incomes and manage market fluctuations. Programs promote sustainable farming practices, fund research on modern technologies to improve crop yields, and support critical infrastructure improvements in rural communities, including child care.

Looking Ahead

The most recent Farm Bill signed by President Donald Trump, [*The Agricultural Improvement Act of 2018*](#), was authorized until 2023 and extended through the end of fiscal year 2024. To avoid significant impacts to food and farm funding, Congress will need to either pass a new farm bill or extend the 2018 bill by the end of the current calendar year.

On Nov. 18, U.S. Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee Chairwoman Debbie Stabenow (D) released a section-by-section framework of the [*Rural Prosperity and Food Security Act*](#) which builds upon a [framework released earlier this year](#) and includes strategic investments for agriculture. In May 2024, the House Agriculture Committee approved the [*Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2024*](#), which has not yet reached the House floor.

[This House bill](#) would establish a three-year rural child care initiative at USDA to help rural communities meet the child care demands of their area and require UDSA to evaluate the initiative upon its completion. While the [Senate proposal](#) does not specifically mention the initiative in the House bill, it does require a prioritization of projects and establishes access to credit for rural child care.

² https://marshfieldresearch.org/Media/Default/NFMC/National%20Childrens%20Center/2022_Child_Ag_Injury_Fact_Sheet.pdf