



Buffett Early Childhood Institute  
at the University of Nebraska

# Position Statement on Reauthorization of the Farm Bill in the 119th Congress

March 2025

## Background

The Farm Bill is a critical tool for supporting our nation's rural communities and agricultural industry, which are vital to the national economy. The food and agriculture industry employs nearly 24 million employees, more than 14% of workers in the United States, and supports over 48 million jobs.<sup>1</sup> Still, rural and farm communities are isolated, overlooked, and facing declining populations. Attracting and retaining young families is the largest and most critical obstacle facing rural communities today.

## Rural Child Care Challenges

Child care access is tied to employment opportunities, business sustainability, and economic viability. Nearly 74% of farm families experience challenges in child care due to cost, availability, and distance. Long-term economic impact analyses of the rural child care gap (in 35 states and Washington, D.C.) show that each missing child care slot results in \$32.79 billion to \$49.93 billion in economic losses.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> Almost half of parents think access to affordable child care is important to growing their farm. Lack of child care also affects stress levels and mental health in farming communities.<sup>4</sup>

Prior work by the Bipartisan Policy Center shows that child care shortages are especially large in rural areas.<sup>5</sup> In Nebraska, nearly 1 in 4 families in rural areas do not have access to child care, versus 1 in 10 in urban areas. Nationwide, only 38% of rural families can easily access high-quality child care within their budget. 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. Rural parents, like parents everywhere, want safe and enriching child care options.<sup>6, 7</sup>

Child care is a key strategy to supporting rural communities, and investments in rural families pay off. A Nebraska analysis by the Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska shows that state investments in rural child care benefited families. With targeted investments, rural child care capacity increased by over 2,000 spaces (6%), reducing the child care gap by 12.8%. As the gap decreased, estimates of long-term economic losses improved by nearly 23%.<sup>8</sup>

## Reauthorizing the Farm Bill

The Farm Bill, which authorizes most programs administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), provides farmers with a range of programs to stabilize their incomes and manage market fluctuations. These 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.

The current law, *The Agricultural Improvement Act of 2018*, was signed by President Donald Trump. Due to expire in 2023, it was extended once for the end of FY 2024 and again through FY 2025 by the American Relief Act of 2025. Congress must either pass a new Farm Bill or extend the 2018 bill by September 30, 2025. Child care in rural and farming communities is often overlooked or viewed as too challenging because of the small community size. It is time to address the challenges in these communities, especially for the farmers and ranchers that help secure our domestic food supply.

## Congressional Recommendations

- Reauthorize the Farm Bill, and support child care for rural communities by strengthening the rural development sections of the bill.
- Authorize a three-year rural child care initiative at USDA to help rural communities meet the child care demands of their area.
- Authorize the use of funding from USDA's Rural Business Development Grant program, Rural Microentrepreneur Assistance program, and Rural Innovation Stronger Economy grant program for the expansion and/or construction of child care facilities to increase safe, direct child care services in rural communities.
- Exempt small, family child care homes from the USDA's Rural Development housing regulations prohibiting ties to commercial use.
- Expand the USDA's Rural Partners Network to include child care representation in the network and programming, as well as to provide technical assistance for communities in need of child care infrastructure.

## Nebraska Recommendations

- Utilize the Buffett Institute's child care gaps analysis of the "Six Regions, One Nebraska" economic development regions to develop plans to ensure sufficient child care is available for each local region.
- Work in partnership with the Nebraska Chamber of Commerce & Industry, local businesses, philanthropy, Communities for Kids, and state government officials to support expansion of child care in rural communities.

<sup>1</sup> Feeding the Economy. (2024). *U.S. food and ag industries economic impact on the United States*. <https://thesustainabilityalliance.us/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/United-States-Table.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska. (March 2025). *National Child Care Gap Assessment: Nebraska Analysis*.

<sup>3</sup> New Bridge Strategy, Hart Research. (December 2022). *Rural voters' views on hunger, child care, and early education*. <https://savethechildrenactionnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/SCAN-Rural-Voters-Key-Findings.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Bipartisan Policy Center. (October 2023). *Early childhood rural child care framework*. <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/report/rural-child-care-policy-framework/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://childcaregap.org/>

<sup>6</sup> See footnote 4

<sup>7</sup> National Children's Center for Rural and Agricultural Health and Safety. (2022). *Childhood agricultural injuries*. [https://marshfieldresearch.org/Media/Default/NFMC/National%20Childrens%20Center/2022\\_Child\\_Ag\\_Injury\\_Fact\\_Sheet.pdf](https://marshfieldresearch.org/Media/Default/NFMC/National%20Childrens%20Center/2022_Child_Ag_Injury_Fact_Sheet.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> See footnote 2

