

determining eligibility for meals under the National School Lunch Act or the School Breakfast Program.

(d) Expanding the farm to school program.—In administering the programs amended by this section, the Secretary of Agriculture shall—

(1) ensure that not less than 20 percent of total food expenditures under the National School Lunch Act and the School Breakfast Program are directed to food produced, processed, or aggregated by small and mid-sized farms and independent processors located locally or regionally;

(2) prioritize procurement arrangements that shorten supply chains, increase farmer participation, and expand access for small and mid-sized farms and independent producers; and

(3) exclude from the minimum percentage any procurement from vertically integrated or dominant firms that primarily source food through national or global supply chains.

(e) Infrastructure and coordination.—The Secretary of Agriculture shall provide technical assistance and administrative support to enable compliance with subsection (d), including support for aggregation, storage, processing, distribution, food hubs, producer-to-school coordination, and other activities traditionally carried out under the Patrick Leahy Farm to School Program ([42 U.S.C. 1769\(g\)](#)).

(f) Transition authority.—The Secretary may provide for phased compliance with subsection (d), waivers for demonstrated hardship, and technical assistance, but shall require each school food authority to make continuous progress toward meeting the minimum percentage.

(g) Appropriation authorization.—There are authorized to be appropriated such sums as may be necessary to carry out this section.

Subtitle A—Institutional Capacity

SEC. 711. STRENGTHENING USDA INSPECTION CAPACITY.

(a) Findings.—Congress finds the following:

(1) the Department of Agriculture faces persistent shortages in inspection personnel necessary to carry out inspection, facility oversight, grading, and sanitation duties under the Federal Meat Inspection Act and the Poultry Products Inspection Act; and

(2) effective enforcement of the Packers and Stockyards Act by the Administrator requires a well-resourced and fully staffed inspection and grading workforce within the Department of Agriculture.

(b) Workforce expansion.—The Secretary of Agriculture (in this section referred to as the "Secretary") shall take such actions as are necessary within the Meat and Poultry Inspection Division of the Food Safety and Inspection Service to—

(1) increase the number of inspection personnel, using recruitment and retention incentives as needed;

(2) modernize inspector scheduling, deployment, and training systems;

(3) identify and train part-time inspectors and technical assistance providers; and

(4) expand the availability of processing inspectors, technical assistance, and onsite inspection for eligible processing facilities, including no-cost overtime inspections.

(c) Professional experience.—The Secretary shall determine the appropriate professional experience of inspectors and providers described in subsection (b), which shall include individuals with expertise in veterinary medicine, public health, food service management, and animal science, as applicable.

(d) Rulemaking.—The Secretary shall promulgate such regulations as are necessary to carry out this section.

(e) Funding from USDA Field Capacity Restoration Fund.—

(1) In general.—For each fiscal year, the Secretary of Agriculture may use not more than \$50,000,000 from the USDA Field Capacity Restoration Fund established under section 712 to carry out this section.

(2) Priority use.—Amounts made available under paragraph (1) shall be used for inspection personnel recruitment, retention, training, deployment, and related support functions necessary to carry out the Federal Meat Inspection Act, the Poultry Products Inspection Act, and the Packers and Stockyards Act.

(3) Supplement not supplant.—Amounts made available under this subsection shall supplement and not supplant any other amounts made available for inspection or enforcement activities.

SEC. 712. REBUILDING USDA FIELD CAPACITY AND SERVICE DELIVERY.

(a) Findings.—Congress finds the following:

(1) effective agricultural policy depends on timely, accessible, and equitable delivery of services by the Department of Agriculture;

(2) chronic understaffing, office closures, and administrative backlogs within the Department of Agriculture have impaired access to farm programs, credit, conservation assistance, and market support, particularly for small and mid-sized producers;

(3) reliance on centralized or online-only service delivery has reduced practical access for producers in rural and underserved areas; and

(4) restoring on-the-ground capacity is necessary to ensure that Federal agricultural programs operate as enacted by Congress.

(b) Covered agencies.—In this section, the term "covered agency" means—

(1) the Farm Service Agency;

(2) the Natural Resources Conservation Service;

(3) the Rural Development mission area of the Department of Agriculture;

(4) the Agricultural Marketing Service, including functions relating to agricultural input oversight, contract fairness, market conduct, and producer protection, but excluding inspection functions carried out under the Federal Meat Inspection Act and the Poultry Products Inspection Act;

(5) the National Organic Program, including organic transition assistance under section 741(f), certification assistance, or organic compliance support programs; and

(6) any successor agency or office performing substantially similar producer-facing functions.

(c) Minimum service capacity requirements.—

(1) Staffing floors.—The Secretary of Agriculture shall ensure that each covered agency maintains sufficient personnel to carry out statutory duties without unreasonable delay, including minimum staffing levels for field offices serving agricultural producers.

(2) Vacancy limits.—No covered field office position essential to producer services may remain vacant for more than 180 days unless the Secretary publicly certifies that extraordinary circumstances prevent timely hiring.

(3) Physical presence.—The Secretary shall maintain accessible physical service locations for covered agencies in agricultural regions and may not eliminate or consolidate such locations if doing so would materially impair access to services.

(d) Hiring and retention authorities.—The Secretary of Agriculture may use the following authorities to carry out this section:

(1) direct-hire authority for covered agency positions;

(2) recruitment and retention incentives, including rural pay differentials and student loan repayment;

(3) paid training, apprenticeship, and fellowship programs linked to land-grant colleges and universities; and

(4) targeted hiring initiatives for underserved and high-need agricultural regions.

(e) Service delivery benchmarks.—

(1) Timeliness.—The Secretary shall establish benchmarks for timely processing of applications, payments, determinations, and approvals administered by covered agencies.

(2) Transparency.—The Secretary shall publish annual metrics on staffing levels, vacancy duration, and average processing times for major programs administered by covered agencies.

(f) USDA Field Capacity Restoration Fund.—

(1) Establishment.—There is established in the Treasury a fund to be known as the "USDA Field Capacity Restoration Fund".

(2) Funding.—The USDA Field Capacity Restoration Fund shall consist of amounts transferred under sections 731 and 742. In addition, there is appropriated to the USDA Field Capacity Restoration Fund, out of amounts in the Treasury not otherwise appropriated, \$500,000,000 to carry out the purposes of this section.

(3) Availability.—Amounts in the USDA Field Capacity Restoration Fund shall be available to the Secretary of Agriculture, without fiscal year limitation, solely for personnel, training and transition services, field offices, travel, core administrative systems of covered agencies, and activities authorized under section 711, and not for grants or activities unrelated to direct service delivery.

(g) Oversight.—

(1) Report.—Not later than July 1, 2028, and every 2 years thereafter, the Secretary shall submit to the Committees on Agriculture of the House of Representatives and the Senate a report describing compliance with this section.

(2) Review.—The Comptroller General of the United States may review implementation of this section and assess whether staffing and service benchmarks are being met.

(h) Rulemaking.—The Secretary of Agriculture shall promulgate such regulations as are necessary to carry out this section.

SEC. 713. PROCESSOR CAREER TRAINING PROGRAMS.

(a) Title IV of the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 is amended by inserting before section 404 ([7 U.S.C. 7624](#)) the following:

"Sec. 403. Processor career training programs.

"(a) Definitions.—In this section:

"(1) Land-grant colleges and universities.—The term 'land-grant colleges and universities' has the meaning given the term in section 1404 of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 ([7 U.S.C. 3103](#)).

"(2) Smaller establishment; very small establishment.—The terms 'smaller establishment' and 'very small establishment' have the meanings given those terms in the final rule entitled 'Pathogen Reduction; Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) Systems', as published in the Federal Register on July 25, 1996 ([61 Fed. Reg. 38806](#)).

"(3) Structured apprenticeship.—The term 'structured apprenticeship' means an apprenticeship program that—

"(A) provides most of the training on the job in a meat or poultry processing facility;

"(B) describes in detail—

"(i) all of the competencies necessary to work in a meat or poultry processing facility; and

"(ii) the competencies that are necessary to own and operate a meat or poultry processing facility that is a smaller establishment or a very small establishment;

"(C) describes the level of knowledge, skill, and ability the apprentice ought to attain in each competency;

"(D) includes a component for someone other than the trainer—

"(i) to assess competency attainment; and

"(ii) to assure that all competencies are being addressed during the apprenticeship;

"(E) includes an individualized plan for each apprentice that—

"(i) considers prior knowledge, skill, and ability; and

"(ii) allows for apprentices to opt out of competencies irrelevant to their career goals; and

"(F) focuses on individuals who will work in or operate meat or poultry processing facilities that are smaller establishments or very small establishments.

"(b) Processor career training programs.—

"(1) In general.—The Secretary shall provide competitive grants to junior or community colleges, technical or vocational schools, nonprofit organizations, worker training centers, and land-grant colleges and universities to establish or expand career training programs, including for structured apprenticeships, relating to meat and poultry processing.

"(2) Applications for small grants.—The Secretary shall establish a separate, simplified application and reporting process for entities described in paragraph (1) applying for a grant under this subsection of not more than \$100,000.

"(3) Authorization of appropriations.—There is authorized to be appropriated to the Secretary to carry out this subsection \$10,000,000 for each of fiscal years 2027 through 2032."

SEC. 714. PUBLIC INTEREST SAFEGUARDS FOR USDA-FUNDED AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH.

(a) Findings.—Congress finds the following:

(1) Federal agricultural research funded by the Department of Agriculture is a public investment intended to serve farmers, consumers, and the long-term resilience of the United States food system.

(2) Consolidation in agricultural input markets has been reinforced through proprietary control over research developed with public funds.

(3) Farmers, independent researchers, and public institutions require access to open, replicable, and nonexclusive innovations to maintain competition and resilience.

(4) Federal research funding should not be used to entrench private market power, dependency, or exclusionary control over essential agricultural inputs.

(b) Definitions.—In this section, the term "agricultural research programs" means research, extension, education, and innovation programs administered or funded by the Department of Agriculture, including programs carried out through the Agricultural Research Service, the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, land-grant colleges and universities, cooperative extension services, and any successor or substantially similar programs.

(c) Research funding priorities.—In carrying out agricultural research programs, the Secretary of Agriculture shall prioritize funding for research that—

(1) reduces producer reliance on purchased, monopolized, or proprietary agricultural inputs;

(2) improves soil health, fertility, and long-term agricultural productivity;

(3) supports region-specific, climate-resilient, and diversified farming systems;

(4) advances open-source seed development, including publicly accessible germplasm, breeding lines, and varietal improvements available for unrestricted research, breeding, and farmer use;

(5) supports farmer transition to regenerative and organic production systems;

(6) promotes input-reducing agronomic practices, biological alternatives, and agroecological approaches; and

(7) supports farmer-led, public, or cooperative research and innovation models.

(d) Nonexclusive licensing requirement.—Any intellectual property, germplasm, biological material, data, or technical innovation developed in whole or in part using funds provided under agricultural research programs shall—

(1) be made available under nonexclusive, fair, and reasonable licensing terms; and

(2) not be licensed, transferred, or restricted in a manner that materially limits farmer access, independent research, replication, breeding, or competitive market entry.

(e) Prohibited licensing and agreement terms.—Funds provided under agricultural research programs may not be used for grants, cooperative agreements, or contracts that—

(1) require exclusive licenses or exclusive field-of-use restrictions for resulting research outputs;

(2) prohibit independent testing, evaluation, replication, or breeding;

(3) condition access to research outputs on the purchase or use of proprietary inputs, technologies, or services; or

(4) impose downstream restrictions that limit farmer reuse, seed saving, or further development of research outputs, except as consistent with subsection (d).

(f) Transparency and reporting.—The Secretary of Agriculture shall publish an annual public report describing—

(1) categories of research funded under agricultural research programs;

(2) licensing status of resulting research outputs;

(3) the use of nonexclusive licensing arrangements; and

(4) actions taken to expand open-source, farmer-accessible, and publicly available research outcomes.

(g) Applicability and background intellectual property.—

(1) Applicability.—This section shall apply to all grants, cooperative agreements, and contracts entered into after the date of enactment of this Act.

(2) Background intellectual property.—Except as provided in paragraph (3), nothing in this section shall require the licensing, transfer, or disclosure of intellectual property, germplasm, biological material, data, or technical innovation developed independently of and without the use of funds provided under agricultural research programs, including any such property developed before the commencement of a grant, cooperative agreement, or contract subject to this section. Each such grant, cooperative agreement, or contract shall identify, to the extent reasonably practicable, any such background property expected to be used in carrying out the agreement.

(3) Necessary access.—If a research output subject to subsection (d) cannot reasonably be used or practiced without access to background property identified under paragraph (2), the grant, cooperative agreement, or contract shall require a nonexclusive, fair, and reasonable license to such background property to the extent necessary to prevent the material limitations described in subsection (d)(2).

Subtitle B—Transparency and Fairer Competition in Grocery Markets

SEC. 721. PROHIBITING ALGORITHMIC COORDINATION IN THE FOOD SUPPLY.

(a) In this section:

(1) Chair.—The term "Chair" means the Chair of the Commission.

(2) Commission.—The term "Commission" means the Federal Trade Commission.

(3) Consciously parallel pricing coordination.—The term "consciously parallel pricing coordination" means a tacit agreement between 2 or more food producers to raise, lower, change, maintain, or manipulate pricing for the purchase or sale of reasonably interchangeable food products.

(4) Coordinating function.—The term "coordinating function" means—

(A) collecting historical or contemporaneous food product prices or supply levels from 2 or more food producers;