



SUMMIT REPORT

Executive Summary

July 2025

Reimagining the
Future of U.S.
Agriculture:
Insights from the
Farm Foundation
2025 Summit.



On May 20, 2025, the Farm Foundation hosted an invitation-only Summit at its Innovation and Education Campus in Libertyville, Illinois, to facilitate high-level, non-partisan, interdisciplinary dialogue concerning the long-term viability and structural resilience of the U.S. food and agriculture system.



The Summit defined what resilience in food and agriculture truly means:

A resilient food and agriculture system has the ability to produce food, even in the midst of changes and shocks, that sustains the planet and all people through access to safe, affordable, nutritious, and culturally relevant food.

The U.S. food and agriculture system is operating within an increasingly complex and contested landscape. Exogenous disruptions—including global supply chain fragility, climatic volatility, and geopolitical instability—interact with endogenous stressors such as rural demographic decline, land consolidation, and institutional fragmentation. Together, these dynamics have created an environment for the entire sector that can be characterized by uncertainty, contested legitimacy, and divergent stakeholder expectations.

This complexity also presents a rare opportunity for system-level reconfiguration. Emerging technologies, digital infrastructure, novel market mechanisms, and a renewed public discourse on sustainability offer tangible tools for redesigning agricultural systems around principles of resilience, equity, and ecological integrity. However, realizing this potential will require more than technical innovation—it necessitates rebuilding institutional trust, coordinating fragmented policy regimes, and cultivating adaptive governance capacities at multiple scales.



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The event brought together a curated group of thought leaders across policy, industry, research, and farming communities.

The structure of the Summit was intentionally participatory and peer-driven. It included keynote conversations, panel-style sessions, and structured group discussions designed to synthesize ideas across stakeholder categories. Attendees were encouraged not only to analyze current conditions but to propose bold new frameworks for innovation and change. Breakout group discussions further allowed for peer-led synthesis, which was later shared and visually summarized through session posters and presentations.

While no singular consensus was mandated, substantial convergence emerged around three strategic imperatives:

- (1) The establishment of controlled environments for policy experimentation—"policy innovation sandboxes"—that allow adaptive learning in a risk-mitigated setting;
- (2) The revitalization of rural communities, not merely as sites of production but as complex socio-economic systems requiring integrated investment; and
- (3) The reengineering of extension systems to operate as modern, trusted, and community-embedded institutions.

Farm Foundation's Future Food System Key Takeaways

Convergence emerged around three strategic imperatives:

(1) Change policy making environments.

Participants noted that the current agricultural policy landscape is characterized by procedural rigidity and compliance-driven mandates, which leave little room for **innovation**.



(2) The revitalization of rural communities

not merely as sites of production but as complex socio-economic systems requiring integrated investment.



(3) The reengineering of extension systems

to operate as modern, trusted, and community-embedded institutions.



Possible innovations and actions for further exploration:

Establish controlled environments for **policy experimentation, "policy innovation sandboxes,"** that allow adaptive learning in a risk-mitigated setting.

Integrated approach to policy making, national and local, bottom up and top down. Integrate social, economic and ecological. **Opportunities for innovation in how to convene differently and highlight what's working.**

Innovations such as **mobile advisory platforms, leveraging AI, peer-to-peer farmer training networks,** and integrated extension hubs that combine agricultural, environmental, and rural development services.

In addition to these core themes, the Summit explored a range of cross-cutting enablers, including innovation and metrics infrastructure, shared risk paradigms, and public-private alignment. The proceedings emphasized that technological and financial inputs, while necessary, are insufficient in isolation. Instead, sustained transformation will require a recalibration of institutional arrangements, governance frameworks, and trust-building mechanisms.

Participants first identified and agreed upon five key systemic barriers in US agriculture: policy fragmentation, risk asymmetry, gaps in extension services, capital and infrastructure constraints, and the urban-rural divide. Rather than treating these as discrete technical issues, the Summit positioned them as interdependent constraints requiring coordinated, multi-level responses.



Participants noted that the current agricultural policy landscape is characterized by procedural rigidity and compliance-driven mandates, which leave little room for innovation. There was broad agreement that designated institutional spaces are necessary for piloting, evaluating, and refining policy tools, regulatory models, and incentive structures before implementing them on a national scale. This so-called policy “sandbox” was seen not as a discretionary tool but as an operational necessity in the context of rapid ecological, technological, and economic change. If designed rigorously, these environments can accelerate institutional learning, build political legitimacy for reform, and facilitate the scaling of high-impact solutions.

The second strategic imperative identified by Summit participants centered on the socio-economic and spatial repositioning of rural communities. Participants argued for the integration of rural policy into national development planning, moving beyond sectoral silos. Because the future of American agriculture depends on whether rural communities are empowered not merely as beneficiaries but as co-creators of development agendas. A resilient rural policy must integrate social equity, economic inclusion, and ecological sustainability as interlocking objectives. Participants emphasized the importance of culturally sensitive outreach strategies, bottom-up governance models, and adaptable policy design that accommodates regional diversity.

The third strategic imperative focused on reconfiguring agricultural extension systems. These institutions, historically rooted in the land-grant university model, have played a central role in bridging the gap between research and practice. Participants cited promising innovations such as mobile advisory platforms, peer-to-peer farmer training networks, and integrated extension hubs that combine agricultural, environmental, and rural development services. Rebuilding extension credibility among underserved populations—including BIPOC producers, immigrant farmers, and non-English-speaking communities—was identified as a moral and strategic imperative.

The future of U.S. food and agriculture depends on our sector's willingness to innovate not only in technologies and markets, but in the very structures and relationships that shape them. By embracing policy innovation sandboxes, strengthening rural communities, and revitalizing extension services—while simultaneously investing in data-driven metrics, shared-risk frameworks, and deep public-private collaboration—we can transition from siloed programs and short-term fixes to a system that is adaptive, equitable, and resilient.

This collective agenda is neither static nor exhaustive; it is a living blueprint that requires ongoing engagement, mutual learning, and the steady forging of new alliances. As policymakers, producers, researchers, investors, and community leaders, each of us holds a piece of the puzzle. The work ahead requires a sustained commitment, cross-sector dialogue, and the courage to pilot innovative approaches. Together, we can turn the Summit's vision into enduring practice—and ensure that American agriculture thrives in the face of twenty-first-century challenges.



To explore the full insights and findings, you can read the complete report: *Toward a Resilient Food and Agriculture Future: Summary Report of the 2025 Farm Foundation Summit, held May 20, 2025, in Libertyville, Illinois.* [Read the full report](#)

Thank you to the leaders who attended this summit and engaged in this process:

Farmer/Producers/Land

Inputs/Equip

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Technological Tools and Verification Methods

Please note that Several AI tools were utilized throughout the development of this paper. In the first stage, Samsung's voice AI was used to convert voice recordings into transcripts, which were then cross-verified using Gemini to ensure accuracy. Additionally, optical character recognition (OCR) technology was utilized to digitize handwritten notes from meetings.

These converted materials were used to draft the initial version of the paper, which was then iteratively refined with the support of four additional AI tools: Claude, Elicit, ChatGPT, and SciSpace. These tools helped ensure the scientific integrity of the content and assisted in refining the language to align the tone with that of prior Farm Foundation publications.



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