Title: Toward a Resilient Food and Agriculture Future

Summary Report of the 2025 Farm Foundation Summit

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Executive Summary

The U.S. food and agriculture system is confronting a complex and growing set of challenges. Global supply chain vulnerabilities, climate extremes, and international conflicts are converging with domestic issues, including rural population decline, concentrated land ownership, and fragmented policies. Together, these forces have generated widespread uncertainty, policy gridlock, and diverging expectations among stakeholders.

Yet, these challenges also present a rare opportunity to rethink and reshape the future of American agriculture. Emerging technologies, expanded broadband access, modernized markets, and growing public interest in sustainability offer the tools to build a more equitable, resilient, and environmentally responsible system. However, technological solutions alone are insufficient. Achieving lasting change will require rebuilding trust, reforming outdated institutions, and fostering new models of collaboration.

On May 20, 2025, the Farm Foundation convened a private, nonpartisan summit at its Innovation and Education Campus in Libertyville, Illinois. This event brought together a cross-sector group of leaders from government, agribusiness, food retailers, research institutions, and the farming community. The summit was designed as a working session, not a lecture series—featuring interactive panels, small-group discussions, and collaborative problem-solving focused on innovation, not just diagnosis.

While participants brought diverse perspectives, three unifying themes emerged:

Creating Policy Sandboxes for Innovation
Attendees widely supported the development of "policy sandboxes"—controlled environments that allow for the testing of new agricultural and food policy approaches on a small scale before broader implementation. These safe "testing grounds" could foster innovation while minimizing risk, enabling more agile and adaptive policy development.

Reinvesting in Rural Communities
Participants emphasized that rural America is not only the backbone of food, fuel, and fiber production but also home to families, businesses, and a rich rural legacy.

Revitalizing rural communities is essential for the future of agriculture. This means comprehensive investments—in education, healthcare, infrastructure, entrepreneurship, and leadership development—that go beyond just targeted agricultural support.

Modernizing Extension Services
The Cooperative Extension System—originally designed to translate research into practical guidance for farmers—must be reimagined to meet the needs of today's diverse agricultural landscape. Participants called for more inclusive, tech-enabled, and community-centered extension models. These may include mobile advisory platforms, peer-to-peer learning networks, and integrated hubs that address agricultural, environmental, and social needs. Importantly, better engagement with diverse producer groups was identified as both an equity imperative and a practical priority.

In addition to these central themes, the summit examined key enablers of change, including enhanced data infrastructure, innovative risk-sharing models, and strengthened public-private partnerships. Throughout all of the discussions, a consistent message was clear: financial resources and advanced technologies are essential, but not sufficient. Trust, collaboration, and institutional renewal are equally vital.

Participants also identified five persistent barriers that hinder progress:

- Fragmented and misaligned policies
- Disproportionate risk burdens
- Outdated or under-resourced extension services
- Insufficient rural investment and infrastructure
- A deepening urban-rural divide

Participants agreed that these challenges are interconnected and must be addressed through coordinated, cross-sector action.

A Vision in Progress
The future of American agriculture depends not only on tools and technologies, but also on new relationships, institutions, and approaches to problem-solving. By piloting bold policy innovations, investing in vibrant rural communities, and transforming support systems such as extension, the agricultural sector can shift from fragmented and often competing initiatives to a more coherent, inclusive, and future-ready system.

This vision is not a static plan—it is a dynamic, evolving commitment. It will require sustained effort, open dialogue, and courageous leadership from across the sector. Farmers, researchers, business leaders, policymakers, investors, and community advocates all play a crucial role. Together, we can build a more resilient and equitable agricultural future for a rapidly changing world.

Section I: Framing the Challenge

Despite the thematic breadth of discussions at the 2025 Farm Foundation Summit—ranging from food systems innovation to rural revitalization—participants consistently returned to a set of foundational impediments that undermine the structural coherence, equity, and adaptability of the U.S. food and agriculture system. These constraints are neither isolated nor incidental; rather, they reflect entrenched institutional path dependencies, historically uneven patterns of development, and policy inertia in the face of accelerating environmental and market volatility. This section elaborates on five interrelated systemic barriers that were repeatedly identified by participants, offering an analytical foundation for the strategic priorities addressed in the subsequent sections of this report.

Challenge 1: Policy Fragmentation and Governance Incoherence

The architecture of U.S. agricultural governance has evolved over decades through a cumulative layering of programs, agencies, and mandates. While such an evolutionary approach has offered policy continuity, it has also produced a highly fragmented and siloed institutional landscape. Participants expressed widespread concern regarding the incoherence across federal, state, and local policies, citing overlapping mandates, conflicting eligibility criteria, and temporal misalignments in program cycles as significant barriers to innovation.

This fragmentation is especially problematic in addressing multidimensional challenges such as climate adaptation, which require cross-scalar coordination, integrative planning, and dynamic risk management. For example, efforts to implement soil health improvement practices may fall under disparate conservation programs (e.g., EQIP, CSP), each with different criteria and reporting mechanisms, thereby deterring producer participation. Moreover, inter-agency misalignment between USDA, EPA, and state-level departments was cited as a key obstacle to integrated land and water resource governance. Without coherent, adaptive, and transparent policy frameworks, producers and local governments face disincentives to engage in long-term planning or to invest in regenerative innovations.

Challenge 2: Asymmetric Risk Distribution and the Limitations of Safety Nets

Another widely shared concern related to the disproportionate burden of risk borne by producers, particularly in the face of increasingly volatile climatic, market, and policy environments. While federal safety net programs such as crop insurance and disaster relief offer some degree of protection, they are often reactive, yield-based, and poorly tailored to the emerging risk profiles of diversified, conservation-oriented operations.

Participants underscored the absence of risk-sharing mechanisms that reflect the interdependence between producers, consumers, markets, and state actors. The existing institutional architecture fails to equitably distribute systemic risks across the value chain, often leaving small- and medium-scale producers vulnerable to exogenous shocks. In particular, beginning farmers, producers in marginalized geographies, and those transitioning toward climate-smart practices were identified as being underserved by current risk mitigation instruments.

Calls were made for the development of new financial instruments—such as outcome-indexed insurance, income stabilization funds, and climate risk bonds—that could facilitate more anticipatory, performance-based, and collaborative risk management. Participants emphasized that such tools should be embedded within broader governance frameworks that incentivize co-investment, institutional trust, and adaptive capacity at the landscape scale.

Challenge 3: Institutional Erosion of Agricultural Extension Systems

Historically, agricultural extension services—anchored in land-grant universities—played a pivotal role in disseminating scientific knowledge and supporting capacity-building in rural regions. However, multiple participants noted a perceived erosion of both the legitimacy and effectiveness of extension systems over recent decades. This erosion is not simply a matter of resource constraints, though chronic underfunding was widely acknowledged. It also reflects a deeper crisis of institutional relevance and relational trust.

In particular, traditional extension delivery models were described as insufficiently attuned to the socio-cultural diversity, digital expectations, and multi-dimensional learning needs of contemporary agricultural communities. Producers in racially and linguistically diverse regions, for example, often report limited engagement with extension agents or programming that fails to address their specific operational and cultural contexts. Furthermore, the technical content of extension programs was viewed as lagging behind advances in agri-environmental science, digital agriculture, and climate adaptation planning.

Participants argued that extension systems require not only a modernization of content and methods but also a reorientation of institutional purpose—from top-down knowledge transfer to iterative co-learning, facilitation, and community empowerment. Without trusted, responsive, and scientifically robust extension infrastructures, efforts to scale up sustainable practices and diversify rural economies are likely to fall short.

Challenge 4: Capital Access and Infrastructure Deficiencies in Rural Economies

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The viability of rural agricultural enterprises is increasingly undermined by inadequate access to capital and deteriorating physical infrastructure. While these issues are longstanding, their impacts have become more pronounced under conditions of global supply chain reconfiguration, demographic decline in rural areas, and intensified land market competition. New and beginning farmers—especially those lacking inherited assets—face formidable barriers in securing land, credit, and working capital. Existing financial services are often inaccessible, misaligned with seasonal cash flows, or risk-averse in underwriting non-conventional or diversified operations.

Equally constraining is the state of rural infrastructure. Participants pointed to limited broadband connectivity, insufficient cold-chain logistics, and degraded transportation networks as structural bottlenecks to competitiveness, value addition, and market integration. These deficiencies not only inhibit farm profitability but also limit opportunities for economic diversification and the attraction of new talent to rural regions. Infrastructure investment, therefore, was not merely framed as a matter of economic stimulus, but as a prerequisite for long-term structural transformation.

Challenge 5: Public Perception and Urban-Rural Divides

Lastly, participants highlighted the widening perceptual and cultural divide between urban consumers and rural producers as a barrier to both public understanding and effective policymaking. Misconceptions about modern agricultural practices, food pricing, environmental impacts, and labor conditions contribute to polarized discourse and politicized policy environments. This disconnect undermines public support for farm programs, sustainability transitions, and rural development initiatives.

Several participants emphasized the need for enhanced communication channels, participatory food system governance models, and public education initiatives aimed at bridging this divide. Furthermore, it was suggested that agricultural policy reform must be accompanied by civic engagement strategies that reframe agriculture as a public good with broad-based benefits and responsibilities.

In sum, these five systemic barriers—policy fragmentation, risk asymmetry, institutional erosion, infrastructure and capital gaps, and social disconnection—constitute the structural terrain upon which future reform strategies must operate. Rather than treating these as discrete technical issues, the Summit positioned them as interdependent constraints requiring coordinated, multi-level responses. The next section of this report turns to the strategic opportunities that emerged in response to this diagnostic framework.

Section II: Strategic Imperatives for Systemic Innovation

Having identified in Part I the five shared systemic barriers—policy fragmentation, risk asymmetry, extension service gaps, capital and infrastructure constraints, and urban–rural perception divides—we now turn to the strategic imperatives for systemic innovation. In this section, we present three interlocking frameworks designed to surmount these entrenched challenges: controlled policy experimentation through “innovation sandboxes,” the multidimensional revitalization of rural ecosystems, and the comprehensive modernization of extension services. Together, these imperatives establish a practical, learning-oriented roadmap

for catalyzing adaptive governance, fostering inclusive stakeholder engagement, and driving large-scale transformation across the U.S. food and agriculture system.

Strategy 1: Policy Innovation Sandbox

The concept of a policy innovation sandbox has gained traction across sectors such as financial technology, health care, and energy governance as a means of facilitating structured, low-risk experimentation. Within the agricultural policy domain, participants at the 2025 Farm Foundation Summit advocated for the establishment of similar experimental zones—designated institutional spaces in which policy tools, regulatory models, and incentive structures can be piloted, evaluated, and refined prior to national deployment. These sandboxes would function as semi-regulated environments supported by legal waivers and flexible funding streams, designed to promote iterative learning while containing institutional risk.

Participants articulated that the current agricultural policy landscape is marked by procedural rigidity and compliance-driven mandates that leave little room for innovation. Federal programs are frequently bound to legacy metrics and timelines that do not accommodate site-specific or emerging challenges, such as climate adaptation or regenerative land management. In response, the sandbox model was positioned as an essential precondition for adaptive policymaking in a dynamic and uncertain agri-environmental context.

Proposed sandbox interventions included:

- Performance-based insurance schemes indexed to measurable soil health indicators and ecosystem service outcomes.
- Ecological land appraisal models that incorporate non-market values such as biodiversity, water retention, and carbon sequestration.
- Blended finance instruments combining public investment with private sector funding to de-risk climate-smart agricultural transitions.
- Flexible conservation payment systems tied to adaptive carbon accounting tools and localized environmental baselines.

Despite widespread support for sandbox frameworks, several implementation barriers were identified. These included bureaucratic risk aversion, the absence of statutory mechanisms to authorize regulatory flexibility, and a lack of cross-agency coordination platforms. Furthermore, existing programmatic cycles within the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) often misalign with on-the-ground decision timelines, thereby constraining real-time adaptation and responsiveness.

Participants emphasized the need for inclusive governance architectures to guide sandbox development. Such structures would include advisory boards comprising producer representatives, land-grant university researchers, state and federal policymakers, and representatives from underserved farming communities. Evaluation metrics must prioritize learning, iterative refinement, and equity of access over narrow performance-based success criteria.

In terms of policy design, several strategic actions were proposed:

- Establish dedicated innovation funds at USDA and corresponding state agencies to support policy prototyping.
- Institutionalize multistakeholder oversight committees to safeguard transparency and local relevance.
- Create statutory mechanisms for regulatory experimentation under defined conditions.
- Embed equity benchmarks to ensure that marginalized producer groups are not excluded from participation.

In sum, the policy sandbox was framed 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.

Strategy 2: Thriving Rural Communities

The second strategic imperative identified by Summit participants centered on the socio-economic and spatial repositioning of rural communities. Rather than treating rural areas as static sites of

commodity production, participants called for a paradigmatic shift in rural policy—toward conceptualizing these geographies as complex, interdependent systems embedded within broader national development processes.

Participants emphasized that thriving rural communities are essential to the resilience of the national food system. Yet, prevailing policy frameworks often address rural issues through a narrow agricultural lens, marginalizing the broader infrastructural, demographic, and institutional challenges these regions face. Rural decline, depopulation, and disinvestment have eroded the adaptive capacity of local economies, labor markets, and public services.

Key priorities included:

- Expanding access to financial capital and land ownership for beginning, small-scale, and socially disadvantaged producers.
- Investing in broadband, energy, and transportation infrastructure as foundational supports for rural economic diversification.
- Promoting local control and ownership of food value chains, including processing, storage, and distribution nodes.
- Supporting youth engagement, leadership development, and rural repopulation strategies.
- Linking agricultural investment to health care, housing, and educational access.

Participants argued for the integration of rural policy into national development planning, moving beyond sectoral silos. Community colleges and land-grant universities were recognized as key institutional actors in workforce development, civic engagement, and innovation diffusion. Several examples highlighted cooperative broadband initiatives, regional food hubs, and community land trusts as successful grassroots-led models of rural renewal.

Persistent barriers include systemic underinvestment, regulatory constraints on cooperative structures, restrictive immigration frameworks, and cultural distrust of externally imposed interventions. Participants highlighted the need for culturally appropriate outreach strategies, bottom-up governance models, and flexible policy design that adapts to regional diversity.

Policy recommendations emphasized:

• Reforming immigration policy to enable year-round, legally protected labor mobility for agricultural and rural service sectors.

• Expanding rural business development grants, tax credits, and community infrastructure loan guarantees.

• Designing land tenure support programs that prioritize multi-generational ownership and community-based stewardship.

• Facilitating public-private partnerships that anchor wealth generation within rural economies.

Ultimately, participants asserted that 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.

Strategy 3: Revitalized Extension Systems

The third strategic imperative centered on the reconfiguration of agricultural extension systems. These institutions, historically anchored in the land-grant university model, have played a central role in linking research and practice. Yet, participants voiced concerns that current extension frameworks are increasingly misaligned with producer needs, technological realities, and the demographic complexity of contemporary agricultural constituencies.

Summit discussions portrayed extension as a critical node in the agri-food knowledge ecosystem, but one that must evolve. Key shortcomings identified included declining public investment, limited cultural competency among advisors, an erosion of public trust, and a lack of digital and climate literacy.

Desired attributes of revitalized extension systems included:

• Multidisciplinary expertise encompassing agroecology, data science, climate adaptation, and rural sociology.

- Embeddedness in local communities foster long-term relational trust and contextual knowledge.
- Institutional independence from political and corporate influence to preserve scientific integrity.
- Robust digital infrastructure and analytics capacity to enable precision outreach and feedback loops.

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 (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) producers, immigrant farmers, and non-English-speaking communities—was identified as a moral and strategic imperative.

Policy proposals to support extension reform included:

- Creating competitive federal grants for extension system modernization and workforce development.
- Establishing credentialing programs and career ladders for culturally competent extension personnel.
- Incentivizing collaboration between universities and grassroots organizations to co-produce knowledge.
- Implementing national standards and accountability metrics to ensure service quality and inclusivity.

Participants warned that without revitalization, the extension system may falter due to implementation gaps, knowledge bottlenecks, and relational distrust. Reimagined extension must function as both a source of technical knowledge and a platform for social learning, enabling farmers to navigate increasingly complex production, regulatory, and environmental landscapes.

In conclusion, these three strategic imperatives—adaptive policy innovation, rural systems development, and extension modernization—form the backbone of the Summit's collective vision

for a resilient, equitable, and future-ready U.S. agricultural system. The next section explores the cross-cutting enablers that must underpin these efforts.

Section III: Cross-Cutting Enablers & Systemic Insights

While the three strategic opportunities outlined in Section II—policy innovation sandboxes, thriving rural communities, and revitalized extension systems—provide targeted pathways for reform, their success depends on a set of cross-cutting enablers. In Part III, we examine the foundational insights around innovation infrastructure, data and metrics, shared risk mechanisms, and public-private collaboration that underpin and accelerate systemic change. By integrating these enablers into each strategic pillar, stakeholders can ensure coherent governance, robust financial models, and resilient networks necessary for a truly adaptive food and agriculture system.

Insight 1: Innovation, Data, and Metrics for Outcome-Based Governance

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Innovation in contemporary agriculture has evolved beyond the domains of seed genetics and mechanical efficiency to encompass the development of digital infrastructure, data-driven decision systems, and performance-based evaluation metrics. Participants at the 2025 Summit argued forcefully that future policy architectures must be predicated on dynamic information ecosystems that support adaptive governance across spatial and temporal scales.

The continued reliance on gross yield as the primary metric of agricultural performance was deemed insufficient for addressing the sector's complex environmental and socio-economic mandates. Instead, there was strong consensus that new metrics must account for resilience, equity, sustainability, and systemic return on investment. As agriculture becomes more tightly coupled to climate, conservation, and food security agendas, measurement systems must evolve accordingly.

Key thematic areas included:

- Soil health: Framed as a keystone indicator of long-term productivity, ecological resilience, and carbon sequestration capacity. Participants emphasized the need for

standardized protocols that link soil health indicators to both environmental outcomes and economic incentives.

• Carbon and ecosystem service monitoring: As carbon markets and ecosystem service payments gain traction, participants noted the critical need for credible, interoperable MMRV (Measure, Monitor, Report, Verify) systems that are accessible to producers and validated by regulators.

• Data interoperability and governance: Multiple attendees highlighted the fragmentation of data tools and platforms across public, private, and philanthropic sectors. Without interoperable standards and governance protocols, innovation risks becoming siloed and inaccessible.

• Digital equity and infrastructure: The digital divide in rural America—manifested in insufficient broadband access and lack of training—was framed as a foundational barrier to equitable innovation adoption. Human-centered design and tech literacy initiatives were seen as essential.

Challenges noted included the absence of a unified MRV framework at the national level, insufficient legal protection for producer data, and a lack of trusted intermediaries capable of translating complex datasets into actionable insights.

Policy proposals included:

• Funding for national MRV infrastructure across USDA, EPA, and DOI to harmonize ecological monitoring.

• Development of shared digital platforms governed by farmer-led boards to ensure trust and relevance.

• Investment in rural data science capacity, including local analytics hubs, mobile sensor systems, and broadband cooperatives.

• Integration of digital access policies with rural workforce development to ensure human and technological capacity co-evolve.

Participants emphasized that data and innovation should not be treated as neutral or technical inputs; they are socially embedded and politically contingent. A future-ready food system requires measurement architectures that are inclusive, trusted, and outcome-oriented.

Insight 2: Shared Risk Frameworks and Incentives for Long-Term Resilience

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Risk in agriculture is inherently multidimensional, spanning climate variability, commodity price shocks, policy discontinuities, and biosecurity threats. Yet, Summit participants expressed concern that this risk is disproportionately borne by producers, particularly small and medium-sized operations with limited access to financial buffers or political capital.

The concept of shared risk emerged as a critical reframing of agricultural policy. Rather than positioning risk solely at the producer level, new frameworks would distribute it equitably across the value chain—including processors, retailers, insurers, consumers, and government.

Proposals focused on developing mechanisms that embed resilience and risk-sharing into existing policy tools and market relationships:

- Public-private risk pooling mechanisms, such as climate risk insurance consortia or catastrophe bonds tied to regional agro-climatic indicators.
- Contractual innovations, including index-linked contracts and revenue-sharing arrangements that insulate producers from price volatility.
- Long-horizon cost-sharing programs that reward investments in soil regeneration, diversified cropping, and perennial systems with delayed payback timelines.

Structural barriers included misalignment between the fiscal timelines of federal programs and the operational planning cycles of farms; overreliance on yield-based metrics for insurance eligibility; and insufficient valuation of co-benefits such as biodiversity, water retention, or community well-being.

To address these limitations, policy recommendations included:

• Redesigning agriculture insurance programs to reward ecological diversification and risk mitigation strategies.

• Expanding public investment in ecosystem service markets through procurement mandates or federal trust funds.

• Legalizing and standardizing new financial instruments that allow pooled investment and risk-sharing across geographies and sectors.

Participants emphasized that risk redistribution should not undermine producer agency. Instead, it should enable autonomy by stabilizing the system in which producers operate. Long-term resilience is not just about survival—it is about enabling innovation under uncertainty.

Insight 3: Public-Private Synergy and Institutional Coordination

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No single sector—government, private industry, civil society, or philanthropy—possesses the capacity to address the structural complexity of today's food and agriculture systems. Thus, public-private synergy emerged as a foundational enabler across all Summit themes. The concept denotes not merely transactional partnerships, but deeper forms of alignment, co-design, and shared infrastructure.

Participants identified numerous domains where synergy is not only possible but necessary:

• Pre-competitive regional innovation consortia, funded jointly by state governments, philanthropic actors, and agrifood companies to coordinate R&D and pilot projects.

• Shared logistics and processing hubs in underserved areas, with co-investment from rural development authorities and producer cooperatives.

• Neutral research platforms embedded in land-grant universities or civic intermediaries, capable of convening diverse stakeholders and safeguarding trust.

Challenges to synergy included legacy mistrust among sectors, divergent time horizons for accountability (e.g., quarterly vs. decadal), and the absence of shared data standards. Furthermore,

participants noted that philanthropic actors often struggle to define their roles in systems change—oscillating between short-term project funding and long-term institutional investment.

Recommendations to strengthen public-private synergy included:

- Establishing regional coordinating bodies that pool funding, manage shared infrastructure, and convene stakeholders across silos.
- Embedding transparency requirements in public-private agreements, including governance by producer representatives.
- Funding legal and institutional design work to clarify fiduciary obligations and data ownership in co-managed systems.

Ultimately, the Summit advanced a pragmatic yet aspirational vision: that synergy is not the same as homogenization. Rather, it involves aligning diverse institutional logics toward shared outcomes. When coordinated, public and private sectors can reduce duplication, scale innovation, and accelerate transitions toward sustainable agriculture.

Together, the insights in this section underscore the cross-cutting systems and capacities required to realize the strategic imperatives detailed in Part II. Without enabling conditions such as interoperable data systems, equitable risk-sharing models, and institutional trust mechanisms, even the most ambitious reforms will fail to scale. Part IV outlines a coordinated action agenda for the 2025–2030 horizon to address these systemic requirements head-on.

Section IV: From Dialogue to Direction — A Coordinated Action Agenda

The 2025 Farm Foundation Summit functioned not merely as a space for discussion, but as a strategic launchpad for action. Throughout the Summit, participants acknowledged that structural reform in the U.S. food and agriculture system requires more than conceptual clarity—it demands coordinated, multi-sectoral, and time-sensitive intervention. The conversations culminated in a shared recognition that the next five years will be pivotal. To that end, participants collectively articulated a preliminary action agenda, identifying a set of mutually reinforcing strategies across

four institutional domains: public policy, institutional infrastructure, private sector engagement, and philanthropic-civic mobilization.

1. Policy Actions: Building Adaptive Governance

At the core of the proposed public sector actions lies the imperative to enhance the adaptive capacity of agricultural governance. First, the creation of "policy innovation sandboxes" at state and federal levels was prioritized. These are bounded regulatory environments where new instruments—such as performance-based insurance models, dynamic subsidy structures, or climate-contingent conservation incentives—can be tested, iterated, and evaluated in real time before broader deployment. These spaces would allow policy to evolve through evidence, rather than through political consensus alone.

Second, participants emphasized the modernization of agricultural extension systems through targeted funding streams. Extension grants could support workforce development, digital platform integration, and trust-building strategies in underserved regions. Alongside this, Summit attendees called for greater investment in rural infrastructure and land access, particularly benefiting beginning and BIPOC farmers. These investments should be complemented by a policy mandate to reduce fragmentation within USDA programs. Fragmentation not only increases administrative inefficiency but creates confusion and inequity in access, disproportionately affecting smaller producers.

Lastly, the need to redesign insurance and conservation programs was broadly acknowledged. Present tools are often biased toward large-scale operations and narrowly focused on yield metrics. Participants advocated for a transition toward incentive structures that reward diversification, resilience, and long-term ecological performance.

2. Institutional Actions: Strengthening Infrastructure for Systemic Resilience

Reform at the institutional level is essential to operationalize the ambitions of policy. Participants called for renewed investment in the nation's land-grant university system and community colleges, with a focus on strengthening rural talent pipelines. This includes not only technical training but also the cultivation of civic leadership and entrepreneurial skills.

Additionally, support for robust data and metrics infrastructure was seen as foundational. Monitoring, Reporting, and Verification (MRV) systems must be developed and maintained to ensure policy accountability, facilitate adaptive learning, and enable access to ecosystem service markets. Participants argued that institutional capacity must be matched with inclusive governance mechanisms—structures that bring farmers, researchers, public officials, and community-based organizations into co-design and oversight roles. Such models enhance legitimacy, ensure policy relevance, and support equity.

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3. Private Sector Actions: Leveraging Market Power for Public Outcomes

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The private sector's role was framed not only in terms of innovation but also in terms of responsibility. Firms were encouraged to co-invest in shared risk models, including public-private insurance pools, revenue-stabilizing contracts, and flexible finance products that account for ecological outcomes. In parallel, companies can strengthen regional food systems by developing innovation hubs that integrate logistics, processing, and cooperative infrastructure.

Support for farmer-led initiatives was another key recommendation. This includes flexible procurement standards that reward regenerative practices, capacity-building support for small and mid-sized suppliers, and branding collaborations that elevate the market visibility of diverse producer groups. Participants noted that aligning corporate sustainability goals with community development objectives is both ethically sound and economically strategic in an era of heightened consumer scrutiny.

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4. Philanthropic and Civic Actions: Catalyzing Innovation and Bridging Risk

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Philanthropic organizations and civic actors were identified as critical enablers of systemic experimentation. Their comparative advantage lies in their ability to absorb early-stage risk, fund process-oriented innovation, and convene actors across institutional boundaries. Participants urged philanthropic actors to seed cooperative and civic-agriculture models, particularly in regions with histories of underinvestment.

Bridge funding for pilot programs—especially those not immediately eligible for federal support—was viewed as a catalytic lever. Similarly, the convening power of foundations and civic intermediaries can support ongoing learning platforms, ensuring that best practices are diffused and institutional memory is preserved.

This proposed action agenda is not intended as a definitive blueprint. Rather, it is a provisional roadmap—a pragmatic synthesis of ideas generated during the Summit. Its strength lies in its recognition of interdependence: among institutions, across sectors, and between the local and the federal. By acting in concert, these diverse stakeholders can transform the food and agriculture system into one that is more equitable, more innovative, and more resilient in the face of the complex challenges that lie ahead.

Concluding Remarks: Rebuilding Institutional Trust and Systemic Resilience

The 2025 Farm Foundation Summit convened at a critical juncture in the evolution of U.S. food and agriculture systems. Bringing together stakeholders from across the sector—producers, researchers, public officials, investors, educators, and civic leaders—the Summit did not seek to impose a singular solution or final consensus. Rather, its purpose was to establish a structured platform for pluralistic dialogue, systemic diagnosis, and co-creation of future-oriented strategies.

Across sessions and breakout discussions, participants reaffirmed that the sector's challenges are neither purely technical nor sectoral—they are deeply institutional, relational, and ecological. From that recognition emerged three interlinked imperatives: (1) the institutionalization of adaptive policy experimentation through well-governed sandboxes; (2) the repositioning of rural communities as complex developmental systems; and (3) the revitalization of agricultural

extension as a locally embedded knowledge infrastructure. These are not standalone interventions; they represent mutually reinforcing entry points for transforming how agricultural value is generated, distributed, and sustained.

However, the most profound insight to emerge from the Summit was that resilience is not merely an attribute of systems or individuals—it is relational. It arises from the quality of interactions among stakeholders, the inclusivity of governance processes, and the extent to which institutions can learn, adapt, and respond equitably to change. Building resilience, therefore, is as much a social and political project as it is a technical or economic one.

Moving from dialogue to implementation will require intentional alignment across institutions and time horizons. Stakeholders must move beyond episodic collaboration to build enduring trust architectures—mechanisms for shared risk, co-investment, mutual accountability, and iterative learning. These efforts must be rooted in humility, recognizing the limits of top-down planning and the value of local knowledge and leadership.

While the road ahead is complex, the Summit demonstrated that the necessary vision, creativity, and will already exist within the agricultural sector. The ideas presented in this report are not endpoints, but invitations to act—grounded in empirical insight and shaped by collective wisdom.

As we conclude, the insights and proposals distilled in this report point to a clear imperative: the future of U.S. food and agriculture depends on our 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 calls for sustained commitment, cross-sector dialogue, and the courage to pilot bold 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.