



## Policy Resolution 2023-05 Western Agriculture

### **A. BACKGROUND**

Farms and ranches are important contributors to the economies and quality of life of western states. Among other important values, western agricultural lands are primary sources of open space, wildlife habitat, water supplies, and diverse rural economic opportunities in the recreation, food and nutrition, fiber, energy and bio-based product industries. While united with a common history of agricultural production and culture, the western states and territories have greater variations in soil, climate, terrain, commodities, production practices and water availability.

Changes in climate, the increased prevalence and severity of extreme weather events, extended drought, and the approaching 2023 Farm Bill necessitate the advancement of Western Governors' policy which supports, protects, and advocates for the continued health of Western agricultural communities and their economies.

### **B. GOVERNORS' POLICY STATEMENT**

1. Western Governors support funding for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Market Access and Foreign Market Development Programs and Small Business Administration (SBA) State Trade Expansion Program to promote opportunities for western producers to increase export revenues and encourage trade agreements that maximize benefits for the West's farmers and ranchers. Western Governors appreciate the increased alignment between USDA and SBA agricultural trade promotion programs, and support adjustments to update funding amounts which have not accounted for inflation since 2006.
2. Western Governors support adequate funding for the USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant Program, which provides critical research, education, and promotion tools to fruit, vegetable, tree nut, dried fruit, horticulture, viticulture, and nursery crop (including floriculture) producers with an annual re-evaluation of funding formulas and eligible crops.
3. Western states have experienced severe volatility in farm income and farm prices since their peaks in 2013. Western Governors support a farm safety net that recognizes past deficit reduction contributions of the agricultural sector and maintains funding for other key commodity, conservation, crop insurance, livestock indemnity and emergency assistance, research, energy, and export promotion programs.
4. Western Governors encourage the expansion of federal programs, including USDA programs that can meet the unique educational, training, technical and financial needs of new, beginning, underserved, and veteran farmers and ranchers. We also support other USDA programming that can help these producers develop and expand business opportunities in rural communities.
5. Western Governors emphasize that the agriculture industry has a growing need for workers with science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) skills, especially rural professionals

with advanced training, including large animal and production veterinarians. We support efforts to develop a diverse and skilled agricultural workforce, by increasing awareness of career opportunities, expanding education and training programs, and other means, in order to meet the needs of this increasingly high-tech industry.

6. Western Governors support the expansion of research, implementation, and disaster-related funding to address drought, catastrophic wildfires and the effects of smoke on crops, a changing climate, and extreme weather risks facing western producers and local and tribal communities. Loss-adjustment procedures should be conducted in a timely manner and should account for contemporary market discounts that may occur due to natural disasters.
7. Western Governors encourage the effective use of Cooperative Extension Services, Agricultural Experiment Stations and other partnerships to deliver practical tools, technologies and information to farmers, ranchers and private landowners. We support Congressional and Administration efforts that provide support to the Cooperative Extension Services and Agricultural Experiments Station networks as they address research, staff capacity, and agricultural and food system challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Western Governors also support efforts which enable Extension Services and Experiment Stations to collaborate with the private sector for workforce solutions, and compete with foreign countries to advance bioeconomic and agricultural research.
8. Western Governors emphasize the importance of supporting the growth of the precision agriculture sector and highlight the substantive policy recommendations contained in our policy resolution addressing broadband connectivity issues.
9. Western Governors support funding for federal programs that provide assistance to agricultural cooperatives across the West. These include USDA Rural Cooperative Development Grants and Value-Added Producer Grants, and programs administered by the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service and National Institute of Food and Agriculture. Western Governors also support adjustments to these programs which improve accessibility by small producers.
10. Nutrition assistance programs should continue to provide flexibility for states to respond to unique economic conditions, serve all eligible participants to the greatest extent practicable, and encourage continued pursuit of transparency, efficiency, and accountability in program administration.
11. Existing federal assistance options that help build connections and reduce geographic and regulatory barriers between growers with surplus products and food insecure families lack the flexibility to nimbly address needs in many western communities. Western Governors support Congressional and Administration efforts to provide states with flexible emergency funding to purchase goods from local producers who lack a market for their surplus crops and provide them to food banks and nutrition assistance programs who are facing increased demands.
12. Western Governors encourage USDA to coordinate with state departments of agriculture and local governments in the revision and return of the Farmers to Families Food Box Program and other federal efforts focused on addressing food insecurity challenges, including access by small producers, the inclusion of additional commodities, and increased

flexibility for state implementation. Strong partnerships across federal, state, and local agencies can help ensure that food is not wasted due to logistical and capacity constraints at local food banks including storage and distribution.

13. Western Governors support legislative measures that provide states with access to flexible funding to respond to urgent and emerging issues in the agricultural economy and food supply and distribution chains. Additionally, we support legislative efforts that: address agricultural supply chain disruptions; reduce instability in value-added food supply systems; increase food banks and nonprofits' capacity to address growing nutrition demands; prepare for potential supply disruptions; and promote the ability of producer and business cooperatives, state departments of agriculture, and Cooperative Extension Services to strengthen local food networks.
14. Western Governors recognize the significant effects that animal and plant diseases, including African Swine Fever, Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza, foot and mouth disease, and brucellosis can have on the ability of producers to maintain operations and contribute to stable food supply chains. Western Governors support federal, state, territorial, local, and tribal efforts to detect and monitor outbreaks, and develop and implement emergency plans to minimize the effects that these diseases have on western agriculture. Additionally, federal agencies should work together with states, territories, and tribes to continue developing and deployment of the National Animal Vaccine and Veterinary Countermeasures Bank and National Animal Disease Preparedness and Response Program, and indemnification efforts for Foreign Animal Diseases to support these efforts.
15. Western Governors recognize that the Farm Bill includes titles and issues not contemplated in this resolution. We encourage Congress and the Administration to pass a Farm Bill that is unified with nutrition and agriculture programs together, and on time. We encourage Congressional committees, federal agencies and the executive branch to review Governors' existing policy resolutions addressing national forest and rangeland management; species conservation; incentive-based local, state, and regionally shaped voluntary conservation programs; biosecurity and invasive species management; rural development; and broadband connectivity.

**C. GOVERNORS' MANAGEMENT DIRECTIVE**

1. The Governors direct WGA staff to work with Congressional committees of jurisdiction, the Executive Branch, and other entities, where appropriate, to achieve the objectives of this resolution.
2. Furthermore, the Governors direct WGA staff to consult with the Staff Advisory Council regarding its efforts to realize the objectives of this resolution and to keep the Governors apprised of its progress in this regard.

*This resolution will expire in June 2026. Western Governors enact new policy resolutions and amend existing resolutions on a semiannual basis. Please consult <http://www.westgov.org/resolutions> for the most current copy of a resolution and a list of all current WGA policy resolutions.*