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Farm Bill Good for Farmers Markets, Family Farmers, and Local Food

December 11, 2018 - After months of delay and disagreement, Congress finally released the [2018 Farm Bill Conference Report](#), the compromise between the House and Senate versions, late Monday night. In a surprise move, the Senate voted and passed the bill Tuesday evening, less than 24 hours after introduction. The bill avoids [the worst of the House provision](#) and instead leans heavily on the [Senate version](#) to include important wins for farmers markets, family farmers, and local food systems. Next up, the Conference Report will go to the House, where a vote is expected Wednesday or Thursday, and then to the President for his signature before the end of the week.

Farm Bill highlights for farmers markets and local food include:

- Permanent, baseline funding for the Local Agriculture Market Program (LAMP), a new program that combines the [Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Program](#) (FMLFPP), and the Value-Added Producer Grant (VAPG) into a comprehensive local food program.
- Language directing USDA Food and Nutrition Service to resolve a [longstanding, problematic policy](#) that has prevented farmers market operators from using wireless SNAP processing equipment at more than one market location.
- Continued funding for the [Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program](#).
- A big increase in funding for the [Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive \(FINI\) Program](#), which will also be renamed to honor local food pioneer and former FMC board member, Gus Schumacher.

The release of the new bill comes two months after the 2014 bill expired in October, resolving concern among the agriculture community about the prospects of passing a 2018 bill before the newly elected Congress takes office in 2019, which would start the process from scratch. This victory is largely owed to the hard work of local food advocates and organizations across the country, including members of the Farmers Market Coalition (FMC).

"Thank you to everyone who invited public officials to your markets, made calls to Congress, traveled to DC to meet with legislators, analyzed and drafted policy, responded to surveys, and shared information about your work with FMC," said FMC Executive Director, Jen Cheek. "The success of this farm bill is a result of a multi-year effort from the farmers market community to make our collective voice heard."

While the 2018 bill is widely viewed as making important progress for American agriculture, major challenges still remain for farmers, local food, and farmers markets.

“Particularly viewed from where we were 6-9 months ago, this bill is great news for our members and agricultural communities, but politics is an ongoing process,” said FMC Policy Director, Ben Feldman. “It’s imperative that farmers market leaders and enthusiasts remain actively engaged, and continue to advocate for the future of local food. Stay in touch with your members of Congress. Stay connected to the issues by becoming an [FMC member](#). Get out to market each week and support family farmers. These ways and others are how we can transform our local food systems together.”

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The Farmers Market Coalition (FMC) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit dedicated to strengthening farmers markets for the benefit of farmers, consumers, and communities. For more information about the Farmers Market Coalition, visit www.farmersmarketcoalition.org