

Food Subsidies

A Topic Proposal for the National Federation of High Schools Topic
Selection Committee

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About the Author

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Introduction: Why “Food”?

Yes, the topic paper’s title is a bit of a misnomer. If you scroll to the [resolutions](#) section, you’ll notice “food” is not in any of my propositions. That is intentional as one of the largest barriers to student engagement on this topic is that it sounds boring. When discussing the potential topics for the 2024-25 season, my students were immediately opposed to the agricultural subsidies topic, despite Lauren Ivey making a fantastic case for it (Ivey, 2022). My students’ skepticism came from the topic not sounding exciting as opposed to concerns about affirmative and negative balance, potentially obnoxious negative arguments, or other competitive concerns. Most students do not actually read the paper for the topic they end up debating. I do not know that calling the topic “food subsidies” instead of “agricultural subsidies” actually solves this problem, but it hopefully at least makes the proximity of the topic more obvious for students. Food is on students’ minds a lot, whether or not they experience food insecurity. So do me a favor, and call this the “food topic” instead of the “ag topic.”

Relevance and Proximity

Agriculture is a topic that impacts all students, irrespective of geographic or social location. As was pointed out in Lauren Ivey’s 2022 Agricultural Subsidies topic paper, each time we buy food, we are effectively voting on our preferred food system (factory farming, localism, etc.). Students and their families (particularly their guardians) regularly make these choices and should be more informed about their food consumption (Ivey, 2022). This is why I think it is better to talk about this as a “food topic” instead of an “ag topic;” the part of agriculture most of our students interact with is the consumption of agricultural products, e.g. food.

Students in farming states certainly have an obvious connection to the topic, which is particularly interesting as many of the top farming states overlap with states that maintain large local debate circuits and a prevalent national circuit presence, including Texas, Kansas, and Illinois (Ivey, 2022). The proximity of the topic also opens up possibilities for compelling arguments about social location without making them the primary kritikal focus. This does not mean the connection is obvious for students themselves, but that makes it all the more important for them to learn about U.S. agriculture in the iterative fashion only policy debate can provide.

Accessibility

Agriculture also has an exceptional literature base for high school policy debate. This topic boasts the rare goldilocks position of having a low floor but a high ceiling when it comes to topic literature accessibility. Much of the communication in the agriculture literature base is targeted at farmers, even written by farmers in many cases. If we assume they have the same reading level as the average American, over 50% of farmers read at a sixth-grade level or lower (Dapcevich, 2022). This provides a good floor for students who have their own literacy struggles.

The topic literature also has a high ceiling, which will help coaches challenge students who are ready for more dense, scholarly material, including those related to economics, farming practices, and sustainability. Students who want to be competitive on the national circuit likely will not need prompting to pursue this higher ceiling due to the competitive demands of the national circuit.

Balance and Recency

The topic is also controversial enough for a year's worth of in-depth debates. Very little about agriculture is bipartisan.

2024 Presidential Election

During the 2024 presidential race, agricultural policy moved from the fringes of public discourse to becoming a defining issue—especially around trade, climate, and labor. Candidates emphasized different visions to win over rural and swing-state voters. For instance, Kamala Harris's platform addressed food-price inflation with proposals like banning price-gouging in the meat industry and strengthening market competition by opposing large-scale corporate mergers in agriculture (Zimmerman & Owens, 2024). Conversely, Donald Trump pushed for expanded deregulation, lower production costs, and protective tariffs—emphasizing measures to reduce energy and operational expenses for farmers .

Labor and immigration emerged as critical fault lines. Nearly half of U.S. farm labor is undocumented, prompting anxiety when Trump's hardline deportation proposals resurfaced (Douglas & Hesson, 2024). Many farm groups implored a carve-out for agriculture in his enforcement plans, citing both operational risks and vulnerable rural economies .

Finally, climate-focused agricultural reforms became a point of contrast. Investigative reporting highlighted Harris's support for climate-smart farming and ongoing funding to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions—backed by the Biden administration's Inflation Reduction Act—while Trump signaled he would drastically reduce such climate-oriented programs (McCracken, 2024).

Farm Bill

The next Farm Bill is also due to be passed in 2025 after recent stop-gap measures (Hart, 2025). While there is the outside chance the bill will be passed in 2025 (Addison, 2025), having the Farm Bill in the political zeitgeist leading up to the 2026-2027 competition season ensures students will have a wealth of recent literature to utilize throughout the season.

The political discourse surrounding the Farm Bill is multifaceted, drawing input from a wide array of interest groups including environmental organizations, agribusiness coalitions, public health advocates, and anti-poverty campaigners. Debates are already underway concerning the allocation of climate-smart agriculture funding, the expansion or restriction of SNAP benefits, and the disproportionate influence of large-scale commodity producers in shaping federal policy (Lee & Wang, 2024; Zaks, 2025). As these issues continue to unfold, they are generating a robust and diverse body of literature—ranging from investigative journalism and think tank reports to peer-reviewed academic studies and government white papers—which students can draw upon to build well-informed, evidence-based arguments. The evolving nature of this policy debate also allows students to engage with real-time political developments, track proposed amendments, and evaluate competing policy frameworks as they emerge.

Moreover, the Farm Bill's prominence in the 2024 presidential election has only increased its visibility and relevance in the broader political landscape. Both major-party candidates took clear positions on agricultural and nutrition policy, which has helped to elevate public awareness and increase the volume of media coverage and political analysis surrounding the bill's eventual reauthorization. This clash of ideologies has created a fertile ground for students to explore not only policy specifics but also broader themes such as federalism, the role of government in economic planning, and the intersection of environmental and social justice.

Rising inflation

Inflation continues to be a growing concern as President Trump's second term gets underway. According to the Consumer Price Index, inflation has increased 3% on an annual basis for the first time since June of 2024 with a 0.5% spike from December to January alone (Ventura, 2025). Continued inflation was unexpected, meaning there will be a wealth of recent economic analysis for students to research (Smith, 2025). This also makes it likely that the federal reserve keeps its status quo interest rates for quite a while, providing a relatively stable economic narrative going into next season (Wallace, 2025). This context is important to consider for any topic, but an agriculture topic allows the affirmative to actually solve large alternative causes to growth in the United States economy.

A lot of policymakers' concerns related to inflation are specifically about food prices, and issues with food prices are not disappearing anytime soon, even if Congress takes some action before or during the season (Rugaber, 2025). For example, the spread of bird flu in U.S. hen houses likely means the prices of staples like eggs will continue to climb (Lin-Fisher, 2025). Since the 2019-2020 season, most affirmatives have found a way to solve disease, and this topic would be no exception. In fact, agriculture is one of the primary industries pandemic literature concerns itself with (Nitnavare et al., 2024).

President Trump has also poured kerosene on the situation with his immigration crackdown. 42%-50% of laborers in the U.S. agriculture industry are estimated to be undocumented immigrants, and raids on agricultural facilities have farmers concerned that they could be facing a significant labor shortage (Ewing, 2025). It would be extremely easy for the affirmative to argue they offset the cost of having to hire more workers by creating a better, more efficient agriculture industry. President Trump's tariff policies are another fire-starter, with many in the industry concerned about costs being passed on directly to consumers (Coolidge, 2025). Fear of increasing tariffs or actually increasing tariffs can be solved by the affirmative directly via the "Trade Barriers" resolution or indirectly offset via the other resolution options (Zimmerman, 2025).

Partisanship

The diversity in the literature base is further magnified by the partisanship in agriculture. While there are a few exceptions, such as bipartisan crop insurance, most issues result in stark partisan lines (Farm Foundation, 2024). Conservatives want to cut down on regulations;

President Trump went so far in his first term as to require the EPA to remove two regulations for each new regulation it added (Farm Foundation, 2024). Progressives want to increase and protect agriculture-related programs such as the Price Gouging Prevention Act of 2022 and SNAP benefits for low-income families (Farm Foundation, 2024). Conservatives argue these programs will only create more inflation, including the increased risk of fraud (Farm Foundation, 2024). The partisan nature of many of these policies also makes it unlikely for Congress to make substantial policy changes during the course of the session itself, which prevents students from having to throw out an entire affirmative because Congress just did it.

Suggested Resolutions

Despite the varied literature base, generally agricultural policies that actually impact the choices of producers are thought to be fairly limited. “Farmers’ decisions on production levels and methods of production are influenced by three broad policy interventions: 1. Coupled and decoupled subsidies, 2. Import measures, 3. Export measures” (Laborde et al., 2020). This means any resolution attempting to deal in agriculture must deal directly with subsidies or trade.

Status quo agricultural policy can be reduced to “subsidies good,” “exports good,” and “imports bad.” In order to require the affirmative to make a large change from the status quo, the topic needs to be “subsidies bad,” “exports bad,” or “imports good.” As trade can seem like a separate paper from subsidies, I have limited proposed resolutions to subsidies.

Decrease Subsidies

Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially decrease its primary subsidies for domestic agriculture.

This resolution allows for affirmative flexibility while also forcing the affirmative to make a large change from the status quo. Subsidies are thought to be the primary driver of negative impacts from the agricultural industry, particularly for the environment (Laborde et al., 2020). “This is because, in contrast with market price support measures such as tariffs, they do not provide incentives for consumers in protecting countries to reduce their consumption of potentially polluting agricultural commodities” (Laborde et al., 2020).

Eliminate Subsidies

Resolved: The United States federal government should eliminate one or more of its primary subsidies for domestic agriculture.

This resolution also focuses on subsidies while creating a clearer brightline in topicality debates. What “decreasing” a subsidy means is certainly up for debate, whereas eliminating a subsidy is a lot clearer. This resolution, however, leaves less flexibility for the affirmative.

Aff Ground

An agriculture topic has strong policy and kritikal affirmative ground. I'll discuss the kritikal connections in the [Kritiks](#) section under [Negative Ground](#) to decrease redundancy.

Solvency Mechanisms

Congress

Congress possesses constitutional authority over agricultural subsidies primarily through its power to regulate interstate commerce (U.S. Const. art. I, § 8, cl. 3) and to allocate federal spending (U.S. Const. art. I, § 8, cl. 1). This authority is most visibly exercised through omnibus legislation like the Farm Bill, which Congress reauthorizes approximately every five years. The Farm Bill establishes the framework for programs ranging from commodity support and crop insurance to conservation and nutrition assistance (Congressional Research Service, 2024). Through the House and Senate Agriculture Committees, Congress drafts and negotiates the provisions of the bill, setting both the funding levels and the eligibility criteria for subsidies and related benefits. The USDA then administers the programs authorized and funded by Congress, creating a direct link between legislative decision-making and farm-level impacts.

The origins of modern U.S. agricultural subsidies can be traced back to the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933, which aimed to stabilize farm prices and protect farmers during the Great Depression. Since then, subsidies have become a fixture of American agricultural policy, designed not only to buffer farmers from market volatility but also to promote national food security and economic development in rural areas (Orden et al., 1999). However, critics have argued that subsidies disproportionately benefit large-scale agribusinesses and encourage environmentally unsustainable practices, such as monoculture farming and excessive fertilizer use (Bellmann, 2019). Despite these concerns, subsidies remain politically resilient due to the strong influence of agricultural interest groups and the electoral importance of rural states. As a result, Congress continues to play a central role in maintaining and reshaping the subsidy structure. More about these stakeholders will be discussed in the [Politics DAs](#) section.

Beyond agriculture, a move by Congress to reduce subsidies could set a legislative precedent for reconsidering long-standing federal support programs across other sectors, such as fossil fuels, defense, or technology. It might signal a broader shift toward market liberalization and

fiscal restraint, emboldening efforts to shrink the federal budget and curtail what some policymakers see as government overreach (Edwards, 2023). However, such reforms are likely to be politically contentious, as they would challenge entrenched interests and disrupt constituencies that depend on federal aid. As with agricultural subsidies, other subsidies are often protected by powerful coalitions, suggesting that reform could require public consensus and significant political capital.

USDA

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) plays a central role in administering agricultural subsidy programs, but its legal authority to change those programs is limited by the framework established by Congress. The USDA is part of the executive branch and operates under statutory authority granted primarily through legislation such as the Farm Bill, the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) Charter Act, and the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1938. These laws provide the USDA with discretion over how to implement subsidy programs within the boundaries set by Congress, but they do not give the department power to create, eliminate, or fundamentally restructure subsidies without congressional approval (Congressional Research Service, 2024).

Within its delegated authority, however, the USDA can make important administrative and regulatory decisions that influence how subsidies are delivered. This includes determining eligibility criteria, setting payment limits, interpreting ambiguous statutory language, and issuing rules and guidance under the Administrative Procedure Act (APA). For example, the USDA has discretion over how conservation subsidies are administered through programs like the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), or how risk-management subsidies are distributed via the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation (Congressional Research Service, 2024). The Secretary of Agriculture also has authority under the CCC Charter Act to fund certain programs during emergencies, such as trade aid or pandemic relief, as long as those actions remain within the CCC's legal parameters (Congressional Research Service, 2024).

Advantage Areas

Economy

Subsidies have varied economic impacts in a complex system, but we can draw a few conclusions about what affirmative internal links in this area would look like. One economic advantage could be based primarily on national income. “For the world as a whole, both national income and farmer income would be higher in the absence of agricultural trade protection” including specifically in the United States as a “competitive exporter” (Laborde et al., 2020).

Agricultural subsidies, while aimed at supporting farmers and stabilizing food supply, have wide-reaching economic impacts both domestically and internationally. In the United States, subsidies help buffer farmers against price volatility and crop failure, often making farming a more financially viable occupation. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), in 2023, government payments totaled about \$15 billion, primarily through commodity support, conservation programs, and disaster assistance (USDA, 2023). These payments can reduce financial risk and promote investment in agricultural technology and infrastructure, which in turn can lead to greater productivity and food security.

However, subsidies can also distort market incentives, sometimes encouraging overproduction of certain crops. For example, large-scale subsidies for corn and soybeans have led to a surplus, depressing prices and contributing to monoculture farming practices that may not be environmentally sustainable (Environmental Working Group, 2022). Overproduction can result in food waste and environmental degradation, while smaller farms or those producing unsubsidized crops may struggle to compete. Additionally, subsidies tend to disproportionately benefit large agribusinesses rather than small-scale farmers, exacerbating income inequality within the agricultural sector (OECD, 2021).

On the global stage, subsidies in wealthy nations can harm farmers in developing countries by undercutting local agricultural prices. When countries like the U.S. or members of the European Union export subsidized crops at artificially low prices—a practice known as “dumping”—it can render farmers in poorer countries unable to compete in both domestic and international markets (WTO, 2020). This dynamic can stifle agricultural development abroad, contributing to persistent poverty and dependence on imported food. As a result, international organizations

such as the World Trade Organization have called for reforms to reduce trade-distorting subsidies.

Economists often debate the balance between the short-term benefits and long-term consequences of agricultural subsidies. While they may provide economic stability and food affordability in the short term, their broader impacts—such as environmental harm, global trade inequality, and market inefficiencies—suggest the need for more targeted and sustainable subsidy frameworks. Reform efforts have begun to shift some support toward environmental conservation and climate resilience, but challenges remain in aligning subsidies with broader economic and ecological goals (FAO, 2021). Ultimately, the economic impacts of agricultural subsidies are complex and depend heavily on how they are designed and implemented.

Environment

The subsidies pro-con debate in the literature directly cites environmental concerns. These issues relate primarily to farming practices causing ecosystem damage via monoculture, pollution via fertilizer run-off, and climate change via greenhouse gas emissions (Calvo, 2022). These environmental harms are something the rest of the international community, including the World Trade Organization, is already taking steps to mitigate, giving affirmatives some persuasive “U.S. key” warrants (Calvo, 2022).

This literature base also gives students a lot to work with in terms of both quality and accessibility. There are certainly obvious sources, such as the aforementioned EPA, that study the impacts agriculture has on our environment, but many organizations go further. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) does international comparative analysis using transparent criteria (OECD, 2025). This gives students access to evidence already doing comparative analysis to scaffold this skills for them; the transparency of OECD’s criteria can assist coaches in demonstrating the formulaic nature of comparative evidence analysis in policy debate.

Ecosystems

U.S. agricultural subsidies often promote intensive monoculture farming and large-scale production, which reduce biodiversity and strain local ecosystems. Subsidies disproportionately support a few major crops—corn, soy, and wheat—encouraging the conversion of diverse landscapes into uniform farmland. This monoculture depletes soil nutrients, disrupts native plant

and animal habitats, and weakens the ecological resilience of rural landscapes (Robbins, 2022). The loss of habitat contributes to the decline of pollinators and other keystone species critical to ecosystem health.

Pollution

Subsidies incentivize the overproduction of crops and livestock, which increases pollution from pesticides, herbicides, and manure. Many farms receiving subsidies apply excessive amounts of chemicals to maximize yield, contributing to air and water pollution. These pollutants can drift from fields into surrounding communities, impacting air quality and public health. Livestock operations—often backed by indirect subsidies like grain feed price supports—also generate methane, a potent greenhouse gas, and contribute significantly to particulate pollution (EPA, 2025).

Nutrient runoff is one of the most harmful environmental effects of subsidized agricultural production. Excess nitrogen and phosphorus from synthetic fertilizers and manure can leach into rivers, lakes, and coastal waters. According to Calvo (2022), these substances enter both surface and groundwater supplies, causing eutrophication—a process that leads to harmful algal blooms, oxygen-depleted “dead zones,” and kills marine life. The Gulf of Mexico dead zone, one of the largest in the world, is largely fueled by nutrient runoff from subsidized farms in the Mississippi River Basin (NOAA, 2024).

Climate Change

Global emissions are inextricably linked to status quo agricultural policy. The World Bank identifies subsidies as a significant contributor in and of themselves, “It shows that without those subsidies and, hence, with lower output, there would be less global emissions in the amount of 34 million tons of CO₂ equivalent, or around -0.6 percent lower” (Laborde et al., 2020). Climate change will be the most popular environmental impact on the national circuit simply due to its magnitude potential. Approximately 20% of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions come from the agriculture industry, allowing the affirmative to debatably make a significant dent in overall U.S. emissions (Laborde et al., 2020). The affirmative can argue that these environmental costs are not outweighed by an increase in food production as “total agricultural production can only be increased by raising total agricultural land use or substituting other inputs for land” (Laborde et al., 2020).

Land use is a major factor in agricultural contributions to climate change in and of itself.

“Increases in agricultural land use, in turn, are likely to induce very large one-off increases in emissions as land is cleared for use in agriculture, particularly if land is cleared by burning forests” (Laborde et al., 2020). This indicates that the type of financial support a government offers its agriculture industry matters as “high rates of support are likely to attract resources into agriculture, increase output and, at constant technology, to increase emissions from agricultural activity” (Laborde et al., 2020). Affirmatives can make persuasive solvency arguments based on a broad category of subsidies (defined in the Definitions section) by arguing that a specific subsidy category attracts the kind of resources necessary for more deforestation.

Certain agricultural commodities are also more emissions-intensive than others. “The emission intensity for bovine meat is by far the largest for any food” (Laborde et al., 2020). In the status quo, “on average, the existing structure of agricultural support provides little incentive to farmers to switch from high to low emission-intensive commodities” (Laborde et al., 2020). This effect is magnified by the fact that these emission-intensive agricultural products are the very same commodities most likely to be subsidized (Laborde et al., 2021, 2). Affirmatives can also argue the subsidy they decrease or remove impacts these emission-intensive crops more than other, less emission-intensive crops, moving the needle on climate change.

Fertilizers in the agriculture industry can also directly contribute to greenhouse gas emissions. In fact, “the largest impact on emissions comes from fertilizer subsidies (explaining about one third of the impact)” (Laborde et al., 2020). For example, nitrogen-based fertilizers “emit nitrous oxide, a gas that is around 300 times more harmful than carbon dioxide” (Calvo, 2022).

Food Insecurity and Poverty

The literature base is divided on the efficacy of subsidies in decreasing food insecurity. Defense to the status quo is pretty easy to come by, allowing the affirmative to make the case that decreasing food subsidies would have a minimal impact on food insecurity as subsidies have a very small effect on global yields (Laborde et al., 2020).

Decreasing U.S. agricultural subsidies could help alleviate global and domestic food insecurity by promoting a more equitable and efficient food system. Current subsidies heavily favor large-scale commodity crops such as corn, soybeans, and wheat, often leading to overproduction of these crops at the expense of more diverse and nutritious food production (Hayes, 2021). By reducing subsidies, the market could better reflect supply and demand,

encouraging farmers to diversify crops and invest in sustainable farming practices that improve local food availability and nutritional quality. This shift can strengthen regional food systems, reduce reliance on imports, and help smallholder farmers compete, particularly in developing countries where subsidized U.S. exports have undercut local producers. Overall, subsidy reform can contribute to a food system that is more resilient, sustainable, and better aligned with the goal of reducing hunger.

Food insecurity—the lack of consistent access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food—has significant social, economic, and health impacts. According to the United Nations, over 800 million people worldwide suffer from hunger, and food insecurity is linked to increased rates of malnutrition, stunted growth in children, and chronic diseases such as diabetes and heart conditions (FAO, 2023). In the U.S., food insecurity affects millions of households, leading to negative outcomes including poor educational performance in children and increased healthcare costs (USDA, 2022). By addressing distortions in agricultural subsidies that exacerbate market inefficiencies and limit food access, policymakers can make progress toward mitigating these harmful impacts. Reducing subsidies can pave the way for more targeted food assistance programs and agricultural policies that prioritize food security and public health outcomes.

International Relations

Multilateralism

Decreasing U.S. agricultural subsidies could yield several positive impacts within multilateral institutions by promoting fairer global trade practices and enhancing U.S. leadership in international forums. First, reducing subsidies would align U.S. policy more closely with World Trade Organization (WTO) rules, which discourage market-distorting subsidies that harm producers in developing countries. This alignment could help resolve longstanding trade disputes, such as those brought by Brazil and other nations against U.S. cotton subsidies, improving the WTO's effectiveness and legitimacy. Demonstrating a commitment to fair trade would strengthen the U.S.'s position in negotiations, enabling it to advocate more credibly for reforms on issues like agricultural market access, intellectual property rights, and environmental standards.

Moreover, subsidy reductions could foster improved cooperation in other multilateral institutions concerned with food security, development, and climate change. For example, within the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the Committee on World Food Security (CFS), U.S.

leadership is essential to building global consensus on sustainable agriculture and equitable food systems. By scaling back subsidies that contribute to market distortions, the U.S. can better support initiatives promoting smallholder farmers, climate-smart agriculture, and resilient food supply chains, all key priorities for these bodies (FAO, 2022). Such actions would also bolster U.S. soft power and diplomatic influence, enabling it to build coalitions to address pressing global challenges in food security and sustainable development more effectively.

Africa - LDCs, Ghana, Kenya

U.S. agricultural subsidy reductions uniquely access African policy literature and provide affirmatives with strong internal links. Cotton, a globally vital export—second only to soybeans—is critical to African LDC economies, which were hit hard by COVID-19, disrupting livelihoods and food security (WTO Secretariat, 2021). Reducing U.S. subsidies could stabilize cotton markets, promote development, and support climate adaptation.

In Ghana, U.S. subsidies for rice, poultry, and corn have undermined local producers and deepened food dependency (Oram, 2014). Reform would revitalize domestic agriculture, align with initiatives like “Planting for Food and Jobs” (Pauw, 2022), and counter China’s growing West African influence (Brautigam, 2015). Ghana is a key partner on counterterrorism, democracy, and regional peacekeeping (Bureau of African Affairs, 2021), enabling affirmatives to claim economic, soft power, and terrorism impacts.

In Kenya, subsidies have depressed local prices for key crops like maize and dairy (Oram, 2014). Reductions would improve trade equity, support the U.S.–Kenya Strategic Trade and Investment Partnership (STIP), and enable sustainable agriculture investment (DOS, 2023). Kenya’s strategic role in regional security, counterterrorism, and economic integration—plus its position as the first sub-Saharan African nation negotiating a bilateral free trade deal with the U.S.—makes it an optimal actor for development and alliance-based advantages.

Asian - China, India

U.S. subsidies depress global prices in key sectors like soy, corn, and dairy, disadvantaging major Asian producers—including China, India, and Vietnam (Arsenault, 2015). Reductions would promote fairer global pricing, ease WTO tensions, and enhance alignment with developing economies.

India has faced criticism over its own subsidies—especially Minimum Support Prices—but counters U.S. pressure by citing American hypocrisy (Beniwal, 2025). A U.S. policy shift aligning with WTO standards could restore leadership in global trade talks and pressure India to reform. This links to WTO effectiveness, U.S.–India cooperation, and broader issues like climate change, economic integration, and China-India strategic stability.

In Southeast Asia, nations like Vietnam and Indonesia would benefit from less distorted commodity prices, boosting rural development and enhancing food sovereignty. Reducing subsidies also counters China's influence through the Belt and Road Initiative by positioning the U.S. as a fairer, more responsive economic partner. Indo-Pacific stability, alliance-building, and climate adaptation all become viable impact areas.

Europe

U.S.–EU tensions over agricultural policy are longstanding. Both parties subsidize heavily—through the U.S. Farm Bill and EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)—but the EU has consistently criticized U.S. programs for violating WTO rules (Josling & Tangermann, 2015). Reducing subsidies would ease transatlantic friction, boost global market transparency, and enable cooperation on shared goals like food security and climate resilience.

U.S.–EU agricultural competition is especially sharp in third markets like Africa and Southeast Asia. Reform could revive transatlantic trade efforts, including a revised TTIP, which previously stalled over farm policy (Josling & Tangermann, 2016). Strengthening this alliance also supports global governance and multilateral norms. With the U.S. and EU comprising nearly half of global GDP, affirmatives gain access to economic leadership, rules-based order, and soft-power impacts.

South America - Brazil, Argentina

As major agricultural exporters, Brazil and Argentina have consistently opposed U.S. subsidies that undercut global commodity prices (Ingco & Nash, 2004). Reductions would enhance WTO compliance, improve trade equity, and create space for cooperation on food security and climate initiatives.

Brazil—one of the world's top producers of soy, beef, sugar, and coffee—successfully challenged U.S. cotton subsidies at the WTO in 2009 (WTO Secretariat, 2014). Reform would

ease future disputes, strengthen U.S.–Brazil ties, and provide strategic leverage with a regional power balancing U.S. and Chinese influence.

Argentina, whose soy- and grain-heavy sector faces similar disadvantages, has long advocated for subsidy reform (FAO, 2018). Reductions could improve trade relations, support rural development, and enable partnerships on clean energy and ag-tech. Affirmatives can access impacts in Latin American diplomacy, climate cooperation, and regional stability.

USMCA Partners

U.S. subsidies have long strained relations with Canada and Mexico. Canadian officials argue they distort markets and challenge Canada's supply management system (Polzin, n.d.).

Mexican smallholders have struggled to compete with cheap U.S. corn exports since NAFTA, worsening rural poverty and food insecurity (Wise, 2009; Fitting, 2011). Reducing subsidies would ease USMCA tensions, restore Mexican agricultural competitiveness, and address migration push factors—generating immigration, trade, and development impacts.

For Canada, rolling back subsidies improves predictability, strengthens the U.S.'s rules-based trade credibility, and helps sustain bilateral cooperation amid global protectionism. For Mexico, it also boosts rural development and aligns with diplomatic goals by promoting regional stability.

Terrorism

Agroterrorism—the deliberate introduction of pests or diseases to disrupt agriculture—poses a significant threat to national security and the economy. Reducing U.S. agricultural subsidies could potentially lower the risk of agroterrorism by decreasing the concentration and scale of large agribusiness operations, which are often prime targets due to their critical role in food supply chains (Schneider et al., 2024). Smaller, diversified farms may be less vulnerable to widespread disruption, thereby increasing the resilience of the agricultural sector overall. Moreover, subsidy reform that encourages diversified and sustainable farming systems can reduce systemic vulnerabilities exploited by agroterrorists.

The economic and social impacts of an agroterrorist attack would be severe. A successful agroterrorist bio-attack could trigger massive economic losses not only within agriculture but across allied sectors including transportation, processing, and retail (Smith, Grambell, & Russell, 2009). Beyond direct financial damage, such an attack could undermine public trust in

government response efforts, provoke widespread fear, and disrupt food security as became obvious during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, policies that reduce agricultural concentration and vulnerability—potentially through subsidy reduction—can play a crucial role in mitigating agroterrorism risks and enhancing national security.

Neg Ground

Case Debate

Defense

This topic affords the negative to mount an actual defense of the status quo. As mentioned in the Balance section of the Introduction, progressives and liberals mount well-warranted defenses of the importance of agricultural subsidies.

It is possible that decreasing or eliminating agricultural subsidies would have a net zero impact on climate change, despite their contributions due country-specific economics as “countries providing little support through coupled subsidies, like Australia, the impact would be less and, if subsidies would be removed, they would even see an increase in emissions as their output would increase in response to improved farm competitiveness, owing to higher world prices resulting from removal of subsidies elsewhere” (Laborde et al., 2020). The negative does not even have to concede an affirmative modeling claim to make this argument as one country’s subsidies impact prices in other countries.

On balance, the literature finds that the emission-intensity of a given agricultural commodity is based, at least in part, on that country’s overall wealth (Laborde et al., 2020). The earlier bovine meat example is telling here as “it varies from 12.1 in the United States to 108.3 in India. There is clearly a link between income levels and intensity...” (Laborde et al., 2020). Laborde may not be accounting for other factors like religious practices, but this can still be used by the negative to argue that simply disincentivizing emissions-intense commodities has varied effects at best.

No matter which resolution is selected, the other category of resolutions act as alternative causes. In terms of agricultural market incentives in the U.S., money spent is split almost evenly between subsidies and market price supports (MPS) (Laborde et al., 2020). The negative can argue that if the affirmative decreases subsidies, other MPS mechanisms, like trade barriers, will be used to offset costs.

Offense

There are a host of arguments in the literature base for why subsidies are actually good for all the reasons other authors say they are bad. This gives the negative good options for offense on case, encouraging better case debating. It also offers good options for net benefits for counterplans that reform subsidies as opposed to decreasing or removing them. Due to this paper's general length issues, I won't outline each case turn, but I will use the environment advantage as emblematic of what I mean.

Environment

Some authors argue that subsidies can play a crucial role in environmental protection when they are designed with sustainability in mind. One prominent example is the use of Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES), which offer financial compensation to farmers and landowners for engaging in practices that conserve biodiversity, improve water quality, sequester carbon, and maintain healthy ecosystems. "This is certainly the case of payments for ecosystem services, which provide financial incentives to farmers in exchange for the protection, preservation, and maintenance of natural environments" (Calvo, 2022). These environmentally targeted subsidies can help shift the focus of agricultural support away from production-maximizing practices—often associated with pollution, deforestation, and soil degradation—toward more sustainable and regenerative models of farming. For instance, PES programs have been implemented in countries such as Costa Rica, where farmers are paid to reforest or preserve existing forested land, leading to notable improvements in biodiversity and carbon sequestration (Pagiola, 2008). When designed and implemented effectively, these types of subsidies can serve as powerful tools to align agricultural policy with broader environmental and climate goals.

Disadvantages

Subsidy-Specific DAs

Each of the topic areas in this resolution supports at least one strong, subsidy-specific disadvantage that negative teams can leverage. While space doesn't allow for a full exploration of each, a few clear examples illustrate the broader pattern. A fisheries affirmative, for instance, could trigger a disadvantage related to global fishing subsidies, which have been linked to overfishing and international regulatory conflicts. Similarly, a cotton affirmative opens the door to disadvantages tied to international trade relations—particularly with developing countries or

competitors like Indonesia. Substantial research indicates that U.S. cotton subsidies have had a disproportionately damaging impact on global markets, depressing prices and reducing income for producers in West and Central Africa as covered in the [Africa](#) section of affirmative ground. This evidence not only supports disadvantages about international backlash or trade retaliation, but also enables impact stories related to development, food security, and diplomatic relations.

Beyond specific sectors, teams can also generate disadvantages based on the strategic importance of maintaining U.S. subsidies in general. Historically, some countries have had a vested interest in the continuation of U.S. subsidy policy. For example, to avoid a trade war and preserve its domestic subsidy system, the U.S. paid Brazil \$147.3 million annually as part of a WTO settlement over cotton subsidies (Langevin, 2014). The implication is clear: the U.S. has at times been willing to spend significant resources to preserve its subsidy programs, suggesting high strategic and economic value. Domestic advantages to maintaining subsidies include supporting struggling farmers, preserving rural economies, ensuring food price stability, and promoting job creation across the agricultural sector. Eliminating these supports could lead to large-scale economic displacement. Additionally, subsidies can deter overdevelopment by allowing farmers to set aside land while still receiving income, contributing to land conservation goals.

Policy changes targeting specific subsidies might also have unintended consequences. For example, removing subsidies for certain crops could create market incentives for producers to shift toward genetically modified (GMO) variants to maintain profitability. While GMO crops can increase yields, they are controversial in global trade and environmental circles. Some argue that expanding GMO usage can harm biodiversity, create dependence on biotech corporations, and trigger resistance from international buyers—particularly the European Union, which has strict GMO regulations. These ripple effects can be turned into effective disadvantages, especially in rounds focused on environmental regulation or global economic stability.

In short, the breadth and depth of subsidy-related disadvantages make this topic fertile ground for strong negative strategy. Whether arguing that specific affirmatives disrupt beneficial trade arrangements, worsen rural poverty, accelerate biotech controversies, or destabilize commodity markets, students will have ample access to well-supported, high-impact disads. These arguments are grounded in empirical research, historical precedent, and active policy debates—making them timely, credible, and versatile in competitive rounds.

Economy DAs

Decreasing U.S. agricultural subsidies could further raise food prices, as subsidies help depress consumer costs—especially for staples like corn, soy, wheat, and processed foods. According to the USDA Economic Research Service, food-at-home prices increased by 5.8 % in 2023 and still remain higher than pre-pandemic levels (USDA, 2025). Elevated food prices worsen poverty and food insecurity; when budgets tighten, families often shift to calorie-dense, less nutritious options, increasing obesity and health issues. For instance, higher food costs forced 2 million residents in Los Angeles County to compromise on diet quality in early 2023 (LA Food Bank, 2023). Globally, rising food prices are contributing to acute food insecurity—over 238 million people across 48 countries faced high food crisis levels in 2023 (Kim et al., 2023).

Another economic concern is the risk of market consolidation and price-fixing, exacerbated by subsidy cuts. The largest U.S. meat packers—Cargill, Tyson, JBS, and National Beef—control around 85 % of the beef market (Polansek et al., 2021). These firms have already initiated major layoffs: Cargill alone laid off approximately 8,000 employees in late 2024 due to low commodity prices (Lv et al., 2024). Reducing subsidies could give these powerful firms' pricing strategies even more control, making it harder for regulators to check anti-competitive behavior and potentially triggering future price scandals.

Energy DAs

A significant decrease in U.S. agricultural subsidies would have notable impacts on the energy sector, particularly in the production and use of biofuels. Currently, subsidies support large-scale cultivation of crops like corn and soybeans, which are key feedstocks for biofuel production, including ethanol and biodiesel. Reducing these subsidies could decrease the profitability and scale of biofuel production, potentially leading to reduced investment in bioenergy infrastructure and slower growth in renewable fuel markets (Sharma et al., 2020). This could have a ripple effect on the broader energy transition by limiting alternatives to fossil fuels, affecting energy diversification efforts, and slowing progress toward emissions reduction goals.

Conversely, cutting subsidies might encourage more efficient and sustainable agricultural practices that reduce the energy intensity of crop production. Large-scale monocultures supported by subsidies often rely heavily on fossil fuel-based inputs such as synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, and intensive irrigation, which contribute significantly to agricultural greenhouse gas

emissions (Shaver & Avanzini, 2023). A reduction in subsidies could shift incentives toward lower-input farming systems, organic agriculture, or perennial crops that require less energy to produce. This transition could reduce agriculture's overall energy demand and emissions footprint, aligning with broader climate and energy policy objectives. Thus, subsidy reform carries complex but potentially positive implications for the nexus of agriculture and energy.

Politics DAs

The politics disadvantage is a compelling argument on this topic, supported by strong evidence on both sides. This disadvantage will of course exist regardless of the topic selected, but the link evidence on this topic would actually be good. Agricultural subsidies have long been criticized as examples of government waste and misuse. For instance, in recent years, billions of dollars in farm payments have disproportionately benefited large agribusinesses; in 2020, the top 10% of farms received nearly 75% of all federal commodity payments, with some individual operations receiving millions in subsidies annually (Schechinger & Faber, 2023). Despite concerns over inequity and abuse, the farm lobby remains one of the most powerful interest groups in Washington, making politicians reluctant to challenge subsidy programs. This is especially true because rural voters, often dependent on farming economies, form a critical electoral base, and any perceived opposition to “feeding farming families” risks political backlash (Zimmerman, 2024).

Furthermore, agricultural subsidies have significant political entanglements. Notably, many members of Congress have received substantial payments through farm programs or maintain close ties to agricultural interests, creating conflicts of interest that disincentivize reform. Additionally, horse-trading is common in farm policy: proposals to reduce subsidies are frequently offset by protections or expansions in other food assistance programs such as SNAP, complicating legislative change (Vilhauer, 2025).

Counterplans

Counterplans on this topic afford the negative important checks against affirmatives attempting to push the bounds of the resolution without being “overpowered.” Many of our topics since 2017 have left the negative with a lack of core generics. On the national circuit, this has resulted

in a lower threshold for counterplans as most judges and coaches recognize they are the negative's primary (or only) way to win in many debates. This topic offers other core negative positions, allowing judges and coaches to hold counterplans to a higher standard. The literature base has specific solvency advocates for a lot of high school debate's default counterplan options as well as solvency advocates for counterplans that could be unique to the topic. I say "could be" because once a counterplan is introduced, it rarely if ever actually goes away once the topic is over.

Caps CPs

Caps, rather than outright elimination of agricultural subsidies, offer a potentially viable and politically feasible process counterplan. Instead of removing subsidies altogether, which could result in major disruptions to domestic agriculture and provoke significant political backlash, a cap would place an upper limit on the amount any individual producer or entity could receive. This approach retains the stabilizing benefits of subsidies—such as supporting farmer incomes and promoting rural economic development—while addressing the widespread concern that current policies disproportionately benefit large agribusinesses over small or mid-sized farms. In the European Union, capping payments has been a central component of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reform.

There is also growing support for implementing similar caps in the United States. According to the Environmental Working Group, in some years, the top 1% of subsidy recipients collect over 25% of total payments, often amounting to millions of dollars per farm. A cap on subsidies—such as \$250,000 per farm, a figure proposed in various reform efforts—could curb excessive spending and reduce public criticism without removing support for family farms that genuinely rely on assistance (EWG, 2023). Policy experts have also suggested that caps could reduce market distortions and limit overproduction, especially for commodities like corn and soy, while still allowing flexibility to address food security and conservation goals. Thus, a cap-based counterplan not only offers strategic ground for the negative but also aligns with existing models and reform efforts that aim to make agricultural support more equitable, efficient, and environmentally responsible.

Reform CPs

As mentioned in the Case Offense section, there are many in the literature who argue that reforming subsidies is a better option than decreasing or removing them. This means there are

actual solvency advocates for reform counterplans that go beyond “we should reform that thing” or “reforming that thing is good.” Some of these reforms might look like conditions counterplans with a specific example being conditioning subsidies on making livestock or crops more materially efficient, thus decreasing their environmental impact (Laborde et al., 2020).

The affirmative, likewise, will have specific solvency deficits based on status quo attempts to create more environmentally-friendly agriculture policy. The World Bank, for example, found that many subsidies in the United States and Europe are already conditioned on environmental requirements (Laborde et al., 2020). “This suggests that the coverage of conditionality is substantial, only the effectiveness of this conditionality remains a source of uncertainty” (Laborde et al., 2020).

Agent CPs

Other branches of the U.S. government can also be ground for agent CPs on this topic. While the executive does not have the authority to decrease U.S. agricultural subsidies, within the limits of existing law, executive orders can influence the implementation and prioritization of agricultural subsidies. For example, the President can direct federal agencies like the USDA to modify the administration of discretionary programs, adjust regulatory interpretations, or reallocate funds within authorized limits. A recent example is Executive Order 14008 (2021), which directed federal agencies to prioritize climate-related objectives; in response, the USDA expanded its support for climate-smart agriculture initiatives using funds from existing conservation programs (USDA, 2021). These types of actions do not change the underlying subsidy structures but can shift emphasis, eligibility criteria, or administrative enforcement.

The courts could operate similarly on this topic. The courts do not have the authority to decrease subsidies, but federal courts can influence agricultural subsidies indirectly by reviewing legal challenges related to how subsidy programs are administered or how laws are interpreted. For example, courts may rule on whether a USDA regulation implementing a subsidy program is consistent with the statutory language of the Farm Bill or whether it violates administrative law principles under the Administrative Procedure Act (APA). Courts may also assess whether subsidy distribution practices violate constitutional protections, such as the Equal Protection Clause or the Due Process Clause. In *National Black Farmers Association v. USDA* (1999), for instance, the federal judiciary played a critical role in requiring the USDA to address systemic racial discrimination in access to agricultural subsidies and loans (Cowen & Feder, 2013).

States CP

The states do not have the authority to eliminate or decrease subsidies as they are a federal program. They have some leeway, however, about how they interpret policy, which makes the states counterplan an excellent check on small affirmative that attempt to avoid large changes to the status quo. This sidelines the states counterplan, which is good as it has taken center stage on many of our recent domestic topics. It does not, however, eliminate the state vs. federal debate as so-called “squirrely” affirmatives could be solved by the states simple reinterpreting an existing policy.

Advantage CPs

Counterplans may solve the affirmative advantages in a variety of ways. Domestic food prices advantages could be solved by an export taxes counterplan, “...export taxes or export restrictions designed to lower domestic prices are the most common, although export subsidies designed to raise domestic prices have been widely used in agriculture in the past” (Laborde et al., 2020). Climate change advantages can be solved by cap and trade counterplans which have specific solvency advocates in the literature. “If, for instance, emissions were linked to the amount of land used, and output per unit of land increased, then emissions per unit of output would decline” (Laborde et al., 2020). This gives the current trend of tacking advantage counterplan texts onto larger counterplans to actual support in the literature base, making it easier for negative teams to research good counterplans and for affirmative teams to hold negative counterplans to a higher standard.

Kritiks

An agriculture topic has a wealth of kritik ground, including specific journals like the *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics*. That is true of most topics, but critical agriculture literature is often specific to actual policy proposals, giving the access to nuanced link arguments to the action of the plan in addition to broader structural and historical analysis part and parcel with critical literature. This is, of course, not to say that every high school link debate is going to magically improve by selecting this topic. It does, however, allow coaches and judges to hold link debates to higher standards as with counterplans. While also making for more enjoyable debates during the season itself, it also helps scaffold link debate for students. Even if future topics do not have good critical policy analysis, they would now at least know what it

looks like. In addition to structural analysis, critical agricultural literature also has decent phenomenological analysis, allowing students to make tangible arguments about their social location in context of larger systems, particularly students who do experience food insecurity.

While each of the specific kritiks discussed below is available on any topic, I would like to consider the specifics of the critical agricultural literature base.

Anthropocentrism

The anthropocentrism kritik's popularity has certainly declined in recent years, but would nevertheless still be a "go-to" for many in the community were this topic to be chosen.

Anthropocentrism "argues human beings are the central or most significant entities in the world" (Boslaugh, n.d.). This is hardly human nature; many indigenous and First Nations philosophies do not believe humans to be superior to or more important than other animals (Kopnina et al., 2018, 112).

While the subsidies "good vs bad" debate in mainstream news literature largely falls on partisan lines, the academic left has their own internal debate about subsidies specifically. There is sufficient disagreement within this literature base to give teams answering this kritik *substantive* offensive and defensive arguments. Many within the field argue "criticism of anthropocentrism can be counterproductive in failing to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate human interests" (Kopnina et al., 2018, 111). Particularly on a topic wherein one of the central questions is access to food, teams can make offensive arguments about limited anthropocentrism being a good thing, characterizing the other team's arguments as against "human chauvinism" as opposed to all anthropocentrism (Kopnina et al., 2018, 112). Authors even go so far as to argue that human self-interest can be strategically utilized towards protecting the environment, giving the affirmative permutation and alternative solvency fodder or the negative strategic "state good" arguments when debating a kritikal affirmative (Kopnina et al., 2018, 112).

Biopolitics

The biopolitics kritik, rooted in the work of Michel Foucault, critiques how state power regulates life—particularly through control over bodies, populations, and definitions of health, productivity, and worth (Faubion, 2025). On an agriculture topic, it can be used to challenge the affirmative's underlying assumptions about governance, life, and value. Agricultural subsidies are already a mechanism of biopolitical control—deciding who receives resources, who gets to farm, and

whose food systems are prioritized (Stock & Gardezi, 2023). A plan that removes some subsidies simply reconfigures these power relations rather than escaping them. By trying to make farming or food production more “efficient” or “sustainable,” the affirmative may unintentionally intensify state surveillance and control over marginalized populations (such as small farmers, migrant workers, or Indigenous communities). The negative could advocate for decentering state control over agriculture and embracing community-led food sovereignty movements. These resist the state’s role in defining whose lives and labor matter. The affirmative, similarly to the anthropocentrism kritik, can make a more credible impact turn argument here than on other topics. A “biopower good” argument centering on food insecurity has a persuasive argument about some forms of biopower being good to get people’s basic needs met.

Feminism & Queer Theory

Feminism and queer theory kritiks interrogate how dominant narratives—especially those of productivity, heteronormativity, and capitalist rationality—marginalize gendered and queer bodies, epistemologies, and ways of living. Authors in this literature base largely rely on biopolitical concepts, thus making the stories similar to the biopolitics kritik. The affirmative implicitly affirms a normative model of citizenship and life—i.e., productive, heteronormative, property-owning farmers who “deserve” state support. U.S. ag subsidies have historically benefited male-dominated agribusiness at the expense of small-scale women farmers, migrant workers, and caretakers whose agricultural labor is often unpaid or underpaid (Leslie et al., 2019). Policies that reduce subsidies may claim to increase fairness or reduce waste, but they often ignore the gendered consequences, such as exacerbating rural poverty or disempowering women-led farms. The negative’s alternative to technocratic policymaking could include things like an ethics of care, which would advocate for an independent, mutual aid model of food production and distribution (Jarosz, 2011).

Capitalism

I won’t rehash the most popular kritik in policy debate, but I will argue this topic presents a unique opportunity for affirmative offense against the capitalism kritik: cases can actually solve the 2AC’s “cap good” offense. On other topics, it is strategic and common for the affirmative to argue that capitalism is actually good because it is key to things like environmental sustainability or food insecurity. However, on most domestic topics, the affirmative has no way to solve that offense. Even if capitalism is hypothetically good for those reasons, the affirmative can’t use

them as offense absent that small section of the cap good/bad debate and a negative team unprepared to point out this simple fact. If affirmatives could actually solve their offense, it becomes much more widely applicable, enhancing the quality of these debates. If a given kritik is going to be read on any topic, we should prioritize topics that give students access to better debates on those kritiks.

Semiocapitalism

Often referred to broadly as “postmodernism,” semiocapitalism theorizes that capitalism has moved beyond the material. Value is produced through signs and affect; labor has become emotional and/or cognitive; politics is purely performative. Similarly to the link to a typical capitalism kritik, a semiocapitalism kritik may argue that the affirmative, by debating how to efficiently manage or remove agricultural subsidies, reproduces a semiocapitalist logic where nature, food, and labor are reduced to financial instruments. The link story may also be more about discourse. The very discourse of subsidies (e.g., food security, market fairness, productivity) is part of a semiotic apparatus—a system of signs used to manage populations and desires. The demand for certain foods over others does not exist in a vacuum; it exists in the economy of signs (Reisman, 2019). The kritik argues that these discussions serve to obscure the violence of capital and neutralize radical imagination, even while appearing technocratic or benevolent.

Colonialism

The colonialism kritik concerns itself with the “political-economic phenomenon whereby various European nations explored, conquered, settled, and exploited large areas of the world (Webster & Nowell, n.d.). As discussed in the [relations](#) sections of this paper, the U.S. uses subsidies to flood global South markets with cheap commodities, undermining local agriculture in countries that were colonized or exploited under Western imperialism. However, decreasing subsidies through U.S.-centered policy discussions risks reproducing a neocolonial mindset: the idea that the U.S. can unilaterally alter global markets and development trajectories without engaging the sovereignty or voices of formerly colonized nations. Negative teams reading this international version of the colonialism kritik may advocate for solidarity alternatives; instead of reforming subsidies to “help” developing nations, the U.S. should decenter itself, elevate postcolonial movements, and transfer resources and reparations (Graddy-Lovelace, 2016). Teams can be held to a high standard in terms of the alternative or methodology of the kritikal affirmative; the

literature base at the intersection of agriculture and colonialism is incredibly detailed and specific.

Anti-Blackness

A significant decrease in U.S. agricultural subsidies could have uniquely harmful effects on Black Americans, particularly Black farmers, due to the compounded impact of historical discrimination and current structural inequities in federal agricultural policy. Although agricultural subsidies are theoretically race-neutral, in practice, they have disproportionately benefited white farmers for decades. Since the New Deal era, Black farmers have been systematically excluded from subsidy programs due to racist policies, discriminatory lending practices, and inequitable access to USDA support services. According to the USDA, in 1920, there were nearly 1 million Black farmers in the U.S.; by 2017, that number had dropped to just over 45,000—less than 2% of all farmers—largely due to institutional racism and lack of access to the same financial safety nets extended to white counterparts (USDA, 2017).

In recent years, there have been efforts—albeit limited and contested—to address this historical injustice through targeted support for socially disadvantaged farmers, including direct payments and debt relief. These efforts were part of the broader USDA Equity Commission and the American Rescue Plan Act, which sought to rectify past discrimination. However, these initiatives have faced legal and political challenges, including lawsuits that halted debt relief to Black farmers on the grounds of "reverse discrimination" (Breed & Hegeman, 2021). If broader U.S. agricultural subsidies were now significantly reduced or eliminated, Black farmers—who are already on weaker financial footing and often rely more heavily on government support—would face disproportionate harm. Many are small-scale producers with limited access to credit and fewer economic buffers, so losing federal assistance could force further land loss or push them out of agriculture entirely. In this context, eliminating subsidies without simultaneously addressing racial equity and implementing reparative measures could entrench systemic inequities and worsen the historic dispossession of Black farmers. Any policy reform must therefore consider not just aggregate economic efficiency, but also how subsidy cuts will interact with entrenched racial disparities in land ownership, farm income, and institutional trust in the USDA.

Settler Colonialism

Settler colonialism “is a term for when the colonizer comes to stay and as such the distinction between the colony and the imperial nation is lost” (Shah, 2021). U.S. agricultural policy is deeply rooted in land theft from Indigenous peoples and the exploitation of Black labor. Agricultural subsidies often prop up white landownership and agribusiness empires while Black, Indigenous, and small-scale farmers receive little to no support. Thus, even reformist efforts—like decreasing subsidies—can reinforce settler colonial logics by continuing to treat land as a state-controlled economic resource rather than a relational, ancestral, or sacred space. Settler colonialism kritiks may offer alternatives such as land back; U.S. agriculture policy must be preceded by returning land to Indigenous nations and dismantling state control over natural resources (Hernandez, 2024).

Definitions

Agriculture

“The science, art, or practice of cultivating the soil, producing crops, and raising livestock and in varying degrees the preparation and marketing of the resulting products.” (*AGRICULTURE Definition & Meaning*, n.d.)

Agroterrorism

“A subset of bioterrorism, agroterrorism is defined as the deliberate introduction of an animal or plant disease for the purpose of generating fear, causing economic losses, or undermining social stability.” (Olson, 2012)

Animal Feeding Operation, Concentrated

“An animal feeding operation (AFO) is a facility where animals are confined or stabled and fed for 45 days or more in a 12-month period and crops, forage or other vegetative ground cover is not sustained over at least 50% of the confinement area. A concentrated animal feeding operation (CAFO) is an AFO that confines more than 1,000 animal units. Animal units are based on the weight of the animal.” (Missouri Department of Natural Resources, n.d.)

Aquaculture

“aquaculture, the propagation and husbandry of aquatic plants, animals, and other organisms for commercial, recreational, and scientific purposes. Aquaculture is an approximate aquatic equivalent to agriculture—that is, the rearing of certain marine and freshwater organisms to supplement the natural supply. This includes production for supplying other aquaculture operations, for providing food and industrial products, for stocking sport fisheries, for supplying aquatic bait animals, for stocking fee-fishing operations, for providing aquatic organisms for ornamental purposes, and for supplying feedstocks to the pharmaceutical and chemical industries.” (Amundson, 2025)

Biofuel

“biofuel, any fuel that is derived from biomass—that is, plant or algae material or animal waste. Since such feedstock material can be replenished readily, biofuel is considered to be a source of renewable energy, unlike fossil fuels such as petroleum, coal, and natural gas. Biofuel is commonly advocated as a cost-effective and environmentally benign alternative to petroleum and other fossil fuels, particularly within the context of rising petroleum prices and increased concern over the contributions made by fossil fuels to global warming. Many critics express concerns about the scope of the expansion of certain biofuels because of the economic and environmental costs associated with the refining process and the potential removal of vast areas of arable land from food production.” (Selin, 2025)

Commodity Crop

“Commodity crops are agricultural products that are grown primarily for sale in bulk markets rather than for individual consumption. These crops are typically standardized and interchangeable with one another, making them a key component of the global agricultural economy. They are often produced in large quantities and are essential for various industries, including food production, biofuels, and textiles.

Common characteristics of commodity crops include:

- **Standardization:** They are produced according to specific quality standards that ensure uniformity.
- **Market Demand:** Commodity crops generally have a stable demand, influenced by global markets and prices.
- **Large Scale Production:** These crops are often cultivated over vast areas, utilizing industrial agricultural practices.” (Ohara, n.d.)

Environmental Protection Agency

“Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), agency of the U.S. government that sets and enforces national pollution-control standards.” (*Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) | Function, History, & Facts*, n.d.)

Farm Bill

“The farm bill refers to an authorization of mandatory and discretionary spending bills appropriated to provide assistance related to food and farms. It is a multi-year law that is primarily executed by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and it governs a wide variety of agricultural and food programs. First created to help struggling farmers in the 1930s, the farm bill has expanded to be a resource to help the industry grow and thrive in an ever-evolving world.” (Meyers, 2022)

Genetically Modified Organism, Food

“Genetically modified organisms (GMOs) can be defined as organisms (i.e. plants, animals or microorganisms) in which the genetic material (DNA) has been altered in a way that does not occur naturally by mating and/or natural recombination. The technology is often called “modern biotechnology” or “gene technology”, sometimes also “recombinant DNA technology” or “genetic engineering”. It allows selected individual genes to be transferred from one organism into another, also between nonrelated species. Foods produced from or using GM organisms are often referred to as GM foods.” (WHO, 2014)

Mercosur

“Mercosur, South American regional economic organization. Mercosur grew out of earlier efforts to integrate the economies of Latin America through the Latin American Free Trade Association (1960) and its successor, the Latin American Integration Association (1980).” (Bondarenko, 2025)

Monoculture, Mono-cropping

“monoculture, in agriculture, the practice of growing a single crop on a given acreage. While monoculture crops are sometimes rotated year to year, continuous monoculture, or mono-cropping, in which the same crop is grown year after year, has become one of the dominant paradigms in modern industrial agriculture.” (Petruzzello & Dubey, n.d.)

Subsidy

“subsidy, a direct or indirect payment, economic concession, or privilege granted by a government to private firms, households, or other governmental units in order to promote a public objective.” (Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d.)

Subsidy, Agricultural

“Payments by the federal government to producers of agricultural products for the purpose of stabilizing food prices, ensuring plentiful food production, guaranteeing farmers' basic incomes, and generally strengthening the agricultural segment of the national economy.” (Legal Dictionary, n.d.)

“These direct subsidies are either ‘coupled’ to output levels and input use, or ‘decoupled’ from specific production and provided as direct payments to farmers” (Laborde et al., 2021, 2).

Expert consensus and definitional clarity strongly support the interpretation of “agricultural subsidies” as referring to direct payments made by the federal government to producers of agricultural goods. This understanding is consistently upheld across a broad ideological spectrum, with sources ranging from the *Free Legal Dictionary* to the progressive Center for American Progress and the libertarian Cato Institute, all identifying primary producer payments as the core of what constitutes agricultural subsidies. While broader interpretations might argue that subsidies to related industries—such as fracking or ethanol production—could fall under the umbrella of agricultural support, the literature simply does not support this interpretation, especially given that the resolutions I have written intentionally use the word “agricultural” as an adjective directly modifying “subsidies.” Empirical precedent also supports this narrower interpretation.

During the 2008–2009 academic debate season, which focused on agricultural subsidies, there was little controversy surrounding the definition or scope of the term—indicating general agreement on its meaning in competitive settings.

Sustainable Agriculture

“Sustainable agriculture, a system of farming that strives to provide the resources necessary for present human populations while conserving the planet’s ability to sustain future generations.”

(Dubey & Adamchak, 2025)

Trade and Environmental Sustainability Structured Discussions

“The Trade and Environmental Sustainability Structured Discussions (TESSD) are intended to complement the work of the Committee on Trade and Environment and other relevant WTO bodies and to support the objectives of the Marrakesh Agreement Establishing the WTO, which envisages a global trading system that protects and preserves the environment in accordance with sustainable development. The co-coordinators of this initiative are Canada and Costa Rica.” (WTO, n.d.)

United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)

“U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), executive division of the U.S. federal government in charge of programs and policies relating to the farming industry and the use of national forests and grasslands. Formed in 1862, the USDA works to stabilize or improve domestic farm income, develop foreign markets, curb poverty and hunger, protect soil and water resources, make credit available for rural development, and ensure the quality of food supplies.” (*U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)*, n.d.)

United States–Mexico–Canada Agreement (USMCA)

“The USMCA is a trade deal between the United States, Mexico, and Canada. Known formally as the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement, it was signed on Nov. 30, 2018.” (Reiff, 2024)

World Trade Organization (WTO)

“World Trade Organization (WTO), international organization established to supervise and liberalize world trade. The WTO is the successor to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), which was created in 1947 in the expectation that it would soon be replaced by a specialized agency of the United Nations (UN) to be called the International Trade Organization (ITO). Although the ITO never materialized, the GATT proved remarkably successful in liberalizing world trade over the next five decades. By the late 1980s there were calls for a

stronger multilateral organization to monitor trade and resolve trade disputes. Following the completion of the Uruguay Round (1986–94) of multilateral trade negotiations, the WTO began operations on January 1, 1995.” (Anderson, n.d.)

“The World Trade Organization (WTO) is the only international organization dealing with the rules of trade between nations. At its heart are the WTO agreements, negotiated and signed by the bulk of the world’s trading nations and ratified in their parliaments.” (WTO, n.d.)

“The WTO operates the global system of trade rules and helps developing countries improve their capacity to trade. It also provides a forum for its members to negotiate trade agreements and to resolve the trade problems they face with each other. The overall objective of the WTO is to help its members use trade as a means to raise living standards, create jobs and improve people’s lives.” (WTO, n.d.)

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