



GOOD FOOD MOVEMENT

MESSAGE GUIDE

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PRODUCED BY THE FARM TO FORK INITIATIVE





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Dear Food Policy Advocates -

Whether you are focused on improving food safety, boosting environmental sustainability or increasing food access, a strong and coordinated Good Food movement can help. Fostering that movement starts with consistent, compelling messaging that we can all incorporate into our advocacy efforts.

Spitfire Strategies and Arabella Advisors partnered with a bipartisan research team, Public Opinion Strategies and Gerstein Bocian Agne Strategies, to understand American attitudes about food and food policy. We tested messages (through qualitative and quantitative research) in support of "Good Food Policy" to find the ideas and language that resonate most strongly with priority audiences. We concentrated this research on moderate and swing voters in politically important states. These voters and their representatives in Washington and state capitals are key players to establishing Good Food policies, but the movement has had limited success in engaging and activating their support in the past.

Through a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods, we tested several different messages in support of "Good Food Policy" to find the ideas and language that resonate most strongly with priority audiences, especially moderate and swing voters in politically important states. Through our research we discovered a set of core messages that are effective in engaging moderate and conservative voters. Importantly, these messages were generally well received by voters across the political spectrum, so they are safe to use in situations where moderates may not be your only audience. We also identified language that advocates should avoid when communicating to moderate voters about these issues. This message guide provides a roadmap for navigating what we've learned about Americans' attitudes and perceptions around food.

In this message guide, you will find:

- Research-based messaging recommendations for the Good Food Movement
- Examples of how this messaging can be applied to various issues and communications vehicles
- "Do's and Don'ts" for communicating about food and food policy
- A summary of research methodology and findings

We hope you will find these resources helpful as you develop a communications strategy for your organization and/or issue around the Farm Bill and other critical policy debates. If you have questions about the research used to develop this message guide, the message guidance itself, or how you can adapt this messaging to your specific issues, please get in touch with us.

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Recommended Messaging

The framework below offers a formula for tapping into our priority audiences' values and linking them to the Good Food policies we want to advance. While you do not always have to communicate the four main message points in the same order, it is critical to mention all four in order to fully connect the policies we care about with the things that matter most to the audience.

Step 1: Tap into a sense of pride and the belief that our food system should be the best in the world

From farm to fork¹, our food system should be something we are proud of, making the safest and healthiest food available for everyone.²

Step 2: Establish Good Food policies as the path to achieving that vision.

A world-class food system that works for all American families is built on Good Food policies.

- Good Food policies are measures that strengthen a healthy, fair and sustainable³ food system, from farm to fork.
- Good Food policies include improved⁴ food safety, healthier farming practices, and greater access to healthy food.^{5 6}

¹ Always pair the term “food system” with language like “**from farm to fork**” to make clear what we mean by a food system.

² Research found that a feeling of **pride**, and the importance of **safety, health and availability** are critical values to tap to activate support for Good Food Policies.

³ 94% of voters believe that growing and harvesting food in an environmentally friendly way is important.

⁴ It is important **not to overstate the impact** of Good Food policies. Respondents had positive reactions to language like “these policies will help reduce hunger” and negative reactions to language like “these policies will eradicate hunger.” Moderate and independent voters are especially sensitive to language that seems to overpromise solutions to large-scale problems.

⁵ 78% of voters believe that food insecurity is a serious problem in the United States.

⁶ Based on this description, 92% of voters agreed that establishing Good Food policies is important. There is overwhelming bipartisan support for Good Food policies: more than 85% of Republicans, Independents, and Democrats agree that it is important to enact these types of policies.

Step 3: Connect specific policies with Good Food values of safety, health, affordability and availability⁷

A. The [Farm Bill/Nutrition Standards/hearing on X/public comment period on Y] is the best way to put strong protections⁸ on how our food is grown, manufactured and labeled so we can all be confident we are putting the safest, healthiest food⁹ on the table.¹⁰

- Reducing the use of pesticides and other harmful chemicals makes the food we eat safer and protects the health of the people and land that grow our food.
- Stopping chemicals from seeping into our streams, rivers and oceans keeps our land and people healthy.
- Making sure food has clear and honest labels gives us the knowledge to make our own choices about what we feed our families.
- Providing calorie counts and other nutrition facts on restaurant menus and food labels empowers us to make the food choices that are right for ourselves and our families.¹¹

B. The [Farm Bill/federal budget/SNAP] is how America makes healthy food more affordable and accessible¹² so that everyone has the freedom to make the food choices that are right for ourselves and our families.

- In America¹³, no parent should have to choose between putting wholesome, nutritious food on the table and keeping the lights on.

⁷ **Affordability, availability, nutrition** and safety ranked as the highest priorities for American voters when it comes to their food. It's important to reinforce this vision when communicating about your issues.

⁸ Use “**protections**” rather than “regulations,” which triggers negative reactions, especially among moderate and conservative voters.

⁹ When talking about government's role in the food system, always emphasize that government **empowers Americans to make their own choices** with confidence. Avoid statements that suggest government is making choices for them.

¹⁰ 63% of voters support increased government regulations on how our food is grown, made and packaged, including a majority of Democrats, Independents, and Republican-leaning voters.

¹¹ More than two-thirds of Democrats, Independents, and Republicans support requiring restaurants to include calorie counts on their menus.

¹² When communicating about SNAP and other food assistance programs, use language around **access** and **affordability** rather than assistance.

¹³ Emphasize pride and patriotism around issues of hunger. 86% of all American voters (including a majority of Democrats, Republicans, and Independents) agree with the statement “in the United States of America, no one should go hungry.”

- Protecting the [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program/Women, Infants and Children Program/Healthy School Lunches Program] ensures that healthy, nutritious food is available to every family.¹⁴

Step 4: Frame your ask as a step toward a world-class food system

Tell your elected leaders you want a food system we can all be proud of that will make affordable, nutritious and safe food available to everyone.

Specific examples: ¹⁵

- Submit a comment to the FDA supporting menu labeling to help build a food system we can be proud of that makes safe, nutritious food available to all.
- Tell your senators to protect Farm Bill funding for SNAP – a crucial part of a world-class food system that makes affordable, healthy food available to everyone.
- Sign our letter demanding stronger Farm Bill protections for our land and water so that we can be proud knowing our food is safe and nutritious.

¹⁴ When advocating for SNAP and food assistance, focus on **children and families** to combat the opposition's arguments around food stamps being abused by able-bodied adults.

¹⁵ As specific policy proposals emerge, advocates should tailor asks to the political moment and opportunity. You may ask supporters to contact their representatives, submit their stories, attend an event, or any number of activities. The key is to tie in language that evokes pride and emphasizes the things voters want in their food system: safety, affordability, and nutrition.

Communications Examples

Sample letter-to-the-editor for the *Indianapolis Star* re: budget cuts to SNAP

To the editor:

In America, no family should have to choose between putting wholesome, nutritious food on the table and keeping the lights on. But that's the choice facing millions of Americans who struggle with food insecurity in this country. America should be home to a world-class food system that works for all families.

That's why I'm counting on Senator Joe Donnelly to vote against cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which is how America makes healthy food more affordable and accessible so that everyone has the freedom to make the food choices that are right for themselves and their families. SNAP is part of a set of Good Food policies we need to improve our food system from farm to fork. Good Food Policies mean improved food safety, healthier farming practices and greater access to healthy food for all. I urge Sen. Donnelly to stand up for SNAP, because our food system should be something we are proud of, making the safest and healthiest food available for everyone.

Sample action alert re: sustainable agriculture

All Americans should have the confidence to know we are putting the safest, healthiest food on the table for our families. That means that from farm to fork, we need Good Food Policies that make our food safer, keep our land and water clean, and give all families access to healthy food.

Right now, the Senate is debating the Farm Bill: the best way to put strong protections on how our food is grown, manufactured and labeled. And Good Food policies like preventing pesticides from running into our rivers and streams – are at risk of getting cut.

We want a Farm Bill we can be proud of – one that keeps our families and our environment safe. That means protecting programs that help farmers care for their land and give all Americans the confidence to make good food choices for themselves and their families.

Call, write and Tweet your representatives today and tell them you support Good Food Policies like cover crop subsidies. Remind them that from the farmer's field to our kitchen tables, we deserve a world-class food system that makes the safest and healthiest food available for everyone.

Do

Don't

Do use farmers and mothers as messengers.

Voters find mothers and farmers to be the most credible messengers on food-related issues.

Don't use grocery stores or food companies as messengers.

Grocery stores and food companies are seen as the least trustworthy on food issues.

Do talk about affordability, availability, safety and nutrition.

Don't use the term "food system" without accompanying language like "from farm to fork."

Research shows voters do not always understand the term "food system" when it stands alone.

Do define Good Food policy:

Good Food means a healthy, fair and sustainable food system from farm to fork. Good Food policies include improved food safety, healthier farming practices, and greater access to healthy food.

Based on this description, 92% of voters agree that establishing Good Food policies is important.

There is overwhelming bipartisan support for establishing Good Food policies, with more than 85% of Republicans, Independents, and Democrats agreeing that it is important to enact these types of policies.

Don't talk about one component of Good Food policy without including the others. For example, do not just talk about sustainable farming without mentioning food assistance, food safety, etc.

Do emphasize how policies allow people to make good choices. Use language like "make healthy food available," "increase access to nutritious food," and "give consumers the confidence and knowledge to make choices for their families."

Don't imply government is making choices for American families. Avoid language like "these programs provide healthy food to families."

Do link SNAP to increasing access to healthy food and eliminating food insecurity.

Don't mention SNAP or "food stamps" without mentioning the problems the program seeks to address.

Appendix: Summary of Research Methodology and Findings

Overview

Spitfire Strategies and Arabella Advisors partnered with a bipartisan team of polling firms, Public Opinion Strategies and Gerstein Bocian Agne Strategies, to understand American attitudes about food and food policy. Our research sought to test several different messages in support of “Good Food Policy” to find a message that resonates most strongly with target audiences, especially moderate and swing voters in politically important states.

Methodology

Our research included two phases: qualitative and quantitative analysis. First, we conducted focus groups in Pittsburgh, PA and Kansas City, MO on October 3-4, 2017. In each city, we held two focus groups: one consisting of women swing voters and one consisting of men swing voters. Second, we conducted a national online survey on October 20-23, 2017. The survey included 1,000 voters from all over the country and across the political spectrum, and has a margin of error of +3.10%.

Focus Group Findings

- **Participants recognized that not all Americans have equal access to healthy food.** Asked about healthy food access, there was near unanimous agreement among focus group participants that some Americans, especially lower income families, have less access to healthy food than others. Participants cited both the price and the lack of healthy options in more urban areas as the primary reasons for this lack of access.
- **When it comes to changes they would make in how they get their food, participants want to know where their food is from, and what is in it.** Participants noted that they would like their food to come from local sources. Several mentioned that given the choice in the grocery store, they will choose a food item that is from a local source, even if that means the item is slightly more expensive. When local options are not available, they would prefer the product be grown in America, rather than imported from a foreign country.
- **The term “food system” can cause confusion.** When asked what the term food system brought to mind (without additional context or explanation provided to participants), answers were varied, ranging from a very literal definition of food going from the ground to a store and then to tables and pantries, to more negative definitions, such as “corporate” or “processed.”
- **A large majority of participants chose the below statement as making the best case for Good Food policies:** *“From farm to fork, our food system should be something we are proud of, making the safest and healthiest food available for everyone.”* Asked what stuck out to them about this phrase, participants mentioned the availability for everyone, the food being both safe and healthy, and the pride element, as they felt the importance of taking pride in something like our food system is sometimes overlooked.

- **Participants are wary of messages that they saw as over promising.** Many viewed Good Food policies as being able to *help* solve problems, but were very skeptical that Good Food policies could eradicate problems completely. Phrases like “making sure no child goes to bed hungry” were especially likely to be met with skepticism.
- **Participants also found messaging about personal responsibility and freedom of choice (which is likely to be used by the opposition) convincing.** Participants found the following message most persuasive: *“People are personally responsible for what they eat and what they drink. They should be free to make their own choices for both themselves, and for their children, without the government getting involved.”*
- **Farmers and mothers are the most trusted spokespeople on Good Food issues.** Participants were given a long list of organizations, types of people, and specific individuals and asked who they would trust the most on the issue of Good Food. Farmers easily topped the list, with participants saying that farmers would know the most about our food, because it is their livelihood. Participants were also very trusting of mothers, with participants saying that mothers would always want what is best for their kids.
- **Participants know there is a role for government when it comes to the safety of our food.** Throughout the groups, participants recognized that the government plays the leading role both in terms of how we get our food, as well as the safety of our food. They are viewed as the ultimate watchdog and not a single participant expressed support for government food regulations being reduced. Many participants mentioned areas where they would like to see more government oversight, such as regulations on the type of food we are importing and the ingredients in our food. However, there were still at least a few concerns about the government trying to dictate *what* people eat, so it is important to emphasize that the government’s goal is that all food be safe, all people have access to healthy food, but that people ultimately can make their own choices about what they eat.

Survey Findings

- **A majority of voters recognize that access to healthy food is a problem in America.** Just 41% of voters agree that all Americans have access to healthy food, while 59% disagree. More than half (53%) say the lack of equal access to healthy food is concerning to them. Voters read a definition of food insecurity, which was described as a lack of access to safe and nutritious foods. The vast majority (78%) view this as a serious problem, with 36% saying the problem is extremely or very serious. This concern over food insecurity crosses party lines, with 66% of Republicans, 79% of Independents, and 88% of Democrats saying food insecurity is a problem in this country. African-Americans, base Democrats, and voters in big cities are most likely to view food insecurity as an extremely or very serious problem.
- **Voters also recognize that the way food is grown in this country has a serious impact on the environment.** Eighty-three percent (83%) of voters say the way Americans grow and get their food has an impact on the environment, including 30% who say it has a great deal of impact. This sentiment crosses partisan lines, with 76% of Republicans, 87% of Independents and 86%

of Democrats saying that the way we get our food impacts the environment. There is widespread agreement about the importance of growing and harvesting the country's food in an environmentally friendly way, with 66% of voters saying it is extremely (27%) or very (39%) important. Women are especially focused on this issue, with 73% saying environmentally-friendly growing practices are extremely or very important, compared to 58% of men.

- **Almost twice as many voters say there is not enough government involvement in the food we eat as say there is too much government involvement.** Forty-three percent (43%) of voters say there is not enough government involvement in the food we eat, compared to 22% who say there is too much involvement. The remaining 35% say the government currently has about the right amount of involvement.
- **There is substantial support for increased government regulations on how our food is grown, made and packaged.** A clear majority (63%) of voters favor increased government regulations on how food in the country is grown, made and packaged, while 37% are opposed. Republicans are narrowly divided on this issue (49% favor/51% opposed), while well more than half of Independents (61%) and Democrats (75%) are in favor of increasing these regulations.
- **After reading a description of Good Food policies, voters view establishing these types of policies as highly important. Voters read the following description of Good Food policies:** *Good Food enables a nutritious, accessible, equitable, and sustainable food system. Good Food policies include improved school nutrition, children's health and access to healthy food. These Good Food policies can affect food systems, hunger, nutrition, health, equity, rural development, and sustainability.* Based on this description, 92% of voters agree that establishing Good Food policies is important. There is overwhelming bipartisan support for establishing Good Food policies, with more than 85% of Republicans, Independents, and Democrats agreeing that it is important to enact these types of policies.
- **The most effective message in support of Good Food policies matches what we saw in the focus groups:** *"From farm to fork, our food system should be something we are proud of, making the safest and healthiest food available for everyone."* This statement was the top choice of every demographic subgroup, and the results were remarkably consistent across party lines, with 49% of Republicans, 50% of Independents, and 49% of Democrats choosing it as the statement that best made the case for Good Food policies.
- **Also echoing focus group results, farmers and mothers are viewed as the most effective messengers on Good Food policies.** Survey respondents were asked to rate a variety of groups, types of people, and individuals on a one to ten scale reflecting how much they would trust them on Good Food policies. Just as we saw in the focus groups, voters were most likely to trust mothers and farmers. Conversely, grocery stores, restaurant owners, and food companies are seen as the least trustworthy on this issue.
- **When it comes to the food they buy, voters place a priority on affordability, nutrition, and safety.** Voters read a variety of potential descriptors of their food, and asked how important each one was to them. The food being affordable, safe, and nutritious easily topped the list, far outpacing the food being locally grown, from a family farm, or from a producer that places on priority on sustainability.

- **Echoing the focus groups, the following opposition message was the by far the most effective message in opposition to Good Food policies, with 66% of voters finding it convincing:** *People are personally responsible for what they eat and what they drink. They should be free to make their own choices for both themselves, and for their children, without the government getting involved.* Republicans (78% convincing) are most persuaded by this argument, but it also works with Independents (63% convincing) and Democrats (57% convincing).
- **A majority of voters say that food producers do not place enough emphasis on food safety or on producing food in a way that reduces pollution and protects our air and water.** Voters do not give food producers much credit on the issue of food safety or on environmental issues. Fifty-six percent (56%) say not enough emphasis is placed on food safety, while 59% say not enough emphasis is placed on producing food in a way that reduces pollution and protects the air and water. Even 44% of Republicans say not enough emphasis is placed on food safety, and a similar 41% say there is insufficient emphasis on producing food in a way that benefits the environment.