

# **Agricultural Subsidies**

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

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“If that sounds implausible or insane, well, welcome to U.S. agricultural policy, where the implausible and the insane are the routine” – Michael Grunwald

## Author Biography & Acknowledgements

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## Introduction

Why agricultural subsidies?

Agricultural subsidies is a topic that impacts everyone roughly equally, whereas some topics for consideration might affect students in one area of the country more than others. When students buy food, they're voting on what kind of food system they want (factory farm, organic, etc.). This means the agricultural subsidies topic is uniquely accessible to students and easy to relate to their current life. Students (and their parents) think about food choices; what to feed themselves and their families, what food to purchase or not purchase, and which foods they enjoy eating the most and why. While people in farming states will have an obvious connection with the topic, the topic is accessible and relevant to all students (as an interesting aside, the top farming states somewhat overlap with the largest debate states- Texas, Illinois, and Kansas all make the list of the top states that receive subsidies) (White). And, even students who live in urban areas should make educational choices about the food they are eating and are probably the ones who most need to debate this topic. Rural students, in particular, would also benefit from a true connection with the material in a way that is not typically seen in high school debates. This has the potential for some really interesting identity-based arguments if students are so inclined

Additionally, agriculture is a substantive policy question that affects every state and municipality in some form or another. For instance, questions about whether states are net importers or net exporters of agriculture between states are also relevant to this topic. Food is also one of the largest expenses of the average American household; for instance, in 2020 the average American spent \$4,942 on groceries, and inflation has only increased the likelihood that Americans will continue to spend on food (Williams).

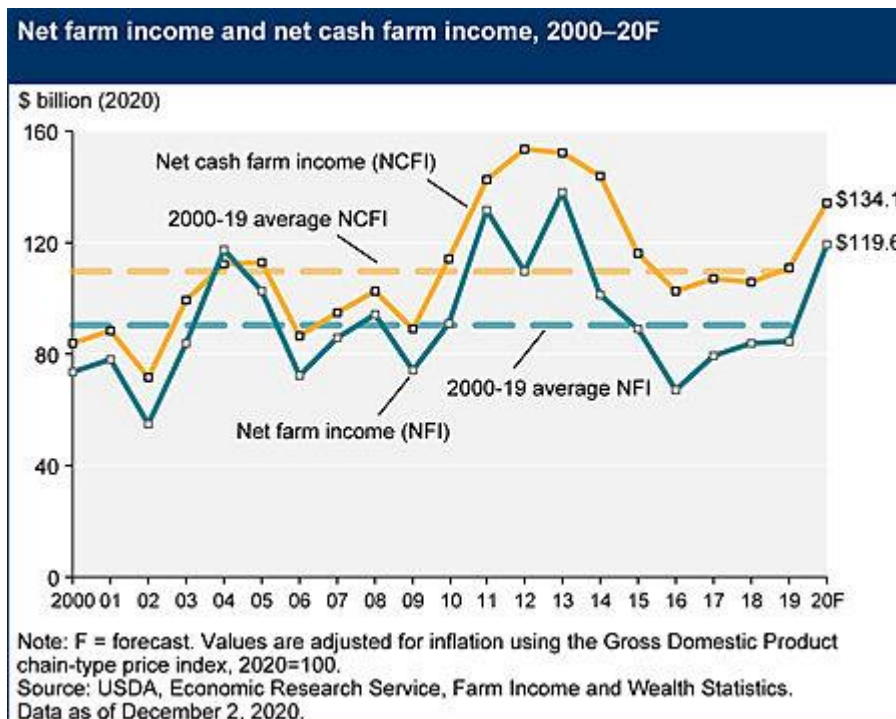
The major 2022 foreign policy issue, the war in Ukraine, directly implicates food production, but is a unique angle on current events. Ukraine produces a significant amount of world grain production and the geopolitical implications of that conflict are impacting decisions we make at home in terms of production and subsidization. Additionally, recent events such as the spring 2022 baby formula shortage and international food wars have drawn attention to this topic and reinforce that this is an important topic students should learn about.

Furthermore, the 2018 version of the Farm Bill – the major document that lays out American agricultural policy- is set to expire in 2023. This means that if this topic were selected, students would be debating provisions of the farm bill for which there should be an increased amount of literature criticizing and supporting the 2018 Farm Bill. Further, they would make recommendations for what should be included in the 2023 Farm Bill just as the 2023-2024 debate season begins. However, the passage of the 2023 Farm Bill does not non unique the topic; rather, it provides more uniqueness for the topic by making it extremely clear what the current policy is (and thus, affirmatives would have to substantially deviate from the mandates in the 2023 Farm Bill). If, for some reason, the 2023 Farm Bill does not get passed around the time the topic is debated (perhaps due to the political maneuvers required and discussed in the politix DA

section), negative DA uniqueness wouldn't be harmed because it would still be linked to the status quo recommendations in the 2018 Farm Bill.

A unique variety of ground should make this topic relatively easy to research, and students have access to a diverse array of negative arguments in the form of interesting and educational counterplans, disadvantages, kritiks and topicality arguments. Students who favor policy arguments could talk about how agriculture impacts our trade and elections, and students who favor Kritikal arguments can draw on a wealth of literature that analyzes agriculture and our food system.

Despite the pandemic, American farms are having an outstanding year for income and profits: (Lincicome)



There are 8 major types of subsidies that students would be able to debate: crop insurance, agriculture risk coverage, price loss coverage, conservation programs, marketing loans, disaster aid, marketing and export promotion, and research and other support. However, there are more than 60 direct and indirect aid programs. The vast majority- about 70%- of the subsidies goes towards 3 crops: wheat, corn, and soybeans (Edwards).

The topic promotes research and theorizing that challenges students to critically think about their world and consider different perspectives and experiences. The topic's research and theorizing promote awareness of specific experiences related to oppression and other systematic issues through evaluating the American food system. The topic also has the potential to enable students to address ethical, social, political and economic barriers that perpetuate inequalities by advocating for changes to policies and practices. After researching this topic, students might

rethink their relationship to food and perhaps seek to address some of the harms of mass production of food through engagement within political institutions.

One of the biggest reasons to choose this topic is its accessibility. At its most basic level, this topic applies to everyone because everyone eats and makes choices about what foods to purchase. Agricultural subsidies are one of the most accessible topics being considered this year. The resolution's simple wording will appeal to novice debaters, varsity debater, national circuit teams, and lay circuit teams. The simple phrasing is relatively easy to understand by the least experienced debaters, but the depth of information pertaining to the American food system will appeal to high level technical national circuit debate. Agricultural subsidies have a diverse body of literature that will help to sustain a year of interesting and engaging debates; this was proven at the college level when a similar topic was debated well for a school year (2008-2009). Agricultural subsidies have the unique ability to engage in complex, critical thinking about issues that should be important to all Americans. It's likely an area that many students and coaches do not think a lot about, but it's something they should consider. In my research, much of the information about this topic was accessible and interesting. It allows students to differentiate and learn more about topics that interest them, which is discussed more in the arguments section below, while still ensuring that students have the breadth of knowledge to be able to discuss the basics of the American food system and its impact.

Finally, the language of the topic and its relatively simple resolution wording should appeal to both national circuit and non-national circuit teams. The wording of the topic, to the best of my ability, is meant to create an appealing resolution for all types of debaters and teams.

High school have not debated agriculture since the 1986-1987, before all students and some coaches were alive. This topic is substantially different from the 1986-1987 high school policy debate resolution. During that season, students debated "Resolved: That the federal government should implement a comprehensive long-term agricultural policy in the United States." First, the mechanism is substantially different. One of the issues with the past resolution was that it was super broad, and yet "comprehensive long-term agricultural policy" did not actually meet anything so resulted in a large number of affirmatives which made negative prep difficult. The subsidies topic will effectively limit students to agricultural subsidies, which narrows the scope of the debate while providing for enough affirmative ground. Secondly, the world has radically changed in the past thirty-six years. Inflation is at record highs. There have been approximately five farm bills since that time that have changed the way we view agriculture and what foods are subsidized. "Over time, the Farm Bills have become more expansive and now include provisions on, for example, "farm commodity revenue supports, agricultural conservation, trade and foreign food assistance, farm credit, research, rural development, forestry, bioenergy, horticulture, and domestic nutrition assistance." (DeSimone). The 1985 Farm Bill does not even mention the term "concentrated animal feeding operations" which now make up 99% of the meat Americans eat.

Students also have the potential to gain some really valuable portable skills from debating this topic. Whether you are a national circuit coach, a classroom teacher, a coach in an urban debate league, or any other type of coach, there is generally universal agreement that critical thinking is

one of the greatest benefits of debate. Through this topic students would develop critical thinking skills to make informed and educational choices about the food they eat.



## Suggested Resolutions

“An agricultural policy topic would offer the prospect of a good domestic topic with a deep body of literature and a diverse set of impacts for the affirmative...Because the federal government already has a large role in agricultural policy and spends billions of dollars every year to support farmers, the logical direction of the topic would be to decrease the federal government’s support for agriculture. This direction ensures negative uniqueness for disadvantages and allows affirmatives to access the best literature. Because the affirmative would decrease federal support for agriculture, the affirmative will have clear warrants for federal action” (Grayson et al).

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

This is the best of the resolutions provided. This resolution is promising because it appears to strike a good balance between breadth and depth. It restricts debaters to “agricultural subsidies” but allows any substantial decrease in “domestic agriculture” rather than specifying a list of crops. Greenwalt, an agriculture policy expert I consulted, says this is the best one. Broad, but restricting to subsidies makes it balanced. I also like the idea of limiting the topic to subsidies, because I think there is a lot of literature in this area. As we have seen from past topics, especially water, it’s imperative that the community use phrasing found in the literature. The consensus in the literature is that “agricultural subsidies” is the preferred terminology and is found in the literature. There is some discussion in the literature about “primary” versus “secondary” subsidies. Primary subsidies are the direct payments made to farmers, which is the focus of this resolution. When we use the term “agricultural subsidies” we are referring to these direct payments. Sources as diverse as the CATO Institute, the Free Legal Dictionary, and the Center for American Progress all use the term “agricultural subsidies” to indicate these direct payments. The addition of “in the United States” could also be added after the words “domestic agriculture” but that is redundant.

2. Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially reduce its agricultural support, at least eliminating nearly all of the domestic subsidies, for biofuels, Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations, corn, cotton, dairy, fisheries, rice, soybeans, sugar and/or wheat.

This was the resolution successfully used at the college level from 2008-2009. This resolution limits the topic to the key subsidies. However, it does link to the “words disadvantage” which suggests longer, list topics are less likely to be selected by the community, and that the community prefers topics that are more simply worded.

3. Resolved: The United States federal government should remove one or more of its agricultural trade barriers for commodity crops.



This resolution is a little broader because it allows students to address multiple trade barriers. Trade barriers are further defined in the “definitions” section. The potential advantage to this topic is it allows for more creativity later in the year as students explore new and different trade barriers. It also limits students to commodity crops (see definitions section). Some subsidies that are aimed at price supports can definitely be classified as a trade barrier - so Corn/biofuel, CAFOs, and wheat would all be topical affs. But other subsidies that are aimed at environmental protection (EQIP, school lunches, etc.) are not. Some affs might want to reduce tariffs and subsidies, and this resolution would allow them to do that.

4. Resolved: The United States federal government should eliminate its agricultural subsidies for domestic agriculture.

This is the same as Resolution 1 but it uses the term “eliminate” instead of “substantially decrease.” Resolution 1 would allow a substantial decrease but not a complete elimination, whereas the use of the term “eliminate” means affirmatives would have to reduce to zero. This resolution would be too neg biased since it would massively increase the risk of the link to disadvantages. One problem with this resolution is that forcing affirmatives to defend elimination is that negatives could read PICS that eliminate subsidies for all but one farm or state which would make for poor debates (Grayson et al).

5. Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially increase its regulation of one or more of the following in the United States: genetically modified foods, biofuels, pesticides, concentrated animal feeding operations, crop insurance.

This resolution adds genetically modified foods, which is an important debate in the literature, to the topic wording. It also does not mandate the use of subsidies, as there are other ways the United States federal government could increase their regulation of agriculture. “Regulation” is also a very broad term and my concern is that this resolution is too broad.

6. Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially decrease its restrictions on the importation of agricultural commodities into the United States.”

This resolution could capture a lot of the tariffs arguments, but also allows the aff to access some specific international ground. There would also be interesting affirmatives about our racist preconceptions of different foods or growing practices in other countries. It also uses the term “commodities” and does not limit the topic to subsidies; however, a subsidies topic would be preferable as discussed in other places in this paper.

7. Resolved: that the United States federal government should rescind its subsidies for one or more commodity crops.

This resolution uses the word “rescind” and limits the resolution to commodity crops (defined in the definitions section). One problem with this resolution is that forcing affirmatives to defend elimination (or rescinding) is that negatives could read PICS that eliminate subsidies for all but one farm or state which would make for poor debates (Grayson et al).

## Definitions

Note: These sources do not appear in the Works Cited because it seemed unnecessary, but I have listed the source of each definition in parentheses. If the source is harder to find than just a quick Google search, I provided more information about the cite in order to facilitate finding the original card.

### 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 product” (Merriam Webster)

“The production of crops, livestock, or poultry” (Dictionary.com)

### Agricultural Subsidies

Note: Definitions and expert consensus support that primary payments is what is meant by the term "agricultural subsidies" from sources as diverse as the Free legal dictionary, the left-wing Center for American Progress, and the right-wing CATO Institute. While it is possible to argue, for example, that subsidies to people who do fracking are subsidies for agriculture, multiple experts I consulted for this topic paper indicated that the literature doesn't really support that. Thus, these broader definitions probably get crushed in a limits debate on topicality; this is helped by the fact that I have written the resolutions to have the word “agricultural” as the adjective before the word “subsidy.” These more expansive definitions moot the word “agriculture” in the resolution as it is written to describe the word “subsidy.” Also, empirics prove this was not really an issue in the 2008-2009 agricultural subsidies topic.

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.” (The Free Dictionary)

“Although agricultural support is a more general term than agricultural protection or agricultural subsidies, we use these terms interchangeably in this article. Agricultural support, agricultural protection, or agricultural subsidies usually consist of tariffs, domestic price support, and export subsidies targeting the agricultural sector” (Park and Jensen in 2007 Jong Hee and Nathan, PhD candidate and assistant professor of Political Science, Washington University in St. Louis, *American Journal of Political Science*, p. 315 note 1.)

## Aquaculture

“The term “aquaculture” means the propagation and rearing of aquacultural species, including, but not limited to, any species of finfish, mollusk, or crustacean (or other aquatic invertebrate), amphibian, reptile, ornamental fish, or aquatic plant, in controlled or selected environments” ([*Subchapter I: Findings, Purposes, and Definitions*](link is external), U.S. Code, Title 7, Chapter 64-Agricultural Research, Extension and Teaching]”

## Biofuels

“The term *biofuels* usually applies to liquid fuels and blending components produced from biomass materials called *feedstocks*” (US Energy Information Administration).

“Fuel derived from organic matter (obtained directly from plants, or indirectly from agricultural, commercial, domestic, and/or industrial wastes) instead of from fossil products” (Businessdictionary.com)

### **Biofuels refers to motor fuels produced from biological materials**

**Seelke, 07** – Congressional Research Service (Clare, Congressional Research Service (CRS) Reports and Issue Briefs, 9/1, “Ethanol and other biofuels: potential for U.S.-Brazil energy cooperation”, lexis)

### Biofuels: A Definition

The term biofuels generally refers to motor fuels produced from agricultural commodities or other biological materials such as agricultural and municipal wastes. The most widely used biofuel is ethanol (both in the United States and worldwide), an alcohol usually produced from the fermentation and distillation of sugar- or starch-based crops such as sugarcane or corn. (4) Ethanol can also be produced from cellulose-based materials (such as perennial grasses and trees), although the technology to produce cellulosic ethanol is in its infancy, and no commercial-scale cellulosic ethanol plants have been constructed. (5) Other biofuels include biodiesel and other renewable diesel fuel substitutes produced from vegetable oils or animal fats (such as soybean or palm oil), and butanol produced from various biological feedstocks. (6)

### **Biofuels refers to ethanol and biodiesel**

**Koplow, 07** – founder of Earth Track, an organization that tracks energy subsidies, and has 20 years of experience (Doug, “BIOFUELS – AT WHAT COST?,” October, [http://www.globalsubsidies.org/files/assets/Brochure\\_-\\_US\\_Update.pdf](http://www.globalsubsidies.org/files/assets/Brochure_-_US_Update.pdf))

Biofuels refers to renewable fuels such as ethanol (an alcohol fermented from plant materials) and biodiesel (fuels made from vegetable oils and animal fats) that can substitute for petroleum-based fuels. Although specially modified vehicles can operate on pure versions of these fuels, most biofuels are sold mixed with conventional gasoline or diesel for use in standard production vehicles. Mixes are usually indicated by the percent biofuel, such as B5(5 percent biodiesel) and E85 (85 percent ethanol) blends.

### **Biofuels are any fuel made from plant matter**

**Benson, 07** - J.D. candidate, The University of Iowa (Christine, 16 Transnat'l L. & Contemp. Probs. 633, Winter, “Putting Your Money Where Your Mouth Is: The Varied Success of Biofuel Incentive Policies in the United States and the European Union,” lexis)

Before delving into the development, criticism, and praise of the biofuel industries in the United States and Europe since the 1970s, it is necessary to define several commonly used terms in order to lay a foundation for understanding those industries. Biofuels are any fuels made from plant matter, such as corn, soybeans, or biomass. n32 Biofuels are blended at varying percentages with petroleum fuel. Biofuels are unlimited in supply (unlike petroleum), emit fewer harmful gasses, and reduce dependence on foreign oil. n33

### Commodity Crops

“Any crop that gets traded” (The Culinary Farm)

"Covered commodities" for PLC [Price Loss Coverage] and ARC [Agriculture Risk Coverage] include wheat, corn, sorghum, barley, oats, seed cotton, long- and medium-grain rice, certain pulses, soybeans/other oilseeds, and peanuts” (United States Department of Agriculture)

### Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation (CAFO)

“Agricultural facilities that house and feed a large number of animals in a confined area for 45 days or more during any 12-month period” (Merriam-Webster)

“A CAFO is another EPA term for a large concentrated AFO [animal feeding operation]. A CAFO is an AFO with more than 1000 animal units (an animal unit is defined as an animal equivalent of 1000 pounds live weight and equates to 1000 head of beef cattle, 700 dairy cows, 2500 swine weighing more than 55 lbs, 125 thousand broiler chickens, or 82 thousand laying hens or pullets) confined on site for more than 45 days during the year. Any size AFO that discharges manure or wastewater into a natural or man-made ditch, stream or other waterway is defined as a CAFO, regardless of size. CAFOs are regulated by EPA under the Clean Water Act in both the 2003 and 2008 versions of the "CAFO" rule” (United States Department of Agriculture).

### Farm Bill

The Farm Bill is a major “package of legislation passed roughly once every five years that has a tremendous impact on farming livelihoods, how food is grown, and what kinds of foods are grown. Covering programs ranging from crop insurance for farmers to healthy food access for low-income families, from beginning farmer training to support for sustainable farming practices, the farm bill sets the stage for our food and farm systems” (Sustainable Agriculture.Net)

### Farm Subsidies

“Farm subsidies Subsidies to farmers. These may take the form of price support payments, to increase farm incomes per unit of output, or direct payments to farmers, for example as compensation for taking land out of cultivation. Such subsidies are designed to increase farm incomes, and slow down the tendency in modern economies for farmers to leave the land. Whether such subsidies are called food or farm subsidies, the benefits are divided between consumers, farmers and landlords” (A Dictionary of Economics in 2002 “Farm Subsidies,” John Black, ed. Oxford Reference Online.  
<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t19.e1162>

### Genetically Modified Foods

“Foods derived from organisms whose genetic material (DNA) has been modified in a way that does not occur naturally, e.g., through the introduction of a gene from a different organism” (World Health Organization)

“Genetically engineered (GE) foods have had their DNA changed using genes from other plants or animals. Scientists take the gene for a desired trait in one plant or animal, and they insert that gene into a cell of another plant or animal” (Medline Plus)

## Subsidies

**A subsidy is a direct financial contribution to industry – includes grants, loan guarantees, tax credits and price support – this is the WTO definition**

**Dunne, 01** - J.D. Candidate, 2002, American University, Washington College of Law (Julie, 17 Am. U. Int'l L. Rev. 79, “DELVERDE AND THE WTO'S BRITISH STEEL DECISION FORESHADOW MORE CONFLICT WHERE THE WTO SUBSIDIES AGREEMENT, PRIVATIZATION, AND UNITED STATES COUNTERVAILING DUTY LAW INTERSECT”, lexis)

n93. See WTO Subsidies Agreement, supra note 11, art. 1.1. Article 1.1 states:

a subsidy shall be deemed to exist if: (a)(1) there is a financial contribution by a government or any public body within the territory of a Member (referred to in this Agreement as "government"), i.e. where: (i) a government practice involves a direct transfer of funds (e.g. grants, loans, and equity infusion), potential direct transfers of funds or liabilities (e.g. loan guarantees); (ii) government revenue that is otherwise due is foregone or not collected (e.g. fiscal incentives such as tax credits) [footnote omitted]; (iii) a government provides goods or services other than general infrastructure, or purchases goods; (iv) a government makes payments to a funding mechanism, or entrusts or directs a private body to carry out one or more of the type of functions illustrated in (i) or (iii) above which would normally be vested in the government and the practice in no real sense differs from practices normally followed by governments; or (a)(2) there is any form of income or price support in the sense of Article XVI of GATT 1994; and (b) a benefit is thereby conferred.

“A subsidy is a benefit given to an individual, business, or institution, usually by the government. It can be direct (such as cash payments) or indirect (such as tax breaks). The subsidy is typically given to remove some type of burden, and it is often considered to be in the overall interest of the public, given to promote a social good or an economic policy” (Investopedia).

“Farm subsidies, also known as agricultural subsidies, are payments and other kinds of support extended by the U.S. federal government to certain farmers and agribusinesses. While some people consider this aid vital to the U.S. economy, others consider the subsidies to be a form of corporate welfare” (White).

**Subsidies are specific if they are limited to a certain enterprise- by definition, each area in the resolution is referring to specific subsidies, not general subsidies**

**WTO 06** [Patrick Low, Director of the Economic Research and Statistics Division, WTO. Signed Off on by former WTO Director-General Lamy. Yearly Report Written by Technical Experts. world trade report II SUBSIDIES, TRADE AND THE WTO: F Subsidies and the WTO, [http://www.wto.org/english/res\\_e/booksp\\_e/anrep\\_e/wtr06-2f\\_e.pdf](http://www.wto.org/english/res_e/booksp_e/anrep_e/wtr06-2f_e.pdf))

As indicated above, the SCM agreement only aims at disciplining the use of subsidies that are “specific” according to the definition given in article 2 of the agreement. Most notably, a subsidy is to be considered “specific” if access to it is explicitly limited to certain enterprises. Conversely, if eligibility of enterprises is based on objective criteria and neutral conditions, which are economic in nature and horizontal in application, such as size,<sup>314</sup> and if eligibility for the subsidy is automatic, specificity does not exist.<sup>315</sup> article 2 of the SCM agreement acknowledges, however, that a subsidy programme may appear non-specific according to these principles, but may turn out to be specific in the way it is implemented. thus, article 2.1(c) illustrates some of the factors to be examined in that regard, such as the use of a subsidy programme by a limited number of certain enterprises or the manner in which discretion has been exercised by the granting authority in making the awards.

**The most basic subsidy is a direct, cash payment to producers.**

**Steenblik 2007** – senior trade policy analyst at the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (Ronald P., “A Subsidy Primer”, The Global Subsidies Initiative, NGO funded by several European nations to research the global economic impacts of subsidization, <http://www.globalsubsidies.org/subsidy-primer/ASubsidyPrimer.php>)

<The most basic form of a subsidy, and the one that still defines a subsidy in some dictionaries, is a cash payment or grant. Although few grants are paid out in currency any more (most are paid via cheque or bank transfer), it is still common to refer to them as "cash" grants, payments or subsidies. Normally, a grant refers to a time-limited payment, either in connection with a specific investment, or to enable an individual, company or organization to cover some or all of its general costs, or costs of undertaking a specific activity, such as research. Other direct payments may be linked to the volume of production or sales. In previous centuries, and still in Australia, these types of subsidies were called bounties. They are far from archaic, however. In some states of the United States, for example, companies producing liquid biofuels receive direct subsidies for every gallon of ethanol they produce. Cash payments to producers are also sometimes linked to prices. The main form is a deficiency payment, which makes up the difference between a target price for a good (typically an agricultural commodity) and the actual price received in the market.>

**Subsidies are government payments not exchanged for goods or services**



Morgan **Rose 02**, Ph.D. candidate in economics at Washington University in St. Louis, with research interests in industrial organization, corporate governance and economic history

<http://www.econlib.org/library/Columns/Teachers/subsidies.html>

Subsidies are payments from a government for which it receives no goods or services in return. They are usually provided under the auspices of support for a specific group of people or industry that is seen to be in need of assistance. A subsidy usually consists of a fixed payment to a firm for every unit it sells. While in the past, American farm subsidies have coincided with price supports (federal guarantees of minimum prices for farmers' crops) and supply controls (payments for acreage that farmers kept out of productive use), since 1996 farm subsidies mainly have taken the form of fixed payments.

### Sustainable Agriculture

“19) The term “sustainable agriculture” means an integrated system of plant and animal production practices having a site-specific application that will, over the long-term—

(A) satisfy human food and fiber needs;

(B) enhance environmental quality and the natural resource base upon which the agriculture economy depends;

(C) make the most efficient use of nonrenewable resources and on-farm resources and integrate, where appropriate, natural biological cycles and controls;

(D) sustain the economic viability of farm operations; and

(E) enhance the quality of life for farmers and society as a whole” ([*Subchapter I: Findings, Purposes, and Definitions*](link is external), U.S. Code, Title 7, Chapter 64-Agricultural Research, Extension and Teaching]”

### Trade Barriers

“Government policies which place restrictions on international trade. Trade barriers can either make trade more difficult and expensive (tariff barriers) or prevent trade completely (e.g., trade embargo)” (Economics Help)

“Any regulation or policy that restricts international trade, especially tariffs, quotas, etc.” (Dictionary.com)



# Affirmative Ground

## Introduction

In the introduction to this paper, I listed the eight major types of subsidies that were involved in American agricultural production. There are a few advantage areas that would apply to virtually every aff on this topic. I have mostly organized this section by potential advantage area and then discussed the affs that would fall under that advantage area because I thought that was the most logical. However, in a few places, such as the CAFOs section, I have focused on the specific affirmative if I thought more discussion was needed in that particular section.

There are several different mechanisms that the affirmatives could use in the 1AC. As discussed in the introduction, there are eight types of subsidies students could advocate for a reduction in: crop insurance, agriculture risk coverage, price loss coverage, conservation programs, marketing loans, disaster aid, marketing and export promotion, and research and other support. The vast majority- about 70%- of the subsidies goes towards 3 crops: wheat, corn, and soybeans, which means that the topic would be limited to mostly affirmatives on those subjects.

Although some of the resolutions suggested do not include the word “subsidies” subsidies is the best topic mechanism to ensure a balanced, competitive topic. The pros and cons of subsidies are one of the biggest debates in the literature.

## Trade/ International Relations

As discussed above, increasing American output and price of crops lowers the cost of these crops in other places in the world. Lincicome explains that “Farm subsidies also act as a “non-tariff” barrier to imports of food and feed: By making U.S. farm goods cheaper to produce than in foreign markets, farm subsidies—like tariffs—raise the price of foreign goods relative to U.S. goods and thus reduce imports. Cutting U.S. farm subsidies would thus help some of the poorest people and regions in the world (especially since agriculture historically plays a foundational role in their economic development).”

American subsidies have caused trade disputes that have been managed by the WTO and caused conflicts between the United States and other countries, which isn’t surprising since American subsidies negatively impact farmers in poor countries. Lincicome explains:

...The United States’ unwillingness to agree to a lower cap on domestic farm supports was one of the main reasons that the World Trade Organization’s “Doha Round” of global trade negotiations fell apart last decade. (WTO members can subsidize their farmers up to a certain agreed level.) This is a dumb economic strategy: because WTO talks are comprehensive and reciprocal (we trade our concessions for their concessions), the United States’ recalcitrance on our relatively small agriculture

industry helped sandbag potential gains for larger U.S. manufacturers and service providers in key foreign markets like China or India. Surely, other countries also contributed to the collapse of the WTO's negotiating arm, but the U.S. position on ag subsidies (and a couple other issues) removes our ability to pressure them on it.

Our farm subsidies also generate formal trade disputes at the WTO or in national-level "countervailing duty" cases, which allow governments to unilaterally impose duties on subsidized imports. The risk of anti-subsidy actions (whether at the WTO or in CVD cases) is particularly a concern for export-oriented farmers who could see their subsidy gains offset by foreign market losses, and it should grow in the wake of the new trade war and COVID subsidies. U.S. farm policy also leads to bizarre trade outcomes like the one where the Obama administration, after losing a WTO dispute to Brazil over cotton subsidies, didn't eliminate them but instead decided to subsidize Brazilian cotton farmers (to the tune of \$300 million!). Sigh.

An affirmative related to biofuels would also access trade/ international relations type advantages. There is concern that phasing out biofuels that use palm oil, for instance, could hurt relations between countries (Guardian). When a major study in the European Union concluded that biofuels that used palm oil were harmful for the environment, the study's release was delayed because of concerns of harming relationships between countries (Guardian).

One empirical example of the negative impact of U.S. farm subsidies is the Doha round of trade talks and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). To briefly summarize, the Doha round would have "eliminated tariffs between every country in the World Trade Organization [and] the TTIP would have lowered trade barriers between the United States and the European Union" (Amadeo).

### Environment/ Climate Resilience/ Global Warming

As Edwards explains, "Federal farm policies damage the natural environment in a number of ways. Subsidies cause overproduction, which draws lower-quality farmlands into active production. Areas that might have been used for parks, forests, grasslands, and wetlands get locked into agricultural use... subsidizing crop insurance encourages farmers "to expand crop production on highly erodible land" ...that would have been used for pasture or grazing have been shifted into crop production."

One of the strongest affirmatives to access an environment advantage would be a Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) aff. One of the biggest controversies in the literature is over whether the government should continue to subsidize CAFOs, colloquially known as factory farms. A CAFO is defined as "an AFO [animal feeding operation] with more than 1000 animal units (an animal unit is defined as an animal equivalent of 1000 pounds live weight and equates to 1000 head of beef cattle, 700 dairy cows, 2500 swine weighing more than 55 lbs., 125 thousand broiler chickens, or 82 thousand laying hens or pullets) confined on site for more than

45 days during the year” (USDA). The 2018 Farm Bill continues to subsidize factory farms, notably in the following ways: “...They get bailouts when they overproduce, have their most costly business expense (feed) subsidized, get federally supervised dollars to market their products, and even get free research and development that they benefit from but for which they don’t pay a cent” (Shapiro).

There is obvious advantage ground here related to the numerous costly effects of CAFOs on people and the planet. CAFOs are terrible for the environment. The methane from cows at CAFOs is a large contributor to global warming, and CAFOs have also been linked to toxic algae blooms. CAFOs are also responsible for nitrates poisoning drinking water. CAFOs are also detrimental to humans, as they pollute the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the land we live on (NRDC). As Sewell notes, “...meat and other animal-derived products constitute the third-largest source of greenhouse gas emissions globally, following the energy and industrial sectors. They have a larger carbon footprint than the world’s entire transportation sector—every car, ship, train, and airplane on Earth. The meat and dairy industries alone account for 78% of all agricultural GHG emissions” (Sewell).

One of the common advantages read on the 2008-2009 college agricultural subsidies topic was a small farms advantage, and I think that advantage would still be viable. The advantage generally argued that shifting farm subsidies to EQIP would result in the resurgence of small farms. Small farms avoid many of the negative (mostly environmental) consequences of CAFOs that were discussed above and typically do not receive the extensive government subsidies that large CAFOs receive. Sewell notes that “the larger the producer, the fewer subsidies it should receive, and the smaller the farm or company, the higher the percentage of subsidies, to a certain threshold. Doing so would break down the power structure of large meat and dairy corporations and prop up locally based agriculture. Inevitably, this will move the emphasis of food production and its profits away from factory farming and toward small-scale farms owned and operated by the very working people who’ve long been marginalized at the hands of big animal agriculture” (Sewell).

A biofuels affirmative is another example of an affirmative that would also access an environment advantage. Despite originally being promoted as limiting greenhouse gases, major studies have found that biofuels production actually increases global warming, especially when palm oil is used to produce biofuels (The Guardian). Biofuels also lead to deforestation, because of peat loss to create biofuels; one author went as far as saying “there is no case for continuing to support virgin vegetable oil-based biodiesel on climate grounds” (Guardian).

There is also a lot of literature about how the current subsidy regime promotes forms of agriculture which will be defunct with increasing climate change. Monoculture bad might be a related area to explore as well (Greenwalt).

### Energy

The affirmative that would probably best access an advantage is biofuels. Biofuels are defined as “any fuel that is derived from biomass—that is, plant or algae material or animal waste” (Britannica). One of the most popular biofuels used today is ethanol, which is made mostly from

corn. I agree with the 2017 high school ag topic paper author, Chris Lowery, when he writes that “this area has received a large amount of debate within the community for a number of years...The area is extremely popular among debaters for its ability to access powerful advantages such as warming, oil dependency, and even hegemony by arguing for a new more effective type of...fuel” (Lowery). And biofuels aren’t going anywhere; in 2020, the USDA announced \$100 million for American biofuels infrastructure (USDA).

### Economy

Subsidies distribute wealth upwards; interestingly, most of the farmers who receive subsidies are not poor (Edwards). Edwards also indicates that subsidies can have negative effects on American trade policy, such as overproduction, distorted land use, distorted choice of crops, and inadequate cost control. Subsidies also lead to more farm consolidation, which makes it difficult for local and rural communities to thrive.

There’s also a whole debate to be had about insurance/ reinsurance markets. The shift to subsidizing insurance premiums was a major boon for financialization that further tied agriculture to the commodities/ futures markets in ways that are problematic.

Another area this topic accesses is debates about the effect of subsidies on land prices, which stops the entry of new farmers and drives inflation.

One consistent theme in the literature is that American crop subsidies hurt costs of that crop elsewhere in the world. For instance, cotton subsidies have been very problematic in recent years. While they reduce profit loss for cotton producers, they have extremely negative effects in other areas. Cotton subsidies increase American cotton production, which lowers the world price for cotton. This directly contributes to extremely harmful situations in the world’s poorest countries. In particular, between “2 and 3 million farms in West Africa rely on cotton as their main source of cash income, and they compete directly with subsidized US cotton. Not surprisingly then, lower world cotton prices harm millions of households and more than 10 million people across the region” (Oxfam).

The relationship between increased American cotton production and the lowering of the world price for cotton is well established. In 2002, Brazil, through the WTO, sued claiming that U.S. cotton prices artificially lowered cotton prices worldwide (Gro Intelligence). In response, U.S. taxpayers spent approximately \$750 million dollars compensating Brazil for profit loss and studies found that U.S. cotton subsidies reduced worldwide cotton prices by at least six percent (Sumner).

Similarly, to cotton, U.S. rice subsidies put downward pressure on global rice prices. Griswold explains that “Globally, U.S. policy drives down prices for rice by 4 to 6 percent. Those lower prices, in turn, perpetuate poverty and hardship for millions of rice farmers in developing countries, undermining our broader interests and our standing in the world. The U.S. program also leaves the United States vulnerable to challenges in the World Trade Organization” which I will talk more about in the next section.

There is also some evidence that U.S. subsidy policies contribute to global poverty. For example, U.S. corn subsidies flood Mexico with cheap corn, leading to poverty. Corn dumping undermines local economies by 1) making it impossible for small farmers to be profitable and 2) encourages the switch to cattle/ animal farming by driving down feed prices, which in turn drives consolidation and a dependence on the US market to sell feed the product.

Arguments could also be made that removing subsidies constitutes a removal of trade protectionism, and that removal would be beneficial. “According to the Corporate Finance Institute, trade protectionism can be politically motivated and lead to trade isolationism. The four primary tools used in trade protectionism are tariffs, subsidies, quotas, and currency manipulation” (Amadeo). There are a number of reasons trade protectionism is problematic; notably that it gives developed countries an advantage over developing countries, and it also can cause problems. “For instance, the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933 allowed the government to pay farmers not to grow crops or livestock [because]the government wanted to control supply and increase prices. The act also enabled farmers the chance to let their fields rest and regain nutrients due to overproduction. In this case, the subsidies helped the agriculture industry but raised food costs during the Depression and hurt consumers” which increased the negative impact of the Great Depression (Amadeo). Removing subsidies to decrease trade protectionism, thus, lends itself to a strong advantage area related to the negative economic impact of subsidies.

There are also debates to be had about what the affirmatives would mean for prices and economic implications if prices of cotton and rice rise in the US. Additionally, the recent inflation trends alongside future rising in prices will help students understand more than just supply and demand are in the complexity of economic policies

### Food Insecurity/ Poverty

This is an example of an advantage area not accessed by any of the other topics under consideration.

One of the most problematic areas of subsidies is food insecurity, and American farm subsidies have an enormous impact on food insecurity worldwide. For instance, American subsidization of biofuels lead to “farmers across the world, particularly in South America and Southeast Asia...growing crops for fuel instead of food. Government targets meant an artificially inflated market, which began to drive up food prices and change land use. The changes have resulted in food shortages, according to nongovernmental groups” (DW).

Additionally, teams could read an affirmative related to food insecurity/ poverty modeling. There is good evidence that explains how US food production policies, such as CAFOs, get modeled globally, and that if the US were to stop promoting big agriculture other countries would follow suit. US food markets are also interconnected with worldwide food markets and global poverty. As one source noted, “agricultural subsidies in...countries such as the U.S. artificially depress international market prices, so much that they induce poorer nations to import food that local farmers could otherwise produce more efficiently.<sup>10</sup> These farmers are then forced to exit the

market because they can't afford to grow local crops, much less put food on the table for their families... eliminating agricultural subsidies in the U.S. alone would lift millions of people out of poverty around the world" (Sewell).

Fisheries are another topic area that would address food insecurity impacts. As Tom Dillion explains, "as fisheries decline, millions of people face more than economic hardship; they risk an imminent threat of food insecurity. Increasingly, the artisanal crews are not only failing to catch enough fish to turn a profit, they're also not even catching enough to feed themselves and their families. In many coastal communities, fish are the primary source of protein, and scientists tell us that more than 10 percent of the world's population, particularly those in developing countries, could face deficiencies in micronutrients such as iron, zinc, omega-3 fatty acids, and vitamins driven by fish declines over the coming decades. This could lead to increases in serious issues ranging from child mortality to cognitive impairment" (Dillon).

### Public Health/ Obesity

Another possible advantage area to explore is public health/ obesity which is largely related to the fact that government subsidies bulk grains which are bad for public health, and corn, which is a major staple in "junk food" as diverse as soda, Reese's peanut butter cups, and bread. Mandy Oaklander, writing for Time Magazine, explains:

"If you want to eat healthy in America, don't expect government subsidies to help. The most federally subsidized foods are heavily processed, and diets rich in them may be having profound negative effects on health, suggests a new study published in *JAMA Internal Medicine*... In the U.S., the cost of treating these kinds of diseases is at least \$150 billion per year—and the foods proven to help reduce their risk aren't cheap either. If we hope to improve our national health, the study authors argue, that needs to change. "We need to start thinking about more central ways to change the foods that we eat," Gregg says. "One potential policy lever for addressing this need may be to shift agricultural subsidies toward the production of healthier crops, such as fruits and vegetables," the authors write. Bringing down the cost per calorie of healthy food would help people eat more of it while reducing their risk for disease" (Oaklander).

In fact, the familiar food pyramid we've all seen actually contributes to obesity. Luise Light, who worked on the Food Pyramid explained that the recommendation the experts submitted to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) was not at all what the final result ended up being. He explains that one reason Americans followed the food pyramid and still ended up overweight was because of the influence of the farm lobby:

"When our version of the Food Guide came back to us revised, we were shocked to find that it was vastly different from the one we had developed. As I later discovered, the wholesale changes made to the guide by the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture were calculated to win the acceptance of the food industry. For instance, the Ag Secretary's office altered wording to emphasize processed foods over fresh and whole foods, to downplay lean meats and low-fat dairy choices because the meat and milk lobbies believed it'd hurt sales of full-fat products; it



also hugely increased the servings of wheat and other grains to make the wheat growers happy. The meat lobby got the final word on the color of the saturated fat/cholesterol guideline which was changed from red to purple because meat producers worried that using red to signify “bad” fat would be linked to red meat in consumers’ minds.

Where we, the USDA nutritionists, called for a base of 5-9 servings of fresh fruits and vegetables a day, it was replaced with a paltry 2-3 servings (changed to 5-7 servings a couple of years later because an anti-cancer campaign by another government agency, the National Cancer Institute, forced the USDA to adopt the higher standard). Our recommendation of 3-4 daily servings of whole-grain breads and cereals was changed to a whopping 6-11 servings forming the base of the Food Pyramid as a concession to the processed wheat and corn industries. Moreover, my nutritionist group had placed baked goods made with white flour — including crackers, sweets and other low-nutrient foods laden with sugars and fats — at the peak of the pyramid, recommending that they be eaten sparingly. To our alarm, in the “revised” Food Guide, they were now made part of the Pyramid’s base. And, in yet one more assault on dietary logic, changes were made to the wording of the dietary guidelines from “eat less” to “avoid too much,” giving a nod to the processed-food industry interests by *not* limiting highly profitable “fun foods” (junk foods by any other name) that might affect the bottom line of food companies.

But even this neutralized wording of the revised Guidelines created a firestorm of angry responses from the food industry and their Congressional allies who believed that the “farmers’ department” (USDA) should *not* be telling the public to eat less of anything, including saturated fat and cholesterol, meat, eggs and sugar” (Light 2004).

Public health/ obesity is also an example of an advantage area that is not accessed by most of the other topics under consideration at the topic meeting.

### Terrorism

There’s some evidence that suggests that agroterrorism is a serious concern. Affirmatives that decrease subsidies might decrease the risk of agroterrorism because some major farm companies would either be eliminated or massively decrease their operations as a result of the affirmative. There’s also concern of agroterrorism usage of disease spread, which would have a catastrophic impact:

“A major agroterrorist attack would have substantial economic repercussions, especially when allied industries and services — suppliers, transporters, distributors, and restaurant chains — are taken into account. The fiscal downstream effect of a deliberate act of sabotage would be multidimensional, reverberating through other sectors of the economy and ultimately impacting the consumer.

Aside from economic considerations, a successful bio-assault against the agricultural sector could also undermine the public’s confidence in, and support for, the government. The

mechanics of dealing with an attack — especially the potential need for mass animal slaughter to contain a major disease outbreak — could certainly generate public criticism (as it did during the 2001 foot and mouth epidemic in the United Kingdom).

Beyond the immediate economic and political impact, such attacks could also elicit fear and anxiety among the public. This would be particularly true in the event of a public health scare resulting from foodborne outbreaks or the spread of animal pathogens contagious to humans” (Chalk).

### Kritikal Affirmatives

For those wanting to approach the topic from a more Kritikal perspective, here are two examples of Kritikal affs that could be read on the topic.

### Immigration

It is well documented that immigrants perform much of the labor in low-paying jobs associated with farms. The 2009 documentary *Food, Inc* has a terrifying scene that has stayed with me for years. I show this documentary every year in my AP US Government classes, so I have seen it about 25 times. In the documentary, the filmmakers follow Eduardo Pena, a union organizer who works with Smithfield workers. Smithfield actively recruits workers from Mexico, pays them poorly to work in their slaughterhouse in Tar Heel, North Carolina, and then the company tips off Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) regularly about these illegal immigrants in exchange for less monitoring of the Smithfield plant in Tar Heel.

Unfortunately, the situation has not changed much since 2009. The vast majority of food harvested on farms is done by illegal immigrants. These immigrants are often treated poorly and earn very low wages for the hard work they are doing. Depending on the resolution selected, there could certainly be access to advantage areas related to reforming the work environment for illegal immigrants, and the coronavirus pandemic has certainly made the situation more difficult for these illegal immigrants.

### Minority Farmers

Depending on the resolution selected, there could also be access to advantage ground about minority color related to institutional racism. 95.4% of farmers are white (USA Facts). Black farmers also own an incredibly small percentage of America’s farmland (0.52%) (Guardian). In 2021, the Biden administration attempted to increase payments to black farmers, but the lawsuits were issued by white farmers accusing the Biden administration of discrimination and the payments have been halted by a federal judge (Guardian). The history of black farmers in this country has also been incredibly problematic; New Deal legislation pushed out black farmers and the country has continued to disenfranchise this group of people. The shift to organic farming, a relatively new and profitable area of farming, has also generally excluded black farmers. “Reporter Melissa Evans for Civil Eats writes that, “A history of discrimination, mass land loss, lack of start-up capital, lack of collateral for loans, and a multi-generational distrust of federal

programs have put Black farmers behind in the organic movement” (Public Source). Teams that wanted to have advantage areas related to institutional racism would find a black farmers affirmative a timely way to discuss this advantage area.

**Negative Ground**

### Disadvantages

In this section I am almost exclusively going to focus on generic topic disads. While I'll briefly mention some disads that apply exclusively to particular affirmatives, the bulk of this section will focus on the generic ones that will likely appear in most policy 1ncs on this topic.

#### Politix/ Midterms

The politix disad would be an extremely strong argument on this topic, with great cards on both sides. First, the link evidence would be excellent. Farm subsidies have frequently become targets of government waste and abuse, which is one reason they have been criticized. For example, in 2015 alone, "the federal government made about \$2.7 billion in payments, ...the top 50 farming operations received an average of \$884 thousand in payments; and one farming operation even received \$3.7 million in farm subsidies" (Blumenaur, I corrected capitalization). Despite these problems of fraud and abuse, the farm lobby is extremely popular and strong. No politician wants to vote against the interests of the farmers, who are often key voters in rural areas. Additionally, no politician wants to be seen as being against feeding hungry farming families, making potential adjustments to American crop subsidies quite controversial. In the fall semester, arguments about how the affirmatives would have a substantial effect on midterm elections are also likely to be popular, as seen in the 2007-2008 college agricultural subsidies topic. Additionally, "nearly two dozen current members of Congress took home a combined \$6 million in these subsidies in recent years" which means these members of Congress would likely be reluctant to embrace the affirmative (Dechter).

A horse-trading disad would also work well on this topic; cuts in agriculture are often traded for cuts in SNAP and other food programs (Greenwalt).

#### Economy/ Trade Disadvantages

There are a number of economy-based disads that could be read on this topic. First are food prices. Most if not all of the topic affirmatives would result in increased food prices. This is because food subsidies are one of the major reasons that food prices are kept relatively low. There is a plethora of impacts to why keeping food prices increasing would be bad. The major one, of course, is that it would make it more difficult for people to feed their families, increasing poverty and food insecurity. Food insecurity is also a very timely issue as food prices have increased about 6.4% over the past year due to the supply chain issues that have plagued America and the world in the past year or so, as well as the rising inflation (Fortune). There is data that suggests that when people have less money for food, they tend to prioritize foods that are unhealthy, such as fast food, since it is cheaper. This can lead to obesity related impacts, as well as a tradeoff with education. If the world's poor are focused on providing food for their families, education can even be seen as non-essential because "Education is not as tangible a loss as a chicken or a goat, but the long-term consequences can be severe. Children may never go back to school. If that happens, their chances of pulling themselves and their families out of poverty are reduced – possibly forever" (ReliefWeb). Students could also read argument about how providing subsidies leads to short term cheaper food, which could have negative impacts.

Another generic disadvantage related to the economy would be related to antitrust. Farm programs are already prone to mismanagement and scandal; in fact, “The Government Accountability Office found that improper farm payments amount to as much as \$500 million each year” (Edwards). Decreasing or eliminating agricultural subsidies could potentially incentivize people to engage in price fixing and other illegal activities in order to retain the high profits to which farms are accustomed. Related, market consolidation has been a huge problem for the agriculture industry and also increases incentives for price fixing. “Despite the government’s efforts to stop monopolization a century ago, today four companies control roughly 80% of the beef production in the United States” (Johnson-King) and similar numbers exist for other types of crops in the United States. This is also a timely issue, with numerous examples in recent years in the headlines showing companies engaging in unethical price-fixing behavior; while this could also be considered a non-unique argument there might be evidence to support that the affirmatives would increase incentives for price-fixing by reducing or eliminating subsidies.

Another potential argument would be reverse spending- cutting subsidies frees up federal funding, which will be used for X, that's bad (coal to liquid technology, nuclear weapons modernization, etc.). This was also seen on the 2007-2008 college agriculture topic, and one card says that there are “endless possibilities of what the government could do with the money saved by reducing farm subsidies” (Drisker).

There are also arguments about trade that would link well to affirmatives on this topic. On the 2007-2008 college agricultural subsidies topic, there were some trade disadvantages that said either cutting subsidies increases US trade leverage and that has a negative impact. There were also disadvantages that said cutting subsidies causes a quid pro quo, Aff is the quid, the quo is something negative. Additionally, students could get links to a generic spending disadvantage that might be a useful core generic or less experienced students (i.e., rather than spending the money on government subsidies, the money would be spent on X thing, and that is bad).

Finally, another potential economy related disadvantage could be related to jobs. Factory farms employ around 700,000 people, and Cargill, one of the largest meat companies, employs around 155,000 people alone (Dalzell). A cut subsidies to CAFOs affirmative, for instance, would essentially destroy factory farming in the United States and leave thousands of people out of work, which could potentially cause an economic crisis.

### International Relations Disadvantages

One of the most interesting areas of the topic is how subsidies impact our relations with other countries. This could be used as both a positive (affirmative advantage area) and a negative (removal of subsidies would hurt the relationship of the United States with other countries). I briefly discussed the international relations advantage area earlier, and here I will discuss the negative ground of this area.

There are several reasons the removal of US subsidies might hurt the relationship of the United States with one or more countries or cause negative impacts. There are several countries that are deriving benefits from US subsidies, such as Brazil, China, and Ukraine.

Additionally, students could read disadvantages about how cutting US subsidies, such as in soy, would make it more attractive for other nations to grow the crop and potential negative impacts of that scenario.

### Subsidy-Specific Disadvantages

Each of the topic areas selected in this topic will have at least one subsidy-specific disadvantage. While there is not space in here to go into detail on each of them, I will highlight a few. For a fisheries aff, there would be a disadvantage related to fishing subsidies. For a cotton affirmative, there is a disadvantage related to Indonesia or the impact of removing cotton subsidies and how it would influence another country. For the latter, there is a substantial amount of evidence that suggests:

“... paying the most subsidies do most damage. Models developed to investigate the impact of cotton subsidies have found that US support, by virtue of its absolute magnitude, is particularly damaging and responsible for most of the reduction in cotton-earning potential in developing countries. This has been used as an argument for reducing or postponing cuts in subsidies to European farmers, as these appear to have less impact on developing countries. Our results, through a careful examination of the nature of the cotton market, agree but suggest that under certain assumptions subsidies by smaller subsidizers (such as the EU) may be disproportionately harmful to some suppliers, notably to West and Central African countries. This is especially damaging to them since they have the potential to increase supply” (Gillson et al).

### Subsidies Good Disadvantages

There is also some evidence to suggest that certain countries like status quo U.S. subsidy policy (i.e., a “subsidies are good” type of disadvantage). In 2010, the United States gave Brazil agribusiness a whopping \$147.3 million a year in order to maintain U.S. subsidy policy (Grunwald). There is also evidence to suggest that there are numerous reasons U.S. subsidies are good and effective; for instance, they help struggling farmers pay their bills and maintain a predictable trade market. There are other reasons it might be good to maintain subsidies. One reason is job creation. Without a doubt, big agriculture would lose jobs if subsidies were taken away. Subsidies also protect land from over development, because farmers don’t have to farm or utilize land if they’re getting paid by the government already. There are also some potential economy-related arguments about why subsidies are key to the US economy; a massive change in American subsidy policy would have potentially negative effects both in the United States and abroad.

Students could also run argument that removing subsidies directed towards a particular crop could lead to an increase in GMO planting of that crop, which is bad. There is a rich debate in the literature about genetically modified foods.

### Case Debate

In order to have a robust case debate, affirmatives would need a substantial change from the status quo; this is why the word “substantial” is mandated in each of the suggested resolutions. Additionally, I think impact uniqueness isn’t a huge issue on this topic compared to some of the other topics to be discussed at the topic meeting. For instance, while impacts like global warming and food wars are happening now, there is some evidence to suggest we’re not past the tipping point for warming and that food prices have not devolved into widespread food wars. There’s potential to impact turn a lot of the impacts in this topic area, such as high food prices good/bad, global warming good/bad, or hegemony good/ bad debates. While high food prices good may not seem a persuasive impact turn, the literature is pretty divided on this question. For instance, there’s some evidence how high food prices are good because they lead to democratization since it undercuts the legitimacy of authoritarian regimes which are often predicated off payments to citizens. The Arab Spring caused widespread political movements, which were largely based on the price of food. One author writes:

“Do food prices figure into global security? They do – now, as in the past. Historians credit famine and upward surges in food prices with triggering, or at least contributing to, scores of popular revolts (see Jack Goldstone’s chapter in *Revolutions: Theoretical, Comparative, and Historical Studies*). But determining when and how food prices interact with state stability is not always as simple as tracking an index – local context matters a great deal” (Cincotta).

There’s potential for some really interesting and robust case debate over the solvency questions of the affirmative i.e. does reducing subsidies really result in alleviating the harms discussed in the resolution? For instance, there’s evidence to suggest that subsidies maintain research and development for high-yield farming; there’s also evidence to suggest that subsidies harm research and development for high-yield farming.

Another example of an interesting case debate argument could be a fertilizer turn. This turn would argue that the plan would cause a shift to an excess of fertilizer in soil to stimulate production after, say, a major farm was diminished due to the plan (there is some evidence that reduction of subsidies would substantially decrease mass farming operations) . Rain, snow, and other natural occurrences can cause fertilizer runoff into lakes and ponds. Fertilizer has too much phosphorous, and phosphorous causes algae to bloom at the top of bodies of water. When algae dies, it sinks to the bottom and depletes oxygen levels in water which disrupts an ecosystem’s natural cycle.

Additionally, “back in 2014, Congress made some significant revisions to the subsidy programs—limiting direct payments and subsidies to certain farmers while amplifying federal crop insurance—but the overall amount of money remained relatively steady in subsequent



years” proving that inherency shouldn’t be an issue (Lincicome). Put another way, it is virtually impossible that the 2023 Farm Bill massively decreases subsidies due to the real world political ramifications, among other things.

## Counterplans

The next core negative argument is the counterplan. In this section, I have highlighted a few potential counterplans that would work well for negative teams on this topic.

### Caps Counterplans

Caps, rather than elimination of subsidies, would be another potentially viable process counterplan. Caps would restrict the total amount of subsidies to a predetermined cap, rather than eliminating them altogether. Caps have worked well in the European Union, and there is some evidence to suggest they could also work well in the United States too.

### Offsets Counterplans

Offsets would be another potential counterplan on this topic. Essentially, offsets would mean that the subsidy's negative environmental impact would be "offset" through policies that decrease the impact of that pollution. This counterplan would be most competitive against affirmatives that have environment-based advantages.

### Regulate/ Reform Subsidies Counterplans

Negative teams could read counterplans that establish conditions to regulate or reform subsidies rather than eliminating them. This counterplan is a good example of a counterplan that might be useful for novice debaters because it's intuitively relatively easy to understand the difference between eliminating something and establishing conditions for it.

Many of the problems with subsidies relate to fraud and mismanagement of subsidies. This is some evidence to suggest that increased regulation would solve the affirmatives, rather than altogether eliminating the subsidies. Bitman argues that by reforming, rather than eliminating subsidies, it could: "Fund research and innovation in sustainable agriculture, so that in the long run we can get the system on track. Provide necessary incentives to attract the 100,000 new farmers Secretary of Agriculture Vilsack claims we need. Save more farmland from development. Provide support for farmers who grow currently unsubsidized fruits, vegetables and beans, while providing incentives for monoculture commodity farmers to convert some of their operations to these more desirable foods [and] Level the playing field so that medium-sized farms — big enough to supply local supermarkets but small enough to care what and how they grow — can become more competitive with agribusiness" (Bitman).

### Establish a New Subsidy Counterplans

One counterplan idea that takes a more creative approach would be to establish a large subsidy on a new crop, with the idea being that farmers would likely shift to the crop with the subsidy instead of growing the original crop. This could potentially solve affirmative advantages decreasing the production of crop A, but would avoid the elections or politics disadvantage because they would avoid decreasing an existing subsidy that might anger the farm lobby.

### International Actor Counterplans

While the community has moved away from international actors counterplans in recent years, it is worth noting the potential for a European Union counterplan. The European Union provides \$65 billion to farmers each year, one of the largest subsidy programs in the world (Gebrekedian et al). These subsidy schemes are problematic, as Gebrekedian explains:

“Every year, the 28-country bloc [the European Union] pays out \$65 billion in farm subsidies intended to support farmers around the Continent and keep rural communities alive. But across Hungary and much of Central and Eastern Europe, the bulk goes to a connected and powerful few. The prime minister of the Czech Republic collected tens of millions of dollars in subsidies just last year. Subsidies have underwritten Mafia-style land grabs in Slovakia and Bulgaria. Europe’s farm program, a system that was instrumental in forming the European Union, is now being exploited by the same antidemocratic forces that threaten the bloc from within. This is because governments in Central and Eastern Europe, several led by populists, have wide latitude in how the subsidies, funded by taxpayers across Europe, are distributed — even as the entire system is shrouded in secrecy... The European Union spends three times as much as the United States on farm subsidies each year, but as the system has expanded, accountability has not kept up” (Gebrekedian).

The first net benefit that comes to mind for this counterplan is elections or any agenda-based politix disadvantage because, of course, utilizing the European Union would avoid any disadvantage that is linked to the US elections or agenda process. I suspect this would be the most common net benefit to this counterplan, but others that might serve as net benefits are any other US-based disadvantage related to trade, trade credibility or competitiveness.

#### Advantage Counterplans

One potential advantage counterplan that would be particularly useful against economic advantages is a counterplan to remove trade barriers. There is some evidence that suggests that removing tariffs, rather than removing subsidies, would be the most effective way to combat economic inequalities in developing countries. For example, multiple pieces of evidence establish a direct link between trade liberalization and an improvement in the quality of life/economy of developing countries. As one source notes, “policies that make an economy open to trade and investment with the rest of the world are needed for sustained economic growth. The evidence on this is clear. No country in recent decades has achieved economic success, in terms of substantial increases in living standards for its people, without being open to the rest of the world” (IMF Staff). Trade liberalization’s effectiveness has also been proven by the economic success in East Asia, where import tariffs have generally decreased over the past twenty years. One advantage counterplan in the literature suggests the United States should “[phase] out [direct subsidies], starting with limits that would restrict eligibility to people earning less than \$250,000 in farm income. Congress should redirect more than \$4.2 billion in savings to deficit reduction, and target the remaining \$650 million to farm-based clean energy projects, rural home modernizations, biofuel crop cultivation, and agricultural exports (Decher).

### States CP

Although some farm policy is dictated by the federal government, the states also have some leeway in how they interpret farm policy which makes the states counterplan viable on this topic against certain affirmatives. However, most of the affirmatives on the topic would not be solved by the states counterplan, which is good because it represents a change from several previous resolutions.

### Kritiks

An agricultural subsidies topic has excellent links to Kritikal ground. The idea of “developing land”, for example, is something that there is criticism of in the literature. The topic would also lend itself to kritiks of trade, capitalism, environment, ecology, globalization, xenophobia, and race, among other areas.

### Anthropocentrism

There are multiple Kritiks that would have strong links to the affirmative. The first one that comes to mind is anthropocentrism, which is a Kritik the debate community has not debated much in recent years. Anthropocentrism can be defined as “philosophical viewpoint arguing that human beings are the central or most significant entities in the world” (Encyclopedia Britannica). Anthropocentrism is a fundamental belief in virtually all Western religions and philosophies; it is not unusual for humans to subjugate other entities such as animals or crops for the benefit of humans. There are obvious links to this topic, because the United States would be revising agricultural and food production policy for the benefit of humans. Even though some of these changes, such as reducing support for CAFOs, would benefit the lives of animals and would probably be in the direction of the kritik, the United States would still be raising animals and crops for food production and valuing human lives over others.

### USDA

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) is also ripe for Kritiks; as Gabe Rosenberg explains, the very history of the agency is extremely problematic: (*italics added by me*)

“The USDA was fertile ground for the coproduction of livestock breeding and eugenic racecraft. USDA scientists and experts were at the forefront of inquiries into how to accumulate value by managing the reproduction of living entities—a foundational question of agricultural science.... The USDA’s seemingly bland educational programs often positioned federal authorities as important experts on matters of sexuality, gender, the body, and race. At the same time, those same authorities administered complex interventions in the national political economy in ways that reinforced their racial and gendered assumptions. Rather than an exceptional outlier, *racist implementation of subsidy and loan programs was consistent with the broad racial ideology of the USDA that also manifested in strong working relationships between eugenicists and agricultural experts*. The eugenicists in the USDA formed a deep network linking livestock research programs to organizations advocating for the racialized management of human reproduction” (Rosenberg)

### International Relations

This topic would also link well to Kritiks of international relations. The affirmatives would often have advantages related to strengthening US foreign policy, which is ripe for criticism as US foreign policy often is done with the goal of strengthening the United States at the expense of other countries.

## Racism

There are also links to race based Kritik, as most farming in the United States is done by white males. Farming is in itself (arguably) a racist practice; its racist and capitalist practices have “had a profound impact on who owns, accesses, and benefits from farmland.” There are “significant racial/ethnic disparities when it comes to representation, land, and money” (Eater). There is also structural racism in the food system; “white Americans are most likely to own land and benefit from the wealth it generates. From 2012 to 2014, white people comprised over 97 percent of non-farming landowners, 96 percent of owner-operators, and 86 percent of tenant operators. They also generated 98 percent of all farm-related income from land ownership and 97 percent of the income that comes from operating farms” (Eater). “On the other hand, farmers of color (Black, Asian, Native American, Pacific Islander, and those reporting more than one race) comprised less than 3 percent of non-farming landowners and less than 4 percent of owner-operators. They were more likely to be tenants than owners; they also owned less land and smaller farms and generated less wealth from farming than their white counterparts” (Eater). Similar data exists for Latinx farmers.

The history of American farming has also been marked by policies that have not been positive toward minority farmers. Policies like the Homestead Acts and the California Alien Land Law of 1913 discriminated against minority farmers (Eater). There are also structural problems with farming because so much of the history of American farming, especially in the South, is rooted in slavery. Thus, in a nutshell, despite the fact that the population of the United States as a whole is trending towards more diversity, which has certainly not existed in the farming community and inequality is rampant because of historic and structural factors. There is a significant amount of important literature on this topic.

## Xenophobia

Students who are interested in the connection between agriculture and xenophobia could also look at the work of Douglas and Kristeva. Rosenberg explains, “Diet tends to be one place where powerful lines of social exclusion and inclusion are drawn, since eating is a paradigmatic act that tests and constantly remaps the body/world boundary (Douglas 2003; Kristeva 1992)” (Rosenberg). He also notes that “By the early twentieth century, Chinese restaurants were increasingly popular as venues to consume what white audiences believed was an exotic, primitive cuisine. As Haiming Liu (2015) shows, this obsession with inappropriate meats has been a persistent and sensational component of anti-Chinese racism in the United States and continues into the present” (Rosenberg).

## Biopolitics

Biopolitical theory has recently been addressing questions of animal slaughter more frequently. One author even says that “biopolitical theory of late is obsessed with slaughter” (Rosenberg). The connections between biopolitics and the agricultural system is an opportunity for students to read some interesting and new research on these topics.

## Capitalism

Finally, there are obvious links to the capitalism Kritik, as the topic would revise the policies of a capitalist country; thus, teams could make arguments about the inequalities and other negative impacts of engaging in a capitalist economy.

## Summary- Agricultural Subsidies

By the time we reach the 2023-2024, high school students will have debated NATO (2022-2023), water resources (2021-2022), criminal justice reform (2020-2021), and arms sales (2019-2020). This means it is highly unlikely students will have had a debate that addresses in any meaningful way the issue of agricultural subsidies in the United States. Furthermore, as noted in the paper, high school students have not debated this topic since the 1986-1987, before all students and many coaches were engaged in the activity of policy debate.

The agricultural subsidies topic would be debated around the same time as the 2023 Farm Bill is being debated, which makes the topic uniquely engaging and exciting. Additionally, the topic allows for differentiation. Students can differentiate which crop(s) they want to research, but the breadth of the topic ensures students will still learn some about major core controversies. Students will get a chance to learn about the farm lobby which extends their base government knowledge by looking at the role of lobbies and economic impacts from the process of a bill becoming a law. Students can also learn about where the food they're eating comes from, a decision that every person involved in the debate community faces, and every community depends on the work of farmers and the agricultural sector. In addition, students can grapple with interesting and complex questions related to the economy.

Agricultural subsidies have a diverse body of literature that will help to sustain a year of interesting and engaging debates; this was proven at the college level when a similar topic was debated well for a school year (2008-2009). Agricultural subsidies have the unique ability to engage in complex, critical thinking about issues that should be important to all Americans. It's likely an area that many students and coaches do not think a lot about, but it's something they should consider. In my research, much of the information about this topic was accessible and interesting. It allows students to differentiate and learn more about topics that interest them, which is discussed more in the arguments section below, while still ensuring that students have the breadth of knowledge to be able to discuss the basics of the American food system and its impact. While people in farming states will have an obvious connection with the topic, the topic is accessible and relevant to all students. For instance, even students who live in urban areas should make educational choices about the food they are eating and are probably the ones who most need to debate this topic. Additionally, agriculture is a substantive policy question that affects every state and municipality in some form or another. For instance, questions about whether states are net importers or net exporters of agriculture between states are also relevant to this topic. Food is also one of the largest expenses of the average American household; for instance, in 2020 the average American spent \$4,942 on groceries, and inflation has only increased the likelihood that Americans will continue to spend on food (Williams).

The best resolution is Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially decrease its agricultural subsidies for domestic agriculture. The author has been careful to craft resolutions that are rooted in the terminology in the literature to avoid difficult topicality debates



we have seen in past topics. It is imperative that a resolution is chosen that is reflected in the literature, and I am confident all of the resolutions provided meet that criteria.

On the affirmative, students can pick from a broad variety of advantage areas and a broad variety of crops. Student could read affirmatives that substantially decrease agricultural support, probably through subsidies, for crops like for biofuels, Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations, corn, cotton, dairy, fisheries, rice, soybeans, sugar and/or wheat. Students can access advantage ground that includes arguments about the economy, trade, international relations, the environment, climate resilience, global warming, public health, obesity, energy, food insecurity, and poverty, among many others. Students preferring a more Kritikal approach could read arguments about minority farmers and the problematic issues in the immigration system that relate to agricultural subsidies.

On the negative, students can choose from a variety of reform type counterplans, agent counterplans, process counterplans, and other types that allow them to solve the affirmative. Negative teams also have access to substantial literature about why subsidies are good and shouldn't be decreased. There are a substantial number of disadvantages that students could read, such as disadvantages related to the economy, trade, farming, a particular subsidy, the environment, food prices, or climate change. Students can also enjoy a wealth of interesting and relevant Kritikal literature that critiques American agriculture production from lenses based on race, xenophobia, capitalism, and others.

The ideal novice debate would probably include an affirmative about Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFO) and the core negative topic disadvantage for novices would probably be a high food prices bad argument. CAFOs would be a great topical affirmative that gets at the heart of most of the debates in the literature. It also accesses an exciting array of impacts such as potentially disease, war, or terrorism which would be relevant and useful for novices to understand. Finally, the "gross" factor of learning about factory farming practices will increase student interest and engagement with the topic.

Most if not all of the topic affirmatives would result in increased food prices. This is because food subsidies are one of the major reasons that food prices are kept relatively low. There is a plethora of impacts to why keeping food prices increasing would be bad. The major one, of course, is that it would make it more difficult for people to feed their families, increasing poverty and food insecurity. Food insecurity is also a very timely issue as food prices have increased about 6.4% over the past year due to the supply chain issues that have plagued America and the world in the past year or so, as well as the rising inflation (Fortune). There is data that suggests that when people have less money for food, they tend to prioritize foods that are unhealthy, such as fast food, since it is cheaper. This can lead to obesity related impacts, as well as a tradeoff with education. If the world's poor are focused on providing food for their families, education can even be seen as non-essential because "Education is not as tangible a loss as a chicken or a goat, but the long-term consequences can be severe. Children may never go back to school. If that happens, their chances of pulling themselves and their families out of poverty are reduced – possibly forever" (ReliefWeb). Students could also read arguments about how providing subsidies leads to short term cheaper food, which could have negative impacts. This is a great

argument for novices to debate because it's something that most students have had to consider as they make food choices, and students already often have an intuitive understanding that cheap food is not always the healthiest food.

In JV and varsity debates, students could benefit from a diversity of arguments related to the economy and the political system, as well as access some really interesting Kritikal literature about how food production shapes our thought processes. The politix DA is often an afterthought when creating and deciding on topics, but an agriculture topic has the benefit of some really interesting and well warranted politix arguments related to the strength of the farm lobby. Students would also benefit from some engaging and creative counterplans which are advocated in the literature, such as using a caps system, regulating subsidies instead, or some interesting advantage counterplans to solve the harms outlined in the 1ac. One of the reasons I think Resolution 1 is the most preferable is because it has the appropriate balance of a topic limited to subsidies, but one that allows students to have flexibility in making strategic choices about which crops to end subsidies for while still ensuring a comprehensive study of the economy vis a vis agricultural subsidies. One of the advantages to this topic compared to some of the other topics being discussed is that there is a large array of negative arguments supported by the literature, which will keep higher levels of debate exciting and engaging throughout the entire season.



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