

September 17, 2024

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chair
Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry
Committee
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Boozman
Ranking Member
Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry
Committee
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Glenn "G.T." Thompson
Chair
Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable David Scott
Ranking Member
Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow, Ranking Member Boozman, Chairman Thompson, and Ranking Member Scott:

HEAL (Health, Environment, Agriculture, Labor) Food Alliance and the 65 undersigned representing farmers and ranchers, farm and food chain workers, Indigenous groups, scientists, public health advocates, animal welfare organizations, policy experts, community organizers, and activists urge you to support the Child Labor Exploitation Accountability Act (S.1288/ H.R.2822) and include its provisions in the next farm bill.

According to the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), there has been a 69 percent increase in the illegal employment of children by companies across the United States. Recently, at least two dozen children (minors under 18 years old) were illegally hired to clean meat processing facilities by a Tennessee-based sanitation company.¹ These children worked with hazardous materials around dangerous equipment, undertaking tasks beyond their capabilities. Underscoring this are troubling reports of the fatal mangling of a 16-year-old

¹ Fingerhut, H. A US company is accused of illegally hiring children to clean meat processing plants. Associated Press. February 22, 2024
<https://apnews.com/article/illegal-child-labor-slaughterhouses-8f95aef240050c6910aa8e1b6bce1c6a>

at a poultry plant² and the death of another 16-year-old at a sawmill.³ Over 800 cases have been investigated finding more than 3,800 illegal child workers.⁴

In a letter to the Meat and Poultry Industry,⁵ the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) requested precautionary steps be taken to reduce systemic violations and adopt standards for all across the food supply chain to guard against the use of illegal child labor.

The Child Labor Exploitation Accountability Act, introduced by Representative Casar (D-TX) and Senator Booker (D-NJ) takes a step further to hold corporations accountable for illegal child labor in the food industry. The bill will keep federal funding from the hands of those who have committed egregious labor law violations. The Child Labor Exploitation Accountability Act:

- Requires corporations and their associated contractors to disclose labor and worker safety violations,
- Allows DOL to take corrective measures for companies to be able to remain eligible for federal contracts with USDA,
- Improves transparency by reporting a list of companies ineligible for USDA contracts based on repeated or pervasive violations, among other measures.

We support holding bad actors accountable, especially those who exploit children and workers in general. Food companies and those they contract with should not benefit from federal contracts while breaking U.S. laws. Oftentimes bad actors who employ child labor also put other workers at risk with unsafe and abusive working conditions and practices. The Child Labor Exploitation Accountability Act and the accountability measures proposed send a strong, clear message that illegal child labor will not be tolerated, and ensure taxpayer dollars are not used to fund these illegal and unjust practices.

² Johnson Rodrigue, C. Officials open investigation into workplace death of Hattiesburg teen at Mar-Jac Poultry factory. Associated Press. July 19, 2023
https://apnews.com/article/mississippi-poultry-plant-teen-death-investigation-4938901018f65ca2c095d8fc_b44024df

³ Federal agency wants to fine Wisconsin sawmill \$1.4 million for violations found after teen's death. Associated Press. December 10, 2023.
https://apnews.com/article/osh-fine-wisconsin-sawmill-investigation-de59dd6e8a8a19fe0d1387d2a045f6_a6

⁴ USDA. USDA Takes steps to Prevent Illegal Child Labor. April 12, 2023.
<https://www.usda.gov/media/blog/2023/04/12/usda-takes-steps-prevent-illegal-child-labor>

⁵ Ibid

We call on your leadership and your committee to support the Child Labor Exploitation Accountability Act and urge you to act to protect children from exploitative labor practices that put their well-being at risk by holding corporations accountable. We also strongly recommend that the accountability measures laid out in this bill be codified into the next farm bill, and look forward to working with you and your committee to prioritize this important issue.

Sincerely,

Acta Non Verba: Youth Urban Farm Project
Agri-Cultura Cooperative Network/ La Cosecha
Agricultural Justice Project
Alianza Nacional de Campesinas
American Indian Mothers Inc
American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA)
Animal Legal Defense Fund
Appetite For Change
Campaign for Family Farms and the Environment
Center for Science in the Public Interest
Community Food Advocates
Cultivate Charlottesville
Dakota Rural Action
Detroit Black Community Food Sovereignty Network
Ethical And Respectful Treatment of Humans (EARTH)
Farm Sanctuary
Farmworker Association of Florida
Food Animal Concerns Trust (FACT)
Foodwise
Friends of the Earth U.S.
GC Resolve
Georgia Organics
Green New Deal Network
HEAL (Health, Environment, Agriculture, Labor) Food Alliance
Health Care Without Harm
Illinois Stewardship Alliance
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy
JustServe LCC

La Semilla Food Center
Land Loss Prevention Project
Latino Farmers & Ranchers International, Inc.
Latinx Farmworkers of Southern Idaho
Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association
Midwest Farmers of Color Collective
Minnow
National Farm to School Network
National Farm Worker Ministry
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
NOFA/Mass
Northeast Organic Farming Association of New Hampshire (NOFA-NH)
Northeast Organic Farming Association of New York (NOFA-NY)
Not Our Farm
OMI Cultural Participation Project
Organic Farming Research Foundation
Pasa Sustainable Agriculture
Pesticide Action & Agroecology Network
Pesticide Action Network
Polo's Pantry
Public Justice Center
Rural Advancement Foundation International
Rural Coalition
San Diego Food System Alliance
Slow Food USA
Soul Fire Farm
Springfield Food Policy Council
Sprout
Striving to Serve Others
The National Black Food & Justice Alliance
The Restaurant Opportunities Centers United (ROC United)
The Round Group
Toxic Free NC
Union of Concerned Scientists
Until Justice Data Partners
Wallace Center at Winrock International
Wellness in the Schools