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Farm Action:

Exposing a Phony Farmer Group



Background

A group called Farm Action has been trying to enlist farmers and ranchers into its political orbit through a new campaign called the Rural Independence Initiative. But despite calling itself “nonpartisan,” Farm Action’s funding—and actions—call into question how this group presents itself

to the agriculture community. Recent tax filings reveal that as much as 99% of its funding comes from activist foundations and “dark money” funds, while the group promotes policies that attack farmers and consumer choice.

Farm Action is Funded By Dark Money & Activist Foundations

Tax records reveal that Farm Action’s funding largely comes from a handful of foundations and dark-money groups.

In 2024, 99% of Farm Action’s contributions came from 7 foundations and “donor-advised funds,” which are a form of dark money by acting as a middleman between an anonymous donor

In 2025, 96% of Farm Action’s contributions came from 8 foundations and dark-money sources.

Farm Action’s known funders include:

- **Stray Dog Institute**, which funds animal rights groups that promote total veganism. “Our allies encourage plant-forward eating, oppose industrial animal agriculture, and advance alternatives to animal-based food systems.”
- **11th Hour Project/Schmidt Family Foundation**, an environmentalist grantmaker linked to billionaire former Google CEO Eric Schmidt.
- **Windward Fund**, an environmental activist foundation.
- **Grace Communications Foundation**, which founded the “Meatless Monday” campaign.

But Farm Action’s biggest donor? Dark money.

Dark money provided about 73% of Farm Action’s contributions in 2024/2025. Meanwhile, donations from the public totaled just 1% and 4% of Farm Action’s contributions in those years, respectively.

For Farm Action’s political arm, it’s a similar story.

About 74% of the funding of Farm Action Fund, the group’s 501(c)(4) political arm, came from a single source in 2024: Coefficient Giving Action Fund (formerly Open Philanthropy Action). The Coefficient group is a political entity linked to California billionaire Dustin Moskovitz.

Moskovitz is a major funder of the animal rights movement. His Open Philanthropy/Coefficient funding network has given more than \$400 million to animal rights organizations since 2016.

Humane America Animal Foundation, another funder of animal rights groups, gave \$50,000 to Farm Action in 2023. As of this writing, HAAF’s 2024 tax return has not been published despite being due nearly one year ago.

Farm Action's Funding*

2024 Contributions	Amount
11th Hour (Schmidt Family Foundation)	\$125,000
Windward Fund	\$40,000
Stray Dog Institute	\$50,000
National Philanthropic Fund - Echo Fund	\$250,000
ImpactAssets	\$20,000
Good Chaos	\$150,000
Grace Communication Foundation	\$20,000



2025 Contributions	Amount
11th Hour (Schmidt Family Foundation)	\$125,000
Silicon Valley Community Foundation	\$225,000
Windward Fund	\$40,000
National Philanthropic Trust	\$300,000
Grace Communication Foundation	\$50,000
ImpactAssets	\$170,000
Good Chaos	\$250,000
Martin-Fabert Foundation	\$10,000



* Farm Action, the 501(c)(3) only.

Farm Action's Ties to Animal Rights and Lab-Grown Meat Industry

Along with getting significant funding from animal rights activists, Farm Action's co-founders both worked for the vegan advocacy group Humane Society of the United States. There, they both engaged in "rural outreach" to try to get farmers to support HSUS, despite the organization being run by ideological vegans who reject all farm-animal protein regardless of the production system. This is reminiscent of Farm Action's modus operandi—conducting "rural outreach" while being backed by animal rights extremists.

But that's not all. Tom Rossmeissl, one of the founders and board members of Farm Action's political arm, works for the synthetic protein industry that aims to replace livestock farms.

According to Agri-Pulse, Rossmeissl was one of the founders of Farm Action Fund in 2017, when it was known as Family Farm Action:

A group called Family Farm Action has been launched to lobby for the interests of family farmers and against "multinational agribusiness monopolies that are destroying rural economies and way of life."

FFA – not to be confused with the FFA that used to be known as Future Farmers of America – is led by Joe Maxwell, a farmer and former lieutenant governor of Missouri who is the part-time executive director of the Organization for Competitive Markets (OCM) and formerly the Humane Society of the United States' VP of Outreach and Engagement. Organized as a 501(c)(4) group, FFA will be able to lobby federal and state lawmakers. The group also plans to start a Political Action Committee, Maxwell said. FFA hopes to "amplify" the voices of like-minded organizations such as the National Farmers Union and National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition. FFA also endorses the work of OCM, including its recently [sic] report, "Consolidation, Globalization, and the American Family Farm," which recommends a return to Country of Origin Labeling; increased antitrust enforcement in order to limit mergers; and reform of checkoff programs.

So far, all those involved in the group are working without pay until fundraising ramps up, Maxwell said. Other key FFA members are Tom Rossmeissl, a Wisconsin political strategist who helped found FFA and is now an adviser, and Chairwoman Lillian Salerno, deputy undersecretary for rural development at USDA for 18 months ending in January 2017. Salerno also worked on rural business development at USDA for about three and a half years after the re-election of President Barack Obama.

Rossmeissl continued to serve on Farm Action Fund's board through 2025, according to tax returns.

According to his LinkedIn profile, Rossmeissel worked for Eat Just as the company’s global head of marketing from 2019-2025, while he served on Farm Action’s board:



Tom Rossmeissel
CMO, Eat Just, Inc.

Experience



Eat Just, Inc.
Full-time · 6 yrs 4 mos

- Chief Marketing Officer**
Oct 2024 - Aug 2025 · 11 mos
- Head Of Global Marketing**
Sep 2020 - Oct 2024 · 4 yrs 2 mos
San Francisco, California, United States
- Director of Consumer Engagement and Public Affairs**
May 2019 - Sep 2020 · 1 yr 5 mos
San Francisco, California, United States

Eat Just is a fake-egg company founded by two vegans, Josh Tetrick and Josh Balk, and originally named Beyond Eggs. Balk is a longtime animal rights activist and former vice president at the Humane Society of the United States (now called Humane World). Eat Just has a subsidiary, GOOD Meat, that manufactures lab-grown chicken. The company calls itself “the future of meat.”

The goal of these synthetic protein companies is to replace farm-raised animal products. Tetrick hopes his company “will disrupt the world food industry by replacing eggs (and other water-intensive foods) with plants,” reports The Guardian.

Farm Action has also endorsed legislation proposed by Senator Cory Booker (D-NJ), a vegan, to impose a national moratorium on larger livestock farms.

Farm Action also supports state laws such as California Proposition 12 that ban the sale of common egg and pork products, leaving consumers to only be able to purchase higher-cost, “Whole Foods”-style products. Farmers with conventional systems must spend millions retrofitting them in order to sell in California.

These laws restrict consumer choice and impose huge costs on many farmers.

FARM ACTION IS RUN BY LEFTWING POLITICAL ACTIVISTS

Farm Action's cofounders lean into their backgrounds in agriculture to try to gain credibility with farmers and ranchers. But a look at Farm Action's directors and staff members reveal many leftwing activists.

While it calls itself nonpartisan, all four board members of Farm Action Fund are tied to liberal activism:

- Chairwoman **Lillian Selerno** is an advisor to the Texas Democratic Party and worked in the Obama and Biden Administrations.
- **Barry Lynn** is a Democratic donor and has worked for liberal interest groups.
- **Anim Steel** has a history with far-left groups, including running a group called Uprooted & Rising, which has called for abolishing the police. Uprooted claims it is "committed to ending higher education's support for Big Food corporations and white supremacy in the food system." Steel is also on the board of the leftwing group Changing the Conversation for Progress. Steel is a board member of both Farm Action and Farm Action Fund.
- **Wes Shoemeyer** is a former Democratic politician.

Joe Maxwell, Farm Action Fund's director, is a former Democratic lieutenant governor of Missouri. The remaining three staff members include two Democratic donors and a Democratic political consultant.

Angela Huffman, head of Farm Action, donated to Kamala Harris' presidential campaign and several other Democratic candidates. (Her one donation to a Republican was in 2026 to anti-Trump libertarian Thomas Massie, who lost his primary.) Other Farm Action staffers include a Biden donor, a former staffer for a Democratic Congressman, and an organizer for Democratic presidential candidates.



FARM ACTION'S “WOKE” POLICY AGENDA

Along with pushing anti-meat laws that drive up costs for farmers and consumers, Farm Action has promoted a “woke” policy agenda.

The group endorsed legislation that would have provided government support based on race. Called the “Justice for Black Farmers Act,” the legislation would have formed a “Black Farmer Land Grant” program to give up to 160 acres—at no cost—to black individuals. Farm Action also endorsed the “Emergency Relief for Farmers of Color Act” which would have forgiven federal loans to “socially disadvantaged” farmers and ranchers.¹ It also would have provided federal funds to groups that serve “socially disadvantaged” farmers and ranchers and created an “equity commission” at USDA.

Farm Action also called for the “creation of racial equity, diversity, and inclusion priorities in 4-H and other federal agricultural discovery programs,” and also argued the Biden Administration should use racial preferences in staffing the USDA. “We believe the best way to change the culture of the USDA, is to change its personnel. Leading by example, the Biden Administration should hire political appointees that reflect the diversity and cultural knowledge that exists in rural America,” states a policy agenda put out by Farm Action.

Farm Action Fund endorsed Black Lives Matter protests, claiming “racial injustice...is rooted deep in the heritage of American agriculture.”

**Joe Maxwell**
June 5, 2020 · 🌐

I am proud to be a board member of Family Farm Action Alliance and for their statement against racial injustice.

**Farm Action Fund**
June 5, 2020 · 🌐

Black Lives Matter. Family Farm Action and Family Farm Action Alliance stand in solidarity with the protests and individuals standing up for justice in our legal system. The murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police is the latest case of Black lives taken at the hands of the police and other authorities, stemming from a long legacy of racism in America.

Agriculture is not immune from racial injustice; it is rooted deep in the heritage of American agriculture, which stripped Indigenous peoples of their land and enslaved millions of Africans and their descendants. In the post-emancipation era, Black farmers have been driven from their family's lands, discriminated against by their own United States Department of Agriculture, and have felt the sting of inequality in the market. We will continue to work to end food and agriculture market injustice and discrimination against Black farmers and other people of color. However, it is clearer than ever that we must listen to and learn from organizations representing individuals and communities of color and double down on supporting their work to help build a new reality.

It is time for all of us who are white to stand in solidarity with those individuals and communities of color who are being oppressed and demand an end to the systemic racial injustice that exists in this country. We recognize there are a wide variety of opinions about this issue and we invite you to be in dialog with us.

¹ Citing 7 U.S.C. 2279(a): “the term “socially disadvantaged producer” means a producer who is a member of a group whose members have been subjected to racial, ethnic, or gender prejudice because of their identity as members of a group without regard to their individual qualities.”



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