

“Arkansas Farmers in Crisis,” by Dr. Chris Jones

For generations, Arkansas farmers have been the backbone of our state’s economy, feeding families here at home and around the world. Agriculture is not just an industry in Arkansas—it is a way of life, deeply woven into our communities, shaping our history and securing our future.

Recent cuts by the Trump/Musk administration to USDA programs and the dismantling of USAID have left many struggling with unexpected financial burdens. These cuts affect not just the farmers themselves but entire rural economies that depend on agricultural success.

Take Dan Spatz, a farmer in Conway, who signed a contract with the USDA’s Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) to build a hoop house. According to a report by the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, Spatz entered a \$21,284 contract with the USDA for this project. He put down deposits, started construction, and then—nothing.

The Trump/Musk funding freeze left Dan holding the bill, with no answers about when, or even if, the funds will come through. Spatz isn’t alone. Across Arkansas, farmers are now weighing tough choices: take on more debt or shut down.

The ripple effect of these policy changes extends beyond individual farmers—it impacts local suppliers, farm workers, and even grocery stores that depend on locally sourced products.

The dismantling of USAID has disrupted programs like Food for Peace, leaving 30,000 tons of American-grown food stranded at a Houston port. Without these markets, farmers are losing contracts, forcing them to sell crops at a loss or let them rot in the fields. This affects not just Arkansas but global food security.

Supporters of these policies argue that USDA cuts were necessary for budget reduction and administrative efficiency. They contend that the federal government must curb spending to address the national debt and ensure taxpayer dollars are used effectively.

Others claim that alternative relief programs exist or that state governments should step in to provide aid. State legislators have proposed using local funds to supplement federal shortfalls, though implementation has been slow and inconsistent.

While these points outline the problem, the solutions don't solve those problems. Many farmers argue that these cuts and policy shifts have created more harm than good.

Budget reductions may be necessary in some areas, cutting essential agricultural funding without a robust safety net has left many in dire situations. With rising input costs and disappearing markets, the long-term consequences on food supply chains and the economy could be severe.

State programs, where available, often lack the resources and reach of federal initiatives. Farmers believe that administrative inefficiencies should be addressed through targeted reforms rather than blanket funding freezes.

What's worse, every member of Arkansas's congressional delegation voted in favor of policies that are now hurting our farmers. It's time to hold them accountable.

We must demand action from our elected officials—call your representatives and senators and tell them to restore funding to these critical programs and ensure the future of Arkansas agriculture.

Farmers provide the food that feeds America. They should not have to beg for basic support from the very government that has long relied on their labor.

The hardworking people of Arkansas deserve better.

Share your thoughts and comments at chrisjoneslistens@gmail.com.