

Agribusiness and the Obama budget

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Brad Plumer has a helpful list of [winners and losers in the White House budget](#). If you want to understand the president's proposal at a deeper level than a soundbite (but a shallower level than actually reading [the whole thing](#)), I recommend starting here.

One small quibble: Plumer's list of losers includes "farms and agribusinesses." It's true that [Obama's budget cuts several farm programs](#). But these are mostly crop insurance subsidies and direct payments, which target commodity growers (grain, soybeans, cotton). And these subsidies contribute to overproduction, which in turn contributes to numerous social ills—including the glut of artificially cheap junk food American retailers are peddling.

Fruit and vegetable farmers are largely locked out of this corporate dole, which effectively turns their (biodiverse, healthful) products into relative luxury items. If we cut farm subsidies as they currently exist, there would be many potential winners: public health, the environment, people who farm things that aren't commodities or animals that eat them.

Also: farmers in the developing world, whose livelihoods are undermined by surplus U.S. commodities dumped on foreign markets. Shipping U.S. food for aid use is also inflexible and inefficient.

The White House budget deals with this issue directly as well: [Obama proposes sending money overseas instead of food](#). Along with saving on shipping costs and time, this would shift the relationship between U.S. foreign aid and developing-world farmers from competition to support.

American agribusiness is a loser in the White House's budget. But as is often the case, what's bad for agribusiness may be good for some farmers, here and abroad—and for those of us who hope for a more sustainable and just food system.