June 2, 2015

The Honorable Lamar Alexander, Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions
835 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Kline, Chairman
U.S. House Committee on Education and the Workforce
2181 Rayburn Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Patty Murray, Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Robert Scott, Ranking Member
U.S. House Committee on Education and the Workforce
2101 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairmen Alexander and Kline and Ranking Members Murray and Scott:

American agriculture faces a crisis of attrition. Two-thirds of our farmland is on the cusp of transition as farmers age and retire, and there are few young farmers positioned to manage this resource. Farmers over the age of 65 outnumber farmers under the age of 35 by a margin of 6-to-1, and the number of farmers under the age of 35 grew by only 1% between 2007 and 2012.

We must incentivize more young people to pursue careers in agriculture. That is why our coalition asks you to add farmers to the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program.

For college graduates, 71% of whom now graduate with student debt, a farm career is often out of the question. Student debt 1) deters many from considering farm careers; 2) places an often insurmountable financial burden on young farmers; and 3) prevents farmers from capitalizing their businesses and purchasing land because they are unable to secure mortgages and operating loans.

Bringing young people back to the farm and ranch is a national priority. We need innovative policies and programs that will incentivize agricultural careers and reduce risks and barriers to entry. Traditional farm programs are not enough. Farmers grow our food, steward our land and environment, support our rural communities, and contribute to national security. Much like teachers, doctors, nurses, and government employees, farmers are public servants.

For all of these reasons, we should recognize the contributions young farmers make to this country. We must rebuild the career path to farming and ranching by adding farmers to the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program.

Sincerely,

Agrarian Trust
Alabama Sustainable Agriculture Network
Alaska Farmers Union
Alternative Energy Resources Organization
American Grassfed Association
American Sustainable Business Council
California Certified Organic Farmers
Catholic Rural Life
Center for Land-Based Learning
Certified Naturally Grown
Community Alliance with Family Farmers
Community Farm Alliance
Dakota Rural Action
Ecological Farming Association
FairShare CSA Coalition
Family Farm Alliance
Farm Aid
Farm Education Resource Network
Farmer Veteran Coalition
Farmers Market Coalition
Florida Certified Organic Growers & Consumers, Inc
Food & Water Watch
Food Tank
FoodCorps
Foodshed Farm
Friends of Family Farmers
Future Harvest, Chesapeake Alliance for Sustainable Agriculture
Georgia Organics
Greenhorns
Guidestone Colorado
Healthy Community Food Systems
Illinois Stewardship Alliance
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy
Intervale Center
Iowa Farmers Union
Kansas Farmers Union
Kansas Rural Center
Land Stewardship Project
Lexicon of Sustainability
Lowcountry Local First
Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association
Michael Fields Agricultural Institute
Michigan Integrated Food and Farming Systems
Michigan State University Student Organic Farm
Midwest Organic & Sustainable Education Service
Mississippi Sustainable Agriculture Network
Missouri Farmers Union
Montezuma Land Conservancy
National Center for Appropriate Technology
National Farm to School Network
National Farmers Union
National FFA Organization
National Hmong American Farmers, Inc
National Organic Coalition
National Young Farmers Coalition
Nebraska Farmers Union
Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society
New England Farmers Union
New Entry Sustainable Farming Project
Northeast Organic Farming Association of New York
Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont
Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group
Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association
One Wisconsin Institute
Oregon Tilth
Organic Growers School
Organic Seed Alliance
Organic Trade Association
PCC Farmland Trust
Pennsylvania Farmers Union
RAFI-USA
Real Food Challenge
Renewing the Countryside
Rio Grande Agricultural Land Trust
Rocky Mountain Farmers Union
Rodale Institute
Roots Memphis Farm Academy
Roots of Change
Scenic Hudson
Slow Food Nebraska
Stone Barns Center for Food and Agriculture
Student Debt Crisis
Sustainable Food Trade Association
The Farmers Guild
Tilth Producers of Washington
University of Vermont Farmer Training Program
Veterans Education Success
Washington State Farmers Market Association
West Virginia Food & Farm Coalition
Woodstock Foods
Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms, USA