

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