



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
November 21, 2016

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Short film highlights joys and challenges of being a young farmer in the arid West

Western farmers grow 85% of all winter produce in the U.S, but lack of access to affordable water is making it increasingly difficult for young farmers to succeed

DURANGO, CO—A new short film, *Conservation Generation*, offers a look into the lives of four young farmers and ranchers in the arid West who are contending with the impacts of historic drought, climate change, and increased competition for water. Despite the challenges they face, the farmers are each committed to their communities and to finding innovative solutions to water shortages.

Eighty-five percent of all winter produce in the U.S. is grown with irrigation water that originates in the Colorado River Basin, making Western agriculture an issue that is crucial to the lives and dinner plates of all Americans. The majority of holiday meals consumed in the coming weeks will include produce grown by farmers in the arid West.

Despite the importance of Western agriculture, farmers are in increasingly short supply. The average age of the American farmer is 58, and farmers over 65 outnumber farmers under 35 by a ratio of six-to-one. According to the National Young Farmers Coalition (NYFC), the nonprofit organization that produced *Conservation Generation* as well as a report by the same name, lack of access to affordable land and water are two of the biggest issues preventing more young people from succeeding in agriculture.

“There are a number of challenges faced by young people who decide to become farmers, but in the West, all of those issues are compounded by the lack of water,” says Kate Greenberg, western water program director for NYFC. “As the film shows, young farmers face these challenges with a spirit of innovation and a deep commitment to conservation. A good sense of humor helps, too.”

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According to the report produced by NYFC, 97% of young farmers surveyed considered water conservation important and 94% reported using some form of conservation on their farms.

Conservation Generation features four young farmers in Colorado and New Mexico:

- **Harrison Topp** of Topp Fruits in Paonia, Colorado and Fields Livestock in Montrose, Colorado
- **Tyler Hoyt** of [Green Table Farm](#) in Mancos, Colorado
- **Nery Martinez** of Santa Cruz Farm & Greenhouses in Espanola, New Mexico
- **Casey Holland** of [Red Tractor Farm](#) in Albuquerque, New Mexico
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Each of the farmers have also been blogging about the joys and challenges of farming in the arid West; view the film and read their stories at [youngfarmers.org/](#)

The National Young Farmers Coalition unites young farmers and ranchers to ensure a sustainable future for American agriculture. Visit us at [youngfarmers.org](#)

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