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NATIONAL YOUNG FARMER SURVEY REVEALS A GENERATION READY TO DEFY ODDS

Young farmers working to overcome barriers—land access, student debt, labor, health care

National Young Farmers Coalition issues report on survey results; calls on lawmakers, businesses, and consumers to promote the “Young Farmer Agenda” as Congress writes a new farm bill

HUDSON, NY – Nov. 27, 2017 – America’s new generation of young farmers expect to overcome major barriers to their success in agriculture, including access to land, affordable health care, and mounting student loan debt, but success will require deliberate policy change at all levels of government, according to the [2017 National Young Farmer Survey](#). The survey was conducted by the **National Young Farmers Coalition (NYFC)** in partnership with Dr. Kathleen Merrigan, Executive Director of Sustainability at George Washington University and former U.S. Deputy Secretary of Agriculture.

“The time is now for our country to help young farmers defy the odds, preserve farming as a livelihood, and revitalize our nation’s rural economy,” said Lindsey Lusher Shute, Executive Director and Co-founder of NYFC. “This report proves that there are thousands of young people ready to build new farms in the United States, but we’ve got to do our part and make sure that they will succeed.”

The survey, conducted with 94 partner organizations, collected data from 3,517 current, former, and aspiring U.S. farmers under 40 years of age. In its report on the survey, NYFC finds that the top challenge cited by young farmers is land access, particularly finding and affording land on a farm income. It is also the main reason why farmers quit farming and why aspiring farmers haven’t yet started.

A ground-breaking survey of young farmers and ranchers

“America desperately needs young people to repopulate our farm and ranch lands. This survey reveals the daunting challenges they face. As policymakers sit down to write our next farm bill, I hope they pay attention to these survey findings,” said Dr. Merrigan. “If nothing more is done to help transition young people into American agriculture, we will be importing all our food.”

NYFC reports that young farmers surveyed are capitalizing on the demand for local food by selling directly to consumers and growing a diversity of crops and livestock. The survey also indicates a generation of producers strongly committed to environmental stewardship, with

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75% of current young farmers describing their practices as “sustainable,” and 63% describing their farming as “organic,” though many of them have not sought certification.

Like their millennial counterparts, young farmers surveyed by NYFC were highly educated and increasingly racially diverse, and despite challenges and relatively low income, the survey found high optimism: 63% of respondents said they are making or eventually would make sufficient income to meet their life goals.

“Things are changing in American agriculture and our perceptions and policies need to keep pace,” said Dr. Merrigan. “This survey reveals that it’s no longer Old MacDonald of storybook fame. Rather, it’s Ms. MacDonald, a college graduate who didn’t grow up on the farm and considers her farming practices to be sustainable or organic.”

How lawmakers can help young farmers

Considering these findings, NYFC called on lawmakers to enact a slate of policy reforms it calls the “Young Farmer Agenda,” which includes: addressing land access and affordability; helping young farmers manage student debt; increasing the skilled agricultural workforce; enabling farmers to invest in on-farm conservation; improving credit, savings, and risk management opportunities for young farmers; and addressing racial inequity among farmers. (See full policy recommendations [here](#).)

Young farmers need consumer, community, and business support

“Ensuring the success of our nation’s newest farmers and ranchers requires deliberate policy change at all levels of government,” said Shute. “It also demands the support of every stakeholder—individuals, communities, and businesses.”

NYFC called on supporters to act: help grow your local food economy; rent or sell farmland to young and beginning farmers; enable your business to be part of the solution; and join NYFC to add your voice to the young farmer movement. (For details, visit www.youngfarmers.org)

The full survey, including the executive summary, charts, policy recommendations, and stakeholder action steps, are available at NYFC at www.youngfarmers.org.

The National Young Farmers Coalition (NYFC) is a national advocacy network of young farmers fighting for the future of agriculture. Visit NYFC on the web at www.youngfarmers.org, and on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [YouTube](#) and [Instagram](#).

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MEDIA: Interviews with NYFC spokespeople, young farmers, and other experts are available upon request. Please contact Sue McGovern, sue@youngfarmers.org, 781-315-3400.

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