



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
February 8, 2016

CONTACT:
Chelsey Simpson,
Communications Director, NYFC
chelsey@youngfarmers.org
405-684-7608

Water scarcity, climate change threaten a generation of young farmers in the West
A new report, Conservation Generation, says vast majority of young farmers are dedicated to water conservation, but lack the resources to succeed

DURANGO, CO — A report released this week by the National Young Farmers Coalition (NYFC) paints the picture of a generation of farmers and ranchers who are dedicated to water conservation but who feel threatened by water scarcity and other serious challenges, such as access to land and capital. According to the report, *Conservation Generation: How Young Farmers And Ranchers Are Essential to Tackling Water Scarcity in the Arid West*, 94% of young farmers in the arid West are using some form of conservation on their farms, while water availability and climate change were named as the top two agricultural concerns.

High land prices and lack of access to capital are major challenges faced by young farmers and would-be farmers across the country, but in the arid West where irrigated land comes at a premium, access to water compounds these barriers. Because of these challenges, water is not the only scarce agricultural resource: young farmers themselves are in short supply. Nationwide, farmers over 65 outnumber those under 35 by a ratio of six-to-one, but between 2007 and 2012 America gained only 1,220 young principal farm operators, according to USDA.

NYFC western water program director Kate Greenberg says protecting our national food and water supply will require a deeper commitment to young farmers.

“If we fail to adequately invest in young farmers, we risk losing a generation of water stewards, and land currently farmed will likely fall out of agricultural production and be fallowed, developed, or consolidated,” Greenberg says. “All of those outcomes will impact not only our nation’s water supply but our food security.”

Western agriculture and water scarcity are regional issues of national importance; the Colorado River, which flows through the Rockies toward the Gulf of California, irrigates 15% of the nation’s crops and 85% of its winter produce. As much as 80% of water used by humans in the

NATIONAL YOUNG FARMERS COALITION

PO BOX 1074 HUDSON, NY 12534 | 518-643-3564 | YOUNGFARMERS.ORG

Colorado River Basin is devoted to agriculture, so on-farm water conservation efforts are important in any conversation about water scarcity.

While programs to help farmers invest in conservation technology already exist, the report—which is based on a survey of 379 young farmers and ranchers in the arid West—found that the majority of young farmers are not accessing them, either because they lack information or because their circumstances make it difficult to work with the programs. The report also found widespread misinformation around key water policy issues, such as the “use it or lose it” principle in western water law.

To address these issues and others, *Conservation Generation* outlines a series of recommendations that includes protecting irrigated farmland, increased education and outreach to the young farmer community, strengthening incentives for on-farm water conservation and efficiency, and elevating soil health as an essential tool for resilience.

According to Greenberg, young farmers and ranchers are well positioned to become leaders in water conservation.

“Across most of the arid West, drought has been the norm for the last 15 years. The young farmers we surveyed are conservation-minded, and the majority of them have never farmed in non-drought conditions, which means they are uniquely focused on getting creative with less water,” Greenberg said.

The full report, including all six key recommendations, can be found at youngfarmers.org/conservationgeneration

The National Young Farmers Coalition is a national network of farmers, ranchers, and consumers who support practices and policies that will sustain young, independent farmers now and in the future. Visit us at youngfarmers.org

###

NATIONAL YOUNG FARMERS COALITION

PO BOX 1074 HUDSON, NY 12534 | 518-643-3564 | YOUNGFARMERS.ORG