

# ***YOUNG FARMER AGENDA: THE FARM BILL***



**POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON  
THE NATIONAL YOUNG FARMER SURVEY**

***NOVEMBER 2017***

## **THE YOUNG FARMER AGENDA**

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The following recommendations are based on the 2017 National Young Farmer Survey, conducted by the National Young Farmers Coalition. The full report on the survey, “Building a Future with Farmers II: Results and Recommendations from the National Young Farmer Survey,” may be found online at [www.youngfarmers.org/survey2017](http://www.youngfarmers.org/survey2017).

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# INTRODUCTION

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Agriculture in the United States is at the breaking point. Farmers over the age of 65 now outnumber farmers under 35 by a margin of six to one, and U.S. farmland is overwhelmingly concentrated in the hands of older farmers. Nearly two-thirds of farmland is currently managed by someone over 55.<sup>1</sup> The National Agricultural Statistics Service estimates that over the next five years—the lifespan of the next farm bill—nearly 100 million acres of U.S. farmland are expected to change ownership<sup>2</sup> and will need a new farmer.

Fortunately, many young Americans are stepping up and launching new farm businesses. For only the second time in the last century, the 2012 Census of Agriculture registered an increase over the previous census in the number of farmers under 35 years old. These young farmers are entrepreneurial and tough, but they are finding that talent and hard work alone may not equate to farm success. There are many structural barriers standing in their way—and the stakes have never been higher.

Given the scale and immediacy of our nation’s need for more farmers, the upcoming farm bill presents an opportunity to make young and beginning farmers a national priority—an opportunity we cannot miss.

**By enacting the Young Farmer Agenda, Congress can inspire and support an entire generation of entrepreneurial young producers, protect the resources they steward, strengthen the communities they feed, and revitalize the rural economies they underpin.**

## THE 2017 NATIONAL YOUNG FARMER SURVEY

In January and February 2017, the National Young Farmers Coalition conducted a National Young Farmer Survey to ensure our work is grounded in the needs of young farmers and to offer policymakers recommendations to address these needs ahead of the next farm bill.

In our report, “Building a Future with Farmers II: Results and Recommendations from the National Young Farmer Survey,” we present responses from past, current, and aspiring farmers under 40 years old across the U.S., and highlight key challenges they face, including difficulty accessing farmland, student loan debt, and labor. The conclusions drawn from that report form the basis of the Young Farmer Agenda.

## ABOUT THE NATIONAL YOUNG FARMERS COALITION

The National Young Farmers Coalition (NYFC) represents, mobilizes, and engages young farmers and ranchers to ensure their success. With the goal of helping 25,000 young people enter into viable farming careers by 2022, NYFC tackles the most critical structural and economic barriers that prevent motivated young people from starting and growing farm businesses.

Since 2010, NYFC has launched 37 farmer-led chapters across the United States. We help young farmers become leaders in their communities through local chapter organizing, ensuring they have a seat at the table in local, state, and national policy decisions. We address structural barriers facing young farmers through farm bill advocacy, USDA program reform, and by training key stakeholders and service providers to better serve the next generation. NYFC also provides business services to young farmers, offering tools, resources, and technical assistance to help them navigate business challenges and seize market opportunities.

**In short, we are young farmers fighting for the future of American agriculture.**

# THE YOUNG FARMER AGENDA

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Based on the results of the 2017 National Young Farmer Survey and NYFC's work over the last seven years, we have assembled the following farm bill policy recommendations. Given the scale and immediacy of young farmer needs, we encourage lawmakers, advocates, and citizens to move quickly on these opportunities for reform.

The Young Farmer Agenda is organized into seven key areas:

- **Delivering Federal Programs**
- **Land Access**
- **Student Loan Debt**
- **Training & Farm Viability**
- **Housing**
- **Climate & Conservation**
- **Racial Equity**



## DELIVERING FEDERAL PROGRAMS

Preparing our nation for the unprecedented generational transfer and farmland transition expected in the coming decades will require forward-thinking investments in farmland protection, farmer training, and new market opportunities. But as Congress writes a farm bill in a challenging fiscal environment, it can make significant progress supporting the next generation simply by helping to improve the way USDA does business and reaches young and beginning farmers.

USDA has taken real, substantive steps in addressing barriers to entry for its programs, and the 2014 Farm Bill helped create additional on-ramps for new producers. The 2017 National Young Farmer Survey, however, found that challenges remain. Our survey asked young farm owners what, if any, challenges they had encountered accessing federal programs. Forty percent said the application and paperwork are too burdensome. Another 30% said they were unfamiliar with the federal programs listed, and 28% said their local staff had been too difficult to work with. These challenges are solvable.

### ***IMPROVE IN-PERSON OUTREACH & EDUCATION***

***Hire, or designate within existing staff, specially trained agents within each of USDA's county and state offices to work with young and beginning farmers***

Many young farmers cite a lack of familiarity with federal programs as a significant barrier, and NYFC also routinely receives reports from young and beginning farmers that local USDA staff don't know about or inform them of beginning farmer initiatives within USDA. These staff should assist young and beginning farmers with technical assistance, help identify resources and opportunities for training, and help coordinate outreach efforts with local stakeholders and service providers. In 2015, USDA began hiring a small number of beginning farmer coordinators on a regional basis to begin this important work. These efforts should be expanded to every state.

## ***MODERNIZE DELIVERY OF SERVICES***

### ***Move USDA loan application and servicing systems online***

In addition to a lack of familiarity with federal programs, young farmers also cite the burdensome and time-consuming paperwork as a challenge in accessing federal programs. For many young farmers today, use of technology and the internet are second nature. They order seed and stock online, pay vendors with apps, track sales and expenses using programs like Quickbooks, market their products on social media, and implement automated irrigation systems. Too many USDA services, however, remain out of reach or out of touch for millennial farmers, and must be modernized to keep pace with new customers and the rapidly changing industry. The current process requires farmers to turn in application forms in person, which can compound the time and expense required of farmers, particularly in rural areas. Creating a full-service online portal would give FSA staff more flexibility to work directly with farmers and put FSA on track to attract the customers of the future.

For older and low-resource farmers, and until broadband has reached every rural county in the U.S., USDA must, of course, maintain critical in-person and on-paper services. In many cases, and for many functions, USDA staff in the field are irreplaceable, and we should ensure they have the resources to continue their work and build long-term relationships in the communities they serve, particularly as they strive to reach historically underserved farmers.

Congress should direct USDA to modernize its customer service platforms, starting with FSA, and authorize funding to do so.

### ***Streamline the application process by creating a system for farmers to pre-qualify for loans***

In competitive real estate markets, the FSA loan-making process often takes too long for growers to purchase land. Non-farmers with pre-approved mortgages and cash bids can easily outbid working farmers for farmland. The current application process can take longer than 30 days and funds may not be available for months. To address this barrier, Congress should direct the Agency to streamline the application process by creating a system for farmers to conditionally pre-qualify for loans.

## ***GO SMALL***

### ***Create a “micro” version of every USDA program possible***

The success of FSA’s microloan program offers a valuable lesson: reaching young farmers doesn’t always require creating new programs, but instead scaling down existing ones. Some of the biggest barriers revealed in our survey—unfamiliarity, burdensome paperwork, not enough time to apply—are also the most solvable. USDA should continue exploring ways to streamline applications, reduce paperwork, and adjust oversight requirements to be scale-appropriate for beginning farmers, many of whom start their careers operating small-acreage farms.

Congress should authorize the Department to create a “micro” version of every program possible, starting with EQIP.



## LAND ACCESS

Land access was the top challenge cited by current farmers, aspiring farmers, and former farmers in the 2017 National Young Farmer Survey. Whether survey respondents grew up on a farm or not, and regardless of which state or region they resided in, land access was the most common challenge they faced. Secure land tenure is a fundamental component of a viable farm business. Without secure land tenure, farmers are unable to invest in on-farm infrastructure and conservation practices critical to building soil quality, financial equity, and their businesses.

Farmland in the U.S. is a limited resource that has become increasingly unaffordable and inaccessible to the next generation of farmers. According to the USDA Land Values 2016 Summary, agricultural real estate values doubled in the years between 2004 and 2013 and continue to rise in many parts of the U.S.<sup>3</sup> Particularly around our nation's cities—where good access to markets makes land desirable for working farmers—development pressure, high demand from other farmers, and speculation and competition from non-farm buyers has made land prohibitively expensive for young farmers. Young farmers are easily outbid by more established farmers and non-farmers who are able to offer a cash bid or access credit more easily.

### ***Increase & prioritize funding for working farm easements through the NRCS Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)***

The Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP), through its Agricultural Land Easements (ALE) funding, helps eligible entities purchase the development rights on farmland by matching up to 50% of the cost of an easement. For more than two decades, this program has been critical to protecting our nation's farmland from development. Mandatory funding for ACEP must be increased in the upcoming farm bill, and fully funded in the annual appropriations process.

In addition, all ACEP-ALE funding should be prioritized for easement projects that incorporate affordability provisions and ensure that protected farmland stays in the hands of working farmers. This will help to fulfill its program purpose of protecting agricultural use and future viability of eligible land, along with the related conservation values.<sup>4</sup> Traditional conservation easements funded through ACEP prevent future development and subdivision on conserved land, but stronger easements are needed to keep this land in agricultural production. In 2013, NYFC reported that nearly 25% of agricultural land trusts had seen land go fallow or be underutilized because it was not held by a working farmer.<sup>5</sup> Once farmland leaves production, it no longer contributes to food growth or agricultural economic development, undermining the intent of federal dollars spent to protect it.

Working farm easements with affordability provisions, such as the Option to Purchase at Agricultural Value (OPAV), protect the long-term affordability of land and keep it in the hands of working farmers. Given the limits of public funding for farmland protection and the scale of the issue of farmland access and affordability for the next generation of producers, we must ensure that farmland protected with federal funding remains in production and that it will provide rural economic opportunity for working farmers and ranchers for generations to come.

Lastly, in order to ensure that ACEP continues to serve the needs of our nation's current and future farmers, ACEP must allow qualified land trusts to receive funding directly while they hold land that will be sold to a beginning farmer. Eligible entities should be given the flexibility to use ACEP-ALE funding for projects that combine conservation benefits with pathways to ownership and secure access for farmers to achieve the program purpose.

### ***Increase funding for Farm Service Agency (FSA) Direct Farm Ownership loans and raise the loan limit***

FSA loans are critical for young and beginning farmers and are often the only credit option available to them. In recent years as the farm economy has declined, however, farmer demand for loans has caused many programs to run out of available funds only partway through the fiscal year. This demand will likely continue to increase until commodity prices and median farm incomes rebound. Congress should increase funding for loan authority across all FSA loan programs to ensure that they keep pace with demand and meet statutory participation targets for beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers.

In addition to adequate funding, the Direct Farm Ownership Loan limit should be increased to meet the realities of farm real estate prices. Current statute limits these loans to \$300,000, making them insufficient for many farmers in areas of high real estate prices and volatility, and unable to keep pace with real estate inflation. Overall, farmland real estate values have increased by more than 40% since the cap was last adjusted in 2008. Although Direct Farm Ownership Loans have met their statutory participation rates of 75% for beginning farmers in recent years, they are the only loan program at FSA that has not exhausted its funding, and for which the average loan is the highest relative to its cap. There are undoubtedly a number of reasons this program has not spent down its full funding, including a lack of landowners putting farmland on the market and the competition from buyers with private financing, but the high average loan indicates that the cap is also an impediment that can easily be solved. NYFC recommends adequately funding this program, increasing the loan limit in the next farm bill to \$500,000 and pegging it to farmland inflation rates thereafter, and leaving all other loan limits in place to ensure the effectiveness and availability of these funds for beginning farmers.

### ***Improve the Conservation Reserve Program - Transition Incentives Program (CRP-TIP) to increase program participation***

Through the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), landowners can enter into contracts with USDA and receive rental payments to temporarily remove farmland from production and conserve soil and water resources. CRP-TIP provides retired or retiring landowners with two additional annual rental payments on land enrolled in expiring CRP contracts, on the condition that they sell or rent this land to a beginning, socially disadvantaged, or veteran farmer or rancher who agrees to use sustainable practices. In effect, CRP-TIP creates a pathway for these farmers to access land. It also provides additional income to retired or retiring producers. Congress should assist USDA in developing a better system for matching program participants and provide more direct technical assistance to farmers entering the program to help start production on land previously enrolled in CRP.

## ***Support transition assistance for exiting farmers***

Transitioning land owned by an established farm is complex and takes time. Congress should create dedicated funding for critical transition assistance—such as legal services, mediation, and financial consulting—offered by farm service providers and extension offices.



## **STUDENT LOAN DEBT**

After land access, student loan debt was the most significant challenge cited by young farmers in the 2017 National Young Farmer Survey. Young people should not have to choose between a career in farming and earning a college degree. But we have heard it again and again—student loan debt is keeping young people from succeeding in agriculture. In 2014, NYFC surveyed more than 700 young farmers on the topic of student loan debt. Respondents had an average of \$35,000 in student loan debt. Fifty-three percent of respondents were farming but struggled to make their monthly loan payments, and 30% of respondents said they were not farming or had delayed farming because of their student loans.<sup>6</sup>

Farming is a capital-intensive and risky undertaking, and accessing credit for farming is already difficult. When saddled with thousands of dollars of student loan debt, many young farmers are denied loans to launch or grow their farm businesses because of their existing debt burden.

## ***Create a loan forgiveness, repayment, or refinance program for beginning farmers and ranchers at USDA***

In order to encourage individuals to enter into and continue long-term careers in agriculture, Congress should authorize a program at USDA to help qualified beginning farmers and ranchers manage their student debt. The purpose of the new program would be to recruit and retain new farmers and ranchers, thus creating rural jobs by allowing recent graduates to refinance their student loan debt with preferential interest rates and to receive partial loan forgiveness in exchange for farming full time.

## ***Establish a federal-state student loan repayment program for young farmers***

New York has started to address this critical barrier facing its young farmers by creating a loan repayment program. A number of states are considering similar initiatives. These programs can help make farming a more viable option for young people, incentivize young entrepreneurs to stay in their home states, and help attract new, young residents to the state. Congress and USDA should establish a federal match program for states that create and administer farmer student loan repayment programs. This would give states flexibility to administer their own programs specific to the needs of farmers in their state and motivate more states to create similar initiatives.





## **TRAINING & FARM VIABILITY**

Agriculture is a knowledge-intensive and experience-driven occupation, and one that can take a lifetime to completely master. Many aspiring farmers and ranchers entering the field today are first-generation farmers, meaning they come from non-farming backgrounds and may not have had the opportunity to acquire important farming skills and techniques. Providing training to young farmers—in things like production skills, financial management, and business planning—as well as creating pathways for mentorship from more established farmers are critical to helping new farmers succeed in agriculture.

### ***Expand support for training opportunities for beginning farmers and ranchers***

The Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP) is the only federal program exclusively dedicated to training the next generation of farmers and ranchers. BFRDP provides competitive grants to nonprofits and universities to develop education, extension, outreach, and training initiatives directed at helping new farmers and ranchers, and is one of the most successful national programs to date helping to grow the next generation of farmers. BFRDP funding has been used to develop incubator farm programs, provide business planning and food safety training services, promote innovative farm and ranch transfer strategies, and to establish on-farm apprenticeship opportunities to train future farmers and farm workers. Though the 2014 Farm Bill authorized \$20 million per year for BFRDP, the program did not receive any funds for an entire year when Congress failed to pass a farm bill on time in 2012. To avoid such shortfalls and uncertainty in the future, and to meet the urgent national need for more young, skilled farmers and ranchers, NYFC supports increasing mandatory baseline funding to \$50 million per year. We also recommend eliminating the match requirement for BFRDP grant awardees, to ensure that all organizations and service providers can best train the next generation, particularly in areas of high need and low resources.

### ***Establish tax-free savings accounts***

Farms are high-risk enterprises, and even profitable farm businesses often face cash-flow challenges during periods of unpredictability. In addition to expanding opportunities for young farmers to access credit and risk management assistance, Congress should work to create special savings accounts for farmers that incentivize year-to-year financial management and foresight by allowing for tax-free withdrawals on farm-related purchases. Such accounts would create a low-cost safety net for farmers to manage risk and invest in the future. For many farmers, even a small cushion can make a big difference in a difficult year. We recommend that farmers have an option similar to a Health Savings Account, where they could save up to a specified amount on an annual basis. We encourage Congress to make such a program also available to farm workers, as a means to save for future farms.

### ***Reauthorize and fund Individual Development Accounts***

Individual Development Accounts (IDAs) can help young and beginning farmers save money by matching funds that they put into a savings account, and help them become successful entrepreneurs by requiring business planning and financial management courses. IDA programs have been instrumental in helping young people start businesses in states including Michigan, Iowa, and California. The 2008 and 2014 Farm Bills authorized a matched savings program for

beginning farmers, but Congress has never funded the program. Congress should again authorize IDAs and provide mandatory funding to ensure this important tool is available to farmers.

### ***Expand FSA borrower training***

Because land acquisition costs have such a significant impact on a farm’s business model and financial outlook, FSA should include a module on farmland acquisition and farmland succession planning as part of its required borrower training for FSA Direct Farm Ownership Loans.



## **HOUSING**

Lacking access to affordable farmland and, therefore, the ability to live on-farm, young farmers often rent housing near their leased farm property. In our National Young Farmer Survey, “Affordable housing” was the fifth most cited challenge by respondents overall. Among farm workers, it ranked fourth. Compounded by difficulty accessing land and credit, housing presents a significant challenge for new farm owners as they establish and grow their businesses. For farmers who are not farm owners, the challenge of housing can be especially acute.

### ***Preserve USDA rural housing programs through Rural Development***

Rural Development provides critical investments to address housing, infrastructure, and economic development needs in struggling rural communities. The Rural Housing Service, in particular, provides low-cost loans, grants, and other forms of assistance to improve the availability and quality of rural housing. Farmers can also access affordable financing to expand and improve on-farm housing for farm workers through the Farm Labor Housing Program. Funding and administration for these Rural Development services should be maintained, and Congress should ensure that beginning farmers and ranchers can access them.



## **CLIMATE & CONSERVATION**

Our survey indicated that young farmers are predisposed toward conservation and stewardship—with three in four survey respondents describing their practices as “sustainable”—and many are selling directly to members of their community. To support young farmers and their businesses, in other words, means necessarily to improve conservation outcomes, promote rural economic development and repopulation, and keep farmland in production. Increasing opportunities for young farmers to access federal programs and increase resilience on their farms can lock in conservation benefits for a generation.

### ***Increase funding for voluntary USDA conservation programs***

USDA conservation programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) help farmers and ranchers manage natural resources and improve environmental benefits while also enhancing farm viability. EQIP and CSP provide payments and hands-on help for farmers and ranchers who implement practices that conserve natural resources such as planting cover crops or creating wildlife habitat. EQIP can also help reduce the cost of equipment or infrastructure like irrigation equipment, fencing, and livestock watering facilities, while promoting farm viability in the process. Funding through targeted programs such as the EQIP High Tunnel System Initiative has helped young farmers extend their growing seasons and access new markets, and helped many young farmers access EQIP for the first time.

Despite their proven benefits, conservation programs experienced significant cuts in the 2014 Farm Bill, and many continue to be targeted for reductions in the annual appropriations process. Cutting funding for conservation programs makes it harder for smaller family farm operations to compete for available funding; leaves farmers vulnerable to climate change, drought, and other natural resource challenges; and, over the long term, increases the need for federal intervention and mitigation. NYFC believes that these programs yield a significant return on their investment and that funding for these programs should be increased.

### ***Expand existing EQIP benefits for beginning farmers and ranchers***

Recent farm bills include special participation incentives for beginning farmers and ranchers (BFRs) in EQIP and other conservation programs. USDA is required to set aside 5% of total EQIP funding for BFRs. To keep up with demand, however, Congress should raise the reservation rate for BFRs to 15%. In addition to the funding set-aside, BFRs should remain eligible for higher EQIP rates than other farmers and advance payments to beginning farmers should be automatic.

### ***Establish a national pilot program to ensure small farm access to EQIP funds***

Under EQIP, small-scale farmers, which include many young farmers, are often at a competitive disadvantage with larger operations for program funds and NRCS staff resources. To improve parity and equity for these farmers, Congress should help states establish pilot small-acreage EQIP initiatives to help ensure that EQIP funds are more cost-effective and equitably administered to small-acreage operations. The pilot program should further streamline the EQIP application process to reduce the paperwork required for small operations and set aside technical assistance funds to help small-scale farmers develop conservation plans and apply for EQIP funding.

### ***Promote climate-resilient agricultural practices through EQIP initiatives***

EQIP initiatives are designed to address particular challenges and promote targeted conservation practices. Building healthy soil through cover cropping and other conservation practices can help improve farm productivity, while also promoting carbon sequestration, flood resistance, and drought tolerance. Congress should direct USDA to establish a new EQIP initiative to accelerate implementation of core conservation practices that help agricultural producers build healthy soils, promote on-farm water stewardship, and enhance both farm viability and resilience to the impacts of climatic variability and extreme weather events.

## ***Renew and improve the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) to promote public-private partnerships in conservation projects***

RCPP fosters the creation of partnerships between farm and conservation organizations, states, and federal agencies to help farmers tackle priority natural resource concerns on a regional scale. These partnerships help leverage significant private dollars to further conservation objectives. Several RCPP projects have recognized the importance of beginning farmers to conservation outcomes and have been designed specifically to help BFRs succeed. Congress should reauthorize this important program, include farmland transition to and participation of BFRs in the program's purpose and funding priorities, increase funding for state-level RCPP projects, and expand the funding reservation from covered programs to leverage these partnerships even further.

## ***Expand conservation education and outreach initiatives***

Many aspiring farmers entering the field today did not come from agricultural backgrounds and are, therefore, often not aware of the USDA programs and resources available to support them. Simultaneously, reductions in USDA staff have limited the ability of state and county offices to adequately market available USDA programs to new farmers and ranchers. NYFC supports a dedicated funding stream within the Conservation Title of the farm bill to advance conservation adoption and outreach to beginning farmers and ranchers. Funding should be made available to local service providers such as soil and water conservation districts and cooperative extension service offices to hire staff that assist BFRs in applying for USDA conservation programs. Funding through the set-aside could also be used to develop additional online resources for BFRs and expand the existing network of USDA-BFR regional outreach staff.

## ***Reauthorize the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) Program***

The Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) grant program has been helping fund farmer-driven, sustainable agriculture research for over 25 years and remains the only USDA competitive grants research program that focuses solely on sustainable agriculture. SARE grants directly fund farmers who want to explore sustainable solutions through on-farm scientific research, demonstration, and education projects. SARE grants have helped develop regional water quality trading markets that effectively improve water quality through market-driven, voluntary efforts; supported efforts to expand markets for organic crops; increased economic viability; and provided farmers and ranchers with timely information concerning adaptation measures to drought and other natural disasters. Congress should reauthorize and provide mandatory funding for the SARE program.



## **RACIAL EQUITY**

The challenges faced by farmers are not shared equally. For farmers of color and indigenous farmers, the disappearance of family farms has not simply been economic, but systemic. These farmers have faced disproportionate rates of land loss, and the drop in numbers of their farms over the last century has been attributed to decades of discriminatory practices by the USDA, which the department itself has been forced to admit and begin to address.

## ***Increase funding for programs that help historically underserved farmers and ranchers gain access to land and government services***

Historically underserved farmers and ranchers have faced disproportionate rates of land loss and discrimination. Programs that address these challenges must remain adequately funded and implemented effectively for the communities they are designed to serve. Examples include:

**Outreach and Assistance for Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers Grant Program** (known as 2501), which funds organizations specifically working to address the resource needs of historically underserved communities, including heir property land transition;

**The Highly Fractionated Indian Land Loan Program**, which addresses issues of land ownership fractionation in Native American communities by providing a way for tribes and tribal members to obtain loans to purchase fractionated interests through intermediary lenders;

**The Indian Tribal Land Acquisition Loan Program**, through which USDA extends credit to Indian Tribes or Tribal corporations that do not qualify for standard commercial loans to purchase land within their reservation, and assist with legal and closing costs associated with land purchase;<sup>7</sup>

**The Federally Recognized Tribal Extension Program**, which provides competitive grants to tribal extension programs that enhance tribal farming and ranching operations.

All of these critical programs have been underfunded relative to the nature and scale of the challenges they address, and mandatory funding should be significantly increased.

## ***Add focus on first-time landowners and increase coordination***

After generations of systemic dispossession and loss of farmland among farmers of color and indigenous farmers, the interfamily transfer of farmland between generations is often no longer possible. To help repair this broken link, Congress should create focus areas within federal funding for conservation and education initiatives that address the needs of first-time landowners—similar to programs for first-time homeowners—and ensure these programs meet the needs of farmers and organizations utilizing cooperative ownership models, which have been an important tool for many communities of color and indigenous communities.

## ***Require collection and public release of demographic data for all programs***

As USDA continues to acknowledge and address historic and current racial disparities in federal farm programs, Congress should improve its oversight of these programs by requiring the collection of demographic data across all programs and making it public, as some programs already do. The collection and release of this data—including applicants, awardees, and decision-makers—would allow for proper evaluation of program implementation and outcomes.

# ENDNOTES

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