



RELEASE: New census reveals threat to the future of agriculture as average age of farmers continues to rise

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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(WASHINGTON, DC, April 11, 2019) At noon today, the **United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS)** released the results of the [2017 Census of Agriculture](#), a count of our nation's farms and ranches and the people who run them. This is the first accounting of our nation's farm population since 2012, providing a new outlook on the future of U.S. agriculture.

The results should concern us all: the number of young farmers is not keeping pace with the number of farmers aging out of the field. **The average age of primary producers increased from 58.3 in 2012 to 59.4 in 2017.** The average age of all producers also increased from 56.3 to 57.5 years from 2012 to 2017. Although the number of primary producers under 35 increased by nearly 2,000, **primary producers over 65 now outnumber farmers under 35 by more than 6 (6.41) to 1.** Previously a ratio of 5.85 to 1, this widening gap reveals a crisis of attrition in agriculture as farmers retire without a successor in place.

Enterprising young people face an uphill battle in establishing themselves in agriculture given prohibitive land prices, student loan debt, lack of skilled farm labor, and limited health care options. Our federal farm policy must do more to address these barriers to entry and support our next generation of farmers and ranchers. Young farmers rely on funding for key farm bill programs, and additional data collection efforts on farmland ownership are needed to inform policy solutions.

Inability to access farmland was the number one challenge reported by participants in our 2017 National Young Farmer Survey. The census data confirm that across the country we are losing quality farmland at a rapid pace. **Land in farms has decreased by 14,310,081 acres and the total number of farms has decreased by 67,083 farms.** Average farm size increased by seven acres over the five years since the 2012 Census, highlighting continued consolidation of farming operations across the sector.

The 2017 Census data underlines the urgency of the National Young Farmers Coalition's work. **Sophie Ackoff, Vice President of Policy and Campaigns,** says, "The latest census results should be seen as a call to action. The small uptick in the number of primary producers under 35 is not nearly enough to replace those aging out and retiring.

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The U.S. needs more young farmers to ensure healthy food for our communities and to steward our water, air, and soil resources into the future.”

Unfortunately, the number of Latinx and non-white primary producers did not increase. Ninety-five percent of U.S. primary producers surveyed identified as White; the number of Black, Latinx, Asian American, and Native American primary producers all decreased between 2012 and 2017.

Despite these concerning trends, the Coalition is thrilled to see an increase in the number of female farmers represented in agriculture. **Forty-one percent of farmers in their first 10 years of farming are women and the total number of female principal operators increased by nearly 70%.**

“We hope that these new findings will lead to a concerted effort across government to support young farmers, especially young farmers of color, in entering into viable careers in agriculture,” said Ackoff.

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

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