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Contact: Jessica Manly, Communications Director, jessica@youngfarmers.org | 914-980-2964

The Coalition issues new report on challenges facing young Pennsylvania farmers and recommends creative policy solutions to support the future of agriculture

The Coalition's latest report calls on the Commonwealth to protect its agricultural and economic future by investing in the success of young Pennsylvania farmers who are getting trained, working hard, and managing the risks inherent to their chosen career. The report highlights three main challenges standing in the way of young farmers—land access, workforce development, and farmer business services—and recommends creative policy solutions to help address these challenges.

Hudson, NY (June 25, 2019)—Today, the **National Young Farmers Coalition** published a report and corresponding one pager—*Growing Pennsylvania's Future: Challenges Facing Young Farmers and Recommendations to Address Them*—analyzing the results of a survey and series of listening sessions, identifying the top challenges young Pennsylvania farmers face, and providing recommendations to address those challenges. The report is a call to action from the Coalition to policy makers, technical service providers, and agricultural stakeholders, to meet these challenges head on with creative policy solutions designed to invest in the Commonwealth's agricultural economy by investing in the success of young and beginning farmers.

"The time to act is now," said **Martin Lemos**, the Coalition's Interim Executive Director. "Agriculture is a major industry in Pennsylvania but the future of farming in the Commonwealth is at risk. As the average age of farmers continues to climb, we must do more to enable the next generation of farmers to steward our land. Fortunately, many of the challenges facing young farmers are eminently solvable. This report provides a compelling case for pursuing policy solutions that will support young farmers through improvements in land access, workforce development, and farmer services."

For every three principal farm operators in Pennsylvania over 65, there is only one under 35. At the same time, 11% of agricultural land in the Commonwealth is expected to change hands in the next five years. Between 2012 and 2017, the Commonwealth lost more than 6,000 farms, with 400,000 acres transitioning out of farmland. To secure the investments that have been made in this sector—and Pennsylvania's agricultural and economic future—the Commonwealth must support young and beginning farmers.

"Pennsylvania's young farmers are skilled and ready to take the necessary risks to grow their businesses and contribute to the health of Pennsylvania's agricultural economy," says Karen Gardner, the Coalition's Pennsylvania Policy Associate and chief author of the report. "In return, we must ensure that they have clear pathways and support in finding the land, training, and resources necessary to create viable businesses that can support themselves and their families through farming. We look forward to continuing to work together with farmers, partners, and policy makers across the Commonwealth to build a brighter future for agriculture."

What young farmers, partners, and policy makers are saying:

“I grow mixed vegetables and cut flowers in West Philadelphia. It’s a really daunting endeavor for young people, like me, to pursue a career in agriculture due to what feels like countless obstacles along the way. The biggest barrier is a lack of land access due to the high cost of farmland and a lack of transparency in the market place. It’s really hard to find land to farm on long term. We farmers want to work hard—we’re willing to take a little risk and start these operations, and we really want to contribute to Pennsylvania’s farm economy and community. We need to make farming a viable career for the next generation of farmers.” - **Kim Cook**, farmer, Philadelphia County

“I’m committed to carrying on the Pennsylvania tradition of agriculture here in Western Pennsylvania and find myself faced with significant roadblocks when trying to acquire affordable, arable land. Without addressing the lack of resources and business services available to young farmers, there won’t be a future of farming in the state.” **Katy Lydon**, farmer, Allegheny County

“On-farm training was difficult to find. I knew I wanted to gain experience in the variety of skills required in running a farm, not just field work. However, apprenticeships only seemed available in different states, and I wanted to stay in Western Pennsylvania.” - **David Slebodnik**, farmer, Beaver County

"After being colonized and reclassified as Colored, Negro, and Black farmers, our land was stolen and lost through unlawful USDA practices. During the early 19th centuries we migrated up North and brought our agricultural culture. As the elders passed away thus did some of our ways. There is a resurgence of the sustainable farming methods that we have used for generations. It is crucially important that agricultural land is available to all farmers in Pennsylvania, including farmers of color who have faced disproportionately large barriers to accessing agricultural land." - **Dana Harris-Yates**, Three Rivers Agricultural Land Initiative and The Black Urban Gardeners and Farmers of Pittsburgh Co-op

"Today, when 75 percent of beginning and aspiring farmers under the age of 40 did not grow up on farms, on-farm training programs are vital to cultivating the next generation of Pennsylvania's agricultural workforce. That's why we administer government-registered diversified vegetable farm management and dairy grazing apprenticeship programs, which serve the dual purpose of offering beginning farmers a guided path toward managing or starting their own farm business while helping to meet the labor needs of established farms. A cost-sharing grant program devoted to workforce development would help us grow our capacity and truly make an impact by meeting the high demand for these programs." - **Hannah Smith-Brubaker**, Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture

“We know the struggles that young farmers face in trying to start a business, and get access to quality farmland. We continue to support programs, like a beginning farmer tax credit, that will help this next generation of entrepreneurs pursue their passion of starting a farm of their own.” - **Darrin Youker**, Pennsylvania Farm Bureau

“Pennsylvania Farmers Union is committed to ensuring the success of the next generation of farmers in Pennsylvania. We support the Coalition's recommendations to incentivize land transfer to young farmers and to increase investments that will expand workforce development and business services for young farmers across the Commonwealth.” - **Heidi Secord**, Pennsylvania Farmers Union

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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