



GROWING PENNSYLVANIA'S FUTURE:

CHALLENGES FACING YOUNG FARMERS AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO ADDRESS THEM

Pennsylvania relies on its thriving agricultural industry, but the future of farming is at risk. Young farmers in Pennsylvania are investing in our economy, taking risks, getting trained, and working hard to build productive farms across the Commonwealth. However, many barriers stand in the way of their success. In 2018, the National Young Farmers Coalition (Young Farmers) completed a survey and series of listening sessions to identify the top challenges these producers face and provide recommendations on how Pennsylvania lawmakers can address those challenges.

The time to act is now. As the average age of farmers continues to climb, not enough younger farmers are replacing them: 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 success in meeting the challenge of farmland transition is directly tied to the success of its young farmers.



ABOUT OUR COALITION

The **National Young Farmers Coalition** (Young Farmers) is a grassroots network of farmers, ranchers, and supporters fighting for the future of agriculture. We change policy, build networks, and provide business services to ensure that all young farmers have the chance to succeed. In short, we are young farmers fighting for a bright future for American agriculture.

In fall 2018, we completed a survey with responses from 94 aspiring, current, and former young farmers, and conducted three listening sessions across the Commonwealth. Our **2019 Pennsylvania Young Farmers Report** identifies and makes recommendations to help address three main challenges standing in the way of the aspirations of Pennsylvania's young farmers: land access, workforce development, and farmer services.

"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

YOUNG FARMER CHALLENGES

Please see the 2019 Pennsylvania Young Farmers Report for references

LAND AFFORDABILITY AND INSECURE LEASES

Farmers across Pennsylvania told us in listening sessions, through our survey, and in on-farm visits that their number one concern is finding secure access to affordable, high quality farmland. Without long-term, reliable tenure on affordable land, young farmers cannot fully invest in the land and their businesses. Young farmers are struggling to find secure land tenure due to development pressure and high land prices, especially near urban centers and direct-to-consumer markets. Word-of-mouth land sales are often only accessible to farmers in specific communities. Among farmers who lease land, many operate under short-term, insecure lease arrangements, sometimes relying only on a handshake agreement.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Prioritize Agricultural Conservation Easement Purchase Program (ACEPP) funds for working farm easements that include affordability and farmer ownership provisions and allocate funding to retroactively place these provisions on existing easements;
- Prioritize easement projects that include a minimum of a three-year, written lease in cases where the landowner-applicant is leasing to a farmer;
- Create two young farmer member positions on the Agricultural Land Preservation Board;
- Incentivize the sale and renting of land and other agricultural assets to young and beginning farmers; and
- Increase support for Pennsylvania Farm Link.

AGRICULTURAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

The future of Pennsylvania's agricultural economy relies on young farmers receiving the training needed to successfully and responsibly steward the land. Farmers across the Commonwealth have reported a lack of on-farm training opportunities, which are especially important as young farmers are increasingly first-generation farmers. Similarly, young farmers have reported a lack of skilled labor as a key challenge to running successful farms in Pennsylvania, which further emphasizes a need for increased investment in agricultural workforce development.

RECOMMENDATION:

- Support on-farm training opportunities through a cost sharing grant program.

"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

INADEQUATE OR INACCESSIBLE FARMER SERVICES

Young farmers in Pennsylvania report that increased access to information, awareness of state and federal programs, access to capital, and marketing assistance would greatly improve their ability to start and maintain successful farm businesses. Investing in farmer services that are accessible online and that address a diversity of farm models and products is essential to ensuring the success of a new generation of farmers in the Commonwealth.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Establish a young farmer outreach coordinator position at the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture;
- Establish a young farmer advisory committee to report to Pennsylvania State Government on gaps in existing resources for young farmers and how to modernize and improve upon those resources so they are more accessible; and
- Create a Pennsylvania Agricultural Business Development Center.

