

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### YOUNG FARMERS FROM ACROSS THE COUNTRY FLY TO WASHINGTON, D.C. TO FIGHT FOR THE FUTURE OF U.S. AGRICULTURE

**WASHINGTON, D.C.** (July 23, 2019) This week, the **National Young Farmers Coalition** is flying young farmers from across the country to Washington, D.C. to advocate for funding for key farm bill programs, student loan forgiveness for farmers and ranchers, and tax provisions for farm owners interested in selling their land to the next generation.

“Leaving the farm to travel to D.C. in July, at the height of the growing season, is a huge effort for these young farmers. They’re here despite the sacrifice to fight for their livelihoods, and for the future of U.S. agriculture. That’s how important land access, student loan debt, and farm bill programming are to their farm businesses,” said the Coalition’s Federal Policy Director, **Erin Foster West**. “As the average age of farmers reaches 60, we have to focus on the unique challenges young farmers are facing in pursuing careers in agriculture. Our nation needs more young farmers, and young farmers need support to access to affordable farmland, leverage additional capital with existing student loan debt, and utilize the federal programs that were authorized in the farm bill specifically for young and beginning farmers.”

*Farmers participating in the July fly-in include:*

- **Melony Edwards**, Willowood Farm, Whidbey Island, Washington;
- **Don Nickelson**, Nickelson Farms, Frederick, South Dakota;
- **Héktor Caldero**, farmer organizer in Salinas, California;
- **Meri Lillia Mullins**, Lighthearted Ranch, Longmont, Colorado;
- **Taylor Yowell**, The Garden Farmacy, Bolton, Mississippi;
- **John Beaton**, Fairhaven Farm, Saginaw, Minnesota;
- **Cassandra Harrington**, Laporte, Colorado;
- **Asaud Frazier**, Tuskegee, Alabama;
- **Ian Colburn**, Chispas farm, Albuquerque, New Mexico;
- **Jason Grimm**, Grimm Family Farm, Williamsburg, Iowa.

Among the many legislators the farmers are scheduled to meet with are members of the Senate Committee on Appropriations, Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, Senate Committee on Finance, House Committee on Ways & Means, and the House Committee on Education and Labor including: Senators Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), Tina Smith (D-MN), Cindy Hyde-Smith (R-MS), Patty Murray (D-WA), Doug Jones (D-AL), and Representatives Dusty Johnson (R-SD-1), Joe Neguse (D-CO-2), Don Young (D-AK-1), Pete Stauber (R-MN-8), Mike Rogers (R-AL-3), Kim Schrier (D-WA-8), and Abby Finkenauer (D-IA-1).

In addition to meetings with their Members of Congress, two young farmers will also testify in front of the **House Committee on Small Business** at a hearing focused on young and beginning farmer issues on Thursday, July 25 at 10:00am. Both **Jason Grimm** (Iowa) and **Meri Lillia Mullins** (Colorado) will serve as witnesses and share their stories on land access, student loan debt and federal programs.

In his written testimony, Jason said, “Like many other farmers in the Midwest, my family has **struggled to transition our land to the younger generation due to high capital gains tax on farmland and student loan debt that has negatively impacted my ability to grow my farm business.** There is a

shortage of young and beginning farmers to guide agriculture into the future. Farmers support our rural communities, provide jobs and economic activity, and feed our communities. **This hearing is timely as we continue to implement the recently passed farm bill and as millions of acres of agricultural land are changing hands.**

In her testimony, Lillia shared how her student loan debt is a barrier to pursuing farming full-time: “Without any financial cushion or inheritance, the chances of quitting my engineering job to pursue farming full-time at this point is pretty slim. While the barriers to entry into an agricultural career are high for first generation farmers, one way to support beginning farmers is through a student loan forgiveness program. My student loan debt is currently the largest obstacle that I face in my pursuit of farming, and this is the reality for many talented, passionate young individuals across the country.”

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

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