



The National Young Farmers Coalition is a network of more than 200,000 farmers, ranchers, and supporters building a brighter and more equitable future for U.S. agriculture. Since 2010, the Coalition has launched 46 farmer-led chapters across the United States. We help young farmers become leaders in their communities through local chapter organizing, and ensuring they have a seat at the table in local, state and national policy decisions. In short, we are young farmers fighting for the future of U.S. agriculture.

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We represent, mobilize, and engage young farmers and ranchers to ensure their success, tackling the most critical structural and economic issues that prevent motivated young people from starting and growing farm businesses. We recognize that farmers of color face added structural and economic challenges as a result of systemic racism that must be addressed with specificity to ensure that all future farmers have a fair shot at continuing their agricultural careers.



Stetla Kalinina, Ts'uuya Farm

As the Biden transition team looks ahead to its priorities for the coming four years, we urge you to focus your efforts on the interconnected issue areas of agricultural land, climate change, racial equity, student loan debt, and the ability of the federal government to successfully deliver programs to young and Black, Indigenous, and other people of color (BIPOC) farmers that address these issues. Time is of the essence to reverse the trends of agricultural land loss, an aging farmer population, a rapidly changing climate, and discrimination against farmers of color that threaten our food supply and the health of our natural environment. The Coronavirus pandemic has exacerbated the challenges and inequities in our agricultural system, and in order to build back better it is imperative to holistically support the next generation of rural business owners and environmental stewards.

This document contains policies and budgetary recommendations that the Biden administration could enact for immediate impact on young farmers and farmers of color across the country as follows:

- Equitable Land Access, Tenure, and Transition
- Racial Equity and Increased Support for Farmers of Color
- Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation
- Accessibility and Accountability at USDA
- Reduced Burden of Student Loan Debt

The Coalition is ready and eager to assist on implementation of any of these suggestions, as well as to offer connections to our farmers. We look forward to addressing these challenges together.

Sophie Ackoff
Co-Executive Director

Martin Lemos
Co-Executive Director



North Fork Valley, Colorado

Equitable Land Access, Tenure, and Transition

Regardless of geography or whether or not they grew up on a farm, access to land is the number one challenge facing young farmers in the United States. Lack of opportunity to access secure, high-quality land is the top reason that young people are leaving agriculture and also why many aspiring farmers are never entering the field at all. Fewer farmers on the land means fewer small business owner-operators who can fuel the revitalization of rural America.

If we are to have a future with farmers, this trend cannot continue.

Agricultural land and those who steward it are essential to the strength of our economy, the well-being of our rural communities, and the health of the environment and our climate. Land access is a precursor to success in agriculture, yet land ownership and access in this country are vastly unequal—98% of all farmland and 95% of all farms are owned by white landowners. This inequity is the result of an ongoing legacy of policies, laws, and violence that dispossessed Black and Indigenous farmers from millions of acres of land. Further, land is increasingly disconnected from farmer ownership. According to the 2014 Tenure, Ownership and Transition of Agricultural Land (TOTAL) Survey, 87% of all landlords are non-operators, and 45% of these non-operator landlords have never farmed.

This is a pivotal moment. Each new report from the USDA shows that land is rapidly leaving agriculture, farmers are aging out of the industry, more land is under development, and land is increasingly owned by non-farmers. As the average age of farmers continues to rise, as many as 400 million acres of farmland are expected to need a new farmer soon. The forthcoming land transition presents an opportunity to create more secure, equitable land access for young farmers, and to aid farmers of color in regaining the land and wealth that has been dispossessed from them over generations.

The challenges of land access, tenure, and transition require a concerted focus at USDA, cross-agency coordination, new programs, and consistent data collection and reporting. We urge your administration to address this issue immediately.

We strongly support the proposal from the Biden campaign platform to restore Tribal lands and safeguard natural and cultural resources, take land-into-trust and support Tribal water rights. In addition, we recommend that you:

Administrative Action

- Create a national farmland access and transition initiative funded through both public appropriations and private dollars to support land transition to the next generation with prioritization for projects that resource BIPOC farmers.
- Create a mechanism by which young farmers and farmers of color can pre-qualify for Farm Service Agency loans, thereby allowing them to more quickly and competitively place offers on farmland and rangeland.
- Ensure coordination among departments within USDA as well as with other agencies across the federal government so that programs and initiatives are working together to facilitate transition and access for young, beginning, and BIPOC farmers.
- Establish a commission to study reparations and propose recommendations for land and wealth redistribution to BIPOC individuals who have been dispossessed of these resources.
- Prioritize the timely and consistent completion of the Tenure, Ownership, and Transition of Agricultural Land (TOTAL) survey within the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), and ensure robust analysis and reporting of results.
- Establish the Commission on Farm Transitions – Needs for 2050 as required by the 2018 Farm Bill to conduct a study on issues impacting the transition of agricultural operations from established farmers and ranchers to the next generation, and ensure that members appointed by the Secretary of Agriculture are representative of young and BIPOC farmers.
- Implement needed programmatic changes to the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP), including:
 - Ensure that the Agricultural Land Easements program within ACEP receives funding equal to historic high levels—at least 40% of total ACEP funding.
- Prioritize farmland protection projects that protect farmland affordability and farmer ownership, and those that provide secure land tenure to BIPOC farmers. Examples of tools for this work include the Option to Purchase at Agricultural Value (OPAV), buy-protect-sell, and ground leases.
- Provide clear guidance to practitioners for buy-protect-sell projects, through which permanently protected farmland can be transitioned to a next generation farmer.
- Establish internal goals for set-asides in ACEP for socially disadvantaged farmers, as is the norm in other conservation programs.
- Utilize targeted funding provided by the 2018 Farm Bill to more effectively utilize the Conservation Reserve Program - Transition Incentive Program (CRP-TIP) to facilitate land transition to the next generation of farmers, military veterans, and farmers of color.
- Support Congressional efforts to legislatively address land access and tenure, including capital gains exclusions for land sold to young farmers and farmers of color.

Budgetary action

- Include the authorized \$3 million per year for TOTAL Survey funding in each Presidential budget request to Congress.
- Request increased funding for conservation technical assistance to support rapid ACEP-ALE land protection.
- Provide travel funds and administrative support to the Commission on Farm Transitions as needed.

Racial Equity and Increased Support for Farmers of Color

The contributions to agriculture made by people of color are immense and largely unacknowledged within the dominant narrative of farming in this country. Beyond a lack of acknowledgment, the USDA, and indeed the federal government as a whole, has a long history of racial discrimination that continues to this day, with compounding socioeconomic impacts for farmers and ranchers of color. Change is necessary at all levels, from FSA County Committees to program structure and outreach to appointing diverse leadership throughout the agency. Since excluding or ignoring farmers and ranchers of color has been the norm for so long, it is imperative that racial equity be at the forefront of policy and program decisions in order to serve all farmers and ranchers.

We commend the Biden Campaign for introducing a platform specifically to advance racial equity at the Department of Agriculture, including the establishment of an Equity Commission, and proposals to improve fairness, accountability, and transparency by eliminating the USDA's backlog of civil rights complaints, streamlining and expediting the complaints process, permitting appeals, and reinstating a foreclosure moratorium for those whose complaints remain unsettled.

We also strongly support campaign proposals to recognize the essential work provided by farmworkers by providing legal status based on prior agricultural work history, ensuring paid sick time, and requiring that labor and safety rules are strictly enforced.

Administrative action

- Immediately repeal the Executive Order on Combating Race and Sex Stereotyping implemented by the previous administration, and ensure that any changes made in response to the order are reversed. Not only does this order need to be reversed, but proactive steps must be taken to increase racial equity trainings for staff at all levels. Details about the number and impact of these trainings should be made publicly available.



- Establish the Tribal Advisory Committee as required by the 2018 Farm Bill Section 12303 to improve government-to-government cooperation between USDA, the Department of Interior, and Tribal nations.
- Review all USDA programs with set-asides or priority given to farmers and ranchers of color to ensure that Tribal producers and Tribal nations are specifically recognized.
- Empower the Office of Tribal Relations to work with Tribal partners and organizations to test innovative models that invest in the self-determination and self-sufficiency of Tribal communities, including pilots for implementation of FSA programs and other funding initiatives. For example, this could include allowing Community Development Financial Institutions to access FSA Loan program dollars to demonstrate the efficacy of flexibility at the outset of a lending relationship.
- Establish additional guardrails for guaranteed lenders to prohibit poor treatment of guaranteed borrowers, in particular Indigenous, Black, and other people of color farmers, in return for having up to 95% of the risk mitigated by the taxpayer.
- Ensure that the Outreach and Assistance for Socially Disadvantaged and Veteran Farmers and Ranchers Program (2501 Program) is implemented effectively and with an emphasis on transparency. The grant implementation should include a regular timetable for grant administration, a longer window for submitting applications, and increased transparency about the farmers and ranchers that are being served by the projects. Further, as required by the 2018 Farm Bill, implementation of the 2501 program should include at least annual input from awardees providing technical assistance to ensure that the program is responsive to their needs and the needs of their communities.
- In addition, we recommend that the Centers for Community Prosperity grants no longer take funds away from the traditional 2501 grants.
- Fast-track the release of rules for the Heirs Property Relending Program, and provide regular opportunities for partners to share their feedback for improvement.
- Implement rules within the USDA Community Facilities Direct Loan & Grant Program to restrict funding of law enforcement services and facilities.
- Create supportive pathways for farmworkers to use their agricultural expertise to become land-owning farmers running their own businesses. This includes assuring the Department of Agriculture's Farmworker Coordinator has the resources, authority and coordinating capacity to assure farmworker perspectives and needs are fully integrated into the Department.
- Ensure that farmworker wages are fair by continuing to regularly conduct and accurately report the National Agricultural Workers Survey, and begin to promulgate new rules to reverse the Department of Labor Adverse Effect Wage Rate Methodology for the Temporary Employment of H-2A Nonimmigrants in Non-Range Occupations in the United States published November 5th.

Budgetary action

- Ensure generous funding for grant and advisory committee support, including within the Office of Partnerships and Public Engagement Funding.
- Ensure that the Farmworker Coordinator's initiatives receive adequate funding.



Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation

Climate change poses a grave threat to agriculture, and by extension to everyone who depends upon it. Farmers and farm workers are at the frontlines of climate change: they are both highly susceptible to its impacts and highly motivated to reinforce our climate resiliency. Of the 3,500 young farmer respondents to the 2017 National Young Farmer Survey, 66% reported experiencing the impacts of the climate crisis: unpredictable weather patterns, more severe storms, increased pest pressure, increased uncertainty in water supply, and/or increased rate of disease. Young farmers and ranchers are facing the doubly difficult task of beginning their careers in a challenging industry at a time when their environment is rapidly changing. Further, our coalition recognizes that these impacts are not felt equally by all. The most vulnerable communities are least able to adapt due to limited resources, structural marginalization, and poverty. Crop loss, food shortages, distribution disruption, and eventual increases in food prices and access will impact communities of color and low-income communities first.

At the same time, young farmers and ranchers are already working to do their part. In the 2017 National Young Farmers Survey, 75% of respondents described their farming practices as “sustainable.” Seventeen percent of respondents were USDA certified organic, compared with the 1% national average. They are ready and willing partners in the fight against climate change, if they can be supported in starting and growing their farm operations.

We support the commitments of the Biden Campaign to work in concert with the rest of the world to address the existential threat posed by climate change, and to partner with farmers and ranchers to make U.S. agriculture the first to achieve net-zero emissions.

In addition, we recommend that you:

Administrative action

- Ensure that conservation technical assistance (CTA) is culturally appropriate for distinct populations of farmers and ranchers by: making it available in multiple languages, presenting it in relevant pedagogies, and ensuring that it incorporates indigenous and culturally-relevant production practices when working with populations that use traditional methods. Many traditional and indigenous farming practices, such as cover cropping, crop rotation,

intercropping, agroforestry, organic composting, and integrating crop-animal agriculture, have been “climate-smart” for thousands of years and should be recognized as such. In addition, USDA should set ambitious internal goals to increase the amount of CTA funding going to serve farmers of color.

- Recommit the United States to the global agreement on climate change and rejoin the Paris Agreement.
- Establish a micro-Environmental Quality Incentive Program (microEQIP) pilot specifically designed to work for small farm and ranch operations, particularly with respect to diversified and local-scale producers.
- Increase the capacity of the Technical Service Provider network by assisting state and local partners to streamline and accelerate the certification and training process by coordinating state and local training opportunities with those offered by NRCS. In addition, NRCS should also offer more TSP training opportunities focused on small-scale farming operations, sustainable agriculture methods and practices, and challenges faced by young, beginning, and socially disadvantaged farmers, to ensure investments are made equitably.
- Establish a new Landscape Conservation Initiative at NRCS focused specifically on water conservation and climate resilience. This would dedicate more funding to promote agricultural conservation practices that increase water-sharing opportunities and protect the farmer or rancher’s water rights while making the producer financially whole.

Budgetary action

- Steadily increase funding for Conservation Operations to allow adequate CTA and staffing for federal conservation programs.
- Prioritize funding for research programs that will better quantify the climate change impacts of conservation practices, particularly for small-scale and diversified producers.
- Increase funding for the Cooperative Extension System, to allow for greater conservation outreach to beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers.



Accessibility and Accountability at USDA

Farmers and ranchers entering the field today have specific needs and face new challenges that are unlike those of more established farmers and ranchers and of generations past. Beginning farmers and ranchers are younger on average than more established farmers, tend to operate smaller farms, have more diversified operations, and are increasingly likely to come from non-farming backgrounds. They are implementing innovative practices, and may be farming in urban areas or indoors.

USDA must also innovate to meet these next-generation farmers where they are. Programs should continue to be streamlined and designed at the outset with flexibility for small-scale, local market producers. The changes to the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program 2 based on proposals from the National Young Farmers Coalition is a clear example; rather than requiring diversified vegetable farmers to maintain records on a crop-by-crop basis, the program allows for revenue-based relief payments. In addition, as these programs become more responsive to the needs of young farmers and farmers of color, increased and consistent outreach, including multiple language translations, is necessary to rebuild trust and ensure that these producers use the programs available. This includes by streamlining and simplifying information online for electronic outreach.

To accomplish this, we recommend that you:

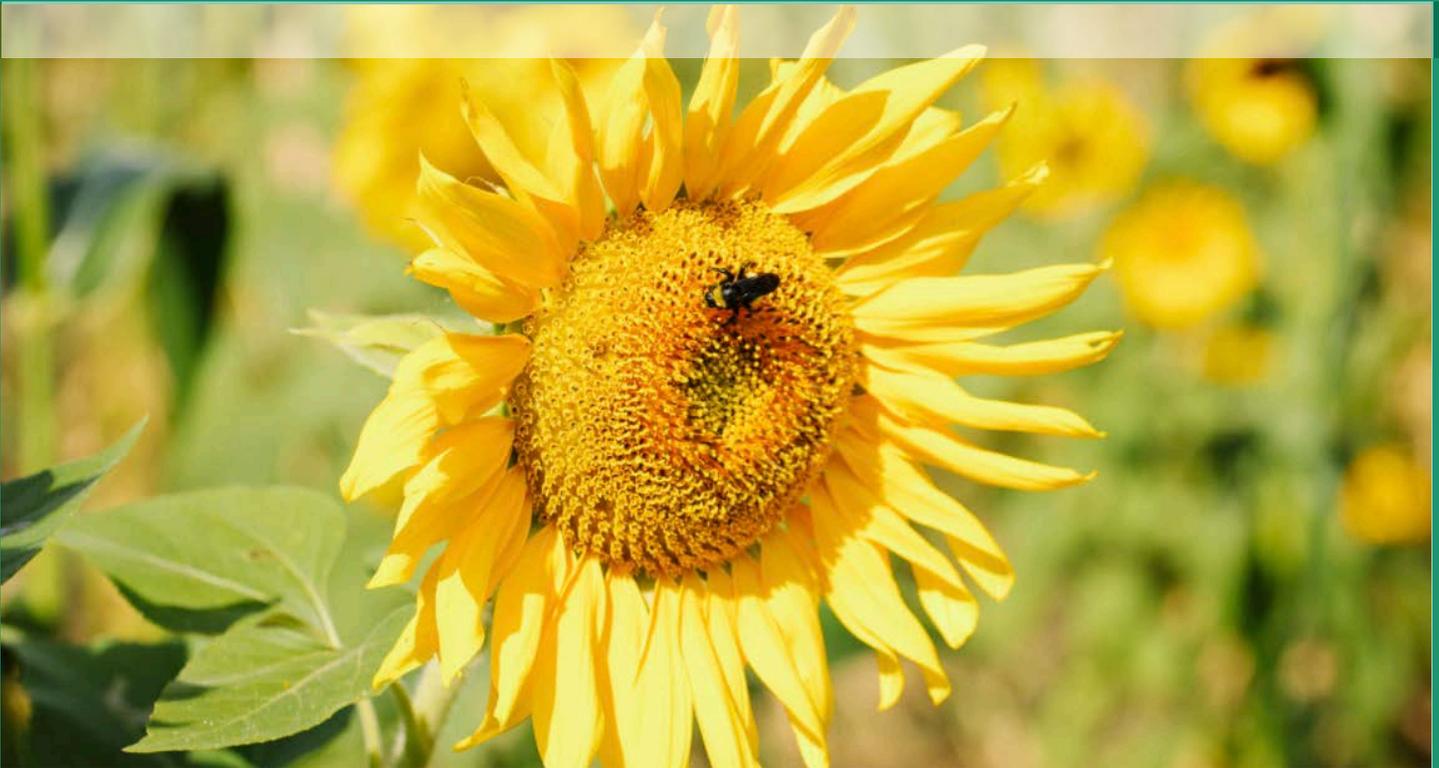
Administrative action

- Appoint a Black, Indigenous, or other person of color as the Secretary of the Department of Agriculture, and commit to naming a majority of BIPOC appointees within the agency.
- Create a mechanism by which young farmers and farmers of color can pre-qualify for Farm Service Agency loans, thereby allowing them to more quickly and competitively place offers on farmland and ranchland.
- Develop a plan to rebuild and advance USDA's Research, Education, and Economics (REE) science capacity that defines the agencies' major strategic and tactical goals for the upcoming years, assesses talent and trends impacting availability of needed expertise, analyzes the current state of function of the agencies, conducts a gap analysis, and develops a plan for implementing program or policy changes. This plan should:
 - Ensure that ERS and NIFA analyses and research continue to inform the federal policymaking process.
 - Return science-program leadership positions to Washington, DC, where the leaders can best interact with and inform policymakers in accordance with their mission.
 - Ensure that ERS remains under the purview of the REE mission area. This will ensure that the USDA Secretary and the Office of the Chief Economist are respecting the organizational firewall between ERS and the Office of the Secretary.
- Continue modernizing the online presence of the USDA by bringing more applications and resources online.
- Conduct a review of the USDA website and print materials to ensure that plain-language explanations and multiple language translations are available to guide young farmers and farmers of color through federal programs and resources. Work towards collective utilization of forms across programs and agencies.
- Prioritize the robust implementation of the Office of Urban Agriculture and urban FSA county committee pilots. Ensure that adequate staff is available to collect and implement feedback provided by urban farmers and organizations serving urban farmers, especially urban farmers of color.
- Convene regular meetings of both the Advisory Committee on Beginning Farmers and Ranchers and the Advisory Committee on Minority Farmers and Ranchers. Ensure the Secretary responds in a timely manner to committee recommendations and increase transparency in committee activities, including posting up-to-date information on committee membership, meeting minutes, and agendas on each committee website. Increase timeliness of committee appointments and ensure adequate outreach to non-profit and community-based organizations that work with farmers of color and beginning farmers.
- Conduct an analysis of current and past regional food system projects in order to implement new initiatives and administrative changes to existing programs and policies that improve food system resilience, increase diversity in slaughter and food processing facilities, and reinforce short supply chains that ensure greater returns to farmers for their goods.

- Continue improvements to Whole Farm Revenue Protection, as young farmers and farmers of color will increasingly need risk management that works for them in the face of extreme weather events and market volatility. This should include: crop insurance agent and adjuster education, a national hotline to answer agent questions, elimination of the current expense reporting requirements, requiring that applicants only need to provide tax records as sufficient documentation in calculating revenue guarantees and in determining indemnity payments, counting indemnity payments as historic revenue for claims adjustment purposes, and adapting the online tool for farmer usability and document organization in advance of visiting an agent.
- Prioritize local food and community health infrastructure in the Community Facilities Direct Loan & Grant Program, and deemphasize grant use for law enforcement, especially building prisons and jails.

Budgetary action

- Include funding in each annual Presidential budget to allow for full-time state beginning farmer and rancher coordinators, rather than maintaining this as a Request funding for BFR coordinators as full-time positions
- Request appropriations for the Farming Opportunities Training and Outreach Program that exceed historical levels of funding, and support additional funding for this program in future stimulus bills to help beginning farmers and farmers of color recover from the Covid-19 pandemic, up to the \$50 million authorized amount.
- Request appropriations for the Local Agriculture Market Program that exceed historical levels of funding, and support additional funding in future stimulus bills to help local and direct-to-consumer markets recover from the Covid-19 pandemic, up to the \$20 million authorized amount.
- Request appropriations Office of Urban Agriculture that exceed historical levels of funding, up to the \$25 million authorized amount.



Reduced Burden of Student Loan Debt

In order to support the next generation in agriculture, we must recognize that those entering the field today do so with significant structural barriers outside of the agricultural system. In our national survey of young farmers in our network, nearly a third of young farmers cited student loan debt as a significant challenge. 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. These challenges are often compounded for students of color, who often have no choice other than to borrow and are more likely to struggle with repayment and default than their peers. Addressing the overwhelming burden of student loan debt will allow a next generation of young and BIPOC farmers to enter agriculture and access the credit needed to grow their businesses.

We appreciate the Biden campaign's plan to decrease payments on student loans through a new income-based program, and to create a simplified program to provide debt relief in return for community service.

In addition, we urge you to:

Administrative action

- Pursue all administrative actions that can reduce the burden of student loan debt, including loan forgiveness.
 - Continue to defer student loan payments throughout the duration of the Coronavirus pandemic.
 - Include young and BIPOC farmers and ranchers in any future program to provide loan forgiveness to public servants.