2020 was a year filled with unforeseen challenges and demands on our communities. Many in our network lost friends and loved ones to the pandemic, others lost their businesses or struggled to meet their basic living expenses. Farm workers have continued harvesting food for our country on the frontlines of the pandemic without basic labor protections. Police violence against Black people added immense additional labor and stress on farmers of color, and urgency to our Coalition’s commitment to advocate for racial equity and justice. Wildfires, flooding, derechos, shifting seasons, and other impacts of the climate crisis intensified across the country.

In spite of the hardships, 2020 was also a year of growth for our coalition. We led successful policy campaigns at the state and federal level, helped thousands of farmers access federal programs and COVID aid, trained farmer leaders in policy advocacy, released valuable new resources, and much more. Read on for some of the amazing progress our coalition led through an exceptionally challenging year.

About the National Young Farmers Coalition

The National Young Farmers Coalition (Young Farmers) is a non-profit advocacy network of beginning farmers, ranchers, and supporters working together for a brighter, more equitable future for U.S. agriculture. The Coalition tackles the most critical structural and economic issues preventing young people from succeeding in farming and ranching.

Highlights from 2020:

- Farmer-led chapters: 48
- New chapters: 7, 4 of which are BIPOC-led
- Advocates who contacted their Members of Congress in 2020: 7,396
- New staff members: 13
- Farmers called through our COVID-19 and CFAP2 phonebank: 3,000+
- Federal funds made more accessible to farmers through CFAP2: $14 Billion
- Downloads of our Racial Equity Toolkit: 6,000+
- New members in 2020: 500+
- Direct funding to young farmers through our grant program and other stipends: $306,000+
- Supporters in our network: 200,000+
Securing COVID-19 Relief for Young Farmers.

The first round of pandemic assistance from the USDA was challenging for small, diversified farmers to access. So we organized, we mobilized, and made young farmers’ voices heard. We scheduled meetings with USDA and legislators, and organized our corporate partners and farmers to send messages to Congress asking for aid that would work better for young farmers and farmers of color. As a result, the second round of the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP2) was designed to better meet young farmers’ needs. Our work didn’t stop there, we also made over 3,000 calls to farmers to ensure they could access this funding and had support in the application process. We also organized COVID resources into an online library, hosted an FAQ site, and supported our chapter network to make sure that farmers had the resources and support they needed to withstand the pandemic’s many challenges.

Debuting new leadership opportunities for young farmers and farmers of color.

These opportunities include the Farmer Citizen Food Policy Training, a 4-week certificate course for majority Black, Indigenous, and other people of color (BIPOC) farmers to be trained in policy systems and grassroots advocacy; the Colorado Young Farmer Water Fellowship, which trained 10 farmers to take positions of water leadership in Colorado; and the California Young Farmer Political Leadership Fellowship which aims to support underrepresented, young farmers in gaining positions within agricultural governance entities and in leading policy campaigns for farmer viability.

Releasing New Young Farmers Resources.

Our new Land Report and microsite detail the realities of the challenges young farmers are facing in accessing land and policy solutions that can shape a future where farmland is accessible, affordable, and equitable. We also released a short film illustrating our work and vision for a brighter and more equitable future for agriculture, state policy platforms, our 2020 Racial Equity Toolkit, dozens of farmer case studies, and a Small Farmer’s Practical Guide to Food Safety.

Centering Racial Equity.

Our goal is to secure a bright and just future for agriculture, which will require a significant amount of change to our current agriculture system. And that change starts with us. To support our racial equity transformation, we’ve audited our programs, projects, policies, and practices to make sure that they are better serving BIPOC farmers and communities. We granted our first round of Young Farmer Grants with Chipotle, which awarded $5,000 start-up grants to majority BIPOC farmers and ranchers. We’ll also be releasing our first Young Farmers Accountability Report in 2021 to transparently document our progress.

Hosting our largest Convergence ever!

In November, over 350 attendees from 35 states joined us for our 6th National Leadership Convergence, our first ever virtual Convergence, with the theme of “Achieving Equity Through Agriculture.” Farmers reported feeling a renewed sense of community and purpose in a very difficult year, and honed their skills in organizing, policy and advocacy, communications, and movement building. One farmer shared, “So often in my work as a farmer I feel isolated in the truth that agriculture and racial justice are intertwined, and Convergence made me feel the exact opposite. I am energized to keep committing to this work and excited about the new connections I made.”

Launching our first farmer-centric and equity-driven Federal Policy Platform.

In December, our Federal Policy Platform was approved by a member-wide vote. It is rooted in racial equity and will prioritize the following pillars in our policy work over the next two years: climate change, land access and tenure, access and accountability at USDA, labor and immigration, and student loan debt.

Please consider supporting the National Young Farmers Coalition in 2021!