



The Honorable David Scott
Chairman
House of Representatives Committee on
Agriculture
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Glenn ‘GT’ Thompson
Ranking Member
House of Representatives Committee on
Agriculture
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jim Costa
Chairman
House of Representatives Committee on
Agriculture, Subcommittee on Livestock and
Foreign Agriculture
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Dusty Johnson
Ranking Member
House of Representatives Committee on
Agriculture, Subcommittee on Livestock and
Foreign Agriculture
Washington, DC 20515

Re: In Regards to the Sustainability in the Livestock Sector: Environmental Gain and Economic Viability
Hearing before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Agriculture, Subcommittee on Livestock
and Foreign Agriculture

Date: February 3, 2022

The National Young Farmers Coalition (Young Farmers) thanks the U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Agriculture for holding this hearing on sustainability in the livestock sector.

Climate change is an increasing and persistent threat to agriculture, disrupting food production across the country and the rest of the world. The agricultural sector, however, is uniquely poised to be able to directly mitigate the disastrous effects of climate change through practices that sequester carbon in the soil and provide other ecosystem services to build on-farm climate resilience. Many of these practices go hand in hand with sustainable livestock management, and together can have a significant impact in combating climate change. In examining the sustainability of the livestock sector, we must also consider the sustainability of the infrastructure and processes, fairness of practices, and health and dignity of people involved in getting meat on the table. As the pandemic began and worsened through the first half of 2020, we saw clear indications of the fragility of our food supply, and smaller scale livestock producers across

the country faced even greater wait times for processing than they were already experiencing¹. We thank the Honorable David Scott, Glenn ‘GT’ Thompson, Jim Costa, and Dusty Johnson for holding this hearing to discuss the sustainability of the livestock sector.

The National Young Farmers Coalition works closely with young farmers across the country to assist them in building resilience to climate change through training, building farmer networks across the U.S., and advocating for policy change at the state and federal level. Our campaigns focus on key issues, identified by our members, to address the major obstacles young farmers face.

In a 2017 national survey of our coalition, 66% of respondents reported experiencing unpredictable weather and 53% attributed those changes to climate change.² Furthermore, in a 2020 survey of policy issues, our members across the country identified addressing climate change as their number one priority.³ Young farmers, particularly Black, Indigenous and other people of color (BIPOC) farmers are on the frontlines of experiencing this crisis and at the same time are carrying knowledge and expertise—often rooted in indigenous practices—necessary to respond to it effectively⁴. Our farmers have experienced increased pest pressure, uncertainty and severe fluctuations in water supply, and increased rates of disease, with seemingly no end in sight. Young farmers have lost crops and sustained damage to their farms due to extreme weather events, have had disrupted growing seasons, suffered severe economic losses, and have shut down operations due to droughts and unsafe conditions from uncontrolled wildfires.

Further compounding this issue is the lack of access to affordable, quality land, as farmland, agriculture, and the climate crisis are deeply intertwined. Land is the foundation of nourishment and resiliency and is the number one tool available to farmers in the fight against climate change. Land that is stewarded plays a critical role in climate change mitigation and resilience, yet accelerating trends of farmland loss are occurring disproportionately on soils rated highest for productivity, versatility, and resiliency.⁵ Additionally, the dispossession of land from BIPOC individuals and the ongoing consolidation of land into the hands of fewer and fewer owners makes this issue all the more difficult for BIPOC farmers. Secure land tenure is critical to farmers’ ability to remain in the field long-term and to making deep-rooted and long lasting climate interventions. Despite being heavily affected by climate change, farmers have the transformative power to sequester carbon by using climate-smart methods including managed grazing, silvopasture, planting cover crops, and using no- and reduced-till methods. By

¹ OECD, Food Supply Chains and COVID-19, Impacts and Policy Lessons, June, 2, 2020, <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/food-supply-chains-and-covid-19-impacts-and-policy-lessons-71b57aea/>

² Sophie Ackoff, Andrew Bahrenburg, and Lindsey Lusher Shute, Building a Future with Farmers II, National Young Farmers Coalition, November 2017, www.youngfarmers.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/NYFC-Report-2017.pdf.

³ National Young Farmers Coalition, “2021 Climate Policy Recommendations,” May 2021, <https://www.youngfarmers.org/2021/05/2021-climate-recommendations/>

⁴ Springer, Regenerative Food Systems and The Conservation of Change, November, 9, 2021, “*There is likewise extensive evidence that most pre-colonial Indigenous environmental practices were, and continue to be, regenerative in nature (Fisher et al. 2019; Ellis et al. 2021).*” <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10460-021-10282-2#ref-CR25>

⁵ Julia Freedgood, Mitch Hunter, Jennifer Dempsey, and Ann Sorensen, Farms Under Threat: The State of the States, American Farmland Trust, 2020.

incorporating these methods and others like them, farmers can simultaneously provide healthy food to their local communities—but they can only do so with access to land and access to affordable and reliable meat processing services.⁶

Young farmers’ values are aligned toward sustainable practices, and they are innovating at the farm level as they navigate the impacts of climate change, a global pandemic, and a livestock processing and packing system that isn’t designed for them. They are leading the way in modeling what a sustainable food and farming future can look like: working at the community level to innovate around the many challenges they face. In recent conversations with young farmers—discussing the Biden Administration’s plans to fund the expansion of independent processing capacity⁷—they have foregrounded the need for direct and ongoing support for small and very small or mobile processors, including state and custom exempt facilities. To compete in an increasingly consolidated system, independent facilities need long-term support to weather swings in supply and demand. Access to processing at this scale is critical for young farmers who are not selling into global or national markets. As one farmer put it, often they “...are the supply chain (producer, processor, distributor).” Young farmers are invested in farming sustainably, in feeding their communities, and building equitable food and farming systems. Federal policies at the intersection of livestock production and climate change must invest in equitable access to high quality farmland and community-led solutions to processing and distribution challenges.

Young Farmers would like to thank the Honorable David Scott, Glenn ‘GT’ Thompson, Jim Costa and Dusty Johnson for convening this hearing to discuss sustainability in the livestock sector. A sustainable livestock sector is critical for combating climate change, improving access to land, and preserving livestock management traditions. We look forward to working with you to find ways to make sure that young, beginning, and BIPOC farmers and ranchers are leading the future of sustainable livestock management.

Sincerely,



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National Young Farmers Coalition



David Howard
Co-Policy Director
National Young Farmers Coalition

⁶ Holly Rippon-Butler, Land Policy: Toward a More Equitable Farming Future, National Young Farmers Coalition, 2020, <https://www.youngfarmers.org/land/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/LandPolicyReport.pdf>.

⁷ The White House, Fact Sheet: The Biden-Harris Action Plan for a Fairer, More Competitive, and More Resilient Meat and Poultry Supply Chain, January 3, 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/01/03/fact-sheet-the-biden-harris-action-plan-for-a-fairer-more-competitive-and-more-resilient-meat-and-poultry-supply-chain/>