



ONE MILLION ACRES FOR THE FUTURE

FARM BILL CAMPAIGN POLICY BRIEF

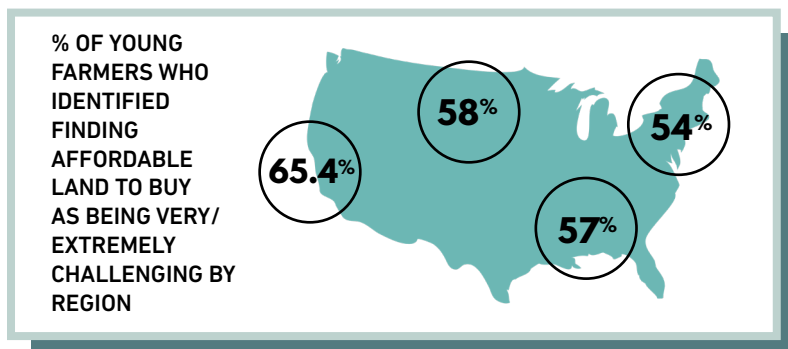
Access to land is the number one challenge facing the next generation of farmers in the United States, and this barrier is even greater for farmers of color. As a coalition of growers and land stewards, equitable access to land is our top priority. According to our 2022 National Young Farmer Survey, 59% of young farmers named finding affordable land to buy as very or extremely challenging, and 65% of BIPOC farmers ranked it as very or extremely challenging. Over half of all respondents said that they currently need more access to land, whether to buy or lease.

The 2023 Farm Bill is a critical moment for action. Along with our partners, the National Young Farmers Coalition has launched the One Million Acres for the Future campaign. We are calling on Congress to invest \$2.5 billion over ten years to facilitate equitable access to one million acres of land for the next generation of farmers.

The need is urgent, but so is the opportunity. Nearly half of all U.S. farmland is expected to change hands in the coming decades, and young farmers are leaving agriculture because they cannot secure land. This Farm Bill is a pivotal moment to invest in the individuals who will steward agricultural land and grow food for our communities into the future.

Land is deeply intertwined with all aspects of farmers' success, and it does not just impact farmers—land access is critical to the health and well-being of our environment, economy, and marginalized communities. Supporting equitable access to land means addressing the climate crisis, facilitating farm transition, investing in community-driven initiatives, and providing support to young farmers and ranchers to access credit, find markets, and strengthen their operations.

Land access is the top challenge for current young farmers, the primary barrier preventing aspiring farmers from getting started, and the number one reason young farmers are leaving agriculture. It is the top challenge regardless of years of experience, region, or whether individuals grew up in farming.



AN EQUITABLE TRANSITION

Secure access to land is directly tied to food sovereignty, economic prosperity, farm viability, and public health. Yet, severe disparity exists in who has access to this resource. Policy has been used to dispossess Indigenous people of millions of acres of land and to perpetuate discrimination against Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (BIPOC), resulting in 98 percent of farmland owned by White individuals. Policies must directly address inequities and create opportunities for BIPOC growers who are stewarding land, leading climate resilient agriculture, and feeding their communities by funding programs that address land-based inequity.

54% of young farmers say they need more land, and 75% of Black farmers in particular need more land.

Our nation must take action now to facilitate secure, affordable access to land for young farmers and farmers of color—there is no time to wait.

A Policy Framework for Equitable Land Access:

- Invest in community-led projects that create secure, affordable land access opportunities.
- Bring coordination to federal land access initiatives across agencies and departments.
- Improve access to credit to help farmers compete in the real estate market.
- Facilitate voluntary, community-led farmland protection that keeps land in the hands of growers.
- Invest in incentivizing farm transition and preventing land loss in communities of color.
- Ensure the accessibility and accountability of USDA programs, centering young farmers of color and increasing access for the next generation of farmers as a whole.
- Invest in data collection, reporting, and research on farmland tenure, ownership and transition.

Invest in community-led projects that create secure, affordable land access opportunities

- Establish a new initiative to fund community-led land access projects. This USDA funding should be available to eligible entities, including Tribes, municipalities, non-profits, and cooperative entities with priority for projects led by, and benefitting, Socially Disadvantaged and Economically Distressed farmers and ranchers.

This new Farm Bill program will be the first to invest in secure, equitable access to land for farmers from the onset. It will also complement the Department's existing farm production and conservation programs, making federal dollars available to community-led projects that create equitable land access outcomes and secure access to land for farmers. Specifically, funding may take the form of a long-term forgivable loan that incorporates support for housing, infrastructure, farmer training, technical assistance, and land stewardship practices. This funding should be available as a line of credit or grant prior to purchase, enabling eligible entities to act quickly in the real estate market.

Bring coordination to federal land access initiatives across agencies and departments

- Establish a new office and coordinating position within the Farm Production and Conservation (FPAC) mission area, focused on equitable access to land and centering the needs of small, beginning, urban, and BIPOC farmers.
- Amend and fund the Commission on Farm Transition established in the 2018 Farm Bill to study land access and transition and inform policy setting that facilitates equitable access to land.
- Seat the Tribal Advisory Committee authorized in the 2018 Farm Bill.
- Secure the purpose and functions of the USDA Equity Commission in the Farm Bill, providing a permanent statutory grounding and operational framework for the critical long-term work of the Commission.

Implementing high-level oversight and thought leadership at USDA will ensure there is coordination within the department and across the federal government so that all USDA staff are working together to facilitate equitable land access and transition.

**THIS NEXT FARM BILL
MUST ADDRESS OUR
LAND ACCESS CRISIS
HEAD ON.**

With a
\$2.5 billion investment
in equitable land access across USDA programs,
Congress could make one million acres of land
available to the next generation of farmers, helping
over 52,000 young people
gain secure access to land in the next 10 years.

52,000 is more than
double the
number of
young farmers
added between the last
two farm bills.

Improve access to credit to help farmers compete in the real estate market

- Develop a pre-approval and pre-qualification process for Farm Service Agency (FSA) Direct Farm Ownership Loans to establish FSA as an appropriately competitive loan making institution.
- Ensure FSA Direct Farm Ownership Loan limits remain adequate by indexing them to land values.
- Secure FSA debt relief for Socially Disadvantaged and Economically Distressed farmers, including guaranteed loan borrowers.
- Expand funding for, and effectively implement, the Indian Tribal Land Acquisition Loan Program and the Highly Fractionated Indian Land Loan Program.
- Pilot a program within FSA to allow Socially Disadvantaged and Economically Distressed farmers to consolidate and refinance commercial debt that may be standing in the way of affording secure land access.

The ability to access financing is foundational to accessing secure land. Affordable federal sources of financing are crucial, but must be designed to meet farmers' needs and help them compete in a fierce real estate market often driven by non-farmer buyers and investors. Federal policy should invest in making pathways to financing more widely accessible and applicable to those who have invested their time in building their farming skills rather than their net worth.

Facilitate voluntary, community-led farmland protection that keeps land in the hands of growers

- Increase funding for the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program Agricultural Land Easements (ACEP-ALE), and the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCP).
• Give priority to ACEP-ALE and RCP projects that keep land affordable and in the hands of farmers.
- Improve the Buy-Protect-Sell mechanism within ACEP-ALE so young farmers can access this program.
- Improve accessibility and adoption of Conservation Reserve Program-Transition Incentives Program.
- Ensure Environmental Quality Incentives Program funding is accessible to farmers and ranchers with small-scale conservation projects and that producers with cooperative business structures can access these programs.

Federal funding for farmland protection has kept thousands of acres of farmland from being lost to development, but this funding has primarily benefited existing landowners. Farmland protection funding should prioritize farmer ownership and keep land at its agricultural value, meaning what a producer can afford to pay. Programs should expand beyond conservation easements to include funding for long-term leasing, lease-to-own, and other mechanisms to increase land access opportunity. Easements should be flexible enough to allow farmers to respond to changing environmental and market conditions.

Invest in incentivizing farm transition and preventing land loss in communities of color

- Continue investment in the Heirs' Property Relending Program and expand funding eligibility to include administration of program funds by relending entities.
- Invest in a dedicated source of multi-year funding for technical service providers supporting farmers seeking land access and landowners transitioning out of farm ownership—prioritizing funding for state mediation programs that focus on outreach to underserved farmers and heirs' property landowners.
- Fund training for culturally-appropriate technical assistance services.
- Continue funding the Farming Opportunities Training and Outreach Grant Program.

Retiring farmers face legal, financial, healthcare, and tax considerations that impact their future and that of the land. Farmers of color face increased challenges due to systemic discrimination. Federal policy should acknowledge current stewards' work and bolster incentives for farmland owners to transition land to the next generation of farmers, centering farmers of color.

Ensure the accessibility and accountability of USDA programs, centering young farmers of color and increasing access for the next generation of farmers as a whole

- Ensure USDA land-related programs are accessible to all young farmers by specifying eligibility for collective, cooperative and communal non-family entities.
- Implement robust reporting requirements to measure program reach, effectiveness, and equity outcomes.
- Provide continued funding for cooperative agreements with community-based organizations, such as the Natural Resources Conservation Service Cooperative Agreements for Racial Justice and Equity.

Invest in data collection, reporting, and research on farmland tenure, ownership and transition

- Authorize mandatory, recurring funding for land-access related data gathering, including the Tenure, Ownership, and Transition of Agricultural Land survey.
- Collect nationwide data on farmland concentration, consolidation, and foreign ownership, as well as specific barriers and data for Socially Disadvantaged and Economically Distressed producers.
- Build in increased transparency for USDA data collection on land access trends, including mandatory reporting to relevant advisory bodies, such as the Equity Commission and Commission on Farm Transitions.
- Increase tracking and disclosure of foreign land investments.

49% of young farmers have never used a USDA program that could help them.

When asked what problems they have experienced in accessing USDA programs, 71% of young farmers said that they were unfamiliar with federal programs. Equitable and culturally appropriate outreach to young and BIPOC farmers, in addition to reduced application requirements and streamlined processes, would help more farmers benefit from federal programs.

Federal policy should provide support to ensure land access opportunities set farmers up for success. This includes increased technical assistance, as well as support for climate resiliency.

Current and comprehensive data is critically important to understanding the challenges farmers face related to land access and transition. We urge policymakers to ensure the data collection components of the 2018 Farm Bill are fully implemented and to continue to invest in recurring data collection, reporting, and research on farmland tenure, ownership, and transition to better understand the large-scale trends and challenges related to land access for young, BIPOC farmers and the next generation as a whole.

A STORY FROM THE FIELD

House Agriculture Committee Farm Bill Hearing on Credit Access
Testimony from Julia Asherman

On July 14th, 2022, Julia Asherman, owner and operator of Rag & Frass Farm in Georgia, testified at a House Agriculture Committee farm bill hearing on credit access. Julia spoke to the challenges many beginning farmers face when trying to access credit through the USDA and FSA, such as lengthy application processes and student loan debt. Below are excerpts from Julia's written testimony. Julia's full testimony is available online through the House Agriculture Committee website at agriculture.house.gov.

My name is Julia Asherman and I am the owner and operator of Rag & Frass Farm, which I started in late 2012. I farm three acres of certified organic vegetables and specialty cut flowers in rural central GA. I employ five people, three full time and two part time, year round. We grow and sell 12 months a year, and I do this with no off-farm income. Until this year, when I had a baby, I worked seven days a week. Now I work six days a week. Farming is mentally and physically challenging but I am pleased that I found my calling, and hope my testimony is helpful to your policy decisions and to other farmers...

I stuck with the paperwork, the county loan officers, and did my homework enough that I could make it work, and sufficiently negotiate the deal with both the seller and lender. However, most farmers are busy and use their time strategically. Any program that requires significant frustrating paperwork and a lot of effort, for what is essentially a gamble, is not really geared toward being accessible to most farmers, most of the year...Having the right documents and records at your fingertips during the right time of year is a must, to make everything come together. Even then, a lot depends on the loan agent's understanding of the type of operation you run. Beginning farmers often do things differently from the farmers my loan officers are used to working with: we are more likely to be organic or sustainable; we are more likely to be diversified; we are more likely to be smaller scale (with more focus on specialty crops); we are more likely to be direct market; we are more likely to be women, queer, people of color; and we are more likely to be first generation.

Luckily, I was able to successfully navigate the timeline. I was able to secure a lease in addition to a sales contract, and this was because the seller was motivated to sell. The property was on the market for a while, it was not in a desirable or populated area, and the condition of the buildings was poor. I was the only person interested in it, and that was great for me and the seller. If I had been trying to buy a property in better condition, in a different area or facing any type of development pressure, it would be unlikely that the seller would wait for me and my FSA process, which took months. The current process is slow, with many steps going back and forth, and no pre-approval. Farmers easily lose out on potential properties by not being able to act fast. I have known several farmers who have not been able to use FSA loans to purchase for this reason.