



BUILDING A FUTURE WITH FARMERS 2022

**Results and Recommendations from the
National Young Farmer Survey**



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Land Acknowledgements

National Young Farmers Coalition staff, chapters, and farmer members live and work on the ancestral, contemporary, and unceded territory of Indigenous people across Turtle Island, encompassing what is now known as the United States. For staff, these lands include those of the Abenaki, Anishinaabeg (Three Fires Confederacy of Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi peoples), Arapaho, Chahta Okla (Choctaw), Cheyenne, Chinook, Chitimacha, Chumash, Clackamas, Cowlitz, Diné, Erie, Haudenosaunee, Houma, Kalapuya, Kathlamet, Kumeyaay, Lenni-Lenape, Manahoac, Methow, Mohawk, Mohican, Molalla, Monocan, Multnomah, Munsee Lenape, Muskogee, Nacotchtank (Anacostan), Oceti Sakowin (Sioux), Oneida, Pequawket, Piscataway, Pueblo, Seminole, Susquehannock, Shawnee, Timucua, Tualatin, Tiwa, Ute, Wazhazhe (Osage), Wahpekute, Wappinger, Wasco, and Wyachtonok. We acknowledge and honor the land and those who have stewarded it for centuries before colonization. We commit to forming deeper partnerships to address past and ongoing land-based injustices against Indigenous people through our work.

Acknowledgments

We at the National Young Farmers Coalition (Young Farmers) consider ourselves incredibly lucky to have an engaged network of supporters and partners that makes a project of the scale and ambition of the National Young Farmer Survey possible.

First and foremost, we'd like to thank the more than 10,000 participants who responded to the 2022 National Young Farmer Survey for taking the time out of their busy days to support our collective work for a brighter future. Particularly, we extend thanks to the Black farmers, Indigenous farmers, and other farmers of color who participated for trusting us with your stories and to bring them forward into our advocacy.

Thank you to Anamaria Gutierrez and Cristina Flores for graciously lending your multilingualism to this project and extending this opportunity through a language justice lens to Spanish-first young farmers.

Thank you to La Semilla, the Midwest Farmers of Color Collective, and the Land Stewardship Project for working closely with us to ensure our outreach was as geographically equitable as possible. Young Farmers staff and network reached out to hundreds of agricultural organizations for support in sharing the survey. We are inspired by and thankful for the number of partners who supported this project and are proud to be a part of this powerful movement.

Thank you to Young Farmers chapters, chapter leaders, and fellows. We are continuously touched by this network of farmer leaders who share our belief that farmers are their own best advocates. Thank you for showing every day that, together, we can build a future that equitably resources a new generation of working farmers.

This work would not have been possible without the generous support of General Mills, Niman Ranch, Applegate, sweetgreen, and J&I Goldman; or without the in-kind support for our participant raffle from Chipotle, Avocado Green Mattress, Johnny's Seeds, Carhartt, Muck Boots, Stonyfield, Patagonia, and Patagonia Provisions.

Many thanks to the photographer Stella Kalinina for capturing beautiful images at Sankofa Orchard and Philly Forests in Philadelphia to support our National Survey outreach and farmers, Bakari Clark, Sybria Deveaux, Mike Jones, Alkebu-Lan Marcus, Amirah Mitchell, Chris Newsome, San Sankofa, Jasmine Thompson, and Alexis Wiley for participating in the photoshoots. And thanks to photographer Mallory Kessel and farmers Sharlene Aquiler, Hernan Cavazos, Luis Gamboa, Elijah Garcia, Steven Larrea, Amanda Subish and our friends at Food Shed for coordinating our photoshoots at Solidarity Farms, Little Bitty Farm, and Pauma Tribal Farm in San Diego.

And thank you to our research partners, Kelly Elver and Nathan Jones, at the University of Wisconsin Survey Center for analyzing our data and ensuring our survey instrument met best practices.

WE BELIEVE WE HAVE
ONE GENERATION
TO TRANSFORM
AGRICULTURE IN
SERVICE TO OUR
COMMUNITIES AND
THE LAND. WE ARE
THAT GENERATION.

Our Purpose

The National Young Farmers Coalition is a national grassroots advocacy organization working to shift power and change policy to equitably resource our new generation of working farmers. We envision a just future where farming is free of racial violence, accessible to communities, oriented towards environmental well-being, and concerned with health over profit.



Introduction

The 2022 National Young Farmer Survey received 10,091 responses, including 4,344 from past, current, and aspiring farmers who self-identified as age 40 and under. Our findings reveal a new generation of farmers answering the call to provide healthy food, steward the land, and cultivate community well-being. They are building diversified operations designed for resilience in the face of a changing climate, and are motivated to farm for conservation, regeneration, and social justice.

The Survey also reveals the urgent structural challenges standing in the way of their success, including access to land, access to capital, health care costs, access to affordable housing, the high cost of production, student loan debt, climate change, immigration issues, and access to federal programs, and that these barriers are even higher for farmers who identify as Black, Indigenous, and other people of color (BIPOC).

Congress and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) have the responsibility to reduce these challenges to ensure the success of the next generation in agriculture. Many of the challenges farmers face require policy change beyond the farm gate, including climate action, immigration policy reform, increased access to health care and education, and more. USDA programs must be redesigned with young farmer challenges in mind, and investments in equitable outreach and staff training are necessary to ensure federal resources reach young farmers. Our survey found that young farmers continue to lack knowledge of available federal programs and have difficulty accessing loans and conservation cost-share dollars. BIPOC farmers especially report being denied loans and other forms of support from the USDA.

With the average U.S. farmer approaching 60 years old¹ and nearly half of U.S. farmland on the brink of changing ownership over the next two decades², creating policy solutions to support this new generation of growers is essential if we are going to achieve food security, healthy communities, and protect natural resources into the future.

Methodology

The National Young Farmers Coalition partnered with the University of Wisconsin Survey Center (UWSC) to design the 2022 National Young Farmer Survey. We resourced and worked closely with La Semilla, the Midwest Farmers of Color Collective, and the Land Stewardship Project to ensure geographic and racial equity in our outreach, and in parallel reached out to hundreds of organizations to share the survey uncompensated. We paid a stipend to 10 farmers to amplify our promotion of the survey on their social media accounts. We engaged in phone banking, text banking, outreach at farm conferences, press outreach, and a participant raffle to increase awareness and incentivize farmers to take the survey. Our 50 chapters also distributed the survey to farmers in their communities. We offered \$25 incentives to Spanish-first farmers to help us reach Spanish-first farmers and farmworkers.

The data from the Survey were analyzed by the University of Wisconsin Survey Center (UWSC) in June and July 2022. UWSC's expertise in instrument design is supported by a full-time survey methodologist and a system of internal training and professional development which ensures that their reviewers know how to apply the findings of this extensive literature to the research needs of clients.

The UWSC review process includes a full documented survey review, with both general survey recommendations and question by question feedback

and detailed suggestions for candidate revisions to questions. Recommendations draw on "best practices" in survey research questionnaire design and personal experience conducting hundreds of surveys, while attempting to avoid altering the substance of researcher's questions. Recommendations are aimed at both increasing the accuracy and reliability with which respondents process the questions, and increasing the response rate for the survey by decreasing the cognitive burden for respondents and the tendency for respondents to not begin the questionnaire or break-off during the questionnaire.

The data from the 2022 Survey were collected and analyzed using methods that adhere to UWSC's best practices. The data were not analyzed to determine statistical significance or correlations. The findings below should be understood as a narrative of the current experience of young farmers, and it was our aim to specifically highlight the unique challenges that Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian, and other young farmers of color face today. We acknowledge that there are complex histories and experiences for BIPOC farmers and immigrant farmers in the United States, and have worked hard to apply nuance to the survey design and in the writing of this report.

This survey did not specifically ask questions about the impacts of COVID-19 on young farmers' businesses. The impacts of the pandemic on farmers' businesses and personal lives are varied and ongoing. This survey was created to capture the current state of the young farmer experience, and it would be impossible to fully articulate the complexities of how the pandemic has impacted the next generation of growers.

About the National Young Farmer Survey

Every five years, the National Young Farmers Coalition surveys young farmers, ranchers, and growers across the country to understand their brightest hopes and biggest challenges, and the policy solutions that will help them to be successful in their farming careers. We conducted our first survey in 2011. That survey and resulting report, Building a Future with Farmers, launched our national grassroots coalition and brought awareness of young farmers' needs and challenges to Capitol Hill and USDA. Our call for accessible credit for young farmers led to the creation of the USDA Farm Service Agency Microloan Program, which has since helped tens of thousands of young and beginning farmers launch their careers in agriculture.

Our 2017 Survey reached 4,746 total respondents, including 3,517 aged 40 and younger, and gathered important insights about young farmers' changing needs and challenges that allowed us to build a responsive policy platform, the Young Farmer Agenda, ahead of the

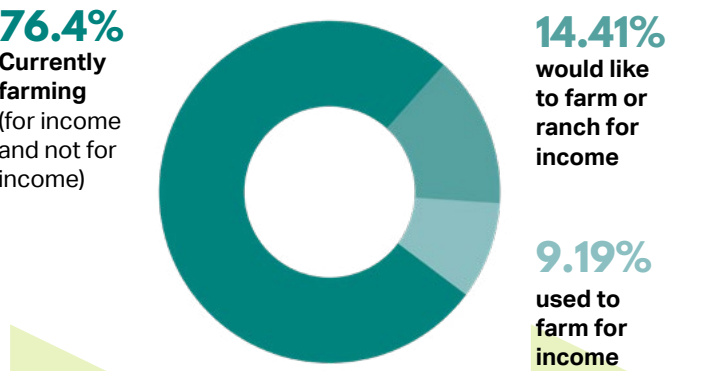
2018 Farm Bill. The Young Farmer Agenda led to passage of the best farm bill on record for young farmers, including historic funding for beginning farmer training and outreach to Socially Disadvantaged farmers, and an increased loan limit for USDA Direct Farm Ownership loans. Both surveys have been widely cited by academics, governments, and the press as the definitive data source on the nation's young farmers.

Our 2022 National Young Farmer Survey, conducted between December 2021 and April 2022, received 10,091 responses. We partnered with nonprofit organizations, farmers in our network, and funders to reach a more diverse sample of young farmers than ever before, and to more equitably represent the disproportionate challenges that Black, Indigenous, and other people of color (BIPOC) are facing in agriculture. In order to better capture the many and complex experiences of farmers across the country, we included farmers who don't farm for income, expanded race and ethnicity options, and updated gender and sexuality questions to be open-ended.

Survey Participants

The 2022 National Survey received 10,091 total responses. To ensure that we are representing the specific challenges of the nation's next generation of growers, we focused our analysis on farmers age 40 and under. Of our total survey respondents, 4,344 current, aspiring, and former farmers self-identified as age 40 or under, and we call these individuals "young farmers" throughout this report. Unless otherwise noted, survey results are from the 3,319 respondents who identified as young farmers who are currently farming. Many of the farmers not included in data analysis may have been under 40 but chose not to share their year of birth.

Of the participants aged 40 years or younger living in the United States:



KEY FINDINGS



Purchasing affordable land is even more challenging for BIPOC farmers

59% of all young farmers named finding affordable land to buy as “very or extremely” challenging.

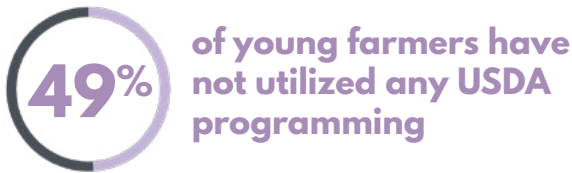
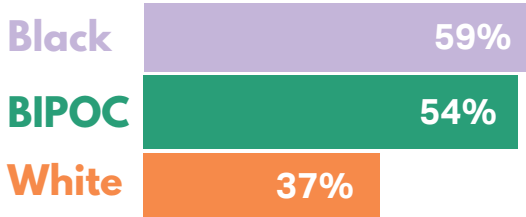
65% of BIPOC farmers ranked finding affordable land to buy as “very or extremely challenging,” including 68% of Indigenous respondents and 66% of Black respondents.

Over half of all respondents (54%), and 75% of Black farmers, said that they currently need more access to land, whether to buy or lease.

BIPOC farmers experience top young farmer challenges at heightened rates

Young BIPOC farmers were more likely to report top challenges as “very or extremely” challenging.

For example, 59% of Black respondents and 54% of BIPOC respondents said finding access to capital was “very or extremely challenging,” as compared to 37% of White respondents.



Of the young farmers who have not participated in a federal program, 71% were unfamiliar with the programs that could help them.

Black and Indigenous farmers reported challenges engaging with the USDA at higher rates

Black and Indigenous farmers reported that they were denied access to federal programs, being ignored by local or state USDA staff, and that a local or state USDA employee acted in ways that were unwelcoming to them based on their race at higher rates than White farmers.



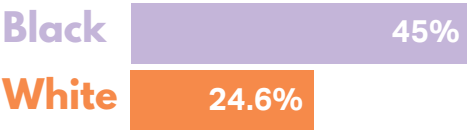
*** The majority of young farmers who took our survey describe their practices as “regenerative.” Regenerative agriculture broadly refers to an approach to farming and ranching that builds healthy soils and ecosystems, supports climate-resilient farms and communities, and addresses inequity in agriculture. Regenerative practices are not new, they have been innovated by Indigenous communities for thousands of years.

Young farmers are motivated by environmental conservation, anti-racism, and social justice

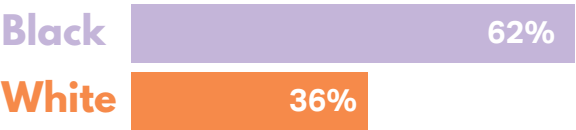


The burden of student loan debt is disproportionately affecting Black young farmers

Farmers who said that student loan debt was “very or extremely” challenging:



Farmers who have student loan debt:



Climate change is impacting young farmers’ businesses across the country



TOP YOUNG FARMER CHALLENGES

1. ACCESS TO LAND

Land access for farmers, ranchers, growers, and land stewards is critical to the health and well-being of our environment, economy, and marginalized communities. Land access is the top challenge cited by current farmers, aspiring farmers, and those who have stopped farming, and proves even more challenging for BIPOC farmers. Responses highlighted the ability to buy land as a key concern (compared to leasing or other methods of access).

59% of young farmers named **finding affordable land to buy as very or extremely challenging**

45% of young farmers named **finding available land to buy as very or extremely challenging**

Young BIPOC farmers and ranchers identified an additional challenge:

33% of young, BIPOC farmers shared that **maintaining access to land** was very or extremely challenging, compared to 17.4% of White farmers.

2. ACCESS TO CAPITAL

41% of survey respondents said that finding access to capital to grow their businesses was very or extremely challenging.

That number was even higher for farmers of color:

59% for Black farmers // **54%** for all BIPOC farmers

3. HEALTH CARE COSTS

40% of young farmers named personal or family health care costs as very or extremely challenging

21% said family, business partner, or healthcare costs were a top challenge

4. COST OF PRODUCTION

35%

of young farmers named that "the cost of production being greater than the price they receive for their products" is very or extremely challenging. When looking just at young farm owners, that number is 37%.

5. HOUSING

Finding an affordable place to live is a major challenge for young farmers, and a leading reason why former farmers quit. Land access and housing are closely intertwined:

83%

of farmers who own land purchased a property that included housing, compared to only 29% of farmers leasing land.

33%

of young farmers reported that finding or maintaining affordable housing was very or extremely challenging. For BIPOC young farmers, that number jumps to 42%.

6. STUDENT LOAN DEBT

38%

of young farmer respondents carry some student loan debt. Student debt burden is much higher for BIPOC farmers, and particularly Black young farmers.

62%

of Black young farmers have student loan debt, compared to only

36%

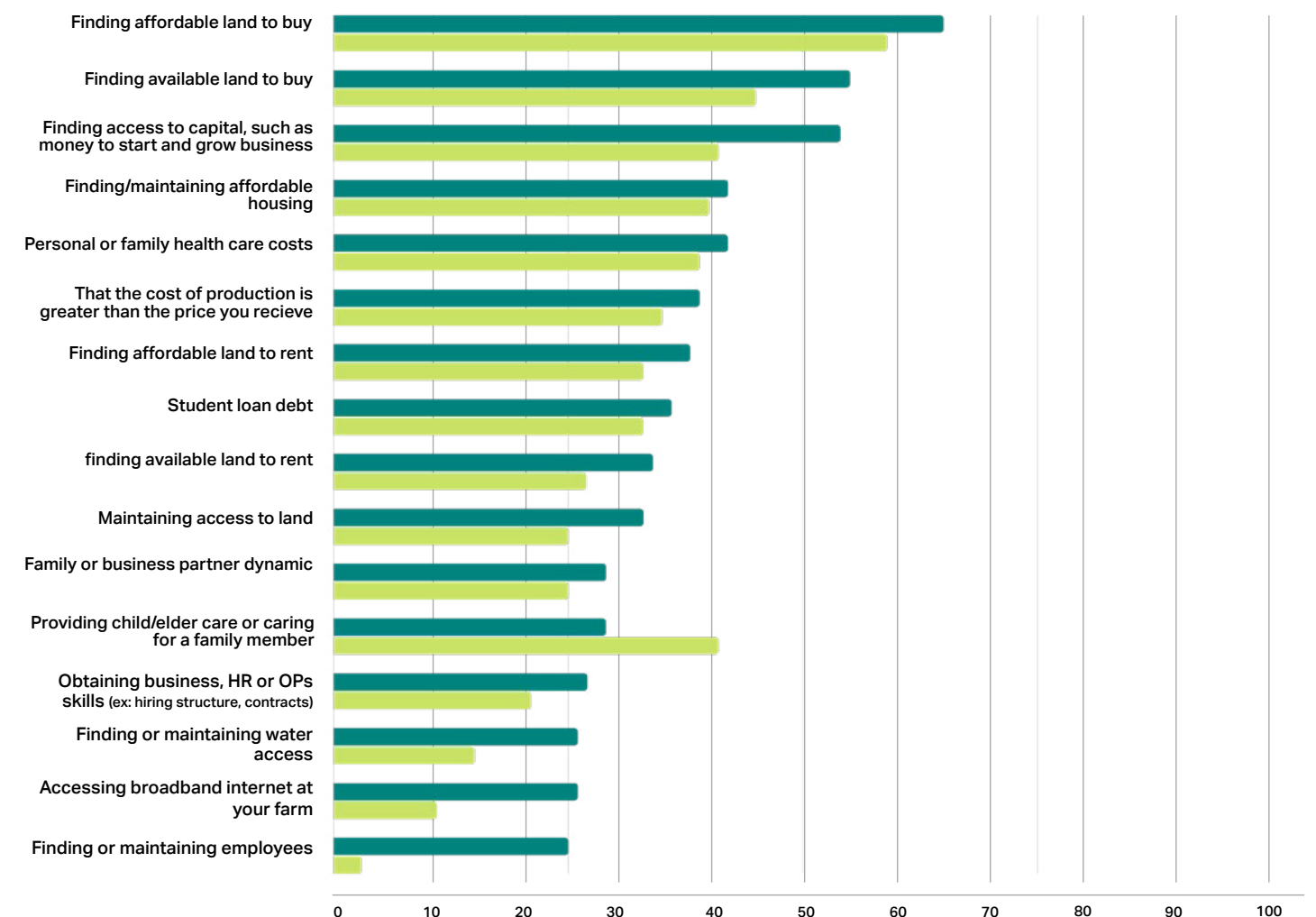
of White young farmers.

Student loan debt can prevent farmers from qualifying for additional financing needed to launch their businesses. Twenty percent of young farmers did not take out additional loans to support or grow their farm businesses because of existing student loan debt.

IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS, HOW CHALLENGING HAVE YOU FOUND...

% BIPOC FARMERS

% ALL RACES

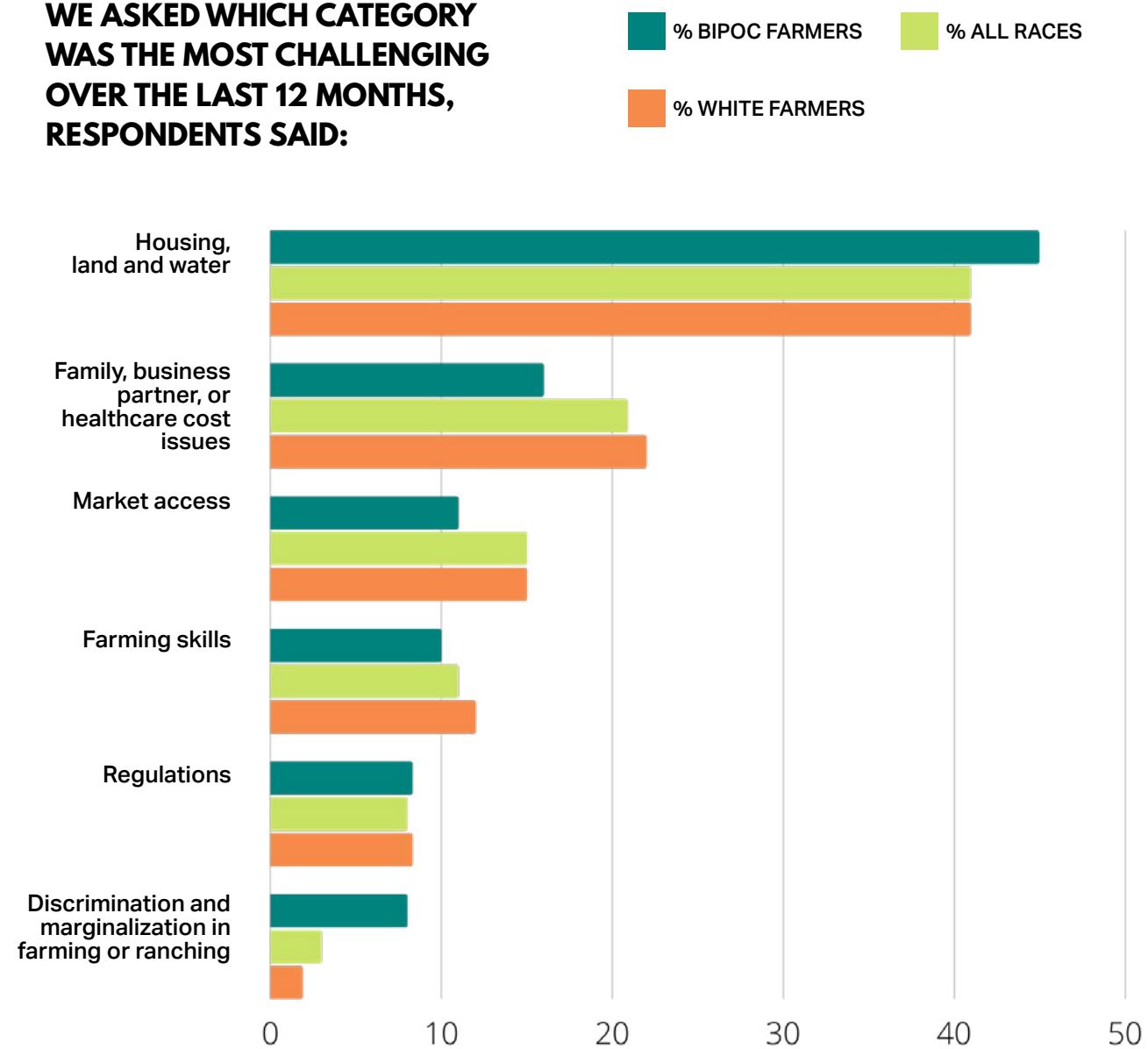


All of the top challenges reported by young farmers who participated in the survey are experienced at higher rates by young, BIPOC farmers.

Access to land, access to capital, health care costs, cost of production, access to housing, and student loans were reported at higher rates as being "very or extremely" challenging for BIPOC young farmers.

TOP CHALLENGES OF YOUNG FARMERS

WE ASKED WHICH CATEGORY WAS THE MOST CHALLENGING OVER THE LAST 12 MONTHS, RESPONDENTS SAID:



MOTIVATION & PURPOSE

Though the challenges stacked against them are significant, many of the young farmers in our network tell us that the fulfillment they feel from planting seeds and helping them grow to harvest, providing more healthful food for their communities, and stewarding natural resources has not diminished since their very first season.

By and far, the majority of young farmers we surveyed named that one of their farm's primary purposes for existing is stewarding and regenerating natural resources.

Eighty-three percent of young farmers were motivated by environmental conservation. For BIPOC young farmers that number is 87%, and it is 88% for Black young farmers.

The majority of young, BIPOC farmers also find motivation for their farming work in anti-racism. Twenty-nine percent of all young farmers, 54% of BIPOC young farmers, and 74% of Black young farmers surveyed named that "one of their farm's primary purposes is anti-racism work, or promoting healing from White Supremacy."

YOUNG FARMERS ARE MOTIVATED BY CONSERVATION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE.

When we asked young farmers to name another primary reason they are farming, their answers included:

“To produce food for the local community, protect the land, teach young farmers, and build community”

“Create food sovereignty for native community”

“Strengthen resiliency and food security within our community.”

“Provide meaningful employment opportunities, feed our community , protect our air, soil and water resources”

“Community support for LGBTQ folks”

“To carry knowledge forward.”



WHO ARE THE NATION'S YOUNG FARMERS?

With the help of over 100 partner organizations, Young Farmers surveyed 10,091 total respondents between January and April 2022. After limiting the sample to respondents 40 years of age and younger living in the United States, our analysis represents 4,344 aspiring, current, and former farmers. Unless otherwise noted, "young farmers" refers to the 3,319 respondents 40 years of age and younger who are currently farming. Submitting age was an optional field, thus many young farmers who took the survey were not included in the final sample of farmers 40 and under.

NOT FROM FARM FAMILIES

78%

of young farmers identify as first-generation farmers

RURAL

78%

of young farmers said their farm or ranch is located on rural land³

FEMALE, NON-BINARY, AND LGBTQ+

63.5%

of young farmers surveyed identify as female, nonbinary, or a gender other than cisgender male

24.2%

of young farmers identify as a sexuality other than heterosexual

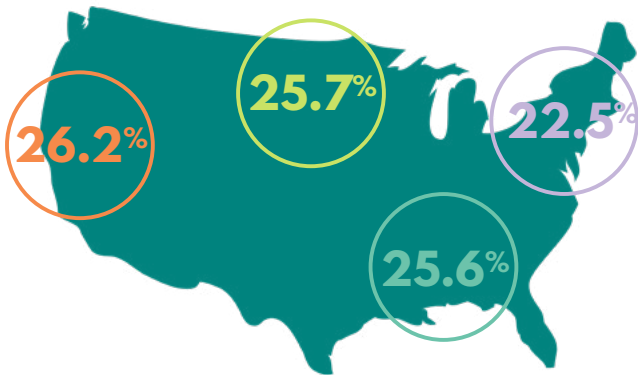
HIGHLY EDUCATED

78.5%

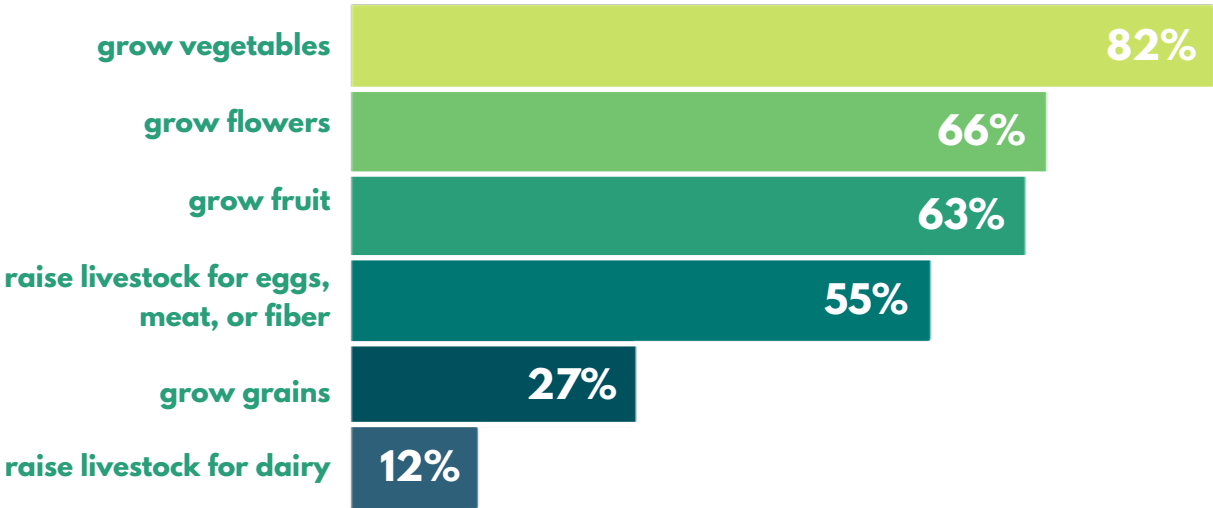
of young farmers hold an associate degree or higher

Where our survey respondents farm

- West >>
- Midwest >>
- SE / Mid-Atlantic >>
- Northeast >>



GROWING VEGETABLES AND LIVESTOCK ON DIVERSIFIED FARMS



ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDS

86%

of young farmers identify the practices they use on their farm or ranch as "regenerative"

97%

identify them as "sustainable"

YOUNG FARMERS ARE MOTIVATED BY CONSERVATION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

83%

of young farmers named that "one of their farm's primary purposes for existing is engaging in conservation or regeneration."

That number is 87% for BIPOC young farmers and 88% for Black young farmers.

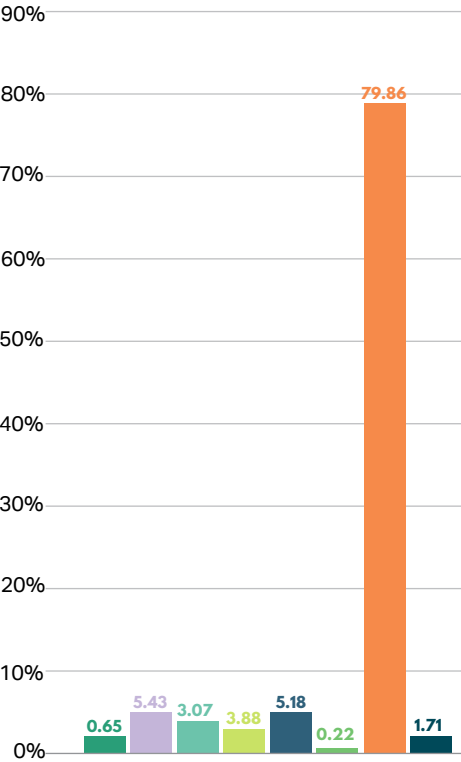
29%

of young farmers and 74% of Black farmers named that "one of their farm's primary purposes is anti-racism work, or promoting healing from White Supremacy."

//AGE



//DISTRIBUTION OF YOUNG FARMERS CURRENTLY FARMING BY SELF-IDENTIFIED RACE

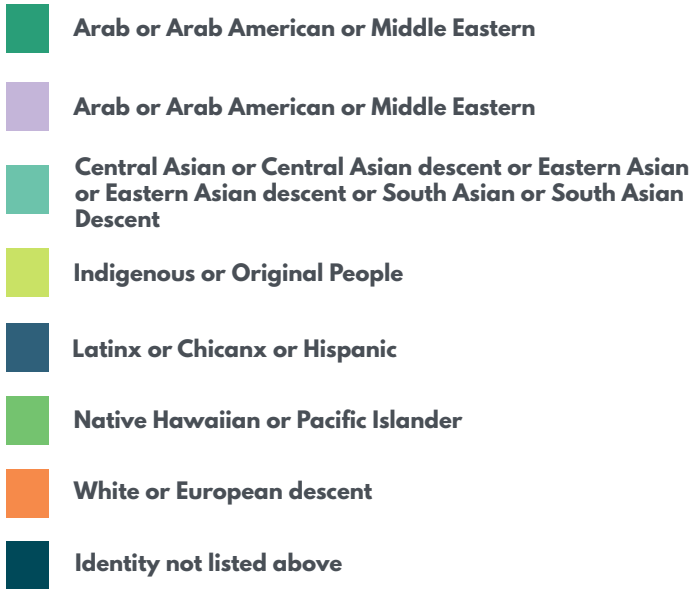
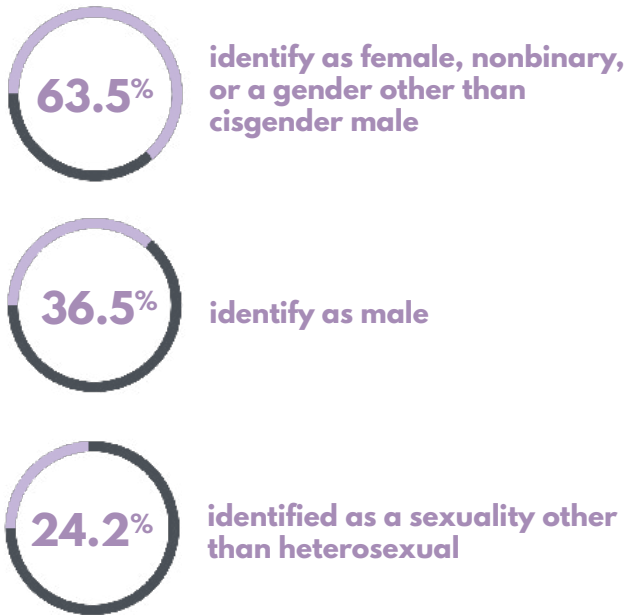


Self-identified race was coded by UWSC in the following method: "White was listed at the end the list and the code checked each of the other categories down the list to assign the race/ethnicity, and doesn't update the code after it has been first assigned. As a result, someone who checked Black and White would have been coded as Black. Someone who chose Asian and White, would have been coded Asian. Anyone who chose two non-White options would have been assigned the first listed."

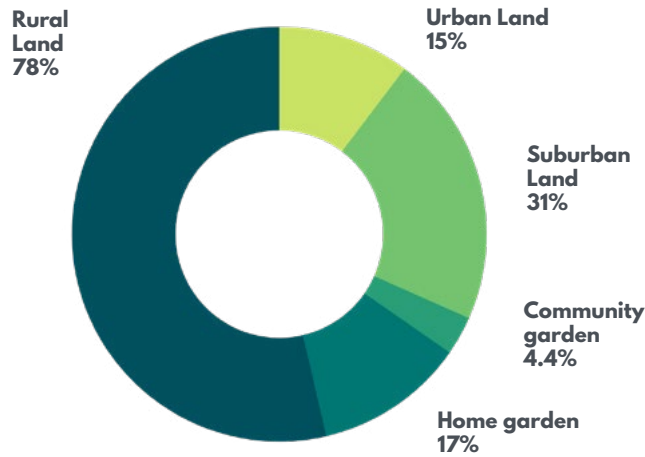
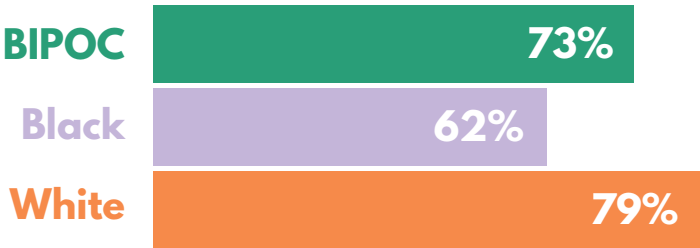
//GENDER + SEXUAL ORIENTATION

The 2017 Census of Agriculture reported that 36% of producers identify as female, but only collects data on male/female gender identification and does not ask about sexual orientation. In our survey, we asked respondents to share how they identify their current gender and how they identify their current sexual orientation in an open-ended response. This survey report provides the largest known comprehensive dataset on U.S. farmers' sexual identification.

Of those who responded:

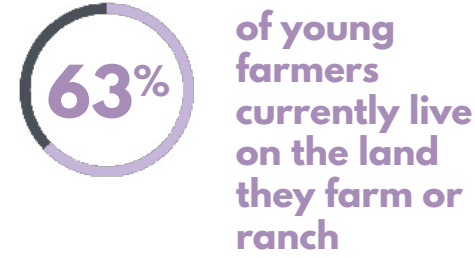


//FARM LOCATION

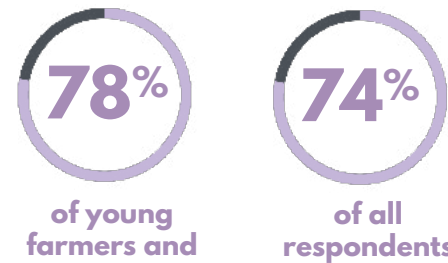


Respondents were able to select more than one option

//HOUSING



//FAMILY BACKGROUND



identify as first-generation farmers.

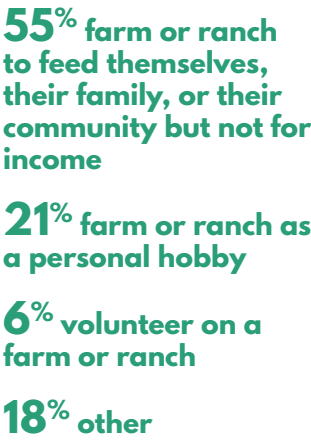
First-generation farmers do not inherit knowledge of the trade from their families, and likely do not inherit a farm business, land, infrastructure, or networks to support them.

//FARM ROLE

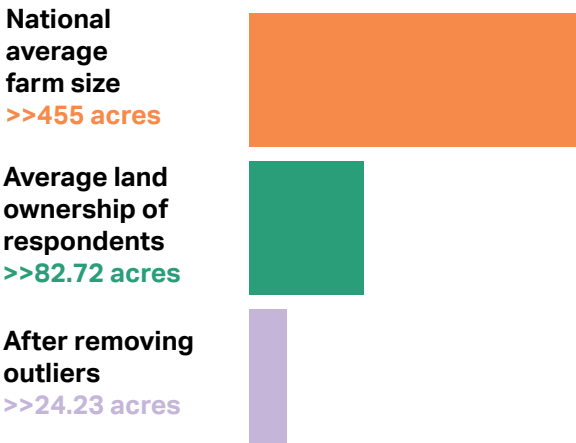
For income:



Not for income:



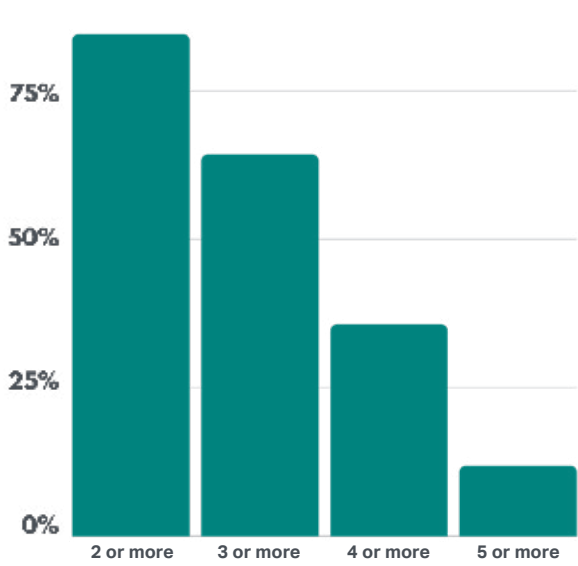
Farm Acreage Held:



//DIVERSITY IN PRODUCTION

Young farmers are building multi-enterprise businesses. We define enterprise as a broad category of production (flowers, fruit, grains, livestock for dairy, livestock for egg, meat, or fiber, and vegetables.) Within each enterprise, they are growing a diversity of species, varieties, and breeds.

% of Young Farmers with Multiple Enterprises:

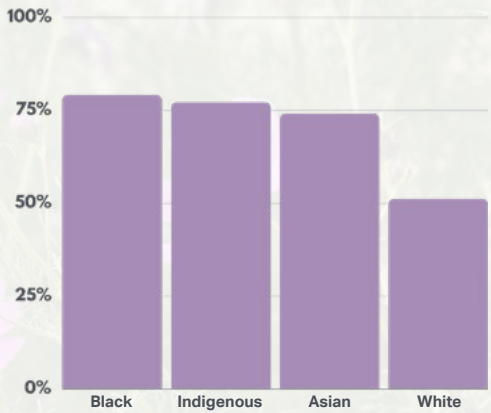


What Young Farmers Grow: (by average numbers of crop type or livestock species)⁸

Vegetables	28.3
Flowers	17.7
Fruit	5.3
Livestock for egg, meat or fiber	4.0
Livestock for dairy	3.7
Grains	2.8

//CULTURALLY IMPORTANT CROPS

74% of young, BIPOC farmers grow crops they identify as culturally important



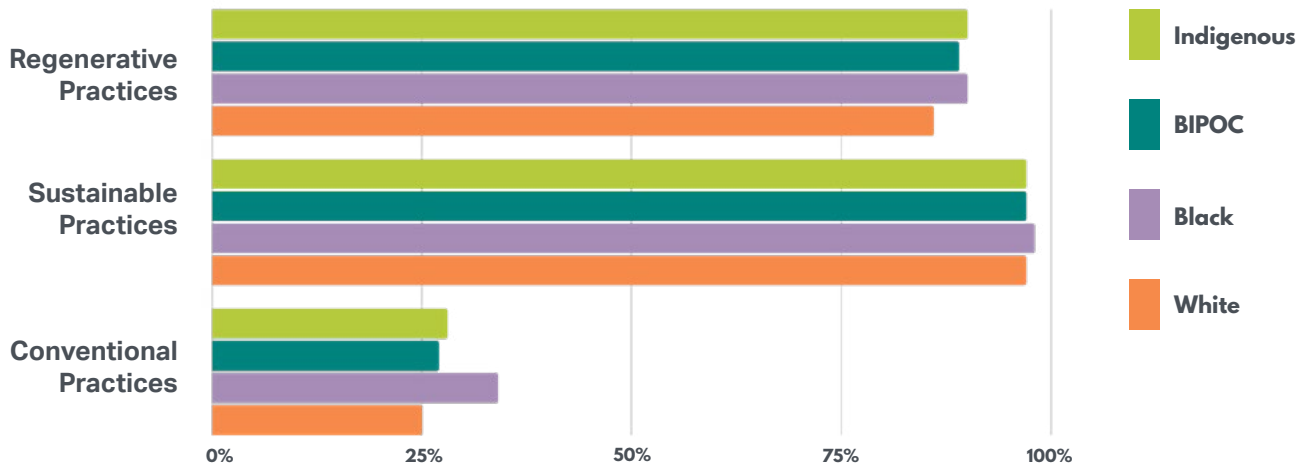
//GROWING PRACTICES AND SUSTAINABILITY

Respondents were able to select multiple options to describe their growing practices, and 97% of young farmers shared that they use sustainable practices, with 86% indicating that they use regenerative practices. Twenty-five percent of young farmers indicated that they use conventional practices. Twenty-one percent of respondents have USDA Organic certification and 2.3% have USDA Grass-Fed certification. Other practices young farmers identify using on their farms included low- and no-till methods, biodynamic practices, holistic or rotational grazing, Certified Naturally Grown practices, or practices approved by the Real Organic Project or state organic certification.

86%
of respondents use regenerative practices

97%
of respondents use sustainable practices

25%
of young farmers use conventional practices



Sustainable practices or certifications young farmers cited include:

- Low and no-till
- Certified Naturally Grown
- Biodynamic practices
- Real Organic Project
- Holistic or rotational grazing
- State certified organic

Certifications:



//REVENUE AND MARKET CHANNELS

Among young farmers, 74.11% of farm owners, operators, and managers reported that their farms grossed \$100,000 or less in 2020. Sixty-nine percent of farm owners, operators, and managers of all ages reported that their farms grossed \$100,000 or less in 2020.

On average, for young farmers who responded:



After removing outliers:

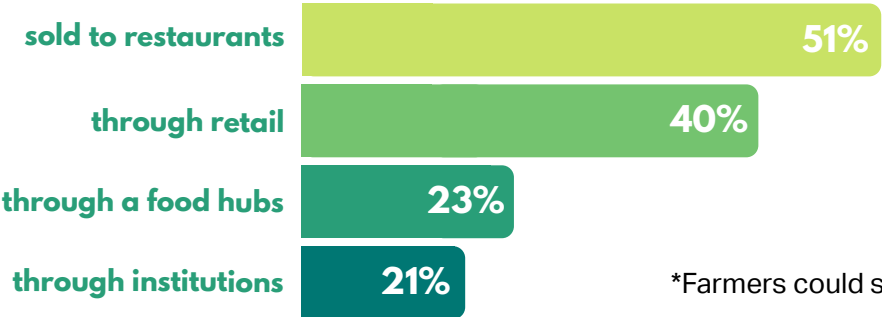


On average, all farmers of all ages who responded grossed \$145,833 in 2020, but the median was \$30,000.

For direct-to-consumer sales outlets:*



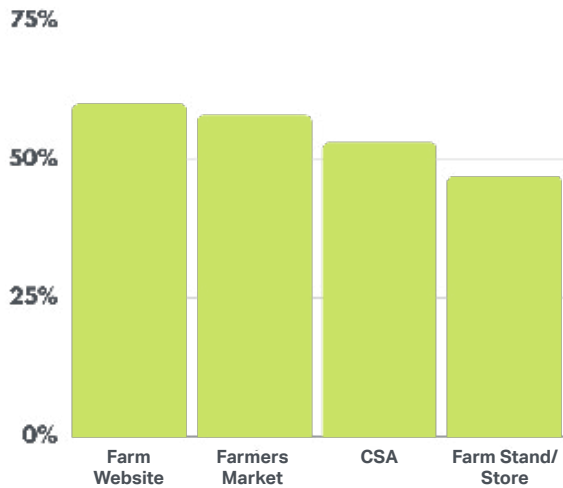
For wholesale sales outlets:*



*Farmers could select more than one option.

//MARKETS

86.4% of young farmers sell through at least one direct-to-consumer channel

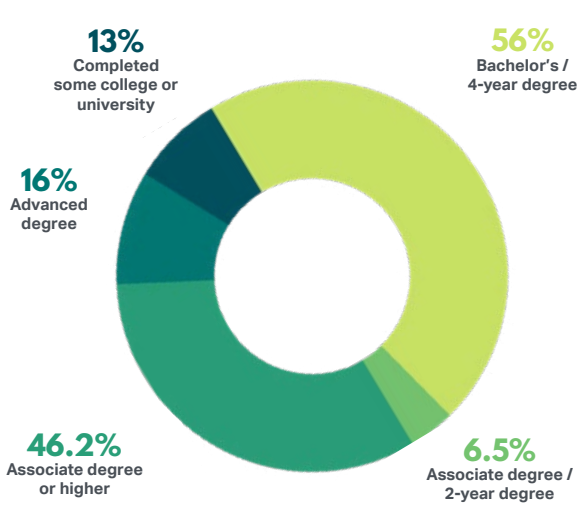


40.5% sell to at least one wholesale market

Restaurants	51%
Retail markets, such as supermarkets, food cooperatives, and grocery stores	40%
Food hub or value-added producer	23%
Institutions, such as schools, universities, hospitals, or food banks	22%
Commodity market, such as through a cooperative	18%
Distributor	14%
Forward contracting to sell directly to an individual processor	12%
Commodity market, such as through an intermediary like a grain elevator	6.5%
Production contracts or custom feeding for livestock you do not own	2.4%

//EDUCATION AND STUDENT LOAN DEBT

The young farmers who participated in our survey are highly educated. 78.5% hold an associate degree or higher (56% hold a four-year degree, 16% hold an advanced degree, and 6.5% hold an associate or two-year degree). 78.5% hold an associate degree or higher (56% hold a four-year degree, 16% hold an advanced degree, and 6.5% hold an associate or two-year degree). This is higher than the national average: 48.4% of Americans over 25 years old have an associate's degree or higher.



38% of young farmer respondents carry some student loan debt

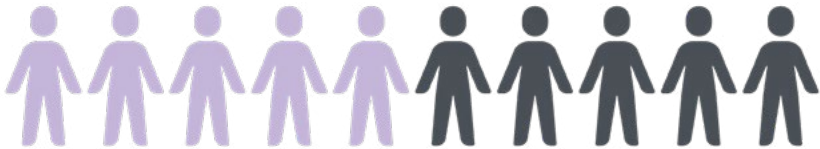
Student loan debt is a particular challenge for young farmers seeking to build careers in agriculture, as it can prevent them from qualifying for additional financing needed to launch their businesses. Twenty percent of young farmers did not take out additional loans to support or grow their farm businesses because of existing student loan debt.

//LABOR



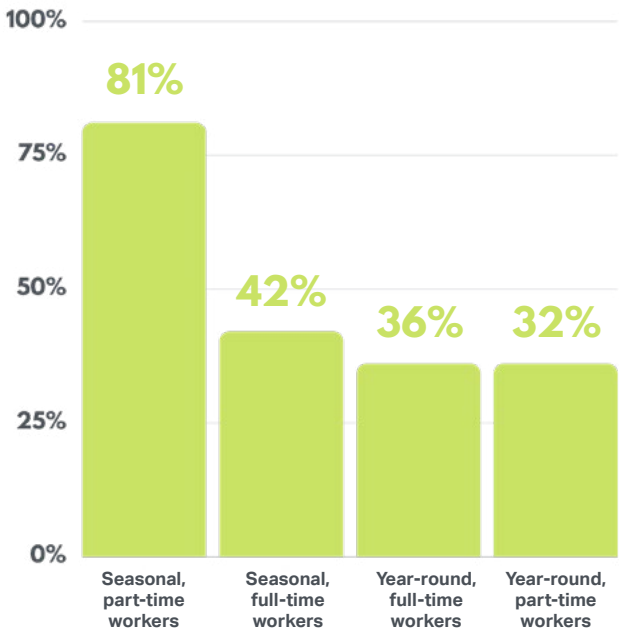
of young farmers worked over 40 hours per week during their farming or ranching seasons

48% of young farmers hired workers, mostly seasonal-part time workers

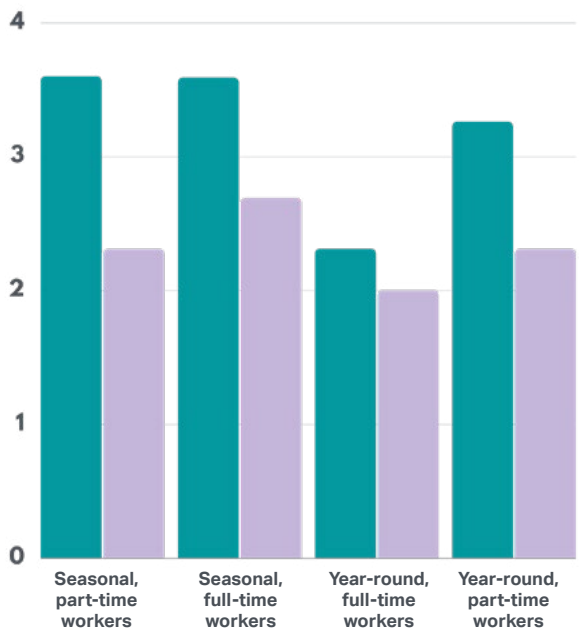


About half of young farmers hired workers in the past 12 months, and on average, they hired four or fewer of each type of worker

Types of Workers by Seasonality:



Average Number of Workers Hired by Young Farmers:



Outliers removed



The 2022 Young Farmer Agenda

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS

Improve access to land and capital for young and BIPOC farmers

- 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
- Invest in incentivizing farm transition and preventing land loss in communities of color
- Ensure the accessibility and accountability of USDA programs, centering young BIPOC farmers
- Facilitate voluntary, community-led farmland protection that keeps land in the hands of growers
- Invest in data collection, reporting, and research on farmland tenure, ownership and transition

Support farmer mental health and well-being

- Establish a national health insurance program
- Expand Medicaid access in all states
- Reauthorize and continue to fund Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network (FRSAN) at regional and state levels

Address cost of production and market access challenges

- Codify USDA’s recently announced regional food business centers
- Drive better coordination and knowledge and data sharing across Farm Production and Conservation agencies, Rural Development, and Agricultural Marketing Service
- Expand outreach regarding, and make additional improvements to, the Value-Added Producer Grant program
- Expand relationships with trusted entities that can verify and improve price discovery of local and regional specialty crops
- Reauthorize and continue funding Urban Agriculture and Innovation Production grants

Increase access to affordable housing

- The Rural Development Rural Business-Cooperative Service should utilize the Community Facilities loan programs to develop on and off-farm community-led housing solutions for farmers and farmworkers
- Continue funding the Rural Housing Service Farm Labor Housing Loans and Grants

Invest in climate action and water access

- Improve access to USDA conservation programs for water and climate resilience
- Ensure that USDA resources and programs are culturally appropriate for Indigenous and farmworker populations
- Improve outreach to young and BIPOC farmers
- Increase funding for research on equitable and sustainable land and water stewardship
- Support young farmers and farmworkers facing disasters
-
- Reform laws and regulations to support farm and food system workers
- Enact a path to citizenship for undocumented farmworkers and their families
- Conduct a thorough review of citizenship and tax identification requirements for participation in USDA programs.
- Allow applicants to or beneficiaries of USDA programs to use any tax identification number recognized by the Internal Revenue Service in lieu of citizenship based eligibility requirements

Improve USDA access and accountability

- Adequately resource state Beginning Farmer and Rancher coordinating positions to be focused full-time on serving beginning farmers, and elevate the national coordinating position to be institutionalized as part of the Farm Production and Conservation Mission Area
- Increase the collection and reporting of demographic data to better understand who is accessing USDA resources and thus improve accountability to young and BIPOC farmers in how programs are implemented, evaluated, and improved over time
- Improve recruitment, hiring, and training of USDA customer-facing employees, and invest in staff competency around diversity, equity, and inclusion principles
- Increase investments in outreach through trusted organizations to improve awareness among BIPOC and young farmers of federal programs and them in accessing assistance

CASE STUDY

Tessa and Wyatt Parks

W.T. Farms,
Minnesota



Livestock Farmers Limited by Land Access

My name is Tessa Parks and my husband Wyatt and I began our farm business, W.T. Farms, in 2018. After working on others' farms and dabbling in farming on our own in Washington State for six years, we moved to Minnesota in order to find more affordable farmland.

We now raise Holstein steers that we purchase as day-old calves from a local dairy farmer. We practice rotational grazing with our animals on 20 acres of rented land at Sharing Our Roots, an educational farm and nonprofit in Northfield, MN. We ultimately market our steers as beef shares for our local community and the Minneapolis-St. Paul metro area.

While we're grateful to operate as a part of the Sharing Our Roots landshare program, a major barrier in further developing our business has been finding more secure land closer to where we live. The land we rent is nearly half an hour from where we live, so we feel the strain as we raise animals 24/7, including bottle feeding calves, so far from home.

We envision a future where we can raise a diverse host of animals including pigs, chickens, and turkeys. Our current rental agreement does not allow hogs onsite, and because of the distance we live from the farm site, raising animals that require more frequent tending is difficult and unsustainable.

Though we live in a small town surrounded by farmland, we are unable to find available land that will meet the needs of our growing farm anywhere nearby. Any space we are going to invest our time into needs to be one that can support regenerative practices, such as rotational grazing and bale grazing. Any parcels with water access and enough space are planted in conventional crops.

Land access isn't our only barrier as young farmers. Our farm budget currently relies on Wyatt and I both working full-time jobs off the farm, which in turn limits the time and energy we have to invest in growing our operation. Many of our needs as a farm business rely on the approval of industry gatekeepers like USDA and Farm Credit, who have the power to deny us credit and access when purchasing feed, equipment, supplies, animals, and land. One of the only ways we have to mitigate their influence is by paying cash from our off-farm work for the equipment and supplies we need. We were very fortunate this season to receive financing for hay equipment; however, the loan would only cover 75% of the purchase value. Only because we had already invested heavily in the business from personal funds could we show sufficient equity to cover the remaining 25%. We worked with an agriculture specific lender that was able to underwrite the loan without us having cash, something other lenders generally will not do.

I am a Japanese-Filipino queer woman, and as part of a mixed-race couple I see the ease with which Wyatt navigates certain male-dominated spaces as a White man. When we're together, it is obvious that he is assumed to be the farmer and I am just the "helpful wife." When I go by myself to places like the farm supply store, I am regularly treated as if I am unable or unqualified to be buying farm supplies. On one occasion I was even cautioned that calves don't make good pets simply because I was buying milk replacer. Obvious assumptions are made about my competency and legitimacy as a farmer based on my identity, and this stirs a hesitancy to talk to suppliers and lenders or approach larger financial institutions who otherwise provide services to local farms. In my experience, the funding and support gap between White male farmers and farmers of color is evident in nearly every aspect of the farming industry.



Wyatt and I are exploring options like working with Agrarian Commons, a nonprofit that supports beginning farmers with accessing land, as well as purchasing land outright as we continue to search for land to grow W.T. Farms. As we look for our permanent home, a primary goal of ours is to continue to be sustainable land stewards. Between our educational and professional experiences, we are both well aware of the environmental cost of poor farming practices. We believe it is in farmers' best interest to protect the natural environment and practice conservation techniques as much as possible.

“AS PART OF A MIXED-RACE COUPLE I SEE THE EASE WITH WHICH WYATT NAVIGATES CERTAIN MALE-DOMINATED SPACES AS A WHITE MAN.”



TOP CHALLENGES IN DEPTH

LAND

//ACCESSING FARMLAND IS THE TOP CHALLENGE YOUNG FARMERS AND YOUNG BIPOC FARMERS FACE.

Equitable access to affordable, quality farmland is a foundational need of the growers and land stewards across the country. In both of our previous National Young Farmer Surveys, access to land has been at, or near, the top of the list of barriers reported by young farmers.^{10 11} Our 2022 results show this challenge is growing. Regardless of years of experience or geographic location, land access is the top challenge facing the next generation of farmers in the United States, and this challenge is even greater for Black, Indigenous, and other people of color (BIPOC) farmers.

Land ownership provides the security that is critical for many of the long-term investments that farmers must make in soil health, infrastructure, and irrigation. It enables them to farm in deep relationship with the land and to build financial equity. The stability that comes from land ownership can also have immense impacts on farmer mental health and resiliency in the face of the many challenges of farming, such as climate change.

Land ownership is rooted in the dispossession of Indigenous land and centuries of stolen labor from Black, Indigneous, and other people of color. Land-based discrimination, sanctioned through public policy, has occurred while the contributions these communities have made to U.S. agriculture remain largely unacknowledged. This history, and the resulting inequity, is essential to understanding the land access challenges young farmers face today.

//FARMERS STRUGGLE TO FIND AND MAINTAIN AFFORDABLE, SECURE LAND ACCESS

Buying farmland is expensive and out of reach for many young farmers, if land is available for them to consider purchasing at all.

The greatest overall challenge current farmers under 40 reported was finding affordable land to buy, followed by finding available land to buy:

59% of young farmers said finding affordable land to buy is very or extremely challenging.

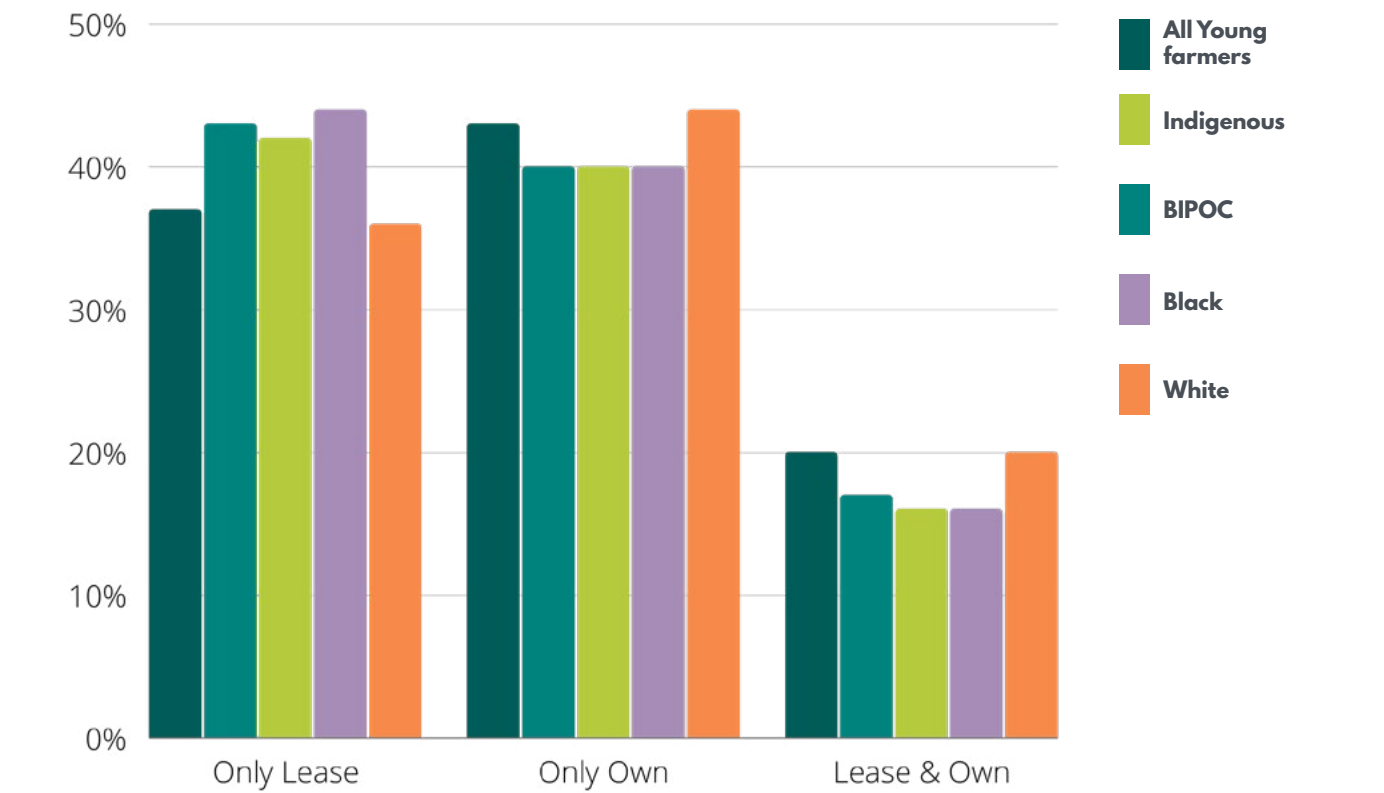
45% of young farmers said finding available land to buy is very or extremely challenging.

For BIPOC farmers, the barrier of secure access to land is even higher: 65% named finding affordable land to buy as very or extremely challenging and 55% named finding available land to buy as very or extremely challenging

Respondents also face barriers renting land, with more than one-third of all respondents naming finding available land to rent (39%) and finding affordable land to rent (33%) as very or extremely challenging. An additional land access challenge we asked about was maintaining access to land, which was very or extremely challenging for 33% of BIPOC respondents, including 37% of Black farmers and Indigenous farmers.

//RACIAL DISPARITIES IN LAND ACCESS

Ownership of Land vs Leasing by Race:



Black farmers, Indigenous farmers, other farmers of color, and immigrant farmers have faced historic discrimination and dispossession of land that has shaped the demographics of farming and patterns of land ownership we see in the U.S. today.

Ninety-five percent of all farmers in the U.S. identify as White,¹² and 98% of farmland is owned by White people.¹³

Policies like the Indian Removal Act of 1830, the Homestead Acts of the mid-1800s, the revocation of Field Order No. 15, and the Alien Land Laws of the early 1900s, among others, have dispossessed Indigenous people and other people of color from hundreds of millions of acres of land, while facilitating land ownership and access for White Americans.¹⁴

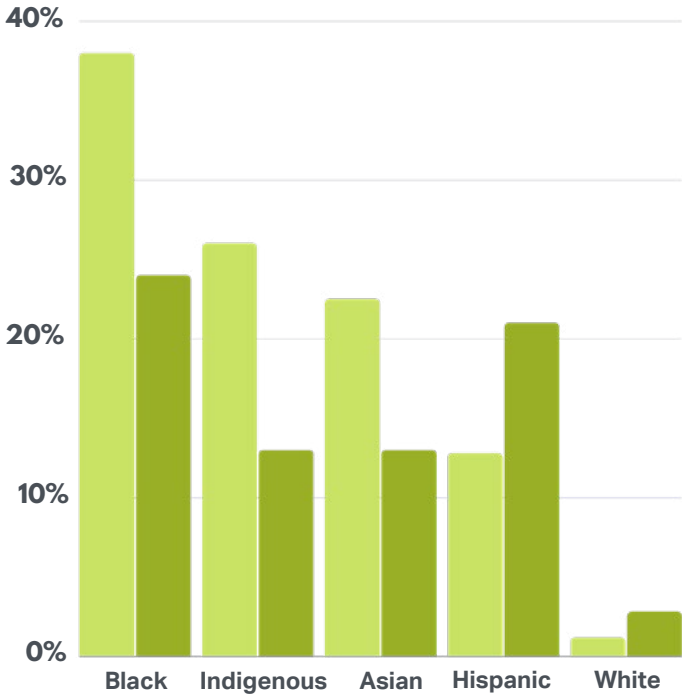
The legacies of slavery, sharecropping and tenant farming, and heirs property challenges have prevented Black farmers from building equity in land. Despite this, many Black farmers succeeded in purchasing property, but discriminatory lending practices and ingrained racism at USDA offices caused significant land loss in the ensuing decades. In 1910, Black farmers owned 16 to 19 million acres of farmland, but 90% of that land was lost over the next century, resulting in thousands of Black farmers leaving agriculture. **There were almost one million Black farmers in 1920; today there are approximately 45,000.**¹⁵

Unfortunately, the racism confronting BIPOC farmers is not a thing of the past. Ongoing discrimination impacts the ability of BIPOC farmers to access land today. Many of the BIPOC young farmers who responded to the 2022 Survey report that they have experienced discrimination in their farming careers.

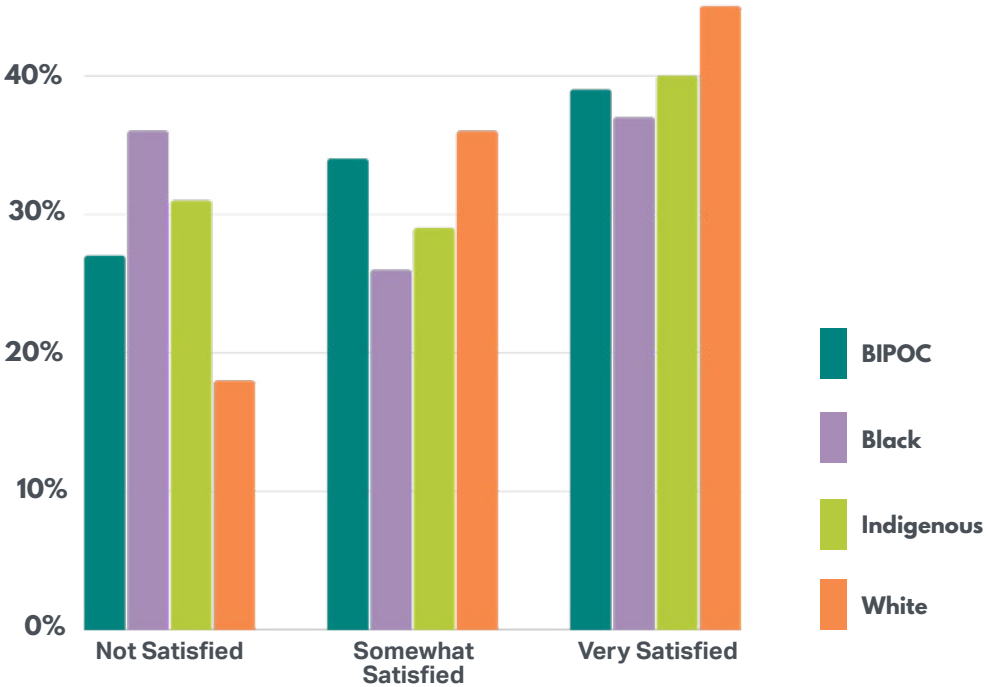
Extremely Challenging

Somewhat Challenging

Farmers Naming Racial Discrimination as Very or Extremely Challenging by Race:



Farmer Satisfaction with Land Arrangements by Race:



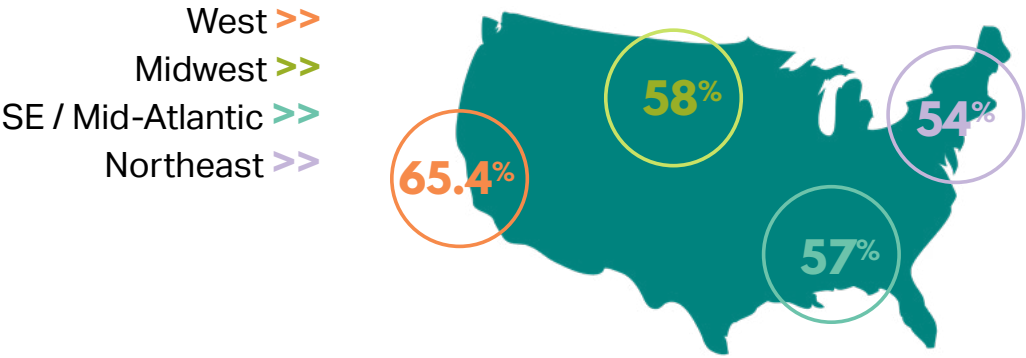
BIPOC farmers reported being less satisfied with their current land arrangements than White farmers: 27% of BIPOC young farmers who have access to land reported being not at all or slightly satisfied with their current land arrangements compared to 18.7% of White young farmers respondents. Black young farmers responded most often that they are “not at all or only slightly satisfied,” at a rate of 36%.

Regardless of experience or location, the majority of farmers identified finding affordable land to buy as being very or extremely challenging.

Finding Affordable Land Very/Extremely Challenging by Experience:

Farming > 5 years	53%
Farming 5-10 years	55.3%
Farming < 10 years	52.1%

Finding Affordable Land Very/Extremely Challenging by Region:



Land access is a challenge for young farmers across the U.S., regardless of how long they have been farming or the geographic region in which they farm. Farmland is a highly desirable asset for more than just agriculture. As developers, investors, technology companies, and individuals looking for a rural residence all compete with farmers for acreage, the cost of land is steadily becoming disconnected from its value for agricultural production.¹⁶

The prospect of saving enough money for a down payment while learning how to farm is becoming increasingly elusive. For many farmworkers, especially those who have traveled to the U.S. to work, language barriers, legal obstacles, and ingrained systems of oppression in farm labor further exacerbate this barrier.

Land prices have been steadily rising for decades and have skyrocketed in recent years.¹⁷ This is particularly true in parts of the country near urban areas—precisely where access to customers and the most profitable market opportunities exist for new farmers.¹⁸ Young farmers are easily outbid by more established farmers and non-farmers who are able to more readily offer a cash bid or secure access to credit. Land is often used as collateral for loans as well, which means existing landowners gain an additional advantage.¹⁹

//FARMERS ARE LEAVING AGRICULTURE
BECAUSE OF LAND ACCESS CHALLENGES

Nearly half of all U.S. farmland is expected to change hands in the next two decades,²⁰ which will be a crucial opportunity to shift power and resources to young, BIPOC farmers and lift up the next generation of farmers as a whole. Yet rising land prices are causing secure access to affordable farmland to be increasingly out of reach for young farmers.

Land access is a primary reason that young farmers are leaving agriculture. Sixty-seven percent of respondents who quit farming said that finding affordable land to buy was a barrier that was very or extremely challenging, and 54% identified that finding affordable land to lease was a barrier that was very or extremely challenging

//LEASING LAND

Land as an entity that can be bought and sold is a settler-colonial construct. This framework has been enforced through the United States’ political and legal systems, and it has been used to dispossess Indigenous people of billions of acres of land.²¹ Many young farmers may wish to have long-term land access without relying on ownership, but feel they have few other realistic options.

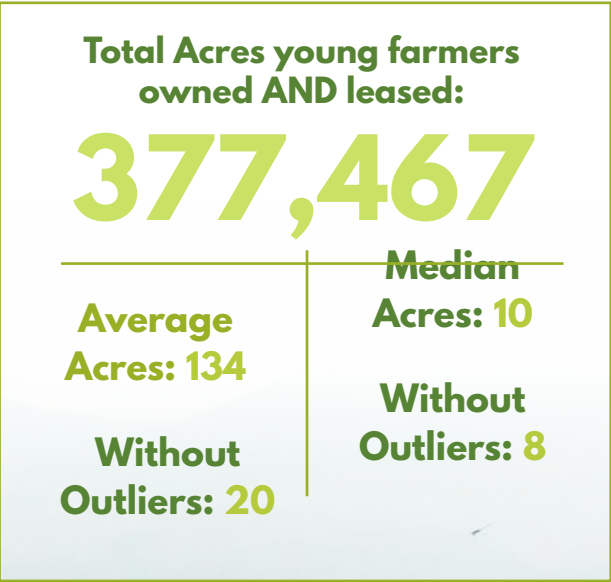
Land ownership provides security, but it comes at a cost—50.3% of young farmers who only own land and 49.2% who both own and lease land reported that they feel that what they currently pay is somewhat or very expensive, compared to 31.1% of young farmers who only lease land.

37% of young farmers only lease the land they farm or ranch

43% only own the land they farm or ranch

20% both own and lease the land they farm or ranch

Young farmers owned on average 82.72 acres and leased on average 190.1 acres



//LEASING LAND

Twenty-nine percent of young farmers found finding available land to rent very or extremely challenging, and 33% found finding affordable land to rent very or extremely challenging.

While the flexibility of leasing can be a good risk management strategy as farmers are getting started or growing their businesses, leasing is rarely viable as a farmer’s sole long-term form of land access. These often precarious arrangements mean that farmers do not have the long-term security to make investments, build lasting marketing channels, or plan for their personal futures. Additionally, short-term leases or handshake deals can limit farmers’ access to federal farm programs and disaster aid, which often require a written lease lasting the length of program agreements.

Of the 57% of young farmers who rely on leased land to farm, 79% are leasing land from an individual private landowner, including family members. In agricultural communities across the country, leases are often handshake agreements between neighbors and friends. For first-generation, and particularly BIPOC farmers, outside of these insider landowner networks it can be exceedingly difficult to find land to lease. According to the most recently available USDA data, 97% of principal landlords are White, 87% are not farm operators, and 45% have never farmed.

While 81% of White young farmers lease from an individual landowner, this percentage drops to 72% for BIPOC young farmers, including 66% for Black young farmers and Asian young farmers, and 77% for Indigenous young farmers.

Who are Young Farmers Leasing From?	All Young Farmers	All BIPOC YF	Black YF	White YF
Individual private landowner, including a family member	79%	72%	66%	81%
Non-profit, such as a land trust	15%	21%	27%	13%
Religious institution	3%	4%	11%	2%
Federally-held public land, such as from the Bureau of Land Management	1%	3%	6%	1%
Locally-held public land, such as from a state or municipality	12%	13%	15%	11%
Land held in trust by the federal government for the benefit of a Native American individual or Tribal Nation	1%	6%	8%	0.30%
Incubator property from a private owner or a non-profit	9%	15%	23%	7%
Publicly-held land as incubator property	3%	6%	11%	2%
Lease-to-own arrangement	6%	12%	23%	5%
Ground lease arrangement, also known as a long-term lease of the land combined with ownership of the infrastructure on the land	12%	15%	19%	11%

//VARIATION IN LAND OWNERSHIP BY GEOGRAPHIC REGION

According to the 2022 Survey results, rates of land ownership vary by geographic region for young farmers. Sixty-nine percent of young farmers indicated that they own some or all of the land they farm or ranch in both the Midwest as well as the Southeast and Mid-Atlantic region, and 61% of young farmers located in the Northeast do.

By contrast, only 52% of young farmers own the land they farm or ranch on in the West. The West also had the highest percentage of farmers who only lease land (48%). This is consistent with the relative cost of cropland in the Western U.S. compared to other regions of the country.²³

In the West, farmers reported that they only lease their land more often, whereas in the Southeast and Mid-Atlantic they reported more often that they own their land: often that they own their land:

LOCATION	LEASE	OWN	LEASE & OWN
WEST	48%	35%	17%
MIDWEST	31%	45%	24%
SE/MID-ATLANTIC	31%	52%	17%
NORTHEAST	38%	44%	17%

//FIRST-GENERATION FARMERS HAVE ACCESS TO FEWER ACRES

Land access is a particularly acute challenge for first-generation farmers, who are less likely to own or inherit land than multi-generation farmers who grew up on a farm. Multi-generation young farmers reported owning and leasing more acreage than those who are first-generation. Twenty-two percent of multi-generation young farmers owned over 50 acres and 24% leased over 40 acres compared to 9% of first-generation farmers who selected either of these categories.

In many cases, farmland is sold by word of mouth or without ever coming on the market, which disproportionately excludes BIPOC farmers and other first-generation farmers who do not have deep community connections to majority-White landowner networks or a family history in agriculture. Sixty-nine percent of young former farmers who left agriculture identified as first-generation farmers.

//YOUNG FARMERS NEED MORE LAND AND DESIRE THE SECURITY OF OWNERSHIP

The bottom line is that young farmers need more land for their operations, and this need is even greater for BIPOC farmers.

54%

of young farmers say they need more land

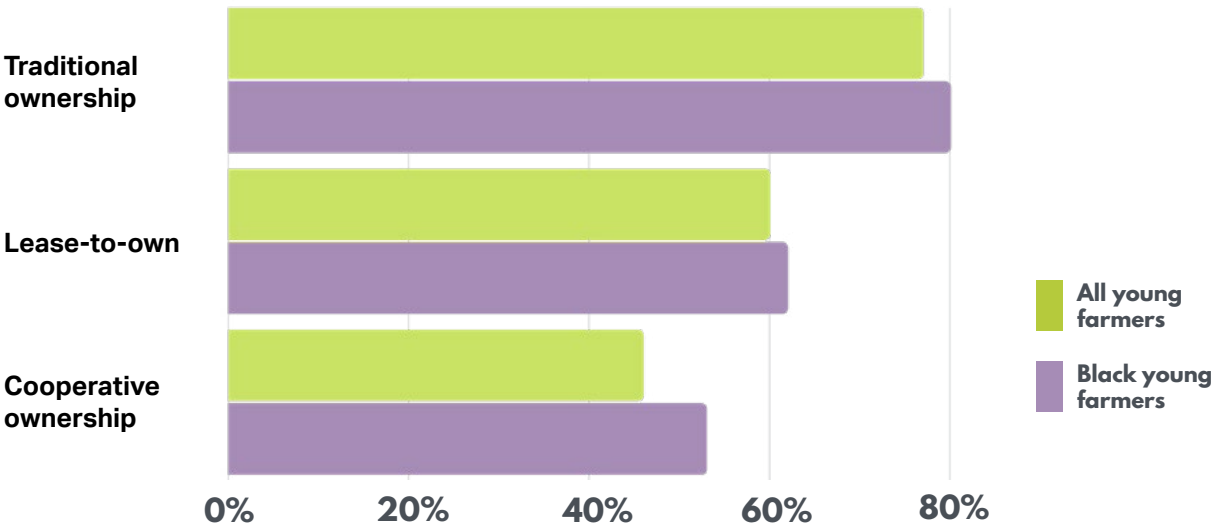
75%

of Black farmers in particular say they need more land

For farmers working in urban areas, securing adequate acreage is a particular challenge. In cities, farmers contend with high land values, insecure land tenure, lack of water access, legal challenges, zoning barriers, and possibly contaminated soil. Fewer young farmers growing in community gardens report being very or extremely satisfied with their current land arrangement (25.3%), and on urban land (23.1%), than farmers growing on rural land (37.5%).

There are many creative solutions to land access challenges, but the majority of respondents reported wanting to own their land, either through traditional purchase or a lease-to-own model. Young farmers are also interested in cooperative ownership, ground leases (in which the farmer owns the infrastructure while leasing the land through a very long-term, often inheritable, lease), and access to public lands.

Types of Land Tenure Young Farmers are Interested In by Race:



There is an urgent need for secure land tenure for young farmers. Land is at the root of racial equity, food sovereignty, economic prosperity, public health, and the climate crisis. Farmers have the transformative power to use climate resilient practices, pay fair wages to their workers, and provide healthy food to their communities, but they must have secure land access in order to do this important work. The 2023 Farm Bill is a crucial opportunity to facilitate equitable land access for the next generation of farmers.

CASE STUDY

Ara and Jim Holmes

Texas Eco Farms,
Magnolia, TX



Land Access Challenges Cause Texas Farming Couple to Rebuild Their Farm Three Times

Ara and Jim Holmes operate Texas Eco Farms, a successful 62-member community supported agriculture (CSA) program, but they didn't grow up raising vegetables or other food for their community.

Ara and Jim both started farming while working full-time as a safety and health professional and registered nurse. Things changed for them when they saw the potential in their local markets and decided to experiment with growing microgreens. Sales of microgreens really took off and showed them that a career in farming could be possible.

In 2016, they began searching for land to grow their operation and quickly realized there were a number of challenges in securing workable farmland. They farmed on two rented plots from 2016 to 2018 before purchasing their land. On their first rented property they had to clear out an area that was overtaken by brush and small trees mostly by hand, and on their second rented property they had to renovate the inside and outside of a 400 square foot cabin to live in on site. The soil was not ideal at either property, and both farms lacked basic infrastructure for tool storage and washing and packing, but they got scrappy and put together some facilities that would work for their operation.

It took Ara and Jim three years to find land that could meet all of their requirements to grow their microgreen business. The most important factors were affordability, zoning, good infrastructure, and workable soil. The property also had to be outside of a flood zone and it had to have access to clean and abundant water. Eventually, they found a three-and-a-half acre tract of land that met their specifications, and began the hard work of moving their pre-existing operations to their new permanent home. Rebuilding their farm three times was exhausting and expensive.



It was also impossible to continue farming while they were transitioning properties, and thus their income took a hit. At this point, Ara had to go back to work full-time off the farm while Jim spent months moving the farm production system to the new site and removing infrastructure at the old site. In 2020, they went back to the farmers market, but after COVID hit and sales were not reliable, they pivoted to a CSA model serving 22 families that fall, then 32 families the next spring. The CSA proved to be a success: the pandemic brought them rapid growth as people were seeking safer options for local food and were trying to support local businesses. This year, they are serving 62 families for 16 weeks in the spring and fall, and they are happy with their level of growth and development as an ecologically responsible farm that serves a very-local customer base.

“THERE WASN'T A LOT OF AFFORDABLE, QUALITY FARMLAND AVAILABLE AND WE HAD TO TAKE WHAT WE COULD FIND.”

Two key lessons they learned through their land search as young farmers was that one or both partners had to be able to work off the farm for extra income to build up a farming business, and that they had to become incredibly frugal to maximize their savings. Their savings and off farm employment not only helped support them economically, but it was a necessary step in obtaining a loan for their permanent farm, the place they now call home.

Obtaining loans through various farm lending programs was unsuccessful because of their low levels of revenue. Off-farm employment was necessary in obtaining a more traditional mortgage. But working off-farm also slowed their progress in establishing and growing their farm business.

There was huge community demand for fresh food, but they lacked the land security to meet that demand. Farm loan options should exist to support new farmers so they don't need to work off-farm to secure a traditional mortgage. With solid revenue records, they have been able to establish a farm number through the Farm Service Agency (FSA) and received a couple of high tunnel grants through the USDA's Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS).

Ara and Jim are excited to continue building Texas Eco Farms and serving local families by growing fresh foods in organically managed and remineralized soil for years to come.

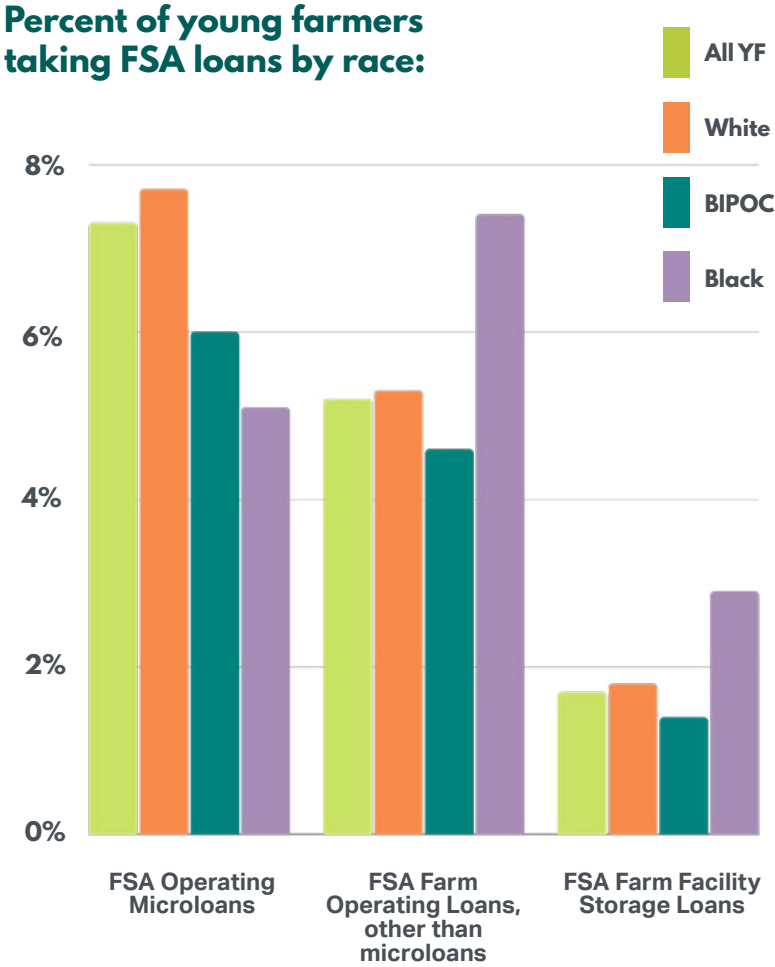
ACCESS TO CAPITAL

Farming is a capital-intensive undertaking. Seventy-eight percent of the farmers under forty years old surveyed identify as first-generation farmers, meaning that they most likely did not inherit farmland, infrastructure, or equipment from their families. Land, tractors, fencing, housing, and other farm infrastructure needed to grow a successful farm business are extremely expensive, and when coupled with the burden of student loan debt or lack of existing credit, access to capital can be a major barrier in building a successful farm career.

41% of all young farmers said that finding access to capital, such as money to start or grow their business, was very or extremely challenging. That number was even higher for BIPOC farmers: 59% for Black farmers and 54% for all BIPOC farmers. And 76% of all respondents said access to capital was at least a little bit of a challenge.

Difficulty in accessing capital is also a major reason why young farmers are leaving agriculture. Fifty-seven percent of former young farmers reported that finding access to capital was a barrier that was very or extremely challenging.

USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) offers low-interest rate loans that are designed to make credit available to our nation's farmers and ranchers, but only a small percentage of respondents have succeeded in using these loans. The FSA Operating Microloan is the most streamlined of the loan programs, but only 7.3% of participants have accessed them. Only 5.2% of respondents have used FSA Farm Operating Loans other than microloans



Government financing represents only a small percentage of how farmers are buying land: half of the survey respondents who own land purchased it with personal cash, whereas only 14% purchased land with government financing (such as Ownership Loans through FSA).

72% of young farmers currently hold a loan to finance their farm or ranch business:



With the outliers removed



51.4% of respondents owe over \$50,000



HEALTH CARE COSTS

Farming is not only a dangerous and physically strenuous occupation, it is also stressful and often isolating. Both physical and mental health care access are vital to our nation's farmers. Low-income and self-employed farm owners often struggle to afford health insurance premiums for themselves, their families, and their employees. Though farmworkers face significant workplace hazards—increasing in a warming climate—they rarely receive health care as part of their compensation. Without affordable health care options, many farmers and farmworkers work off-farm jobs to receive coverage or must forgo insurance, risking physical, mental, and financial harm.

Forty percent of young farmers identified personal or family health care costs as very or extremely challenging.

Health care costs were more challenging for Black young farmers, with 45% of Black young farmers citing health care costs as very or extremely challenging.

Seventy-nine percent of all survey respondents said that the cost of health care was a challenge.

Health care costs are a reason that farmers quit the industry in search of more stable income and health care coverage. Of former farmers surveyed, 51% identified personal or family health care costs as a barrier that was very or extremely challenging (compared to 40% for current farmers). Eighty-three percent of former farmers said health care costs were at least a little bit of a challenge compared to 79% of current farmers.

Health care costs were similarly challenging for farm owners and farmworkers, with 81% of farmworkers identifying personal or family health care costs as being at least a little bit of a challenge and 80% of farm owners.

Establishing a national health insurance program to provide comprehensive protection against the costs of health care to all individuals who are residents of the United States would ensure both our nation's farmers and farmworkers have access to the care they need.

Farming is essential and therapeutic for my mental and physical health.



HIGH COST OF PRODUCTION

Young farmers who are growing high quality food using sustainable practices are struggling to receive a fair price for their products, especially in competition with the artificially cheap food available on the market. Unlike commodity farmers, young farmers who run diversified operations or grow specialty crops are typically not supported by government subsidies and often struggle to obtain USDA program support.

Overall, 35% of young farmers surveyed cited the cost of production being greater than the price they receive for their products as very or extremely challenging. For BIPOC farmers specifically, 39% surveyed identified this issue as very or extremely challenging. In other words, for many young and BIPOC farmers running a farm business today, the numbers don't add up.

As inflation skyrockets in 2022, this challenge is exacerbated. Impacted by the war in Ukraine and disrupted supply chains from the pandemic, farm input and production costs rose 12% in 2021 from 2020 and are continuing to rise in 2022.²⁹ While some are able to raise prices modestly, young farmers are often motivated to keep prices stable and affordable in order to serve their communities good food when they need it most.

High cost of production is the most cited challenge in the survey when all those who said that the high cost of production was at least a little bit of a challenge are included.

More than three-quarters of young farmers said that the high cost of production compared to their income received was “a little” through “extremely challenging.” The longer the respondents had been farming, the higher the rate of response; 77.9% of young farmers with less than five years, 84.8% of young farmers with five to 10 years, and 86.4% of young farmers with 10 years of experience reported that the cost of production being greater than the price they receive for their products is a challenge.”

Whether farming for one year or ten, young farmers are passionate about their work. Farming is often a labor of love, but love is not enough to sustain farmers through long work weeks and grueling seasons. More than 64% of young farm owners worked more than full-time during their last season, with more than one-quarter working 61 hours or more per week. Similarly, more than half of young farmers employed on a farm or ranch worked more than full-time during their last season.³⁰

At the National Young Farmers Coalition, we believe in constructively challenging existing economic paradigms by acknowledging the limits of an agriculture system that exists within the confines of capitalism. We work towards creating a public agricultural system where farming is a recognized public service, local and regional food systems are supported, and workers are fairly compensated.

HOUSING

Farming is an enterprise that requires daily monitoring and management, and long commute times can make this work a real challenge. Farmers are in need of on-farm housing or affordable options near farms, particularly those who rent their land. Though finding farmland is a challenge, once farmers are able to secure land, they are more likely to have secure housing as well. Eighty-three percent of the young farmers who own land live on their property, while only 29% of young farmers' land leases include housing.

Most young farmers who work on a farm but don't lease or own farmland named housing as a top challenge: 81% said that finding or maintaining affordable housing was at least a little bit of a challenge, with almost half (47%) finding it very or extremely challenging.

The difficulty and expense of finding housing is also a top reason why farmers ended up leaving farming: 90% of former farmers age 40 and under stated that finding or maintaining affordable housing was at least a little bit of a barrier.

More than half (52%) of young former farmers identified finding or maintaining affordable housing as a barrier that was very or extremely challenging.

Our 2019 California Young Farmer Report³¹ highlighted the issue of housing and its interconnection with land access challenges. Report author Mai Nguyen wrote, "The combined costs of farmland and housing create a financially daunting scenario for respondents." A second-generation Fresno farmer said,

"When I'm not dealing with the cost of land going up, I'm dealing with [housing] rent going up. It's all too much."

And as land prices increase, farmers are looking further outside of cities for affordable prices. The result: long commutes.

"It's hard to live far from the farm, but it's so hard to find a good piece of land, that it's worth the travel," said a farmer who travels three hours daily to and from the farm property they lease.



STUDENT LOAN DEBT

Student Loan Debt Held by Young Farmers



For those farmers looking to grow their businesses, student loan debt can stand in the way of increasing their farm or ranch's economic viability and can prevent them from qualifying for the additional financing needed. Overall, 38% of young farmers and ranchers surveyed said they currently hold student loans. The challenge of student loan debt, however, is not held equally for all young farmers. Sixty-two percent of Black young farmers currently hold student loan debt, and 45% of those student loan borrowers identify their debt as very or extremely challenging. Twenty percent of young farmers said that the main reason why they did not take out additional loans to support or grow their farm businesses was because of existing student loan debt.

Many more Black and Indigenous young farmers identified student loan debt as being a significant challenge, compared to young farmers as a whole.

Forty-five percent of Black young farmers and 37.8% of Indigenous young farmers identified student loan debt as being very and extremely challenging, compared to 24.6% of White young farmers.

Even when they qualify for assistance, some young farmers choose not to take out loans because they believe in a debt-free approach to life and business. For others, however, student loan debt prevents them from taking out additional business loans.

We see that this challenge disproportionately affects young BIPOC farmers. For young farmers, 20% of survey respondents identified student loans as the main reason why they are not taking out additional loans, but for Black young farmers that number jumps to 26%.

Student loan debt is also a reason that young farmers decide to leave their farming careers: 39% of former farmers said student loans were very or extremely challenging compared to 26.9% of current farmers.

Percentage of Debt Held by Young Farmers:

Less than or equal to \$10,000	25.7%
\$10,001 - \$25,000	29.9%
\$25,001 - \$50,000	25.6%
\$50,001 - \$75,000	7.8%
\$75,001 - \$100,000	5.8%
\$100,001 or more	5.1%

CLIMATE

Young farmers call for climate action.

Young farmers across the country are dealing with the increasingly destructive impacts of the climate crisis on their farms every day. As farmers struggle to rebuild from hurricanes and record-breaking heat waves, and producers throughout the West manage extreme drought and the constant threat of wildfire, it is clear that the impacts of the climate crisis on U.S. agriculture are increasingly severe and demand immediate policy intervention.

73.3% of young farmers have experienced at least one climate impact, such as rising temperatures or changing precipitation patterns, on their farm in the past five years compared to 66% of respondents to our 2017 Survey who said that they were experiencing weather and environmental changes on their farm.

More than half of the 2022 survey respondents reported experiencing climate impacts very or extremely often, including rising average temperatures (51%), extreme temperature changes (55%), and changing precipitation patterns (52%). These unpredictable weather events are not just an inconvenience—they can mean a total loss of income for the season.

Eighty-eight percent of young farmers under 40 who responded to our 2022 Survey attribute changes in weather patterns to climate change, compared to 53% who attributed these changes to human-caused climate change in our 2017 Survey.



Young farmers reported experiencing the following very or extremely often:

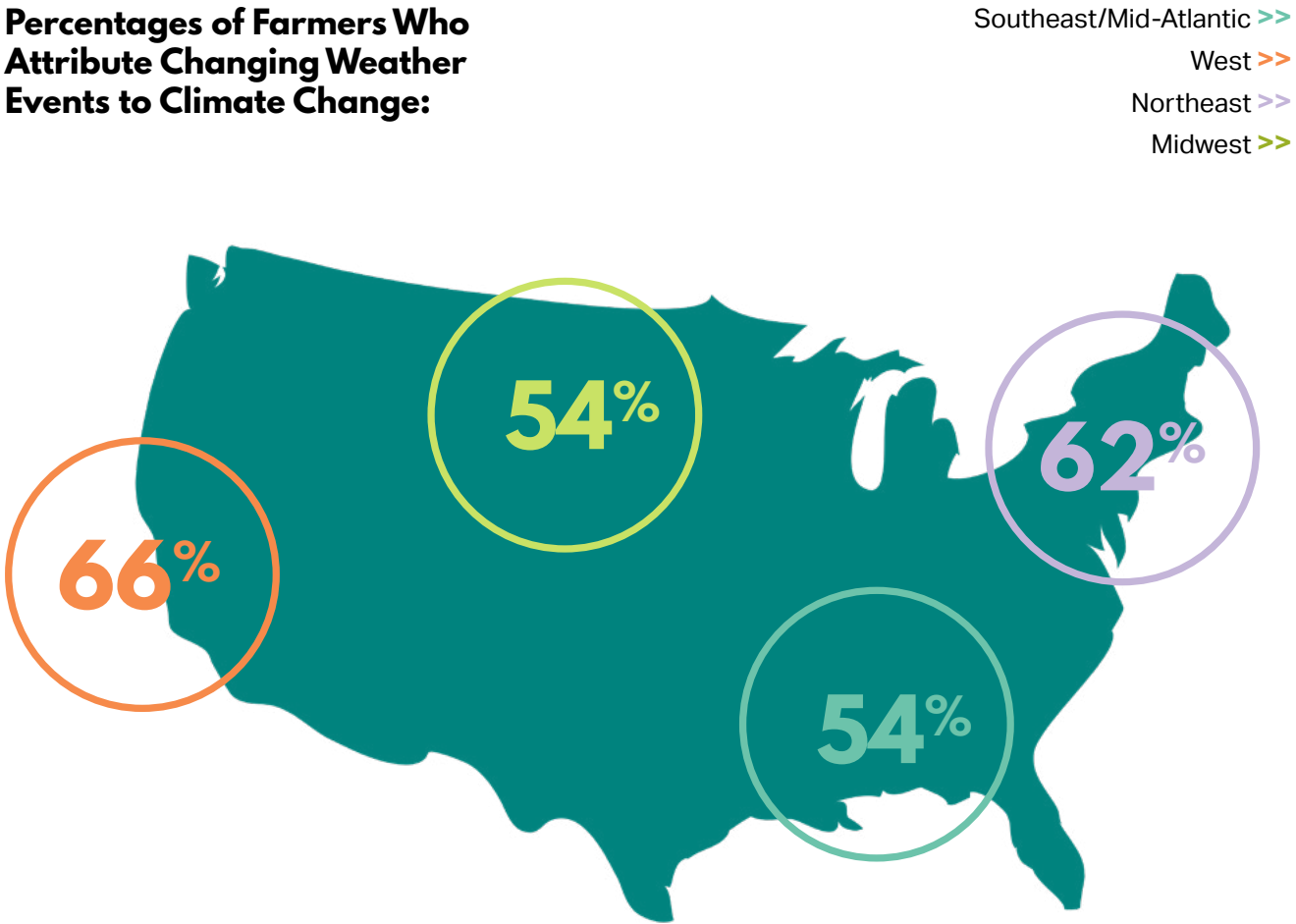
55%
extreme
temperature
swings

51%
rising average
temperatures

52%
changing
rain or snow
patterns

44%
more severe
weather events

Percentages of Farmers Who Attribute Changing Weather Events to Climate Change:



Though BIPOC farmers reported more often that their purpose for farming is engaging in conservation or regeneration (88% of Black farmers and 87% of all BIPOC farmers versus 82% of White young farmers), their communities are more likely to suffer the impacts of the climate crisis. Crop loss, food shortages, distribution disruption, and eventual increases in food prices and access will impact communities of color and low-income communities first.

Scott Chang-Fleeman

Shao Shan Farm,
Northern C.A.



Climate Change, Water and Land Access Challenges in Northern California

My name is Scott Chang-Fleeman and I live and farm in Northern California. My business, Shao Shan Farm, is a five-acre certified organic farm specializing in Asian vegetables. We sell our products at farmers markets, through vegetable boxes, and to chefs and grocery stores throughout the San Francisco Bay Area. This year, I am scaling up the production of Kabocha squash, Japanese sweet potatoes, soy beans, Azuki beans, Asian chilis, Chinese shallots, and dried flowers.

We are no strangers to the ways in which climate change is affecting farms like ours. Farming in California today is dynamic, adaptive, and sometimes heartbreaking. As the state faces historic droughts and wildfires due to climate change, farmers are having to make difficult decisions. In the 2020 season, we had to pivot away from growing fresh greens and switch to primarily dry-farming Kabocha squash and tomatoes due to a lack of water. We were also unable to irrigate our fields that season due to drought and decreased water availability.

Farming is always unpredictable, but it's even more drastic now because of climate change. There are going to be years where there just isn't enough water for everyone to farm. Frequent and persistent wildfires have also caused us to shut down operations so that my crew and I were not working in poor air quality. That decision, however, led to product and revenue loss, but I would rather have a loss of money than make people work in conditions like that.

Farm bill conservation programs, managed by USDA, are tools that can assist farmers in investing in on-farm sustainability and climate resilience, but these programs are underutilized by young farmers across the country.

Barriers like land tenure make accessing these programs difficult for farmers like me. Because I don't own the land I farm on, I didn't think it made a lot of sense to make costly and resource-intensive, long-term infrastructure investments on the farm. Additionally, financial assistance didn't cover the entire cost of the irrigation system we wanted to establish, so applying for USDA's EQIP program did not feel particularly worth the effort.

I want lawmakers to know that consistent financial support and land access for young and Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) farmers is necessary for our success and for the health of the planet. People who own their land or have long-term land tenure are able, and incentivized, to buy the equipment and make the investments needed to build on-farm resilience. By helping young, BIPOC, small, and beginning farmers gain access to land and government services, we can begin the important work of addressing the climate crisis and investing in a sustainable and resilient future with farmers leading the way.



“FARMING IN CALIFORNIA TODAY IS DYNAMIC, ADAPTIVE, AND SOMETIMES HEARTBREAKING”

The National Young Farmers Coalition believes that our country’s water systems should foster vibrant agricultural communities, healthy ecosystems, and water justice for Indigenous communities and other people of color. Public policy must protect water for agriculture, support on-farm conservation that can conserve and protect clean water resources, and ensure access to clean drinking water.

This is a crucial moment for water policy in the United States. Western states in particular face myriad threats and challenges, such as extended drought and other impacts of climate change, and a booming population driving up demand for food and freshwater.

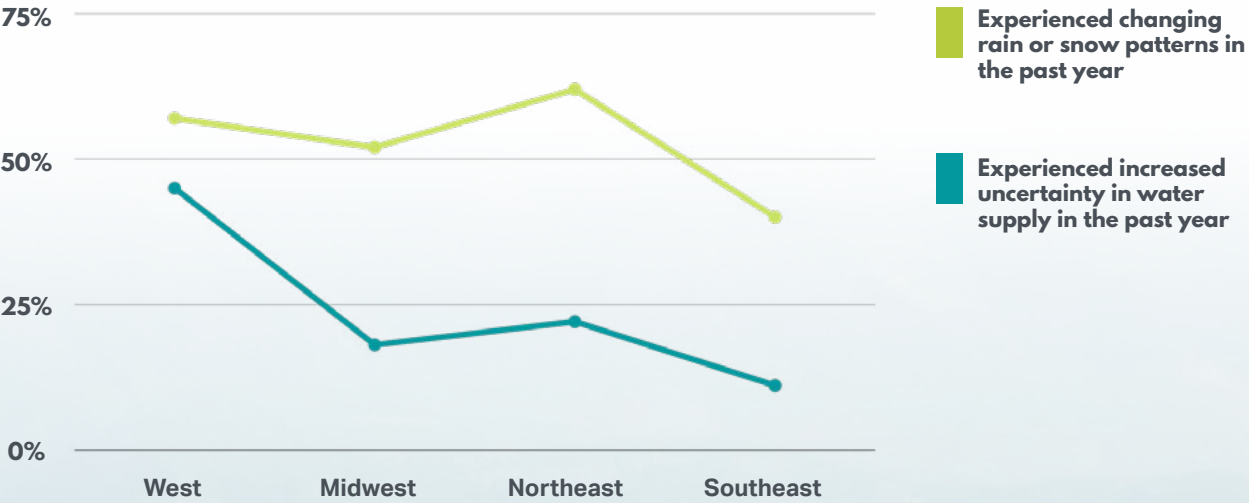
Sixty-five percent of young farmers and ranchers in the West said that finding or maintaining water access was at least a little challenging, with 30% stating that it is very or extremely challenging.

Local land or water use restrictions present additional challenges for farmers in the West, with 22.4% saying restrictions were very or extremely challenging and 44.4% saying they were a little or somewhat challenging. A typical land use restriction may limit or ban the use of high tunnels or other permanent structures on farmland, especially in urban or exurban areas. Water use restrictions may also impact a young farmer’s ability to store water on their farm or expand their irrigated acreage.

Young farmers in the West also reported the highest rates of increased uncertainty in water supply, with 45% respondents experiencing water uncertainty very and extremely often in the past 12 months.

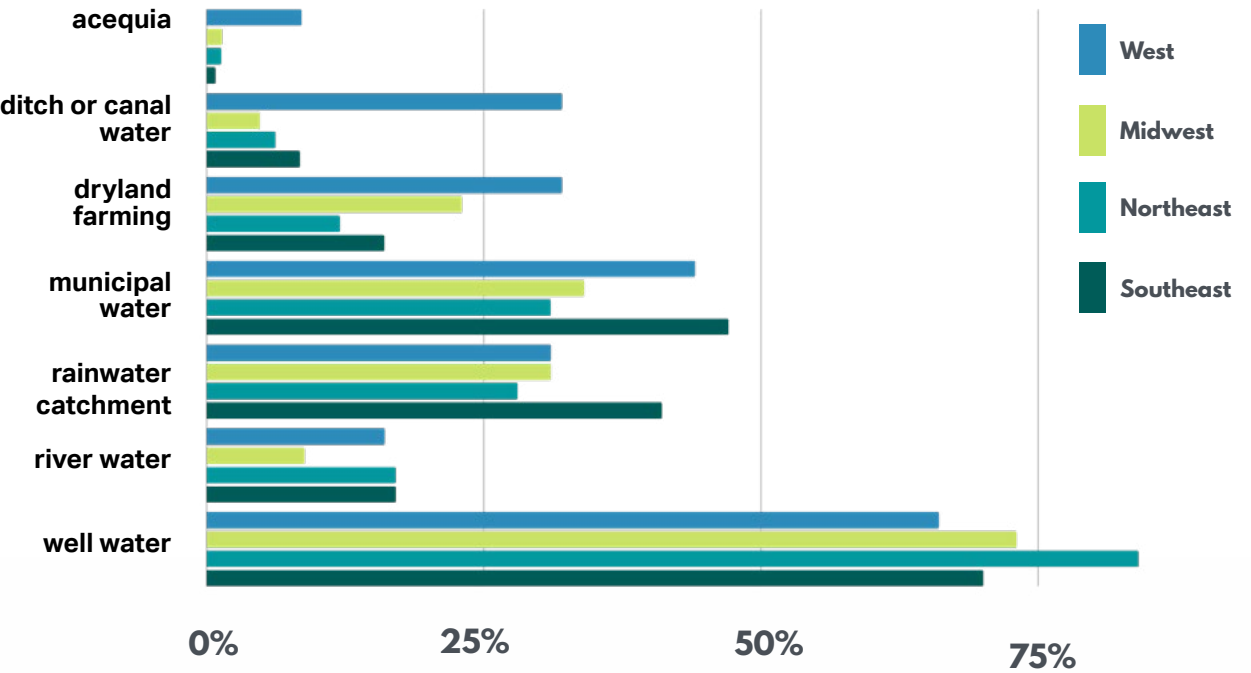
Young farmers in the West also reported the highest rates of increased uncertainty in water supply, with 45% respondents experiencing water uncertainty very and extremely often in the past 12 months.

Young Farmers Climate & Water Challenges by Region:



Young farmers in the West use various methods to access water, and are more likely to rely on ditches or use dryland farming practices than other regions. Farmers in other regions primarily use well water, municipal water, and/or rainwater catchment.

Currently, which of the following methods do you use to access water on your farm or ranch?



Young and BIPOC farmers and ranchers are critical to addressing both our dwindling water resources and producer populations. While young farmers innovate their operations to meet a mounting climate crisis, their work would be impossible without the Indigenous producers who have farmed under arid conditions for millenia. Their cultural practices form the basis of many commonly used conservation practices and systems, yet ongoing discrimination and the structure of USDA programs often exclude these producers from accessing federal farm funding.

Federal policy should ensure that Indigenous, Black, Latinx, and other communities of color are prioritized when it comes to conservation funding and access to clean, safe water.

CASE STUDY

Joseluis
M. Ortiz
y Muniz

Dream New Mexico LLC
and Corinas Querencia
Farms, New Mexico



Indigenous Farmer
and Mayordomo
Dedicated to
Future Generations
Through Land and
Water Stewardship
in Northern New
Mexico

My name is Joseluis Ortiz y Muniz and I am a detribalized Indigenous and Indo-Hispano father, farmer, mayordomo and community liaison from the village of Llano de La Yegua in the Indigenous Genizaro Santo Tomas el Apostol de Rio de Las Trampas Land Grant. I currently live with my daughter Corina and partner Luzero in my maternal village of San Antonio Del Rio Embudo in the high desert of Northern New Mexico, where together we grow garlic, medicinal herbs, and other vegetables on one acre and care for a variety of animals on our ancestral lands.

For those who don't know, a mayordomo is a key role in stewarding the acequias of the Southwest. I facilitate sustainable water usage in the region by stewarding the Acequia Del Llano del Rio Embudo.

In Northern New Mexico and in our traditional self-governance systems, the mayordomo is the highest community-elected position. This role comes to me through a long line of water stewards as both my paternal and maternal grandfathers were acequia mayordomos who gave their lives to acequia culture for over fifty years. Additionally, one of my grandfathers worked closely with the USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) as well as our local conservation district on land stewardship efforts.

“CULTURAL AND TRADITIONAL HEALING
IN COMMUNITY HAS BEEN A JOURNEY
OF SELF-TRANSFORMATION AND
SELF-DISCOVERY”

As I write this, Northern New Mexico is experiencing devastating flooding that has been exacerbated by climate change-fueled wildfires. After flash flooding ran down burn scars from previous wildfires, our communities have become overwhelmed and are under water. As retirees and other folks from around the country relocate to or buy second homes in the southwest, our local food system and waterways have also been greatly impacted by the pressures that a growing population has brought to the region. The demands of the growing population have driven already thirsty cities to turn to agricultural areas for new water supplies, which has led to water being sold off the land and farmers and local businesses following suit. Additionally, these pressures have directly impacted the ability to find affordable housing across the Southwest. The reality is that many Indigenous youth are homeless in their homeland. As a young person who left home in the early years of adulthood, I can attest that it is not easy to find a way back home for the current generation.

For centuries colonizers across the United States have tried to systemically erase Indigenous knowledge and lifeways like those that have been passed on to me. Through policies such as the Indian Removal Act of 1830, the Homestead Acts of the mid-1800s, the revocation of Field Order No. 15, and the Alien Land Laws of the early 1900s, among others, Congress has been responsible for the dispossession of hundreds of millions of acres from Indigenous people and other people of color, while facilitating land ownership and access for White Americans. The exclusion of Indigenous and Hispano voices in land and water policy has led to our near erasure and extinction.

In my experience, however, cultural and traditional healing in community has been a journey of self-transformation and self-discovery that has shown me how to care for the land and water and how to overcome the hardships many young people face in occupied Northern New Mexico. Through my work as a Community Liaison and Research Scientist at Sostenga for the Greenroots Institute at the Northern New Mexico College, I help coordinate the development of grassroots, community-driven processes to determine and implement environmentally, economically, and culturally sustainable plans rooted in water, food, and economic security for the future of Northern New Mexico culture. I do this work alongside world-renowned traditional farmer, water rights advocate, and community leader and elder Don Bustos.

To ensure a future where we have thriving communities and a healthy food system, we must also ensure that we have a future where we have access to clean water: agua es vida (water is life). We need a future where food and water policies include an Indigenous perspective. We need a future where zoning laws help us to protect water, not sell it. We need a future where it's possible for our young people to find a way back home.

IMMIGRATION & LABOR

For centuries the United States has depended on violent and exploitative measures to power and operate the food system. The system we see today has only come to be through the dispossession of Indigenous lands, chattel slavery, and other forms of systematic exploitation and erasure. Since its foundation, the U.S. has been dependent on immigrant farmers and workers to feed the country, and it is imperative that we recognize the knowledge, labor, and time immigrant farmers and workers contribute to our food system.

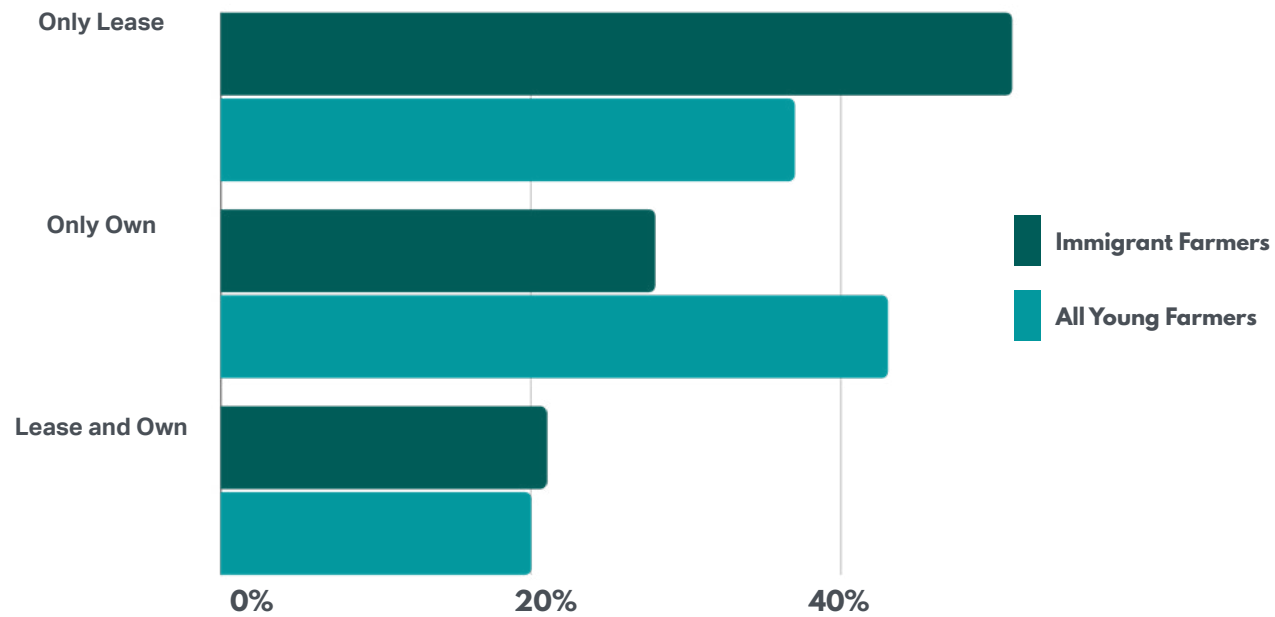
Of our 4,344 survey respondents who self-identified as young farmers, 110 also responded that they identify as an immigrant or refugee. Of the respondents who farm or ranch for income, 58% identify as farm or ranch owners. If a clear pathway to farm ownership is cultivated for more immigrant and undocumented farmers, the U.S. would no longer face a new farmer shortage. But immigrant farmers face tremendous obstacles, and the USDA fails to support many by requiring citizenship or permanent residency status for its grant and loan programs.

Despite being key players in the food system, undocumented farmers and farmworkers are unable to apply for many private and federal grants and financial assistance that require applicants to be full-time residents or citizens. Fifty-nine percent of young immigrant and refugee farmers indicated that they have been denied a loan to finance their farm or ranch business while only 31% of all young farmers indicated they had been denied.

Immigrant and refugee farmers and farmworkers face disproportionate obstacles in other facets of farming as well.

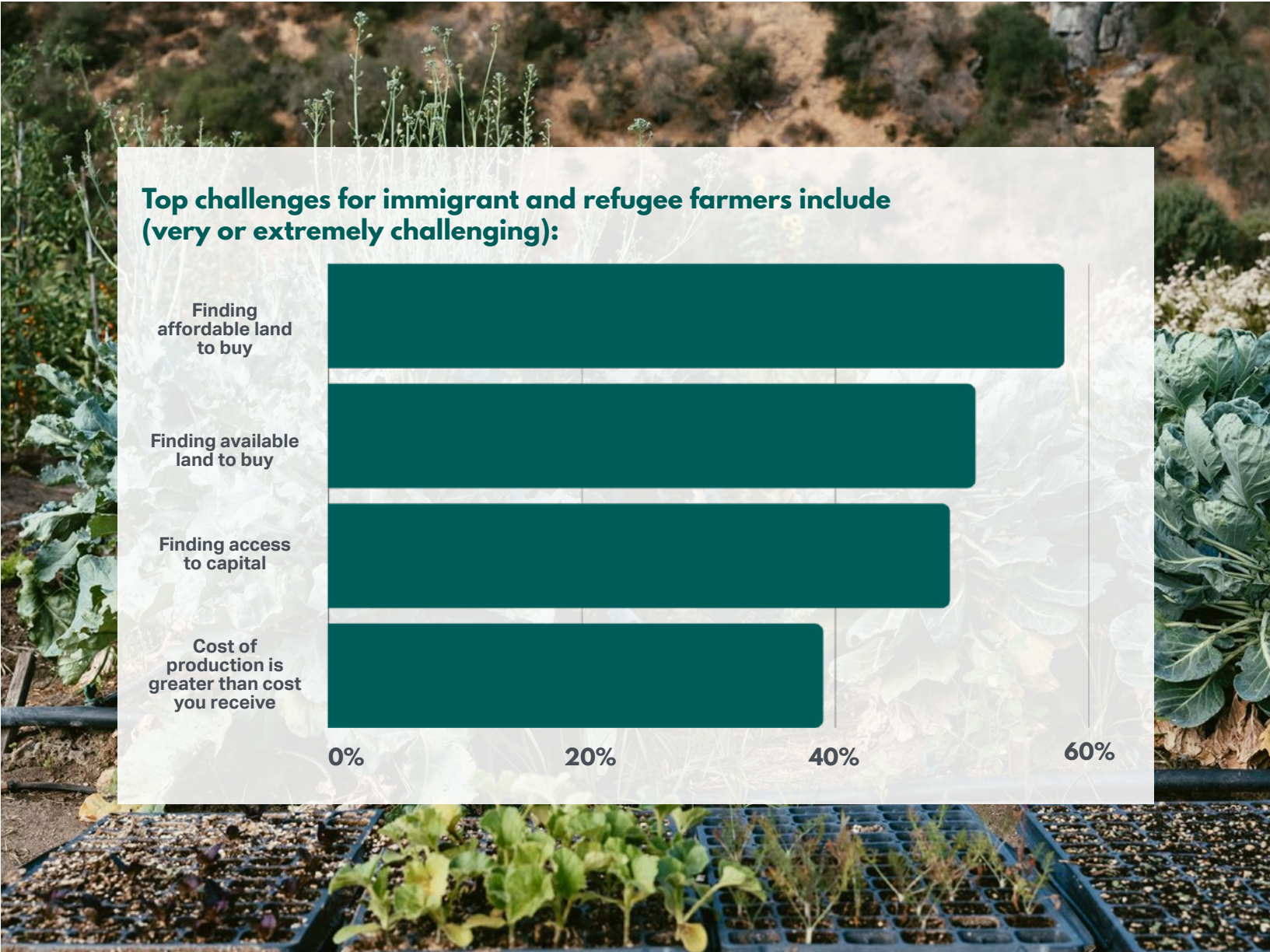
Eleven percent of young immigrant farmers named experiencing discrimination based on their immigration status as very or extremely challenging, compared to 0.9% of all young farmers.

Young immigrant respondents are also more likely to lease and less likely to own their land:



Additionally, many immigrant workers in the U.S. face inhumane working and living conditions.³⁴ Undocumented workers fear deportation and being separated from their loved ones. Lack of citizenship status makes undocumented workers particularly vulnerable to workplace abuse³⁵ and unsafe working conditions where they may experience injuries or casualties³⁶ and be afraid to seek treatment. The conditions many migrant farmworkers face on farms put them and their families at risk of harmful pesticide exposure, and many farmworkers do not have access to health care³⁷ should they become ill. Undocumented workers are also forced to navigate a car-dependent country without access to driver's licenses in most states³⁸, making transportation to work or to the grocery store immensely challenging.

We believe that a just future for agriculture depends on the recognition that immigrant farmers and farmworkers are agricultural experts without whom the food system could not operate. We work toward the elimination of obstacles for immigrant farmers and the end of the exploitation of farmworkers. A just food system cannot exist without the full recognition and respect of immigrant farmer and farmworker expertise, rights, and freedoms.



CASE STUDY

Irving
Reza

Sugar Moon
Mushrooms,
Bennett, CO



Citizenship Status
Prevents Colorado
Mushroom Farmer
from Accessing the
Capital He Needs to
Grow His Business

My name is Irving Reza and I am a farmer and owner of Sugar Moon Mushrooms in Bennett, Colorado. I got my start in agriculture back in 2018 when I became a farm apprentice for the GrowHaus in Denver. During a year-long apprenticeship, I worked at the hydroponic, aquaponic, and mushroom farms that are part of the GrowHaus’ food access programming. Throughout the year, I developed skills in urban agriculture that eventually led me to manage the mushroom operation. With this experience, I was able to launch my own business, Sugar Moon Mushrooms, in 2020.

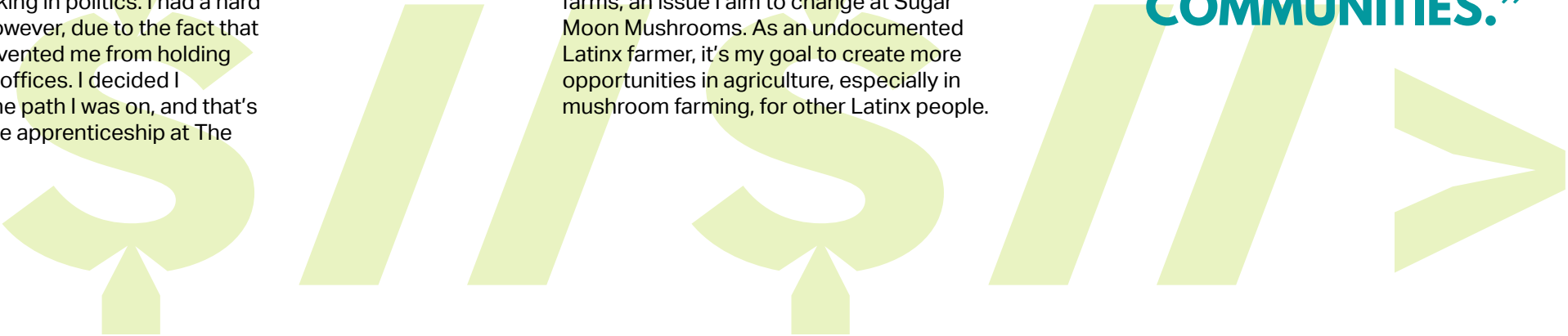
As an undocumented Latinx farmer with Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) status, I’ve come up against several challenges in my career, both in and out of agriculture. Before I began farming, I attended college in Denver where I majored in political science and dreamed of working in politics. I had a hard time finding work, however, due to the fact that my DACA status prevented me from holding positions in political offices. I decided I needed to change the path I was on, and that’s when I sought out the apprenticeship at The Growhaus.

Since I began farming, my DACA status has prevented me from applying for many private and federal grants and assistance, as they generally require applicants to be a permanent resident or citizen. Because of my status, I am excluded from all USDA loans and cost-share grants. My business partners at Sugar Moon are U.S. citizens and therefore are able to apply for USDA programs, but I am personally limited in the amount of aid that I can apply for. I believe Congress should allow undocumented farmers to apply for USDA programs so that people like me can grow their farm businesses and provide healthy food for their communities.

I have faced additional barriers to entry into the mushroom market as an undocumented farmer. In my experience, almost all mushroom growers in Colorado are White male farmers with easier access to funding. As a beginning farmer of color, I have received pressure to stay clear from selling mushrooms through certain channels, like the local farmers markets, that would compete with ‘established’ growers.

We would like to expand our operations at Sugar Moon Mushrooms but lack the capital to invest in key infrastructure. A larger farm would allow me to pursue a dream of hiring other farmers of color to assist me in running the business. I’ve seen very little diversity in management positions at U.S. mushroom farms, an issue I aim to change at Sugar Moon Mushrooms. As an undocumented Latinx farmer, it’s my goal to create more opportunities in agriculture, especially in mushroom farming, for other Latinx people.

“I BELIEVE
CONGRESS
SHOULD ALLOW
UNDOCUMENTED
FARMERS TO
APPLY FOR USDA
PROGRAMS SO
THAT PEOPLE LIKE
ME CAN GROW
THEIR FARM
BUSINESSES AND
PROVIDE HEALTHY
FOOD FOR THEIR
COMMUNITIES.”



REASONS FARMERS LEFT THE FIELD

Examining the reasons that ultimately lead young people to leave farming and ranching shows us the pain points of the agriculture industry and the interventions that can keep trained, passionate young people growing food for their communities.

Land access issues are the top reasons young farmers leave the industry, or never start at all.

Public and private resources for beginning farmers focus on farmer training and market access, but these are not the issues we found to be causing farmers to leave the field. Only 9% of former young farmers said that farming skills or market access were terminal barriers for their businesses. The Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program, which is the only federal program focused on beginning farmer training and success, cannot be the only USDA beginning farmer program. We need significant attention brought to the land access challenge.

41% of young former farmer respondents stopped farming in 2021

21% in 2020

69% of young former farmers identified as first-generation farmers

49% of young former farmers were farm or ranch workers

26% were farm or ranch managers or operators

15% were owners



Why did you stop farming?

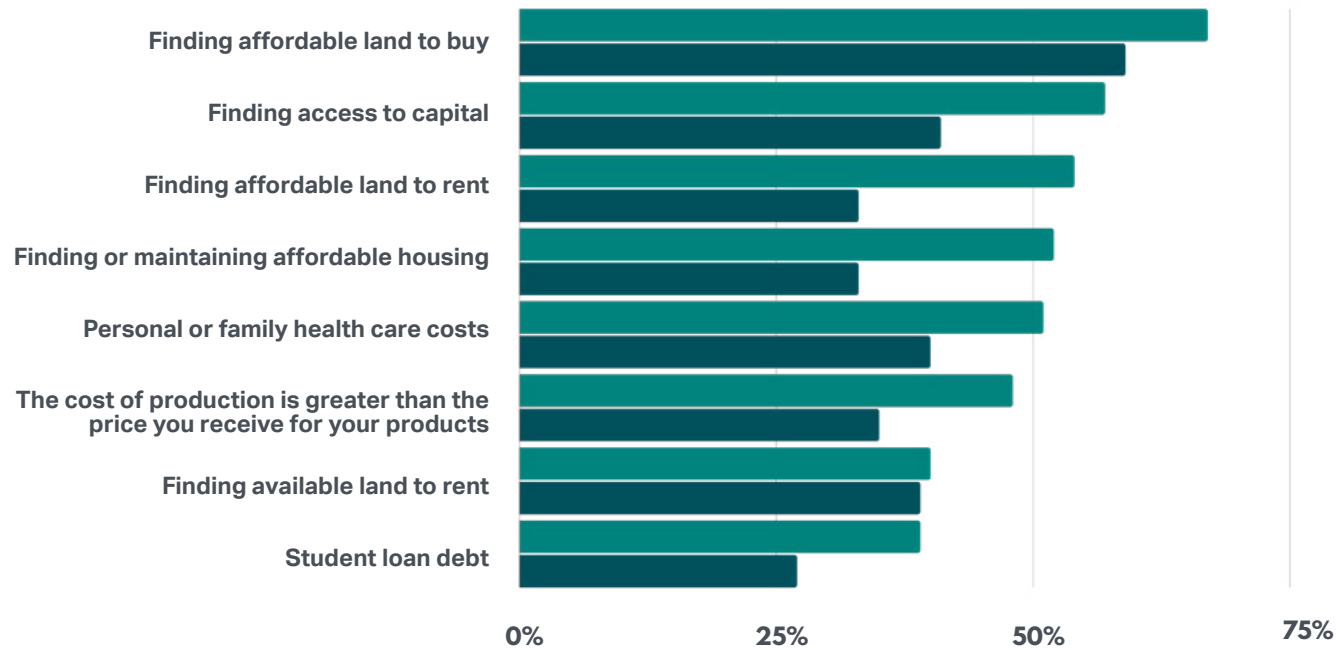
1. Finding affordable land to buy

2. Finding access to capital

3. Finding affordable land to rent

Former farmers were more likely to cite significant challenges in accessing land, capital, housing and dealing with health care costs and student loan debt than current farmers.

Barriers for Former Farmers vs Current Farmers:



Factors That Had the Largest Impact on Former Famers' Decision to Quit Farming:

Housing, land and water	51%
Family, business partner, or health care cost issues	32%
Market access	5.4%
Farming skills	3.6%
Discrimination and marginalization in farming or ranching	4.4%
Regulations	2.8%

BARRIERS TO ENTRY

The top challenge facing aspiring farmers (those who would like to farm for income) is also finding affordable land to buy. Finding affordable housing is a greater challenge for aspiring farmers than current farmers: 58% said it was very or extremely challenging as opposed to 33% of current farmers. Ensuring aspiring farmers have access to affordable farmland as well as an affordable place to live close to that farmland will be critical to their success.

Top Barriers for Young Farmers

Finding affordable land to buy	80%
Finding access to capital, such as money to start and grow your business	69%
Finding available land to buy	62%
Finding or maintaining affordable housing	58%
Finding affordable land to rent	53%



YOUNG FARMERS AND THE USDA

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) is tasked with ensuring the success of our nation’s farmers and ranchers, but for decades its programs and policies have been designed to support a select few: larger and larger operations, primarily growing commodities crops. In addition to exclusive program design, documented discrimination at USDA has contributed to the significant decline in Black farmers in the U.S. As a result, this new generation of farmers are largely unfamiliar with USDA programs or do not trust the Agency, and those who do seek support face tremendous obstacles.

Seventy-one percent of respondents who have not used a federal program reported being unfamiliar with USDA programs, and 26% had applied but were denied.

//YOUNG FARMERS’ PARTICIPATION IN USDA PROGRAMS

Twenty-two percent of young farmers utilized at least one FSA program, with FSA Operating Microloans program being the most frequently used at 7.3%. 37.9% utilized at least one NRCS program and 26.7% used at least one other USDA program. 50.9% percent of farmers have used at least one USDA program on their farm or ranch, but 23% of those are farmers using the NRCS High Tunnel program which offers cost-share grants to farmers to promote season extension, protect against climate impacts, and improve plant and soil quality. Less than 12% of young farmers have ever used a USDA program other than the High Tunnel Program.

Young farmers report using the following USDA FSA programs:

7.3%	FSA Operating Microloans 7.7% White 6% BIPOC 5.1% Black
7.1%	FSA Conservation Reserve Program, or CRP 7.3% White 6.3% BIPOC 4.3% Black
6.4%	FSA Commodity Programs, such as Price Loss Coverage, Average Risk Coverage, or the Dairy Margin Protection Program 7% White 4.2% BIPOC 4.3% Black
5.2%	FSA Farm Operating Loans, other than microloans 5.3% White 4.6% BIPOC 7.4% Black
3.9%	FSA Non-insured Crop Disaster Assistance Program, or NAP 3.8% White 4.4% BIPOC 5.1% Black
1.8%	FSA Conservation Reserve Program Transition Incentive Program, or CRP TIP 1.7% White 2% BIPOC 2.9% Black
1.7%	FSA Farm Facility Storage Loans 1.8% White 1.4% BIPOC 2.9% Black
0.4%	Heirs’ Property Relending Program⁴¹ 0.2% White 1.2% BIPOC 2.2% Black

//YOUNG FARMERS’ PARTICIPATION IN USDA PROGRAMS

Young farmers use of the following NRCS programs:

23%	NRCS High Tunnel Assistance 24% White 20% BIPOC 15% Black
20%	NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program, or EQIP, other than high tunnel assistance 21% White 18% BIPOC 18% Black
12%	NRCS Conservation Stewardship Program, or CSP 13% White 10% BIPOC 7.4% Black
6%	NRCS Agricultural Management Assistance, or AMA 5.9% White 6.2% BIPOC 7.2% Black

Young farmer use of the following other federal programs:

11%	Organic Certification Cost-Share Assistance 12% White 7.5% BIPOC 5.1% Black
11%	Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program, or SARE 12% White 9.3% BIPOC 7.3% Black
3.5%	Risk Management Agency, or RMA Crop Insurance 3.8% White 2.6% BIPOC 4.4% Black
2.3%	Rural Energy for America Program, or REAP 2.4% White 1.6% BIPOC 2.9% Black

//CHALLENGES TO ACCESSING FEDERAL PROGRAMS

The most common challenge young farmers report in accessing USDA programs is that they are unfamiliar with federal programs (71%).

Barriers to Participation in USDA Programs:

Young farmers were unfamiliar with federal programs	71%
They did not have time to apply	59%
The application and reporting paperwork requirements were too much work	59%
Timing of applications is during peak production	42%

These challenges were particularly exacerbated for Indigenous young farmers. Indigenous young farmers are more unfamiliar with USDA programs (83%); the application and reporting requirements were too much work (63%), and/or did not have time to apply (66%). Fifty-three percent named that the timing of application deadlines is during peak production.

//THE CHALLENGE OF LAND TENURE AND USDA PROGRAMS

To access Farm Service Agency (FSA) loans, a farmer must demonstrate the ability to repay the loan. A loan officer may require a written lease agreement to support repayment ability, as not having secure land access can make it hard to implement the farm business plan. For Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS), proving land tenure is required to access cost-share grants. NRCS’s focus is on the land and its ecological outcomes, not on the farmer. These policies contribute to inequities in program access, as young, BIPOC farmers in particular, and young farmers as a whole, often have precarious land arrangements.

Twenty-five percent of young farmers reported not having secure or adequate land tenure to be eligible for federal programs

Farmers Who Report Not Being Eligible for Federal Programs Based on Land Tenure by Race:

Black YF	38%
Indigenous YF	28%
White YF	23%
Asian YF	24%
BIPOC YF	31%

CASE STUDY

Friendly
Vang-
JohnsonFriendly Hmong Farms,
King County,USDA Program Reform
Needed for Equitable
Farmland Access

As the daughter of Hmong refugees who have farmed in Minnesota since the early 1980s, my lived experience is grounded in the struggle for anti-racism, justice, equity, and inclusion. When I was younger and more naive, I believed that attaining higher education would allow me to participate equally in the American Dream. I thought education would enable my access to programs from USDA, especially those aimed at serving disadvantaged farmers: women and Black, Indigenous, and other people of color (BIPOC). In 2021, I learned firsthand how USDA programs continue to fail our farmers and communities. Reforms are needed for USDA programs to equitably serve BIPOC farmers.

During the height of the COVID pandemic, in conjunction with the Hmong Association of WA, I began a mutual aid effort to help local Hmong flower farmers. Leveraging a network of more than 40 volunteers and social media, we raised more than half a million dollars to keep our farmers afloat when the farmer's markets were closed. We gave out thousands of pounds of produce to address food insecurity and food apartheid in BIPOC and other vulnerable communities. We honored thousands of essential and frontline workers, elders, and other mutual aid and non-profit organizations serving our communities with gifts of food and flowers.

This work continued into 2021 with the creation of Friendly Hmong Farms, a social enterprise that works to advance food sovereignty, land reparations, and racial justice. Our community-supported agriculture (CSA) business sources vegetables, herbs, fruit, and flowers exclusively from Black and Brown farmers. We continue to gift food and flowers to the community. We have made both in-kind and monetary contributions to organizations led by and serving Indigenous people as an acknowledgement of their original stewardship of the lands our farmers farm, their resilience, and continued presence. We do all of this, without a farm ourselves, and without paid staff, because USDA programs and staff upheld systemic racism instead of standing in solidarity with us.

In the spring of 2021, I spent countless hours intensively looking for affordable, available farmland in King County—one of the most expensive housing markets in the country. When I found acreage that could work for our family, and discovered USDA FSA Direct Farmloan program, I happily announced to my mother that it would be just a matter of time before we could start farming in Washington State. She would be able to continue her decades of farming and our small CSA business would provide her the outlet she needed to avoid having to go to the market every day

as a 67-year old farmer. When I explained to her the details of the program, she said to not bother: "Those programs are not meant for us." I insisted that it was just a matter of paperwork, and I, as someone who has a Masters degree in public policy and works for the federal government as a performance auditor, could surely navigate whatever hoops or hurdles they had. I was wrong.

We were not successful in getting USDA FSA loans for land, even though the lending program is supposed to support Socially Disadvantaged farmers and ranchers. One USDA requirement stood (and continues to stand) in our way: an applicant must provide a signed purchase and sale agreement from a seller, before USDA will even establish eligibility.

On the surface, this might appear race-neutral and simply the typical way that commercial property loan transactions are handled. That is, there is no intent to harm or disenfranchise BIPOC farmers, so how could it be racist? In fact, this is what a top USDA official told me, as he insisted that the FSA loan officer did her job (very courteously and professionally at that), but the failure was on my part. He announced that while USDA can "make a buffet, they can't force people to eat." In other words, it was the failure of BIPOC farmers, not this USDA program, for why billions of dollars appropriated by Congress to assist disadvantaged farmers was not getting out to our communities.

I explained that most BIPOC farmers—and refugee farmers in particular—lack pre-existing relationships with landowners through familial or local community ties. This is due to historic, systemic racism: Our forebears were not allowed to own land when land was taken from Indigenous people, and many of them did not settle or stay in rural areas because they did not feel welcome or safe. Therefore, today BIPOC farmers are at a distinct disadvantage when we are bidding on land and when we are trying to access public programs that are structured the way the USDA's are structured. USDA is perpetuating the racism that has kept BIPOC farmers from owning land and saying their hands are tied, because they won't recognize how their interpretation of the regulations and the way they've written their program policies institutionalizes that racism.

“USDA IS
PERPETUATING
THE RACISM THAT
HAS KEPT BIPOC
FARMERS FROM
OWNING LAND.”

USDA's failure to serve BIPOC farmers means that our farmers are more likely to use predatory lending and other forms of higher-cost financing. It puts our business, incomes, and families at more risk. If I had sought and somehow gotten a business loan (unlikely because the CSA had yet to turn a profit), I would have been charged three or four times the interest rate that USDA's FSA Direct Loan would have afforded me. That difference in expense effectively operates as a tax on me for being BIPOC and not having the intergenerational or community ties that a White farmer would be more likely to have by virtue of historic racism that has privileged them and their family.

This difference in the history and lived experience of BIPOC farmers compared to White farmers is especially poignant and stark to me, because I am married to the eldest grandson of White dairy farmers who were allowed to own and work 100+ acres of land in Minnesota. Their ability to own the land that they diligently farmed and stewarded meant that they were in a position to send their 10 children to college, retire comfortably. This is the price and sacrifice that BIPOC farming families are being asked to pay when we cannot equitably access USDA programs and are kept from owning farmland.

I continue to operate Friendly Hmong Farms without land and without paid staff, sourcing exclusively from Black and Brown farmers in both Washington and Minnesota. I ask for anyone who reads my story to stand in solidarity with BIPOC farmers and advocate for the reform of USDA programs so that anti-racism, justice, equity, and inclusion can become the legacy we leave all our children.

//RACIAL DISPARITIES IN ACCESSING USDA PROGRAMS

Young White and BIPOC farmers alike report negative customer service experiences at their local FSA offices. But young BIPOC farmers reported more often that they have been ignored by local or state USDA staff and that a local or state USDA employee acted in ways that were unwelcoming based on their race. These experiences can be so harmful that they do not see the USDA as a place meant for them.

- 16% of Indigenous young farmers and 13.6% of Black young farmers reported having been ignored by local or state USDA staff very often or extremely often compared to 9.6% of Latinx farmers and 7.6% of White young farmers.
- 9% of Black young farmers and 8.1% of Indigenous young farmers reported that a local or state USDA employee acted in ways that were unwelcoming to them based on their race very often or extremely often compared to 0.4% of White young farmers. (20% reported sometimes for Black young farmers, 0.9% for White young farmers)
- 17% of Black young farmers and 12% of Indigenous young farmers reported trying but being unable to register for a farm number with the USDA compared to 4.4% of White young farmers (11% for all BIPOC young farmers)

BIPOC farmers, particularly Indigenous and Black farmers, reported having been denied funding from USDA at higher rates compared to all young farmers and White farmers.

Twenty-six percent of young farmers applied to federal programs but were denied, including:

Indigenous YF	37%
Black YF	30%
BIPOC YF	29%
White YF	25%
Asian YF	23%

In addition to land security challenges and racial discrimination, many young farmer challenges to accessing USDA programs stem from non-traditional business plans. Young farmers are building diversified, direct-market businesses with niche crops and price premiums based on their ecological practices, but FSA loan program applications and loan officers favor conventional business plans. Young farmers struggle to make use of the programs that should be prioritizing their needs. They are often not successful in making their alternative operations fit the mold of loan applications designed for single commodity operations.

//OUTREACH DISPARITIES

Although USDA Office of Advocacy and Outreach is working hard to reach underserved farmers, young farmers and particularly first-generation farmers are often not on the radar of county offices. Seventy-two percent of Black young farmers reported never or rarely receiving outreach about federal farm programs. First-generation farmers reported never or rarely receiving outreach from the USDA (66%) more often than multi-generation farmers (56%).

Have you received outreach from USDA or community partners about federal farm programs?

	Black YF	White YF	Multi-gen YF	First-gen YF
Never	72%	65%	56%	66%
Sometimes	23%	30%	37%	28%
Very/Extremely Often	5%	5%	7.2%	6%

//TECHNICAL AND BUSINESS ASSISTANCE

USDA has work to do to increase technical assistance to its customers. Sixty-eight percent of young farmers reported that they never or rarely received the technical and business support they require from the USDA. This was increased for BIPOC farmers (75%), and in particular Black farmers (77%), compared to White farmers (66%). Multi-generation young farmers reported that they have never or rarely received technical and business support less often at 57%, compared to first-generation young farmers at 68%.

//OUR USDA

As farmers over 65 outnumber farmers under 35 by more than six to one, the USDA must focus on this crisis of attrition in agriculture and ensure its programs are accessible and equitable for the next generation in agriculture. With access to land and capital as top challenges for young farmers, the Department has the opportunity to address these challenges through existing and new programs that support land transition, capitalize new operations, support scaling, and compensate farmers for their ecosystem services. A lack of demographic data collection and transparency across many programs makes proper evaluation of program implementation and outcomes difficult.

The Coalition’s partnership with USDA consists of working with the Department to reform its programs to truly serve all farmers and ranchers and to address historic and current racial disparities and discrimination in federal farm programs and Agency support. Young Farmers’ Operations and Impact Director, Michelle A. T. Hughes, serves on the Agriculture Subcommittee of the USDA Equity Commission and works to keep the Department accountable to the Commission’s goal to integrate racial equity into the structure, policies, operations, and strategic plans of USDA’s numerous agencies.

Since the founding of the Coalition in 2010, significant progress has been made in expanding young and beginning farmer access to critical federally-funded farm programs and services. For example, the Operating Microloan was created in 2013 and made permanent in 2014 in response to our Coalition’s advocacy. Despite these victories, our report finds that 49% of young farmers have never utilized any of the most commonly used USDA programs.

CASE STUDY

Tasha Trujillo

Palm Pike,
Miami, FL



Young Flower Farmer in Florida Motivated by Regenerating Natural Resources and Protecting Pollinators, but Left Behind by USDA

My name is Tasha Trujillo and I am the owner and operator of Palm Pike, a second-year flower farm located in Miami, Florida. We specialize in growing flowers using both organic and regenerative practices to protect pollinators and our community from pesticides. Restoring the health of our soil through cover cropping and organic amendments is a priority so that we can sequester carbon and be part of the solution to climate change.

I came to farming by an unconventional path. I used to work at a science museum in Florida where I was deeply moved by our pollinator exhibit. In 2017, I began Palm Pike as an apiary. After studying sustainability at Florida International University, I wanted to expand my work to help save honeybees and other pollinators. So in 2021, I transitioned from beekeeping to flower farming on a 3,000 square foot field. I like to say that the flowers swallowed me whole.

We’ve experienced many difficulties in trying to receive funding to support our work at Palm Pike. After months of trying to reach someone at our local Farm Service Agency (FSA) office, we had no luck in acquiring a Direct Farm Ownership loan to secure our land tenure. Once we did finally get in touch with an FSA officer, we were informed that Direct Farm Ownership loans require a purchase agreement to prove land tenure, but I have no written lease for the land I farm on. Without an opportunity for pre-approval on the loan it feels almost impossible for us to secure land in Southern Florida, where farmland is being developed into housing at a very fast rate, and \$500,000 feels like the minimum price-of-entry for five acres.

“WITHOUT SUPPORT FROM INSTITUTIONS LIKE THE USDA, REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE AS A CAREER AND LIVELIHOOD FEELS OUT OF REACH FOR YOUNG FARMERS LIKE ME”



These barriers accessing federal support prevent many young farmers like me from building successful businesses. We hear about farming being a “dying profession,” but most USDA programs are geared towards large, established farms and don’t have young farmers in mind. I hope to grow Palm Pike a little more every year until I reach my goal of farming five acres. Once we reach that scale, I would like to expand into education by hosting workshops and trainings at our farm to teach others about beekeeping, gardening for pollinators, and growing your own cut flowers. But in order to reach that scale, I need credit from USDA for operating expenses and support to purchase my farmland. Five acres of farmland in Miami-Dade County is currently selling in the \$500,000-\$1 million range, and farmers are being outbid by developers.

Without support from institutions like the USDA, land tenure, regenerative agriculture as a career and livelihood feels out of reach for young farmers like me. This sort of farming is exactly what our soil and pollinators need, and the USDA should invest in the young people who are motivated to do this work.





POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

THE YOUNG FARMER AGENDA



ACCESS TO LAND/CAPITAL

Access to land is the number one challenge facing the next generation of farmers in the United States. Given the systemic challenges in finding secure land tenure, this barrier is even greater for BIPOC farmers. Land is deeply intertwined with all aspects of farmers' success and impacts more than agricultural communities. 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 capital, find markets, and strengthen their operations.

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

Invest in community-led projects that create secure, affordable land access opportunities centering BIPOC farmers.

- Establish a new initiative to direct funding to community-led land access projects. This USDA funding should be available to a wide variety of entities, such as tribes, municipalities, non-profits, and cooperatives, 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.

- Implement high-level oversight and thought leadership at USDA to 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.
- Establish a new office and coordinating position within the Farm Production and Conservation (FPAC) mission area focused on equitable access to land and centered around 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 to 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.

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

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 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 in building their farming skills rather than their net worth.

- 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.
- Require FSA loan officers to waive the credit elsewhere test for Socially Disadvantaged and Economically Distressed applicants for FSA loan products.
- Provide FSA loan officers with guidance on working with collective, cooperative, and non-familial structures.
- In considering loan applications where profit and growth are not the principal goals of the operation, provide FSA loan officers with clear guidance on evaluating the financial soundness of farm operating plans.
- Allow applicants to use any tax identification number recognized by the Internal Revenue Service, in lieu of citizenship based eligibility requirements.
- Waive FSA Microloan eligibility constraints around state or federal convictions for possession of controlled substances.
- For Direct Farm Ownership Microloans, waive the management experience requirement for Socially Disadvantaged and Economically Distressed applicants if applicants provide a financially sound farm plan.
- Waive collateral and experience requirements for Operating Microloans of \$10,000 or less.
- Create a micro-operating grant in addition to micro-operating loans. Many farmers need small amounts of capital, often \$10,000-\$25,000. A micro-grant would be transformative for these operations and could be an important entry point for new USDA customers. Micro-grants should be available regardless of citizenship status.
- Reauthorize and appropriate funding for the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Individual Development Accounts originally authorized in the 2008 Farm Bill.
- Expand support for "wrap around" capital that combines business technical assistance with affordable financing.
- Ensure that FSA is coordinated with other agencies, such as Rural Development, to address credit, land, and housing access challenges.

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

Retiring farmers face legal, financial, health care, and tax considerations that impact their future and that of the land. BIPOC farmers face increased challenges due to systemic discrimination. Federal policies should acknowledge current land stewards' work and bolster incentives for aging farmers to transition land to the next generation of farmers, centering BIPOC growers.

- 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.
- Incentivize farmland transition by creating a federal capital gains tax exclusion for the sale of land to qualified young, BIPOC farmers.
- Fund training for culturally-appropriate technical assistance services through FSA.
- Continue funding the Farming Opportunities Training and Outreach Grants Program.
- Create a strategy plan or blueprint designed to be a resource for staff across USDA agencies, to support equitable land transition to this new generation of farmers that will serve across the agency to access agency staff in prioritizing young farmers' land access and tenure.

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

Farmers are increasingly using alternative structures to grow food for communities and steward natural resources, yet these farms lack support from governmental and financial entities designed with for-profit family farm businesses in mind.

- Ensure USDA land-related programs are accessible to all young, BIPOC farmers specifically, and next generation farmers as a whole, by accommodating eligibility for collective, cooperative, and communal non-family entities, and tracking and publicly reporting demographics data on program participants. As stated in President Biden's Executive Order On Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government, "...lack of data has cascading effects and impedes efforts to measure and advance equity. A first step to promoting equity in Government action is to gather the data necessary to inform that effort."
- Implement thorough, racial equity informed evaluation and reporting requirements to not only measure who is benefitting, but to measure program effectiveness in facilitating secure land tenure for young and BIPOC farmers.
- Provide continued funding for cooperative agreements with community-based organizations, such as the Natural Resources Conservation Service Cooperative Agreements for Racial Justice and Equity.
- Enact H.R. 40, the Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African-Americans Act.

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

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 help keep land at its agricultural value, meaning the price a producer can afford. 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.

- Increase funding for the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program Agricultural Land Easements (ACEP-ALE), and the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP).
- Give priority to ACEP-ALE and RCPP 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 the Conservation Reserve Program-Transition Incentives Program.

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

Current and comprehensive data is critically important to understanding and responding to 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. We urge Congress 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 of farmers as a whole.

- 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 corporate 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, including the Equity Commission and Commission on Farm Transitions.

CASE STUDY

WALTER
DAVIS III

Davis & Daughter
Farms, LLC
Douglasville, GA



Young Black Farmer Continues His Family's Legacy Aiming to Avoid the Loans That His Family Was Denied

My name is Walter Davis III and I grew up in New Orleans, but spent a large part of my childhood visiting my family's farm in St. Francisville, Louisiana. I'm so fortunate to have had the experience of spending time on my grandmother's farm, learning to love the land and understanding there is more to the world than the urban environment. But like many Black farm families in the South, my family experienced incredible adversity and trauma, including discrimination by the USDA. Though my family still owns their land, keeping the farm in the family has been incredibly difficult.

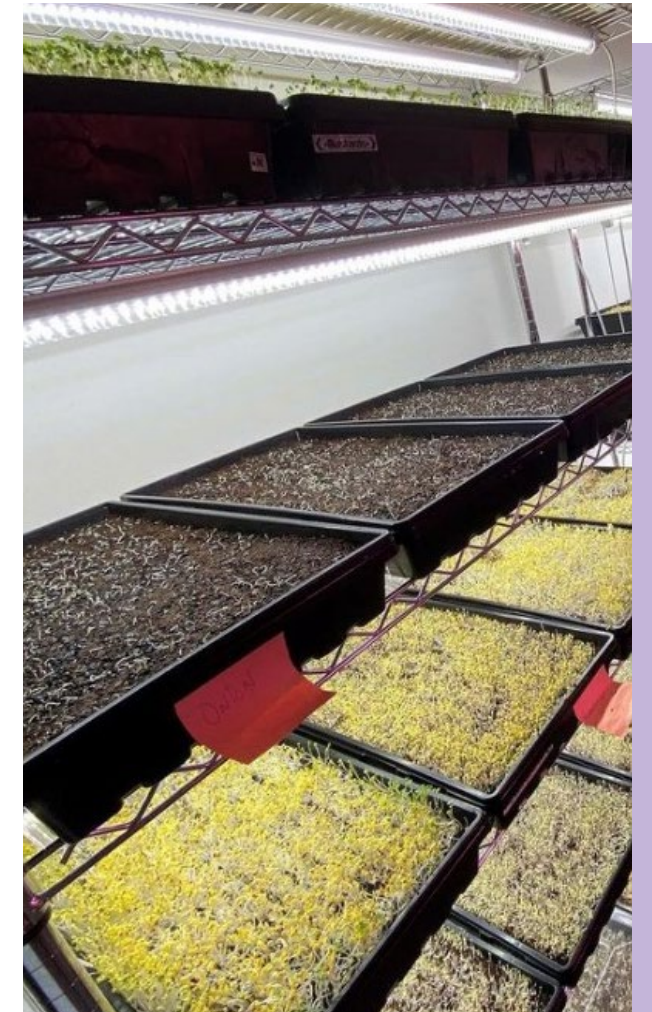
My family was constantly denied loans from the USDA, and had to work even harder without the capital and government support that some of the bigger, White-owned farms were receiving. We could never afford the best equipment or technology, so we tried everything from ranching to market gardening, and ultimately, we were able to keep the land by finding jobs off the farm.

Those off-farm jobs that my relatives found were in pulp and paper mills, where the pay was low and the impacts on worker health were tremendous. Employee cancer rates were sky-high, and some people died at very young ages. Our family has been able to retain our land, but at a huge cost.

I'm currently continuing my family's farming legacy through a social enterprise I created in northwest Georgia, about 20 miles west of Atlanta. Our farm, Davis and Daughter Farms, grows microgreens, mushrooms, and vegetables on our micro-urban farm, and we sell Belizean cacao as well. I've also begun consulting with other homeowners who want to grow food on their properties.

My farming venture grew out of an after-school gardening club that I started while teaching English to high school students over the last twelve years. I've seen firsthand that my students needed a deeper connection with the natural world around them.

My plans are to grow through wholesale market channels, but I want to capitalize my operation through grants instead of loans and debt. I've seen what debt being held over your head can do to a farmer. It happened to my family in Louisiana, and so many Black farm families have been dispossessed of their land because of bad loans and direct discrimination by USDA lending. I also have student loans. I've already been able to secure a couple of grants to support our new family farming operation, and I'll continue pursuing more as we expand.



“IF USDA TRULY WANTS TO SUPPORT THE NEXT-GENERATION OF BLACK FARMERS LIKE ME, IT SHOULD EXPAND GRANTS AND EDUCATION INITIATIVES THAT INVEST IN OUR OPERATIONS WITHOUT PUTTING OUR FARMS, FAMILIES, AND LEGACIES ON THE LINE.”



FARMER HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Good health and well-being motivate many young farmers to be out in their fields. As one farmer shared in the 2022 Survey, “Farming is therapeutic for my own mental and physical issues, and hopefully someday will be for others.” At the same time, farming is also a physically and mentally demanding profession. Many young farmers cannot afford health insurance while they also invest in secure land access, housing, and farm inputs. Some married farmers are able to make ends meet if one spouse has an off-farm job that covers some of the cost of premiums, but young farmers who manage an operation without a legally recognized partner often lack this coverage. The strain of this challenge is confirmed by our survey results, with **40% of respondents naming personal or family health care costs as very or extremely challenging.**

In the Northeast, Cultivemos is a network to cultivate farmer well-being. The National Young Farmers Coalition, along with key partners, received USDA’s Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network (FRSAN) funds to establish a regional network of service providers focused on reducing stress, increasing wellness, and improving overall mental well-being for farmers. Cultivemos addresses the structural root causes of farm stress such as land access, structural racism, and chemical contamination. The Network focuses on agricultural communities disproportionately harmed by these root causes: BIPOC farmers, Latinx farmworkers, and young farmers. As a nation, we must expand and strengthen existing mental and physical health resources by centering socially marginalized farmers’ needs and experiences.

To realize a farming future where public policy is truly concerned with health over profit, Congress must take action to make access to comprehensive health care benefits free to everyone.

- Establish a national health insurance program to provide comprehensive protection against the costs of health- and wellness-related services to all individuals who are residents of the United States.
- Ensure stability in the insurance marketplace and increase market competition for insurance coverage in rural areas.
- The Administration should work with states to fully expand Medicaid access to close the gap for economically distressed individuals and families who are not able to purchase coverage in their state.
- Reauthorize and continue to fund Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network (FRSAN) at regional and state levels, and maximize funding impacts by applying learnings from developing the Cultivemos network.

At Young Farmers, we envision a future where our public policy systems are concerned with well-being over profit. While we have far to go in realizing that vision, we can act now to protect, improve, and expand upon existing programmatic resources. Without these resources, uninsured and underinsured individuals and families will continue to be one crisis or accident away from financial ruin, and be forced to decide between pursuing their passions and protecting their physical and mental wellbeing.

COSTS OF PRODUCTION AND MARKET ACCESS

Young farmers are driven by a variety of ambitions and guiding beliefs, and are implementing an array of different operational models—with varying relationships to profitability and various definitions of viability. At Young Farmers, we envision a public agricultural system where farming is a recognized public service, local food infrastructure is in place, and all people are guaranteed the right to food. Realizing this vision will take time, and to pursue it, we must constructively challenge existing economic paradigms and acknowledge the limits of solely market-based solutions. At the same time, we currently exist under capitalist systems that expect and reward profitability and economic growth.

This system isn’t working for young farmers, with 81% of young farmers surveyed affirming that the cost of production on their farm is greater than the prices they receive for their products presents at least a little bit of a challenge. **Current business and market related policies should evolve to clearly recognize and include the diversity of farming operations this new generation is modeling.**

This means changing policy to: build on existing production, processing, distribution, and marketing infrastructures with a focus on local and regional food sheds; expanding metrics of success to consider community health and quality of life in addition to job creation and farm revenue; improving programmatic supports around economic- and climate-related losses (discussed in the water and climate section below); and reinforcing protections against potential abuses and economic harm.



COSTS OF PRODUCTION AND MARKET ACCESS

The Biden Administration has rightly recognized the fragilities in our system laid bare by the pandemic and the war in Ukraine, along with the necessity and opportunity to invest heavily in the success and resilience of smaller scale operations and this new generation of farmers. We call on Congress to build on this work in crafting the 2023 Farm Bill, centering farmers who have been most marginalized from influencing our public agricultural policy systems.

- Congress should build on the national structure of regional food business centers proposed by USDA, institutionalizing this effort in statute and heavily investing in processing, distribution, and marketing challenges facing Economically Distressed communities.
- Ensure that Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), Risk Management Agency (RMA), FSA, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and Rural Development (RD) program and field staff have a good working knowledge of the variety of sister agency resources available to support young farmers and their operations. And ensure staff are actively reaching out and providing appropriate technical assistance to young and BIPOC farmers on how programmatic resources, from disaster and insurance to value-added investments, can complement each other to counter financial and market related pressures.
- Expand outreach regarding the potential of the Value-Added Producer Grant program (VAPG) to alleviate stress points in existing farm systems by investing in identity preserved marketing systems and food safety practices.
- Reduce VAPG matching requirements for Socially Disadvantaged and Economically Distressed applicants, and streamline application processes.
- Further expand VAPG capabilities to support additional activities and investments that would improve food safety, food quality, and community health and care.
- USDA and Congress should invest in expanding relationships with trusted entities that can verify and improve price discovery of local and regional specialty crops, providing better market data to support disaster reporting and insurance claims.
- Ensure that there is good consistent market data and information sharing between AMS Market News, RMA, and FSA.
- Reauthorize and continue funding the Urban Agriculture and Innovation Production grants that were authorized in the 2018 Farm Bill, supporting connections between farmers and consumers in urban communities.

Young farmers are leading the way, modeling solutions at the community level to produce and distribute high quality, fresh, affordable products. In some cases, they are creating much of the processing, aggregation and distribution, and marketing pathways and resources they need. As we have clearly seen the connections between small-scale agriculture and the stability of our food systems, as well as our collective well-being, we must do more to invest in and support farmers selling into local and regional markets and directly to consumers.

HOUSING

With the many layers of complicated challenges facing this new generation of farmers, it can be overwhelming to also face housing insecurity. Increased real estate pressures on suburban and rural communities through the pandemic—fueled in part by temporary rental and second-home demand—lack of available housing stock, and increasing rent prices together with inflation are contributing to housing insecurity and some very long commutes for this new generation. Only 29% of young farmers reported that their land leases include housing, and 63% said that finding or maintaining affordable housing was at least a little bit of a challenge. Further, as a farming operation evolves, meeting labor needs can be particularly challenging if there is nowhere convenient and affordable for employees to live. For farmers and farmworkers without full citizenship status or an adequate history of credit, this challenge is even more difficult to navigate.

- Rural Development Rural Business-Cooperative Service offers a broad suite of resources through the various current Community Facilities programs—emphasizing the potential for these resources to improve quality of life, development, and sustainability in rural communities. RD should coordinate with sister agencies to explore more fully what Community Facilities programs can do to support local and regional food systems, and specifically to develop on and off-farm community-led housing solutions available to farmers and farmworkers.
- Continue funding Rural Housing Service Farm Labor Housing Loans and Grants, the only program specifically designed to fund housing for domestic farmworkers.



CLIMATE & WATER

Young farmers are working hard to build solutions to the climate crisis and to grow climate resilient communities. Agriculture does not need to exist in opposition to climate action; in fact, agriculture can be at the heart of policy change in support of climate resiliency. **Eighty-eight percent of young farmers under 40 who responded to our 2022 National Young Farmer Survey attribute changes in weather patterns to climate change.** In our 2020 survey of policy issues, our members identified climate action as their number one priority and selected climate change as one of five pillars in our Federal Policy Platform.

Water is a critical resource for farmers and ranchers, and has been deeply impacted by the climate crisis. Producers and communities in the arid Southwest face challenges in accessing water, as state governments cut back on water usage due to ongoing drought across the region. Other regions are experiencing changing precipitation patterns such as severe rain and floods that can be as devastating as droughts for farms and ranches. Young Farmers believes that our water systems should foster vibrant agricultural communities, healthy ecosystems, and water justice for Indigenous communities and other people of color.

Young farmers and ranchers are on the frontlines of the climate crisis, and urgently need concerted policy action. They are committing their time, energy, and their farms to form part of our national response to the climate emergency. Young farmers need policies that encompass the depth of the climate crisis, the possibility of climate resilience, and that support both vibrant agricultural communities and healthy watersheds. Climate and water policies should focus on expanding and supporting the number of young and BIPOC farmers already following climate-smart agriculture guidelines while making it easier for other farmers to transition to using climate-smart practices.

Improve access to USDA conservation programs for water and climate resilience

- Increase investment in conservation programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), and the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP).
- Establish an EQIP initiative or program to make cost-share dollars more accessible to young and BIPOC farmers. The modified program should streamline the conservation planning and application process to reduce the paperwork involved for both small or diversified acreage producers, and for NRCS staff in processing contracts for such operations. It should also include more flexible land tenure requirements, to allow producers with temporary land tenure arrangements to access cost-share assistance.
- Increase incentive payments for implementation of climate-resilient practices to ensure limited-resource farmers can participate in cost-share programs. Automatically provide EQIP advance payments for Socially Disadvantaged and Economically Distressed producers.
- Allow for the use of reused or recycled materials within NRCS practice standards to bring down costs for producers.

Often, small and diversified farms are denied access to conservation programs because they cannot compete against larger operations for available funding. NRCS should explore how to replicate successes, such as the EQIP High Tunnel Initiative, to modify existing programs to meet the needs of young, beginning, and BIPOC farmers. Programs should be easy to apply for, designed specifically for small, diversified operations, and prioritize climate-resilient practices.

Ensure that USDA resources and programs are culturally appropriate for Indigenous and farmworker populations

- Adjust EQIP practice standards to better accommodate cultural practices, such as Indigenous and acequia conservation practices.
- Provide funding for technical assistance to be culturally appropriate and invest in local experts and communities through cooperative agreements with tribes, acequias, and other experts.
- Support Indigenous communities in securing greater land sovereignty, and recognize traditional land management practices as the powerful tools they are for enhancing climate resilience.

Resources available from the NRCS are sometimes not accessible or not applicable to Indigenous communities or other communities of color. Land tenure, practice standards, and cultural barriers can pose challenges to accessing NRCS programs for these communities, perpetuating systems of inequity within our farming system. NRCS should examine these barriers and modify programs, as well as resource the communities directly to provide technical assistance.

Improve outreach to young and BIPOC farmers

- Require the collection and public reporting of demographic data on all conservation programs to better understand how producers who are young and BIPOC are utilizing these programs. USDA should then audit their programs for diversity and inclusivity and make public the results of their findings to address historic and existing racial disparities in federal farm programs.
- Establish a climate advisory committee on climate action at USDA, with positions allocated for young farmers, BIPOC farmers, and farmworkers.
- Adequately resource outreach to BIPOC farming communities and farmworker communities through organizations led by representatives of these constituencies.
- Institute regular reporting practices and engagement processes to inform farming communities of new climate policies.

Still, the biggest challenge producers face in accessing USDA programs is awareness. Nearly three-quarters of young farmers do not know there are USDA programs to assist them. 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.

Increase Funding for Research on Equitable and Sustainable Land and Water Stewardship

- Prioritize climate research, including farmer-led research and innovation, through programs like the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program.
- Prioritize research that helps small-scale, diversified farmers implement conservation practices and measure their climate mitigation impacts through methods with a proven track record of success.
- Ensure that research programs focus on and celebrate the contributions of BIPOC farmers.
- Develop science-based climate-smart agriculture definitions that prioritize practices that afford the greatest climate benefit, such as incorporating cover crops, perennial crops, managed grazing of perennial pasture, and other investments in soil health.
- Provide adequate funding for agricultural research agencies and programs such as the Conservation Innovation Grants, Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program, the Economic Research Service, Climate Hubs, and the National Institute for Food and Agriculture.
- Within agricultural research funding, prioritize research opportunities on land access and water conservation to better understand the large-scale trends and challenges related to land and water conservation for beginning and BIPOC producers.

Quality research and data is a crucial tool for farmers, advocates, and lawmakers, and we believe that climate action should be science-based and data-driven. Current and comprehensive data is important to understanding the challenges farmers face when building resilience. We must ensure the data collection components of the 2018 Farm Bill are fully implemented and continue to invest in recurring data collection, reporting, and research that helps small-scale, diversified farmers implement conservation practices and measure their climate mitigation impacts.

FSA has a variety of programs to help farmers, ranchers, and rural communities in the case of a disaster, such as a flood, wildfire, drought, hail, freeze, etc. Young farmers are learning to farm and starting their operations in more extreme and unpredictable weather conditions than previous generations. It is necessary that disaster programs are accessible to and designed for young producers who will need more support for livestock losses and forage, damaged farm and forest land, and crop losses. Increased transparency into application processes and eligibility, as well as improved outreach, could improve participation by young and BIPOC farmers in these programs. FSA should ensure these programs are streamlined and accessible. Additionally, FSA loan officers should be trained to understand new types of production including urban and indoor production that will be important in the face of the climate crisis, and to understand the needs of diversified, organic, and regenerative farmers and those receiving price-premiums for local, grass-fed, and other premium products.

Support Young Farmers and Farmworkers Facing Disasters

- Support climate justice solutions that target resources to BIPOC farmers by prioritizing both social and economic benefits in conservation programs alongside environmental outcomes. Move away from reimbursement-based payments and provide upfront payments so that farmers and farmworkers are not required to shoulder these costs.
- Protect farmers and farmworkers from hazardous working conditions due to climate change by adopting a federal standard to protect workers from harmful heat conditions and heat stress.
- Codify the new Micro Farm program through the Risk Management Agency to improve access to crop insurance for operations that are diversified, organic, and/or selling in local, regional, and specialty markets.
- Expand direct marketing prices within the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) or allow farmers to use their own yields and historic pricing data to more equitably serve farmers who sell direct-to-consumer or receive a premium on their crops.
- Administer NAP as an on-ramp to more holistic risk management programs such as Whole Farm Revenue Protection program and the Micro Farm program.
- Increase the maximum allowable farm revenue for Socially Disadvantaged and Economically Distressed applicants to the Micro Farm program.
- Ensure that USDA Approved Insurance Providers are fluent in available insurance products and are actively marketing them consistent with USDA policies, as a condition of approval.
- Continue piloting and evaluating programs like the Emergency Relief Program and the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program that redefine and expand current availability of farm safety nets programs in the face of climate and natural disasters.

“Farmers are on the frontlines of the impacts of the climate crisis. At the same time, they are taking critical action to mitigate its effects by providing local food and fiber, stewarding biodiversity, sequestering carbon, and reducing carbon emissions.”

Melissa Law & Ben Whalen, Bumbleroot Organic Farm



STUDENT DEBT

Student loan debt is a burden preventing many farmers from fully realizing their career ambitions, with 38% of young farmers overall, and 62% of Black young farmers surveyed reported that they currently hold student loan debt. Until we collectively decide to make access to higher education free in this country, Congress and the Biden Administration should reduce current costs, especially for those most marginalized from educational opportunities and those engaged in professions directly contributing to the public good.

- Eliminate federal and commercial student debt for all current borrowers.
- Recognize farmers as public servants within the Department of Education Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program (PSLF), including farmers working part-time and farmers operating at a community scale.
- Improve the PSLF program to reduce the total number of payments required, and increase flexibility around when payments are made and what types of debt are eligible.
- USDA should work with states, non-profits, and the Department of Labor to expand on the model proven through the federally-recognized Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship program and the state-recognized Diversified Vegetable Apprenticeship.
- Expand funding for the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative Competitive Grants Program Education and Workforce Development Program that invest in training the next generation of farmers at land grant universities through programs like the Rhode Island Agriculture and Food Systems Fellows Program.
- Expand funding and focus on farm careers as part of the USDA 1890 National Scholars Program and the 1994 Tribal Scholars Program.

Seventy-eight percent of young farmers did not grow up in a farming family and therefore they develop knowledge and skills, and access on the job training, through a wide variety of pathways. Agricultural education and workforce development policies are falling behind the need among this new generation of farmers. We must lessen the burden of educational debt and expand pathways for learning and hands-on experience.

IMMIGRATION & LABOR

Challenging capitalism is one of the National Young Farmers Coalition’s Guiding Principles. Capitalism favors profit and wealth accumulation over community needs and the social good, perpetuating consolidation, wealth inequality, and labor exploitation in food and agriculture. Despite contributing to our society in such a tremendous and essential way—a fact made obvious to everyone living through the pandemic—farm and food system workers face harsh working conditions, and many live in fear of the various hazards and challenges that surround them. Our mission of building a brighter, just future for agriculture is only possible when we work in solidarity to address these critical issues.

All workers in the U.S. deserve full labor protections, especially farmworkers and immigrant workers. No one in their workplace should ever feel powerless, not know their rights, or have someone else infringe upon them. Further, supporting the transition of immigrants, farmworkers, and food systems workers to farm ownership and other agricultural roles will make our agricultural system resilient and diversified.

- Congress and the Administration must work together to develop and enact comprehensive agricultural labor reform, as well as immigration reform that includes a path to citizenship for undocumented farmworkers, food chain workers, and their families. Such reforms should also include improved labor protections for all farm and food workers, and more effective reporting and enforcement standards regarding violations of labor and human rights.
- One outcome of the USDA Equity Commission should be a thorough review of citizenship and tax identification requirements for participation in USDA programs. There is currently widely inconsistent application of such requirements at the Department. Applicants or beneficiaries of USDA programs should be able to use any tax identification number recognized by the Internal Revenue Service in lieu of citizenship based eligibility requirements. Regardless of citizenship status, farmers and farmworkers should be able to benefit from resources through the People’s DepartmentUSDA.



USDA ACCESS

Federal programs are failing to reach and support the next generation of farmers and ranchers. Young farmers are unfamiliar with federal programs, overwhelmed with the cumbersome application processes, lack the land tenure required to make use of conservation programs, and/or are not successful in making their diversified, direct-market operations fit the mold of loan applications designed for large-scale commodity operations. We must work to improve the customer experience for young and BIPOC farmers, modernizing and streamlining processes, increasing USDA technical assistance staff capacity, and improving staff knowledge of diversity, equity, and inclusion—as well as knowledge of programs that benefit young and BIPOC farmers and the unique needs of this new generation.

- USDA has invested in establishing a Beginning Farmer and Rancher (BFR) national coordinating position at the Department, and has tapped employees across the country to serve as the Department's beginning farmer coordinator in each state. To be accountable to the needs of young and beginning farmers, Congress and USDA should adequately resource these state positions to be focused full-time on serving beginning farmers, and elevate the national coordinating position to be institutionalized as part of the Farm Production and Conservation Mission Area.
- For all programs, increase the collection and reporting of demographic data to better understand who is accessing USDA resources and practice accountability to young and BIPOC farmers in how programs are implemented, evaluated, and improved over time.
- Increase investments in outreach so BIPOC and young farmers are aware of federal programs and are empowered to apply for technical and/or financial assistance—looking to models such as the Technical Assistance Investment Program—by resourcing organizations that already have trust with these farming communities.
- Require USDA RD State Directors, FSA State Executive Directors, NRCS State Conservationists, and their respective state and county office leaders to complete Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice training programs at reasonable intervals.
- Train every USDA agent and representative on needs and opportunities for young and beginning farmers, and foster a culture of creativity and flexibility regarding the application of program rules and regulations.
- Continue to improve USDA recruitment so that field offices are fully staffed and can provide technical assistance to producers. Recruitment should target underrepresented demographics so field staff reflect the diversity of our farming populations.
- Acknowledge the leadership and lived experiences of young and BIPOC farmers by actively recruiting, including, and compensating their voices on all county, state, and federal advisory committees related to farmland protection, land access, and farm viability.
- Establish a new position within USDA Departmental Management to drive agency adoption of standards, practices, and training in support of cultural competency among all customer facing and application evaluation staff across the Department.

The next generation of producers are innovative and open to trying alternative methods for growing food and marketing it to their communities. USDA must ensure that its officers are empowered and expected to work with and understand these new growers, and to make every local, county, or state office a one-stop shop for programs specifically designed to benefit young and BIPOC farmers.





YOUNG FARMERS NEED ACCESS TO LAND NOW

The 2023 Farm Bill will dictate U.S. farm policy for the next decade and impact the lives of hundreds of thousands of farmers, ranchers, farmworkers, growers, and the communities they serve.

But because our nation's farmers are aging out of the field and their land is transitioning hands, this farm bill will not only determine the next 10 years, but the future of our nation's farmland. According to the most recent Census of Agriculture, the average U.S. farmer is 57.5 years old, a significant increase from 50.5 years old in 1982. The majority of people who manage U.S. agriculture are on the brink of retirement, and over the next two decades, more than half of all farmland is expected to change hands, and is at risk of being developed and leaving agriculture forever.

According to our Survey, access to affordable, quality farmland was the top challenge facing young farmers, and this barrier is even greater for BIPOC farmers. 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. A lack of secure land access is preventing young farmers from investing in the growth and resiliency of their operations. Importantly, they struggle to access critical USDA programs because of lack of land security.

According to the most recent Census of Agriculture, the average U.S. farmer is 57.5 years old, a significant increase from 50.5 years old in 1982. The majority of people who manage U.S. agriculture are on the brink of retirement, and over the next two decades, more than half of all farmland is expected to change hands, and is at risk of being developed and leaving agriculture forever.

Young farmers need policies that enable equitable access to land now.

The 2022 National Young Farmer Survey findings reveal that farm policy is failing the next generation of farmers, and challenges such as access to land and capital are preventing a new generation from launching and scaling their operations. This is a pivotal moment to invest in the BIPOC and young farmers who will steward agricultural land and resources for decades to come, and a chance to reorient our farm policy to ensure their success.

We urgently need to support the next generation of young farmers stepping up and launching farm businesses in this country. And fortunately, the last Census of Agriculture showed an increase in the number of farmers under the age of 35. Beginning farmers with less than 10 years of farming experience now make up 27% of U.S. producers as of 2017, and farmers under the age of 35 comprise 8% of U.S. producers.

Young farmers, and specifically young, BIPOC farmers, are motivated by environmental conservation, social justice, and community health, and they need policies that will support their growth and success. Our policy recommendations provide a road map for how to mobilize our federal funding to equitably resource the next generation in agriculture. Let's work together to make the 2023 Farm Bill an opportunity to transform agriculture to be in service to our communities and the land.