



THE YOUNG FARMER AGENDA



**POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS
BASED ON THE NATIONAL
YOUNG FARMER SURVEY**

// OCTOBER 2022



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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. 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.

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, the government, and the press as the definitive data source on the nation's young farmers.

Our 2022 National Young Farmer Survey was conducted between December 2021 and April 2022. 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.

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 (RCPD).
- Give priority to ACEP-ALE and RCPD projects that keep land affordable and in the hands of farmers by utilizing tools such as the Option to Purchase at Agricultural Value.
- 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.

FARMER HEALTH & 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 & 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 that supports food sovereignty, where farming is recognized as a public service, and local food infrastructure is in place. 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.



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 and Hazardous Conditions Due to Climate Change

- 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 USDA.



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.



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