

The Beginning Farmer and Rancher Opportunity Act of 2017

H.R.4316

Sponsored by Representatives Tim Walz (D-MN)
and Jeff Fortenberry (R-NE)

Bill Summary

The **Beginning Farmer and Rancher Opportunity Act** (H.R. 4316) lays out a national beginning farmer strategy that breaks down barriers to entry and gives real support to the next generation. This legislation addresses the critical issues new and aspiring farmers face in accessing land, building skills, managing risk and financial security, and investing in conservation to ensure that the 2018 Farm Bill is truly a farm bill for the future.

The Need for a New Generation

Our nation's farmers and ranchers are aging, and many of them will reach retirement without a succession plan in place that ensures the ongoing viability and vitality of their operation. At the same time, aspiring farmers nationwide are facing significant barriers to success in agriculture, including: the limited availability of affordable and desirable farmland, challenges in acquiring start-up capital and financing, and inadequate access to hands-on training and risk management tools.

Nearly 100 million acres of farmland (enough to support nearly 250,000 family farms) is set to change hands over the next five years – *during* the course of our next farm bill. **To keep our agricultural economy strong, the next farm bill needs to facilitate the transfer of skills, knowledge, and land between current and future generations of family farmers.** The tools provided in previous farm bills have made a dent in slowing the aging of American agriculture, but it is very clear that a greater investment and a more coordinated national strategy is needed to truly buck this trend.

The Beginning Farmer and Rancher Opportunity Act will ensure that the 2018 Farm Bill gives real support to both aspiring and retiring farmers and ranchers, as well as the American public, by:

Expanding beginning farmers' access to affordable land

- Increase the flexibility and effectiveness of land-link programs like the Transition Incentives Program by removing the current funding limitation in the Conservation Reserve Program baseline and expanding eligibility to all CRP contract holders
- Launch a new data initiative to support on-going data collection and analysis of national trends on farmland ownership, tenure, transition, barriers to entry, profitability and viability of beginning farmers
- Protect farmland affordability for easements purchased under the Agriculture Conservation Easement Program

Empowering new farmers with the skills to succeed in today's agricultural economy

- Secure permanent support for the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP) to ensure long-term investments in new farmer training and expanded priorities on succession planning, farm transfer, and transition planning
- Launch a new matched savings asset-building and financial training Individual Development Account program
- Increase funding for the Rural Microentrepreneur Assistance Program to \$5 million per year to support 1:1 technical assistance and start-up capital to foster new farm businesses

Ensuring equitable access to financial capital and federal crop insurance

- Ensure farmers are able to finance new farm purchases by raising the cap on FSA Direct Ownership Loans to \$500,000, adjusted annually by regional farmland inflation rates
- Expand beginning farmer crop insurance incentives to all new farmers under 10 years, and create an on-ramp to Federal Crop Insurance for beginning farmers with no revenue history through the Non-insured Crop Assistance Program

Encouraging commitment to conservation and stewardship across generations

- Increase beginning and socially disadvantaged farmer participation in working lands conservation programs by increasing the existing set-aside from 5 to 15 percent within both the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and the Conservation Stewardship Program
- Simplify the EQIP Advance Payment Option to ensure automatic enrollment for both beginners and socially disadvantaged farmers

All Members are encouraged to co-sponsor the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Opportunity Act. For more information or to co-sponsor, please contact:

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