



Provide Opportunity for our Nation's New-Entry and Historically Underserved & Veteran Farmers and Ranchers through USDA Programs and Services

The new **Farming Opportunities Training and Outreach (FOTO) Program in Section 12301** of the Senate Bill would streamline and strengthen existing efforts to support beginning, veteran, and socially disadvantaged farmers. Through a more coordinated and efficient approach, this new consolidated program would permanently protect resources that address the critical issues socially disadvantaged, veteran, new and aspiring farmers face in accessing land, building skills, and managing risk and financial security.

This new program, as proposed by the Senate, would permanently extend two complementary programs by linking the statutory authorities for both the **Outreach and Assistance for Socially Disadvantaged and Veteran Farmers and Ranchers Program** and the **Beginning Farmers and Ranchers Development Program**. It would further engage and ensure coordination with the relevant USDA Advisory Committees to ensure continuous stakeholder input, oversight, and improvement of both programs.

Previous Achievements: Socially Disadvantaged Farmers

For nearly 3 decades, **the Outreach and Assistance to Socially Disadvantaged and Veteran Farmers and Ranchers (OASDVFR) Program**, authorized in Section 2501 of the 1990 Farm Bill, has been USDA's primary tool to help our nation's historically underserved producers gain access to USDA credit, commodity, conservation and other programs and services. The program supports technical assistance to farmers and ranchers through the community-based organizations, tribes and minority serving educational institutions best prepared to reach and serve them. It has helped sustain rural food systems in hundreds of very small and food insecure counties across the US, particularly concentrated in the South, Southwest and in immigrant and refugee communities.

Proven impacts:

- ✓ In the 4 years of the 2008 Farm Bill, when the program received about \$18 million a year, the number of:
 - Hispanic Farmer and Asian-American farm operators increased by 21%,
 - Native American farm operators by 5%, and
 - African American Farm operators by 7%.
 - By the end of that farm bill, there were 28,000 additional producers from all the included groups reflected in the 2012 Census of Agriculture as compared to the 2007 Agriculture Census, reflecting an increasing need for the program for a growing sector of producers.

- ✓ Participation by diverse producers in programs such as the NRCS High-tunnel program and in the FSA micro-loan program has significantly increased.
- ✓ Program utilization is high, having served more than 100,000 rural constituents.
- ✓ Geographic reach is broad, including over 400 counties in more than 35 states, including the most persistently poor parts of our country.
- ✓ There is also increased need for services for veteran farmers and ranchers, added to the program in 2014, many of whom are from rural areas. According to the 2010 Census, there were 21.9 million veterans, 156,000 of whom are American Indian Veterans, 2.4 million are African American Veterans, 1.2 Million are Hispanic Veterans, and 265,000 are Asian Veterans.

Previous Achievements: Beginning Farmers

Congress created **The Beginning Farmers and Ranchers Development Program** over a decade ago with the recognition that more needed to be done to ensure the stability and success of the next generation of farmers, including veterans which were formally added to the program in 2014. To date, BFRDP remains the only federal program that is explicitly focused on training the next generation of farmers.

While funding has remained flat since the program's creation in 2002, demand for new farmer training resources has increased significantly – with over 40 percent more applications since the passage of the 2014 Farm Bill and the addition of veterans.

Additionally, since 2014, BFRDP has only been able to fund 22 percent of all proposals submitted, turning down two out of every three meritorious proposals recommended for funding.

Proven impacts:

- ✓ According to a recent evaluation of BFRDP¹, in its 10-year history, the program has proven instrumental in building a national infrastructure, new models, and best practices to train and support new farmers.
- ✓ Since 2008, BFRDP has invested roughly \$150 million in over 250 new farmer training projects across the country and has reached over 60,000 beginning farmers.
- ✓ BFRDP funded projects are showing real outcomes – project leaders estimate that over half of their participants are now engaged in a farming career, and that nearly three-quarters of them felt more prepared for a successful career in agriculture.

¹ *Cultivating the Next Generation: An Evaluation of the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (2009-2015)*. National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition. October 2017. Available: <http://sustainableagriculture.net/publications/bfrdp>

- ✓ BFRDP has also helped nonprofit and community-based organizations, along with their academic partners, to build their capacity and serve more farmers, and serve them better.
- ✓ Almost all projects focus on farmers in their first 5 years of farming, with a significant focus on those farmers starting out at a small-scale, and intensive programs, lasting months or even several years, designed to move aspiring farmers quickly into production.
- ✓ BFRDP projects focus on addressing the challenges and building the skills new farmers need to succeed. Almost all projects including training on essential farm business management skills to help new farmers succeed, and more third help new farmers access land and capital – two of the biggest barriers to farming today.

The new Farming Opportunities Training and Outreach (FOTO) Program (Sec. 12301 of the Senate Bill) would:

- Merge the authorizations for the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program and the Outreach and Assistance for Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Rancher and Veteran Farmer and Rancher Program into a new Farming Opportunities Training and Outreach Program.
- Provide \$50 million in mandatory funding for the combined program in fiscal year 2018 and each year thereafter, with authority for additional appropriations up to \$50 million in each fiscal year through 2023.
- Increase transparency and accountability to ensure the program remains responsive and accessible to those serving our nation's most vulnerable farming communities, by establishing an external peer review process and outcomes reporting.
- Seek continual input on program operations from constituents including from the relevant Advisory committees that sit together in the USDA Office of Advocacy and Outreach.
- Set the maximum award amount for grants made through both programs at \$250,000 for a maximum of three years.
- Assure all new-entry, veteran and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers have access to a seamless web of education and hands on technical assistance to access opportunities in the farming and ranching now and in the future.