

April 6, 2017

The Honorable Lamar Alexander, Chair
U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education,
Labor, and Pensions
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Virginia Foxx, Chair
U.S. House Committee on Education and
the Workforce
2176 Rayburn Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Patty Murray, Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education,
Labor, and Pensions
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Robert Scott, Ranking Member
U.S. House Committee on Education and
the Workforce
2176 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairpersons Alexander and Foxx and Ranking Members Murray and Scott:

American agriculture faces a crisis of attrition. Two-thirds of our farmland is on the cusp of transition as farmers age and retire, and there are few young farmers positioned to manage this resource. Farmers over the age of 65 outnumber farmers under the age of 35 by a margin of 6-to-1, and the number of farmers under the age of 35 grew by only 1% between 2007 and 2012.

We must incentivize more young people to pursue careers in agriculture. That is why our growing coalition asks you to add farmers to the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program. A bill recently introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives, the *Young Farmer Success Act* (H.R. 1060), would do exactly that.

For college graduates, 71% of whom now graduate with student debt, a farm career is often out of the question. Student debt 1) deters many from considering farm careers; 2) places an often insurmountable financial burden on young farmers; and 3) prevents farmers from capitalizing their businesses and purchasing land because they are unable to secure mortgages and operating loans.

Bringing young people back to the farm and ranch must be a national priority. We need innovative policies and programs that will incentivize careers in agriculture and reduce the risks and barriers to entry. Given this urgent national need, traditional farm programs are not enough. Farmers grow our food, strengthen rural economies, steward our land and natural resources, and, ultimately, contribute to national security. Much like teachers, doctors, nurses, and government employees, farmers serve their communities.

For all of these reasons, we should recognize the contributions young farmers make to this country. We must rebuild the career path to farming and ranching by adding farmers to the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program.

Sincerely,

A Greener World
AERO (Alternative Energy Resources Organization)
Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association (ALBA)
Alabama Sustainable Agriculture Network
Alaska Farmers Union
Alternative Energy Resource Organization
American Grassfed Association
American Sustainable Business Council
Band of Farmers
Catholic Rural Life
CCOF
Center for land-based learning
Certified Naturally Grown
Community Alliance with Family Farmers / Farmers Guild
Community Farm Alliance
Community Farmers Markets
Dakota Rural Action
Ecological Farming Association
FairShare CSA Coalition
Family Farm Alliance
Farm Aid
Farm Food Collaborative
Farmer Training Program at the University of Vermont
Farmers Market Coalition
Florida Certified Organic Growers and Consumers
Food & Water Watch
Food Tank
FoodCorps
Friends of Family Farmers
Friends of the Earth US
Future Harvest CASA
Georgia Organics
GoFarm
Greenhorns
Guidestone Colorado
Healthy Community Food Systems
Illinois Stewardship Alliance
Incubator Farm
Intervale Center
Iowa Farmers Union
Just Food
Kansas Farmers Union

Kansas Rural Center
Liberty Prairie Foundation
Lowcountry Local First
Lutheran Family Services Rocky Mountain
Lutheran Services in Iowa: Global Greens
Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association
Maryland Pesticide Education Network
Michael Fields Agricultural Institute
Michigan Food and Farming Systems
Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service MOSES
Mississippi Sustainable Agriculture Network
Missouri Farmers Union
MN Food Association
Montezuma Land Conservancy
National Farm to School Network
National Farmers Union
National FFA Organization
National Hmong American Farmers
National Organic Coalition
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
National Young Farmers Coalition
Nebraska Farmers Union
Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society
New England Farmers Union
New Entry Sustainable Farming Project
Northeast Organic Farming Association of New York
Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont
Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group (NESAWG)
One Wisconsin Institute
Oregon Tilth
Organic Growers School
Organic Seed Alliance
Organic Trade Association
PCC Farmland Trust
Pennsylvania Farmers Union
RAFI-USA
Real Food Challenge
Renewing the Countryside
Rio Grande Ag Land Trust
Rocky Mountain Farmers Union
Rodale Institute
Rogue Farm Corps
Roots of Change

Sebastopol Farmers Market
Slow Food Nebraska
Smokey House Center
Southside Community Land Trust
Sprouting Farms
Stone Barns Center for Food and Agriculture
Student Debt Crisis
Sustainable Food Trade Association
The Seed Farm
Tilth Alliance
Tilth Producers of Washington
Veterans Education Success
Vilicus Farms
Washington State Farmers Market Association
West Virginia Food & Farm Coalition
Western Colorado Congress
Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms, USA (WWOOF-USA)