

The Honorable Pat Roberts
Chairman, Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition & Forestry
United States Senate

The Honorable K. Michael Conaway
Chairman, Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Ranking Member, Senate Committee on
Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry
United States Senate

The Honorable Collin C. Peterson
Ranking Member, Committee on
Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives

September 20, 2018

Dear Chairs and Ranking Members:

During the final negotiations and deliberations of the Farm Bill Conference Committee, we the undersigned 141 groups write to express our strong support for permanent investments in both the next generation of farmers as well as our nation's most chronically underserved farmers – including socially disadvantaged, veteran, new and beginning farmers and ranchers. **We therefore urge the conference to adopt Section 12301 of the Senate Bill, which establishes the Farming Opportunities Training and Outreach (FOTO) Program.** FOTO efficiently merges the authorizations for the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP) and the Outreach and Assistance for Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers and Veteran Farmers and Ranchers Program (OASDVFR) program (also known as the 2501 Program).

While we appreciate the continued support for the two programs contained in sections 7507 and 11201 of the House Bill, Section 12301 of the Senate bill more fully ensures that the risk management, credit, and marketing challenges of our new generation of producers are addressed in a timely and practical manner. Senate Section 12301 directly tackles the increased demand for technical assistance by two growing populations of producers: military veteran farmers and ranchers, and historically underserved producers, including Tribal producers and African American, Latino, and Asian Pacific American producers. This investment also helps grow the next generation of farmers that the future of our country's food and farming system relies on.

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

- Provide permanent authority and invest permanent mandatory funding of \$50 million split equally between the two linked programs, 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 to assure the complementary needs for direct, hands-on technical assistance in accessing programs, coupled with training and education are met through the community-based organizations and educational institutions best prepared to deliver these services.

- Allow improved function, coordination, and accountability of the two programs with each other, with their overlapping constituencies, and with the relevant Advisory Committees on Beginning Farmers and Ranchers, and Minority Farmers and Ranchers housed in the USDA Office of Advocacy and Outreach, and the Tribal Advisory Committee housed in the Office of Tribal Relations.

For over a decade, the Beginning Farmers and Ranchers Development Program (BFRDP) has been the only USDA program dedicated to training the next generation of farmers. OASDVFR has for almost three decades served as the only Farm Bill program dedicated to addressing the specific needs of minority farmers and ranchers. In 2014, both programs were expanded to also serve military veterans.

With additional demand for program resources from returning military veterans and increasing numbers of diverse and young farmers, Congress must scale up and make permanent investments in the next Farm Bill to support for our nation’s most underserved communities.

Adequate funding for these critical programs will support new-entry farmers and ranchers including veterans, expand economic development opportunities in rural communities, advance intergenerational land tenure, and promote familial and community wealth for beginning, socially disadvantaged, and veteran producers. We therefore strongly urge the conference committee to accept the Senate language and the important improvements and stability it provides to these vital programs.

Thank you for your consideration and attention to the matter.

Sincerely,

National Organizations

ActionAid USA	Washington	DC
Agroecology Research-Action Collective	Berkeley	CA
Alianza Nacional de Campesinas	Oxnard	CA
American Farmland Trust		
American Indian Mothers Inc. (AIMI)	Red Springs	NC
American Sustainable Business Council	Washington	DC
Asian American Farmers Alliance	San Diego	CA
Black Farmers and Agriculturalists Association	Tillery	NC
Center for Rural Affairs	Lyons	NE
Climate Consensus Institute	Belen	NM
Community Food and Justice Coalition	Oakland	CA
Family Farm Defenders	Madison	WI
Farm Aid	Cambridge	MA
Farmer Veteran Coalition	Dixon	CA
Florida Organic Growers (FOG) / Quality Certification Services (QCS)	Gainesville	FL
Food & Water Watch	Washington	DC
Food First	Oakland	CA
Friends of the Earth		
Global Justice Ecology Project	Buffalo	NY

H.E.A.L. Food Alliance		
Hempstead Project Heart	Keshena	WI
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy	Minneapolis	MN
Intertribal Agriculture Council		
Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future	Baltimore	MD
National Association of Credit Specialists		
National Center for Frontier Communities	Silver City	NM
National Family Farm Coalition	Washington	DC
National Farm to School Network		DC
National Farmers Union		
National Hmong American Farmers, Inc.	Fresno	CA
National Latino Farmers and Ranchers Trade Association	Washington	DC
National Rural Lenders Association		
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition	Washington	DC
National Young Farmers Coalition	Hudson	NY
Northeast Organic Farming Association of New York	Syracuse	NY
Nuestras Raices	Holyoke	MA
Pesticide Action Network	Berkeley	CA
Plainsong Farm & Ministry	Rockford	MI
RAFI-USA	Pittsboro	NC
Real Food Challenge	Cambridge	MA
Rural Advancement Fund of the National Sharecroppers Fund	Orangeburg	SC
Rural Coalition	Washington	DC
Rural Development Leadership Network	New York	NY
Save Our Roots for Indigenous Environmental Network		
Sierra Club	Oakland	CA
Slow Food USA	New York	NY
Stone Barns Center for Food & Agriculture	Pocantico Hills	NY
The Common Market	Philadelphia	PA
Transformative Justice Coalition	Washington	DC
Unilever		
Union of Concerned Scientists	Washington	DC
Veterans Justice	Chicago	IL
Wild Farm Alliance	Watsonville	CA

Regional, State and Local Organizations

21st Century Youth Leadership Movement	Eutaw	AL
AFGE Local 3354	Florissant	MO, IL, OK, KS
Alabama State Association of Cooperatives	Forkland	AL
Appetite For Change	Minneapolis	MN
Arkansas Land and Community Development Corporation	Brinkley	AR
Ashtabula, Geauga, Lake Counties Farmers Union (Ohio)	Windsor	OH
Atrisco Land Grant	Atrisco	NM
Atrisco Land Rights Council	Atrisco	NM
BioRegional Strategies	Albuquerque	NM
Black Farmers and Ranchers New Mexico	Puebitos	NM
Black Mesa Farm	Los Padillas	NM

California Institute for Rural Studies	Davis	CA
Carolina Farm Stewardship	Pittsboro	NC, SC
Casa Grande Farms	Atrisco	NM
Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems UC Santa Cruz	Santa Cruz	CA
Coastal Enterprises, Inc.	Brunswick	ME
Colorado Springs Food Rescue	Colorado Springs	CO
Community Alliance for Global Justice	Seattle	WA
Community Farm Alliance		KY
Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture (CISA)	South Deerfield	MA
Concerned Citizens of Tillery	Tillery	NC
Cottage House Inc.	Ariton	AL
Crossroads Community Food Network	Takoma Park	MD
Cumberland County Food Security Council		ME
Current-C Energy Systems	Albuquerque	NM
Dakota Rural Action	Brookings	SD
DC Greens	Washington	DC
Denver Urban Gardens	Denver	CO
Double Up Food Bucks Garfield	Rifle	CO
Earth Ethics	Pensacola	FL
Fair Farms	Annapolis	MD
Farms to Grow, Inc	Oakland	CA
Farmworker Association of Florida	Apopka	FL
Federation of Southern Cooperatives	East Point	GA
Greene County Newspaper Company	Eutaw	AL
Illinois Stewardship Alliance		IL
Ilokano Farms	Orosi	CA
Interfaith Sustainable Food	Sebastopol	CA
Just Food	New York	NY
Kansas Black Farmers Association	Bogue	KS
Kansas Rural Center	Topeka	KA
Kitchen Table Advisors		CA
KULANU	Sebastopol	CA
La Merced del Pueblo	Chama	NM
La Semilla Food Center	Anthony	NM
Land For Good	Keene	NH
Land Stewardship Project	Minneapolis	MN
Lideres Campesinas	Oxnard	CA
LiveWell Colorado	Denver	CO
Maine Farmland Trust	Portland	ME
Manito Ranches	Atrisco	NM
Merced Del Pueblo De San Joaquin Del Rio de Chama	Gallina	NM
Michael Fields Agricultural Institute	Madison	WI
Michigan Food and Farming Systems	East Lansing	MI
Missouri Coalition for the Environment	Saint Louis	MO
Missouri Rural Crisis Center	Columbia	MO
Montezuma Farms	Atrisco	NM

NM Acequia Association	Santa Fe	NM
North Carolina Association of Black Lawyers Land Loss Prevention Project	Durham	NC
Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont (NOFA-VT)	Richmond	VT
Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group	Kingston	NY
Northern New Mexico Stockmans Association	Taos	NM
Northwest Forest Worker Center	Albany	CA
Now You Know New Mexico	Bernalillo	NM
Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts	Oklahoma City	OK
Oklahoma Black Historical Research Project	Oklahoma City	OK
Operation Spring Plant	Oxford	NC
Planting Justice	Oakland	CA
PLBA Housing Development Corporation	Gainesville	AL
Range Cafe	Bernalillo	NM
Rural Advancement Fund of the National Sharecroppers Fund	Orangeburg	SC
Rural Communities Resource Center	Cutler	CA
Rural Vermont		VT
Share Food Program	Philadelphia	PA
Solidarity Farm	Pauma Valley	CA
Soul Fire Farm	Petersburg	NY
Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group	Fayetteville	AR
Texas Mexico Border Coalition CBO	San Isidro	TX
The Common Market Georgia	East Point	GA
The Common Market Mid-Atlantic	Philadelphia	PA
The Common Market Texas	Houston	TX
The Keep & Till	Lineboro	MD
The Land Connection	Champaign	IL
Tierra del Sol Housing Corporation	Las Cruces	NM
Virginia Association for Biological Farming	Montvale	VA
Waller County Farmers' & Ranchers' Cooperative	Prairie View	TX
World Farmers	Lancaster	MA
WV Food & Farm Coalition	Charleston	WV

Cc: Farm Bill Conference Committee