

A Bill to Feed Farming Viability

by Jackie Nutter

On March 1st, the importance of food “from field to fork” was highlighted during the first annual [Food Justice Summit](#)¹ in Upstate New York, and farmers at the conference struggled to understand why their work isn’t considered a public service.

The [Young Farmers Success Act](#)² (H.R.1060) was introduced to congress on February 15th of 2017 and still struggles today to become a law. Amending the Higher Education Act of 1965, this bill will now include full-time farm or ranch employees as a public service job so they can be included in the loan forgiveness program. It is essential that this law is passed because Farmers are critical to our nation’s well being.

Not enough young people are farming in rural America because of money pressures. Talking to farmers at the North Country Food Justice Summit, many of them feared they will never have the chance at a retirement plan. According to a survey from the [National Young Farmers Coalition](#)³, new farmers coming out of college owe an average of \$35,000 in student loans—and they aren’t having an easy time paying these loans off. According to PayScale, new farmers are making 16 percent less than the average wage of the graduating class of 2016—\$39,332 per year.

One factor to this is money. Farmers only get 16 cents from every dollar spent on food. The odds of farmers getting a higher profit has only gotten smaller since the 1980’s. According to FarmAid, [farmers saw a 45% drop in income between 2013 and 2016](#)⁴. As the U.S. Department of Agriculture [expects their income to continue falling](#)⁵, farmers are feeling pressure in a strained farm economy. Farming is no longer viable for a full time position, therefore we need to create the proper benefits for our nation's young farmers so they can succeed in our economy.

Food is a necessity to our nation. On average, [one U.S. farm feeds 165 people per year](#)⁶. According to the [American Farm Bureau](#)⁶, “The global population is expected to increase to 9.7 billion by 2050, which means the world’s farmers will have to grow about 70% more food than what is now produced.” We need more farmers so we can feed these people. As well, farmers help to support the economy. American Farm Bureau also said that farmers in the U.S. account for about 1% of the U.S. GDP where in 2016, \$135.5 billion of American agricultural products were exported. Food is a necessity because it nourishes us and helps contribute to our economy, therefore we must value it as we value our doctors for keeping us healthy and police officers for keeping us safe.

We need new farming practices —the only way to move towards an ecological future is through the ones who will be around for our future. The [National Young Farmers Coalition](#)² said that even though the USDA has started to focus more on beginning farmers, only 6% of farmers are under 35 years old. This is important because our youth will solve our farming issues, and move us away from traditional ways of farming. Currently, “69% of the world's freshwater withdrawals are committed to agriculture,” says [Global Agriculture](#)⁷. This makes a huge impact since our world’s largest freshwater systems are being depleted at an [unsustainable rate](#)⁸. Not only does agriculture cause harm during its production process with usage and runoff, but for food to get from farm to plate, the [Center for Urban Education](#)⁹ said it takes on average 1,500 miles. As well there are issues like genetic drift, superweeds, and food insecurity. We need to support our young farmers because they will be the ones to solve issues of water, GMOs, food security and overall health of our nation.

Does the government/tax money have to be the ones to pay, what about lowering worker wages or raising food prices? First off, H.R.1060 makes benefits more widespread to farmers, and puts public money towards something directly benefiting them. For a farmer, competition is tough, so raising the price of their product will drive away customers to another farm. According to the [New Food Economy](#)¹⁰, lowering worker wages will leave farmers with less workers on top of the already diminishing worker population. As well, farmers have some funds available to them such as the Open Space fund, Clipper Fund, Co-ops, but these funds only apply to certain farmers who qualify. Implementing this law will kill two birds with one stone— it will provide money for farmers to keep their jobs viable, while also providing a greater incentive for workers because there would be a opportunity to raise their wages.

Most recently, the [New Food Economy](#)¹¹ reported that the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program approval letters may be invalid because it is hard to define a non-profit or government employee. Therefore, congress has reason to delay the expansion of farmers into the program. Even if this slows down progress, the law shouldn't be stopped. We will eventually have to reestablish what groups are considered a public service. So, by the time the law is ready to be passed, the problem could be resolved.

“From field to fork,” food is a broad term with issues that touch on many aspects of society. The Food Justice Summit is one of the early steps to acknowledge and attempt to stop these challenges in their tracks. We need to promote jobs in agriculture because food is a necessity for our nourishment and economy, and farmers will be the ones who will have to solve issues of water and more that not only affect the Adirondack region, but the nation and world.

What can you do? To help push H.R.1060, let your representatives know you want this law to pass! Write a letter, organize a petition or protest, or you can join a movement such as: [National Young Farmers Coalition](#)¹², [Food Tank](#)¹³, [New Food Economy](#)¹⁴, [Farm Aid](#)¹⁵. If you

aren't willing to commit much time to these efforts, you could enhance your daily habits. Volunteer at a farm, buy local and, talk about the issue by bring up this law to others.

Work Cited:

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¹⁵ NA. "[Take Action with Farm Aid.](#)" *Farm Aid*, 2018.