



Farm Bill Support for Beginners

The Beginning Farmer & Rancher Development Program

Overdue support for beginning farmers

The 2008 Farm Bill is currently being debated and is expected to be passed by Congress and signed into law by President Bush in the spring of 2008. *While nothing is final*, this fact sheet is meant to provide information to organizations and groups interested in beginning farmer policies and funding opportunities that we believe will soon be enacted.

While the new Farm Bill lacks major reforms, and inequities continue to exist in the commodity title, it does for the first time ever dedicate substantial resources to beginning farmer and rancher initiatives. It's hard to believe that the U.S. until now has never had a comprehensive approach to supporting the next generation of family farmers, but it's true.

During the Farm Bill debate, the Land Stewardship Project, working with the Sustainable Agriculture Coalition as well as other farm and rural organizations from across the nation, pushed for beginning farmer and rancher initiatives. With the support of Congressional leaders, the bill now includes smart start-up support for beginning farmers through additional credit provisions, conservation incentives and beginning farmer and rancher assistance programs.

The investment in beginning farmer and rancher initiatives is an important step in strengthening our rural communities and building a more sustainable food and agriculture system. With the growth in organics, local markets and regional food systems, for example, there are clearly opportunities in agriculture. The Farm Bill's beginning farmer and rancher initiatives will help new farmers and ranchers take advantage of opportunities in agriculture and overcome barriers to getting started.

Beginning Farmer & Rancher Development Program

Perhaps the most significant beginning farmer measure included in the 2008 Farm Bill as it now stands is the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP). The BFRDP is a competitive grants program aimed at providing support to community-based organizations and collaborative networks that provide beginning farmer and rancher education, training and mentoring.

As we go to press with this fact sheet, we're optimistic that mandatory BFRDP funding will be included in

the final Farm Bill. The U.S. House dedicated \$15 million per year to the BFRDP, and indications are that this will be incorporated into the final bill. Essentially the program provides federal resources to community organizations, partnerships or networks that have a plan to help people begin farming or ranching. Networks may include: community-based and non-governmental organizations; cooperative extension; relevant USDA and state agencies; universities; and community colleges.

The BFRDP will make it possible for such groups to use a wide variety of strategies for assisting beginning farmers and ranchers:

- 1) mentoring, apprenticeships and internships;
- 2) resources and referral;
- 3) assisting beginning farmers or ranchers in acquiring land;
- 4) innovative farm and ranch transfer strategies;
- 5) entrepreneurship and business training;
- 6) model land leasing contracts;
- 7) financial management training;
- 8) whole farm planning;
- 9) conservation assistance, including energy conservation and efficiency;
- 10) risk management education;
- 11) diversification and marketing strategies, including transition to organic and other source-verified and value-added alternative production and marketing systems;
- 12) curriculum development;
- 13) understanding the impact of concentration and globalization;
- 14) basic livestock and crop farming practices;
- 15) the acquisition and management of agricultural credit;
- 16) environmental compliance;
- 17) information processing;
- 18) other similar subject areas of use to beginning farmers or ranchers.



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Why the BFRDP makes sense

The BFRDP is a common-sense initiative with the flexibility to support a number of different approaches and strategies to help new farmers and ranchers get started. Community-based organizations and networks can use the BFRDP to address barriers beginning farmers and ranchers face which might be specific to their region. The structure of BFRDP also makes it possible to help with challenges new producers face regardless of where they farm. In the end, this program's goal is to get more people farming or ranching in a way that strengthens rural communities and the land. Matching federal resources with community-based organizations and networks that are working day-to-day with new producers is a good approach that can produce results.

Who will administer BFRDP?

The BFRDP is likely to be administered by the USDA's Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES). CSREES (www.csrees.usda.gov) will develop program guidelines and appoint a review committee that evaluates proposals from interested organizations or networks.

Guidelines include provisions such as:

- ✓ Community-based organizations or networks applying for grants must use funds to primarily target beginning farmers and ranchers who have been farming or ranching less than 10 years*.
- ✓ The term of the grants can be no greater than three years.
- ✓ The size of the grant can be no greater than \$250,000 per year (eligible recipients may receive consecutive grants).
- ✓ To qualify for a grant, the community-based organization or network must provide a match in the form of cash or in-kind contribution equal to 25 percent of the funds provided.

The BFRDP also sets aside 25 percent of the yearly funds for organizations or networks serving socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers. Socially disadvantaged producers have traditionally been excluded from federal programs and include minority, immigrant, refugee and female farmers and ranchers, as well as farm workers seeking to become farmers in their own right.

Who can participate in the BFRDP?

The BFRDP is a voluntary program and nearly any organization, institution, network or partnership can submit a proposal. Proposals will be evaluated against others and essentially ranked to determine who is awarded grants. It's expected that CSREES will accept proposals every year. Along with the

guidelines and recommendations from an appointed review committee, regional equity will be considered during the awarding of grants.

When will the BFRDP be available?

Since the 2008 Farm Bill is still in negotiations, the timing of the bill's passage will help determine when the first BFRDP request for proposals might occur. Predictions are that the earliest CSREES would be able to begin accepting proposals is in the first half of 2009, although factors such as how much grassroots pressure we generate, Farm Bill delays, changing Presidential administrations and legislative issues may delay or speed up program delivery.

For more information

If you have additional questions about the BFRDP or other beginning farmer provisions that are proposed in the 2008 Farm Bill, contact the Land Stewardship Project at 612-722-6377 or visit our website at www.landstewardshipproject.org. Also, if you are interested in working with the Land Stewardship Project to get the BFRDP off the ground, we'd like to hear your ideas and suggestions.

Sources

- ➔ House 2007 Farm Bill Title XI - Miscellaneous Provisions. <http://agriculture.house.gov/inside/2007FarmBill.html>
- ➔ Senate 2007 Farm Bill Title XI - Miscellaneous (Legal). <http://agriculture.senate.gov/>
- ➔ January 27-29 2008: Supporting the Next Generation of Family Farmers and Ranchers. www.landstewardshipproject.org/pdf/dc_fly-in_packet_1-08.pdf
- ➔ March 27, 2007: "Statement of Karen Stettler, Land Stewardship Project Farm Beginnings@ Director, for the Credit Hearing of the Subcommittee on Conservation, Credit, Energy, and Research, U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Agriculture." This testimony outlines how Congress can help beginning farmers in the new Farm Bill. www.landstewardshipproject.org/pr/07/newsr_070327-2.htm
- ➔ 2007: Sustainable Agriculture Coalition Farm Bill Platform. www.sustainableagriculturecoalition.org/key-farmbill.html



This fact sheet is brought to you by the members and staff of the Land Stewardship Project, a private, nonprofit organization devoted to fostering an ethic of stewardship for farmland and to seeing more successful farmers on the land raising crops and livestock. For more information, call 651-653-0618 or visit www.landstewardshipproject.org

* Those farmers and ranchers who are not beginning farmers and ranchers are allowed to participate in BFRDP projects as long as it doesn't detract from the primary purpose of educating beginning farmers and ranchers.