

November 2011

Dear Members of Congress:

We the undersigned organizations enthusiastically endorse the *Beginning Farmer and Rancher Opportunity Act of 2011* [H.R.3236, S.1850] that was recently introduced in the House by Rep. Tim Walz (D-MN-1) and Rep. Jeff Fortenberry (R-NE-1), and in the Senate by Sen. Tom Harkin along with nine original co-sponsors. This comprehensive and forward-thinking initiative would help a new generation of farmers and ranchers enter agriculture, and we strongly support its inclusion, in its entirety, in the upcoming farm bill.

The bill recognizes the urgent need to address the aging of American agriculture and at the same time to take advantage of the opportunity provided by the rising interest in farming among an increasingly diverse set of new farmers. In doing so, the bill addresses the credit, conservation, research, and training needs of beginning farmers and ranchers. It would improve existing credit programs so they are accessible for young and beginning farmers, reauthorize important conservation programs that foster new life-long stewards of the land, and invest in research and training to encourage innovative strategies for land transfer and farm entry. The bill also invests farm bill dollars in beginning farmer development grants with a new priority on military veterans, in an innovative individual development account pilot program, and in value added producer grants that will increase market opportunities and profitability for new farmers.

We urge you to support this innovative and much-needed initiative to tackle a pressing concern that too often in the past has been talked about but not acted upon. We look forward to working with you to ensure this initiative is enacted into law as part of the new farm bill.

Sincerely,

Institute for Social and Economic Development, Washington, DC
National Association of Counties, Washington, DC
National Farmers Union, Washington, DC
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, Washington, DC

Adelante Mujeres, Forest Grove, OR
Alternative Energy Resources Organization, Helena, MT
Angelic Organics Learning Center, Caledonia, IL
Beginning Farmers, Lansing, MI
Berkshire Grown, Great Barrington, MA
Boston Area Gleaners, Waltham, MA
California Certified Organic Farmers, Santa Cruz, CA
California Farmers Union, Turlock, CA
California FarmLink, Santa Cruz, CA
Carolina Farm Stewardship Alliance, Pittsboro, NC
Catholic Charities of Kansas City-St. Joseph, Kansas City, MO
Center for Bioregional Living, Ellenville, NY
Center for Land-Based Learning, Winters, CA
Center for Rural Affairs, Lyons, NE

Coastal Enterprises, Inc., Wiscasset, ME
Community Action Development Commission, Norristown, PA
Community of Farmers, Decatur, GA
Community to Community, Bellingham, WA
Cultivating Community, Portland, ME
Dakota Rural Action, Brookings, SD
Eastern Carolina Organics, Pittsboro, NC
Eden Hall Farm, Gibsonia, PA
Equity Trust, Inc., Turners Falls, MA
Family Farm Defenders, Madison, WI
Farley Center, Madison, WI
Farm Business Development Center, Grayslake, IL
Farm Catskills, Delhi, NY
Farm Fresh Rhode Island, Pawtucket, RI
Farm School NYC, New York, NY
Farmer-Veteran Coalition, Davis, CA
Fay-Penn Economic Development Council, Uniontown, PA
Finger Lakes Permaculture Institute, Alpine, NY
Food Animal Concerns Trust, Chicago, IL
Food Democracy Now!, Clear Lake, IA
Food System Economic Partnership, Ann Arbor, MI
Food Works, Carbondale, IL
Fresh Start Community Farm, Newport, VT
Friends of Family Farmers, Molalla, OR
Georgia Organics, Atlanta, GA
Gorge Grown Food Network, Hood River, OR
GrassWorks, Inc., Hudson, WI
Illinois Stewardship Alliance, Springfield, IL
Innovative Farmers of Ohio, Powell, OH
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, Minneapolis, MN
Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement, Des Moines, IA
Iowa Environmental Council, Des Moines, IA
Iowa Farmers Union, Ames, IA
Izaak Walton League of America, Gaithersburg, MD
John Hopkins Center for a Livable Future, Baltimore, MD
Just Food, New York, NY
Kansas Rural Center, Whiting, KS
Lake Superior Sustainable Farming Association, Carlton, MN
Land for Good, Keene, NH
Land Stewardship Project, Minneapolis, MN
Leopold Group, S.E. Iowa chapter, Iowa Sierra Club, Fairfield, IA
Liberty Prairie Foundation, Grayslake, IL
Lutheran Social Service of New England, Worcester, MA
Maine Sustainable Agriculture Society, Bangor, ME
Matthews Family Farm, Eighty-Four, PA
Michael Fields Agricultural Institute, East Troy, WI
Michigan Coalition of Black Farmers, Detroit, MI
Michigan Food and Farming Systems, East Lansing, MI

Michigan Land Use Institute, Traverse City, MI
Michigan Organic Food and Farm Alliance, Lansing, MI
Michigan Yarn Company, Mason, MI
Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service, Spring Valley, WI
Minnesota Catholic Conference, St. Paul, MN
Minnesota COACT, St. Paul, MN
Minnesota Farmers Union, St. Paul, MN
Minnesota Food Association, Marine on St. Croix, MN
Minnesota National Farmers Organization, Watertown, MN
Missouri Farmers Union, Rock Port, MO
Montgomery Countryside Alliance, Poolesville, MD
Mulberry Hill, Saline, MI
National Catholic Rural Life Conference, Des Moines, IA
National Center for Appropriate Technology, Butte, MT
National Farmers Organization, Ames, IA
National Young Farmers' Coalition, Tivoli, NY
Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society, Hartington, NE
New England Farmers' Union, Shelburne Falls, MA
New Entry Sustainable Farming Project, Lowell, MA
New Mexico Acequia Association, Santa Fe, NM
Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance, Deerfield, MA
Northeast Organic Farming Association of Connecticut, Oxford, CT
Northeast Organic Farming Association of New Jersey, Hillsborough, NJ
Northeast Organic Farming Association of New York, Rochester, NY
Northeast Pasture Consortium, Greensboro, NC
Northeast States Association for Agriculture Stewardship, Dresden, ME
Northwest Michigan Council of Governments, Traverse City, MI
Northwest Michigan Food and Farming Network, Traverse City, MI
Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association, Columbus, OH
Ohio Environmental Council, Columbus, OH
Okmulgee County Farmers and Ranchers, Wilson OK
Oregon Tilth, Corvallis, OR
Organic Farming Research Foundation, Santa Cruz, CA
Organic Valley, La Farge, WI
Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture, Millheim, PA
Pennypack Farm & Education Center, Horsham, PA
Pesticide Action Network, San Francisco, CA
Practical Farmers of Iowa, Ames, IA
Rainbow Natural Grocery Cooperative, Jackson, MS
Renewing the Countryside, St. Paul, MN
Rogue Farm Corps, Ashland, OR
Root 'n Roost Farm, White Sulphur Springs, NY
Round River Farm, Finland, MN
Rural Advancement Foundation International-USA, Pittsboro, NC
Shalom Seed Sanctuary, Finland, MN
Slow Food First Coast, St. Augustine, FL
Slow Food Nebraska, Ceresco, NE
Slow Food USA, New York, NY

Southern Mutual Help Association Inc., New Iberia, LA
Southern Research and Development, New Iberia, LA
Sundhill Farm, Dublin, NH
Sustainable Business Network, Wayland, MA
Sustainable Food Center, Austin, TX
Taos County Economic Development Corp, Taos, NM
Texas Mexico Border Coalition CBO, San Isidro, TX
The Cornucopia Institute, Cornucopia, WI
The CSA Coalition, Madison, WI
The Land Connection, Sidney, IL
The Lost Arts Collaborative, Still River, MA
Thrive, Ashland, OR
United Farmers USA, Manning, SC
Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund, Montpelier, VT
Virginia Association for Biological Farming, Lexington, VA
Washington Sustainable Food & Farming Network, Mount Vernon, WA
Washtenaw County Public Health, Ypsilanti, MI
Women, Food and Agriculture Network, Ames, IA