

**Statement by
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Chairman Davis, Ranking Member Del Bene, and Members of the Subcommittee, I am pleased to have the opportunity to address you today on the topic of the future of American farming and ranching.

I am looking forward to hearing the testimony of my fellow witnesses and learning from their enthusiasm and experiences how we at USDA can best serve this new generation of agricultural producers.

Under the leadership of Secretary Vilsack, I have dedicated my efforts at USDA to supporting and aligning our resources to best serve the new generation of farmers and ranchers and to create opportunities for tomorrow's leaders. USDA has worked to update the way we provide customer service for new and beginning farmers; implemented the farm bill quickly and effectively; worked to update our programs to reflect the new and modern farm needs; updated our budget priorities to reflect priorities for the next generation; and, built new partnership and mentorship opportunities that are helping USDA connect with new farmers and the next generation more effectively.

New Farmers

America's farmers and ranchers have created an impressive legacy of stewardship, productivity, and innovation. But as the average age of farmers and ranchers in America continues to rise, the question of how we build our bench in agriculture becomes ever more important. As you can see here in this room, the work of supporting and engaging the next generation is already well underway.

New farmers are as diverse as American agriculture itself. They are growing traditional crops and new varieties, organic produce and heirloom products. They are part of row-crop farms – employing cutting-edge technology and equipment – and community supported agriculture programs – delivering fresh products directly to their neighbors. They are raising beef, pork, dairy cattle, poultry, and fish on operations of every size. They are everywhere – from urban New Orleans to rural Montana.

USDA Results for New Farmers

Thanks to Congress' support through the 2014 Farm Bill, USDA has a comprehensive suite of programs that can support new and beginning farmers and ranchers, including veterans, first generation farmers, new generations returning home to family farms, and retirees seeking second careers.

To help these producers navigate and find the assistance they need, USDA has launched www.usda.gov/newfarmers, which for the first time creates a single front door for all USDA resources that can be used by a new and beginning farmer and is indexed by customer need. USDA offers lending assistance, risk management tools, market building opportunities, opportunities to grow a farm business, education, research, technical assistance, and conservation assistance to help protect the land and natural resources.

The Farm Service Agency is often “the lender of first opportunity” for many new and beginning producers. Since 2009, FSA has issued approximately 93,000 direct and guaranteed farm operating and farm ownership loans to beginning farmers and ranchers. Further, since the microloan program began in 2013, USDA has issued 12,000 microloans – 70 percent of which have gone to beginning farmers.

Of particular interest to this audience, the Farm Service Agency makes available Youth Loans of up to \$5,000 to eligible individual youths, ages 10 to 20, to finance income producing and agriculturally related projects. The project must be modest in size, educational, and initiated and carried out by youths participating in a 4-H Club, FFA, or similar organization. The 2014 Farm Bill removed the prior rural residency requirement for youth loans and allows FSA to extend youth loan assistance to youth residing in suburban and urban areas to finance eligible agriculturally-related projects. This fiscal year, FSA lent almost \$6 million to approximately 2,000 youth for projects.

USDA also works to help support access to land for new farmers. Since 2009, FSA has facilitated 2,305 contracts to transition over 384,000 acres of expiring conservation reserve program land from retired or retiring landowners to beginning or socially disadvantaged producers for sustainable grazing or crop production.

The 2014 Farm Bill provided USDA additional tools and authorities to help new and beginning farmers to manage the risks inherent in farming and ranching. Beginning farmers are now exempt from administrative fees associated with catastrophic and additional coverage policies; qualify for additional premium support to reduce the cost of insurance; and increase the yield adjustment received for actual production history in low yielding years. For new, beginning, limited resource, or targeted underserved producers, administrative fees for the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) are also waived, and there is a 50 percent premium reduction on higher levels of coverage.

Since FY 2013, the Department has also made more than 500 investments in infrastructure in all parts of the supply chain for local foods, which are often an entry point for new and beginning farmers. These investments include scale-appropriate processing facilities, farmers markets, food hubs, and distribution networks. Farmers markets have increased 180 percent from 2006 and 2014, and the national Farmers Market Directory now lists over 8,200 farmers markets nationwide. About twenty percent of all Value Added Producer Grants have gone to beginning farmers and ranchers to better leverage their operations and grow opportunities.

USDA also provides training, education, and outreach to the new generation of producers through the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program. From investments in the

previous Farm Bill, USDA has awarded more than \$70 million through more than 146 grants to develop education and training programs; the 2014 Farm Bill increased our commitments in this area.

USDA has also focused on building new and fruitful partnerships, both within government and with producer, land, and education/outreach groups. Our work has also focused on building awareness of the issue of new and beginning farmers broadly.

In 2014, USDA and the White House hosted a Champions of Change event, “Future of American Agriculture.” We heard from farmers and ranchers from across the country – with an audience who included land grant universities, producer organizations, land conservation groups, youth development organizations and students, and industry representatives. We saw examples of urban agriculture, peri-urban agriculture, traditional production agriculture, and new and emergent technologies being applied in non-traditional farming models. Together, these bright individuals shared their experiences, challenges, struggles, and hopes for the future, creating a greater awareness of new and beginning farmers nationwide.

In February 2015, USDA announced the Women in Agriculture Mentoring Network. The network is a way to connect, share stories, and create opportunities for women in agriculture to share their advice with one another. The goal is to promote the image, role, and leadership of women not only on the farm, but in leading youth organizations, in conducting cutting edge research at universities across the country, and in the boardrooms of global corporations.

Finally, USDA is working to further enhance our resources to connect with this next generation in a more regionalized and tailored way. The President’s FY 2016 budget request seeks to increase FSA outreach capacity for new and beginning farmers and ranchers as part. This investment would support \$2 million for new farmer outreach coordinators in Strikeforce states to facilitate and guide beginning farmer outreach, provide support and cross-cutting customer service training for USDA employees in the field, and enhance partnerships within regional, state, and local communities, including with the agricultural community, the lending community, and others. An additional \$2 million is for cooperative agreements that would be entered into with private organizations to leverage financial literacy, enhance technical assistance, and provide loan support to new and beginning farmers and ranchers, including leveraging tribal resources in Indian country, and leveraging urban organizations to help urban beginning farmers.

Youth Efforts

I am so inspired by these bright young students’ energy, enthusiasm, and passion for leadership, agriculture, and their communities. At USDA, a major part of our focus on new and beginning farmers is on youth and how to best connect with and create early opportunities for the next generation.

4-H, a key vehicle for connecting youth with opportunity, has been a leading USDA program in this work for more than a century. It is the largest positive youth development program in the United States and works to connect youth with opportunities to learn, practice, and apply career readiness skills. 4-H currently reaches six million young people across the country and has been used as a youth agricultural education model in over 50 countries.

Implemented through the land-grant university system, 4-H is the youth education program of USDA's Cooperative Extension and receives the majority of its federal support through Smith-Lever funding. Early advocates for youth development programming realized that a key part of the strength and innovation of agriculture and rural America lay with those who were to inherit it. Today, 4-H has grown to encompass the full spectrum of opportunities, not only within agriculture and rural America, but within personal growth, leadership training, and STEM applications.

I had the privilege of addressing the National 4-H Congress this year, and as I stated there – the lessons that I learned as a proud member of 4-H in my youth – to lend my head to clearer thinking, my heart to greater loyalty, my hands to larger service, and my health to better living – have all informed and guided my work as a professional, a leader, and a public servant.

These principles inform my work today as the Deputy Secretary of Agriculture, as we work to chart a strong and stable path for the next generation of American agriculture.

USDA and Youth Development: Building Results Together

Through 4-H and partner educational youth groups, including National FFA Organization (FFA), USDA has worked to create new paths into careers in agriculture and to celebrate diversity in the agriculture. At the White House Champions of Change we heard from a young member of FFA who hoped to own his own orchard one day. He shared with us the importance of youth agricultural education programs in his development and leadership training, and his passion for following in the footsteps of his father, who as a farm worker had taught his son from an early age a passion for the land and a strong work ethic. At USDA, we are hard at work to honor the passion that new entrepreneurs can bring to farm businesses and to create new pathways into agriculture.

In this work, USDA has engaged a broad coalition partners, including NASA, to discuss and share with youth the abundant opportunities in agriculture, including the exciting connection between disciplines like science, engineering and agriculture. A great example of this type of partnership was a trip that we took late last year to the Kennedy Space Center, accompanied by students from a Florida 4-H club, to see NASA and the Agriculture Research Service's work to develop plants that can be grown in space. Together, we learned about biology, chemistry, physics, and their applications in agriculture. There is a wide frontier for agriculture and science, and together, we are working to engage the scientific communities with those who are passionate about the land and our food supply.

We are working to make USDA more accessible and relevant in a changing landscape. Last year, during the National 4-H Conference, passionate students spoke with representatives from across the Department, including myself, about the importance of communicating with the next generation in new ways – connecting with those who are more used to apps than offices in a way that was meaningful to them. As I speak to you now, another group of 4-H'ers are again preparing to meet with USDA staff and administrators to present their newest ideas for solving today's critical societal issues. In fact, there are 4-H youth leaders presenting briefings to 14 different federal audiences today – including Health and Human Services, Department of

Defense, Department of Transportation, Department of Energy, Department of Education, NASA, Smithsonian, and Housing and Urban Development.

I have met so many new beginning farmers and ranchers this year – many who are 4-H, FFA, and other youth development organization alumni – who are looking for strategies to connect with increasingly urban communities as neighbors, to create profitability and opportunity in urban and peri-urban spaces, to explore strategies to meet the need to expand profitability without being able to add more land, and to meet the challenges of connecting with customers in changing markets. All of these discussions create new opportunities – opportunities to make our programs more flexible and relevant, opportunities to share agriculture with those who are generations removed from the farm, opportunities to be a part of our communities in new ways, and opportunities to build new constituencies for American agriculture.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to thank you for this opportunity to share just a few of the ways that we have been supporting these bright young people. The future of agriculture is exciting, diverse, and full of opportunity, and we at USDA are eager for the opportunity to serve and work alongside the next generation as we have alongside those that have come before.