

Letter from U.S. Farmers & Ranchers to Congress: We Need a Green New Deal

Dear Member of Congress,

We, the undersigned U.S. farmers, ranchers, and supporting organizations urge you to join us in supporting the Green New Deal (GND) Resolution, now before Congress.

We support the GND's call to ". . . secure for all people of the United States for generations to come: clean air and water; climate and community resiliency; healthy food; access to nature; and a sustainable environment."

We support the GND's call to ". . . work collaboratively with farmers and ranchers in the United States to remove pollution and greenhouse gas emissions from the agricultural sector as much as is technologically feasible, including—by supporting family farming; by investing in sustainable farming and land-use practices that increase soil health; and by building a more sustainable food system that ensures universal access to healthy food."

We also support the GND's overarching climate goals, including the goal to achieve net-zero emissions by 2030 - 2050. We believe these climate goals are achievable—*but only if* the GND includes policies that spur *two* large-scale transitions: the transition away from fossil fuels toward renewable energy alternatives, *and* the transition away from industrial agriculture toward family farm-based organic and regenerative farming and land-use practices that improve soil health and draw down and sequester carbon.

We stand ready to help achieve all of these GND goals. But we need Congress to work with us to develop food and agriculture policies that support climate-friendly organic and regenerative farming, ranching, and land-use practices.

We also ask that Congress stop subsidizing monopolistic, extractive industrial agriculture practices that pollute the environment, produce unhealthy food, and disproportionately devastate rural communities and economies. These one-sided subsidies put farmers and ranchers like us, who are good stewards of the land, at such a competitive disadvantage in the marketplace that growing numbers of us are being forced out of business.

America's food and farming system is in crisis

As farmers and ranchers, our businesses and livelihoods are uniquely vulnerable to the impact of climate change, with its increasingly frequent and extreme droughts and flooding.

There are now only 3 million of us (less than 1% of the population) remaining. Meanwhile, consolidation runs rampant in the industrial agriculture sector. Four corporations, two of which are foreign-owned, control most of America's meat production. This concentration of power threatens our livelihoods, and also this country's food safety and food security in general. Consolidation also allows the powerful few to degrade the environment in pursuit of "cheap" food production, while those corporations offload the environmental and human health costs of their irresponsible farming and ranching practices—including practices that contribute to global warming—onto citizens and taxpayers.

Recent headlines paint a bleak picture for America's family farms:

- Midwest farmers are filing for chapter 12 bankruptcy protection at levels not seen for at least a decade (Wall Street Journal, February 6, 2019).



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- The USDA reports that 2,731 dairy farms went out of business in 2018. Mega factory farm dairies, allowed to evade clean water and air regulations, are over-producing to drive out both conventional and organic dairy farmers. Failure to enforce USDA organic regulations makes it nearly impossible for certified organic dairy farmers to compete against huge “factory farm” dairies that use their clout to gain organic certification despite failing to adhere to organic regulation.
- The USDA in February 2018 projected negative median farm income of \$1,316, the lowest level since 2002 (adjusted for inflation). This is partly a function of farmers not being paid a fair price for the goods they produce.
- Research by students at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, published in June 2018, by *Farm Progress*, found that suicide rates in agriculture are five times higher than the national average—double the rate for military veterans, and 50% higher than during the 1980s farm crisis.

Better policies mean healthier people, communities and ecosystems

When America’s family farms fail, rural economies and communities fail with them. As the author of a recent article in *American Conservative* points out, the decline we are experiencing in our rural farming communities is the direct result of deliberate policy decisions made by both political parties who favor multinational corporations at the expense of rural communities.

It doesn't have to be this way. Family farmers are essential to combating climate change. A GND can make family farming economically viable again through fair farm prices, parity, and supply management. New agricultural policies could provide greater support for practices such as cover cropping, rotational grazing, agroforestry, and silvopasture. These practices are proven to restore ecosystem health, including the soil's potential to sequester carbon.

Policies that support better farming and ranching practices would make our farming businesses less vulnerable to the impact of climate change and more financially resilient. They would also empower us to play an important role in reducing the impact of global warming.

Policies that support the transformation of how we produce food would also end the contamination of our communities’ air, water, and soil with agricultural chemicals, and would lead to a reduction in illnesses associated with exposure to those chemicals.

Policies that support our efforts to rebuild the infrastructure for local and sustainable food systems will spur the creation of jobs and of new independent business opportunities in food and farming, such as local fruit and vegetable, grain, and meat processing and distribution. Thriving local food systems also improve food security by providing greater numbers of people readier access to healthier food, which in turns makes our rural and urban communities more vibrant and prosperous.

We call on Congress to put the "Green" in the Green New Deal by empowering us to revitalize the health and economic security of this country's middle class, to make family farming economically viable again, and to help reverse climate change and improve America's air and water quality by making our ecosystems healthy again.

See who signed already here: <http://bit.ly/frsigners>



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