



Farmers and Ranchers Sign on to Support the Green New Deal

A coalition representing 10,000 farmers and ranchers are urging the government to rethink its approach to agriculture.

BY **LISA HELD**

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"I have stayed out of politics. I don't know whether I'm a Republican or Democrat; I find myself unable to fit into any of the boxes," said fourth-generation farmer Will Harris, earlier this week on the phone from **White Oak Pastures**—a farm that has become **well-known** for its regenerative grazing systems and commercial success—in Bluffton, Georgia. "But I do believe that a lot needs to be done with regard to our environment and the way we treat our animals and the impoverishment of rural America."

Which is why, two days later, Harris stepped out of his comfort zone to speak at a press conference in front of the Capitol Building in Washington, D.C., for the launch of a new coalition called "U.S. Farmers and Ranchers for a Green New Deal."



Will Harris. (Photo courtesy of White Oak)

The coalition was born out of a partnership between the youth advocacy group [Sunrise Movement](#) and [Regeneration International](#), a nonprofit that advocates for regenerative agriculture around the world. On Capitol Hill yesterday, the group delivered [a letter to Congress](#) expressing support for the Green New Deal's (GND) [agriculture-related goals](#) and a desire to work with legislators to draft policies that will enable farmers to both confront climate change and help reverse it.

The letter was signed by more than [500 individuals](#) from farms across the country (many of them small and medium-scale family operations) and 50 organizations that represent farmers and ranchers, including the [American Grassfed Association](#) and the [Women, Food, and Agriculture Network](#) (WFAN). The groups behind the coalition estimate that, all included, they represent more than 10,000 farmers and ranchers.

"For far too long, corporate executives and politicians have divided us. They've told us that environmentalists and farmers can't work together. Well, I'm here today with a few friends behind me to say, 'That is history,'" Sunrise Movement's Garrett Blad said at the press conference. Blad shared his story of growing up on a farm in

Indiana, where he said his family was forced to sell off cows after an influx of **corporate dairies**.

“Today, tens of thousands of young people with the Sunrise Movement are linking arms with the tens of thousands of farmers and ranchers in this historic coalition to demand a Green New Deal that reinvests in our family farms and empowers them to be the heroes we need them to be to stop the climate crisis.”

This unity presents a striking image, considering the popular narrative around environmental policies, which pits environmental advocates, said to care about the planet above all else, against farmers, said to consider all environmental regulation as burdensome government overreach.

Sherri Dugger, who also spoke at the press conference, is the executive director of the **Indiana Farmers Union** and WFAN. On the phone from her small, diversified farm in Indiana, she said that she is constantly trying to counter that farmers vs. environmentalists narrative.

“We have to work together. Whether we want to or not, our work impacts one another,” Dugger said. “Environmentalists need to understand the realities for farmers. Sometimes, for example, if you’re an advocate, you’re not actually out on the farm and you don’t understand how hard it is to put policies into place or the financial burdens. They need to understand those things. At the same time, farmers need to understand we’re all fighting the same problems.”



Sherri Dugger.

That narrative also relies on groups such as the American Farm Bureau Federation—which **typically lobbies** for the interests of corporate agribusinesses—being tapped to represent “farmer voices.” Farmers like Harris don’t see those interests

as aligning with their own. He says many of the signature elements of the system—monocultures, chemical fertilizers, and pesticides—are destructive rather than regenerative.

“I think that centralized, commoditized, industrial agriculture has moved away from being beneficial to the land and the animals and the community—and I think that is wrong,” Harris said. “Most farmers want to be good to their land and their animals and their local communities. Most farmers, given a chance, would be happy to run back [to the system before industrial agriculture].”

But will endorsing the Green New Deal create opportunities for them to do that?

U.S. Representatives Chellie Pingree (D-ME), Jim McGovern (D-MA), Earl Blumenauer (D-OR), and Debra Haaland (D-NM) all spoke at the press conference, offering broad statements that echoed the principles put forth in the coalition’s letter to Congress.

They spoke of ending subsidies to industrial agriculture that relies on crop monocultures and pollutes the environment, fighting agricultural consolidation and supporting small family farms, and incentivizing regenerative agriculture practices that build soil health to sequester carbon. Aside from Rep. Haaland pointing out that she is co-sponsoring Senator Cory Booker (D-NJ)’s [Climate Stewardship Act](#) and Rep. Pingree’s reference to a [food waste bill](#) she introduced over the summer, very few of the ideas were related to concrete policies.

Making progress on these issues also seems impossible at a time when the current administration has been rapidly dismantling environmental regulations and programs across the board. At the end of the conference, Rep. Peter DeFazio (D-OR) took the podium in a state of exasperation, having just [come from a hearing](#) on the recent Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) [rollback of the WOTUS rule](#) at which he said the EPA revealed further plans to make it harder for the agency to enforce the Clean Water Act. “We are confronted with a massive political problem,” he said.

While the GND is a non-binding resolution, its co-author, Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY), has [said](#) that some of its value is in calling attention to the issue at a larger scale so that others are inspired to work toward turning its goals into reality in different ways.

For instance, instead of giving “massive corporate interests” a seat at the decision-making table, Rep. McGovern said, “the people who should be at the table are the people who put food on our table—our farmers and our ranchers. They’re on the front lines of this fight, whether it’s dealing with the impacts of crazy weather or invasive species or changing growing seasons. They’re also on the frontlines of creating a better food system.”

Speaking from the frontlines in Georgia, Harris would agree. “I’m not a policy wonk and I can’t discuss the line-by-line detail of the GND,” he said. “But I know enough to know that it’s a complete rethinking of the way the federal government approaches agriculture, and I think that badly needs rethinking.”

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