

Farmers and Ranchers Just Came Together to Support the Green New Deal



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A national coalition of some 10,000 farmers and ranchers have come together to support a Green New Deal. Some members came together outside the Capitol on Wednesday to announce the launch of Farmers and Ranchers for a Green New Deal. The group will lobby Congress, educate

consumers, and work with communities to ensure that the transition away from fossil fuels and toward a green economy covers their food and nutritional needs.

This represents a major step in building rural support for the Green New Deal. The GOP likes to paint the Green New Deal as liberal lunacy, but if more people in the Midwest or more traditionally Republican states can get on board, well, the GOP may finally STFU. Moreover, the agriculture sector make up 9 percent of all U.S. greenhouse gas emissions so it will have to be part of any climate solution.

“Now is the time for solutions, not supporting the status quo,” Sherri Dugger, coalition co-chair and Indiana-based farmer, said during the announcement. “I care about the climate. I care about food security. I care about the world and what we’re leaving behind for our children.”



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The agriculture sector can play a key role in the effort to stop climate change. When done right, farms can sequester carbon in their soil. The coalition is pushing regenerative agriculture, in particular, which involves organic farming and crop rotation to protect the soil quality and local environment. By switching crops up, farmers can prevent the soil from eroding or losing its nutrients. And by avoiding pesticides and harmful chemicals, farmers can also protect the greater ecosystem.

There are also benefits to farmers themselves, who often suffer when extreme weather events strike—whether it's severe drought or dangerous floods. Using their land to prevent further climate catastrophe can help their bottom line, too.

In the Green New Deal resolution Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez introduced to Congress in February, farmers got major love. Her proposal was clear: A Green New Deal should work closely with farmers and ranchers to eliminate the pollution and greenhouse gas emissions the industry emits through family farming, sustainable land-use practices, and increasing access to healthy food. All these things are connected in the Green New Deal as Ocasio-Cortez envisioned it. And this coalition wants to see that plan come to fruition.

The coalition's support for the Green New Deal isn't just about individual farm practices. It's about making over the entire industrial agricultural system. Members want to see a Green New Deal that ends the subsidies to giant corporate farms. They want to see a focus, instead, on smaller family farms that practice regenerative and organic agriculture, as well as farm animal welfare. They don't support the mass slaughtering of chickens and cattle, something that is not only fucked up but also vulnerable to climate change when floodwaters come rushing in. Farm subsidies should benefit local rural economies, the coalition argues, not multinational corporations.

“Our current farm program subsidizes the wrong things,” coalition co-chair and Georgia-based rancher Will Harris, told Earther. “The Green New Deal is a step in the right direction in addressing these things.”

Doing all this not only protects the environment and combats climate change, but it also benefits public health and equity. After all, the Green New Deal is all about equity and justice. The coalition wants to see these values come into the agriculture sector, too. Some farming can lead to air pollution, for example, which harms the rural families who live nearby. The air pollution emitted from all the corn farms in the Midwest—usually grown in a monoculture, which this coalition is trying to end, as growing a single crop ruins soil health—kills an estimated 4,300 Americans prematurely a year, a study earlier this year found. That needs to end.

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The farmers and ranchers in this coalition believe in investing in small local producers. That’ll not only address the pollution problem, but it should also address food accessibility. Some 2.3 million people live in food deserts, according to Tulane University. This means they’re more than a mile from the closest grocery store and don’t own a car. Under a Green New Deal, food producers should be on every other corner, said Maine Representative Craig Hickman, who is also a farmer and chairs the state’s Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture.

“In rural communities, a corner might be 10 miles away, but we want that because we are also dealing with poverty. We are dealing with rural cleansing. We are dealing with hunger. We are dealing with malnutrition,” Hickman told Earther. “Food is medicine, and so we take care of our bodies, but food sovereignty and small farms and small food producers also take care of the Earth and the environment. We steward the land in a way that is regenerative.”

This coalition is dedicated to revolutionizing farming practices in the U.S. The way its members see it, the Green New Deal is the right path there. Democratic presidential candidates are already recognizing this. Elizabeth

Warren released a plan for a new farm economy that touched many of these points just last month. Bernie Sanders has also been clear that he wants to see this industry shift its focus to family farms and sustainability.

Any type of Green New Deal under the current administration feels unlikely, but 2020 isn't that far off anymore. And these farmers and ranchers just may have the support of their president come next year.

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I mostly write about how environmental policy and climate change intersect with race and class though I occasionally write about animals, science, and art, too. We all need an escape, right?