



Farm Bill Support for Beginners

The Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program

Overdue support for beginning farmers

This spring, the Food, Conservation and Energy Act of 2008—commonly known as the 2008 Farm Bill—was passed into law. The new bill guides food and agriculture policy for the next five years. While this law covers a broad array of topics, this fact sheet highlights one positive development: support for beginning farmers and ranchers.

The 2008 Farm Bill takes a comprehensive approach to supporting new farmers and ranchers and dedicates substantial resources to beginning farmer and rancher initiatives. During the Farm Bill debate, the Land Stewardship Project, working with the Sustainable Agriculture Coalition as well as other farm and rural organizations from across the nation, pushed for beginning farmer and rancher initiatives. With the support of Congressional leaders, the bill now includes smart start-up support for beginning farmers through additional credit provisions, conservation incentives and beginning farmer and rancher assistance programs.

The investment in beginning farmer and rancher initiatives is an important step in strengthening our rural communities and building a more sustainable food and agriculture system. With the growth in organics, local markets and regional food systems, for example, there are clearly opportunities in agriculture. The Farm Bill's beginning farmer and rancher initiatives will help new farmers and ranchers take advantage of opportunities in agriculture and overcome barriers to getting started.

This fact sheet provides information to organizations and groups interested in the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP), perhaps the most significant beginning farmer measure included in the 2008 Farm Bill.

Beginning Farmer & Rancher Development Program

BFRDP is a competitive grants program aimed at providing support to collaborative networks or partnerships which may include community-based organizations, non-governmental organizations, and extension and educational institutions that provide beginning farmer and rancher education, training and mentoring.

BFRDP received \$75 million in mandatory funding through the new Farm Bill, which is a precedent-setting investment in our nation's beginning farmers and ranchers. Essentially the program provides federal resources to collaborative state, tribal, local or regionally-based net-

works or partnerships of public and private groups. Networks or partnerships may include: Community-based organizations, non-governmental organizations; cooperative extension; relevant USDA and state agencies; and community colleges.

BFRDP will make it possible for such groups to use a wide variety of strategies for assisting beginning farmers and ranchers. Activities outlined in the Farm Bill that the BFRDP will support include:

- 1) mentoring, apprenticeships and internships;
- 2) resources and referral;
- 3) assisting beginning farmers or ranchers in acquiring land;
- 4) innovative farm and ranch transfer strategies;
- 5) entrepreneurship and business training;
- 6) model land leasing contracts;
- 7) financial management training;
- 8) whole farm planning;
- 9) conservation assistance;
- 10) risk management education;
- 11) diversification and marketing strategies;
- 12) curriculum development;
- 13) understanding the impact of concentration and globalization;
- 14) basic livestock and crop farming practices;
- 15) the acquisition and management of agricultural credit;
- 16) environmental compliance;
- 17) information processing;
- 18) other similar subject areas of use to beginning farmers or ranchers.

Why the BFRDP makes sense

The BFRDP is a common-sense initiative with the flexibility to support a number of different approaches and strategies to help new farmers and ranchers get started. Community-based organizations and networks can use the BFRDP to address barriers beginning farmers and ranchers face which might be specific to their region. In the end, this program can help get more people farming or ranching in ways that build local and regional food systems and strengthen rural com-

Continued on reverse page...

Land Stewardship Project Fact Sheet #12: Farm Bill & Beginning Farmers

munities and care for the land. Matching federal resources with community-based organizations and networks that are working day-to-day with new producers is a good approach that can produce results.

Who will administer BFRDP?

BFRDP will be administered by the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture. The National Institute of Food and Agriculture is the new name for what used to be the Cooperative States Research, Education and Extension Service (CSREES) of USDA. Within the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, a National Program Leader will be appointed and charged with developing a Request for Applications, which contains guidelines for how the program will be administered and grants awarded.

It is likely that as part of those guidelines, a stakeholders' review panel will be established to evaluate proposals from interested organizations or networks applying for grants.

Other guidelines outlined in the Farm Bill for BFRDP include provisions such as:

- ✓ Community-based organizations or networks applying for grants must use funds to primarily target beginning farmers and ranchers who have been farming or ranching less than 10 years*.
- ✓ The term of a grant can be no greater than three years.
- ✓ The size of a grant can be no greater than \$250,000 per year (eligible recipients may receive consecutive grants).
- ✓ To qualify for a grant, the community-based organization or network must provide a match in the form of cash or in-kind contribution equal to 25 percent of the funds provided.

The BFRDP also sets aside 25 percent of the yearly funds for organizations or networks serving socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers. "Socially Disadvantaged" producers have traditionally been excluded from federal programs and include minority and women farmers and ranchers as well as immigrant and farm workers seeking to become farmers in their own right.

Who can participate in BFRDP?

BFRDP is a voluntary program and grants will be awarded to eligible proposals according to ranking criteria established in the Request for Applicants. The National Institute of Food and Agriculture will announce it is accepting proposals through the Federal Register and by other means such as press releases and on its website.

* Those farmers and ranchers who are not beginning farmers and ranchers are allowed to participate in BFRDP projects as long as it doesn't detract from the primary purpose of educating beginning farmers and ranchers.

The new Farm Bill dedicated between \$18 million and \$19 million to BFRDP for each of the next four years. The number of organizations or networks receiving support will vary depending on the size, quality and number of proposals that come forward. Along with guidelines and recommendations from an appointed review committee, regional equity will be considered during awarding of grants.

When will BFRDP be available?

Predictions are the earliest the National Institute of Food and Agriculture would be able to begin accepting proposals is in the first half of 2009, although factors such as how much grassroots engagement and demand there is for the program, any restructuring of USDA, changing Presidential administrations, the development of the Request for Applications and legislative issues may delay or speed up program delivery.

For more information

If you have additional questions about BFRDP or other beginning farmer provisions in the 2008 Farm Bill, contact the Land Stewardship Project at 612-722-6377, visit www.landstewardshipproject.org or see the sources section below.

Sources

- House Agriculture Committee, Farm Bill website, Complete Legal Language of Conference Reports (Title I-Title XV) <http://agriculture.house.gov/inside/FarmBill.html>
- Senate Agriculture Committee <http://agriculture.senate.gov/>
- March 27, 2007: "Statement of Karen Stettler, Land Stewardship Project Farm Beginnings® Director, for the Credit Hearing of the Subcommittee on Conservation, Credit, Energy, and Research, U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Agriculture." This testimony outlines how Congress can help beginning farmers in the new Farm Bill. www.landstewardshipproject.org/pr/07/newsr_070327-2.htm
- Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (see the Legislative Tracking Chart at www.sustainableagriculturecoalition.org)



This fact sheet is brought to you by the members and staff of the Land Stewardship Project, a private, nonprofit organization devoted to fostering an ethic of stewardship for farmland and to seeing more successful farmers on the land raising crops and livestock. For more information, call 651-653-0618 or visit www.landstewardshipproject.org.