

Agriculture in the United States: Looking Ahead for New Beginnings

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Introduction

According to the 2012 Census of Agriculture, the average age of farmers was 58.3 years. This age has been adding to a positive trend that has been occurring for decades. As a greater amount of farmers retire within the next decade, more land will become available for the next generation of farmers. Yet we are currently experiencing a shortage of beginning farmers who are willing and able to transition into the farming community. This shortage can be attributed to the remarkably high financial and technical barriers that are present for the agricultural field. In order to ensure the successful transition of farm land from retiring farmers to beginning farmers and ensuring the success of the agricultural field, more attention must be given to addressing this issue on a societal and economic level. In addition, there must be greater research and more technical and financial tools that benefit beginning farmers and ensure their success in the agricultural field.

Methods:

For my research I utilized a wide variety of sources, including articles, journals, books, and government documents. In addition, I was able to conduct interviews of employees of the Stearns County National Resource Conservation Services (NRCS), the Farm Service Agency (FSA) Waite Park Field Office, Farm Beginnings, as well as beginning farmers. My original research was conducted using data from governmental databases, such as the Census of Agriculture, or United States Department of Agriculture database.

Results and Conclusion:

Keeping beginning farmers on farmland in a sustainable manner has been gaining attention for many years now. There has been official recognition of this issue since, arguably, the passing of the 2008 Farm Bill, which included a section providing funding for programs supporting beginning farmers. There has also been a significant increase in the amount of Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Non-Profit Organizations (NPOs) that provide technical and financial assistance for beginning farmers. Yet further research must be conducted in finding further ways to assist beginning farmers. In addition, there must be a collaboratively led effort by the Government, NGOs, and NPOs to increase societal awareness of this issue. Lastly, the current education system must construct greater opportunities for students interested in farming to pursue it in an academic setting, training farmers for generations to come.

Discussion:

Farming is a necessity for the survival of a society, which is why I argue that more needs to be done in order to keep farmers in the agricultural industry in a sustainable manner. This issue must be addressed on a societal level, and there must be a recognition of farming as a career and profession that is fulfilling and worth pursuing. We are reaching a point in history where the majority of farmers will be retiring in a relatively short period of time, this issue must be addressed with a sense of urgency similar to that of the Green Revolution.

