

August 31, 2015

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Washington, DC, 20250

Re: USDA Advisory Committee on Beginning Farmers and Ranchers Recommendations on Land Tenure

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

On behalf of the USDA Advisory Committee on Beginning Farmers and Ranchers, I am pleased to transmit the Committee's recommendations based on our meetings and those of the Subcommittee on Land Tenure since June of this year.

The Agricultural Credit Improvement Act of 1997 authorized the Advisory Committee on Beginning Farmers and Ranchers, which was established in November 1998. The meetings of the Land Tenure Subcommittee in June and the full Advisory Committee on Beginning Farmers and Ranchers in August of 2015 represent the twelfth time the Advisory Committee has been convened.

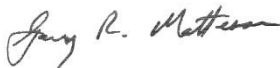
We understand that the purpose of the Advisory Committee is to advise the Secretary on: 1) the development and administration of coordinated assistance to beginning farmers and ranchers between Federal and State beginning farmer programs; 2) methods to maximize the number of farming and ranching opportunities created through the Federal/State beginning farmer partnership and ways to encourage the States to participate; and 3) other methods of creating new farming and ranching opportunities. The Advisory Committee members were pleased to learn at our August meeting that our previous recommendations have led to changes that have improved the ability of USDA to serve the needs of beginning farmers. We anticipate these recommendations on Land Tenure will be as effective.

Appointment of a Land Tenure Subcommittee was particularly effective, especially in light of the limited time available to address complex issues. The Advisory Committee expresses its sincere thanks to Dr. Neil Hamilton (Drake University School of Law), chair of the Subcommittee; appointed Subcommittee members Cornelius Blanding (Federation of Southern Cooperatives), Michael Duffy (Iowa State, retired), Julia Freedgood (American Farmland Trust), Janie Hipp (University of Arkansas School of Law), Kevin Spafford (Legacy By Design), Karen Stettler (Land Stewardship Project); and Advisory Committee members serving on the Subcommittee Chris Beyerhelm, Duncan Chembezi, Marcus Creasy, Maria Miller, Peter Scheffert, Windy Van Dam; and special contributor Anthony Schutz (University of Nebraska School of Law). All volunteered their time, talents, and insights based on their common commitment to the success of beginning farmers and ranchers, as informed by their unique backgrounds and experiences.

The Advisory Committee on Beginning Farmers and Ranchers (ACBFR) recognizes that the topics of land tenure, access to land, and farm business transfers deserve much greater research and reflection than was available during the short time allotted. Therefore we note that the first recommendation in the attached document suggests creation of a Land Tenure Commission similar to the Small Farms Commission of the 1990's. Also, additional topics and observations raised by the Advisory Committee appear in separate text boxes as a guide to topics worthy of further investigation.

We consign to you these recommendations and thank you for your attention to how the issues of land tenure, access, and farm business transitions effect the success of beginning farmers and ranchers and very future of agriculture. My fellow Committee and Subcommittee members and I are honored to have served in this capacity.

Sincerely,



Gary R. Matteson

Gary Matteson, VP of Young, Beginning, Small Farmer Programs for the Farm Credit Council from Washington, DC **(Chair)**

Mr. Peter Scheffert, Farm Loan Officer with Farmers State Bank of Hartland from Minnesota **(Vice Chair)**

Mr. Chris Beyerhelm, Deputy Administrator for Farm Loan Programs with the Farm Service Agency from Washington, DC

Ms. Deborah Cavanaugh-Grant, Local Food Systems and Small Farms Educator, University of Illinois Extension

Dr. Duncan M. Chembezi, Professor and Extension Economist from Alabama A&M University in Madison, Alabama

Ms. Michelle Conner, Owner/Farm Manager of Evandale Farm, LLC, and Beginning Farmer Program Coordinator from Pittsfield, New Hampshire

Mr. Marcus Creasy, Cow/Calf Producer & Immediate Past President of the Arkansas Cattlemen's Association in Arkansas

Mr. Kole James Fitzpatrick, Regional Technical Assistance Specialist with Intertribal Agriculture Council & Operator of a Small Cow/Calf Ranch from Montana

Ms. Marty Gerencer, Principal/Owner of Morse Marketing Connections, LLC in Michigan

Mr. Timothy M. Gossman, Farm Loan Officer/Senior Vice President, Root River State Bank from Minnesota

Mr. Christopher Holman, Farmer/Owner Operator of Nami Moon Farms from Custer, Wisconsin

Mrs. Adrienne Farrar Houël, President and CEO of Greater Bridgeport Community Enterprises, Inc., from Connecticut

Dr. Anna J. Jones-Crabtree, Beginning Farmer and Owner/Operator of Vilicus Farms in Montana

Ms. Yani Rose Keo, Executive Director/Co-Founder of the Alliance for Multicultural Community Services and President/Founder of Cambodian Gardens Inc., from Texas

Ms. Maria Miller, Director of Education, National Farmers Union in Colorado

Mrs. Julie D. Neill, Owner/Operator of Neill & Sons Dairy, a grazing dairy in Missouri

Mr. Jose Antonio Serrano, General Manager of Alba Organics from California

Dr. Garry Stephenson, Professor/Coordinator of Small Farms Program from Oregon State University

Dr. Jennifer Elaine Taylor, Coordinator of Small Farm Programs from Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University in Tallahassee, Florida

Mrs. Windy Mae Van Dam, Dairy Rancher/Operator of Two B Dairy and Director, Animal Health & Food Safety Laboratory Board from California