

## **USDA Announces START2FARM.GOV to Support America's Future Farming Generations**

WASHINGTON, Feb. 6, 2012 – Today, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack and USDA's National Agricultural Library, in partnership with the American Farm Bureau Federation, announced Start2farm.gov, a new online portal that help provide assistance for beginning farmers and ranchers. The portal includes links to training, financing, technical assistance and other support services specifically for beginning farmers and ranchers as well as successful case studies about new and beginning farmers and ranchers.

“America's farmers and rural communities are vitally important to our nation's economy, producing the food, feed, fiber and fuel that continue to help us grow,” said Secretary Vilsack. “I have made it a priority to create 100,000 new farmers and ranchers in America and to continue the record success of America's farmers, ranchers and producers from record farm income to record exports. Start2Farm.gov will help us protect and sustain these successes, so that we continue to build an agriculture industry diverse and successful enough to attract the smartest, hardest-working young people in the nation.”

Start2Farm.gov was funded via the NIFA Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP), a competitive grant for America's new farmers and ranchers. The Program has been funded since fiscal year 2009. It was authorized in the 2008 Farm Bill with \$75 million through FY12. In the first year of NIFA's Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program, three-year grants supported training for 5,000 beginning farmers and ranchers. In 2011, it is anticipated that these grants will have supported training for more than 10,000 beginning farmer and ranchers.

The BFRDP legislation requires the Secretary to establish an online clearinghouse that makes available to beginning farmers or ranchers supporting education curricula and training materials and programs. This clearinghouse, Start2Farm.gov, allows potential and beginning farmers to search for programs and resources that will help them find training, financing, technical assistance, and support networks. Additional features include a ‘Thinking about farming?’ tutorial and an event calendar. Start2farm.gov also showcases stories of how other BFRDP grantees have started, and stayed in, farming and ranching.

Beginning farmers, by USDA definition, are those operated by individuals with 10 years or less experience operating farms. About 20% of the 2.1 million U.S. farms are classified as beginning farms, based on the USDA definition. Most beginning farmers are not young (that is, under 35 years old), do not have a college education, nor have access to farmland through their relatives, and more than one-quarter have zero value of farm production.

Most beginning farmers and ranchers experience shared challenges in getting started. The two most common and important challenges faced by beginning farmers are (1) having the market opportunity to buy or rent suitable land and (2) having capital to acquire land of a large enough scale to be profitable.

USDA is addressing these needs, as well as providing access to the farm safety net, through efforts in addition to the BFRDP grants:

- To raise a new generation of leaders for American agriculture, USDA provides affordable credit, including loans under the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Program, and Youth Loans via Extension and 4-H offices. In just the past two years, more than 40% of all FSA's farm loans went to beginning farmers and ranchers. (Since 2008, the number of loans to BFRs has climbed from 9,000 to 15,000.)
- The Conservation Reserve Transition Incentives Program encourages retiring or retired farmers to sell or lease expiring CRP lands to beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers. It facilitates the transition of expiring CRP land to beginning or socially disadvantaged producers to help them begin farming or to expand their operations in a sustainable manner by providing incentives to retiring or retired owners and operators. Currently, there are 1,280 approved TIP contracts in 26 states totaling about 200,000 acres. The states with the largest TIP participation are: Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, and North Dakota. As of January 18, 2012, TIP payments totaling about \$16.9 million have been obligated to retiring or retired land owners or operators.
- Risk Management Agency supports crop insurance education and outreach in 47 states to beginning, small, and historically underserved farmers and ranchers. From October 2010 through September 2011, a total of 77,000 farmers and ranchers attended educational sessions or were reached by direct mailing with educational information. In the past few years, the number of beginning, small, and historically underserved farmers and ranchers reached by this program has grown 6-10 percent each year (or 8 percent on average).

Start2farm.gov provides information about these and other USDA programs of particular assistance to beginning farmers. Start2farm.gov is developed in partnership with the American Farm Bureau Federation. As part of this partnership, the National Agricultural Library and the American Farm Bureau Federation are co-hosting the second annual Beginning Farmer and Rancher Conference to be held February 18-19 in Grand Rapids, MI. The Beginning Farmer and Rancher Conference is yet another way beginning farmers can access the knowledge from Start2farm.gov about program from USDA and other organizations focused on help beginning farmers start and stay farming.

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