



# WESTERN WATER PROGRAM

## A SHORTAGE OF WATER AND YOUNG FARMERS

A significant water deficit is anticipated to reach the seven states of the Colorado River Basin by 2060. Most believe the deficit will be addressed by removing water from agriculture.

At the same time there is a generation of conservation-minded farmers and ranchers concerned about water scarcity but unable to access affordable, irrigated land.

Getting more young farmers on the land and in roles of water leadership is a key to addressing water scarcity.

In the West, NYFC works to address the major issues facing young farmers, including land access, access to credit and capital and farmland succession. In addition, NYFC focuses on ensuring long-term availability of water for farmers and ranchers, a uniquely Western issue.

The Western Water Program represents farmers and ranchers across the eleven states of the Interior West. Our work focuses on protecting water for agriculture, building incentives to ensure the good stewardship of that water, and empowering young farmers with the tools they need to enter roles of water stewardship.

This is a crucial moment. In the Colorado River Basin, a seven state and two country region that produces around 85% of U.S. winter produce, demand for water is expected to significantly outpace supply by 2060. Agriculture is looked to as the primary sector to reduce this gap. Without creative, collaborative solutions, however, this trend threatens another scarce resource: the family farmer. In the U.S., farmers over 65 outnumber farmers under 35 by six to one. Nationwide, over two-thirds of farmland will need a new farmer in the next two decades. This poses another significant supply-demand gap.

Young farmers are key to addressing both our dwindling water resources and producer populations. Young farmers are concerned about drought and climate change; they are implementing conservation and efficiency practices and experimenting with innovative solutions. The problem is our policies, programs, and funding priorities lag behind. Now is the time to engage the next generation of farmers and ranchers as allies in finding solutions to water scarcity.

# OUR WORK

## In five years, NYFC's Western Water Program has:

- Launched 9 young farmer-led chapters in 5 states;
- Engaged over 1,100 farmers & ranchers in western water advocacy and education;
- Brought together over 50 farmers and ranchers to meet with over a dozen state and federal policy makers;
- Produced 3 reports calling on policymakers to ensure a viable future for young farmers;
- Supported the successful designation of the Colorado River Basin as a Critical Conservation Area under the NRCS Regional Conservation Partnership Program;
- Championed the issue of soil health in water policy planning with the Bureau of Reclamation and the Colorado Water Plan;
- Launched a Water Bootcamp series to train young farmers on state water law and policy;

## Federal Policy Priorities:

- Maintain and enhance funding for the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) to increase farmland acreage protected;
- Prioritize farm viability by supporting conservation projects that keep irrigated farmland in the hands of farmers and protect and promote farmer ownership;
- Fully fund the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) at the Farm Bill-specified, mandatory funding levels in annual appropriations;
- Establish a Landscape Conservation Initiative at USDA's Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), focused on soil health and drought in the Colorado River Basin.

## State Policy Priorities:

- Develop Young Farmer Advisory Board to advise the state on young farmer-related policy;
- Promote the use of conservation easements as a tool to protect irrigated farmland and associated water rights from development;
- Promote and expand trainings for farmers on succession planning and land transition;
- Provide tax incentives for landowners who rent or sell land to beginning farmers
- Pursue new, sustainable funding sources to support programs benefiting the next generation of farmers and ranchers;
- Provide student loan forgiveness.



## PUBLICATIONS & RESOURCES

- Conservation Generation: How Young Farmers And Ranchers Are Essential to Tackling Water Scarcity in the Arid West
- Innovations in Agricultural Stewardship: Stories of Conservation & Drought Resilience in the Arid West
- Sustaining Farming in the Arid West: Stories of young farmers, water and resilience
- Resilient: Soil, Water and the New Stewards of the American West.

For more information visit

[youngfarmers.org/westernwater](http://youngfarmers.org/westernwater)



The National Young Farmers Coalition unites young farmers and ranchers to ensure a sustainable future for American agriculture.

[youngfarmers.org](http://youngfarmers.org) ■ 518-643-3564



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