

**Oral Statement of
Krysta L. Harden
Deputy Secretary of Agriculture
Before the House Committee on Agriculture
Subcommittee on Biotechnology, Horticulture, and Research
Tuesday, April 14, 2015, 1:00 p.m.
1300 LHOB**

Chairman Davis, Ranking Member Del Bene, and Members of the Subcommittee, I am pleased to have the opportunity to address you today on the topic of the future of American farming and ranching.

I am looking forward to hearing the testimony of my fellow witnesses and learning from their enthusiasm and experiences how we at USDA can best serve this new generation of agricultural producers.

This is a special day for me personally. I was a proud 4-H member myself growing up. I raised cattle, showed horses, and participated in leadership. The principles of 4-H continue to inform my work today.

– to lend my head to clearer thinking, my heart to greater loyalty, my hands to larger service, and my health to better living –

And I worked here for this Committee as a staffer.

In so many ways, today I am coming home.

Under the leadership of Secretary Vilsack, I have dedicated my efforts at USDA to supporting and aligning our resources to best serve the new generation of farmers and ranchers and to create opportunities for tomorrow's leaders.

Our work on new farmers is exciting, bipartisan, and inclusive of all the diversity of agriculture that we see.

New farmers are growing traditional crops and new varieties; organic produce and heirloom products. They are part of row-crop farms and community supported agriculture programs. They are raising beef, pork, dairy cattle, poultry, and fish on operations of every size.

They are everywhere – from urban New Orleans to rural Montana to southwest Georgia.

The 2014 Farm Bill laid excellent groundwork. Thanks to your work, USDA has a comprehensive suite of programs that can support new and beginning farmers and ranchers, including veterans, first generation farmers, new generations returning home to family farms, and retirees seeking second careers.

USDA has more flexible lending assistance for those who can't access it elsewhere. We have better risk management tools, tools to help support market access, opportunities to grow a farm business, education, research, technical assistance, and conservation assistance to help protect the land and natural resources.

I wish I had time to go through all the new farmer work that is underway, but here are a few highlights (use at your discretion):

- Since 2009, FSA has issued approximately 93,000 direct and guaranteed farm operating and farm ownership loans to beginning farmers and ranchers.
- This fiscal year, FSA lent almost \$6 million to approximately 2,000 youth for projects.
- Since 2009, FSA has facilitated 2,305 contracts to transition over 384,000 acres of expiring conservation reserve program land from retired or retiring landowners to beginning or socially disadvantaged producers for sustainable grazing or crop production.
- Since FY 2013, the Department has also made more than 500 investments in infrastructure in all parts of the supply chain for local foods. Farmers markets have increased 180 percent from 2006 and 2014, and the national Farmers Market Directory now lists over 8,200 farmers markets nationwide.
- From investments in the previous Farm Bill, USDA has awarded more than \$70 million through more than 146 grants to develop education and training programs.

You can see a more full accounting in my testimony included for the record.

And to help these producers navigate and find the assistance they need, USDA has launched www.usda.gov/newfarmers, which for the first time creates single front door for all USDA resources that can be used by a new and beginning farmer.

We at USDA are working to make USDA more accessible and relevant in a changing landscape. Among other things, the President's FY 2016 budget request seeks to increase our outreach capacity for new and beginning farmers and ranchers. This investment would support \$2 million for new farmer outreach coordinators in Strikeforce states to facilitate and guide beginning farmer outreach, provide support and cross-cutting customer service training for USDA employees in the field, and enhance partnerships within regional, state, and local communities, including with the agricultural community, the lending community, and others.

An additional \$2 million is for cooperative agreements that would leverage financial literacy, enhance technical assistance, and provide loan support to new and beginning farmers and ranchers.

We're also working to review our statistical tools, including the Census, to make sure that we are reflecting modern farm structures – including the roles that women and beginning farmers are playing in agriculture today – to the best of our ability.

And there is so much more!

But there is so much left to do. And this challenge leads me to -

Why I'm really excited about the future of agriculture: these kids here in this room.

I am so inspired by these bright young students' energy, enthusiasm, and passion for leadership, agriculture, and their communities.

We've got to think like these kids. It's hard to stay ahead of them – but we have to try.

At the White House Champions of Change titled the “Future of American Agriculture” we heard from a young member of FFA in Washington State who hoped to own his own orchard one day. He shared with us his passion for following in the footsteps of his father to go into agriculture, who as a farm worker had taught his son from an early age a passion for the land and a strong work ethic.

Last year I had the privilege of going to the Kennedy Space Center, accompanied by students from a Florida 4-H club, to see NASA and the Agriculture Research Service's work to develop plants that can be grown in space. Together, we learned about biology, chemistry, physics, and their applications in agriculture. There is a wide frontier for agriculture and science – and it was so amazing to see these kids be inspired about being a part of it.

In Virginia last year, I was honored to be a guest on a family farm, where there were three generations side by side. Dad and Mom had each built excellent farming operations – Dad a corn and bean farm, Mom a pick-your-own pecan grove. And one of the sons wanted to come home. He knew he had to add more value to support his new family – and so he started doing precision ag for his dad on their farm, and added a fetal pig operation. You should have seen the pride on his father's face when he showed us the print outs of his field – where his son had created new efficiencies on his farm and helped improve and grow their business together.

Our country will be better. Our industry will be better. All because of these kids.

This next generation is so impressive. They're more used to apps than offices. So we'll have to work with them in a new way. But this is a challenge that we at USDA are more than ready to meet.

And I say to these young kids: be a part of this. This is your country and your government.

Being here today is such an important step. It's not enough to know your member of Congress. They need to know you.

And to you, Chairman, Ranking Member, and Members of the Subcommittee – thank you for having this forum. This is such an important occasion for these students. And for us – to hear from them. I hope we do so many more of these.