

I'm a 32-year-old beginning farmer in Molalla, Oregon. I grew up in Portland and got a college degree in Audio Production in 2002. After a couple years working as an audio engineer in Chicago, Illinois, I became interested in pursuing agriculture as a new career. Making that transition took about 8 years. Since I did not grow up in a farming family, I had to get all of my agriculture experience working on farms as an adult. This is primarily the only occupation I've had for the past several years, as I found it was too challenging to farm in the country and work in the city at the same time. All the farming jobs I've had were minimum wage, which means I was not able to build up much savings while in training as a farmer. While I now have all the skills I need to start my own farm, I do not have any capital. I think many new farmers are in a similar position.

Since most people now live in cities, this means most of our new farmers are going to have to make that transition from city to country. This is a difficult transition in a number of ways, but especially financially. Farms don't typically earn a lot of profit and especially not at the beginning. They also have high capital demands up front. Much of the funding assistance that I've seen available to farmers from the USDA and other agricultural agencies has been restricted to farms that have been in business for 3 or more years. This makes sense from a risk management viewpoint, as the agencies know it's generally safer to put money into something that has a proven track record, but unfortunately it also creates a disadvantage for new farmers. It means existing farms have greater access to both loans and grants as compared to new farms, which is a pretty hefty barrier to entry for people trying to get started who could really use the assistance.

Lenders obviously need to manage risk, which is unfortunately directly at odds with the inherently risky endeavor of starting a new farm. If we, as a state, and as a nation, want to support new farmers, then we definitely need to encourage lenders to invest in farm start-ups. A bill like HB 2700, that helps make start-up financing available to new farmers, would help alleviate some of the difficulties of starting a farm from scratch.

Sincerely,
Nathan Moomaw