

The Future of Farming

by Stacey Kusterbeck

Farming in America is changing, and so are farmers. While 90 percent of U.S. farmers are white men, there's an increasing number of ethnically, racially, and culturally diverse growers. These folks are challenging not only historic statistics but also how food is grown, bought, and sold.

"American farmers today, especially young and beginning farmers, include a growing number of women, people of color, veterans, and people in their second career," says Elanor Starmer, former administrator of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Marketing Service.

The future of farming is bright indeed. We are seeing more . . .

Ethnic diversity

The most recent USDA Census of Agriculture (2012) showed that while minority-owned farms were few, their numbers were growing quickly. The number of nonwhite farmers had risen 15 percent since the previous census (2007), while the population of white farmers had declined 5 percent. The fastest-growing minority farm populations were Asian-Americans (+22 percent), Hispanics (+21 percent), African-Americans (+9 percent), and American Indians or Native Alaskans (+9 percent).

(continued)



ABOUT 150,000 FARMERS AND RANCHERS NATIONWIDE SELL DIRECTLY TO CONSUMERS.

Female Farmers

Nearly 1 million women are working America's lands, generating \$12.9 billion in annual agricultural sales. To put it another way, 30 percent of farmers are female. "We are seeing increased attention paid to providing resources to enable women to thrive in the agricultural sector," says Lauren L. Griffeth, extension leadership specialist at University of Georgia's College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences.

Small and Local Farms

The vast majority of U.S. farms are small (75 percent of them gross less than \$50,000 a year), and about 150,000 farmers and ranchers nationwide sell directly to consumers.

The local food movement, strong in the Northeast for years, is taking hold in other regions. "We are starting to see Midwest growers going into farmers' markets," says Jamie M. Cruz of SpringDell Farm in Littleton, Massachusetts. "The community wants to be involved in the farm. It goes beyond their CSA [community-supported agriculture] share. People want to know their farmers."

The "buy local" movement shows no sign of slowing. "There is a large push to drift away from the big box stores that have largely overrun the small local business owner in the course of the last few decades," says New Jersey tree farmer Tyler Cerbo, who recently

started a CSA program for a thriving produce portion of his business.

Some farmers insist that the direct-to-consumer trend is more than just smart business. It also shortens the distance—both geographic and personal—between growers and consumers. "We are seeing a return to the farm in this way," says Kirstin Bailey, who operates a CSA at Fox Run Farms in Brainard, Nebraska.

"New" Farmers

About 20 percent of growers have farmed for fewer than 10 years; the 2012 USDA Census of Agriculture counted 40,499 young beginners. Starting out requires more than enthusiasm and determination; significant capital

A Financial Fix for Farmers?

As a means to enable young college graduates to enter the profession of farming, federal legislation has been introduced. The House bill titled The Young Farmer Success Act of 2015 (H.R. 2590) would allow new farm managers and employees to qualify for certain federal student loan forgiveness programs by being designated as "public service employees." The bill failed to reach the House floor in 2015 but was reintroduced in 2017.

—Dr. Ellen Peffley, Texas Tech University



THE "BUY LOCAL" MOVEMENT SHOWS NO SIGN OF SLOWING.

investment—or the ability to borrow money—is needed, due in part to the high cost of land.

"More people would jump into farming if they could see light at the end of the tunnel," says Cruz. "They want to do this, but the door isn't easy to open."

First-generation farmers are coming into the business with new ideas, in some cases shaking up the status quo. Adds Cruz: "Old-timers and seasoned farmers need to be open-minded and

welcoming to them."

For some beginning growers, farming is a way to simplify modern life by getting their hands into the dirt and away from the corporate rat race. Raj Sinha of Liberty Farms says that farming is "the hardest and most demanding and unforgiving endeavor you may ever undertake. But if you are truly passionate about agriculture, then—as George Washington believed—farming is the most noble of professions."

Kate Bowen of Meadowdale Farm in Putney, Vermont, echoes this sentiment, calling farming "the most honest way a human being can make a living. No one in their right mind would ever get into agriculture if they saw how hard they were going to work and how much money they were going to lose."

Regardless of their background, many modern-day growers chose farming for the simplest of reasons: They like it better than any other job. ■

Young Farmers, Unite!

Farming organizations designed specifically to tackle challenges that young farmers encounter have been formed in recent years with the goal of facilitating a new generation of successful, young, independent farmers. One such group is The National Young Farmers Coalition (NYFC; youngfarmers.org). The NYFC is a nonprofit organization sponsored by The Center for Rural Affairs.

—Peffley

Stacey Kusterbeck compiles our annual Trends section of "forecasts, facts, and fascinating ideas." She lives in New York State.

RAJ SINHA



WARREN BROCKMAN

TENISIO SEANIMA



AMANDA FREUND



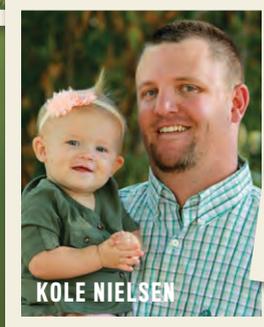
JAMIE CRUZ



DEAN HUTTO



KOLE NIELSEN



KEN SUZUKI



KATE BOWEN



The Faces of Farming

compiled by Stacey Kusterbeck

We reached out to some of America's farmers and growers with these questions:

1. How or why did you become a farmer?
2. What is the hardest part of your job?
3. What is the best part of your job?
4. What is your favorite farming or gardening tradition?
5. What advice would you give someone who wants to be a farmer today?
6. What, in your opinion, is the future of farming?

Their answers speak to both changes underfoot and timeless traditions.

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Kirstin Bailey
FOX RUN FARMS
BRAINARD, NEBRASKA

1. My mom has always had a large garden. We thought that together, we could make it into a CSA farm.
2. Relying on nature. There is so much at stake.
3. Connecting directly with our customers.
4. We always plant our potatoes on Good Friday.
5. Have a strong plan and a realistic budget. Be flexible.
6. Women-led, small-scale, sustainable farms.

Kate Bowen
MEADOWDALE FARM
PUTNEY, VERMONT



1. I grew up in the woods just off a dirt road, where we always heated with wood and raised chickens. When I met my husband, we decided to expand from just selling forest products to raising livestock.
2. Having no money.
3. Our family working as a team.
4. My grandfather always told me to “plant peas when the daffodils bloomed.”
5. Jump in and do it. Don’t overanalyze.
6. Consumers are demanding fresh, local foods. Over the next decade, we farmers will find our niche and get a proper price for our food.

Warren Brockman
HEMLOCK TRAILS
CRANBERRY COMPANY
CRANMOOR, WISCONSIN

1. After college, I took over our farm from my father, who wanted to retire.
2. Balancing the needs of the family with those of the farm. Long hours with no time off.
3. Having the chance to be around as our kids grow up.
4. We start frost-protecting when we see blooming serviceberries or ash tree leaves the size of a squirrel’s ear.
5. Start small and stay out of debt.
6. Farmers will have to grow more for less and market more of their crop themselves.



Tyler Cerbo
CERBO’S NORTH JERSEY
TREE FARM
BRANCHVILLE, NEW JERSEY

1. Coming from a large family that has been in business for 103 years, I found that farming was a lifestyle that just could not be turned down.
2. Tying tomatoes.
3. Harvesting—whether it be a field of trees or a simple basket of eggplant.
4. Every spring we have a week’s worth of late nights to get the new plantings in the ground on time.
5. Have a flexible schedule.
6. The bumper sticker slogan “No Farmers, No Food” sums up the future of farming. *(continued)*

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Jamie Cruz
SPRINGDELL FARM

LITTLETON, MASSACHUSETTS

1. I always assumed that the farm would be here. But I saw myself doing something else. When I witnessed a potential threat to the farm's future, I decided that I should tend to it.

2. Juggling the retail, wholesale, and CSA worlds during the height of the season.



3. Picking kale!

4. "Staked and tied by the 4th of July."

5. Be optimistic! You can put your whole heart and soul into something—and in the blink of an eye, Mother Nature can knock it down.

6. Consumers need to remember that a human worked to produce their food.

Amanda Freund
FREUND'S FARM

EAST CANAAN, CONNECTICUT

1. My very persistent father frequently asked, "When are you coming back to take on this farm?" I guess you could say that persistence outweighs resistance!

2. Hearing misinformation spread about how food is produced.



3. Engaging with followers on social media, speaking at conferences, and hosting visitors.

4. Scouting our 200 acres of cornfields for cutworms and other pests in June, walking each field.

5. Build your network: Get to know other farmers, ag service providers, extension agents, government officials, and ag lenders.

6. Farming needs to adopt new technologies.

Aaron Golladay
STOKROSE FARMS
WARDEN, WASHINGTON

1. Love of the outdoors, T-shirts, and blue jeans.

2. Dealing with people.

3. Dealing with animals.

4. In the Midwest, the saying is "knee high by the 4th of July." Here we have a standard of "head high by the 4th of July."

5. Lose money the first year you farm. The lessons you learn make you successful for the rest of your career!

6. Farmers have to be optimists! No one else would work this hard for this many hours for a hope.

Linda Grinthal

SUNSET VISTA FARM

ANDOVER TOWNSHIP, NEW JERSEY

1. We wanted to raise children in the country. We saved enough money to buy 20 acres.

2. Dealing with weather and pests!

3. Conversations among family, friends, and volunteers in the fields.

4. Planting peas on St. Patrick's Day.

5. Plant lots of perennials! These crops come back, year after year.

6. More small local farms.

Giulia Iannitelli Grotenhuis

THE FARM IN HARMONY

HARMONY TOWNSHIP,

NEW JERSEY

1. As first-generation Italian immigrants, my parents had a garden that was the envy of their neighbors and friends. Growing up, I did not know a time when food came from a restaurant, cans, or a box.

2. The unpredictability of it all.

3. We celebrate the rain and the growth spurt of our crop that follows (but so do the weeds!).

4. Fly-by-the-seat-of-the-pants gardening.

5. Be able to adapt and enjoy the ride.

6. Vertical farming.

Leslie Hamilton

TRIPLE H FARMS

GENESEO, NEW YORK

1. Growing up, I worked summers

on the farm that my father and uncle run today.

2. Full-time dedication. We have a few head of beef cattle, and they always get out or need something during the most inopportune times.

3. Getting to work outdoors, alongside your family and animals, all while being your own boss.

4. Getting meals for each other during harvesttime.

5. Most farms need part-time or seasonal help.

6. Harnessing people's interest in where their food comes from.

Joël Hatch-Jensen
HATCH LIVESTOCK LLC
HUNTINGTON, UTAH

1. By marrying into the lifestyle.

2. The animals! I don't understand why they can't go through the open gate right in front of them, why the ewe doesn't like its babies, or why a calf is sick.

3. Seeing that the calves that were born are now ready to be shipped or that the alfalfa you planted and watered is now in a bale of hay in the stackyard.

4. Easter weekend means marking calves on the desert, the 4th of July means moving cows, and the "Fall Behind" time change means we are gathering cows off the mountain.

5. Be prepared to work harder than you have ever worked in your life—but also be prepared to receive great rewards.

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6. Do more with less and for less—but do it, and keep doing it!

Mary Hull

**HULL FOREST PRODUCTS INC.
POMFRET CENTER, CONNECTICUT**

1. I was born into a family of tree farmers. My family still owns working forests that our ancestors were harvesting trees from in the 1700s.
2. Public scorn for timber harvesting; it can be disheartening.
3. Getting testimonials from our wide plank wood flooring.
4. I always plant corn when the oak leaves are as big as a squirrel's ear.
5. Study marketing and economics in addition to agriculture.
6. Helping farm and forestland owners to pass on their land, intact, to the next generation.

Dean Hutto

**HUTTO BROTHERS PARTNERSHIP
HOLLY HILL, SOUTH CAROLINA**



1. I came back to carry on the tradition after graduating from college.
2. Planning based on the weather. It always seems that when we start hoping for rain, it doesn't come, and vice versa.

3. Watching what you plant grow until harvest.

4. An old proverb is "Thunder in February means frost in April." If we get thunderstorms in February, we delay planting a few days.

5. Surround yourself with lots of people who know about as many different topics as possible!
6. The people who love this occupation need to stick together.

Julie Keene

**FLINCHBAUGH'S ORCHARD
& FARM MARKET
HELLAM, PENNSYLVANIA**

1. It comes with ups and downs but always ends with fullness when you see your crop come to fruition. That crop might be peaches, soybeans, hogs—or a new generation of educated students after a farm tour.
2. Managing time.
3. Eating our harvest!
4. Nothing in particular.
5. Be open-minded to all avenues of agriculture.
6. Exciting!

Frank Kurylo

**KIMBERTON CSA
PHOENIXVILLE, PENNSYLVANIA**

1. After realizing that I could benefit the Earth better as a farmer than as a lawyer, I made farming my life. I wake up every morning with a giant smile.
2. Farming in a changing climate.

3. Knowing you're providing quality produce to many different families all living just as complex a life as you.

4. At the beginning of each growing season, we write on a sheet of paper what we wish to achieve. We ask the universe for these things, then burn the papers in a large bonfire, sending our words to the sky.

5. Work a farm first. Learn from others' mistakes.
6. Row cover for season extension and pest management.

Pam Lewison

**ROBEL FARMS
MOSES LAKE, WASHINGTON**

1. I was born into one of the original farm families to settle into the Columbia Basin of Washington State. I've pursued a life in agriculture because I love everything about it.
2. Establishing a connection with consumers who have lost touch with where their food truly comes from.
3. Seeing hard work come to fruition. You plant a seed in bare soil, water it, hope for warmth and sunshine, and, in a few short months, you've grown something edible.
4. We wait for water to start filling the East Low Canal alongside our farm. Watching that water start to roll by in spring is like hearing the starting gun at a track meet. It's a signal that it's time to start the sprint to harvest!
5. Be a positive voice for your profession.

6. Embrace technology, consumers, and any opportunity to be more efficiently productive.

Sarah Lyons

**MILL HILL FARMS
WILLIAMSBURG, PENNSYLVANIA**

1. I was born into it, as part of the ninth generation to live and work on our dairy farm.
2. Things we can't control—like the weather!
3. Working with family and animals.
4. Taking a yearly family photo in front of the corn on July 4.
5. Be open to learning and change. Practices always evolve for the better!
6. We will need to rely on technology and ingenuity in order to feed the growing population of this world.

Kole Nielsen

**K&R FARMS
WEST WEBER, UTAH**



1. My grandfather was a dairy farmer. I developed a love for farming that I didn't know I had until he sold the cows while I was in high school. I have since started farming his land again so that I can raise my family around this wonderful lifestyle.
 2. Having a full-time job on top of the farm!
- (continued)*

3. Corn that is ready to harvest.
4. (No answer.)
5. Use the resources available—programs to help beginning farmers and agencies that can steer you in the right direction.
6. All farmers need to help fight for each other.

Kies Orr

**FORT HILL FARMS
THOMPSON, CONNECTICUT**

1. As a child, I loved being included in the day-to-day activities, such as milking and moving cows, feeding calves, and washing water tubs. My love for it grew only stronger.
2. Trying to keep all the cows calm and cool, and drinking plenty of water on 90-degree days.
3. Feeding calves. They melt my heart.
4. Plant any perennial ornamentals and trees and shrubs in April and May while there is “natural irrigation.” Then do not water them so that their roots will “look” for water. Your plants will have deep roots, and you won’t even have to water in a drought.
5. Don’t let small problems waylay you!
6. Future generations need to start learning more about farming.

**Rose Robson
ROBSON’S FARM**

WRIGHTSTOWN, NEW JERSEY

1. I am an only child, and when my father passed away, something clicked.

- I quit my corporate job and reopened the farm. I didn’t want something so special to end with me.
2. No vacations.
 3. I’m not sure there is just one. There are many joyful parts!
 4. Planting pumpkins while everyone else is kicking off the start of summer. It speaks to the forward thinking of farming.
 5. Work on an organic farm, a conventional farm, and a livestock farm. Understand and support your fellow farmers, no matter what!
 6. Year-round production in areas where it has never been.

Tenisio Seanima

**NATURE’S CANDY FARMS
ATLANTA, GEORGIA**



1. Our property had not been farmed in several decades, but the older generation put the charge on the younger one to pick that back up. I always knew it was something that I would do.
2. Getting others to understand the true value of food and convincing people to pay the value it’s worth.
3. Knowing that whatever happens, I can feed my family.
4. When you walk through a forest, you don’t see any bare soil. I mulch the beds to mimic the forest floor.

5. Grow wherever you are. There’s always a way.
6. People reaching out to neighbors and others in the community to increase their yield.

**Raj Sinha
LIBERTY FARM
SANDYSTON, NEW JERSEY**



1. I became a farmer for the challenge. I bought a historic circa 1790 farm desperately in need of restoration.
2. Government regulations, wildlife damage, and lack of time.
3. Watching families meet their local farmer, see how food grows, and learn about the value of good land stewardship.
4. We plant our garlic in early fall, just after the fall equinox, and harvest right after the summer solstice.
5. Do it! There is no greater reward than working your own land, being in charge of your destiny, and being rewarded with a bountiful harvest.
6. Agritourism.

Ken Suzuki

**SUZUKI FARM
DELMAR, DELAWARE**

1. When we moved here, we could not find the vegetables that we ate in



- Japan. I started to grow them.
2. Farming is hard, hard work.
 3. Bringing a healthy and bright life to our customers.
 4. We do not use machinery. We do everything—seeding, planting, and harvesting—by hand.
 5. Grow near your customers and sell straight to people.
 6. Selling directly to customers.

**Kevin Wilson
WILSON FARMS**

SPRUCE PINE, NORTH CAROLINA

1. The “farming bug” bit me early in life. I have followed my dream of owning and operating my own farm.
2. Balancing professional life with farm life. There are many days at the office when I sit and daydream about being out on the farm.
3. Working on the farm! Knowing that I have been entrusted with a piece of God’s creation makes me humble and appreciative.
4. We set tobacco on the new of the Moon. The plants live better and grow more aggressively.
5. Experiment. You may stumble upon the future of farming!
6. Efficiency. We must all learn how to produce more while using fewer resources and less labor. ■