



February 22, 2018

Senator Lamar Alexander, Chair
Senator Patty Murray, Ranking Member
Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee
highereducation2018@help.senate.gov

RE: Higher Education Act

Dear Chairman Alexander and Ranking Member Murray:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input into the Committee's work to reauthorize the Higher Education Act.

Founded in 1983, the Northeast Organic Farming Association – New York (NOFA-NY) is the premier statewide organization growing a strong organic and sustainable agriculture movement in New York State. NOFA-NY provides education and assistance to local organic and sustainable farmers; connects consumers with organic and sustainable farmers; advocates policies that support a sustainable food and farm system at both the state and federal levels; and we are the largest USDA-accredited organic certifier in New York certifying over 1,000 organic operations in the state.

Organic agriculture is one of the fastest growing segments of food and agriculture in New York, in both sales of organic products as well as organic acreage and farms. Organic is a growth opportunity for our farmers, yet our farmers are aging – the average age of New York farmers is 55, and young farmers are hampered by debt that limits their ability to own or grow their farm operation.

According to a 2017 national survey of young farmers in the U.S. conducted by the National Young Farmers Coalition, student loan debt is the #2 challenge young farmers face - second only to land access.

Bringing young people back to the farm or ranch is a national priority. The average age of the American farmer is increasing, and farmers over the age of 65 outnumber farmers under the age of 35 by a margin of 6-to-1. Young people are ready to farm, but student loan debt is keeping them from starting.

A bipartisan bill in the House, the Young Farmer Success Act (H.R. 1060) would address this urgent issue by adding farmers to the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program. We strongly urge the Committee to include this language when it reauthorizes the Higher Education Act. Providing loan forgiveness for farmers after ten years of income-based payments would help new farmers reinvest in growing their businesses and incentivize more young people to enter careers agriculture at the exact time our country and our rural communities need them.

Sincerely,

Andrianna Natsoulas,
Executive Director