

## Veterans Fundamental to Next Generation of Family Farmers and Ranchers

Written by Elisha Smith  
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By John Crabtree, [johnc@cfra.org](mailto:johnc@cfra.org) , Center for Rural Affairs

The future of family farming and ranching depends on a new generation getting started in agriculture. Our experience at the Center for Rural Affairs teaches us that many military veterans want to be part of the next generation of farmers and ranchers. The number of returning veterans and the disproportionate number from rural America, coupled with our nation's debt to all these brave men and women, cry out for public policies that help beginners – especially military veterans – establish farms and ranches.

Last month, several veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan traveled to Washington, DC to participate in a nationwide grassroots lobbying effort spearheaded by the Center for Rural Affairs. Justin Doerr, a farmer and military veteran from Plainview, Nebraska, was there to talk to lawmakers and USDA about the importance of the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Opportunity Act in supporting young farmers and ranchers, especially those who have served in the military.

He talked about the need to knock down some of the barriers beginners face, including access to land and credit. And that beginners who get started by serving niche markets and raising high-value crops often struggle to obtain crop insurance. Including policies that address these challenges in the next farm bill is an investment not only in the next generation of family farmers and ranchers, but all of rural America, and it is money well spent. It is also a tribute to the thousands of veterans who hope to farm or ranch someday.