

BEGINNING FARMER RESOURCE GUIDE





Welcome to Your Young & Beginning Farmer Resource Guide

Starting or growing a farm takes more than hard work and passion – it takes the right tools, resources and partnerships. This guide was created to help young and beginning farmers navigate financing, planning and growth opportunities so you can make informed decisions and build a strong future in agriculture.

Who We Are

Compeer Financial is a member-owned cooperative and part of the nationwide Farm Credit System. We exist to champion the hopes and dreams of rural America by providing financing, planning tools and resources designed for people building their careers in agriculture – especially those under 35 or with less than 10 years of experience. Our team brings decades of agricultural expertise and a deep commitment to helping you grow.

How We Support Young & Beginning Farmers

From your first land purchase to long-term expansion, Compeer is here with a full toolbox of support to help you move forward with confidence. We offer:

- **Flexible Financing Options** – including the Farm Forward: Loan Down Payment Program and Starter Loans, both designed to address common barriers like large down payments or limited credit history.
- **Educational Resources** – planning guides, budgeting tools, checklists and webinars to help you make informed financial and operational decisions.
- **Beginning with Compeer Grant** – up to \$1,500 awarded to cover expenses for educational tools, FSA guarantee fees, accounting services and more.
- **One-on-One Guidance** – personalized support from a team that understands agriculture and will work with you to create a plan aligned with your goals.
- **Comprehensive Risk Management** – guidance on federal crop insurance subsidies for beginning farmers; access to discounted premiums, higher coverage levels, waived fees and improved yield calculations to ensure affordable and effective protection for your crops and income.

To help you get started, we have compiled resources to help you navigate the future.

PLAN FINANCE EDUCATION

For more information contact an experienced financial officer at Compeer Financial.



(844) 426-6733 | [COMPEER.COM](https://www.compeer.com)



- **USDA Beginning Farmer Guide**

USDA offers dedicated help to beginning farmers and ranchers. USDA considers anyone who has operated a farm or ranch for less than 10 years to be a beginning farmer or rancher. USDA can help you get started or grow your operation through a variety of programs and services, from farm loans to crop insurance and conservation programs to disaster assistance.

- **SCORE: Startup Roadmap**

SCORE is a Resource Partner of the Small Business Administration (SBA). The Startup Roadmap outlines each step in starting a business with information and resources on the most difficult tasks. It also contains tips for working with your SCORE mentor on each topic.

- **AgPlan**

This free online tool can help you develop your business plan. It includes tips, resources and sample plans and can be printed and downloaded for work with your own reviewers.

- **Farm Commons**

This resource can help you choose the right business structure for your farming operation.

- **University of Wisconsin-Madison: Farm Pulse Financial Management & Analysis**

This collection of articles, videos and podcast episodes provides guidance and resources for starting a farming enterprise.

- **Small Business Development Centers**

Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs) provide counseling and training to small businesses, including working with SBA to develop and provide informational tools to support business start-ups and existing business expansion. SBDC programs deliver professional, high-quality, individualized business advising and technical assistance to existing small businesses and pre-venture entrepreneurs.

Illinois SBDC

Minnesota SBDC

Wisconsin SBDC





FINANCING THAT FITS WHERE YOU ARE Whether you're just getting started or ready to take on more, Compeer offers flexible loan programs designed specifically for young and beginning farmers.

Farm Forward: Loan Down Payment Program

- As little as 1% down
- Up to \$1 million in combined financing
- 30-year amortization available
- Discounted interest rates for the first five years
- Complements — but doesn't combine with — FSA down payment loans
- Ideal for: first-time land buyers, generational transitions, LLCs or partnerships, or farmers who've maxed out FSA options

Starter Loans: Support for your early-stage farm investments

- Reduced loan fees and relaxed underwriting
- Flexible uses: land, equipment, seed, livestock, operating needs
- Designed for farmers with limited financial history or credit
- Stepping stone to larger financing as your operation grows

First-Time Homebuyer Loan Program

- Compeer Home offers a zero down payment option to make your journey to homeownership smoother, more affordable and less daunting

• USDA FSA

The Farm Service Agency (FSA) offers loans to help farmers and ranchers get the financing they need to start, expand or maintain a family farm.

• USDA FSA LOANS

This resource presents information about specific FSA Loan Programs for beginning farmers and ranchers.

• USDA RMA

The Risk Management Agency (RMA) website includes information about crop insurance for U.S. farmers and ranchers.

• National Young Farmers Coalition

The National Young Farmers Coalition is partnering with Chipotle to offer \$5,000 grants in 2023 to 75 young farmers and ranchers to support them in building careers in agriculture.

• NerdWallet: 2023 Farm Grants

This list features available farm grants for 2023.

• USDA: Farming Opportunities Training and Outreach Grant Program

The Farming Opportunities Training and Outreach grant program was established in the Agricultural Act of 2018. It encourages and assists socially disadvantaged and veteran farmers and ranchers and beginning farmers and ranchers in the ownership and operation of farms and ranches through education and training. It also promotes equitable participation in the agricultural programs of USDA.

• USDA: Rural Development

USDA Rural Development supports rural prosperity by investing in modern infrastructure such as high-speed internet and water and waste treatment systems. It helps eligible rural residents buy or rent affordable housing, and it can partner with you to build or improve essential community facilities such as hospitals, libraries, and schools. It boosts rural economic development by funding technical assistance for small business owners and entrepreneurs, helping them design robust business plans, find new markets and promote their goods and services. It also helps eligible businesses and manufacturers expand or improve, and it supports energy programs that finance renewable systems for agriculture and industry.

[Illinois USDA](#)

[Minnesota USDA](#)

[Wisconsin USDA](#)

• Illinois Finance Authority

Serving Illinois' diverse farm and agri-businesses, the Illinois Finance Authority provides access to low-cost capital to help seed, grow and sustain your business. Bond and guarantee programs are offered.

• Minnesota Department of Agriculture: Beginning Farmer Loan Program

The Rural Finance Authority (RFA) established the Beginning Farmer Loan Program to help people who want to farm in Minnesota. The program offers affordable financing, a reasonable down payment and built-in safeguards, such as farm business management training and financial planning to help minimize the risk all farmers face. This is a partnership approach backed by the state's financial participation used to finance a purchase or possibly refinance an existing farm debt.



- **University Extension Offices**

These websites offer fast access to your county extension office so you can connect with a local agriculture and/or community development educator to share ideas with.

[Illinois Extension Office](#)

[Minnesota Extension Office](#)

[Wisconsin Extension Office](#)

- **USDA FSA Price Support**

This website offers links and resources for various programs on price support.

- **USDA: Farmers.gov**

To better support America's farmers and ranchers, USDA has partnered with tax experts from across the country to connect producers to information and resources related to USDA program payments, asset protection and the important relationships between federal income taxes and USDA farm programs.

- **Cornell University: Cornell Small Farms Program**

The Cornell Small Farms Program is housed at the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALs) at Cornell University. By working collaboratively with a network of CALs faculty and staff, Cornell Cooperative Extension educators and other small farm advocates throughout New York, the program has generated innovative research and extension initiatives that enhance small farm viability. Current projects engage farmers at the front-end of challenges they face and also introduce them to new and emerging opportunities.

- **Farm Answers**

Farm Answers is the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture's beginning farmer and rancher (BFRDP) clearinghouse, providing resources to help you get started farming, as well as tools to help more seasoned producers succeed.

- **National Young Farmers Coalition**

This Intersectional coalition works for justice and collective liberation of our food and farm systems. The goal is a future in which people, land and relationships are respected.

- **University of Illinois: Farmdoc**

Farmdoc provides analysis, tools and data to help Cornbelt farmers make better decisions.

- **University of Minnesota: Interpreting Financial Statements and Measures**

Learn what your financial statements and ratios mean and how can you use them to improve farm decision making.

- **GroundBreakers Conference**

A two-day, one-night annual event hosted by Compeer Financial designed for young and beginning farmers to build leadership skills, network with peers and learn strategies for long-term success. Reach out to a Compeer team member for more information.

- **Compeer Learning Center**

Find free interactive calculators, planning templates, videos and expert insights – all created to help you tackle today's challenges and get ready for tomorrow's opportunities.





DAIRY

- [Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship](#)

The Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship (DGA) is an innovative 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that partners with established grazing dairy farmers, universities, community-based organizations and other stakeholders to deliver high-quality work-based training in managed-grazing dairy production in multiple states.

- [Managed Grazing Innovation Center](#)

The center provides high-quality education on managed grazing production systems, farm business management and conservation stewardship in an online format.

- [Professional Dairy Producers of Wisconsin Mentor Program](#)

The goals of the PDPW Mentor Program are to increase opportunities for students to experience modern dairy production systems and stimulate career planning with production agriculture as an option. The PDPW Mentor Program is offered to students of four-year universities, technical schools and short course students.

LIVESTOCK

- [Livestock Registration and Disease Traceability](#)

Premise registration allows for much faster traces when there is an outbreak of an animal disease.

[Illinois](#)

[Minnesota](#)

[Wisconsin](#)

SUSTAINABLE-ORGANIC

- [Land Stewardship Project](#)

The Land Stewardship Project (LSP) works on various fronts to ensure future generations of stewardship-minded farmers are successfully established on the land and in our communities. Whether you are dreaming of farming, in the process of establishing your own farm business or have 10 years under your belt, LSP can support you and your farm.

- [Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education: Building a Sustainable Business](#)

Building a Sustainable Business: A Guide to Developing a Business Plan for Farms and Rural Businesses brings the business planning process alive to help today's alternative and sustainable agriculture entrepreneurs transform farm-grown inspiration into profitable enterprises. Sample worksheets lend a practical perspective and illustrate how real farm families set goals, researched processing alternatives, determined potential markets and evaluated financing options. Blank worksheets help the reader develop a detailed, lender-ready business plan or map out strategies to take advantage of new opportunities.

- [Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education: Outreach Resources & Publications](#)

Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) Outreach produces a wide range of resources featuring SARE-funded research.

- [Marbleseed](#)

Marbleseed was established in 1995 as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit committed to supporting farmers in their transition toward sustainable, organic farming systems that are ecologically sound, economically viable and socially just. They work in community with human-scale farms to support peer-to-peer learning with free and farmer-led programs, print and digital resources, and in-person events that support thriving regenerative and organic farms and food systems.

- [Marbleseed Farmer Advancement Program](#)

The Marbleseed Farmer Advancement Program creates a pipeline for beginning farmers through comprehensive training sessions designed to support all stages of beginning farmers. These include participation in the beginning farmer track at the annual Marbleseed Organic Farming Conference, regional New Farmer U trainings with special focus on business management and the year-long farmer-to-farmer mentorship program.