



**For Immediate Release**  
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## **BEGINNING FARMER BILLS INTRODUCED IN HOUSE AND SENATE**

### **U.S. REPRESENTATIVE SAM FARR SIGNS ON AS CO-SPONSOR LOCAL PROGRAMS SERVE AS MODEL FOR FEDERAL PILOT**

*Salinas and Sebastopol* – The Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association (ALBA) and California FarmLink applaud the recent introduction of the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Opportunity Act of 2007, an initiative to help the next generation of farmers and ranchers enter into agriculture and take advantage of emerging markets. Importantly, U. S. Representative Sam Farr is a sponsor, along with Rep. Stephanie Herseth Sandlin (D-SD) and Rep. Tim Walz (D-MN), who introduced the legislation.

A key element of the bill is a new Beginning Farmer and Rancher Individual Development Account (IDA) Pilot Program. The proposed program is modeled after California FarmLink's IDA program, which works in partnership with ALBA to create opportunities for farmers in Monterey, Santa Cruz and other counties. The bill also includes numerous other programs to advance beginning farmers.

Congressman Sam Farr said, "The Central Coast has always been a center of ag innovation. Expanding the opportunity for new farmers and ranchers to enter into the market not only helps them and their families, it helps all agriculture and strengthens all of our communities that depend on agriculture."

"This legislation represents years of work on the part of family farm advocates," said Brett Melone, executive director of ALBA. "It will deliver real benefits to beginning farmers and ranchers through the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program, which supports community-based efforts to *grow* new farmers. ALBA is grateful for Sam Farr's pioneering support of this bill."

Four Monterey County farmers, all participants in ALBA's program, have participated in California FarmLink's IDA program. These beginning farmers have used IDAs as part of a downpayment to purchase farmland, or to purchase tractors and other capital assets. The program matches participating farmers' savings by a 3:1 ratio for two years, allowing farmers with limited assets to accumulate a \$9,600 nest egg. IDA participants are required to demonstrate and exercise sound financial literacy. They conduct business planning, improved record-keeping and clean up their credit history in order to grow their businesses.

Individual Development Accounts are matched savings accounts helping low-income people to build assets. Best known in urban areas, IDAs have enjoyed bipartisan support as a means of promoting economic development and combating poverty. Accounts have been made available to small-scale family farmers through California FarmLink's Agricultural IDA program.

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“We’re honored that advocates and government officials recognized California FarmLink’s IDA matched savings program as a successful strategy to help beginning farmers across the country,” said Steve Schwartz, executive director of California FarmLink. “The Beginning Farmer and Rancher Opportunity Act of 2007 will mean a dramatic expansion in the number of farmers advancing their dreams with IDAs.”

In the meantime, FarmLink has secured private sector funds to offer a limited number of accounts this year. Applications for a new round of IDAs are due on June 15<sup>th</sup>, and are available at [www.californiafarmlink.org](http://www.californiafarmlink.org). Partners supporting California FarmLink’s IDA program include: Wells Fargo, RaboBank N.A., Union Bank of California, WestAmerica Bank, California Coastal Rural Development Corporation, the Federal Home Loan Bank, Comerica Bank and Santa Cruz Community Credit Union.

“We don’t tell beginning farmers they are choosing the easy path, but if they make the commitment to produce the nation’s food we want to make sure they have the resources they need to build their businesses,” said Schwartz. The Beginning Farmer and Rancher Opportunity Act will provide tools and resources such as training in farm management, down payment loans, matched savings accounts, and conservation incentives and set-asides. “The Beginning Farmer and Rancher bill promises to help new farmers and ranchers get started in agriculture and become economically viable stewards of the land,” said Ferd Hoefner, policy director of the Sustainable Agriculture Coalition.

At the same time that retiring farmers are looking to transfer their land and knowledge, there is a growing movement of people seeking a start in agriculture, including immigrant and women farmers, two of the fastest growing segments of agriculture. Consumer demand for fresh, sustainably-grown produce and meats is outstripping local and regional supply. Many see the 2007 Farm Bill as an opportunity for public policy to foster and connect these trends. “There are real opportunities in agriculture today. Unprecedented consumer demand for organic, locally grown, and grass-fed agricultural products provides those just entering farming with exciting market prospects” said Hoefner. “The 2007 Farm Bill presents us with a chance to give these new farmers and ranchers the tools they need to take advantage of these markets. The Initiative lays the foundation for the next generation of farmers and ranchers as well as the future health and vitality of our food system. ”

The bill incorporates modified versions of several suggestions made by USDA Secretary Mike Johanns in his farm bill proposal but includes many additional measures as well. Identical versions of the bill were introduced in both houses, H.R. 2348 and S. 1412.

California FarmLink is a non-profit organization working to facilitate farm transitions and protect farmland. The group has offices in Sebastopol, Davis and Watsonville.

ALBA is a non-profit group that creates opportunities for beginning and limited-resource farmers in the Central Coast region, and operates two educational farms as farm business incubators near Salinas and Watsonville.

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