



## Fishing and Farming: A Generational Crisis

**Project Description:** Commercial fishing in the U.S. is experiencing a generational crisis, as many are on the cusp of retirement and few are able or willing to enter. U.S. farming is similarly lacking turnover, but unlike fisheries the USDA has robust programmatic infrastructure to tackle the problem. The lack of generational renewal may ultimately pose a national food security problem if there are an insufficient number of new entrants available to run these industries. This research brief presents a summary of the issues faced by new fishermen and farmers and the differences in how issues across these two sectors are being addressed. The following information was gathered throughout 2021 through interviews with experts who work with new entrants in fishing and farming and through reviews of literature and government reports on the topic. The research publication is available here:

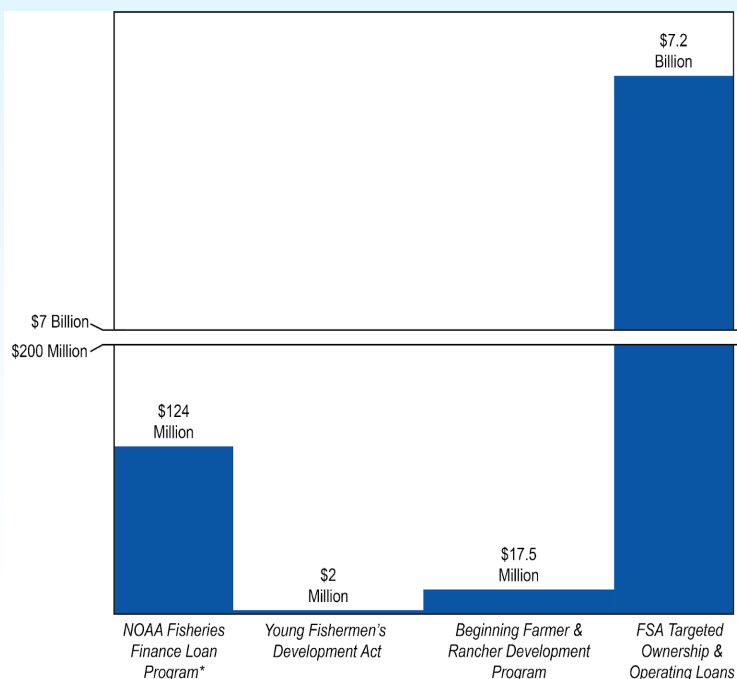
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0743016722001693?dgcid=author>

### What issues do new fishermen and farmers face?

Fishing and farming are both highly risky businesses – subject to weather, inter-annual variability in harvests, market fluctuations, diseases and pathogens. At the forefront of issues faced by new entrants are the increasingly high startup costs of these industries and the capital necessary to purchase farmland, fishing boats, fishing and farming gear, and constantly evolving technology. In part these high costs have emerged from policies that have incentivized large-scale consolidation and, in fisheries specifically, put a price on harvesting privileges that were previously available at a nominal fee. The coupling of increasing costs with rising uncertainties from markets and climate change imply that new entrants into these industries face a confluence of conditions that create formidable challenges to entry and success. This is compounded by rural out migration patterns that have reduced the number of young people available to learn these occupations and less interest from those who remain due to perceptions of inaccessibility and a loss of social cohesion around the values of these occupations.

### What programs exist to aid new farmers?

The realization of issues around entry into farming began in the 1800s. National level recognition of the problem has evolved into federal umbrella programs targeting the diversity of needs of new farmers as well as regional efforts that deploy national grants to develop locally-relevant



\*Not specific to new entrants

Figure 1. Federal programs for new fishermen and farmers and their 2021 total funds.

programming. The Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program can be traced back to 1862 with grant funding for education, mentoring, and technical assistance for beginning farmers and ranchers. The USDA Direct and Guaranteed Farm Ownership and Operating Loans grew out of an act passed in 1916 and provide loans for access to land and capital as well as to help pay normal operating expenses, provide marketing opportunities, assist with diversifying operations, and more. Each year a percentage of these loan funds are set aside by Congress for beginning farmers with certain programs providing access to loans to those who are unable to obtain funds through a commercial lender. In addition the USDA offers multiple grant programs specifically for new farming entrants including for value added production, supplemental insurance, and incentives or set asides for land transfers to new farmers. Fundamental to continually improving programming, the USDA tracks the use of its funds across various beginning farmer efforts, conducts an annual census of all farm operations, regularly reviews its programs, houses a clearinghouse of information regarding new farmers, and has dedicated staff throughout its various offices that work specifically on entry issues into farming.

## What programs exist to aid new fishermen?

Efforts at building the next generation of fishermen lag behind that targeting new farmers with limited national-level programming. NOAA has been providing loans for vessel purchase and quota share acquisition in select federal fisheries since 1996 through the Fisheries Finance Program. The other federal effort for new fishermen is the Young Fishermen's Development Act, which was enacted in 2021, and provides grant funding to support training initiatives for young fishermen. The majority of programming targeting new entry in fisheries has been piecemeal across the U.S., developed largely by NGOs, fishing associations, and regional Sea Grant offices in response to localized issues and needs. Efforts geared towards new fisheries entrants are geographically dispersed, funding opportunities are decentralized, and lessons learned are shared only through irregular, individual efforts. The vast majority of new fisheries entrant programming focuses on training new fisheries participants through crew apprenticeship programs, Figure 2. Several fishing organizations have established their own permit and quota share bank programs to allow new and small-scale fishermen to lease harvesting privileges at affordable rates and provide financial and business development aid.

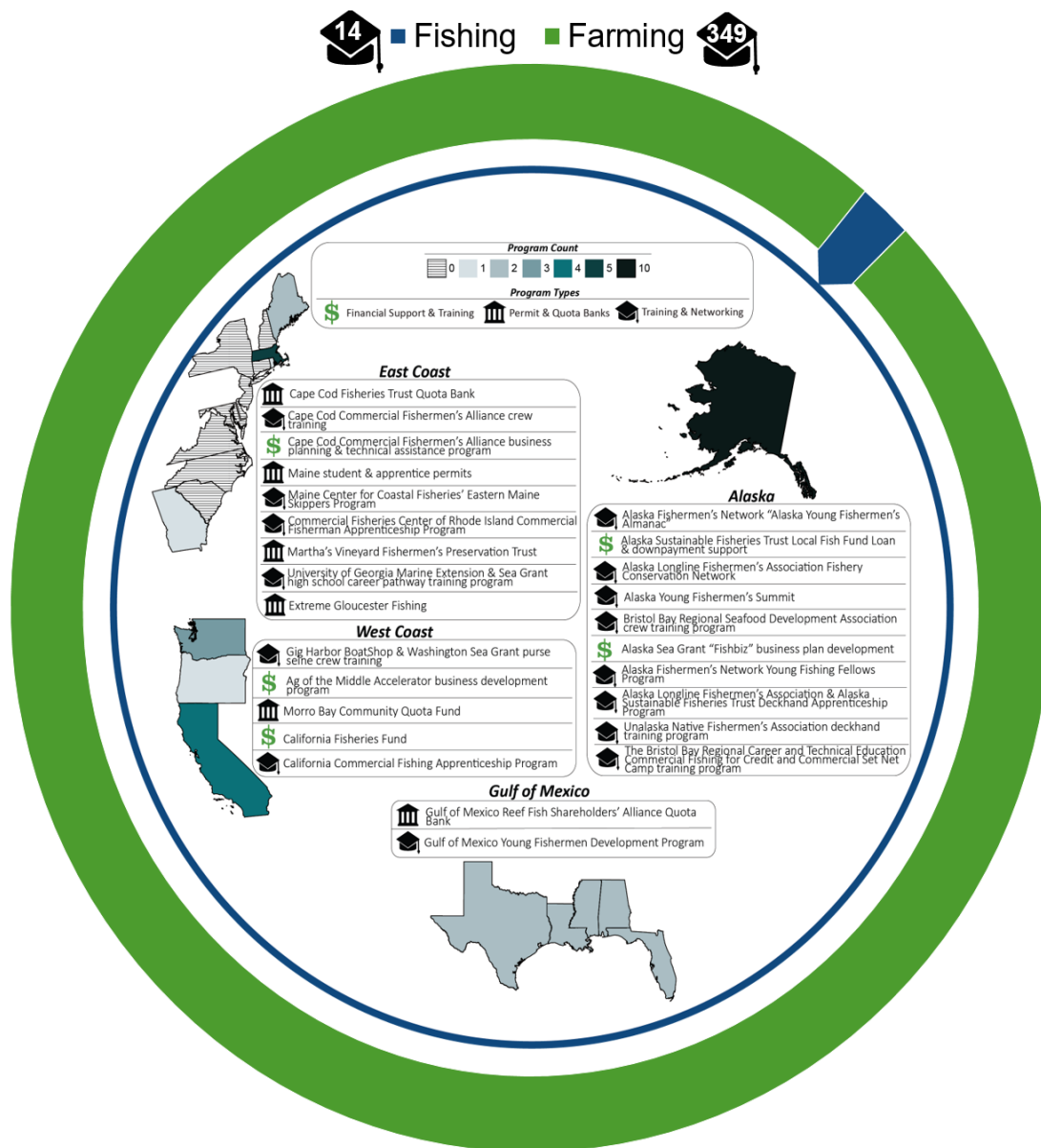


Figure 2. Programs that exist to facilitate entry into fisheries across the U.S.. The internal heatmap of the U.S. demonstrates the number and type of programs that exist for new fishermen. The shading of the states represents the overall number of programs with darker states having higher numbers. The icons denote the type of program: training program (graduation cap), financial support (dollar sign), and permit and quota banks (bank). The radial bar (external ring) on the figure specifically highlights the number of fishery training programs (blue) compared to the number of farming training programs funded by the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP) since 2015 (green).

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