The mission of the Farmer Veteran Coalition (FVC) is to mobilize veterans to feed America. FVC believes that veterans possess the unique skills and character needed to strengthen rural communities and create sustainable food systems for all.

2008
FVC founded out of the back of a pick-up

2010
NFU began working with FVC

2013
FVC expands Homegrown by Heroes brand
Introduction

Returning service members from Iraq and Afghanistan have become the latest group of veterans in need of employment and, by some measures, may be the most likely young people to enter into agriculture and other rural-based businesses.

As service members return from active duty they tend to return to their rural communities, and they sometimes have difficulties finding long-term employment. Veterans often need additional assistance in finding resources to start farm businesses.

From its inception, National Farmers Union (NFU) has supported and collaborated with the Farmer Veteran Coalition (FVC), an organization aimed at mobilizing veterans to enter agriculture and help feed America while rebuilding rural communities. Together we share a mission of national outreach to farmers and ranchers to strengthen their quality of life through educational and advocacy efforts.

NFU is pleased to see FVC taking a similar path in organizing state affiliates to grow a national presence.

When FVC founder Michael O’Gorman first approached NFU President Roger Johnson with his idea, Johnson was immediately impressed. Back when Johnson was a young farmer, he knew the significant value of community support. He could envision the struggles returning military members would face entering or renewing their careers in agriculture. “According to U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, 40 percent of our country’s military forces are from rural areas,” said Johnson. “The least we can do is welcome them home and provide them with the tools they need to build their futures as farmers and ranchers.”

NFU became an advocate of O’Gorman and his mission to make a difference. Agriculture presents unique challenges yet also provides a way of life that young veterans may find conducive to their well-being. NFU has long supported farmers from all walks of life and

“The least we can do is welcome the veterans home and provide them with the tools they need to build their futures as farmers and ranchers.”
has given voice to those less fortunate since 1902.

The mission of the FVC is to mobilize veterans to feed America. “We cultivate a new generation of farmers and food leaders, and develop viable employment and meaningful careers through the collaboration of the farming and military communities. We believe that veterans possess the unique skills and character needed to strengthen rural communities and create sustainable food systems for all. We believe that food production offers purpose, opportunity, as well as physical and psychological benefits,” said Michael O’Gorman, executive director of the FVC.

The goal for the collaboration is to connect Farmers Union members’ practical farming and ranching experience, as well as Farmers Union state and county organizations’ leadership skills, with farmer veterans whom the FVC has identified as potentially needing such assistance. “The Farmer Veteran Coalition offers returning veterans, many disabled, the resources they need to return to a healthy lifestyle in agriculture,” said Johnson. “National Farmers Union is proud to be counted as the first farm organization to offer support to the FVC and encourages other organizations to contribute and partner.”

In addition, veterans have been shown to be exceptional entrepreneurs. In 2010, the Small Business Administration reported that the success rate of a veteran-owned business is higher than that of the general population.

We hope that the materials included in this packet will provide Farmers Union organizations with a simple framework outlining the many different ways to participate in this collaboration and assist returning veterans.

We encourage you to customize these initiatives to fit your county or state Farmers Union.
Get Started

The National Farmers Union and Farmer Veteran Coalition collaboration connects farmer veterans with state and county Farmers Union organizations. To do this, the FVC will refer potential farmer veterans to their state or local Farmers Union as a resource. To prepare for these potential contacts, below is a list of actions a state Farmers Union may consider taking to ensure this collaboration serves both veterans and Farmers Union.

• Designate a specific individual within the state and county Farmers Union as the farmer veteran contact person. Either a Farmers Union staff member or a Farmers Union volunteer could serve in this position
• Create a plan to connect your Farmers Union’s more established farmers (or more established veteran farmers) with the young farmer veterans
• Work with established and experienced veterans to pinpoint areas of need and build the potential network
• Create an internal working group to decide how to best serve future farmer veterans
• Invite veterans to participate in Farmers Union opportunities
• Create a list of volunteer opportunities and events; encourage farmer veterans to become involved
• Invite a farmer veteran to speak at a county convention, annual meeting or education event
• Suggest a farmer veteran to be highlighted in the NFU News, NFU e-newsletter, your state publication or via social media
• Start and participate in a farmer veteran mentoring program in your state

“NFU is proud to be counted as the first farm organization to offer support to the FVC and encourages other organizations to contribute and partner.”
Get Involved

Get to know farmer veterans and their unique needs

• Many state Farmers Unions already have farmer veterans in their leadership ranks. These may be older veterans from past wars or recently returned veterans who are assimilating back into their family-owned businesses. The best way to understand the unique challenges and needs of future generations of farmer veterans is to go right to the source.

• State Farmers Union organizations may want to consider creating an advisory committee of existing farmer veteran leaders. The advisory committee can assist NFU with a better understanding of the unique needs of farmer veterans and they can serve as ambassadors to returning veterans.

• State Farmers Union organizations can hold workshops to ensure everyone has a better understanding of the unique challenges facing our returning military veterans. They may want to consider inviting a working farmer veteran to speak to staff, board and members about his or her experiences as both a farmer and a veteran.

Create a branded farmer veteran welcome packet

The state or county Farmers Union organization may want to consider creating an information packet specifically designed to meet the needs of farmer veterans. This packet could include general information about Farmers Union committees and boards, Farmers Union history, and any existing programs that are specific to veterans, beginning farmers and ranchers, farm safety, or women’s leadership such as the Beginning Farmer Institute, College Conference on Cooperatives, or Women’s Conference (see www.nfu.org/education for more information).

Help farmer veterans understand agricultural opportunities

Despite best efforts, many veterans are not aware of what benefits are available to them as veterans or how to practically apply those benefits. A state organization may want to consider creating a veteran resource guide to help identify both federal and state agriculture resources and programs specific to veterans in their area. Or consider re-branding and editing the existing Farmer Veteran Coalition Resource Guide included in this packet to better meet the needs its regional scope.
Nominate a farmer veteran to be highlighted on the NFU Blog and NFU News

Honor a farmer veteran by nominating him or her to be featured on the NFU blog or in the NFU News. E-mail NFU Communications Director Brittany Jablonsky at bjablonsky@nfudc.org with full contact information and two or more paragraphs describing the nomination. This story can then be used on your own state Farmers Union publication or website.

Create a farmer veteran mentoring program

Who better to help a farmer veteran learn how to create a successful agricultural business than an existing Farmers Union volunteer member, particularly one who may be a veteran? A farmer veteran program will help to engage members to support farmer veterans and ensure that new farmer veterans are getting the best agricultural advice available. Mentors should be individuals or partners who are established in their respective fields and are willing to volunteer to assist farmer veterans for a pre-determined and agreed upon schedule. County and state Farmers Union organizations can help to make these mentorship introductions, as well as advertise the opportunity to current members and new farmer veterans through state publications, state websites and social media.

Support an FVC equipment exchange

At times returning veterans have access to land through family members and friends and may even have experience in agriculture, but they may need the equipment to get started. Farmers Union can help create bridges between existing members and farmer veterans by supporting an FVC farm equipment exchange. Used equipment exchanges are being established by the FVC in various states. Contact FVC for more information.

Engage your members of Congress

Many members of Congress are from urban and suburban regions of the country. They may not understand the connection of urban and rural places and the pathway through farmers’ fields and pastures that brings food to their table. But many congressmen will have veterans as constituents, some of whom may be interested in developing a career in agriculture. Farmers Union’s support for soldiers who wish to find long-term employment, as well as its assistance in finding resources to start farm businesses, is a great message to be able to share. Be sure and invite staff from your members of Congress’ state and local offices to any farmer veterans’ workshops or events that you are hosting.
**Communicate**

**Communication to board and stakeholders**

Below are talking points that may be used in building support among your board and stakeholder groups for your Farmers Union’s outreach efforts to veterans.

- Farmers Union takes pride in serving the diversity of family farmers, ranchers and fishermen.
- Farmers Union provides leadership and advocacy training to all farmers and ranchers of all ages with specialized programs for women and for young and beginning farmers and ranchers.
- Farmers Union believes that good opportunities in production agriculture are the foundation of strong farm and ranch families, and strong farm and ranch families are the basis for thriving rural communities.
- It is estimated that 40 percent of military recruits come from rural America. Among these returning veterans are the next generation of family farmers and rural leaders.
- NFU Education Director Maria Miller has served on FVC’s advisory panel since the organization’s inception. Recently, NFU increased its collaboration with the FVC with the appointment of Donn Teske to the board of directors and its executive committee. Teske, president of Kansas Farmers Union, also serves on the Kansas FVC review board to match beginning farmer veterans with in-kind donations of used farm equipment. Graham Christensen of Nebraska Farmers Union serves on the Nebraska FVC review board that also matches used farm equipment to returning veterans.
- FVC is an organization aimed at mobilizing veterans to enter agriculture.
- FVC seeks to develop viable employment and meaningful careers for returning veterans through the collaboration of the agriculture and military communities.
- The goal for the collaboration is to connect Farmers Union members’ farming and ranching experience, plus Farmers Union state and county organizations’ leadership skills, with farmer veterans whom the FVC has identified as potentially needing such assistance.
- Farmers Union can participate in this initiative to reach out to existing and future farmer veterans and to develop programs to help them to succeed.
Below is a **sample news release** that can be customized with your state or county Farmers Union organization’s information to communicate to the public about your efforts to engage with farmer veterans.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**State Farmers Union Supports Farmer Veterans**

CITY, STATE (Date) – State Farmers Union is pleased to announce a partnership with the Farmer Veteran Coalition (FVC), an organization aimed at mobilizing veterans to enter agriculture and help feed America while cultivating a new generation of farmers and food leaders.

Rural residents comprise a disproportionate number of military recruits, meaning that many veterans may have an agricultural background or a desire to return to their rural roots. State/County Farmers Union will be reaching out to farmer veterans to help provide them with technical assistance, risk management education, advocacy and networking opportunities, and mentoring, among other resources.

“Our returning veterans have done an immeasurable service to our country and face a number of challenges upon their return. State Farmers Union is proud to be able to do our small part in thanking our servicemen and women for their work. It is our hope that the workshops and resources we can provide, as well as the support of our grassroots membership, will help them transition smoothly into farming or ranching as they begin this new role,” said State Farmers Union President Name.

**ADDITIONAL DETAILS ABOUT ACTIVITIES**

**INSERT QUOTE FROM LOCAL VETERAN**

For additional resources and more information about upcoming workshops, visit Website or [www.farmvetco.org](http://www.farmvetco.org).
About National Farmers Union

National Farmers Union was founded in 1902 in Point, Texas, to help the family farmer address profitability issues and monopolistic practices. NFU has been working since 1902 to protect and enhance the economic well-being and quality of life for family farmers, ranchers and rural communities through advocating grassroots-driven policy positions adopted by its membership.

NFU represents farmers and ranchers in all states, with organized divisions in 33 states. The key to the success and credibility of the organization has been Farmers Union’s grassroots structure in which policy positions are initiated locally. The policy process includes the presentation of resolutions by individuals, followed by possible adoption of the resolutions at the local, state and national levels. Members and staff of the Farmers Union advocate these policy positions nationwide.

NFU believes that good opportunities in production agriculture are the foundation of strong farm and ranch families, and strong farm and ranch families are the basis for thriving rural communities. Vibrant rural communities, in
turn, are vital to the health, security and economic well-being of our entire national economy.


**About STATE or COUNTY Farmers Union**

Insert state or county Farmers Union information.

**Farm Credit**

The Farm Credit Council and the FVC have recently partnered to help find farm ownership or employment opportunities for members of the military transitioning into the civilian work force. The vision for the partnership is to connect the talent and experience that Farm Credit System institutions have in financial and business skills, with farmer veterans whom the FVC has identified as potentially needing such assistance. http://fccouncil.com/ybs/fvc/

**National AgrAbility Project**

Returning veterans, just like farmers injured in agricultural accidents, face challenges that may include disabilities and non-physical injuries. The vision of AgrAbility is to enable a high quality lifestyle for farmers, ranchers and other agricultural workers with disabilities. While the term “disability” often brings to mind conditions such as spinal cord injuries and amputations, AgrAbility addresses not only these but also many other conditions, such as arthritis, back impairments and behavioral health issues. Through education and assistance, AgrAbility helps to eliminate or minimize obstacles that inhibit success in production agriculture or agriculture-related occupations. http://www.agrability.org/

**Farmer Veteran Coalition**

You may visit the Farmer Veteran Coalition’s website at www.farmvetco.org to find additional resources and information on the coalition’s other programs. There are also frequent updates on the FVC’s Facebook page at https://www.facebook.com/farmerveterancoalition