



COMMUNITY
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www.cfaky.org

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Climate Declaration

Introduction

The global COVID-19 pandemic has exposed our food and farm system's weaknesses--broken supply chains, greater food insecurity, and an essential yet vulnerable workforce--further exemplifying the immediate and pressing need to build more resilient communities. At the same time, communities all across the world have witnessed more unpredictable weather events that threaten the stability of our global food, fiber, and fuel supply. Kentucky is facing these challenges, and Community Farm Alliance recognizes that climate change poses an existential threat to Kentucky's farms and the communities that they support. An EPA assessment in 2016 reported:

"Kentucky's climate is changing. Although the average temperature did not change much during the 20th century, most of the commonwealth has warmed in the last 20 years. Average annual rainfall is increasing, and a rising percentage of that rain is falling on the four wettest days of the year. In the coming decades, the changing climate is likely to reduce crop yields and threaten some aquatic ecosystems. Floods may be more frequent, and droughts may be longer, which would increase the difficulty of meeting the competing demands for water in the Ohio, Tennessee, and Cumberland rivers."¹

Sustainable agriculture can be a gateway for economic vitality, better health, and the creation of community wealth. Due to decades of exploitation by extractive industries, Kentuckians are already working to build a new economy and facilitate a just transition, and agriculture has emerged as a bright spot especially for Eastern Kentucky as the region transitions from its dependency on the coal industry. As the entire state pursues this just transition, we recognize that it is not just about transforming extractive economies into something else, it's about preserving and including the history of a place into a new vision for the economy. As a strong agricultural state, Kentucky's farmers are integral to building and supporting Kentucky's vibrant rural and urban communities. We have an opportunity and a responsibility to do what we can now to prepare for an increasingly unpredictable future. Kentucky's farmers are on the frontlines of this challenge to ensure a resilient food and farm system.

¹ [What Climate Change Means for Kentucky \(epa.gov\)](https://www.epa.gov/what-climate-change-means-for-kentucky)



The Challenge

The heaviest burden of climate change falls both on low-income Kentuckians and Kentucky's farmers. Neighborhoods and communities that are primarily populated by people of color and members of low socioeconomic backgrounds are already burdened by disproportionate exposure to pollutants, resulting in poor health. With greater spread of waterborne, food, and vector-related diseases (and likelihood of pandemics) as global temperatures rise and weather systems shift, food safety is becoming increasingly important.

As people who are working the land, farmers feel the direct impacts of a changing climate most acutely. Milder winters lead to increased agricultural pests that ravage plants, as well as ticks and other pests that carry life altering diseases for both livestock and humans. Erratic rainfall, manifesting as droughts and floods, will particularly pose a challenge to Kentucky agriculture, which most affects our rolling hills and the floodplains of our state's many rivers.

The Opportunity

We recognize that all Kentuckians--especially farmers--are part of the solution. Farmers are natural allies in the fight against climate change. Farmers are also important stewards of the land, and in Kentucky, agricultural land comprises half of the total area. The choices that farmers make daily affect the quality of our waterways, Kentucky's generation of energy, and greenhouse gas sequestration. These choices not only influence how we mitigate catastrophic climate outcomes; they also determine the viability of rural communities and resiliency of local food, fuel, and fiber supply chains in the face of climate change.

For too long, the rhetoric surrounding climate change has been divisive, pitting consumers against producers, and even sowing discord amongst farmers. **At Community Farm Alliance, we believe that farmers, members of rural and urban communities, policymakers, and eaters--indeed all Kentuckians--can work together to:**

- i. **prevent worst-case climate change-induced scenarios, and**
- ii. **build robust systems that can withstand the increasing extreme weather events and climate variability already observed.**

CFA has been engaging in climate issues by:

- Launching CFA's Climate Change Working Group in Fall 2020 to shape CFA's messaging, policy engagement, and action steps on climate issues;
- Facilitating the Climate Policy Working Group through the Kentucky Food Policy Network since November 2020 to collaborate on efforts with folks across the state;



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- Advocating for continued funding of important conservation programs in the federal Farm Bill, as members of the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC) and the National Family Farm Coalition (NFFC);
- Participating in regional discussions around a just transition for Kentucky and Appalachia;
- Lobbying against anti-solar net metering legislation with the KY Solar Advocates since 2018 to preserve the choice of renewable energy options for Kentuckians;
- Working with partners across the state to explore policy solutions to Kentucky's soil health needs; and
- Advocating for sustainable agriculture to be more prioritized in national Green New Deal discussions.

CFA will continue to promote practices, technologies, and policies that have been demonstrated to reduce agriculture's contributions to climate variability and increase the resilience of farming and food systems. Current priority areas are:

- Strong and resilient local supply chains
- Healthy soils and reliable clean water
- Community-based renewable energy and energy efficient options

Strong and Resilient Local Supply Chains

As global weather patterns become more unpredictable and greatly increase the risk of crop failure, it becomes increasingly important to build a secure, stable, and robust network of local food, fiber, and fuel producers and consumers in communities across Kentucky to increase our state's climate resilience. Strong supply chains are ones that are cyclical, not linear, eliminating waste and keeping impacts within the community. CFA has been working to strengthen Kentucky's local food and farm supply chains for over a decade, and will continue to do so in the face of climate change.

Healthy Soils and Reliable Clean Water

Farmers in Kentucky are already utilizing techniques and leading in practices that allow us to be more resilient to the effects of climate change. While many of these techniques have been practiced for centuries by Indigenous communities both in Kentucky and around the world, many Kentucky farmers are now returning to these practices. These soil management practices can sequester carbon that would have otherwise been released in the form of CO₂, as well as increase the soil's water retention and reduce soil erosion which improve a crop's ability to survive drought and torrential rainfall.

Cover cropping and no-till practices are becoming more widely adopted here in Kentucky. Harry and Lawrence Young from Herndon, Kentucky were one of the first mechanized farmers to use and



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popularize minimum tillage and modern no-till crop production in 1962.² Other practices, like utilizing livestock in intensive rotational grazing through pasture or crop fields, are helping farmers to increase soil health and grow the same volume of crops without the heavy inputs of conventional farming. Farmers also utilize crop diversification through companion planting, intercropping, and trap crops, which involve growing different types of crops together to deter pests and weeds in order to decrease pesticide and herbicide use. Composting--turning organic waste into nutrient-rich soil--allows farmers to develop a closed loop system, minimizing greenhouse gas production and maximizing soil health and carbon sequestration. Farmers are also utilizing protected agriculture technologies like high tunnels to extend the growing season and increase yields. In fact, Kentucky so far has installed more high tunnels than any other state through the National Resources Conservation Service initiative. These methods not only decrease inputs (and costs for the farmer), but also increase soil health, water quality, and carbon sequestration, which is essential to ease the effects of climate change.

Community-Based Renewable Energy and Energy Efficient Options

For a true energy resilient system, communities need to have more control of their energy options and the ability to develop renewable energy and energy efficiency that builds community wealth. Farmers are using solar power to save costs on-farm and reliably power infrastructure like electric livestock fencing and water pumps. This self-sufficiency in energy production is increasingly important as extreme weather events become more frequent causing the energy grid to become a less reliable source.

Call to Action

Community Farm Alliance is committed to combating climate change through equitable solutions for all Kentuckians. We will continue to take action by influencing public policy, raising community awareness, and engaging in fruitful conversation together. **Join us** as we face this challenge and shape a resilient agricultural system allowing Kentuckians to thrive for generations to come.

² [No-Till's Past, Present and Future with the Harry Young Family — from the Kentucky Field Where it all Started | No-Till Farmer \(no-tillfarmer.com\)](#)