



## 100+ SMALL FARMS GET A GIANT BOOST

By Natalie Monroe | May 6, 2021

Access to start-up capital is a big challenge for farmers.

A small grant program through the Farmer Veteran Coalition (FVC) is helping.

More than 100 farmer veterans received word Friday that they are being awarded equipment thanks to the [Farmer Veteran Fellowship Fund](#). The grant supports veterans in their early years of farming and ranching.

“We directly purchase a piece of equipment the farmer has identified as being critical,” explains Jeanette Lombardo, FVC Executive Director. “Our veterans put their lives on the line to protect us. It’s an honor to help them grow their operations so they can continue to feed their communities.”

### Snapshot of Awardees

Over 11 years, this funding has been the difference maker for farmers. More than 700 veterans have benefitted with \$3.5 million in equipment distributed. That’s 600 individual stories FVC has been able to tell already, with 100 more to share on the near horizon.

The 2021 class of Fellows includes:

- Representation in nearly 40 states – from Alaska to Maine, and even Guam
- 47 females, doubling the percentage of women awardees as compared to prior years
- Nine awardees who have spouses who also served in the military
- 52% Army, 18% Marines, 17% Air Force, 11% Navy, 2% Coast Guard

Equipment will soon be delivered to farms – starting now and into the summer. Grantees anxiously await greenhouses and grow tents, walk-in coolers and cold storage units, milking systems, water

filtrations, and honey extractors. Other unique requests include a mushroom substrate steamer and a lavender bud stripper.

“It's Christmas week at FVC and we've all been so busy wrapping the presents!” beams Rachel Pettit, who has managed the Fellowship program for seven years. “Now we start loading them into Santa’s sleigh.”

### **Veterans Helping Veterans**

Funding is made possible by Kubota Tractor Corporation, Tractor Supply Company, Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP), Farm Credit, Tarter USA, Homestead Implements, Vital Farms, and even directly from other farmer veteran members.

This year FVC is humbled to see support come full circle, with two prior Fellows funding awardees. [Eric Grandon](#) of Sugar Bottom Farm in West Virginia got a grant for a 50 cubic foot refrigerator in 2015 to store the Romaine lettuce he delivered to local schools. Now he supports 5 beekeepers with equipment. [Anthony Barreras](#), a 21-year Army veteran, operates Barreras Family Farm in Nebraska. His 2019 grant allowed construction of his poultry barn. He is funding a fellow in his same state.

And [Julie Hollars](#) – who famously exclaimed that “most girls want diamonds, all I want is a tractor!” when she was awarded a Kubota through the Geared to Give program in 2016 – also pledged her support via donation.

Some of this year’s grantees have been mentored by other farmer veterans throughout their career. Many intend to hire veterans as they expand their own businesses. A few will purchase their piece of equipment from another FVC member, in essence doubling the impact within the community.

“The need in our rural communities is great,” acknowledges Lombardo. “We are inspired by the members who applied. This year it was difficult to select finalists; we understand the impact the grants make on peoples’ lives. This furthers our commitment to secure more funds for the next round.”

Her words come on the heels of the single largest day of new membership the organization has ever seen. Last week, after the Office of Veterans Affairs shared news of the Farmer Veteran Coalition, 1,300 new members signed-up in 24 hours. “It probably took 3 years to get what we have had these last few days,” marvels FVC Founder Michael O’Gorman.

Now these 128 Fellowship recipients persevere on their mission of serving our country a second time – by feeding it – with the added help of new capital. Amy Hess raises chickens, ducks, guineas, and heritage turkeys after serving 23 years in the Army. She offers this perspective upon receiving the news: “Tears of joy! These funds will purchase a large incubator cabinet for hatching. [It] will make me just about 100% self sufficient and not reliant on a hatchery. This is amazing!”

You can view the [full list of 2021 awardees here](#).

The five ‘Geared to Give’ Kubota tractor Fellowships will be announced later this month.

### **About Farmer Veteran Coalition (FVC)**

The mission of Farmer Veteran Coalition is mobilizing veterans to feed America. A national non-profit that serves nearly 30,000 veterans turned farmers, FVC creates a new generation of farmers and food leaders. It simultaneously offers veterans a new purpose on America's farms. Established in 2008, its in-house programs include the Farmer Veteran Fellowship Fund small grant program, the nationally recognized *Homegrown By Heroes* label for veteran-grown products, and national and regional conferences. As the nation's largest nonprofit assisting veterans and active duty members of the U.S. Armed Forces embark on careers in agriculture, FVC has been successful in getting millions of dollars of USDA funds appropriated for farmer veteran and the groups that support them. Learn more at: [www.farmvetco.org](http://www.farmvetco.org) or follow on Facebook or Instagram at @FarmerVeteranCoalition and Twitter at @FarmVetCo.

To sponsor equipment for the Fellowship Fund, contact Rachel Petitt at [rachel@farmvetco.org](mailto:rachel@farmvetco.org). To donate to support farmer veterans directly, visit [www.farmvetco.org/donate](http://www.farmvetco.org/donate) or text GIVE and the dollar amount to 270-838-3276 (270-VET-FARM).