



NY State Hearing - NY Health Act

11/25/19

Testimony by Bryn Roshong, co-owner Solid Ground Farm

Thank you to the Senate and Assembly Committees on Health for hosting this hearing today in Kingston. My name is Bryn Roshong, and I'm testifying on behalf of my family as well as on behalf of my large group of peers of young and beginning farmers in NY state. As a long-standing volunteer organizer with the Hudson Valley Young Farmers Coalition, I have gotten to know well the community of my generation of farmers and become familiar with our shared obstacles when it comes to the success of the future of agriculture in NY State. Health care is up there on everyone's list for what scares them the most about running their own farms.

My husband, Wes Hannah, and I are parents to our 16-month old son. We are also parents to our 5-year-old four-season Solid Ground Farm, less than twenty minutes from here on the southwestern edge of Kingston. On our farm we raise a diverse mix of organic veggies and pastured chickens. Over 120 local families are members of our CSA, where they get a weekly share of the harvest spring, summer, and fall. We also sell year-round at the Kingston farmers market, a market in NYC, and to local stores and restaurants. This year, we're on track to gross \$200,000, and we employ four people whom we pay between \$14-\$17 per hour. Wes and I strive to continue to grow our farm so we can serve more and more of our neighbors and others in NY who want fresh, healthy, organic local veggies. There is a strong market for this, and we're grateful that our regional local food culture values what we're doing -- stewarding the land and natural resources, and providing the healthiest food around.

At this time, Wes is the full-time farmer, and I have an off-farm, full-time job in Kingston. My employer subsidizes 50% of my healthcare plan, so I pay \$4200 annually in premiums. That's a significant part of my income, and it would be completely un-affordable for Wes to sign on to my employer's plan, as it would cost an additional \$9600 in premiums alone. Wes' income is such that he is on Medicaid. This is the case for a huge number of farmers in NY, and certainly for almost all farmers of my generation who are in the beginning stages of their farm businesses. Medicaid has been great. It's been there for Wes every time he needed it. But we know the day will come that his income will grow, which would eventually disqualify him from Medicaid coverage. So the dark cloud behind our dream of success is the fear of the financial impact the cost of purchasing a high-quality private plan will have on our farm. Farmers simply cannot go without health insurance - many do, but they should not have to make that choice. The farmer's primary tool for the work is their body. Our farm's livelihood is reliant on Wes' health. If he gets hurt, or gets sick and cannot afford treatment, the vegetables will go un-harvested, un-irrigated, the weeds will grow, and we face utter chaos.

Having single-payer healthcare in NY would remove this major obstacle for farmers and farmworkers, and allow more people to get into this crucial, high risk, but deeply rewarding and dignified profession. Farming is the hardest way to earn an honest dollar -- each dollar is the result of an almost unquantifiable amount of work and dedication. Farming is also a shrinking profession, with the average age of the American farmer creeping closer toward 60 every year. It's seen as work where you just can't make a living, and healthcare is a major part of that equation. How can we train more young people in this work if they cannot afford to dive in, because of healthcare costs? We need to change this equation, if we are to see a future for farming in NY.

I believe NY State can create and administer a single-payer healthcare program for everyone, because I see it doing just that with Child Health Plus (CHP), the universal program for children of all incomes. Our son is on CHP, and because of that, we rest at ease. We pay \$30 a month for great coverage. NY State has already resolved to regulate the insurance industry for the benefit of children, and now it's time to take the next step and cover everyone, for the benefit of us all.

Thank you for your time and consideration.