



Written by [Rebecca Terrell](#) on May 11, 2026

American Farmers Face Severe Challenges in 2026 Planting Season

U.S. agriculture is grappling with [significant headwinds](#) as the 2026 growing season is underway. [Three factors](#) are combining to make things hard on those who provide our nation's food: Roughly one in four American farmers has not secured fertilizer for spring planting, farm bankruptcies rose sharply in 2025, and long-term consolidation continues. Government data and industry reports confirm real pressures on many producers, especially smaller and mid-sized family farms.



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Fertilizer Shortages

Fertilizer availability and cost are immediate concerns. The conflict in Iran (and subsequent turmoil in the [Strait of Hormuz](#)) is a significant driver of shortages, with roughly one-third of global seaborne fertilizer (and up to 50 percent of nitrogen products, such as urea) being choked off. The war in Ukraine is a secondary driver, as Ukraine is one of the world's largest fertilizer producers. U.S. Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins has acknowledged surging prices for key nutrients such as urea and ammonia. A survey by the [American Farm Bureau Federation](#) found that approximately 70 percent of responding farmers could not afford all the fertilizer they needed this season. Given the global supply disruptions, the President Donald Trump's administration has [announced efforts](#) to boost domestic production capacity and stabilize supplies using tariff revenues and interagency coordination, with goals of meaningful expansion in nitrogen, potash, and phosphate output over the next two years.

Chapter 12 farm bankruptcy filings increased 46 percent in 2025, according to data compiled by the American Farm Bureau Federation — the third consecutive year of rises. The Midwest and Southeast saw the sharpest increases. Overall, the number of U.S. farms continues a decades-long decline. U.S. Department of Agriculture figures show roughly 15,000 fewer farms in 2025, with the total around 1.87 million. Since 2017, estimates of farm losses have ranged from 140,000 to more than 160,000. Those losses are driven largely by consolidation as smaller operations exit.

Farm Bankruptcies & Consolidation

Net farm income has fallen from recent peaks, while total farm debt approaches record levels — near \$625 billion. Many operators face thin or negative margins amid high input costs, elevated interest rates, and uncertain commodity prices. Industry analysts note that less than half of farms are projected to show a profit in 2026. That's because advances in technology and economies of scale have long favored larger operations. Smaller farms often lack the capital reserves or diversification to absorb repeated hits from weather, markets, and input costs.

The administration's fertilizer initiatives signal policy attention to the sector's vulnerabilities, framing reliable domestic supply as an economic and national-security priority. Whether these steps deliver



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timely relief for the current planting season remains to be seen. Farmers have shown remarkable adaptability over generations, but 2026 is shaping up to be another demanding year for American agriculture. Sustained support for innovation, risk-management tools, and rural infrastructure will be critical to maintaining a resilient food-production system.

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