

Attendees at YFC-WNY's annual meeting voted overwhelmingly for the group to pursue status as a NYFC chapter. However, NYFC is currently overhauling the way chapters work, and over the past six months of meeting and emailing with NYFC staff, it seems like there will be a lot more control from the national organization if we become a NYFC chapter than we were expecting. Here are the concerns of the YFC-WNY board:

Fiscal Sponsorship

YFC-WNY needs a fiscal sponsor, a 501(c) group that can handle donations on our behalf and pass the money through to us, allowing us to fundraise. All of the YFC-WNY events to date have been paid for by leadership (first co-founders and now board), which is not sustainable. YFC-WNY's leadership hoped that one day NYFC would be our fiscal sponsor, but until that happened, we were in talks with other organizations in our area to find a temporary fiscal sponsor.

In the summer of 2022, we learned that as part of its overall of the chapter system, NYFC was going to be more selective about which chapters it sponsors and, and in November, we learned that NYFC is no longer going to allow chapters to have fiscal sponsors besides NYFC. We also learned in November that NYFC takes a 10% cut of money raised by fiscally sponsored chapters, a much larger cut than many other fiscals sponsors take. In March, we learned that if we are fiscally sponsored, we will have to get NYFC's permission for every grant we apply for.

If we pursue chapter status, we do not know when we will be able to apply for fiscal sponsorship or if we will be approved for fiscal sponsorship. If we do not affiliate with NYFC, we are confident we will have fiscal sponsorship quickly and be able to fundraise to help cover the costs of our late summer and fall events.

Farmers of All Ages and Experience Levels

In a meeting in March, a NYFC staff member expressed concerns about our interest in serving farmers of all ages and experience levels and especially our openness to having more experienced farmers on the board, saying that NYFC wants chapters to be led by beginning farmers. The NYFC co-founders chose to only set aside one board seat exclusively for a beginning farmer because we want to find the best fit for board positions and believed experienced farmers may sometimes be right fit for a role and/or have more time on their hands to be on a board than beginning farmers.

Number of Events

When meeting with a NYFC staff member, YFC-WNY board members felt immense pressure to trim the 2023 event calendar from 7 events to 4 events maximum. We were told that we were being "overambitious" and acting with too much "urgency." Board members explained that two to three of the events would be farmer-led with little board involvement and that one of the reasons an advisory board had been created was so there would be additional people to help out with the expanded events calendar. This did not seem to sway the staffer. The board members were greatly concerned that not if they did not cut the events calendar down to 4 events, this could negatively impact our efforts to get NYFC to fiscally sponsor our group.

Policy Pre Approval

In March, the board learned that as part of NYFC's overall of the chapter program, all policy positions taken by chapters would first have to be approved by NYFC staff. The board's contentious interactions with NYFC staff about fiscal sponsorship and our events calendar makes us wonder how easy it will be to get our policy positions approved by staff, especially because the land deconsolidation platform that the board is beginning to craft is more expansive than the policy positions NYFC has taken on land access.

Potential Downsides to NOT Affiliating with NYFC

We see two downsides to not affiliating with NYFC. First, NYFC is a nationally-known organization that gives us name recognition with potential members, ag service providers, and lawmakers. However, although the name recognition of NYFC is nice, it also is a hindrance to getting experienced farmers to participate, because the name seems to communicate that our group isn't for them. Also, we've begun building relationships with local ag service providers and are confident at least many of them will continue to be interested in working with us even if we are not affiliated with NYFC.

Second, if we wish to do policy work in the future, such as passing legislation in NYS relating to farmland deconsolidation, we would not have the access to NYFC policy staff that we would if we were a chapter. However, given that our conduit to NYFC as a whole is through two staff members that we're having trouble with, we don't know how much help NYFC would be to us in advancing our policy goals if we were a chapter.

In Conclusion

The YFC-WNY board is concerned that if we sign on as a NYFC chapter, even if we're able to make things work with NYFC in the short-term, being a NYFC chapter will not end up being a good fit for our group and we'll end up leaving the organization sometime in the next few years for the aforementioned reasons. So if we feel like we're going to leave NYFC eventually, why take the time and effort to try to sign on as a chapter, try to appease the staff, and apply for fiscal sponsorship? We could achieve fiscal sponsorship quicker without NYFC, and if we're not trying to fit ourselves into what a chapter is allowed to be, our group can naturally grow and change to fit the needs of our community over the years to come.