



# GROWING NEW FARMERS

## A Northeast Service Providers Consortium

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### Addressing Gaps in New Farmer Programming

By Cathleen M. Sheils and Marsha Descartes  
GNF Professional Development

To support and sustain agriculture in the Northeast, innovative approaches and services are necessary to recruit and train future farmers. The Growing New Farmers Project (GNF) mission is to support the next generation of Northeast farmers. GNF was formed to develop an understanding of this diverse and important farmer audience and to create programs and services that meet new farmer needs.

GNF Consortium members across the region are already engaged in providing valuable programs and services to new farmers. However, program and service gaps still exist as identified by new farmers who participated in focus groups in 2000 and 2001. Results are published in *Gaps in New Farmer Programs and Services*, the full text of which can be found on the GNF publications page at [www.northeastnewfarmer.org](http://www.northeastnewfarmer.org). The new farmers pointed to gaps in the range and scope of programs and services that target their particular learning needs and preferences.

Although most agriculture programs and services are open and relevant to new farmers, it is increasingly apparent that more targeted programs are necessary to meet new farmer's particular needs. Based on an inventory of new farmer programs completed in 2001 and published in a Directory of Programs and Services for Northeast New Farmers also found at [www.northeastnewfarmer.org](http://www.northeastnewfarmer.org), we have begun to understand that there are new farmer constituencies who would benefit from targeted programming and that there are new farmer programmatic areas that are in need of more attention.

As you review the gaps outlined here, think about how you and your organization can help fill some of them. The descriptions and stages outlined in the New Farmer Typology, found on the GNF publications page at [www.northeastnewfarmer.org](http://www.northeastnewfarmer.org), emphasize this point: Programs and services must target the learning needs and preferences for new farmers in each stage. For example, in Typology Stage One, recruits need a program that provides them with connections to agriculture. But in Stage Four, a startup farmer needs a program to provide actual farming skills and knowledge.

**Program considerations for each stage must include:**

The level of farming exposure, experience, knowledge and resources of the new farmers in that stage.

- Program delivery – identifying the most conducive learning format for the targeted new farmer audience – classroom, hands –on, tours, discussion group, workshop, on-farm etc.
- Scheduling – determining the best time and day for the targeted new farmer audience, for some audiences weekend programs may be necessary.
- Marketing language. Specifically mentioning the stage of new farmer being targeted. For example, it should be said that a program is, “For new farmers who have one to five years of experience.” Or “for those who are interested in exploring farming opportunities.” This is more effective than general phrasing: “This program is open to all new farmers.”
- Accessibility – convenient scheduling and program location and promotion that is accessible by new farmers. Traditional agricultural publications may not reach the new farmer audience.
- Geographic reach – determining the region you want to target and the number of participants. For example a “hands on” program on a farm may have a limited enrollment from a small geographic region while a one day introductory program may be open to a larger audience from several counties and a statewide New Farmer Conference may draw over a hundred attendees from across the state. Specific topics like rotational grazing or business planning usually are best taught in small audiences to promote discussion then general topics like an Introduction to Farming in New York that can be presented to larger audiences in a more conference type setting.

**Gaps by New Farmer Typology Stages**

The New Farmer Typology is used to describe where program gaps exist. Each stage has definitive, but not necessarily exclusive, service and program needs -- in terms of *what* is offered and *how* it is offered.

Our service provider network can best meet those needs by reviewing the typology categories and determining which groups of prospective and beginning farmers each organization or program best serves. The most effective programming deliberately targets programs to meet the needs of new farmers in each category.

Programming is not “one size fits all.” It must:

- Be targeted to new farmers as a group, but also target specific but varied farming interests and methods of production within the larger new farmer group.
- Must address the ways new farmers prefer to learn. According to feedback from focus groups, new farmers overwhelmingly prefer to learn through hands-on programs, such as apprenticing, mentoring, farm tours and visits, and networking with peers at a similar stage of experience.
- Realize that new farmers typically pass through several stages that are associated with increasing degrees of commitment, decision-making responsibility and risk. And each stage has its own educational and service needs. Targeted programming is required for each stage.

\_\_\_\_\_ Commitment /risk \_\_\_\_\_ ⇒

## Decision-making position

Prospective Farmers      →   →   →      Beginning Farmers:  
Recruits   Explorers   Planners      Start-Ups   Re-strategizers   Establishers

*A steady progression of farmers moving through each of these stages is necessary to sustain the agricultural production sector in the Northeast.*

## Typology Descriptions

### **Prospective farmers**

They fall into three stages. In the first two, prospective farmers have not yet begun to farm or even made a commitment to do so. In the third stage, they may work or apprentice on a farm, but they aren't decision-makers in farming activities and do not have a high level of commitment or risk associated with farming. In these first three stages, they may be taking part in educational or introductory farming experiences such as apprenticeships.

#### **1. Recruits**

They might consider a career in production agriculture if provided with information and connections to agriculture. The group can include nonfarmers, people raised on farms, high school students, or people seeking a career change.

**Learning Needs** - Exposure to farming and information about the choices and types of farming careers.

**Available Programs** - FFA and vocational agriculture programs in urban and rural high schools. Some of these may involve apprentice programs to introduce farming to those who have no background in it.

**Gaps** - Programs that actively encourage people to consider and enter farming are few. Some examples include farm open houses, farm tours for area school guidance counselors and "Fun on the Farm Day" county programs. There is a need to promote full- and part-time farming as a viable career option in both farming and non-farming communities. Diverse audiences that could be targeted include:

- Vocational agriculture students
- Immigrant groups who may have been farmers in their home country.
- People seeking a career change
- People interested in working land they own.

Given the diversity of people to target, programs must address language barriers. Programs for women, minorities and immigrants are essential.

**Preferences** – Experiences and opportunities to be exposed to positive farming careers and options.

#### **2. Explorers**

They are investigating a farming future by gathering information and possibly participating in introductory educational programs and/or farming related experiences. This includes next generation farm family members and those not from a farm.

**Learning Needs** - Practical and introductory information. Exposure to agricultural information and sources of assistance.

**Available Programs** - Local overview and introductory programs and limited informal apprenticeship programs in the region.

**Gaps** - There are a few programs that help guide people in the decision of whether or not to start farming. Such programs are only offered in limited areas in the region. There are limited apprentice programs and many are informal. There are few structured approaches for acquiring basic farming knowledge or to explore the decision to farm or not. There must be greater availability of orientation programs that reach larger geographic areas. These programs should present a realistic picture of farming opportunities and challenges. Apprenticeship programs should provide more experience than what is available on one farm or type of farm. In addition, there needs to be weekend and part-time programs and pre-business planning programs.

**Preferences** - Information targeting local and regional farming conditions. Exposure to various farming methods and enterprises. Workshops or workbooks that assist with enterprise analysis and selection as well as the decision to farm or not based on family and financial goals identified.

### **3. Planners**

They have chosen to pursue some sort of commercial production agriculture. Planners may not be farming yet, but are actively planning their farm entry. Farm employees, apprentices and farm family members who do not have control of farm assets and have limited decision-making responsibility fall into this stage.

**Learning Needs** - Practical information including business planning, land access, credit and financing options, specific farm skills and marketing training.

**Available Programs** - Overview courses, topic courses and workshops, some land access programs and credit options especially through linking programs.

**Gaps** - Relative to recruitment and explorers, there are more courses and workshops to assist new farmers actually begin to plan a farm business. There is a significant need to help planners with land access needs, start up financing options and models of farm entry strategies. There is also a need for some planners to participate in a program where they can learn practical “hands on” skills. Planners not from farm families need more guidance, practical knowledge, skill training and access to agricultural information and resources than those from farm families. Both groups need greater access to credit options and land, including the development of programs to link farm transfer with preservation incentives. Services that can assess and meet the differing levels of need for this group are necessary. The success of Planners depends on their ability to do business, financial planning and marketing analysis including goal setting that includes both business, personal and family goals. They must understand the percentage of family income that must come from farm and off-farm sources.

**Preferences** - Information specific to local farming conditions, opportunities to hear from new and established farmers and interactive workshops. Business planning

courses and one-on-one assistance. Opportunity to work on their own business plan including analysis of their ideas and resources.

### **Beginning farmers**

Beginning farmers have been farming for 10 years or less. They fall into three stages.

#### **1. Startups**

They are in their first three years of farming. Startups can be an employee, manager, or operator on rented or owned land. They have decision-making responsibility and an increasing commitment to farming either in time, equity and/or resources, either on their own farm, a rented farm or on a family farm.

**Learning Needs** - Practical and supportive business, financial, and marketing skills.

**Available Programs** - Workshops, Cooperative Extension and isolated local programs supporting immigrant start-up farmers who had farmed in their country of origin.

**Gaps** - It is difficult to determine how many programs actually target farmers in their first few years of farming. There are very limited sources of credit for start up. They need programming that includes practical skill building information and practice around production, farm management, financial management and marketing. There is a need for mentoring programs that provide both management education and support.

**Preferences** - Technical information available regionally. Startups prefer to learn from farmer mentors, farm visits, peer networks, and interactive training and workshops. Potentially, retiring and exiting farmers may fill some of these roles. New immigrant farmers prefer one-on-one support and need programs in their language.

#### **2. Re-strategizers**

These are farmers who are making adjustments in their fourth to seventh years. They have increased decision-making responsibility and commitment to farming as a renter, manager or owner. Typically, re-strategizers go through a critical phase of modifying or restructuring their operations.

**Learning Needs** - Practical assessment skills, knowledge of innovative farming possibilities and alternatives, financial planning, marketing information, and credit opportunities.

**Available Programs** - There are few targeted services and programs available to this group. But they can use programs available for established farmers such as Cooperative Extension and those developed for new farmers that can offer new ideas. Traditional lending sources and some peer lending groups can make small loans and offer other credit opportunities.

**Gaps** - There are virtually no programs targeted to this stage of farming, for those who are reorganizing their farm. Re-Strategizers need technical assistance in analysis of enterprise, production or marketing changes. They also need exposure to how other farmers have made changes and the decision making process they used.

**Preferences** - They prefer one-on-one technical support from service professionals, farmer mentors, and peer networks.

### 3. Establishers

These farmers are stabilizing in years eight to 10 of the beginning farmer phase. They are on their way to becoming established farmers but continue to make changes and improvements to their farm operation.

**Learning Needs** - Updated marketing information and financial management skills.

**Available Programs** - Cooperative Extension programs.

**Gaps** - Programs that provide information on expansion and diversification.

**Preferences** - Establishers prefer field day and workshop opportunities.

Collaboration with service providers works well.

One last category, or subset, of new farmers to consider are those who grew up on a family farm. They are not easily classified and may have unique programming needs. It's hard to pinpoint when they actually "began" farming or when they moved from planning to actual startup. These young farmers have varying degrees of decision "influencing" roles on the farm without having farm operator status. They may be highly experienced farmers who actively influence farm decisions but because of the nature and progress of farm transfers within families, they are not easily classified as Planners or Startups. In many aspects, this group of new farmers parallels the central stages of the new farmer typology.

#### Gaps by Type of New Farmer Program

From reviewing the program gaps within each typology stage, program gaps essentially fall into these broad categories.

- Introductory Programs
- Land Access Programs
- Hands on Practical Training and Experience
- Production Information and Education
- Financial and Credit Services
- Marketing Analysis and Planning
- Pre-business and Business Planning
- Special Interest Programs that target minority and women farmers

#### What Can You Do?

We see six things, minimum, that can be done by all of us as part of the GNF Consortium:

**1.** Refer to the information collected in focus groups with new farmers and from service provider surveys. It can help identify program and service gaps. (Results of both of these can be found in *Listening to New Farmers: Findings from New Farmer Focus Groups* and *Northeast New Farmer Programs and Services Directory 2004*.)

The directory lists programs and services currently available to new farmers. It includes both targeted and relevant programs. Targeted programs are developed and marketed specifically for new farmers, whereas relevant programs are for all farmers.

**2.** Understand the typology stages, review the gaps, and talk to the new farmer audiences in your community. Identify the gaps that you see. Can you create a program or offer a service that meets one of those gaps?

3. Tap into the service providers. They are in a unique position to promote farming as a viable and satisfying career choice. They can develop services that will support the next generation of farmers.

4. Find a way to build widespread support for and development of apprentice, practice, mentor, peer, and other hands-on programs. These are typically the preferred methods of learning for most of the new farmer groups.

5. Broaden the amount and availability of technical data, including information available for special interest farming such as organic and niche. This is especially important for those Recruits and Planners considering farming as a career change. This group rarely considers dairy farming or animal raising.

6. Give concerted attention to reaching out to recruits in nonfarming settings such as urban areas, and with special groups such as immigrants, minorities, women, or people who may farm part time.

7. Use the GNF Technical Assistance Directory to locate expertise and resources and to identify program partners within the Consortium when you looking to develop a new farmer program.

8. Refer to the GNF Program Profiles booklet for program ideas and delivery strategies.

## **Sources**

*Listening to New Farmers, Findings from New Farmer Focus Groups* (June 2001)

*Gaps in New Farmer Programs and Services* (September 2001),

*What Does the Term "New Farmer: Mean?, A Publication for Growing New Farmers, Professional Development Discussion Series #101* (May 2002).