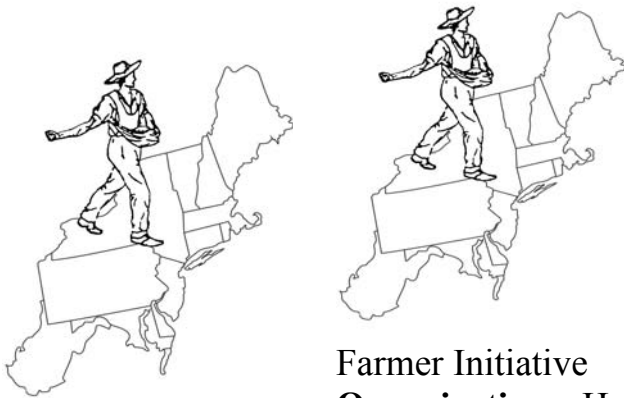


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Program: Connecticut New

Farmer Initiative

Organizations: Hartford Food System and Connecticut

Farmland Trust

Targeted to: Start-ups and Re-strategizers

Dates: July 2002 - June 2004

Need

Connecticut has one of the highest growth pressures in the nation. This pressure affects the long-term survival and productivity of the state's farms.

The Program

The Connecticut New Farmer Initiative addresses the need to keep the state's farmland actively farmed by matching new farmers with available farmland.

The initiative seeks support from local land trusts in finding and securing suitable farmland.

Response

The New Farmer Initiative was developed and takes a two-prong approach

1. It intends to help new farmers find affordable land.
2. It helps these farmers develop a farm business plan with the assistance of First Pioneer Farm Credit employees. The plan outlines how to develop a niche market and to farm successfully in today's difficult farm market environment.

Partners in the New Farmer Initiative include Connecticut Natural Resource Conservation Service, the state's Land Trust Service Bureau, CT-NOFA and First Pioneer Farm Credit.

Funding

A USDA SARE grant for 2002-04 provides funding.

Outreach

For outreach, the program advertised widely to the new farmer audience and to entities/owners with available farmland in the fall and winter of 2002.

Analysis

SUCSESSES: The New Farmer Initiative matched a "re-strategizer" farmer with a large regional land trust and one of its farm holdings in New Milford, CT. After doing business planning, provided by First Pioneer Farm Credit, the farmer has made inroads with nearby markets, specializing in vegetables that appeal to the Latino populations in the eastern part of the state. The farmer is currently arranging a contract with a nearby restaurateur to grow produce to menu specifications.

The New Farmer Initiative assisted a recently married couple in coming back onto the family farm. After business planning, again provided by First Pioneer, and several visits to fruit farms in New England, the couple is starting a berry operation. They planted their first berry bushes in the fall of 2003.

CHALLENGES: Our major challenge is matching farmers with land trusts. Farm leases with local land trusts exist in Connecticut but are concentrated in one region of the state. Only one of the four farmers has been matched with a land trust.

The program is still negotiating leases for a "start-up" farmer and a "re-strategizing" farmer on currently unprotected farmland. Both landowners in the two leases seek farmers who will operate in a sustainable way. Both program participants must address whether to relocate since the farms under consideration are beyond their communities and familiar market areas.

Next Steps

The Connecticut New Farmer Initiative will solicit feedback from the new farmers they have worked with: What do they see as their successes and challenges? How well has the initiative supported them?

The program gathered feedback at a dinner and roundtable discussion in the fall of 2003 that brought together the four new farmers and the initiative team, made up of members from the partnering organizations.

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