

NORTHEAST NEW FARMER REPORTS

GAPS IN NEW FARMER PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

THE NORTHEAST NEW FARMER NETWORK

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Northeast New Farmer Report: Gaps in New Farmer Programs and Services

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This report summarizes "gaps" in the array of programs and services targeted to new farmers in the Northeastern states. This analysis is based on an inventory and directory of new farmer programs and services currently offered in the twelve northeastern states in 2001. The Northeast New Farmer Program and Service Directory is available in hardcopy, and will be available and updateable on a web-site in the near future. A summary table of the gaps discussed in this report is provided on page six. As a conceptual tool to help you think about your own programs and the regional "landscape of programs" for new farmers, we've also attached a checklist that may help you analyze the programs and services available to the new farmers you serve. Both the directory and this analysis are products of a regional project, the Northeast New Farmer Network (NENFN), which was funded by the Mid-Atlantic Consortium and the USDA Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program. We hope that this report will prompt reflection and innovation in the arena of new farmer programming.

I. Introduction

Regionally, growing demand for new farmer programs and services is reflected in the increasing number of contacts service providers are receiving from new farmers and in the growing number of programs and services that are offered to new farmers. Innovative new farmer programs are emerging and evolving for certain new farmer audiences in limited geographic areas. These programs provide interesting prototypes and models, but need to be more widely offered.

Although most agriculture services are open and relevant to new farmers, it is increasingly apparent that more targeted programs are necessary to meet new farmers' particular needs. The NENFN has described several different types of new farmers (see the Northeast New Farmer Report Listening to New Farmers, and below). Of course, every new farmer type doesn't require their own exclusive set of programs, but in some cases programming should target a particular type of new farmer. For instance, individuals in their first "start-up" year of farming have very different program needs than those just exploring the possibility of farming *or* those of established farmers.

While new farmers can participate in and benefit from some programs developed for established farmers, some programming must be *designed* for new farmers to meet their unique needs. Based on the inventory, we have begun to understand that there are new farmer constituencies who would benefit from focused programming and that there are new farmer programmatic areas that are in need of more attention.

Providing a full range of programs to serve new farmers everywhere in the Northeast is a challenge for the entire community of new farmer service providers. The best strategy will emphasize appropriate program content for each type of new farmer, minimize duplication of design efforts, and increase the number of different delivery choices.

The feasible and desirable level of regional coordination varies with program area, but logically, all service providers in the region should be communicating about new farmer initiatives and experiences. The Growing New Farmers (GNF) Service Providers Consortium, which is the follow-up project to the NENFN, provides a regional forum for communication about new farmer programs in the NE as well as opportunities for coordinated program development and referral.

New farmer service providers need to work together to determine which programmatic areas should be addressed at which geographic scale. Certain services need to be designed and offered locally, others can function at the state level, yet others sub-regionally (for example northern New England) or regionally. Ultimately, gaps in new farmer services and programs are recognized *locally*, when a new farmer cannot find or participate in a program or service that he or she needs to farm successfully.

II. Gaps

Based on the inventory of programs and services *targeted* to new farmers in the Northeast we've outlined our observations in terms of:

- A. Different New Farmer Audiences
- B. Program Accessibility
 - 1. Geographic coverage (radius from which participants are drawn)
 - 2. Scheduling
 - 3. Program publicity and outreach
- C. Program Content

A. Audiences

The NENFN defined several different types of new farmers based on their commitment to and experience with farming and consequently their differing program needs.

New Farmers					Established Farmers Year 10+			
Prospective- "Pre-Entry" Farmers			Beginning Farmers			Established	Exiting	Former
Recruits	Explorers	Planners	Years 0-3	Years 4-10		Re-strategizing		
			Start-ups	Re-strategizing	Establishing	Established	Retiring	Retired

Examples of program *gaps* for each of these types of new farmer are outlined below:

Recruits - Programs that actively encourage people to enter farming are few. Some educational institutions reportedly actively discourage entry into farming.

Explorers - 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. Several programs scattered throughout the region provide exposure to farming and some basic farming experiences, primarily through workshops and apprenticeships.

Planners - Relative to recruitment and explorers, there are more courses and workshops to assist new farmers actually begin to plan a farm business.

Start-ups - It is difficult to determine how many programs actually target farmers in their first one-or two years of farming. There are very limited sources of credit for start-up. There are several emerging programs to improve land access by start-up farmers.

Restrategizers - No programs are targeted to new farmers after 2-3 years who are reorganizing their farm. This area probably has some overlap with re-strategization services now offered for more established farmers.

Establishing - Traditional extension programs are probably most valuable for this group of farmers. Since this group of new farmers may be actively "growing" their farms and farm enterprises, they need programs that address expansion and diversification. It was difficult to identify programs that specifically address this group.

B. Accessibility

For any individual program accessibility depends on convenient scheduling and geographic proximity. Appropriate scheduling and geographic range of any program are influenced by a program's content and by the particular new farmer audience. In order to assess programs' overall accessibility to the complete range of new farmer types and audiences, the service provider community needs to "map" the new farmer program "landscape" both geographically and seasonally as well as in terms of content. Accessibility also includes outreach and publicity so that new farmers can easily find programs and resources they need.

Geography

No locality or state currently offers a comprehensive suite of services and programs that can meet the needs of every type of new farmer. We need to develop a better understanding of the geographic reach of

programs currently offered in the Northeast (as listed in the Directory). Subsequently, we need to consider the *feasible* range (or geographic coverage) for various types of programs and audiences. Some excellent programs are locally based, and many states are too large for a single event to reach all interested new farmers. While some initiatives, for instance credit programs, operate along legislative lines, a state-by-state analysis is inadequate, because many programs draw participants from across state lines. The NENFN website should allow for mapping the functional geographic reach of programs.

Scheduling

Program scheduling depends on both program content and the new farmer audience. For example, start-ups may want to attend a once-a-week marketing seminar in the evenings during the winter, but individuals exploring farming might want a summer weekend experience with haying or composting. An individual's mobility greatly determines program participation; for example, many livestock producers are unable to leave the farm for more than part of a day. Farmers with limited family obligations may be able to attend a week-long training workshop. Seasonal demands affect different new farmer audiences' ability to participate in programs. Scheduling for part-time and weekend farmers with off-farm full-time occupations, as well as for full-time start-up farmers is necessary.

Scheduling needs synthesis with the geographic analysis to get an accurate "picture" of program accessibility. The frequency with which a program is offered must also be considered. Many programs in the region are offered occasionally or irregularly.

Outreach and Publicity

New farmers need to be able to find and identify programs, and determine their applicability to their needs. Often they are unaware of the service provider infrastructure and program options that do exist (even the extension service). Service providers need an effective referral network as well as programs that are scheduled and designed to maximize new farmer participation. They need to recognize that many new farmers seek information in different venues than established farmers.

The Northeast New Farmer Program and Services Directory and website are two vehicles for program outreach and referrals.

C. Program Content

Numerous innovative new farmer programs exist, but there are several topics for which only limited programming is available *anywhere* in the NE. Programs are sometimes only available for particular types of new farmers in particular localities. Regionally designed programs may need to be delivered or made more accessible in more locales. Gaps in program *content* can only begin to be identified with a regional analysis. The inventory was a first step, identifying available targeted new farmer programs. The inventory included an assessment of *relevant* programs that may fill some, though not all, new farmer needs in specific topical areas. In this analysis we have not addressed program quality, or which programs really help individuals make good decisions, learn skills, or acquire resources that enable them to become successful farmers. One GNF research project is investigating the effectiveness of different approaches to new farmer training and learning.

A review of existing programming and gaps in program content follows:

Introductory Programs

There are numerous, locally focused efforts to provide overview information through courses or written materials to people considering or starting farming. Around the region, several introductory courses are offered sporadically. Enrollment in these overview programs is reportedly high, and participants are drawn from a wide area. A regional approach could create an effective bank of detailed materials and decision aids.

Land Access

An array of land access, farm link and transfer programs is emerging, but the actual range of their services is still under development and the effectiveness of such services still needs to be demonstrated. These programs connect farm owners with new farmers, address needs such as financing land purchase (which remains a major challenge), and develop alternatives to land purchase including long term leases on private and

community farms. While there are several state level farmland preservation programs, none are encouraging farmland preservation through farm transfer to new farmers. There also seem to be few resources guiding new farmers in "choosing" a farm. A GNF initiative is building a more comprehensive region-wide farm transfer land-link system.

Hands-on Practical Training/Experience

Apprenticeship programs seem to be the main mechanism for gaining practical experience. Many apprenticeship programs target alternative agriculture. Most apprenticeships provide comprehensive experience working on *one* farm. (The CRAFT program is an exception). Apprenticeship experiences are of variable quality, depending on the motives, needs and skills of the host farm and apprentice. Many apprentices seek a farming experience as a personal interest rather than as a career step. Most apprenticeships are full-season, full-time experiences. There appear to be limited opportunities for "weekend" farmers to develop hands-on skills. This includes new farmers with another full-time occupation who need to have access to skill training through something other than a full-time apprenticeship. Similarly, there aren't many options for new farmers who already have farming responsibilities to gain and broaden their experience on other farms.

Many apprenticeships are informal, and there are few structured approaches for acquiring basic farming skills. An NENFN pilot has developed a self-guided curriculum, but individuals still face the challenge of finding farmers to teach them basic hands-on farmer skills. Mentoring programs are emerging here and there around the region; they tend to be targeted to new farmer start-ups more than explorers or planners. Farmer compensation for formal mentoring and training is an issue. Many apprentice opportunities are not designed to train farmers, and learning tends to be incidental. With few exceptions (such as the newly established Pennsylvania Farm Apprenticeship Program which is registered with the PA Dept of Labor) there are no formal mechanisms linking one apprenticeship experience to the next, and no formal system that leads from apprenticeship to employment (actual farm jobs) and that develop farmers as "professionals".

With the exception of a few milking schools, and some high school and two-year college vocational training programs, there are limited opportunities outside of season-long apprenticeships for specific hands-on farm skill building (i.e. equipment maintenance). In contrast, there are several programs for hands-on training in farm product processing in the Northeast. On-the-job-training does not necessarily provide the quality and breadth of hands-on skill building opportunities new farmers (or employers) require.

Production Information and Education

The primary sources of production information are the extension service and sales agents, although neither offers comprehensive *targeted* new farmer services. In some states declining extension resources and a fragmented farming infrastructure make accessing new farmer services more difficult. Non-profit programs provide production and technical information in some locales. Most northeastern states still have a vocational agricultural college and vocational high schools that provide production education and training. Some institutions assume a farm background *and* a "farming future"; at others, the production curriculum is weak, and vocational instructors and counselors either actively or passively discourage students from farming careers.

Financial and Credit Services

While services are available to some, new farmers with limited collateral still have difficulty finding credit for land acquisition, equipment or operations. Most models provide debt financing, few venture beyond to address equity financing. Alternative credit approaches that do exist are highly localized; the Small Dairy Processing Project is commodity specific. There are few local, state or federal tax programs that encourage entry into farming.

Marketing

Major gaps exist in new farmer educational programs about marketing. Many new farmer business planning courses include marketing information, but only one (Pennsylvania Farm Links annual workshop) focuses on marketing for new farmers. One NENFN pilot is scheduled to produce a marketing workbook for new farmers. There aren't any market access or market development programs that actually help new farmers connect with retailers or other markets.

Business Planning

There are only a few offerings focused on business planning specifically for new farmers in the Northeast, for those either anticipating start-up or reorganizing a farm business in its early years. Two programs are adapting the national NxLevel: Tilling the Soil of Opportunity farm business training program, modifying it for "pre-venture" and start-up farmers. Many business planning resources exist, but may not be highly relevant and are certainly not targeted to farm business start-up planning.

Special Interest Programs

Special interest new farmer groups targeting minority and women farmers are scattered around the region. They tend to be very localized. The Northeast has a few distinct new farmer programs that target immigrants (for example, the New Entry Sustainable Farming Project in Lowell, Massachusetts) and women (the Women's Agricultural Network in Vermont and Maine).

III. Collaboration Linkages/Networking/Referrals

As new farmer programs emerge they shouldn't be developed or designed in isolation. Clearly, many agencies are exploring better ways to design and deliver programs for new farmers. Networking and communication among new farmer programs will improve access to more programs for more new farmers, increase program complementarity, help to avoid duplication, allow for shared materials development and coordinate scheduling. Networking should also improve outreach of every new farmer program. The NENFN Directory and the GNF Consortium are mechanisms to improve planning, coordination and the overall quality of programs without over-standardization.

Collectively, service providers can create an environment that nurtures farm start-up and new farmer success. Regionally and locally, collaboration can address gaps in program accessibility and content. Our next step may be to determine what types of targeted programs need to be created for which new farmer audiences: and where each program needs to be offered and in what form/frequency. Steady progress in filling the program needs of every new farmer can be anticipated based on more effective and committed collaboration that is being fostered through the GNF Consortium.

Summary

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<u>Type of Programming</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Gaps</u>
Introductory Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Numerous initiatives, developed and offered locally Many target people without farming backgrounds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many programs offered only sporadically No programs available in many areas (programs highly localized) Few recruitment programs Vo-ag programs offer only limited encouragement for entering production agriculture
Land Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Farm Linking programs that facilitate farmland transfer functioning or under development in several states 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Financing farmland transfer or purchase still prohibitive Many farm transfer programs still just starting No programs linking farmland transfer and preservation Few educational program offerings on farmland purchase
Hands-on Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many formal and informal apprenticeship and internship opportunities, especially for alternative agriculture Formal state accredited apprenticeship program- closely linked with vocational high schools- now functioning in Pennsylvania Self-guided curriculum now available to new farmers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimal quality control assuring the value of the training experience for new farmers Few have 'standards' of performance that can be "taken to the bank" Few programs reimburse mentoring farmers Few alternatives to full season apprenticeships No programs designed for experienced farmers to gain experience on other farms
Production Information and Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Networks for new farmers emerging in some states (NH, MA) Formal agricultural education system continues to function in many states 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited information targeted to farmers just starting up or farmers without a farm background (including product "sources")
Financial and Credit Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formal credit is available to new farmers with collateral and experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Few tax programs encourage entry into farming Programs tend toward traditional debt financing
Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One informational program targeted to new farmers (PA) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No facilitated market access programs targeted to new farmers Need for market education programs
Business Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Several local short courses offering business planning guidance, tools and education to new farmers Two programs adapting the national Tilling the Soil of Opportunity ag business planning program for new farmers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited accessibility, need for programs offered in more geographic arenas Need for follow-up (reorganization) after start-up course Few programs offer business consulting/counseling to new farmers