

Developing Partnership Models with NRCS and other Agencies

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To effectively deliver services to beginning farmers and those considering transition of their farms to the next generation, many governmental and private sector organizations need to be involved. Appropriate organizations include, but are not limited to: Cooperative Extension, Natural Resource and Conservation Service, Conservation Districts, farmland preservation groups, and legal and financial advisors.

Pennsylvania Farm Link's Experience

Pennsylvania Farm Link began working with NRCS at the outset of the Growing New Farmers Project. By actively participating in the Pennsylvania State Technical Committee, we were able to both educate other groups on our resources, programs, and efforts and open a dialog on the needs of beginning and transitioning farmers.

Discussions included ways that beginners could access EQIP funds and the need for referrals to NRCS to learn more about soils and the services of NRCS and conservation districts. Conservation districts work with farmers to develop nutrient management plans and best management practices that protect soil and water resource. In Pennsylvania, many of the conservation districts also administer the farmland preservation programs and oversee federal farmland preservation funds.

Pennsylvania Farm Link used the following methods to link NRCS and Conservation Districts with beginning and transitioning farmers:

- Annual new and beginning farmer workshops included NRCS presentation on resources available to the beginner
- NRCS was invited and participated in New and Beginning Farmer workshop exhibits educating beginners on soil and water resource conservation services.
- Recommendations were made to the state technical committee of NRCS on how to better meet the needs of beginning and retiring farmers
- Conservation districts were invited to participate in regional farm transition workshops to educate farmers on farmland preservation programs and ways to access their services.
- Referrals were made to appropriate conservation districts when beginners and others needed information on ways to protect or preserve soil and water resources.
- Farmland preservation information and NRCS publications were provided to beginning and/or transitioning farmers and they were encouraged to contact their local conservation district.
- Farmland preservation program information available to Pennsylvania farmers was compiled into a fact sheet for distribution.
- Conservation districts helped us publicize our farm transfer workshops to encourage farm transition to the next generation.

As a result of these efforts, more farmers participated in beginning farmer and farm transfer workshops and increased their knowledge of start-up and transfer strategies and resources, including farmland preservation resources. Questions on how to access these programs were answered and thus more farmers participated. Ways that farmers could use these programs in the transition of their farms was encouraged and used.

Participation in the state technical committee meeting resulted in Pennsylvania adopting a policy for federal farmland preservation funds that provided incentives (extra points in the selection process) for farmers that have a written succession plan for their farm. This policy can help some farmers who may not have as good quality soils but have a farm successor to take over their farm. This recommendation received attention by USDA's beginning farmer committee and serves as a model for other states wanting to implement similar guidelines. North Carolina and other states requested this information.

Finally, Pennsylvania Farm Link has made inroads into "preserving the farmer" as well as the farm. The organization is working with the PA Department of Agriculture to implement a referral process that will enable farmers interested in preserving their farms or those who have preserved their farms to be referred directly to PA Farm Link for farm transfer and farm-start up information and assistance. Mailings from local farmland preservation boards will encourage farmers to seek farm transfer or start-up planning assistance from PA Farm Link.

Here's What You Can Do

- 1. Get involved in your NRCS State Technical Committee.* Topics discussed include Farm Bill Programs, EQIP funds, Federal Farmland Preservation funds, and other conservation programs and practices. These committees are usually good avenues for you to promote your programs and services and to increase awareness of the needs of beginning and transitioning farmers. Both relationships and programs can grow as a result.
- 2. Invite conservation districts, NRCS, farmland preservation groups, conservancies and others to participate in your educational efforts.* Generally these groups have good working relationships with farmers and can be a valuable resource in outreach and educational efforts. Begin by opening a dialog about the needs of your constituents. Highlight their services in your workshops, newsletters, and publications.
- 3. Develop fact sheets on organizations and groups that can assist in farm entry and farm transfer planning and make appropriate referrals to these resources.* Begin with your own program but include others that may be helpful. Descriptions of farmland preservation programs, conservation programs, resources that protect soil and water quality, ways to access these resources, and basic information such as phone and fax numbers, email addresses, and street addresses may be helpful.
- 4. Distribute resource information from NRCS, farmland preservation groups, conservancies and conservation district and others to your constituents.* Help these

groups publicize their programs and efforts and generally they will help you. Added benefits include a reputation as a knowledgeable resource for beginners and farmers to tap when they need information.