



GROWING NEW FARMERS

A Northeast Service Providers Consortium

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Targeted and Relevant New Farmer Programs

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A primary focus of the Growing New Farmers (GNF) Project is to increase the development and availability of programs and services that meet the needs of new farmers. Most programs and service for agricultural producers are open to new farmers, and many of those provide information and training that is *relevant* for prospective and beginning farmers. However, it is increasingly apparent from listening to new farmers that they want more programs that are specifically *targeted* to meet their particular learning needs and preferences. While new farmers can participate in and benefit from programs developed for established farmers, some programming must be designed for new farmers to meet their unique needs.

There is a difference between a program designed for a general farmer audience (relevant) and a program specifically designed for a specific farmer audience based on the experiences and educational needs of those farmers (targeted). To best serve the range of new farmer audiences, providers need to appreciate the difference and design programs and services that consciously reflect that understanding. Both kinds of programming are necessary and suitable to help farmers enter and succeed in farming.

Some programming may not be relevant *or* targeted for certain categories of new farmers. A good example is a farm business planning course that requires producers to have several years' of financial information to plug into budget templates. This program is not relevant for a start-up farmer, and in fact may wind up being not a good use of their time and money. Prospective or start-up farmers who need more basic or background information may be confused or discouraged if they participate in a program that is "over their heads". While at the same time established farmers may get frustrated if a program is to "remedial" for them.

Relevant programs are typically designed to meet the needs of a general farmer audience and are usually more targeted to established farmers. These programs may be directed at certain commodity groups, or focus on a particular topic. The degree of usefulness that the farmers in this audience will derive from relevant programming will vary according to their experience and knowledge level. Relevant programs are often aimed at the middle skill or experience range of the audience. Therefore there is some assumption of experience and knowledge. General interest programs are relevant to new farmers but not designed for them. For example, a twilight farm tour or a workshop on integrated pest management may be extremely useful to many kinds of new farmers as well as other farmers.

Targeted programs and services are designed to meet the needs of a specific rather than general audience. Programs **targeted** to new farmers take into account the experience, skills, preferred learning methods and educational needs of the target audience. Within the new farmer audience, there are many kinds of new farmers (see [refer to article about typology].) So, a targeted program may be designed for a certain category of new farmer. For example, the New England Small Farm Institute offers a program for people who are not yet farming but are exploring the idea of farming. A program targeted to pre-starters is offered by Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Morris County, NJ called "*School for Entering a Profitable Small Scale Farming business: A series of day and evening workshops with hands-on training for people without farming experience.*" Other targeted programs might address those farmers who have a few years of farming under their belts, and need support or technical assistance to make adjustments to the farming operation.

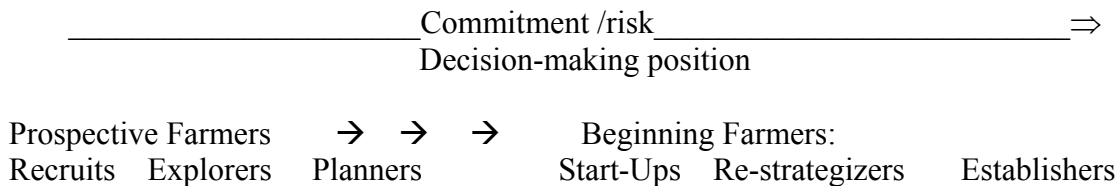
Within the new farmer audience, programming is not 'one size fits all'. Information collected from focus groups with new farmers (see *Listening to New Farmers: Findings from New Farmer Focus Groups*) and from service provider surveys (see *Northeast New Farmer Programs and Services Directory 2001*), can help direct targeted program development. The "new farmer typology" breaks their progress into stages, each with its own distinct educational and service needs. Targeted programming is required for each stage.

New farmers who grew up on the family farm are not easily classified in this typology. It's hard to say when they actually "began" farming, or when they moved from planning to actual start-up. These young farmers are family farm members who 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 transfer within families, they are not easily classified as planners or start-ups. New farmers on the family farm have some unique needs and interests that should be addressed by specific, targeted programs. For example, a program on inter-generational communication skills for successful farm transfers.

Targeted Programming using the New Farmer Typology

New Farmer Typology:

New farmers typically pass through several stages during their farming careers. These stages are associated with increasing degrees of commitment, decision-making responsibility and risk.



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

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

1. Recruits stage: might consider a career in production agriculture if provided with information and connections to agriculture. This includes farm family members and those not from a farm. They could be high school students, or people who want to change careers.

People in this stage would benefit from targeted program opportunities where farming is introduced to them. Events such as Farm Open Houses, County Fair, Introductory one day programs like “Farming 101,” where various options are identified, basic farming booklets, websites and participation in programs like 4-H and FFA are program examples.

2. Explorers stage: are investigating a farming future. They are gathering information and may be participating in introductory educational programs and/or farming related experiences. This includes next generation farm family members as well as those not from a farm.

Targeted programs for explorers need to include practical and introductory programs that provide a greater understanding of production, marketing, financial planning, and start-up issues geared to their level of expertise. Those in this stage have a need for varied apprenticeships and hands-on opportunities. The use of new farmer stories and

hands-on experiences are high interest learning methods. The availability of summer and part-time internships, apprenticeships, and employment opportunities in a variety of types of agriculture are important components, as well as the promotion of urban high school vocational agriculture programs. Since recruits can also come from immigrant groups, it is also important to target programs to this population.

3. Planners stage: have made a choice to pursue some sort of commercial production agriculture. They may not actually 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 limited decision making responsibility also fall into this stage.

They are beginning to identify their enterprise idea, farming location, production methods, marketing channels and financial needs. They may have some farming experience as employees or apprentices, but continue to need practical knowledge. Targeted programming for this area should include links to credit resources and farm/land Farmlink and other land/business acquisition program opportunities are important at this stage. Apprenticeships and mentorships are important learning methods as well as web, workshop, and classroom resources. Learning from peers, established farmers, case profiles, case studies, and other interactive methods are preferred learning experiences to enhance knowledge. Enterprise analysis, marketing and business planning skills become important at this stage and programming needs to take into account differing skill levels.

Beginning farmers: Beginning farmers are those who are farming, but have been farming for ten years or less. They also fall into three stages.

1. Start-ups stage: are in their first three years of farming. They 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.

Individuals in this stage need more detailed information on alternative farming options, marketing plans, diversification options, and consumer preferences. This is also a time when new farmers tend to go from rented land to owned land. Targeted services would include mentor programs, peer learning networks, technical information concerning marketing, production methods and alternatives, business skills, and financial services all geared to the relatively inexperienced farmer. Linkages to land and credit options are also important.

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

Workshops and individual trainings using case studies and case profiles are often quite effective during this period as re-strategizers grapple with the cross-roads type of decision-making. They continue to be able to benefit from mentor programs and peer networks as they learn from others how change has been handled and the options available. More detailed technical information as appropriate to the complexity of their farm operations and future farm plans is necessary as they explore marketing and production options and changes. Financial planning and access to credit are also important targeted services at this stage although they typically would have begun to establish a credit history and equity.

3. Establishers stage: are farmers who are stabilizing in years eight to ten of the beginning farmer phase. They are on their way to becoming established farmers, and who continue to make changes and improvements to their farm operation.

These operations are relatively stable although change and modification is an on-going process. They are more likely to own their own operations and have the major decision-making responsibilities. This group has less need for hands-on programs such as mentorships and can increasingly benefit from relevant instead of targeted programming as their knowledge base increases. Peer networks and learning through others' experiences continue to be an important component but this group needs current and projected marketing trends, latest technology updates, and fine-tuned business and financial skills.

Designing Targeted Programming

There are three ways to design programs and services targeted to new farmers. The first is by topic. There are particular subjects that are especially important to new farmers (more so than to established farmers). These include:

- Access to land – options for rental, ownership, leasing and information about land availability Sources of start up and operating capital – traditional and other
- On-farm skill training – production methods, animal management, machinery and equipment use and repair, land management, pasture management etc.
- Start-up business planning – including feasibility analysis of enterprise selection and use of resources
- Decision-making at all levels from enterprise selection to making business changes in years 4-7.
- Goal-setting, values clarification – including both farm, personal and family.
- Marketing analysis – identification and selection of marketing channels appropriate and profitable for various products and farm enterprises.
- Access to information – identification and how to access sources of information – agency, web, other farmers, farm groups and organizations.

The second consideration is by format. How a program is delivered is as important as its subject matter. New farmers consistently report that they most want to learn from other

farmers and prefer hands on and discussion oriented learning. Format considerations for new farmers include:

- Avoid jargon, acronyms and terminology, when used make sure to provide an explanation ie. USDA-FSA, CAFO, AEM, NRCS etc.
- Address appropriate level of knowledge or skills – a program for beginning farmers on crop rotation and management, for example (refer to the typology for ideas)
- Focus on hands-on and farmer-to-farmer approaches – discussion groups, farm tours, on-farm skill workshops
- Build community and networks
- Expose audience to resources – sponsor an agency/organization open house in one location and invite new farmers to increase their exposure to agricultural programs and services available – both public and private.
- Promote less resource- and capital-intensive approaches to farm entry – expose prospective farmers to various models and options to entering farming.

The third consideration has to do with outreach. A program targeted to new farmers is useless unless new farmers know about and are drawn to it. Some considerations include:

- Describe the offering to attract the target audience -- use "targeted" language
- Make the offering as affordable as possible and accessible as possible – think about the location and geographic region you want to target.
- Think about scheduling to reach your targeted audience – you may need to schedule evening and weekend programs to attract perspective farmers and those starting out who may have an off farm job, established farmers are more likely to attend week day programs.
- Remember that new farmers are not as likely to be plugged into existing databases, or farm, commodity and trade groups -- where will you advertise?

Modifying Relevant Programs into Targeted Programs

It is possible to modify a relevant program to more particularly meet the needs of a new farmer audience. For example providing an earlier, pre-program session that introduces and reviews the basic concepts that the general audience would find too fundamental. This special session for new farmers would encourage an interchange of ideas and the formation of questions often stifled by a more advanced presentation. New farmers might also be able to benefit from a particular curriculum with the addition of a hands-on component or the addition of peer trainers or mentors. There are many creative and effective ways to modify successful services not specifically targeted to new farmers. The important component is the willingness to recognize new farmers as a distinct group with specific needs and preferences.

Resources:

Northeast New Farmer Network Publications:

- Listening to New Farmers
- Gaps in New Farmer Programs and Services
- Northeast New Farmer Programs and Services Directory 2004

All found at www.northeastnewfarmer.org

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