

<b>Title:</b>	<b>Nebraska Network for Beginning Farmers and Ranchers</b>		
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**Program Code:** BFRDP

**Program Name:** Beginning Farmer and Rancher

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**Recipient Organization**

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**Performing Department**

{NO DATA ENTERED}

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**Departments**

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**Non-Technical Summary**

This project aims to unlock the land base held by senior farmers and ranchers in Nebraska. The project will also help beginning farmers overcome education and information obstacles to start farm/ranch businesses. The number of farmers over age 65 is double the number of farmers under age 35 and growing. They control half of all farmland but have made few plans to transfer their land to another generation and rarely even plan to retire. Beginning farmers have few skills for business planning or financial management to aid in starting farm businesses in newly competitive markets. This project is a partnership between the Center for Rural Affairs, Legal Aid of Nebraska, and Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society (all nonprofits), the University of Nebraska, and Nebraska Department of Agriculture to provide a range of educational activities and services over three years. They will provide assistance to senior landowners with retirement, succession and estate planning through workshops, materials and advising. Beginners will receive entrepreneurship training, land matching assistance, and access to Internet-based information resources on farm/ranch startup strategies. The partners will form the core of a network of resource providers that provide complementary services such as advising, matching programs and financing, and that will coordinate their activities. Senior farmers/ranchers will get help developing 120+ plans for retirement and business transfer while at least 75 beginners will develop business plans and 60 will find land matches. At least 8000 website users per month will find information on farm startup, farm/ranch transfer strategies, farm financing, and crop production and marketing. Nine hundred beginning and established farmers will get information to access USDA programs through a staffed Farm Bill Program Helpline. These activities will improve the startup success of beginning farmers in Nebraska, which will add population and economic activity for rural communities. This project will test materials and activities that can be used in other states to achieve similar benefits.

**Accomplishments**

**Major goals of the project**

Project goals are for Nebraska landowners to plan for retirement and succession with the next generation of farmers, and for beginning farmers/ranchers to be capable of successful business startup. Objectives include: 1) Senior landowners gain the capacity and access assistance for retirement and succession planning; 2) Beginners gain capacity to farm with sustainable practices and with business skills; and 3) Organizations form a support network for beginning farmers/ranchers in NE. Outputs include products (web-based land matching program, web-based guide to startup information, statewide network of programs, curricula for succession, estate, retirement, and financial management; and a model design for replicating this project) and activities (5 Estate/Retirement Planning workshops/yr; retirement planning curriculum developed; 2 Farm Financial Management & Entrepreneurship workshops/yr; Returning to the Farm family workshop each year; 3 Sustainable Ag Options

workshops/yr; individual consulting & response to information requests; land matching program; website contains guide to startup information; Farm Bill Beginning Farmer Program Helpline; website development; statewide network meetings; publicity & recruitment for programs; evaluation of program outcomes).

### What was accomplished under these goals?

Project accomplishments are listed below for each objective.

Under Objective 1, for landowners to learn about and create succession plans:

- 1369 landowners and family members gained knowledge of estate, transfer and related topics at 25 educational activities.
- 164 people received in-depth advising at these activities.
- 412 estate and transition plans were developed or started at these activities.
- 30 families developed goals and plans for bringing a younger generation into the farm operation through the UNL Returning to the Farm course.
- 24 landowners learned of land matching strategies and accessed a pool of 500 beginners in the CFRA Land Link matching program.

Under Objective 2, for beginners to gain business and production skills for farm startup:

- 16 families developed business plans for farm startup through Farm Beginnings® courses.
- 60 more beginning farmers gained business planning skills for specific production practices at six workshops
- Survey respondents at these workshops reported knowledge gain that would result in changes in their operations worth \$3475/farm
- 151 beginning farmers gained business startup and farm transition knowledge at eight other financial/production workshops
- 482 beginning farmers gained knowledge of specific production practices at 14 farm tours
- 996 beginning and retiring farmers (primarily beginners) received personal advising on farm startup topics by phone and email
- 28 beginning farmers received personal legal and financial consultations on startup strategies, financing and transition issues
- 475 beginning farmers received personal assistance with USDA programs through a Farm Bill HelpLine and another 120 learned of these programs at a conference presentation.
- Online information on farm startup and transition was accessed by over 14,000 website visitors per month by the end of the project (168,000/year, up from 5500/month at project start).
- 325 beginning farmers learned how to approach landowners for land access and accessed land transfer opportunities in the CFRA Land Link matching program; website development to make this process more accessible to participants and less labor-intensive for managers was completed.
- 6 beginners reported successful access to land with this knowledge

For Objective 3, formation of a Nebraska Network for Beginning Farmers and Ranchers:

- 12 organizations met regularly over 3 years
- 5 farmers attended some of these meetings to inform the organizations of specific issues and learn of Nebraska's programs
- The Network participants created a shared website, toll-free information phone line, information brochure, and radio public service announcement for use on ag radio stations. They also shared publicity of programs across their membership bases.
- Network participants advised a member on expansion of the project, resulting in new BFRD funding in 2012 to, in part, continue development of the Nebraska Network and enhance work on farm transition in two additional states.

### What opportunities for training and professional development has the project provided?

A variety of training opportunities were provided during this project, from multi-day courses to shorter workshops and farm tours, to individual consultation and self-help materials. Information was provided by experienced instructors, agency representatives, and farmers.

Courses (multi-day):

- UNL Returning to the Farm course (3): annual 2-weekend training/development course for families to develop plans and goals for bringing a younger generation into the farm operation.
- UNL Farm Beginnings® course (3): annual 10+ week course on farm entrepreneurship and business planning, includes winter coursework, summer farm tours and access to mentors.

Workshops (single-day):

- Estate Planning/farm transition workshops (25): instruction on basics of these topics followed by individual consultations
- Production/Business plan workshops (6): instruction on specific production practices followed by business plan instruction related to those practices.
- Farm Dreams for Women workshops (3): introduction to farm startup strategies; recruit for Farm Beginnings® course

- Beginning Farmer workshop: introduction to farm startup strategies and resources
- Community College workshop (2): introduction to farm startup strategies and resources
- Creative Land Access Workshop: introduction to land access and financing strategies
- Farm Transition for Beginning Farmers workshop: introduction to retirement and estate issues, land access, and financing strategies.

#### Farm tours:

- Young Farmer Nights (10): tour of farm operation followed by social evening with young farmers
- Urban farm options (2): urban farm visit to introduce farming practices & markets for aspiring urban farmers
- Diversified farming tours (2): visits to farms with a variety of crops, cropping practices and markets

#### Consultation (individual)

- Estate/transition planning consultation (25, included in workshops): individual consultation with attorney and financial counselor following instruction on basic concepts.
- Clinic consultation (monthly): individual consultation with attorney and financial counselor, often as followup to Estate/Transition workshops
- Farm Bill HelpLine: individual consultation with a CFRA program expert on access to USDA programs for beginning farmers.
- Individual correspondence: individual correspondence between beginners and CFRA program experts on startup strategies, land access, financing, etc.

#### Self-help materials

- CFRA website materials on startup strategies, resources, beginning farmer programs, land access, financing, etc.

### How have the results been disseminated to communities of interest?

Results of the project have been provided through several avenues:

- Ongoing reports of project purpose and progress were provided in CFRA news releases to state and local news media at least twice per year.
- Reports of aspects of the project were reported in the CFRA newsletter at least four times per year.
- Nebraska Network activities and upcoming events were disseminated to all Farm Service Agency offices through the FSA Outreach Officer at least twice per year.
- Access to Nebraska programs for beginning and retiring farmers through the Network website and toll-free phone line was announced statewide at least annually by Nebraska Department of Agriculture and CFRA media releases.
- Project descriptions and progress were reported at two BFRD Project Director meetings to other farm transition stakeholders from around the country.
- Publications produced through this project are in process of being released by the University of Nebraska. Others will be made available through the Start2Farm.gov website, the CFRA website, and ongoing Legal Aid of Nebraska training activities.

### What do you plan to do during the next reporting period to accomplish the goals?

{Nothing to report}

### Participants

#### Actual FTEs for this Reporting Period

Role	Faculty and Non-Students	Students within Staffing Roles			Computed Total by Role
		Undergraduate	Graduate	Post-Doctorate	
Scientist	0	0	0	0	0
Professional	1.7	0	0	0	1.7
Technical	0.3	0	0	0	0.3
Administrative	0	0	0	0	0

**Actual FTEs for this Reporting Period**

Role	Faculty and Non-Students	Students within Staffing Roles			Computed Total by Role
		Undergraduate	Graduate	Post-Doctorate	
Other	0	0	0	0	0
Computed Total	2.0	0	0	0	2.0

**Target Audience**

This project reached both beginning farmers and senior landowners. We provided education and advising to prospective and beginning farmers and ranchers to enable them to reduce risks and make a successful business start. In addition, as land access is a primary hindrance for beginners to start farming, our project placed substantial effort on educating and advising senior landowners for farm/ranch transition: retirement planning, estate planning, business succession, and asset transfer.

Legal Aid of Nebraska and the UNL Agricultural Economics Department conducted workshops on Estate Planning and Farm/Ranch Transition. These sessions were attended by primarily experienced senior landowners. Many women, nearly half the participants, also attended. A small minority of attendees was of non-white race or was under age 25. Individual consultations were also scheduled at "clinics" with an attorney and financial advisor. Over half these participants were female, but again with a small minority of non-white and beginning farmer attendees.

**Year 3 Estate Workshop Data**

	Attendance	Male	Female	Minority	<age 25
Workshops	667	354	313	11	24
Clinics	104	49	55	3	5

One Farm Beginnings® course was held in 2013 for new farmers/ranchers about business planning, financial planning, marketing and goal setting. Four farm couples participated in 2013 (half of participants were women). Six additional 1-day workshops/tours were held across the state for production and business planning. Ninety people participated in these workshops, of whom sixty were prospective or active beginning farmers. Gender and race of participants was not noted.

Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society hosted Nebraska Young Farmer Night tours in 2013. Of the 400 attendees at 10 events, 265 were women and 100 were non-white minorities. NSAS also hosted two urban farm tours. These attracted 50 participants, of whom 25 were female and 12 were non-white minorities.

Center for Rural Affairs hosted an online land matching program for landowners and beginners. New farmers in 2013 consisted of 99 couples, 53 males and 8 females. Race was not noted.

CFRA hosted 8 beginning farmer workshops in 2013. Three of these were aimed at women and attracted 26 women, about half beginning farmers. The other five sessions attracted 125 participants, of whom 62 were women, primarily beginning farmers.

CFRA also hosted a Farm Bill HelpLine for beginners and landowners to request assistance in accessing USDA programs. 215 beginners called for assistance in 2013; 161 were male while 54 were female. Race was not noted.

The audience for information about farm startup and transition is national. CFRA also maintained information pages on its website for beginners and senior landowners. In 2013, an average of 14,000 people per month visited these web pages. This was an increase of 23% over 2012 visits. CFRA staff advised 280 beginning and senior farmers by phone and email in 2013, a number that has fallen over the project period as the website usage has increased.

CFRA facilitated formation and meetings of Nebraska stakeholders in beginning farmer issues. Participants in this Nebraska Network included 11 organizations and 1 farmer in 2013. These organizations were:

- Center for Rural Affairs
- Farm Credit Services
- Legal Aid of Nebraska
- Nebraska Department of Agriculture
- Nebraska Farmers Union
- Nebraska Investment Finance Authority
- Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society

The Nature Conservancy  
USDA Farm Service Agency  
USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service  
University of Nebraska Extension

**Products**

{Nothing to report}

**Other Products****Product Type**

Educational Aids or Curricula

**Description**

Estate Planning Basics - presentation to senior landowners on planning for estate transfer. 114 slides in PDF format.

**Product Type**

Educational Aids or Curricula

**Description**

Legal guides to topics related to estate planning, asset transfer, etc. 20 documents were produced to supplement presentations or consultations on estate planning and farm/ranch transition:

Buy-sell agreements  
Charitable Giving  
Durable Power of Attorney  
Estate Planning Questionnaire  
Health Care Power of Attorney  
Federal Transfer Taxes  
Future Interests/Life Estate Deed  
Intestacy  
Joint Tenancy  
Nebraska Inheritance Tax  
Nebraska Transfer on Death Act  
Partition  
Preemptive Rights  
Personal Representative  
Personal Representative Checklist  
Probate  
Special Use Valuation  
Spousal Tax Planning  
The Will  
Trusts

**Product Type**

Educational Aids or Curricula

**Description**

Forms to accompany legal guides related to estate planning , asset transfer, etc. 10 documents were produced:

Buy-Sell Agreement  
Equipment Lease  
Estate Plan Questionnaire  
LLC Annual Minutes  
LLC Operating Agreement  
Power of Attorney – Extended

Power of Attorney – General  
Power of Attorney – Health Care  
Transfer on Death deed  
Transfer on Death deed – Multiple Owners

### Changes/Problems

We had planned to hold two Farm Beginnings® entrepreneurship courses each year in which beginners would develop business plans. However, we were unable to recruit sufficient participants to hold more than one class each year, which instructed 16 beginning farm couples. Even though we had identified this as a potential pitfall in the proposal, we were unable to overcome distance and population limitations. In response, we designed one-day workshops on specific, popular production practices and coupled the materials with instruction on business planning specifically related to those practices. These six workshops attracted 90 participants, of whom 60 were beginners, who all began development of basic business plans. We also designed additional special activities, ten Nebraska Young Farmer Night tours, specifically for beginning farmers to meet each other, learn farming practices from each other, and develop the peer support network that would have been accomplished through the Farm Beginnings® courses.

One target for the project was to accomplish 20 land matches each year between beginning and retiring farmers. This fell far short, at only 6 matches over 3 years. This was in part due to inadequate signups of landowners, which had been projected to be 50 per year, but was only 24 over 3 years. Similarly, beginners signed up at a rate of 100 per year, below our projection of 300 per year (although these were both great improvements over previous rates). We knew this to be an extreme challenge in the proposal, as all other land matching programs (about 30) have had similar difficulties, even in times when rising land prices were not a disincentive to work with beginners. Despite greatly expanded publicity around recruiting and additional staff time for landowner discussions and beginner/landowner facilitation, we were unsuccessful at greatly increasing the number of landowners, beginners, and resulting land matches. In our third year, we approached other BFRD projects with matching components to learn of alternative approaches. None were having more success than we were experiencing, and many were reducing their "matching" activities to the equivalent of "want-ad" or "personals" listings without any consultation or advising component. We had proposed to develop our matching process as a fully online program, in line with these other organizations, which we have managed to do, coupled with extensive online resource materials. This also removes staff involvement, allowing both beginner and landowner participants to list themselves for full viewing by prospective landowner-partners or beginners. We will continue to offer individual consultation for those requesting it. One difficulty with this process, while less labor-intensive, is that "match" successes will be unreported except as voluntary communications, which are rare in our experience.