

Title:	Local Markets for Beginning Farmers: Branding, Business Planning, and Mentoring for Appalachian Farms		
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Program Code: BFRDP

Program Name: Beginning Farmer and Rancher

Project Director

Charlie Jackson
828-236-1282
charlie@asapconnections.org

Recipient Organization

APPALACHIAN SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE
306 W HAYWOOD ST
Asheville, NORTH CAROLINA 288013105
DUNS No. 145008186

Performing Department

{NO DATA ENTERED}

Co-Project Directors

Miksa-Blackwell, Jo Ann
McKissick, Meredith
Marks, Peter
Ray, Megan
Weeks, Susan

Departments

{NO DATA ENTERED}

Non-Technical Summary

"Local Markets for Beginning Farmers" is a Standard BRFDP Project; this is a new application. The long term goal of this project is to enhance the viability of farming in the Southern Appalachian region. To support this goal, Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project (ASAP) in partnership with Organic Growers School (OGS) and Mountain BizWorks (MBW) will provide beginning farmers with support through trainings, resources, and one-on-one assistance to build successful farm businesses. Project activities address four of the BFRDP priority topics. Training and apprenticeship opportunities will provide aspiring and beginning farmers with opportunities to learn specific strategies of production and management through hands-on experiences (Topic I). Training and one-on-one assistance will provide farmers with skills and resources in business planning, entrepreneurship, financial and tax recordkeeping, risk management education, and acquisition of credit (Topic II). Market planning and strategies in regional branding will provide beginning farmers with the tools, resources, and support to make decisions about their farm enterprise based on careful planning, access to local markets, and a means to distinguish their products in the market place with Appalachian Grown branding (Topic III). New and beginning farmers will also be trained in, and provided with, necessary resources to achieve compliance with food safety regulations (Topic V). Beginning farmers that have received training and assistance in these areas will have the skills and resources needed to build viable farm enterprises. The outcome is more profitable farms and a stronger agricultural economy in the Southern Appalachian region.

Accomplishments

Major goals of the project

Objective 1: Provide beginning farmers with training and one-on-one support in farm business planning and financial recordkeeping. Outcome: Beginning farmers learn the importance of planning and recordkeeping to the success of their farm business. Farmers learn how to use business planning to make sound risk management decisions concerning their farm enterprise. Producers learn how to use QuickBooks for financial management and recordkeeping. Addresses priority topic II: business management and decisions support strategies that enhance the financial viability of beginning farmers. Objective 2: Provide beginning farmers with training and one-on-one support in market planning and market diversification strategies. Outcome: Beginning farmers are able to assess the capabilities of their farm operation with the desires and requirements of

distinct market outlets. Farmers learn how to use market planning to expand into new markets and improve the profitability of their farm business. Farmers learn how to use branded marketing as a means to value-add their product and increase the competitiveness of their products in the marketplace. Farmers know how to participate in ASAP's Appalachian Grown regional certification program. Addresses priority topic III: marketing strategies that enhance the competitiveness of beginning farmers. Objective 3: Provide beginning farmers with resources and training needed to comply with food safety regulations. Outcome: Beginning farmers have the resources and support to help them understand and comply with federal food safety regulations as they are implemented. Beginning farmers will market the safety of their products, giving them a competitive advantage. Addresses priority topic V: production, processing, and marketing of safe and nutritious food. Objective 4: Provide aspiring and beginning farmers with hands-on training in farm management strategies and sustainable production techniques. Outcome: Aspiring and beginning farmers gain skills in farm management and learn how to implement sustainable production techniques from experienced farmers. Beginning farms learn about resources available to them in the community (e.g., Cooperative Extension, Farm Credit, Farm Bureau). Addresses priority topic I: production and management strategies to enhance land stewardship by beginning farmers. Objective 5: Provide beginning farmers with opportunities to apprentice with experienced farmers. Outcome: Beginning farmers receive on-farm experiences with seasoned farmers and have opportunities to learn firsthand about farm planning and management as well as about specific production strategies. Addresses priority topic I: production and management strategies. Objective 6: Develop resource pages for beginning farmers on ASAP's website. Outcome: A comprehensive and up to date compilation of resources for new and aspiring farmers is available on ASAP's website.

What was accomplished under these goals?

Objectives 1 and 2:

2,121 farmers participated in trainings (workshops and individualized assistance) focused on business planning, financial recordkeeping (including QuickBooks), market planning, and market diversification strategies.

Change in knowledge: In post training and annual project surveys, farmers indicated they learned how to create business plans, improve record-keeping and bookkeeping processes, use QuickBooks specifically to manage their financial records, and do farm cost planning. Farmers learned marketing and market diversification strategies across different market outlets (restaurants, institutions including schools, hospitals, and universities, grocery outlets, direct to consumer markets including farmers markets and CSAs), how to use agritourism as a means to diversify farm income, farm and product promotion with web and social media, how to navigate the agriculture regulatory environment in North Carolina, etc. For farmers that participated in Mountain BizWorks 8-week intensive business training course (Foundations), many indicated they came to class with multiple business ideas. By the conclusion of the training, farmers were able to determine which projects made the most sense based on an understanding of how much those changes were going to cost and when they might expect to get a return on investments.

Planned change in action: Farmers also indicated the changes they intended to implement, for example: implement the business plans they created including applying for business loans, integrate marketing activities into their farm business including utilizing the Appalachian Grown regional food branding and certification program to brand their farm products, add new enterprises or expand existing ones, use QuickBooks to manage farm operations and labor, enhance their web presence and improve website design, diversify their market base, improve the appeal of their booth displays at farmers markets, use cash flow tools to plan financial viability, plan an approach to diversifying into restaurants, develop farm business and marketing plans, keep better farm and financial records, take additional business planning and QuickBooks courses, etc.

Objective 3:

600 notebooks with up-to-date resources on emerging food safety regulations were distributed to farmers attending ASAP's annual Business of Farming Conference (in 2011, 2012, and 2013). Additionally, nearly 100 farmers participated in workshops dedicated to (emerging) food safety regulations with information specifically on GAPs and the Food Safety Modernization Act.

Planned change in action: In post training and annual project surveys, farmers indicated that they would use the information to develop and implement formal on-farm food safety plans, pursue GAP certification, and for farmers market managers, share the knowledge gained with farmer vendors.

Objectives 4 and 5:

879 beginning and/or aspiring farmers participated in on-farm workshops.

411 farm apprentices were impacted by CRAFT programming.

Change in knowledge: In post training surveys, farmers and apprentices indicated that the CRAFT training program allowed them and their workers the opportunity to see a variety of approaches to similar farm management issues. Farmers gained knowledge in farm production planning and greenhouse management, integrated animal and vegetable production, nursery propagation, soil science, biochar, managing diversified small-scale livestock, cut flower production, apple orchard and small fruit management, sustainable forestry, biodynamics, raising pastured turkeys, how to get started farming, and more.

Participants noted that they were inspired to connect with others in their field and that the small details they learned from one another were the most valuable parts of trainings.

Change in action: Farmers integrated new production practices to lengthen the season (high tunnels, for example) and use more sustainable production methods (the use of reusable ground cover to mitigate weeds and different pest management

practices like companion planting, for example). Farms developed farm management plans. Farms integrated farm succession plans and changed their soil management techniques. Farmers implemented different crop mixes, made plans to hire interns, changed greenhouse planning systems, and in general planned to implement techniques learned from other farmers they had not thought about before.

Objective 6:

A database of resources (Building a Farm Business) is online at <http://asapconnections.org/tools-for-farmers/building-a-farm-business/>. Categories of assistance include networking and mentorship, business planning, accessing capital, marketing, and business and farm management. In year three of the project, the resource pages received 1,365 views (ASAP developed a new website that went live in year three of this project; web statistics from previous years are no longer available).

Final project results:

Statistical results of project evaluation across all three organizations across all three years show that 90% of farmers had a change of knowledge as a result of participating in project trainings, 90% of farmers had a change in attitude, and 80% of farmers plan to use information gained through trainings to change/improve farming practices or some aspect of their business.

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

This project provided numerous training opportunities for beginning and aspiring farmers. Through workshops and individualized assistance, farmers received training and technical assistance in farming business planning, financial recordkeeping, QuickBooks, market planning, market diversification strategies, farm management, and sustainable production techniques. Additionally aspiring and beginning farmers had opportunities to apprentice with experienced farmers and had access to a database of resources on ASAP's website dedicated to helping farmers gain knowledge and tools to help them build successful farm businesses (<http://asapconnections.org/tools-for-farmers/building-a-farm-business/>). Resources are grouped by networking and mentorship, business planning, accessing capital, marketing, business and farm management. Over the course of this project, 3,000 farmers received training and technical assistance. 411 farm apprentices participated in project activities. Beginning farmer resources were accessed 1,365 times.

Testimonies of farmers that participated in the project trainings include:

1. From a participant of a CRAFT on-farm workshop: "Another benefit of CRAFT tours is being able to 'get behind the hype'. To me that means hearing the failures and questions a farmer has, the things he/she is experimenting with. You can't get this any other way than at a CRAFT tour. And as mentioned above, meeting the farmers and the interns and having time to talk, allows us all to build a network of help and sharing and spreads good practices farther and faster."
2. From a farmer that hosted a CRAFT workshop on his farm: "Hosting an event this year was incredibly eye opening. Having other farmers and apprentices out to see our farm and our operations created dialogue about opportunities that I could not see with my own eye. When you can see your farm through the eyes of farmers you respect and trust, you can gain perspective on your farm's challenges and assets."
3. From a Business of Farming Conference attendee: "Each of the three workshops that I attended provided information that I have been able to use to directly serve my initiative -- the speakers were very knowledgeable and made the information accessible to the diverse participants. I loved the handouts because it gave me concrete information that I could share with our growers. My workshops were: Food Safety: Current Trends & GAP Certification; Sell More! Improving Sales at your Farmers Market, & 30 Direct Marketing Strategies."
4. This quote from a regional US Foods representative is from an email correspondence, which was followed by a meeting: "Recently, as a result of my work with several major colleges and universities, and an ever growing demand, US Foods has added 'Local and Sustainable' to our corporate pyramid as a foundational tenant. I was hoping to schedule a meeting with you to discuss what that means for US Foods and how we can partner with organizations like ASAP to help identify 'local' suppliers while discussing the challenges often associated with distribution. Would you have time in your schedule to connect soon?"
5. From a participant of a CRAFT on-farm workshop: "I remember a question being asked about cover cropping at one farm as the group was walking through their field. An answer was given, although the answer was not in itself the solution to the question of the CRAFT member. Over the next few weeks, more details and more specific answers were shared by a number of folks who were at the farm tour via emails and the CRAFT list serv. I found it really encouraging that the program sought ways to continue solving this problem for the CRAFT member even after the tour was over, and the information that was shared online proved incredibly insightful and helpful to my farm operation as well."
6. From an attendee of a business planning workshop at ASAP's Business of Farming Conference: "I plan to use the cash flow worksheets on a daily basis and time wheel management to manage my time on producing my products for sale. I will also keep records of my units, variable and overhead costs. These forms and the class instructor were so helpful."
7. From an attendee of Mountain BizWorks' business planning course (Foundations): "With low market trends, I have struggled with finances to remain competitive as a farmer. Because of the Mountain BizWorks training, I have now become more diverse, and I feel I have a handle on my operation. This class has given me advice on what works for business planning in farming. Since I have no experience in business finance, this was a great course and the paperwork helped me with budgeting. Business cash flow information has been very valuable. The Mountain BizWorks training is an excellent course and I now feel more able to make decisions that benefit my business. This course helped me with budgeting and

understanding how to track my expenses and sales. Now I am able project my sales, creating a vision for my future. The great opportunity to network amongst other growers and producers is a true blessing."

8. From an attendee of a business planning workshop: "I was able to create a sustainable business plan and learn how to balance gross profit and variable costs. Really just thankful to have a platform to understand and implement the necessity of having a business plan and knowing the in and outs of creating a successful business."

9. From a farmer that received one-on-one assistance in market planning: "Bridget Kennedy (of ASAP) has been an incredible resource! She is quick to respond to our questions and needs. It is comforting to know there is a responsible, knowledgeable and caring person willing to help you succeed in a challenging field. We appreciate the resources, training and assistance the USDA and ASAP provide to new and established farmers."

10. From a farmer that received one-on-one assistance in market planning: "Excellent marketing ideas and planning with Bridget Kennedy for food distribution business."

11. From an attendee of ASAP's Business of Farming Conference: "I attended the Business of Farming Conference on behalf of Buy Haywood...and it was TREMENDOUSLY helpful! I brought so much valuable information back to my home community...and I have seen growers/producers implement a number of the marketing strategies. Thanks for the incredible work that you do ASAP!"

How have the results been disseminated to communities of interest?

{Nothing to report}

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

{Nothing to report}

Participants

{Nothing to report}

Target Audience

Beginning farmers in the Southern Appalachian region have been the target audience for project activities. Over the course of the project, activities were conducted in areas of Western North Carolina and eastern Tennessee but also made available to farmers in the bordering counties of Georgia, South Carolina, and Virginia. This project directly assisted 3,000 farmers across rural counties in the project region:

For the third and final year of the project:

56% of project participants (566) are female

77% of project participants (781) are beginning farmers

73% of project participants (742) are limited resource farmers

Averaged across all three years of the project:

51% of project participants were female

72% of project participants were beginning farmers

69% of project participants were limited resource

Products

{Nothing to report}

Other Products

Product Type

Educational Aids or Curricula

Description

Foundations Business Training Program: Ag Addition. An addendum to Mountain BizWorks Foundations curriculum to give agricultural clients with business planning materials unique to the industry of agriculture. Published 2013. BFRDP is acknowledged.

Product Type

Educational Aids or Curricula

Description

Organic Growers School CRAFT Handbook. Handbooks developed specifically for CRAFT program participants and written by farmers. Topics range from Pest I.D. and Management to Business Plans to Sample Farm Leases to Enterprise Budgets. A hard copy and CD were developed. Published 2013. BFRDP is acknowledged.

Product Type

Other

Description

Training and technical assistance through workshops and one-on-one support to beginning farmers in farm business planning and financial recordkeeping (workshops at ASAP's Business of Farming Conference, Mountain BizWorks Foundations and QuickBooks courses, individualized assistance to farmers from ASAP and Mountain BizWorks staff)

Product Type

Other

Description

Training and technical assistance to beginning farmers through workshops and one-on-one support in market planning and market diversification strategies (workshops at ASAP's Business of Farming Conference, CRAFT on-farm workshops, ASAP one-on-one consultations in market planning/diversification with farmers)

Product Type

Other

Description

Training and resources to provide farmers with the support needed to understand and comply with food safety regulations (workshops at ASAP's Business of Farming Conference, resources in the conference resource notebook)

Product Type

Other

Description

Training and apprenticeship opportunities for beginning/aspiring farmers to help them gain knowledge of farm management and sustainable production techniques.

Product Type

Databases

Description

A database of resources to help beginning/aspiring farmers build successful farm businesses. Resource areas include networking and mentorship, business planning, accessing capital, marketing, and business and farm management. <http://asapconnections.org/tools-for-farmers/building-a-farm-business/>

Changes/Problems

{Nothing to report}