

Title:	Beginning Farmers for Arkansas		
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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}

Co-Project Directors

{NO DATA ENTERED}

Departments

{NO DATA ENTERED}

Non-Technical Summary

The proposed Beginning Farmers for Arkansas project is designed to recruit 48-60 persons each year for enrollment in a three year comprehensive farm development program. The program begins with 12 weekly Beginning Farmer classroom training sessions, which is then followed by a series of optional practicum short courses designed to address specific skill set needs of the participants. Participants who complete these training sessions are then expected to either enter an apprenticeship on an existing farm or launch their own startup farming operations with guidance from a mentor farmer. Those who enter apprenticeships for additional experience are expected to launch their own startup activities in the following year. Recruitment and delivery of the initial Beginning Farmer training course will rotate to a different region of the state each year. During each recruitment cycle, groups of 12-15 beginning farmers will be recruited from five to eight adjacent counties for training at four different sites in the targeted region. The program is designed for persons who are farmers with less than five years of experience or persons, with or without a farm background, who have an interest in farming as an entrepreneurial activity. By the end of the program each participant will be expected to have: (A) developed a feasible farm plan using a diverse and sustainable set of enterprises, with a special emphasis on fresh produce, livestock and emerging bio-energy crops; (B) strengthened their knowledge and understanding of recommended management practices and cultural requirements for each planned enterprise; (C) developed a marketing strategy and plan that is adequate and appropriate for the intended farm enterprises; (D) developed a feasible plan for farm financing and established adequate access to credit to begin and sustain operations; and (E) learned recommended land and water conservation and sustainable farming practices. While the achievement of these individual outcome objectives is central to program success, the ultimate goal of the program is to address four strategic needs of the agricultural sector and our rural economies in east and south Arkansas: (1) Reverse the decline in the number of African Americans whose primary occupation is farming; (2) Increase the number of farmer operators under the age of 40; (3) Strengthen the economic viability of small, diversified farms in Arkansas, especially those operated by socially disadvantaged farmers; (4) Increase the number of African American and limited resource farmers using existing USDA agency services

Accomplishments

Major goals of the project

The outcome objectives for each of the three cohort cycles are as follows: Objective 1. By the end of the each 12 week training cycle, a minimum of 80% of enrolled participants will have entered into an individualized plan to further develop his farm management knowledge and skills. Objective 2. By the end of the each 12 week training cycle, a minimum of 80% of participants will have successfully completed a farm business and operating plan. Objective 3. By the end of the 12 months following enrollment, 60% of the enrollees will have completed either an apprenticeship or first year production with guidance

from mentor farmer Objective 4. By the end of the three-year development period, 50% of the enrolled participants will have established a sustainable farm enterprise. We recognize that generating 24 to 30 new farms out of each class cohort would constitute a 10% to 15% increase in the number of Black operated farms in each region. While this is an ambitious goal, we believe it is feasible because many of these new farmers will maintain off farm earnings as they launch and grow their new farm businesses. We believe our beginning farmer program, with its ongoing training and technical assistance to new farmers will have a number of significant impacts in Arkansas, including the following: (1) Increase the number of African Americans whose farming enterprises are positioned to grow into their primary occupation; (2) Increase the number of Black farm operators under the age of 35 and thus help ensure that agriculture will remain a vital contributor to our community; (3) Strengthen the economic viability of our rural communities; (4) Provide a market for intergenerational transfer of Black owned land to a new generation of African American and limited resource farmers, and (5) Increase African American and limited resource farmer participation in existing USDA agency services.

What was accomplished under these goals?

Objective 1: 80% of enrolled participants entered into an individualized plan to further develop his farm management knowledge and skills. Objective 2:

Objective 2: 86% of participants completed a farm business and operating plan.

Objective 3: 65% of enrollees completed an apprenticeship with guidance from mentor farmers.

55% of the participants have established a sustainable farm enterprise.

Economic viability have been increased by the establishment of GAP/GHP certified farm operations and produce packaging facilities which resulted in market opportunities with produce retailers.

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

The project provided 12 weeks class room training opportunities, eight workshops, one regional conference, on-going daily availability/access to individual one-on-one counseling and formal business entity/farm cooperatives establishment training.

How have the results been disseminated to communities of interest?

Through the publication of a quarterly newsletter, by conducting two annual conferences with state-wide promotion/advertising, and by radio broad casts and press releases.

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

{Nothing to report}

Participants

{Nothing to report}

Target Audience

The target audiences reached during this reporting period were African American and limited resource persons in southeast and central Arkansas with less than five (5) years of farming experience and African American persons aspiring to become farmers. The audience included individuals with no farming experience but had an interest in farming as an entrepreneurial activity related to agriculture.

Products

{Nothing to report}

Other Products**Product Type**

Educational Aids or Curricula

Description

Food Safety Manuals

Changes/Problems

{Nothing to report}