

<b>Title:</b>	<b>Growing Gorge Farmers Through Producer Working Groups</b>		
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**Program Code:** BFRDP

**Program Name:** Beginning Farmer and Rancher

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**Performing Department**

{NO DATA ENTERED}

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**Departments**

Wasco County Extension Office  
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**Non-Technical Summary**

This BFRDP project - Growing Gorge Farmers Through Producer Working Groups - will develop self-sustaining producer working groups for key production niches and communities that equip farmers in the Gorge with the knowledge, skills, and tools they need to be successful and increase farmer-to-farmer mentoring and resource sharing. PWGs are a means to both deliver region- and niche-specific educational services and foster the kind of peer-to-peer collaboration that is necessary to address regional challenges. Our goal: beginning farmers in the Gorge are more successful, better environmental stewards, and able to work together to solve the region's unique production, marketing and distribution challenges over the long term. To do this, we will: 1) Strengthen existing and develop new Producer Working Groups that foster collaborative problem solving, better access to educational resources, and peer-to-peer learning; 2) enhance partnerships with non-governmental and governmental organizations to deliver educational programs and improve and expand information access for new and beginning farmers across multiple delivery channels, including workshops, printed materials, and online; 3) equip beginning farmers in the Gorge with relevant and measurable knowledge, skills, and tools to make informed decisions that lead to successful agricultural operations; and 4) grow the mentoring capacity of regional leaders to strengthen connections between experienced and prospective, beginning, and transitioning farmers and facilitate the development of local mentoring relationships. Beginning producers seeking to capitalize on opportunities in the region face challenges, including: acquiring the business and production skills necessary, finding profitable scale-appropriate markets, gaining access to land and equipment, and finding suitable processing and distribution infrastructure to support their operations. This region has a long history of being tremendously agriculturally productive, especially with orchard fruit and dryland grain production, but its large geographic area (over 7,000 square miles) and rural, widely dispersed population (approximately 74,000) lend region-specific challenges as well. New means of community-based, farmer-driven knowledge transfer are becoming essential to ensure farmers have the skills and tools they need to succeed. This project will foster both access to traditional educational materials and tacit knowledge that is passed peer to peer. It will increase beginning farmers' ability to access existing regional resources and enable the project team to develop and implement additional educational resources in high demand areas and foster the peer networks and mentor relationships that will help farmers succeed as individual farms and as a community or industry cluster.

**Accomplishments**

## Major goals of the project

GOAL: beginning farmers in the Gorge are more successful, better environmental stewards, and able to work together to solve the region's unique production, marketing and distribution challenges over the long term. 1) OBJECTIVE 1: Strengthen existing and develop additional new Producer Working Groups (PWGs) that foster collaborative problem solving, better access to educational resources, and peer learning. (truncated) - At least 120 beginning producers will participate regularly in one of 8 PWGs. We expect approximately 15 participants per group based on existing PWG group size and increased outreach efforts. - Another 150 producers will attend at least one PWG-related networking or educational event. 2) OBJECTIVE 2: Enhance partnerships with non-governmental and governmental organizations to deliver educational programs and improve and expand information access for new and beginning farmers across multiple delivery channels (truncated) (truncated) - Project partners will be better able to provide the services they need, especially for Spanish-speaking and other underserved beginning farmers and ranchers (truncated) - Project partners will maintain and update PWG toolkits that will further improve both farmers' and partners' awareness of regional services, contacts, and resources available 3) OBJECTIVE 3: Equip beginning farmers in the Gorge with relevant and measurable knowledge, skills, and tools to make informed decisions that lead to successful agricultural operations. - At least 270 farmers will participate in PWGs, PWG networking events, and/or PWG-related trainings. At least 33 short courses or workshops and 35 PWG speakers will be offered over the grant period, with at least 12 speakers and/or workshops offered in Spanish or in dual-language format. - At least 12 new Living on the Land technical briefs will be produced; at least half will be translated into Spanish - At least 75 farmers will participate in Mid-Columbia Cultivating Success classes. A total of 3 CS classes will be offered over the grant period - PWG participants will be able to utilize (truncated) skills to identify and take action on collaborative efforts, and will seek agency and organization partnerships toward larger efforts - Farmers who participate in project PWGs, events, and trainings will report technical knowledge gains and adoption of new practices (truncated) 4) OBJECTIVE 4: Grow the mentoring capacity of regional leaders to strengthen connections between experienced and prospective, beginning, and transitioning farmers and facilitate the development of local mentoring relationships. - Farmers participating in PWGs will represent a range of a range of experience levels, from beginner to experienced, maximizing peer learning and knowledge transfer - (truncated) At least 75% of producers participating in PWGs will report increased peer connections - Youth 4-H and FFA PWG participants will report increased understanding of the risks and rewards of a career in agriculture

## What was accomplished under these goals?

We facilitated 6 Producer Working Groups (PWGs). We were successful in helping the orchardist group expand their network from 7 to 24 individuals. We developed 3 new PWGs: vegetable, value-added, and cider apple growers/makers. We worked closely with the Latino PWG, principally facilitated by The Next Door, to support workshops and hire local bilingual farmers to teach events. Including the 13 individuals who participate in the The Next Door's program, we facilitated or supported PWGs that included 212 individual farmers. 42% of these 212 farmers are considered beginners with a range from 0 to 10 years of commercial farming experience. 43% of these 212 farmers participated in the PWGs on a regular basis by attending a workshop or networking event more than once during the grant period. With 93 individuals from 54 farms, the vegetable PWG is by far the largest of the 7.

Digital toolkits were developed, and producers were engaged in the process. Google Groups (vegetable, meat, organic tree fruit, value-added, hard cider) enabled communications between farmers within a PWG and between resource providers and farmers. One indicator of success of the Google Group is the sheer number of people who applied for NRCS High Tunnel grants. We know of 12 producers who received High Tunnel funding in our area, and we helped several of these connect with their local NRCS agent to initiate the funding process.

55 PWG educational events happened--a mixture of farm tours & field workshops (20%), and classroom workshops or networking events (80%). We also participated in 10 Spanish language events with our partners at The Next Door (2 were facilitated by Gorge Grown).

48% of 25 end-of-project survey respondents indicated that they utilized a new resource as a direct result of the education and networking that occurred via PWGs. For every workshop or networking event we conducted during the 3 year period, farmers reported learning about a new resource at consistently high rate. We have numerous examples of anecdotal successes for this goal, including farmers utilizing co-packing facilities to make a value-added product, farmers receiving high-tunnel funds from the NRCS, farmers reaching out to state University extension agents, farmers applying for Value-Added Producer Grants and more. As we work with nearly 200 farmers, we know the examples of enhanced resource access as a result of our programming is far greater than what we were able to capture.

PWG participants reported increased peer-to-peer information and cost sharing efforts. 88% of 25 end-of-project survey respondents indicated that they became acquainted with two or more fellow farmers as a direct result of the PWGs. As a direct result of the vegetable producer working group, branded twist ties were purchased in bulk as a way to cost share. As a direct result of the organic orchardist working group, collaborative marketing is being explored as a way to cost share. We've witnessed informal cost sharing efforts unfold at several PWG events, such as bulk manure purchasing, on several occasions.

An example of infrastructure development is the opening of a new poultry processing facility. The need for a facility was established at an early niche meat producer working group, and three producers took a leadership role in pursuing the idea. The facility has opened and is serving producers in WA state with hopes to serve USDA customers in the future. The development of specific resources for value-added production is a second example of infrastructure development. We are expanding our digital tool-kit to be an online information hub for value-added producers. The hub will be co-facilitated by several project partners. We expect to be able to report additional examples of infrastructure development as a result of our PWGs in the years to come.

Our BFRDP project led us to hire a Hispanic program liaison for our beginning farmer programs. This bilingual staff person helped us translate vegetable producer programming for Spanish-speaking participants, develop a digital Spanish language toolkit, and facilitate beginning farmer workshops in Spanish. The liaison participated in a dozen of The Next Door's beginning farmer related workshops, and this helped strengthen the relationship between core project partners and The Next Door. Our liaison now has a regular Spanish language radio show, where she can make public announcements about our beginning farmer programming. This increased Spanish language programming--a direct result of our BFRDP project--led us to reveal the community's need and desire for a Spanish language farmers' market in the community where many of our region's farmworkers live. The market is slated to open in 2014, and we are prioritizing Latino vendors.

Five Living on the Land and three Technical Bulletins were published by project partners during this time. The Next Door is working with us to translate our digital value-added producer toolkit into Spanish.

Three Cultivating Success workshop series were offered during the grant period. A total of 30 students participated, and 5 of those students were also PWG members.

We saw evidence that farmers became better equipped with facilitation and group decision making skills as a result of our PWG gatherings. Half way through the grant period, farmers gathered independently to discuss, reach a consensus, and communicate their priorities for Gorge Grown's role in delivering programming to benefit farmers. We are seeking additional funding to further pursue this goal, and we have a head start because of the relationships we've developed with farmers and the relationships farmers have developed with each other as a result of this project.

Of the 55 workshops we delivered, participant farmers nearly always reporting new knowledge gain as a direct result of the workshop. Less frequently, but still commonly, they reported intentions to implement something they learned in the workshop on their farm. We will report the end-of-project summary data for brevity. Of the 25 survey respondents, 12 reported changing their farming practices, and 11 reported changing their marketing practices as a direct result of something they learned in a PWG workshop.

**BENCHMARK 1a:** All producer working groups had at least 25% members with more than 10 years experience except for the Latino PWG. Instead, experienced farmers from other PWGs were featured speakers at Latino PWG workshops. The organic orchardist PWG had the highest percentage of experienced farmers, and the Value-added PWG had the lowest percentage of experience producers. The vegetable producers were a close second. This reflects the agricultural heritage of our region. Traditionally, beef and orchard production predominant. **BENCHMARK 1b:** Of the 25 end of project survey respondents, 88% of producers participating in PWGs reported increased peer connections. **BENCHMARK 1c:** Producers participating in PWGs regularly utilize email, telephone, and face to face interactions to advise one another. This was difficult to capture formally, but numerous anecdotal evidence is available. We hear of informal farmer-farmer mentorships all the time, and we frequently serve as the liaison between these farmers. Examples include new ranchers, High Roost Ranch, being mentored by established ranchers, Little Farms, and the mentorship of Latino PWG by Hood River Organic.

Three young farmers (all less than 20 years old) were included in the vegetable and niche meat producer working groups. Two are new farmers, and one has continued farming throughout the project period. Gorge Grown co-facilitated a youth poultry workshop in partnership with 4H. This was the first time Gorge Grown and 4H had delivered joint programming, and it was a direct result of this project. Additionally, Gorge Grown offered 6 youth agricultural training opportunities as a part of this project, all of them including farm tours.

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

1 Gorge Grown staff participating in Cultivating Success instructor training.

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

Digital toolkits have been established to store regional specific resources for beginning farmers. Additionally, Google Groups have been created and are routinely used to disseminate information to farmers.

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

Work that will continue as a result of this project beyond the grant period: farmer leadership training, collaborative farmer projects, OSU & WSU Extension partnerships, Spanish language program delivery, youth training, and digital toolkit upkeep. Although these PWGs are not fully farmer facilitated as hoped in our original project, we have informally identified leaders within all of the groups. Within the Vegetable PWG, 4 farmers formally self-nominated themselves to participate in leadership training that would help the PWG to become farmer-led. 76% of 28 survey respondents in the vegetable PWG reported an interested in the group transitioning to autonomy. We are currently seeking additional funds to help continue our work on this objective.

**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	1.8	0	0	0	1.8
Technical	0	0	0	0	0
Administrative	0	0	0	0	0
Other	0	0	0	0	0
Computed Total	1.8	0	0	0	1.8

**Target Audience**

13 Hispanic/Latino individuals participated in the Latino PWG through classroom and field workshop delivery. Additional programming served youth, beginning and women farmers.

**Products**

{Nothing to report}

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

Other

**Description**

Digital Producer Toolkits

**Changes/Problems**

No major changes occurred. Some smaller changes included: We were unable to connect with the no-till wheat group mentioned in our original project plan. We developed digital producer toolkits in lieu of print toolkits. We expanded our youth offering to non-4H and FFA students. The PWGs are not 100% producer led. We are continuing this work beyond the grant period, and we have identified leaders ready for the next steps.