

Final Report

Title:	Northwest Michigan New FARM (Farmer Assistance and Resource Management) Program		
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Non-Technical Summary

Though agriculture is Michigan's second largest industry, and four times more important economically in northwest Michigan than in other areas of the state, it has become increasingly difficult for younger farmers to enter into the profession. Specific constraints include: lack of farm transfer, decline of traditional processing markets, residential development, increasing land costs, and financial difficulties. To address these and many other pressing issues, the New FARM Program seeks to address the needs of emerging farmers: financial viability and stability, alternative marketing and business management strategies, communication, economic plans, management skills, environmental stewardship, and public policy. We contend that educational, skill-building efforts like the New FARM program can directly impact beginning farmers' success and will enable emerging farmers to learn the technical and unique skills necessary to begin and maintain a sustainable agriculture operation in northwest Michigan. Methods The New FARM Program is an intensive two-year program that involves eleven educational sessions, three educational field-based tours, a final educational trip to a vegetable and fruit producing region, a formative evaluation, and a comprehensive summative evaluation. Expected outcomes The New FARM Program expects to enroll 45 participants. Currently 34 young farmers have enrolled in the program. Our expected outcomes are as follows: -Seventy-five percent of participants will begin farming within a three-year time period. -Seventy-five of participants will purchase, lease, or take over operation of family farms. -Seventy-five percent will begin producing value-added or fresh market crops. -One-hundred percent of participants will note changes in practical knowledge -Seventy-five percent of participants will enhance land stewardship through enrollment in the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program and other measurable indicators. -Within a ten-year time period, fifty percent of participants will assume either elected or un-elected leadership positions. -One-hundred percent of participants will increase management or leadership roles on-farm. Long-range Impacts on Sustainability of Beginning Farmers The long-range impacts of the New FARM Program for participating farmers includes 12 broad spectrum goals: 1) increased financial literacy and viability; 2) diversification of crop production and marketing strategies; 3) increased sustainability of farm operations through business management skills; 4) increased generational farm transfer through estate planning and other strategies; 5) improved land stewardship strategies and environmental awareness; 6) improved public speaking and communication skills; 7) established network with industry contacts and legislators; 8) improved governmental relations; 9) improved management and labor relations skills; 10) improved social/cultural awareness; 11)

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enhanced leadership and collaborative leadership skills; and 12) abilities to help sustain rural character of northwest Michigan.

Accomplishments

Major goals of the project

Long-term goals Social, economic, political, and environmental changes have created both challenges and opportunities for farmers and rural communities in northwest Michigan. The northwest Michigan New FARM (Farmer Assistance and Resource Management) Program is designed to assist beginning farmers through an intensive educational training series designed to increase economic viability in agriculture, maintain and enhance environmental stewardship, and conserve northwest Michigan's rural character. Programming will also focus on cultivating industry leaders through networking exercises, public speaking education, tolerant communication, and effective direction of group activities through an administrative board or a community organization. In addition, this program is intended to help train and educate farmers to be good stewards of the land, think creatively and innovatively for positive and profitable gain, and successfully operate a sustainable agriculture enterprise. Understanding public policy, recognizing and comprehending governmental policies and opportunities, and utilizing industry resources, people, and past experiences to build upon and uphold agricultural tradition into the 21st century. The goal of this two-year program is to create a tight-knit, regional network of agricultural leaders who will help make informed, long-term decisions that positively shape northwest Michigan's rural communities and agricultural industries now and in the future. Objectives Through the development and dissemination of agricultural-related curricula and training materials by qualified educators, the New FARM Program will help emerging northwest Michigan farmers: 1) engage in estate planning and other strategies to increase intergenerational farm transfer, 2) decipher challenges and opportunities for increasing competitiveness and market share through alternative-marketing, value-added, and other strategies, 3) enhance financial viability through innovative business management strategies, 4) enhance land stewardship and farm safety through technical assistance and advanced horticultural training, and 5) develop and hone leadership, decision-making, facilitation, crisis management, communication, team-work, networking, and problem-solving skills. Expected outputs The New FARM Program expects to enroll 45 participants. Currently 34 young farmers have enrolled in the program. Our expected outcomes are as follows: Seventy-five percent of participants will begin farming within a three-year time period. Seventy-five of participants will purchase, lease, or take over operation of family farms. Seventy-five percent will begin producing value-added or fresh market crops. One-hundred percent of participants will note changes in practical knowledge Seventy-five percent of participants will enhance land stewardship through enrollment in the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program and other measurable indicators. Within a ten-year time period, fifty percent of participants will assume either elected or un-elected leadership positions. One-hundred percent of participants will increase management or leadership roles on-farm.

What was accomplished under these goals?

For the New FARM program, nine event surveys were administered, plus an outcome-focused mid-term evaluation, end-of-program evaluation, and reflective essays collected from participants of the international tour experience. Building a Farm Business and Planning for Farm Succession-Participants reported significant improvement on knowledge of farm business resources, business planning skills, and planning farm succession. Trip to State Capitol-Participants gained new contacts with industry and legislative representatives. Ag Forum with NW MI's Elected Officials-Participants had improved awareness of newly elected officials in NW MI. A program member provided an event on Ag and Environment topics of USDA/NRCS Farm Bill conservation programs, Farmland Preservations options, and state conservation programs. Since the beginning of the program (2011 Mid-Term Evaluation): 100% Changed marketing practices. All indicated how the program expanded their networking and awareness of other marketing strategies and outlets in the local area. 61% Changed farming/growing operations or land management practices. Examples included trying high density apple production; completing MAEAP certification; starting serious planning conversations related to farm transfers; taking out new financial loans for land acquisition or leases. 43% Developed or revised a farm plan. 30% Started farming and 0% stopped farming. 26% Changed business practices such as farm transfer plans, finances, and farmland preservation. End-of-Program (2012 Final Evaluation): 89% improved management or leadership roles on-the-farm because of what they learned in the program. 89% applied practical knowledge to improve farming operation sustainability. 86% plan to seek a future leadership position; 50% had already assumed a leadership position. 57% modified or expanded current marketing practices to begin producing value-added crops. 57% increased local food sales, since the start of the New FARM program. Examples included gaining new customers, joining local farmer markets, participating in farm-to-school programs, and new direct sales. 50% acted on land stewardship practices through MAEAP or NRCS programs. 43% had purchased, leased, or taken over family farming operations. 48% reported an increase in the amount of food produced by the farm or growing operation, since the start of the program, they believed was connected to their participation. 38% experienced an increase in farm revenue. Examples included increasing community supported agriculture income, increasing pasture-based poultry, adding a hop processor facility, and selling merchandise. Three members started farming during the program. Reflective essays on the International Ag tour focused on how exposure to New Zealand helped bring innovative ideas to Michigan, new knowledge or practices to be tried or shared with others, reflections on how the international trip created a shared experience that tightened the group,

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and observations during the trip that could impact local food movements, farmland preservation, environmental stewardship, or economics.

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

OUTPUTS: Objectives of the New FARM Program are to help emerging northwest Michigan farmers: engage in estate planning and other strategies to increase intergenerational farm transfer, decipher challenges and opportunities for increasing competitiveness and market share through alternative-marketing, enhance financial viability through innovative business management strategies, enhance land stewardship and farm safety through technical assistance and advanced training, and develop leadership, decision-making, facilitation, crisis management, communication, team-work, networking, and problem-solving skills. The entire life of the New FARM program was twenty unique opportunities over 30 months (Nov 2009 to April 2012). Content-focused workshops and events delivered new knowledge to participants. Intentionally process-focused activities, such as field trips, were designed to assist participant skill development and provide interaction with program partners and collaborators. Year One Activities included classroom study of public speaking, media relations, crisis management, building/owning a business, marketing, estate/tax planning; attendance at an international conference; meeting with local legislators/policymakers in the state capitol; tours of farms packing houses/processing plants, and retail operations to understand food chain; and communication with veteran farmers/industry leaders. Year Two Activities included classroom study of labor issues, environmental stewardship, public policy, communication, and agritourism; touring the Great Lakes region to view value-added agricultural opportunities; taking an international tour of an agriculture region to better understand global food systems. Timeline of Outputs: Kickoff Event of New FARM Program (Nov 2009). Great Lakes Fruit and Vegetable Expo Dec (2009). Economics and Financial Literacy Session (Jan 2010). Managing Public Relations and Media (Feb 2010). International Fruit Tree Association Meeting and Post-Tour (Mar 2010). Building a Farm Business (Apr 2010). Alternative Marketing Strategies Session (Sep 2010). Planning for Farm Succession (Oct 2010). Meet Lawmakers & State Policy (Lansing Trip Nov 2010). Business Etiquette (Dec 2010). Agriculture Forum: Introduction to NW Michigan's Elected Officials (Jan 2011). Environmental Stewardship (Feb 2011). Agriculture Labor Management (Mar 2011). Tour to West Central Michigan: Federal Marketing Order Problem Solving Discussion (Apr 2011). New FARM member farm tours (Oct 2011). Certificates and Branding (Nov 2011). Great Lakes Fruit and Vegetable Expo (Dec 2011). Planning meeting for international educational Ag Tour (Jan 2012). Capstone International Agricultural Trip to New Zealand South Island (Feb 2012). Indirect outputs included media coverage for New FARM events and participant-written contributions of articles to local media. Results of New FARM program evaluations were shared at the 2012 North American Tart Cherry Industry conference to an audience of 150. A public presentation mostly focused on the international trip was given in April 2012 to 80 other producers/growers in the region and invited guests of the New FARM members. **PARTICIPANTS:** Dr. J. Rob Serrine, Dr. Nikki Rothwell, and Erin Lizotte (all of Michigan State University Extension) were co-leaders of the New FARM program. The trio designed, coordinated, and implemented all educational sessions during the life of the project. The trio divided tasks of communication with speakers and participations, program coordination, expense tracking and budgets. The trio authored newspaper articles about program efforts and kept a Facebook page for the New FARM program. Dr. Cheryl Peters was the evaluator for the program and collected data, analyzed records, and produced public reports for funders and stakeholders. Partner organizations that provided financial or in-kind support, or use of facilities and equipment, included: Rotary Charities of Traverse City, The Leelanau Conservancy, The Leelanau Horticultural Society, The Grand Traverse Fruit Growers' Council, Cherry Marketing Institute, Northwest Michigan Horticultural Research Station Foundation Board, and the participants of the New FARM program. **TARGET AUDIENCES:** Beginning and new farmers from five counties were part of The Northwest Michigan New FARM (Farmer Assistance and Resource Management) Program. Counties included Antrim, Benzie, Manistee, Leelanau, and Grand Traverse. Final participation numbers reveal 42 New FARM program participants over the course of 30 months. In general, program member demographics were young, white, rural, 20% women, and 10% socially disadvantaged or limited resources. The majority of participants were younger than 40 years. Nine were women. Two participants were identified as limited resource from the criteria that direct or indirect gross farm sales were not more than \$172,800 in each of the previous two years AND they made less than \$22,528 total annual household income (50% county median). All (100%) of New FARM Program members were currently farming at the conclusion of the project. Most (71%) were raised on a farm, and all had some farming experiencing before enrolling in the program. Crops grown varied with the majority listing fruits and vegetables: 64% grew cherries (sweet and tart), 50% apples, 18% pears, 14% plums, and 14% vegetables. The 5 county region New FARM program participants represented has a rich agricultural legacy currently pressured by trends in agriculture showing a clear shift towards older growers and fewer acres of production. Furthermore, land is disappearing. Between 1982 and 2002, Michigan lost nearly 2 million acres of farmland or roughly 17%. Conversion is affecting prime farmland at a rate 2-4 times that of more traditional agricultural land. Trend reports indicate Michigan is expected to lose 25% of its fruit growing land in the next 40 years. The foremost reason for farmland conversion in northern Michigan is high property costs due to development pressure and a quickly growing population. Development pressure inflates land prices, and this elevated worth makes it complicated for farmers to offer or purchase acreage at market value. Coincidentally, prime fruit growing acreage in Michigan are located on the same highly sought and highly valued property near Lake Michigan. This program targeted the region's emerging and younger farmers, particularly younger farmers with subordinate or secondary roles to

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parents/grandparents on the farms. PROJECT MODIFICATIONS: There were no significant deviations from the planned project outputs or outcomes. In fact, the number and quality of programming outputs exceeded expectations. Also, the program outcomes have created a potentially useful collection of information for others interested in implementing new farmer programs that stay intact across several years. A no-cost extension was requested and approved to complete program wrap-up activities (such as preparing manuscripts for publication and forming a self-standing farmer network to sustain program efforts beyond this funding period).

How have the results been disseminated to communities of interest?

{NO DATA ENTERED}

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

{NO DATA ENTERED}

Participants

Actual FTE's for this Reporting Period

Role	Non-Students or faculty	Students with Staffing Roles			Computed Total by Role
		Undergraduate	Graduate	Post-Doctorate	
Scientist	0	0	0	0	0
Professional	0	0	0	0	0
Technical	0	0	0	0	0
Administrative	0	0	0	0	0
Other	0	0	0	0	0
Computed Total	0	0	0	0	0

Student Count by Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) Code

{NO DATA ENTERED}

Target Audience

Products

Type	Status	Year Published	NIFA Support Acknowledged
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Citation

No publications reported this period

Other Products

Changes/Problems