

Title:	Growing Farmers Initiative: Training Beginning Farmers in NY and the Northeast in Sustainable Farm Practices -- for Sustainable Farm Busines		
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Non-Technical Summary

Our region suffers from a lack of access to farm-fresh food for many residents, and a history of farm loss. Additionally, the farm sector relies heavily on fossil fuel-based inputs and factory-style models of efficiency, among the largest contributors to greenhouse gases. Meanwhile, there's a growing interest in farming among young people who want to use sustainable methods and reach direct markets. Stone Barns Center, a working farm and education center, addresses the critical need to train young farmers in our region, to increase the number of successful farm operations and sustainable agricultural practices. Workshops, conferences, apprenticeships, on-line resources and mentoring services geared towards beginning farmer needs, will provide intensive hands-on training for more than 1200 farmers by 2014. The topics we focus on include those where we have in-house expertise: sustainable crop, livestock and compost production. Colleagues work with us to address additional critical areas: business planning, and access to land, credit, and markets. Stone Barns has a 7-year track record of providing apprenticeships and workshops geared especially for beginning farmers. Our programs are regularly sold out, a testament to program quality and growing demand for beginning farmer training. We need to grow and improve our program, including conducting new activities and coordinating with additional service providers. Our project partner NOFA-NY will pilot mentoring services specifically for the beginning farmers involved in our programs. This 3-year program helps to build a regional training infrastructure and ensure a better-equipped corps of regional farmers supplying the region with healthful food.

Accomplishments

Major goals of the project

A healthy and sustainable food system relies on the availability of dedicated, skilled farmers. Our goal is to see an increased number of beginning farmers who are better prepared to use sustainable production practices, and better prepared to plan and manage successful farm businesses. Objectives include increasing the number and quality of training programs for - and thus increasing the skills among - beginning farmers in the northeast region. Through beginning farmer apprenticeships, conferences, workshops, mentorship/ consultations and online resources, we'll: Increase technical knowledge of organic and sustainable agriculture production practices; Address the business needs of beginning, small family farmers as they seek to

enhance their operations and gain access to land and markets; and Provide opportunities to build strong networks of personal and professional support, both in-person and via a virtual network. Our activities include: Apprenticeships that include personal goal-setting and focused curricula; An annual 2-day Young Farmers Conference (YFC), especially designed for new-entry farmers by providing the wide range of topics they need to address as start-ups; A series of more in-depth field days on critical topics; A pilot in-person, phone and on-line consultation/mentoring service; and Developing additional on-line resources, including our own uploaded YFC workshops and a "Virtual Grange" By the end of the 3-year grant period there will be over 1,000 beginning farmers directly impacted: by our apprenticeships (15 apprentices per yr/45 over 3yrs), conferences (240 attendees per yr/720 over 3 yrs) and workshops (30 attendees per workshop X 5 workshops/yr = 150/450 over 3 yrs), and thus be better trained to lead and manage sustainable farm enterprises. Due to our targeted outreach to educators in nearby agriculture schools, an additional 480 young farmers will be indirectly impacted by our work through their teachers who we train (4 Ag. teachers attend our programs and go on to teach 40 more students each year: $4 \times 40 = 160$ (X3 yrs) = 480. Those teachers continue to train more classrooms full of students every year with their new-found sustainable production skills, until they retire. Additional beginning farmers benefit by downloading workshops from our website. Given the high quality of our workshops and the fine reputation of our presenters, we expect that hundreds of beginning farmers will download and review our workshops, and participate in our Virtual Grange. Another 90-100 beginning farmer participants will benefit from our pilot mentorship program with NOFA. (30 farmers from our Growing Farmers Initiative programs get referred to mentors, x 3 yrs = 90.) There will be some overlap where farmers participate in our apprentice program, workshops and mentoring services. The different activities are designed to be mutually reinforcing. We expect that the farmers we train are on track to earn \$60,000-\$70,000/year profit, while directly feeding one million additional people through CSA shares, farmers markets and other direct markets that enable the farmer to earn a greater share of the dollar.

What was accomplished under these goals?

Increasing the number of beginning farmers successfully practicing sustainable agriculture and a corresponding number of new farm startups lies at the heart of Stone Barns Center's Growing Farmers Initiative. Food security, environmental stewardship, rural economic growth and regional food systems all depend on growing the ranks of such farmers and giving them the training, experience and resources that can improve their chances of succeeding over the long term. More beginning farmers are especially needed to replace American farmers who are aging off the land at an alarmingly high rate. And given the high rates of farm failure, particularly in the first few years of operation, equipping beginning farmers with solid business management and farm finance skills is essential.

In 2011, we asked the USDA Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program to support our efforts to build out and strengthen our program and its offerings designed to recruit, train and help beginning farmers succeed. As a result of the BFRDP's grant, we have exceeded our initial goals of directly training and educating 1,000 beginning farmers. We have also reached thousands more through our technical consultancy and mentorship work and through the creation of our online beginning farmer resource hub, the Virtual Grange (virtualgrange.org). Our education, training and support services continue to evolve to meet the needs of beginning farmers—for example, the addition and expansion of business-management coursework and training. The broader impact of our work can be seen and felt in the strong, durable bonds being formed in the beginning farmer community. Farming, by nature, can be isolating. Through our focus on building community and ongoing support for young and beginning farmers, we are overcoming this obstacle while providing opportunities to be mentored by established farmers and supported by a well-networked community of peers.

Objective: Increase the number and quality of training programs for -- and thus increase the skills among -- beginning farmers in the Northeast region.

1) **Major Activities Completed:** Trained farm apprentices; held three National Young Farmers Conferences; conducted 29 technical workshops; launched the Virtual Grange; developed a technical consultancy and mentorship program in collaboration with NOFA-NY.

2) **Data Collected:** N/A

3) **Summary Statistics and Discussion of Results:**

Apprentices: We have directly trained 50 apprentices in resilient, restorative farming techniques and business management since 2011. Demand for our apprenticeships is strong: More than 200 people applied for 11 slots for the 2014 season. More than 65% of our former apprentices are active in agriculture today. Given their youth and the state of land prices and the market today, we believe this percentage reflects the high quality of our training program; yet we want to see this percentage grow in coming years.

National Young Farmers Conferences: Through three conferences since 2011, we educated and helped to network more than 920 beginning farmers. Demand for this program remains high: We routinely receive 450 applications from beginning farmers for 300 available slots to attend the conference each year.

Technical Workshops: Since 2011, our 29 technical workshops designed for beginning farmers in the Northeast helped more than 400 people develop basic as well as advanced skills in all aspects of farm operations, from livestock management and processing to four-season growing to business management and strategic planning.

Virtual Grange: Since we launched the Virtual Grange in 2012, more than 38,000 unique visitors have used the site and more than 850 people have become registered users. By 2017, our goal is to reach more than 50,000 beginning farmers through the Virtual Grange.

Technical Consultancy and Mentorship Program: Since we launched this program in 2011, 159 beginning farmers have utilized the services of 53 experienced farmer consultants, logging a total of 262 consultation hours. While our surveys reveal that the majority of participants benefited from these services, this program received less usage than we expected. We are currently making several changes to improve the program's reach and efficacy.

4) **Key Outcomes:** As a recognized thought leader in the sustainable agriculture world, Stone Barns Center's education, training and mentoring programs for beginning farmers help spread new practices, innovation and connectivity to the broader farming community. Farming can be an isolating pursuit, and farmers in general can become isolated. Through the Virtual Grange forum and our conferences and workshops, the Growing Farmers Initiative has become a venue for connections to form within the beginning farmer community around the Northeast and increasingly around the country. Such connection helps resolve some of the social isolation faced by new farmers, and also provides a source of leadership and support during key transition moments for beginning farmers in the first 2 - 5 years of developing enterprises -- the most pivotal make-or-break time for farmers.

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

Training and professional development comprise the majority of the Growing Farmers Initiative's work and programmatic offerings. We offer 8- to 12-month training apprenticeships to aspiring farmers each year. We conduct more than 60 workshops annually through our National Young Farmers Conference, and approximately 15 one-day technical workshops for hundreds of farmers in the region throughout the year. We offer online tutorials and resources through the Virtual Grange, and direct mentorship and one-on-one farmer consultation. (See more above and in Other Products section.)

How have the results been disseminated to communities of interest?

We tell beginning farmers about our Growing Farmers Initiative and its programs through our Virtual Grange; through monthly e-newsletters; and through our Twitter feed and Facebook pages. We regularly post program offerings on listservs such as SANET, COMFOOD, HVFC, Cornell Small Farms Program, Mid Hudson C.R.A.F.T. and Lower Hudson C.R.A.F.T. Since 2011, the Growing Farmers Initiative -- in particular, the National Young Farmers Conference -- has also received major media attention from the New York Times and NPR.

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

{Nothing to report}

Participants

{Nothing to report}

Target Audience

We target and attract beginning farmers with 10 years or less of farming experience. Many are from the Northeast, but our reach is nationwide: 64% of our apprentices come from outside the region, and our annual conference draws people from more than 30 states. The common denominator for this audience is a strong desire to learn about resilient and sustainable production methods for vegetable and/or livestock operations. Most, but not all, have no family-farming background. Most of our apprentices are between 22 and 35 years of age and have 1– 2 years of farming experience and some level of college education. The majority of our apprentice program graduates and conference and workshop attendees go on to become vegetable farmers and/or livestock operators, selling their products through CSAs, farmers markets and restaurants. Through their training at Stone Barns Center, they are poised to replace the aging ranks of American farmers and ranchers.

Products

{Nothing to report}

Other Products

Product Type

Other

Description

Since 2011, 39 apprentices have graduated from our Apprentice Program; 11 more apprentices will graduate from the program later this year. These aspiring farmers come to Stone Barns to be trained and mentored. Apprenticeships are focused on a specific area of the farm: Livestock, Greenhouse, Propagation, Herbs and Flowers, and Field (outdoor production). Apprentices are taught restorative and resilient farming practices

through practical, hands-on instruction, one-on-one mentoring, and weekly workshops and classes, among them: Legal Risk Management, Engines, Beekeeping, Sheep & Lambs, Farm Safety, Composting, Farm-based Education, Tracking Production, Fencing & Pasture Management, Crop Rotation, Poultry Processing, Farm Finances, Soil Science, Pigs, Turkeys, Marketing to Restaurants and Welding. Apprentices also participate in the Collaborative Regional Alliance for Farmer Training (C.R.A.F.T.) Program in the Hudson Valley. C.R.A.F.T. is a cooperative effort of local organic and biodynamic farms organized to enhance educational opportunities for farm apprentices. Through C.R.A.F.T., our apprentices' training experience is enriched, as they are exposed to a variety of successful farm models and are connected to a broader community of fellow apprentices and farmers training in the Hudson Valley.

We have implemented the following changes to our Apprentice Program over the past year:

Common Start Dates: To ensure that all 2014 apprentices started the program on equal footing, with a strong understanding of Stone Barns Center and high-quality tool/safety training, we implemented a common start date for all apprentices.

Orientation: We implemented the first apprentice orientation program to ensure that all apprentices developed a strong understanding of the mission, history, and structure of Stone Barns Center; developed a strong understanding of Stone Barns Center's collaborative relationship with our restaurant partner, Blue Hill; understood the full spectrum of resources that are available to them; received intensive farm-safety and tool training; developed a sense of community and place; had an structured opportunity to meet other apprentices and staff; and identified as part of an annual "class" of beginning farmers.

Apprentice Binders: These contain general information about Stone Barns Center, contact information, and articles/resources particular to their specific apprenticeships.

2014 Apprentice Curriculum: We developed a new technical/farm business management-based curriculum in response to programmatic goals and apprentice feedback, featuring 30+ workshops.

Product Type

Other

Description

Organized and convened the 6th annual National Young Farmers Conference, in December 2013. This in-demand gathering gives beginning farmers the opportunity to attend workshops with experts, interact with thought-leaders and agricultural luminaries, and network with other beginning as well as established farmers. Our special guests at this conference included Wendell Berry and his daughter, Mary Berry, Executive Director of The Berry Center; USDA Deputy Secretary Krysta Harden; farmer and Congresswoman Chellie Pingree; and farmer and MacArthur Fellow Cheryl Rogowski. In 2013, a strict scholarship evaluation process and a new lottery-based registration system gave preference to active beginning farmers, ensuring that our target audience was being served at the event. Approximately 85% of the 300 attendees were active farmers; others were aspiring farmers. They came from 30 states around the country. We gave 20% of beginning farmers scholarships to attend the conference. The conference program included 68 workshops covering topics in sustainable production methods, business management and tools for business planning, and access to markets, land and credit; 11 consulting sessions with experts in business management, agricultural law and farm finance; a pre-conference on Sustainable Hog Production, led by Iowa producer Tom Frantzen; and a pre-conference on Farming Smarter, Not Harder, led by Vermont farmer Richard Wiswall. The two full-day pre-conferences, attended by 100 beginning farmers, were an improvement over 2012's half-day pre-conference offering. Both were organized in direct response to what beginning farmers were requesting.

Here are a few comments about the conference from attendees:

"I thought [the conference] was a huge success, and came away feeling excited, motivated and full of great ideas and new contacts."

Layton Guenther, attendee

Dec 06, 4:46pm via Twitter

Thank you @StoneBarns, amazing experience this week! The knowledge, connections and inspiration will

create big waves in farming.#yfc13

Dec 06, 4:02pm via Twitter

This afternoon at #YFC13, I learned that good butchering can be as transfixing as ballet.#onpoint #bluehill
pic.twitter.com/vMir84Uj7j

Dec 06, 1:57pm via Twitter

In the home stretch but the opportunities and connections of #yfc13 are just starting blossom! One example
pic.twitter.com/uxBaKGrAUI

Dec 06, 10:59am via Twitter for iPhone

Wow, two mind blowing classes by Jack Algiere, Stone Barns Farm Manager, in two days. Inspirational education
abounds! #yfc13

Product Type

Other

Description

We organize and facilitate technical workshops specifically geared toward beginning farmers. Since August 2012, approximately 400 people have participated in 29 technical workshops. This includes our most recent workshop on July 30: Developing Your Farm Marketing Plan. Other topics covered include: Butchering Intensive, Queen Rearing, Silvopasture, Greenhouse Strategic Planning for Four Season Production, The Art of Saving Seeds, Small Engine Mechanics, Crop Rotation, Pastured Turkeys, Heritage Pigs, Beekeeping School and Management Intensive Grazing.

Product Type

Other

Description

Transitioned the Technical Consultancy with NOFA-NY. In 2011, together with the Northeast Organic Farming Association of New York (NOFA-NY), we launched a program to connect beginning farmers with more experienced ones who can provide mentoring and technical support. Since then, 159 beginning farmers have utilized the services of 53 experienced farmer consultants, logging a total of 262 consultation hours. While our surveys reveal that the majority of participants benefited from these services, this program received less usage than we expected, and we are making several changes to improve the program's reach and efficacy. The collaborative consultancy program ended in July 2014. Beginning in 2015, we will merge the Technical Consultancy Program with our new Growing Farmers Network housed on the Virtual Grange, while NOFA-NY will continue a separate mentorship program that focuses on matching beginning farmers with mentors. (Please see more under "Major Changes" section.)

Product Type

Other

Description

Continued to build out and refine the Virtual Grange. To help reach and connect more beginning farmers across the country, we launched the Virtual Grange (virtualgrange.org) in 2012; today it has more than 850 registered users and more than 38,000 unique visitors have used the site since 2012. By 2017, our goal is to reach more than 50,000 beginning farmers through the Virtual Grange.

To aid us in this quest, we commissioned an evaluation of the Virtual Grange, conducted by Collaborative Health Research. Their June 2014 report identified the online and offline resources that beginning farmers already use to determine how the Virtual Grange fits into the beginning farmer's toolbox. The results provide in-depth information about content, skills and resources that beginning farmers might be looking for, the most salient being: mentoring and information sharing from experienced farmers or opportunities for networking and conversations; tailored information; and business-related guidance. Based on the report's findings and discussions with other experts and educators, we intend to make five key improvements to the Virtual Grange:

- 1) Build out video tutorials -- an effective means of teaching technical skills. We plan to expand our library of video tutorials to highlight expertise unique to SBC, such as on-farm plant breeding, rotational grazing and farm-based education.
- 2) Create case studies of a variety of farmers that can elucidate key components of successful farm enterprises and crucial decision-making moments. We plan to build a library of 30 case studies, highlighting three specific areas: funding opportunities, including those from USDA; financial management and successful business enterprises; and innovative farming methods.
- 3) Develop online forums, especially those focused on opportunities for networking, knowledge sharing and community building. We aim to concentrate on one or two specific topics, with additional input from the beginning farmer community.
- 4) Compile a resources page to direct the large number of beginning farmer users of the Virtual Grange to appropriate resources, such as links to available funding sources.
- 5) Develop the Growing Farmers Network and Map. To increase the success of beginning farmers, especially in the make-or-break years 2 – 5 of farming, we want to ensure farmers receive ongoing support from peers, mentors and experts. The Growing Farmers Network will include SBC apprentice graduates and more experienced farmers with whom we've developed a relationship and who can serve as technical consultants to new farmers. In exchange for continued mentoring by our own farming staff, our apprentice graduates will become farmer-mentors to more recent graduates and other beginning farmers in their communities. This network of farmer peers and experts will be made available on an interactive map, attached to case studies profiling the farmers and their operations. The Growing Farmers Network will build on the foundation that we established in our partnership with NOFA-NY to develop a technical consultancy and mentorship program.

Changes/Problems

Changes to the Technical Consultancy Program: In 2011, together with NOFA-NY, we launched a program to connect beginning farmers with more experienced ones who can provide mentoring and technical support. Over the past year, more than 50 beginning farmers utilized the services of 13 farmer consultants, logging a total of 120 consultation hours. While our surveys reveal that the majority of participants benefited from these services, this program received less usage than we expected, and we are making several changes to improve the program's reach and efficacy. Beginning in 2015, we will merge the Technical Consultancy Program with our new Growing Farmers Network housed on the Virtual Grange, while NOFA-NY will continue a separate mentorship program that focuses on matching beginning farmers with mentors. We believe these programs will benefit from being separated, so that both organizations can concentrate on improving the reach and full potential of the services offered. The Technical Consultancy Program will focus on directing beginning farmers' questions to specific subject matter experts. A Growing Farmers Network map will help beginning farmers find consultants in close proximity to them, while case studies will clearly reveal the consultants' type of operation and expertise to better match beginning and seasoned farmers.