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{NO DATA ENTERED}

Non-Technical Summary

The Vermont New Farmer Network(VNFN) Strategies for Success project is a 3-year effort to strengthen our capacity to provide education, technical assistance, coaching and mentoring to beginning farmers in topic areas of production and management strategies, business management and decision support, marketing strategies, legal strategies, and topics related to processing safe and nutritious food. Building on two decades' experience in new farmer development, we are building an innovative coaching program that meets the individualized needs of beginning farmers while maximizing the efficiency of the service providers. Derived directly from stakeholder input, this model ensures each participating farmer has a personalized farm development plan providing the services they most need at the point in their business development where it will be most effective. By formalizing the intake process and coaching new farmers as they develop customized and specific learning plans, we will accelerate the average time from "idea" to startup, and the identification of a business model that is appropriate in scope and scale to meet each farmer's personal and business objectives. By coordinating programs to fill gaps and avoid duplication, VNFN will increase the number of farmers served, expand our geographic reach, support sustainable farm business growth, and contribute knowledge for replication in other regions. Key outcomes include: 1) increasing the number of beginning farmers owning/operating profitable farms; 2) increasing new farmer participation in agricultural programs that enhance access to capital and credit and/or land stewardship and tenure; and 3) enhancing our network's capacity to provide the continuum of services beginning farmers need for success.

Accomplishments

Major goals of the project

Long-term outcomes are: a)increase number of beginning farmers owning/operating profitable farms; b)increase number of new farmers participating in agricultural programs that enhance land stewardship and access to financing, and c)increase the effectiveness of the network of collaborators who address the needs of beginning farmers. Project goals and objectives are: I. Design, pilot, implement and evaluate an integrated farmer coaching model using a variety of training approaches and which helps aspiring farmers establish new businesses and post start-up farmers increase the productivity and profitability of their

operations. Targets: a.1200 aspiring and beginning farmers receive information, education, training, and referrals. b.474 new farmers complete a minimum of 6 hours of education related to production, marketing or business management. c.275 beginning farmers write an individualized learning plan that outlines a logical progression of education and skill-building to advance their farm business within the context of their unique circumstances. d.Within two years of finalizing their individual learning plan, 185 farmers complete the elements in the plan, accessing education and technical assistance provided by project partners and other relevant agencies and organizations. 165 report gains in profitability, productivity and/or overall business performance. e.100 farmers with initial sales below \$50K/year make changes that help increase sales revenue at least 20%. f.65 farmers take steps to scale up their business to earn at least 51% of family income from the farm. II. Increase the number of new farmers participating in agricultural programs that enhance access to capital and credit and/or land stewardship and tenure among beginning farmers. Targets: a.200 farmers meet with a technical assistance provider regarding lending options; land access and tenure options; USDA conservation programs and/or other conservation incentives. b.50 farmers enroll in some type of conservation program for the first time, and 40 report resulting improved farm operations. c.45 farmers will enter into a long-term farm lease, purchase or transfer agreement. III. Increase the effectiveness of the VNFN and the broader network of national, regional, and local partners who address the needs of beginning farmers. Targets: a.A common set of VNFN intake assessment tools will be used by all project partners. b.The VNFN Beginning Farmer Coaching Guide will be used by project partners in their work with 275 farmers. c. The number of new farm business start-ups and a decrease the overall time between idea and business start-ups as indicated by business start-up class graduates increases from 40% in 24 months to 50% in 18 months. d.After being made broadly available through the BFRDP clearinghouse, VNFN intake assessments, our coaching guide and farm development plan templates and decision-making tools are accessed 250 times by other agricultural service providers.

What was accomplished under these goals?

What has been accomplished?

Project partners delivered information, education, training and referrals to 1263 aspiring and beginning farmers. Of those, 463 obtained at least 6 hours of education or individual coaching or technical assistance related to production, marketing or business management. Data from our client surveys shows that participants used the education and technical assistance the project provided to help with goal setting (77%), decision making (79%), strengthen production skills and knowledge (68%), business management (71%), Financial management (64%), and marketing (65 %).

Combining 2013 and 2014 survey data, 332 participants reported that the education and technical assistance they received helped them make decisions, and plan and implement changes. By the mid-point of the project, 63 individuals reported using the education/technical assistance they received through the project to start a new farm enterprise, and 103 reported implementing a change to an existing farm. As a result of assistance they received in the second half of the project, an additional 43 people reported starting a new enterprise and 100 beginning farmers implemented improvements to their farm. With regard to our overall project outcome targets related to increasing the number of profitable beginning farms (100 farmers with sales less than \$50K increasing sales by 20% and 65 farmers increases to above \$50,000 or farm contributions to household income to at least 51%), data in our 2014 survey (total 289 responses) shows that the 93 commercial farms who provided farm sales figures saw aggregate sales grow from about \$1.6 million in 2012 to about \$2.03 million in 2013, an aggregate gain of about 25.5%. Aggregate household income from farming rose from about \$502,916 to \$659,530 (an aggregate gain of over 31%) among the 104 commercial farms that reported household income from farming. Of these farmers, 32 reported that farm enterprises contributed more than 50% of household income in 2013. However, most survey respondents still reported less than \$10,000 in annual income from farming, and 38 farmers indicated zero household income from farming. In open-ended comments, several of these respondents indicated that they are opting to use farm profits to reinvest and grow the farm business, rather than as household income.

With regard to outcomes related to helping farmers access capital and credit, 181 beginning farmers obtained technical assistance related to accessing land and/or financial resources (three-year target= 200). Of the 176 farmers who answered final survey questions about the impact these services had on farm operations, 55 reported improvements in access to land and 70 reported improved access to credit. Additionally 50 farmers accessed USDA-NRCS programs to plan and/or implement water and soil conservation practices, organic production practices and install hoop houses (3 year-goal was 50). With regard to outcomes related to increasing the effectiveness of the Vermont New Farmer Network the number of new farm starts (above) indicate that we are making progress toward our goal of helping to help more new farms get started in less time than before this project. We have developed and implemented a common set of coaching, new farmer assessment and farm planning tools that are facilitating referrals between organizations and helping beginning farmers sequence learning opportunities in a way that makes sense for their situation.

Following are brief descriptions profiles of beginning farmers who have participated in our programs.

Wilder Farm

Jess Simpson grew up in Vermont, visiting her grandfather's farm. The dairy herd was sold in the '80s, but her grandfather held onto the farm, leasing the land to neighbors. In 2013, Simpson returned to start a new farm business, Wilder Farm, with her family. A coaching session in 2013 with a Vermont New Farmer Project farm business advisor helped Simpson complete a SWOT analysis for their farm business. Then Simpson turned to her farmer mentors and resources available online through the New Farmer Project website, blog, webinars, and emailing with program coordinators. "The most helpful thing," said

Simpson, "was just asking direct questions and saying, 'This is what I need to know. Can you help me figure it out?'" The Wilder Farm is growing slowly and experimenting with different markets and products. A CSA, farmers market, and wholesale accounts provide sales outlets for their 2 ½ acres of vegetables, pastured poultry and dried beans. Currently, about 25% of the family's income comes from farming, which is an increase over last year, and has them on the path to their goal of 50% of their income from farming.

Flywheel Farm

Flywheel Farm owners Justin Cote and Ansel Ploog made thorough use of BFRDP-sponsored New Farmer Network (VT NFN) programs and services. In 2012 they contacted the land access specialist to discuss strategies for finding a farm to lease. The specialist connected the farmers to a landowner, helped both parties navigate a lease agreement, and by January 2013 the farmers had secured a five-year farm lease. In 2013 they initiated production of livestock and vegetables, and completed a business plan with the assistance of the Intervale Center. They went through the Northeast Organic Farmers Association journey farmer program, gaining hands-on production and marketing assistance. The VT NFN helped the farmers access services not directly funded through BFRDP, such as food safety training and technical assistance with irrigation from UVM Extension. "We wouldn't have had a chance of being profitable without the assistance of the Vermont New Farmer Network," says Ploog. Barely two years after accessing land, sales in the second year in August 2014 already surpassed sales from the entire first year. The farm added seven new wholesale accounts at local colleges and food hubs.

Vermont African Eggplant Farm

With a lifetime background in farming, Janine Ndagijimana came to Burlington, Vermont in 2011 through the U.S. Refugee Resettlement Program. She approached Vermont New Farmer Network (VT NFN) partner, Association of Africans Living in Vermont (AALV) in the fall of 2013 seeking farmland in Burlington. She requested coaching from a VT NFN marketing specialist. AALV assigned an outreach worker to meet weekly with Ndagijimana, which led to a partnership between UVM Extension New American Farmer Program and Ndagijimana to get the Vermont African Eggplant Farm off the ground. She now has a half acre of Inhori in full harvest, and is already profitable in her first significant year of sales. Demand still exceeds supply and Ndagijimana plans to expand onto three more acres of leased land to triple her sales for next year.

Alchemy Gardens

Scott and Lindsay of Alchemy Gardens first accessed services through the Vermont New Farmer Network in order to connect to a network and get help with their business plan. They have attended many workshops in the Rutland Region offered collaboratively by RAFFL and NOFA-VT and find these networking opportunities invaluable. Scott and Lindsay participated in NOFA-VT's Journey Farmer program, which prepared them well for entering and completing the Farm Viability program. Over the course of their five years in business, Lindsay and Scott have completed a business plan and developed financial goals for their farm using holistic management principles. They are trying to "work smarter, not harder" and "think outside the box when problem solving." Specifically, they have increased the efficiency of their production systems and developed tracking systems that allow them to make informed decisions about what they grow and what markets they serve. In year three, farm income had increased enough to allow Scott to work full-time on the farm and enable them to begin hiring farm help.

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

With regard to increasing the effectiveness of the network, we have developed a online and in-person intake assessment and individual farm development planning tools, which project partners are using and which farmers can access and use independently online. We have also conducted ongoing professional development of the project partners and offered full-day trainings (each attended by about 30 agricultural service providers each) for our partners and representatives of the broader network of agencies and who serve beginning farmers in Vermont and adjacent states. Evaluation surveys from these trainings show that the large majority (91-100%, depending on the session) find these sessions useful. Service providers reported that the trainings help them identify and deepen their understanding of topics to discuss with farmers, and connect with other people and organizations to collaborate with in the future.

How have the results been disseminated to communities of interest?

The partners in the project routinely communicate with farmers and agricultural service providers and educators from public and nonprofit agencies. Partners produce newsletters, maintain websites and blogs, post on Facebook and Twitter, and submit articles to local newspapers and magazines. Over the course of the project, partners published 97 newsletters issues, 348 new web pages, 190 blog posts and received media exposure 76 times. Project staff have presented on about the network, its progress and accomplishments at several conferences, including the 2012 and 2013 Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program Project Directors' meetings, the 2013 Women in Agriculture Conference in Des Moines, and the 2014 Women in Agriculture Educators Conference in Indianapolis in 2014. We have also presented to Food Hub project managers and BFRDP project directors via webinar.

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

{Nothing to report}

Participants

Actual FTE's for this Reporting Period

Role	Non-Students or faculty	Students within Stuffing Roles			Computed Total by Role
		Undergraduate	Graduate	Post-Doctorate	
Scientist	0.2	0	0	0	0.2
Professional	2.8	0	0	0	2.8
Technical	0	0	0	0	0
Administrative	0.2	0	0	0	0.2
Other	0.3	0	0	0	0.3
Computed Total	3.5	0	0	0	3.5

Student Count by Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) Code

{NO DATA ENTERED}

Target Audience**Target Audience:**

Over the course of the project, partners provided information, education, training, and referrals to 1263 aspiring and beginning farmers, primarily from Vermont, with most of the other participants residing in New Hampshire, New York and Massachusetts. At their initial point of contact, 325 people described themselves as aspiring farmers (not yet in commercial operation), 204 were farm workers, 191 were apprentices or interns and 543 were operating a commercial operation that had been in business fewer than 10 years. Sixty percent of participants were women. At the initial point of contact (including online registration forms) it was optional to provide ethnicity information and many participants declined to do so. Of total participants, there were at least 130 individuals from socially disadvantaged and/or limited resource groups, primarily immigrant and refugees populations from Bhutan, Burundi and Somalia.

Attendance in project offerings was as follows:

- Referrals/individual information requests (Up to 2 hrs service): 706;
- Workshops (up to 6 hrs instructional time): 718;
- Courses and classes (6+ hours instructional time): 225;
- Field-based training sessions (hands on/skill-building, 1-20 hrs): 556;
- Mentoring and apprenticeship training: 95
- Internet-based learning (webinars, online-tools and self-assessments): 431
- Individual technical assistance (2-20 hrs service per individual): 161
- Beginning farmer networking events: 129

Many individuals participated in multiple project offerings – combining in-person and online education, coaching and technical assistance that met their particular learning needs and abilities. As a result, the sum of the above categories exceeds the number of total participants.

The Vermont New Farmer Project website (www.uvm.edu/newfarmer) served as a key access point to organizations, services and educational services for new and aspiring farmers from Vermont and throughout the country. As new pages and resources were added to the website, we focused on helping farmers streamline their access to information relevant to their enterprises and stage of farm development. Google Analytics data on traffic to our website indicates that the approach was successful. Over the life of the project, the website received 64,076 visits (with 23,017 visits from 14,663 users in the final year of the project). About 40 percent of site traffic came from Vermont, with sessions from adjacent states – Massachusetts, New York and New Hampshire – accounting for an additional 25% of traffic. While the number of users grew steadily throughout the project, returning users comprised about two-thirds of all traffic – indicating that users found the site worth returning to for additional information and resources.

Our online coach has been accessed by 619 users, of whom 492 are in the US and 204 are from Vermont. The coach is designed to allow users to do a self-assessment anonymously or to create an account in order to access individualized learning plan tools and services. Of all users, 120 have created accounts.

Products

Type	Status	Year Published	NIFA Support Acknowledged
Websites	Published	2014	YES

Citation

Vermont New Farmer Project website, <http://www.uvm.edu/newfarmer>

Type	Status	Year Published	NIFA Support Acknowledged
Conference Papers and	Other	2013	YES

Citation

Holtzman, Beth, "The Vermont New Farmer Network," part of the Local/Regional Agriculture Projects Panel at USDA Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program 4th Annual Project Director Meeting
Cruzando Fronteras: Supporting Diversity in Agriculture
Hosted by The University of Texas-Pan American, Dec. 2013.

Type	Status	Year Published	NIFA Support Acknowledged
Conference Papers and	Other	2014	YES

Citation

Holtzman, Beth, "Web-based Tools to Enhance Outreach to Women Farmers," presentation at the 2014 Women in Agriculture Educators National Conference, Indianapolis, April, 2014.

Type	Status	Year Published	NIFA Support Acknowledged
Conference Papers and	Other	2014	YES

Citation

Peabody, Mary, "What Farmers Need to Know about Social Media and Marketing," at the at the 2014 Women in Agriculture Educators National Conference, Indianapolis, April, 2014.

Type	Status	Year Published	NIFA Support Acknowledged
Conference Papers and	Published	2013	YES

Citation

Planning for Profit: Pricing Strategies for Diversified Farmers presentation at the 2013 Women in Sustainable Agriculture Conference, Des Moines, Iowa.

Other Products**Product Type**

Other

Description

"How to Determine the Right Farm Rental Rate." Factsheet available online at <http://www.uvm.edu/newfarmer/land/RentalGuide.pdf>. This guide provides tips and techniques for determining fair cash rental rates for farmland, equipment and infrastructure. Oriented to new farmers and landowners who may be new to leasing land to farmers. Accessed by over 300 times since publication in mid-2014.

Product Type

Other

Description

New Farmer Project newsletter, monthly electronic newsletter. Provides news, updates, and links to resources relevant to aspiring and beginning farmers. Current mailing list has 668 people on it.

Product Type

Other

Description

Women's Agricultural Network Newsletter. Electronic newsletter providing profiles, news and updates relevant to the learning needs of women farmers. The newsletter's current mailing list is 987 people.

Product Type

Other

Description

Rutland Area Farm And Food Link newsletter, electronic newsletter. Resources, events and learning opportunities geared to farmers in the greater Rutland Vermont area. Audience: approximately 900 people in the greater Rutland Vermont region.

Product Type

Other

Description

NOFA-VT Newsletter. Resource, events and learning opportunities for farmers in Vermont and adjacent regions. Beginning farmer segment reaches approximately 220 individuals of the approximately 2400 on the total list.

Product Type

Survey Instruments

Description

2013 Vermont New Farmer Network mid-project survey. Collected responses from April-May 2013. 304 total respondents, documenting progress participants are making and needs for the next 12-18 months. Respondents answered questions regarding changes in knowledge, skill, confidence and decision-making ability. They also responded to questions about steps taken to start and expand new farmer businesses.

Product Type

Survey Instruments

Description

2014 Vermont New Farmer Network end-of-project survey, collected responses from May-June 2014. 289 total responses. Documented progress participants are making in building knowledge, skills, confidence and decision-making ability. Also documented actions taken to start and expand new farm businesses.

Product Type

Educational Aids or Curricula

Description

Vermont New Farmer Project Online Coach.

The coach guides new and aspiring farmers through a self-assessment and provides next steps and people/organizations to contact. The self assessment questions are organized around the following areas: Commercial Farm Experience; Prior Business Experience; Basic Preparedness; Goals; Land; Capital (Money and Credit); Production; and Markets. The tool allows for anonymous self-assessments or for individuals to set up an account and through which they can develop learning plans and receive assistance. There have been over 1200 coach sessions since it launched in 2013, with roughly 120 people setting up user accounts. Available at: <http://www.uvm.edu/farmcoach/use-coach>. There have been over 1200 coach sessions

Product Type

Educational Aids or Curricula

Description

Vermont New Farmer Project Learning Plan Template. The Farm Learning Plan helps new and aspiring farmers map out the action steps to build the skills, knowledge and/or resources for a successful farm business. It is designed to help new farmers focus on 1-3 objectives. Individuals can work independently or with a New

Farmer Project advisor. The online interactive version is available at the New Farmer Project coach at <http://www.uvm.edu/farmcoach/use-coach>. A pdf version is available at: <http://www.uvm.edu/newfarmer/?Page=service-provider-resources/CoachingResources.html&SM=service-provider-resources/sub-menu.html>

Product Type

Educational Aids or Curricula

Description

New Farmer Skill Assessment. A tool to help coaches and farm advisors create a graphic representation of an individual beginning farmer's relative strengths in terms of knowledge, skills and resources needed to start and grow a farm enterprise. Available at: <http://www.uvm.edu/newfarmer/?Page=service-provider-resources/CoachingResources.html&SM=service-provider-resources/sub-menu.html>

Product Type

Educational Aids or Curricula

Description

Growing Places, course for aspiring and start-up farmers. Offered in-person versions fall of 2011, 2012 and 2014 and online versions in winter of 2012, 2013 and 2014. 90 students enrolled in Growing Places over the three years of this project.

Product Type

Educational Aids or Curricula

Description

Building a Sustainable Business class. Guides participants through developing a first business plan. Offered in December 2011, 2012 and 2013. 32 students over the three years of the project.

Product Type

Educational Aids or Curricula

Description

Introduction to Ag Financial Management class. Participants learn about and develop a balance sheet, cash flow statement and income statement. The course also covers budgeting, financial risk management and components of loan readiness. Offered February 2011, 2012 and 2013. 36 students over the three years of the project.

Product Type

Educational Aids or Curricula

Description

New Farmer Project webinar series. Monthly webinars (except during summer months) covering production, financial, marketing, land access, regulatory and other key topics for new farm business owners. All webinars were recorded and are available to view at: http://www.uvm.edu/newfarmer/?Page=webinars/webinar_recordings.php&SM=webinars/sub-menu.html.

Sessions included:

Business and Financial Topics:

- Filing a Schedule F: Federal Tax Preparation for Farmers (January 2012 and February, 2013)
- Reaping the Rewards of Farm Financial Records (December 2012).
- Where are the Grants? (November 2012)
- What are Lenders Looking For? (December 2013)

Crop Production Topics

- Crop Plans for Year-Round Production in High Tunnels (September 2012)
- Enhancing Native Pollinator Populations on Farms
- Farm-Scale Permaculture: Techniques, Practices and Philosophies for Permanent Agricultural Systems
- Getting Started Growing Small Grains in New England (March 2014)
- Intro to Common Insect Pests and Their Management on the Vermont Vegetable Farm (June 2012)
- Intro to Shiitake Mushroom Production (February 2014)
- Managing Vegetable Transplants for Success (January 2013)

- Cold Storage Options For Beginning Produce Farmers (October 2013)

Farm Safety

- Farming for Life: Using Body Mechanics & Other Tools to Do What You Love Longer (May 2012)

Food Safety

- Creating Products from Farm Produce: Best Practices for Food Safety and Regulations for Value-Added Food Production in Vermont. (April 2013)
- Managing Food Safety Risks in Agritourism (December 2011)

Livestock Production

- Fencing for Multi-Species Grazing (May 2013)
- Fencing Follies: Common Mistakes and Fencing Options for Diversified Livestock Operations (April 2012)
- Principles of Pastured Pork (November 2011)
- The Bottom Line on Broilers (December 2011)
- Transitioning to a Commercial Goat Dairy (March 2013)

Marketing

- CSA Primer
- Direct Markets: Pricing for Profit (February 2012)
- Managing Food Safety Risks in Agritourism (December 2011)
- Selling to Regional Markets: How Vermont Farmers Sell Directly Out of State (May 2014)
- Social Media Strategies for Farms (May 2012)

Product Type

Educational Aids or Curricula

Description

Advanced internship programs following the Collaborative, Regional Alliance for Farmer Training model. Approximately 35 individuals participated in this season-long training and mentoring opportunity.

Product Type

Educational Aids or Curricula

Description

"Goal Driven Planning with the Farm Business Assessment Web," as part of the NIFTI Webinar on Metrics and Evaluation for Food Hubs. Jessie Schmidt contributed to a national training on evaluation and metrics.

Product Type

Other

Description

New Farms for New Americans Training program offered classroom education, hands-on, field-based skill development and individual coaching and technical assistance to immigrant and refugee farming populations.

Changes/Problems

Almost all partner organizations experienced staffing changes during the project. These changes resulted in the need for training and professional development of staff that was not anticipated. Also, time table for rule making related to the Food Safety Modernization Act affected our ability to complete some publications we anticipated. Instead, we were able to do more work regarding land access and access to capital and credit.