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Program Code: BFRDP

Program Name: Beginning Farmer and Rancher

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Performing Department

{NO DATA ENTERED}

Co-Project Directors

{NO DATA ENTERED}

Departments

{NO DATA ENTERED}

Non-Technical Summary

The Organic and Sustainable Experiential Learning for Beginning Farmers project will provide a new level of experiential education, training and support to increase the adoption of organic and sustainable farming practices, especially among beginning and/or young farmers. It is not easy to begin farming. There is a lack of accessible and comprehensive learning and communication resources available for beginning and/or young organic farmers. Technologies, consumer demand, and markets strongly influence the profitability and risks for farmers in changing from conventional to organic systems. A thorough understanding of these risks and practical methods to manage risks are essential. During the first ten years of farming, beginning farmers face additional challenges. Although diversifying, many university programs are based on conventional agriculture. Cooperative Extension programs are also slow to provide organic agriculture training as they are faced with tight budgets and time constraints that impede new programs. Farmers indicate that other farmers are the most useful resource for information and conferences, workshops, field days, and seminars as the second most useful resource. On-farm internships are actively sought by many to improve skills and knowledge of organic systems. Although there is no typical organic farmer, the National Ag Statistics Service (NASS) shows that certified and exempt organic farmers, on average, tended to operate smaller farms (280 acres) than all U.S. farmers (418 acres). Organic agriculture also has a higher share of younger operators (average age was 53 for organic and 57 for all farm operators). Additionally, the Upper-Midwest boasts three of the top ten states with the highest numbers of organic certified farms including Wisconsin, Minnesota and Iowa. To address this need, the Organic Field School at the Gardens of Eagan, Renewing the Countryside, and the Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service (MOSES) will implement an innovative blend of initiatives to promote learning and communication opportunities including the expansion of the Organic University, the Organic Farming Conference programming, and social networking for beginning and/or young farmer relationship building. The project will focus its activities on beginning farmers, with a specific set of offerings at the OFC designed for the subset of young beginning farmers.

Accomplishments

Major goals of the project

In the The Organic and Sustainable Experiential Learning for Beginning Farmers project over 420 beginning and/or young farmers participating in the specially-designed Organic University courses will gain understanding organic production systems, and will learn to utilize a diversity of tools and resources to help them achieve their farm management goals. An additional 380 young organic stewards will participate in workshops and social activities at the Organic Farming Conference and 2,500 young farmers are participating in the online social and learning network. Through this project the Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service (MOSES) and our partners will for each of the next three years: 1) hold two beginning farmer focused courses in the in-classroom Organic University, 2) create two on-farm Organic University courses for beginning

farmers to participate in hands-on training, 3) develop an ongoing Young Organic Stewards track at the Organic Farming Conference, 4) provide financial support for beginning farmers to participate in training, and 5) create a social and learning online network.

What was accomplished under these goals?

MOSES is pleased to report that we vastly exceeded our estimation of impact with the Organic and Sustainable Experiential Learning for Beginning Farmers project. Expecting to impact 420, we now have 1,350 listed in our database who have self-identified as "New Organic Stewards," the name we have coined to collect our participants together.

Using a diversity of educational venues, MOSES created programs which introduced new farmers to successful farm models, and showed them the "reality" of the kinds of decisions they must make to succeed.

Seven on-farm field days showcased successful organic and sustainable systems, most of them run by new farmers themselves. With no fee to attend, the day-long events offered tours and candid discussions about what worked and didn't work on each of the farms. Both farmers and others who had outside perspectives to share (such as FSA and NRCS staff) led discussions at the diverse events. Participants were encouraged to ask questions and pick up MOSES written resources. Over 437 individuals attended the seven field days. Comments in evaluations highlighted the attendee's appreciation for the learning they participated in: "I found the field day very informative and thorough on the topics presented. I appreciated the presenters and subject matter, expert's willingness to share information and to answer all the many questions we asked no matter the depth of knowledge it required. I especially appreciated the electric tractor demonstration and explanation. It was truly inspiring!! Thanks to all of you who had a part in making the day terrific!!"

The **MOSES Organic Farming Conference** became the annual opportunity for NOS participants to reconnect and learn a broad diversity of farm production and marketing topics in a classroom setting. Through the project, **3 day-long "Organic University" intensives** and **15 90-minute workshops** were offered, as well as **8 social events** targeted to the group. Information booths hosted by staff from partner Renewing the Countryside at each conference became the focal point for individuals to meet and share. Those registering for the conference were asked to self-identify if they wanted to be considered a "New Organic Steward," and over the 3 years the number choosing to do so went from 200 in 2012, to 264 in 2013, and then 509 in 2014. Feedback from the conference on evaluations included "presentation was awesome, chock full of resources," and "EXCELLENT workshop! Loved this so much and would love to see more, fantastic energy and ideas."

157 new farmer scholarships, with a value of \$34,800, were given for the conference, OU and later New Farmer Summit. Letters from scholarship recipients gushed about how valuable the experience, and important the support, was for participants.

"It was at your conference that we learned of the process of certification and the in' and out' of it. We met many different vendors and spoke to them. It was a joyous occasion to be with the many experts and learn sustainable ways to achieve our goal. There was a wealth of knowledge present. Our operation is impacted and forever changed."

"We are a Hmong couple farmer in Hartford, WI. Our farming background goes as far back as Laos; Youa has been farming since she was a little girl. We thank you so much for your kind donation so we were able to take the opportunity to attend the 25th MOSES Conference in La Crosse, WI. We hope you will continue to provide support so other farmers like us will have the same opportunity to attend such an amazing event. During the conference, we were taken by surprise to see so many committed, organic farmers and aspiring organic farmers. We were able to network with other farmers. We have heard about the abundance of resources and display booth in the arena but actually seeing it was beyond our imagination. We will share what we have learned at the conference with other Hmong farmers. We are planning to return next year and bring along friends and families so they will be inspired as much as we were."

We received 41 thanks-you letters for our scholarship program. The positive comments go on and on. This program really has made a difference.

In April of 2014, in a departure from our original plans, and in response to our constituent's requests, we held a three day **New Farmer Summit**. The event took place in an exciting educational venue on a farm that had been in operation for only a few years. 150 new farmers joined us for a day of farm tours, 24 workshops, local and organic food and great networking and camaraderie.

Again, evaluation comments were numerous, we enclose a few here: "Really loved the workshops! Gained tangible skills for myself and the farmers I support. Practical things of note were the business planning workshop (month-by-month cash flow!) and ideas for value added products." "I liked the emphasis that many of the presenters had on being creative and flexible in your approach to farming. I plan to use this selling value added products. Also I plan to apply the dual emphasis on profitability and land stewardship that each presenter described while speaking on land management."

The program was so popular that participants, speakers and partners have strongly encouraged MOSES and RTC to make it available on an annual basis, potentially in other regions.

A **New Organic Stewards page** on the MOSES website was created early in the project (<http://mosesorganic.org/neworganicstewards>) to announce activities, post project highlights and connect participants to each other via social media. The NOS webpage had 7,564 unique page views in the past year, since the MOSES website was redesigned. The **NOS Facebook** page (<https://www.facebook.com/NewOrganicStewards>), and **Twitter** account (@FarmerNinja) boost 400 fans and 1,118 followers, respectively. These social media outlets are very active with information updated almost daily.

Farmers project and the development of the New Organic Stewards program. MOSES and RTC definitely plan to continue forging the momentum the project has generated. The group of targeted constituents- those thinking of farming, or less than 10 years farming, in organic and sustainable systems told us over and over how much they appreciated educational offerings in which "no question was too basic," and where they could meet others in situations similar to theirs. Thanks to the BFRDP for supporting this valuable, high-impact program.

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

Seven on-farm field days showcased successful organic and sustainable systems. (2012: Beginning Livestock Production, 2013: Farm Hack, and Vegetable Diversification. 2014: Beginning Orchards and Small Fruits, Diversified Markets, Growing Organic Herbs, and Produce, Syrup, Livestock and Pizza.)

The **MOSES Organic Farming Conference** became the annual opportunity for NOS participants to reconnect and learn a broad diversity of farm production and marketing topics in a classroom setting. Through the project, **3 day-long "Organic University" intensives** (2013: Adding Meat to Potatoes, and Small Farm Profitability, 2014: Five W's of Transitioning to Organic Row Crops) and **15 90-minute workshops** (2012: Farm Town in Real Life: Deciding What to Grow, Show me the Money, How Much for Just One Egg, and Generate Your Organic Community, Share Your Farm Story. 2013: Machinery for Beginning Farmers, Nurturing the Next Generation of Organic Livestock Farmers, Integrating Livestock into Your Veggie Operation, Marketing Contracts and Long-Term Leases, and Organizing for our Collective Success: Beginning Farmer Resources and Coalition Building. 2014: Savvy Marketing Made Easy, Your First Tractor: Primer for New Vegetable Farmers, Holistic Management of Sheep and Goats, Land Access Hacks, Dos and Don't for Obtaining Organic Certification and Orchard Beginnings for Aspiring Tree Fruit Growers.) were offered, as well as **8 social events** (social breakfasts, open mic nights and new farmer meet and greets each year) targeted to the group

In early April, 2014, 150 farmers attended a three day **New Farmer Summit**, with a day of farm tours and 24 workshops specific for new and beginning farmers. Workshop topics ranged from intro to organic certification to developing a business plan, and farming with bees to raising organic vegetables.

157 scholarships, with a value of \$34,800, were given for the conference, OU and New Farmer Summit.

In March 2013 MOSES initiated the **New Farmer Corner** in the Organic Broadcaster newspaper, a place for new farmers to find print information geared directly to their needs. Numerous stories were printed in a diversity of issues (printed 6x per year) and mailed at no charge to over 11,000 households, as well as available free online. Lindsay Rebhan, from partner organization Renewing the Countryside, developed articles based on what was new in the world of beginning farmers, as well as insightful interviews with new farmers, with tips so others could learn from their experiences.

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How have the results been disseminated to communities of interest?

The MOSES website, (<http://mosesorganic.org/projects/new-organic-stewards/>) Facebook and Twitter have been our primary vehicles for conveying information out to the public. New and beginning farmers are frequently web savvy and computer and social media oriented.

MOSES has also relied on project partners to disperse information about upcoming events and project results, as well as dispersing press releases to online and standard media outlets. MOSES has a strong relationship with the area's traditional media, and regularly have ag publication reporters attend and report on our events. A reporter attended the New Farmer Summit and did a nice write-up, found at http://www.thecountrytoday.com/farm/article_0923e0f6-c3e9-11e3-948b-001a4bcf887a.html. Several participants wrote about their experiences on web blogs, for instance <http://justafarm.org/journal/2014/4/7/new-farmer-summit-april-3-5-2014>.

As noted above, the MOSES Organic Broadcaster has had a dedicated section devoted to the project, with numerous articles highlighting new farmer stories, resources and activities. Each issue was mailed at no charge to over 11,000 households and available free online.

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 Staffing Roles			Computed Total by Role
		Undergraduate	Graduate	Post-Doctorate	

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	0	0	0	0
Professional	1	0	0	0	1
Technical	0	0	0	0	0
Administrative	1.5	0	0	0	1.5
Other	0	0	0	0	0
Computed Total	2.5	0	0	0	2.5

Student Count by Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) Code

{NO DATA ENTERED}

Target Audience

Through the Organic and Sustainable Experiential Learning for Beginning Farmers project the Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service (MOSES) and our partner Renewing the Countryside (RTC) brought education, learning and community to over 1,350 new and beginning farmers. We also engaged hundreds of others via print, online and social media communications.

In this three-year project we hosted 7 on-farm field days, held 3 day-long educational intensives, offered 15 beginning farmer workshops, hosted 8 social events for new farmers, held a 3-day "New Farmer Summit" attended by 150, and facilitated social media and web-based connections. We offered \$34,800 in scholarships to 157 new farmers to attend the MOSES Organic Farming Conference and New Farmer Summit. As of the end of the project, 1,350 individuals identify themselves as part of the MOSES "New Organic Stewards" program.

Participants have been those considering farming as a career and those in their first ten years of farming. As there is no age limitation for participants, we have seen a range from 18 year olds to 65 year olds participating in the program offerings. The common thread is being able to learn about sustainable farming from a very elementary starting point, and access to others in a similar mode for support, friendship and information-sharing.

Products

{Nothing to report}

Other Products

{Nothing to report}

Changes/Problems

As noted in the 3rd annual report, holding only one planned field day in 2012 and lack of registrations at a planned field day in 2013 left us with extra resources coming into 2014. Over the project period we also saw the unraveling and eventual dissolution of one of our project partners, the Field School at Gardens of Eagan.

The combination of these two circumstances led project leaders to meet in late 2013 to assess what was most needed to fully complete the project. Although our New Organic Stewards loved the activities we offered at each annual Organic Farming Conference, they were clamoring for an event "all their own," where everyone would be on the same level and the expectation was that no question was too basic. After brainstorming with partners and participants, we decided to host a New Farmer Summit, with a goal of 100 attendees, in April 2014. Relying on our expertise developed in organizing 25 years of successful organic conferences, (with over 3,400 attendees in 2014), we were able to quickly organize a stellar program and offer it at a reasonable price. Feedback and evaluations were, once again, extremely positive. Project partners, presenters and attendees begged MOSES to consider continuing and expanding the program into the future, possibly moving into new geographies. We have been seeking funding to support the continuation of this successful program.