

Title:	Farm Incubator Educational Training Program and Web-based Resource Center for Beginning Farmers and Ranchers		
Sponsoring Agency	NIFA	Project Status	COMPLETE
Funding Source	Non Formula	Reporting Frequency	Annual
Accession No.	229205	Grants.gov No.	GRANT11010573
Project No.	ALAX-013-1611	Proposal No.	2012-00675
Project Start Date	09/01/2012	Project End Date	08/31/2015
Reporting Period Start Date	09/01/2012	Reporting Period End Date	08/31/2015
Submitted By	Phyllis Campbell	Date Submitted to NIFA	07/01/2015

Program Code: BFRDP

Program Name: Beginning Farmer and Rancher

Project Director

Duncan Chembezi
256-372-4970
duncan.chembezi@aamu.edu

Recipient Organization

ALABAMA A & M UNIVERSITY
4900 MERIDIAN ST N
Huntsville, AL 358101015
DUNS No. 079121448

Performing Department

SMALL FARMS RESEARCH CENTER

Co-Project Directors

Ward, Rufina
Wynne, Karen
Gyawali, Buddhi
Banerjee, Swagata
Zippert, John
Spencer, Robert
Tune, Diane
Holt, JC

Departments

Biological & Environmental Sci
{NO DATA ENTERED}
Agribusiness
Alabama Cooperative Extension

Non-Technical Summary

Alabama A&M University's (AAMU) Small Farms Research Center has a long history of serving the needs of small, limited resource and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers in Alabama. Since 2008, the Center has assisted over 300 agricultural producers (NBFRs, SDFRs, small and limited resource producers) through value-added producer grants, crop insurance, cost-share and loan programs totaling over \$4 million. AAMU, in partnership with the Alabama Cooperative Extension System (AAMU and Auburn University), Rosita's Farm, Alabama Agricultural A+ Marketing Association, Tune Farm, and Federation of Southern Cooperatives, is leading the effort to recruit, grow and assist at least 225 new and 600 beginning farmers and ranchers in Alabama over three years. Over 2,000 more farmers and ranchers are expected to be reached through general outreach training, newsletters and online web portal. Farm incubators and web-based resource center are central to the success of this project. The growing number of young, limited resource, minority, retired, and immigrant farmers and ranchers who aspire to own and/or operate farmland and participate in government programs generally lack access to capital, land, markets, and are usually uninformed about various aspects of agricultural, legal, and procedural mechanisms of acquiring land, equitably accessing government services, and lack the technical know-how of how to use their land profitably. Many are also dissatisfied with the current revenue streams from agricultural farmlands as most of their lands are either not effectively utilized or their products are not market-competitive. Thus, this project's long-term goal is to grow the next generation of farmers, ranchers and entrepreneurs who will use the experience, skills and land stewardship to improve and enhance sustainability and productive capacity of their farms and ranches.

Accomplishments

Major goals of the project

The long-term goal of this project is to grow the next generation of farmers, ranchers and entrepreneurs who will use the experience, skills and land stewardship to improve and enhance sustainability and productive capacity of their farms and ranches. Our specific objectives are to: (1) recruit new and beginning farmers and ranchers (NBFR) and provide them with agricultural training and certification courses via five Farm Incubators strategically located across Alabama; 2) establish a web-based resource center within AAMU's Small Farms Research Center for developing and implementing effective training programs and disseminating educational materials and resources; (3) strengthen farm incubator training and education through farmer-to-farmer mentoring, farm field days, on-farm demonstrations, entrepreneurship and business training, web-based instruction, and certification programs; and (4) provide targeted technical assistance and outreach training to expand production and access niche markets for specialty crops and small ruminants. Through a carefully crafted promotional campaign and five strategically located Incubator Farms [four incubator farm satellites and one hub (AAMU Research Station)], we expect the majority of the NBFRs (at least 75%) each year to become aware and familiar with USDA programs and services. Between 500 and 600 BFRs will benefit from farm incubator programs and engage in agricultural activities more effectively. At least 200 BFRs per year will receive information on USDA programs. Thirty (30) new and fifty (50) BFRs will have completed and submitted applications to USDA agricultural programs for loans, technical assistance, and subsidies; 125 farmers will have new whole-farm management and marketing plans and as a result will have increased farm gross revenues by at least 25%. At least 60-75 new farmers and ranchers per year will receive training from the five farm incubators (for a total of at least 180-225 in three years) and will either have their own farms or transitioned to model farmers. These farmers and ranchers will have better understanding of potential multiple use value of lands, improved credit record, improved production and marketing of value-added products, enhanced networking among BFRs for peer-to-peer learning, and, ultimately, improved and efficient use and retention of farmlands for self-sustained and competitive U.S. agriculture. By the end of the project, about 50 NBFRs will be ready to receive direct loan assistance from USDA and 50 BFRs will engage in urban farming/community gardens. Over 90% of NBFRs will manage profitable farm businesses. At least five model farms will be developed in four corridors of Alabama, which will later be adapted by larger groups of BFRs in their communities. Based on strong partnership, target audience support, and the proposed innovative training approach involving incubator training and online resource development, this project will likely be self-sustaining.

What was accomplished under these goals?

The Center developed promotional brochure detailing the New and Beginning Farmers and Ranchers Program (NBFRP) and curriculum. Before starting the NBFRP, the Center along with its partners (subcontractors) developed (4) brochures focusing on incubators activities and main objective related to the project. During the reporting period and through this project, the Small Farms Research Center developed (15) factsheets to assist in training and in response to demand for technical information and advice by agribusinesses, entrepreneurs and small businesses.

The Small Farms Research Center and its farm incubators (Rosita's Farm, Tune Farm, Tri-State Rabbit Association and Federation of Southern Cooperatives) has reached over (2,576) producers, aspiring farmers and ranchers, and agribusinesses. During this year, the project has held over (65) training workshops and seminars, monthly and regular group meetings during the reporting period, a total of (236) agricultural producers and (12) small agribusiness entrepreneurs, and a total of (151) producers have received one-on-one counseling and mentoring advice through farm/home visits by project personnel. Over 3,548 agricultural producers have been contacted through general outreach (SSAWG regional conference, radio, newsletters, social media, online and telephone communications). These milestones have been reached through effective partnerships and close collaboration with key partners including the Alabama Sustainable Agriculture Network, Alabama Cooperative Extension System, Alabama Farmers Market Authority, Federation of Southern Cooperatives, National Crop Insurance Service, the National Center for Appropriate Technology, Tri-State Rabbit Growers Association, Alabama Agricultural A+ Marketing Association, and Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group, other local community-based organizations.

Seventy-four (74) participants were trained at Rosita's Farm, followed by (35) interns at Tune Farm in organic production; while Alabama Agricultural A+ Marketing Association has enrolled (116) producers interested in meat goats, sheep, rabbits and pastured poultry. Ninety additional aspiring farmers and producers utilized the AAMU Small Farms Research Center incubator hands-on training in areas of financial planning, marketing and business planning.

Small Farms Research Center (AAMU) Incubator. The Center developed a curriculum to focused on the following topics to train producers, landowners and aspiring agribusinesses;

- Land Acquisition and Tenure
- Production Practices and Management
- Business Planning and Financial Management
- Market and Marketing
- Capital and Access to Capital

The Center developed and implemented a well-rounded, but flexible program. The New and Beginning Program was strategically developed to assist beginning farmers and individuals on how to start farming (crop production and livestock), financial avenues and resources available, profitable and emerging enterprises, and hands-on and research-based

information from specialist, experts, and fellow farmers. We held courses, farm field days, seminars, and one-on-one consultation with farmers and landowners, including community leaders and grass-root organization interested in agriculture.

Training Programs (Series)

Business Planning and Financial Management-The Business Development & Financial Management training courses consisted of the following: Business Plan Development, Business Economics and Marketing, Financing Farm: Access to Capital, Access to Capital & Other Programs Available, and Alabama Farm Credit.

The Market & Marketing Planning training courses consisted of the following: New Cottage Food Law, Direct Marketing Alternatives, Branding Using Social Media and Market Marker.

The Production Management Practices training courses consisted of the following: How to Get Started: Farmer Perspective, Sustainable Agriculture, Niche Markets, Water Catchmen System, Hydroponic System, Soil Management/Nutrition, Crop Rotation as an IPM Tool, OMRI (Organic) Pesticides & Pesticide and Veggie Garden Organic Production.

Small Ruminants Training course consisted of the following; Goat, Sheep, and Rabbit production on Healthcare/Wellness, Production, Breeding, Housing, and Marketing.

Rosita's Farm and Tune Farm Incubator. Rosita's Farm and Tune Farm worked closely with the Center in developing a curriculum on fruits and vegetable production. These two incubators focused on organic production. They worked closely with aspiring and beginning farmers to assist with hands-on agribusiness planning, exposure to traditional sustainable and organic farming methods and emerging sustainable technologies and strategies. The facility provided interns experience to work the farm and receiving hands-on instruction in production and marketing of small scale organic vegetable production. The facilities also provide mentorship for new and upcoming farmers and ranchers, once the internship were completed. Agricultural activities include opportunities to visit other local producers and close relationship in a farmer's perspective in starting a farm.

Informational Hands-On Demonstrations/Workshops/Seminars Held: High Tunnel Learning Network (series), Keeping Bees, Organic weed management/ Irrigation, Fall Crop Production, Cover Cropping Winter Production, Quick-Book Training, Farm to Table Dinners, Value-Added Products (Cheese Making, Lotion and Soap, Mushroom Foraging Workshop), and Community Supported Agriculture
Farm Field Days

Alabama Agricultural A+ Marketing Association and Tri-State Rabbit Growers Association. Alabama Agricultural A+ Marketing Association and Tri-State Rabbit Growers Association. worked closely with the Center in developing a curriculum on livestock production (specifically goat, sheep and rabbit). The incubators focused on new and beginning farmers in in getting started in livestock production, programs available, and maintaining a healthy herd. The facility also provides farm tours, marketing session, and access to USDA approved processing facilities.

Informational Hands-On Demonstrations/Workshops/Seminars Held: Livestock Production, Marketing Livestock, Healthy Herd, USDA processing facilities and Farm Field Day

EDUCATIONAL CURRICULUM/TRAINING MODULES. Through this project, the Center developed several educational curriculum/modules for producers and landowners. This process will be on-going process throughout the project in developing modules for different areas of agriculture, risk management strategies, and agribusiness. This information will be readily available to and for our clientele. The modules completed are listed below as follows;

- Land Acquisition and Tenure
- Production Practices and Management
- Business Planning and Financial Management
- Markets and Marketing
- Capital and Access to Capital
- Sustainable Beef Management
- Organic Vegetable Production
- Livestock Production and Management
- Risk Management Strategies
- Leadership Training
- Cooperative Development

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

This project has reached over **3,548** producers, landowners, and aspiring farmers. The Small Farms Research Center staff has devoted more than **(498)** hours to providing one-on-one training, education and assistance to producers in areas of business planning, recordkeeping, farm financial management, direct marketing, value-added enterprises, government programs and general technical assistance throughout the state of Alabama. From our program, we have received great feedback from the New and Beginning Farmers and Ranchers Program. Please see comments below:

- Enjoyed the Cooperative Marketing Vs. Direct Marketing class.

- Excellent Business Plan Development course!
- Excellent Information given from the Access to Capital course!
- Excellent job, every workshop I have attended; I have learned something new.
- Internship with Rosita's Farm.
- Great presentation!
- I learned a lot! Great Crop Rotation as IPM Tool session!
- Knowledge was great; possible grant writing class!
- Really enjoyed the program/workshop. Taking away several great points! Please keep me updated with information.

The majority of participants including limited resource and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers reported more knowledgeable on the current programs and USDA programs available. Through this project, (78%) producers acknowledged the access to capital, hands-on-marketing strategies and branding and marketing were the most important attributes for new and beginning farmers. Followed by access land and familiarity to USDA government program (64%) were strongly important for assisting farmers and landowners.

How have the results been disseminated to communities of interest?

Throughout the project, the Center focused on recruitment through informational forums in town-hall meetings, local newspapers, radio stations and broadcasting to introduce the program to potential clientele. We utilized our Facebook page, small farms database, Small Farms Research Center Newsletter to promote the project, including our local agricultural partners. Presently, our website <http://www.aamu.edu/smallfarmscenter/> house all material such as the curriculum, factsheets, and other educational resources in areas of need for new and beginning farmers and ranchers (NBFR). The fact sheets were also disseminated through one-on-one consultation, our small farms database, workshops, farm field days and agricultural events.

Through the project, the program has conducted workshops and group meetings, farm field days, utilizing the incubator approach. The farm incubator assisted new and aspiring farmers and ranchers by providing hands-on demonstration, working closely with farm managers in establishing their own successful farming business, and providing a network system of specific resources and services that are difficult to access for start-up producers on their own.

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

The Small Farms Research Center will continue to work closely with new and beginning farmers and ranchers in an holistic approach on programs and services available. The Center will continue to provide training to farmers on access to capital, USDA government programs and financial management, including production practices and small ruminant production.

There's still much to be done to assist new and beginning farmers.

Participants

{Nothing to report}

Target Audience

The primary target group for this project was African-Americans and other underserved population in chronically and economically depressed communities in Alabama. This target audience included Native American; Hispanics American; and urban and per-urban producers; small ruminants (sheep, goat and rabbit) producers; sustainable and organic producers; and other immigrants producers and transitioning farmers and workers.

Products

{Nothing to report}

Other Products

Product Type

Audio or Video

Description

This video was developed for the New and Beginning Farmer Training Program. The video highlights soil sampling for new and beginning farmers. Please view link below

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JJsE5CsTci8>

Changes/Problems

The major challenge posed from the project was nurturing a new and beginning farmer from start to finish. For many of the new and beginning farmers, we worked with them so closely that it impacted our overall effectiveness. For some producers, we discussed every detail, including the process and expectation of working with USDA agencies and programs. However, many producers appreciated the personable and constant interaction.

|