

<b>Title:</b>	<b>Building Farmers in the West: Strengthening Foundations and Fortifying the Community Supporting Specialty Producers</b>		
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**Program Code:** BFRDP

**Program Name:** Beginning Farmer and Rancher

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**Non-Technical Summary**

Beginning farmers and ranchers will continue to create and maintain economically viable agricultural operations through renewal of the "Building Farmers in the West" project: the ongoing project that Colorado and five partner Western states successfully competed for in the first Beginning Farmer Rancher Development Program grant cycle in 2009. The renewal project, "Building Farmers in the West: Strengthening Foundations and Fortifying the Community Supporting Specialty Producers," extends the ongoing project (which will end in mid-2012), as well as an earlier Colorado-based educational program that was initially piloted in Boulder County. Based on what we have learned through our project's two-year implementation and evaluation processes (see Accomplishments appendix for more detail), we are developing a second stage program that leverages new partnerships to enhance educational opportunities for smaller-scale Western specialty crop and livestock producers, and for the non-profit partners who frequently support the production, marketing and networking that are so critical to the development of new or transitioning farm or ranch enterprises. We have adjusted our team of states based on several lessons learned: 1) the Intermountain states (Utah, Colorado, Idaho, Arizona, and Wyoming) have the most common business planning challenges (large distances between some producers and markets, and short growing seasons); 2) in states where other similar programs have emerged, the Building Farmers program may be in less demand (for example, in Oregon and Washington with the Growing Farms and Cultivating Success programs); and 3) the Building Farmers program only works where there is sufficient existing producer engagement to allow us to recruit experienced and enthusiastic producers for program advisory boards and instructional teams. Our newly balanced project team, based on a mix of community-based organizations and university personnel, seeks to organize and deliver 30 programs that will equip up to 400 producers with the improved knowledge, planning skills, and directed technical assistance necessary to compete and succeed in specialty produce and livestock markets. Building on the knowledge and skills our project participants gain during the program, our goal is that 200 farmers and ranchers will then operationalize a new production planning, input management, harvesting, processing, supply

chain strategy or marketing process within their business, based on their formal business plans. Business plans are then refined with assistance from experienced producers, Extension and community partners with whom they work over the course of the program. By adding a train-the-trainer program, this project will better enable our community-based partner organizations to gain competency in teaching and mentoring new farmers and ranchers and be able to use the curriculum to reach an even greater number of participants.

## Accomplishments

### Major goals of the project

1) Continue to enter and compete in emerging markets by providing a classroom and experiential learning program that improves knowledge and skills in several key areas of ag business development, business planning principles, marketing, and recordkeeping and financial analysis; and 2) Provide program participants that have completed their baseline business plan (in Principles of Business Planning and Management) an opportunity to deepen their knowledge in at least four critical subject areas: integrated production and market planning through improved recordkeeping, value chain management (with more focus on supply chain linkages), farm transitions (business succession planning), and agribusiness management skills (targeted at leadership and value chain management).

### What was accomplished under these goals?

The primary way that we evaluated classroom programs was through pre- and post- surveys of participants. In summary, we found many changes in knowledge, business strategies and experiences.

In general, farmers and ranchers entered the classroom with relatively few years of experience in direct market sales. For example, Utah farmers entered the course with the longest average experience in direct market sales at 2.5 years, with Wyoming farmers having 1.6 years' experience prior to the class, followed by Arizona (1.3 years on average) and Colorado (1.1 years). Across the Colorado programs, Larimer County farmers had the greatest direct market experience at 1.5 years and Chaffee County farmers had the least at less than one year.

In addition to being less experienced in direct market channels, most participants hadn't identified which specific channels they would use, with 23% selling to individuals, 17% selling in farmers markets, 14% selling in restaurants, 12% selling through roadside stands, 12% through CSAs, and 8% through wholesale channels. Participants did indicate that they were interested in selling into different channels. For example, 56% were interested in selling through restaurants, 52% through farmers markets, 44% directly to individuals, 38% through roadside stands, and 32% through wholesale channels.

After taking the class, however, participants had re-oriented both marketing and production. Participants primarily wanted to pursue farmers markets (65%); direct to consumer sales (61%); followed by restaurant and CSA sales (both at 59%). Forty-six percent indicated that they were interested in selling through wholesale channels, increasing from 32% at the beginning of the course.

In addition, and because the program has been given in some form for almost 10 years, we did a long term evaluation. From our survey of long term outcomes of program participants, with 100 respondents, we found:

### **Snap Shot:**

- 49 own their own farm (86% of which are for profit operations); 6 manage someone else's farm; 4 have positions that are food systems related, but off farm.
- On average, the Building Farmers course increased participant's interest in agriculture (3= interest level before the course, 3.92 = interest level after the course, scale = 1-5, n=91).
- 27% of class participants established mentor relationships during the class program (n=100), 81% of those relationships continued after the Building Farmer course ended (n=22).
- 187 business relationships were established as a direct result of the Building Farmer course.
- Of the 100 respondents, 99% took the beginning class, 3% took the advanced class, 4% participated in an experiential learning mentorship or internship, and 5% have participated in advisory committees to support the program.

Some quotes and comments shared include:

"In 2014 our farm switched up our target market, and helped to start a distribution/marketing cooperative with other farmers in the area. Based on feedback we got from the Building Farmers course, we reduced the number of vegetable varieties that we grow, and extended our growing season. We got grant funding to support investment in high tunnels from contacts we gained during the course."

'Unintended' consequences of the course (i.e., not directly related to farm financial outcomes):

- Networking!
- Increased acceptance in the community.
- Started the transition of the farm to the son.
- Got me more engaged in the political process around farm issues.
- Learned about other types of agricultural support services - legal services, NRCS

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

From the long term evaluation we found:

Of those farming in 2014:

- Average gross farm income = \$97,924; median = \$15,000 (n=51)
- Average operating expenses = \$94,071; median = \$13,000 (n=49)
- Positive operating profit margin (expenses/sales  $\leq$  1) = 30 (n=46 with complete information)
- Average full time employees (including yourself or family members) = 2.03; median = 2 (n=62)

### Sample:

There were 7 participants in the Experiential Learning Program during the grant (2013-2015).

### Evaluating Experiential Learning Participants.

The limited number of participants necessitated that qualitative evaluation methods used. A sample of 6 participants were interviewed (interviews lasted from 10-20 minutes). Interviews were transcribed using www.Rev.com. Transcripts were analyzed and themes were triangulated until saturation of content was achieved. Of the 6 participants, 3 were interns or mentees and 3 were supervisors in the building farmer's experiential learning program.

I realize that both of you wanted significant positive outcomes; these are certainly provided, but the very nature of the questions asked them to reflect and provide suggestions for improvement. Therefore, some may be more critical than what you anticipated; but nevertheless the re-read provided for some context of benefits and challenges.

Benefits:

1. New production practices
2. Social capital
3. Real life learning
4. Successful pairings

Challenges

1. Scheduling
2. Utilization of the mentor

Some interesting quotes from the participants included:

- There were moments when I had questions about like, "What is happening to my broccoli?" I wouldn't have learned that in the class. I could just call him up and say, "What did this?" That was good to have specific things that were going on in my farm that I could ask him about for his produce or planting density ... That kind of thing ... Succession planting, all those kind of questions that really didn't apply to anybody in class so we didn't learn about those because had different ...

- That relationship with that mentor has become just a great thing. I feel like now, years later, I can still call him up and just say, "Hey, what about this?" or "What about succession planting?" We have this really great relationship because of that initial mentorship (better after the completion of the mentorship program - may not realize this until much later)

- ... I mean you understand how great all the information is but I don't think you understand how really great all those connections that you make in the program are and having access to all the information you've been given. It doesn't necessarily help right at the time or I didn't understand the full implications of it at the time. Afterwards it's like, "Wow! Okay, I have access to all this stuff and all these people." In the class, my mentor and everybody ... I can call on those reserves and that's great. I would recommend any of those.

- Yeah. The other thing that I didn't expect from the class was relationships that I formed with other students in the class. Some of the other students in the class now buy from me. I sell them flowers. I sell them produce and they take it to farmers' markets and sell it because I don't have time to. I've really developed some really great relationships with the people that were other students in the class as a way to market things. If I don't have time to go on the weekend and sell at the farmer's market, they'll take whatever I have.

- Also there was somebody that came to speak at our class who owned a natural food store and he came just to talk about his business and his store. I've developed a really good relationship with him and sell him herbs and cut flowers all summer long and any extra produce that I happen to have. So that was a really great relationship that came just because of the class.

- A little more structure, I think, would have been nice. But it's a hard thing. Because if you look at it from the farmer's point of view they are extremely busy. So for them yeah maybe they want to take an intern on and share their knowledge and stuff like that. But a big part of it is also having help at their farm. So there this balance between their time and setting aside time to teach you outside what they need you to do to learn. So it would have been nice to maybe have more accountability and make sure that the goals of the mentee could be reached as well as what the mentor was hoping to get out to the program.

In summary, the experiential learning programs were an interesting pilot, but there are several recommendations for improvement in the future including:

1. Need to set clear expectations in the Experiential Learning Program

2. Program is mutually beneficial for participants; there is inherent networking and social capital building
3. Tension on the desire to help and train others yet they may compete in the same competitive market.

#### How have the results been disseminated to communities of interest?

Within Colorado, we continue to meet as a Building Farmer team under the broader umbrella of the Food Systems Extension workteam. That community of educators will continue to provide programming and courses for new entrants and graduates as resources are available. The new Colorado Fruit and Vegetable Growers are an important new partner, and some of the leadership of that association are past program participants

We are exploring options to add courses online, at cost for participants, to make these materials more widely available.

However, there are concerns about losing the part of the program's culture related to building community.

We have presented papers throughout Colorado and the US about how the Building Farmers program has developed a new network of clientele and stakeholders for CSU Extension that is allowing us to pursue new applied research, for example, benchmarking financial performance in small, mid-size, beginning and direct sales farmers, and a new market channel assessment funded by AMS FSMIP.

We are likely to continue supporting Beginning Farmer programs in allied states, most notably a recent grantee Iowa State, in developing their own line of programming through material sharing and train the trainer programs.

#### 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 with Staffing Roles			Computed Total by Role
		Undergraduate	Graduate	Post-Doctorate	
Scientist	0.3	0	0.1	0	0.4
Professional	0	0	0	0.2	0.2
Technical	0	0.2	0	0	0.2
Administrative	0.1	0	0	0	0.1
Other	0	0	0	0	0
Computed Total	0.4	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.9

##### Student Count by Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) Code

Undergraduate	Graduate	Post-Doctorate	CIP Code
1	1	1	01.01 Agricultural Business and Management.

#### Target Audience

Given the program (over its full six years of BF funding, has seen and revisited just over 400 potential beginning farmers, we tried to do a long-term evaluation of all. Our results netted N = 100, or a response rate = 25% (includes only those farms with current contact information).

Given the diversity of programs offered, the target audience can be described in a number of ways including:

Our evaluation of classroom programs delivered under only this grant covers 168 program participants from four states: Colorado (117); Utah (4); Wyoming (8); Arizona (39). Colorado had three different program sites: Denver (delivered 1 time per year over 3 years), Larimer County (delivered 1 time per year over 3 years), and Chaffee County (delivered 2 times over the three-year project period).

Overall the classroom program reached 115 beginning farmers (68%); 43 intermediate-level farmers (26%); and 10 advanced-level farmers (6%). Colorado reached the greatest proportion of beginning farmers (70%), while Wyoming reached the greatest proportion of intermediate farmers (37%). In addition, 17 veteran to farmer participants received targeted curriculum training on controlled environment production business planning.

#### Products

Type	Status	Year Published	NIFA Support Acknowledged
Websites	Published	2015	YES

**Citation**

http://buildingfarmers.com/  
 NIFA acknowledged at:  
 http://buildingfarmers.com/partners/

Type	Status	Year Published	NIFA Support Acknowledged
Conference Papers and	Submitted	2015	YES

**Citation**

Jablonski, R., T. Schmit, D. Thilmany and C. Laughton. 2015. Local Foods Benchmarking and Outreach: The Farm Credit Council's Lending to the Next Generation of Agriculture Conference. Presentation to the Farm Credit Young, Beginning and Small Farmer Conference. Louisville KY 2015.

Type	Status	Year Published	NIFA Support Acknowledged
Journal Articles	Awaiting Publication	2015	YES

**Citation**

Martin, M., R. Hill, A. Van Sandt and D. Thilmany. 2016. Colorado Residents Trusted Sources of Agricultural, Biotechnology and Food Information. Forthcoming. Ag BioForum.

**Other Products****Product Type**

Survey Instruments

**Description**

To conduct a long term evaluation, a survey and interview instrument asking about progress on farm goals, community networks, application of course materials and knowledge was developed. More publications with findings from that evaluation are in development

**Product Type**

Other

**Description**

Promotional brochures and a new logo are being used to share impacts and opportunities to participate in future programs

**Changes/Problems**

As we move off federal support, our biggest challenge will be sustaining programs, but we are excited to see communities, county Extension personnel and sponsors willing to share time and resources to do some programming moving forward. However, materials may not stay up to date, so we will look for other sources of funding to do applied research and create new curriculum.

From the long term evaluation of participants we heard:

Common recommendations for the course

- Would like more 'in-depth' information on financials.
- More funding opportunities.
- More contact with mentors.
- More depth in developing business plans.

From the experiential learning participants, they shared:

1. Mentees were not sure how to best utilize their mentors during a busy season.
2. Intern complexity - the challenges of trying to learn, time to work and time to teach

### 3. Processes for successful mentoring pairing

Quotes from the mentees suggested:

1. I wish there was a little longer time period than just the one-year mentoring. Maybe a more defined what you can do with your mentor or how many hours you should talk to him or having that more clearly defined.
2. Consider placing multiple interns at one farm: "Why wouldn't you want to pair people with the farm they want to work on?" It makes a lot of sense. I don't know, clearly this might not be - I mean, the extension agent we were working with was wishy-washy on the idea of us having two people; the idea of fairness came into it. I understand having to be fair, but in my head it's like, "Why would someone go internship at a farm that they didn't necessarily think was going to be beneficial for them?" You know what I mean?