

Title:	Preparing a new generation of Illinois Fruit and Vegetable Farmers		
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Program Code: BFRDP

Program Name: Beginning Farmer and Rancher

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{NO DATA ENTERED}

Non-Technical Summary

Increased demand for locally produced foods is well documented nationally and in Illinois. Despite increasing demand, only 1.1 percent of all crop sales recorded in Illinois for 2007 were fruits and vegetables. The average age of farmers in the U.S. in 2007 was 55.3 years, and for fruit growers the average age is 57.7 years (USDA NASS 2009). These national figures reflect the situation in Illinois as well. Many current growers will not be operating their farms 10 years from now. To meet the demands of consumers, their roles must be filled by new growers. Barriers to success for beginning farmers center around two broad issues: (1) Start-up costs are high, and in many areas there may be an absence of available land to purchase or rent (Ahearn and Newton 2009). (2) New and beginning farmers lack sufficient knowledge about business planning, production details, and marketing; this deficit is the basis for dozens of training programs across the nation (USDA 2011). This BFRDP project cannot directly influence land availability or costs, but it focuses on small-acreage fruit and vegetable enterprises (lower land costs and greater availability of smaller parcels) and it provides training on land acquisition and rental. The need for training beginning fruit and vegetable farmers is especially great because they must make many more farm-specific decisions about crops, varieties, planting dates, season extension, irrigation, food safety, postharvest handling, marketing plans, pricing, etc. than commodity crop farmers. This project will (1) increase the number of new farmers producing fruits and vegetables throughout Illinois and enhance the viability, profitability, and sustainability of new enterprises; (2) assist a specific target audience - seasonal farm workers - to begin viable, profitable, and sustainable small produce farms; and (3) increase the expertise of university Extension educators, high school and community college teachers, and educators in community organizations so that they can continue programs for new farmers after the term of this grant. To meet these goals, we will (1) provide year-long series of classroom and in-field educational programs and offer incubator plots to new and aspiring farmers in southern, central, and northern Illinois; (2) offer similar series of programs and provide incubator plots specifically for a targeted audience - Spanish-speaking field workers; and (3) train educators and develop a library of online resources.

Accomplishments

Major goals of the project

Goals: 1. Increase the number of new farmers producing fruits and vegetables throughout Illinois and enhance the viability, profitability, and sustainability of new and beginning enterprises to meet increasing demand for local produce and contribute to local economies. 2. Assist a specific target audience - seasonal Hispanic farm workers - in beginning viable, profitable, and sustainable small produce farms. 3. Increase the expertise of university Extension educators, high school and community college teachers, and educators in community organizations so they can better aid new farmers. Objectives. 1. Provide year-long programs of classroom and hands-on / in-field instruction on essential skills and information for 60 or more new farmers per year for three years so that new growers have the information base to be successful. Provide 20 or more of these new farmers (per year) access to land to allow low-risk experience growing vegetables with expert oversight. 2. Provide year-long programs of classroom and hands-on / in-field instruction on essential skills and information for 30 seasonal workers who want to become independent farmers so that they have the knowledge to become successful. Provide 15 of these seasonal workers (per year) access to land to allow low-risk experience growing vegetables with expert oversight. 3. Develop human and informational resources by providing year-long classroom and hands-on / in-field instruction on essential skills and information to Extension educators (15), allied educators (5-10), and vocational agriculture and FFA teachers (90) so that these educators can continue programs for new growers and by developing an online resource library (English and Spanish) of educational materials for new and aspiring fruit and vegetable farmers. Outputs: 180 new and beginning farmers will receive valuable practical information; 60 beginning farmers will gain farming experience. Additionally, 90 seasonal workers will receive valuable practical information; 45 seasonal workers will gain farming experience. 125 educators will receive valuable practical information, and an up-to-date resource library will be available on-line.

What was accomplished under these goals?

We held classes and provided hands-on and in-field experiences in English at three locations (north, central and south) in Illinois for 3 years. Three cohorts of students completed the 1-year program at each location. At each location, classes were held one Saturday per month, 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. (108 classes over the 3-year period). 222 participants (new farmers, aspiring farmers, and educators) completed this program.

Spanish-language programming also was offered at 3 locations (north, central and south) per year using flexible schedules to meet the needs of participants at each location. 47 participants completed the Spanish-language program.

27 participants used incubator plots to gain hands-on farming skills.

67 educators (Extension educators, high school or community college agriculture teachers, and urban farming coordinators, 21 of whom were registered students in the program) attended one or more sessions to gain additional knowledge.

A teaching curriculum comprised of 40 Power Point presentations with audio and associated online references was developed and refined. It is available to our students and accessible to all beginning farmers and the public at www.newillinoisfarmers.org.

Participant responses to questionnaires over the three years combined indicated that as a result of this program.

- 99% experienced a change in knowledge, abilities, skills, and/or farming intentions.
- 86% plan to start farming or are currently farming and plan to continue.
- 90% of those currently farming plan to increase the scale of their farming operations.
- 5% decided not to start farming or to discontinue their initial efforts.
- 59% changed their attitudes about how to operate a successful small farm business.
- 63% adopted plans or practices to increase their production efficiency.
- 51% adopted plans or practices to increase their environmental sustainability.
- 82% plan to increase their participation in future educational programs for fruit and vegetable producers.

Participants from the 3 years combined will grow at least 90 acres of high-value fruits and vegetables in 2016. They also will grow fruits and vegetables in the equivalent of ten or more 30'X96' high tunnels. Nearly all produce will be sold direct-to-consumer, and the resulting annual gross sales for 2016 production by participants in this program is estimated to exceed \$1.1 million.

Participants were asked, "To what extent did this program meet your expectations?" Responses (averaged over 3 years):

- Exceeded = 48%
- Completely = 30%
- Mostly = 21%
- Mostly not = 1%

- Not at all = 0%

Participants were asked, "How much did this program help you in developing your farming plans? Responses:

- A great deal = 67%
- Just what I needed = 17%
- Somewhat = 16%
- Very little = <1%
- Not at all = 0%

Participants were asked to indicate which of the following documents they had completed at the end of the course. Responses:

- Business plan = 62%
- Production plan = 52%
- Marketing plan = 43%
- Financial plan = 41%

While a significant portion of participants had not completed all these documents at the end of one year's training, many were still planning their farming enterprises, and the fact that they had not completed all of these plans is probably evidence that they recognize how much they still had to investigate after a year of classes before assuming they could present a business or financial plan that would be accurate enough to matter.

Participants were asked to indicate if at the end of the course they knew how to Responses:

- Access USDA programs and services (NRCS, FSA, etc.) = 92%
- Access markets = 83%
- Access business management support (SBDC, etc.) = 83%
- Access production information (seed catalogs, newsletters, production guides) = 97%
- Access grower networks = 82%
- Access credit = 83%

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

62 educators (Extension educators, high school or community college agriculture teachers, and urban farming coordinators, 21 of whom were registered students in the program) attended one or more sessions to gain additional knowledge.

How have the results been disseminated to communities of interest?

A teaching curriculum comprised of 40 Power Point presentations with audio and associated online references was developed and refined. It is available to our students and accessible to all beginning farmers and the public at www.newillinoisfarmers.org. Participants also received paper copies of Power Point presentations and numerous other materials. Information was distributed regularly to participants via email messages on a list-serve, and that list-serve also provided networking opportunities for participants.

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	0.5	0	0	0	0.5
Professional	0.9	0	0	0	0.9
Technical	0.6	0	0	0	0.6
Administrative	0.6	0	0	0	0.6

Actual FTE's for this Reporting Period

Role	Non-Students or faculty	Students with Staffing Roles			Computed Total by Role
		Undergraduate	Graduate	Post-Doctorate	
Other	0	0	0	0	0
Computed Total	2.6	0	0	0	2.6

Student Count by Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) Code

{NO DATA ENTERED}

Target Audience

The target audience for this project overall and in Year 3 was aspiring and beginning fruit and vegetable farmers operating on a small scale (generally 0.25 to 20 acres) with less than 5 years produce farming experience. This included English speakers in our core program and Hispanic workers in separate classes taught in Spanish. We also provided professional development opportunities to Extension educators and other educators who will continue to work with beginning farmer audiences.

Products

{Nothing to report}

Other Products

Product Type

Educational Aids or Curricula

Description

A teaching curriculum comprised of more than 40 Power Point presentations with audio and associated online references was developed and refined. It remains available to our students and accessible to all beginning farmers and the public at www.newillinoisfarmers.org.

Changes/Problems

{Nothing to report}