



## BEGINNING FARMER AND RANCHER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

# Educational Enhancement Projects:

Years 2009-2012

**T**HE LONG-TERM GOALS of the Educational Enhancement Projects (EEP) are to identify gaps in beginning farmer and rancher training by evaluating all existing programs and to develop and conduct train-the-trainer projects to address these gaps. In addition, the Educational Enhancement Projects periodically collect and analyze information on the impacts of the beginning farmer and rancher programs on specific audiences of beginning farmers and ranchers based on topic or region. Between 2009-2012, five organizations received Educational Enhancement Project funding under the [Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program](#).

### FARM BEGINNINGS COLLABORATIVE

*Expanding and Strengthening Farmer-to-Farmer Training in a Multi-State Project*

The Minnesota-based Land Stewardship Project (LSP) started the [Farm Beginnings®](#) program in 1997 as a farmer-led, community based training and support program with the goal of getting more farmers on the land farming sustainably. Farm Beginnings® programs are now offered in twelve states under the Farm Beginnings Collaborative (FBC): Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Missouri, Kentucky, Indiana, New York and Maine. With this Educational Enhancement Project, LSP is expanding the use of farmer-to-farmer training models by connecting with established Collaborative Regional Alliances for Farmer Training (CRAFT) organizations, which span at least 16 states. LSP is working to increase farmer participation, strengthen and expand farmer-to-farmer networks, enhance the skills and knowledge of Farm Beginnings trainers, increase the capacity to document training outcomes, and improve program sustainability of FBC and CRAFT organizations.

In FY2013, the fourth year of the project, LSP reached 26 organizations in 20 states. Activities included: individual phone consultations with fundraising trainers; conference call trainings on best practices for farmer networks, farmer-to-farmer training, and the role of farmers as trainers; the identification of a simple, inexpensive data collection and analysis tool for use by FBC; and six-hours of train-the-trainer sessions during the annual meeting of FBC organizations. Training topics included working with farmer presenters, recording keeping, and managing time and content for the Farm Beginnings Course.

### NORTHEAST TRAINING NETWORK

*Enhancing Beginning Farmer Success Through Vibrant Support Networks in the Northeast*

Although there exist many groups providing on-the-ground support to beginning farmers and ranchers, they often work in isolation, missing opportunities for cross-promotion, sharing of best practices, identification of gaps, and reflection on larger issues affecting their work. The result for beginning farmers in the region is training and support that is patchy and often difficult to locate and access. The EEP team from Cornell University has pursued three major strategies to foster vibrant support networks for beginning farmers in the Northeast region:

1. Establish an educational team to assess needs and deliver training to standard BFRDP projects
2. Formalize a regional coalition of beginning farmer service providers
3. Model an approach for engaging youth in farming

A regional coalition – the Beginning Farmer Learning Network (BFLN) – was formed in early 2010 and has strengthened the skills of 60+ BFSP organizations in the region. From those organizations, nearly all reported plans to network with others in order to strengthen their programs and evaluation strategies as well as to evaluate BF competencies and share the results with the network.

The project website – [www.nebeginningfarmers.org](http://www.nebeginningfarmers.org) – offers 13+ online courses that have helped at least 800 new farmers launch or enhance their farm business. The website also hosts a “New Farmer Hub,” which contains pre-business planning tutorials, an events calendar, a map of 82 beginning farmer

service providers, and links to publications. In addition, the team has nearly two dozen YouTube videos highlighting production practices of successful farms. The videos currently have as many as 70,000 to 128,000 views and have been shared by dozens of classroom-based teachers and other organizations.

## LIVESTOCK ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

### *Enhancing Environmental Planning & Leadership of Beginning Farmers & Ranchers*

At the University of Nebraska – Lincoln Extension, the Educational Enhancement Team worked to improve the success rate of new and beginning livestock and poultry producers by enhancing their awareness, knowledge, and practices of proper environmental management, compliance with pertinent regulations, and proactive advocacy for stewardship and conservation.

Over the course of their project, the EEP team produced numerous user-friendly educational resources, utilizing technology and traditional methods, as well as provided technical assistance and curriculum support to BFR trainers. The team developed two smartphone apps – the Manure Calculator and the Manure Monitor – which assist with nutrient application, economic value calculations, and record keeping.

The team developed numerous curriculum modules – subjects include Environmental Regulations, Greenhouse Gases and Ag, Managing Manure Nutrients, Water Quality 101, Managing Dead Animals, and Small Scale Poultry and Livestock – and also translated videos and other livestock-focused curriculum into Spanish. All of these modules have been cross-referenced to the national Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resources, AFNR, Career Content Cluster Standards.

Most of the deliverables are accessible on the [Livestock and Poultry Environmental Learning Center](#) (LPELC) website.

## ASSET BUILDING FOR NEW FARMERS

### *Expanding Agricultural Individual Development Accounts: A Multi-State Collaborative*

California FarmLink works to help farmers access land and capital, which are the two biggest barriers to entry as identified by beginning farmers and ranchers. This Educational Enhancement Project expanded the nation's first agricultural Individual Development Account (IDA) pilot programs to eight states and nine partner organizations. IDAs – matched savings programs – are typically only one component of a partner organization's programming, which might also include technical assistance, business planning, and financial literacy training.

The CA FarmLink EEP team has worked to develop curriculum, manuals, and other resources both for existing IDA programs

as well as to help establish new programs. The EEP team conducts sessions with topics that include: the IDA model, program design and implementation, financial education delivery, curriculum for IDA participants, fundraising for agricultural IDA programs, and various aspects of IDA program management.

In addition, CA FarmLink holds focused conference calls with the group of collaborative IDA organizations for problem-solving, mentoring, and skill-sharing. The group also shares tools and materials on an [online worksite](#), and, through extensive skill and knowledge sharing, they are developing best practices for IDA programs. In 2013, the partners conducted outreach and recruitment to over 3,000 beginning farmers and ranchers, and a total of 121 beginning farmers or ranchers started in IDA programs in 2012 and 2013.

## FINANCIAL PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT

### *Evaluation and Improving Educational Instruments and Outreach (EIEIO) for Beginning Farmers*

In an innovative and competitive agri-food business environment, beginning farmers and ranchers need to be equipped with the right business and financial skills. In order to ensure their preparedness, the Farm Credit Council, in partnership with the Wallace Center at Winrock International, works with beginning farmer and rancher training organizations to increase their capacity to teach financial planning and management. Their approach has been to develop a community of practice in order to link experienced business and financial literacy experts with beginning farmer and rancher (BFR) trainers. Within the community of practice, participants share best practices, identify obstacles, and test new approaches.

Individual EIEIO facilitators continue to make visits to BFR trainers to offer consultations as well as to measure the effectiveness of financial skills trainings. The visits enable the EIEIO team to identify gaps and opportunities for improving training programs.

Over the course of the three-year project, the EIEIO team developed over two dozen curricula and trainer resource guides. They established a website – [www.farmbiztrainer.com](#) – to provide trainers with their resources and to communicate with the community of practice. The EIEIO resources are also available on [www.start2farm.gov](#).

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*The Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program is administered by the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, a sub-agency of the United States Department of Agriculture. For more information, please go to [www.nifa.usda.gov](#)*