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 – 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 support organizations in the Northeast.
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.

**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](http://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](http://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](http://www.nifa.usda.gov)