

Beginning Farmer Learning Network 2016*
Pre-Conference Session at NESAWG
Raising the Bar on Beginning Farmer Training

8:30am Coffee, Registration

9:00am Welcome and Setting the Stage - overview the agenda, share objectives for the day

9:15am Introductions – encourage people to share something they’re working on, or something new and exciting with their organization in the past year

10:00am Whole Group: Making the case for formalizing beginning farmer training – presenting the Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship as a model (Anu)

10:30am Break

10:45 Legal Landscape of Labor Regulations on Farms – Interns, Apprentices, Volunteers – Rachel Armstrong from Farm Commons

Overview: As the regulatory climate around beginning farmer on-farm experiential learning through volunteer work, apprenticeships, and internships continues to change, beginning farmer service providers must empower themselves to deal with the current laws and regulations surrounding on-farm training.

If time permits: Discussion on the implication of the current regulatory climate regarding farmer training, core competencies, developmental stages, and the need for an accredited program.

12:15 – 1:30pm – LUNCH

1:30 – 3:30pm Split into 3 Tracks – Advancing the Beginning Farmer Pipeline, Financial Metrics and Teaching Farmers How to Manage Labor

TRACK 1: Advancing the Beginning Farmer Pipeline – Chris Wayne and Jennifer Hashley

American Farmland Trust’s 2016 *“Gaining Insights, Gaining Access”* report notes that more than 90% of New England’s retirement-age farmers have no identified successor for their farm business. Despite the tireless work of beginning farmer service providers, there are concerns that we are not developing management/ownership-ready beginning farmers fast enough to replace retiring farm businesses.

*NOTE: The Beginning Farmer Learning Network is a loosely organized group of non-profits and government agencies throughout the Northeast providing any form of specific support to new or beginning farmers. We have been meeting annually since 2009. The group is led by the Cornell Small Farms Program and is open to anyone who fits the above description.

For many the training pipeline that funnels a beginning farmer from exploring a career in agriculture to their 10th year in business management or ownership is neither clearly delineated nor straightforward. For some programs, there are simply not enough committed beginning farmers to fill out classes/trainings/incubator farms. For others, bottlenecks within the training pipeline leave beginning farmers with strong skills in certain areas (i.e. production, marketing), but critically lacking in others (leadership, human resources, management).

How, then, do we both grow the beginning farmer pipeline and effectively move aspiring farmers through it? This workshop will be a facilitated discussion--including small group breakouts--on new ways to:

- 1) Increase the size of the beginning farm pipeline to include more beginning farmers by
 - a. Engaging new audiences
 - b. Demonstrating business viability and financial opportunity
 - c. Incentivizing participation
 - d. Offering school credit

- 2) Identify service provider expertise gaps that cause bottlenecks within the pipeline and,
 - a. Train new experts
 - b. Engage non-ag experts (i.e. Human Resource firms)
 - c. Create new policy recommendations
 - d. Formalize (legalizing, accrediting) apprenticeship and mentorship programs

Learning Objective: Participants will leave with new insights into the “big picture” of beginning farmer training, as well as changes their organization can implement to grow the pipeline and move farmers through it to long-term success.

TRACK 2: Best Metrics: Understanding Beginning Farmers Financial Position– Dorothy Suput (The Carrot Project), Chris Laughton and Jon Jaffe (Farm Credit East)

Do you use metrics to evaluate beginning farmers financial position? Do you wonder if you are using the right ones? Would you like to better understand how and why different metrics are used for beginning farmers? During this session, we will discuss metrics used by entities as different as Farm Credit and The Carrot Project to launch a discussion about the metrics you are using and how and why. Bring your questions and help us prioritize the best metrics for different purposes and stage of business.

Learning Objective: Participants will understand the value and explore the use of different metrics for ascertaining a beginning farm’s financial position.

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TRACK 3: Teaching Farmers how to Manage the Full Life Cycle of Farm Labor – Beth Holtzman (UVM), Mary Peabody (UVM) and Rachel Armstrong (Farm Commons)

Labor has been identified as a key management hurdle for many beginning farmers. In this interactive session we address the complex issues farmers should consider as they make the decision to hire their first employees. We'll explore the steps in hiring, training and retaining farm employees from drafting job descriptions and policies to exit interviews. We'll share some decision-making tools and resources to help you coach farmers in becoming effective managers.

Learning Objective: Participants will learn the key components of the labor management cycle for farm employees including best practices for coaching beginning farmers. Participants will be introduced to available tools and resources to make farm labor management less overwhelming for beginning farmers.

3:30 – 4:00pm – Come back together as a whole group to share insights and ideas generated by the days' presentations and working sessions

4:00 – 5:00 Future of the BFLN (Beginning Farmer Learning Network) – present scenarios and allow whole group discussion. Make a plan for 2017 before we leave.

***NOTE: Each participant in this full-day pre-conference session will receive a USB thumb drive with the following documents on it:**

- ❖ American Farmland Trust's "Gaining Insight, Gaining Access" report
- ❖ New fact sheets developed by FarmRoots on unwaged labor (authored by Kate Giessel)
- ❖ New publication on Farm Labor by Rachel Armstrong at Farm Commons

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