Steps to Success in New Farmer Training

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Five major programs:

- Farmer Training Initiative
- On-Farm Initiative
- Urban Initiative
- Farms Forever Initiative
- Civic Engagement Initiative

Programs in northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin (rural, peri-urban, and urban).

Founded 1998 as educational partner to Angelic Organics, a for-profit CSA farm.
Angelic Organics Learning Center

Farmer Training Initiative

*CRAFT (Collaborative Regional Alliance for Farmer Training)

*Stateline Farm Beginnings

Also:
- Farm Asset Builder
- Kiva Loans
- Open Books
- Farm Dreams
230 aspiring farmers have graduated* from Stateline Farm Beginnings®

- CRAFT farmers are faculty and mentors for these new farmers

* 70% of Stateline Farm Beginnings graduates are farming
What is the Farm Beginnings Collaborative?

We are a national alliance of independent, regional groups of farmers and farmer-training support organizations working together to promote Farm Beginnings®.

Guiding Principles

• Farmer Led  Farm Beginnings is a farmer-led business training program for new and beginning farmers. It was started by experienced farmers, and farmers participate at all levels, as steering committee members, classroom presenters, on-farm presenters, and mentors.

• Community Based  We offer new farmers a means to establish relationships with farmers, businesses, resources, and consumers within a local network that supports and strengthens the local food and farming system.

• Sustainable Farming  Our programs support sustainable farming by promoting farming practices that are ecologically sound, economically viable, socially just, and achievable for new and beginning farmers.
Where is Farm Beginnings?

12 FB programs... 13 organizations... serving 14 states
FBC Member Organizations

1. Organic Growers School
2. The Land Connection
3. FARRMS
4. Angelic Organics Learning Center
5. Greenmarket
6. Grow NYC
7. Food Works
8. OEFFA
9. NEBRASKA Sustainable Agriculture Society
10. Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners
11. Hawthorne Valley
12. Dakota Rural Action
The FBC supports our individual programs and thus the farmers we serve. The Farm Beginnings Collaborative is generously funded by the USDA Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program "Farm Beginnings from Regional to National: Beginning Farmers and Viable Farms Initiative" Grant No. 2016-70017-25502.
What is Farm Beginnings?

Farm Beginnings is a yearlong training program that offers:

- farm business-planning sessions
- a series of on-farm field day workshops
- one-on-one mentoring from local farmers

The model is **adaptable** to diverse regions and people.

Farm Beginnings has been recognized as "a model that is creating strong new farm businesses across the country" by Kathleen Merrigan, then U.S. Deputy Secretary of Agriculture, 2012.
How do we build a successful farmer training program?

1. Understand beginning farmers as learners (what do they need?)

2. Understand what your group or organization needs to develop
Beginning Farmers as Learners

Who are they?

- Adult learners
- Diverse backgrounds and experiences
- Educated, second career
- Excited about farming, but with little experience
- Generally assume that the learning process will be quick
- Majority women
Beginning Farmers as Learners

And... what are their common obstacles?

- Access to Land
- Access to Capital (financing)
- Production Experience
- Access to Markets
  (and marketing experience)
Stages of Learning

**Step 1: EMERGING** - Farm Learning Opportunities & Farm Dreams
Field days/Skill Sessions/Farm Tour
Conferences/Workshops
Practice growing where you live.

**Step 2: IN-TRAINING** - On-farm Training Activities
Work Exchanges/Internships/Farm Employment
Field days/Skill Sessions/Farm Tours
Conferences/Workshops
Stages of Learning

Step 3: START-UP - Farm Beginnings & Farm Pathways
Year-long training program
Whole Farm & enterprise planning
Connection to a farmer network
Growing season learning plan
On-Farm Field days & workshops

Step 4: SEASONED - Technical Assistance
Individualized syllabus
Production, marketing and financing assistance
Address land access/Equity building opportunities
Mentorship with an experienced farmer
How do we build a successful farmer training program?

1. ✓ Understand beginning farmers as learners (what do they need?)

2. Understand what your program/organization needs to develop
Laying the Groundwork for a Successful Farmer Training

- Assemble Stakeholders & Farmer Network
- Determine Audience
- Develop Guiding Principles
- Regional Appropriateness
- Assess your Capacity
- Develop Partnerships
- Create Evaluation/Feedback System
Assemble Stakeholders & Farmer Network

- A stakeholder is someone with a vested interest in the outcome of your work
- Helps provide direction and validity
- Farmer network can be a pillar of a farmer training program
- Create connection/community

Example:
- CRAFT steering committee
Determine Your Audience

• Who are you providing support for?
• Assemble some basic demographics
• What type of training/support is needed?
• What is already being provided? Where are the gaps?
• Talk to your stakeholders!
Develop Guiding Principles

• What are your core values?
• Helps with future planning & decision making

Example: Farm Beginnings Collaborative = Farmer-Led, Community-Based, Rooted in Sustainable Agriculture
Regional Appropriateness

- Assess your regions specific needs, resources, and assets.
- Stay true to what is in front of you
- Keep asking for input

Example:
FARRMS emphasis on grazing, utilization of web-based teaching tools, Holistic Management trainers
Assess Your Capacity

Staff, funding, time.... what do you have?

- be realistic
- volunteer-run? one staff person? 20 staff?
- have a planned approach to growth
- be wary of “following the money” in pursuit of grants
- understand that it’s almost impossible to exist on earned income alone, and grant reliance is risky… diversify funding streams
Develop Partnerships

- Who else in your community is supporting food and farming?
- Pursuing partnerships often means identifying how YOU can help your prospective partner
- Take advantage of networks
  low hanging fruit: list serves

Examples:
- PCFBDC, Michael Fields, Illinois Extension
Create Evaluation/Feedback System

- Find a way to collect feedback and input from your participants
- Determine if your programs are having an impact
- Evaluation data can be helpful with grant funding

Examples:
- Pre & Post Workshop Surveys
Which of these services would help you meet your farming goals more quickly? Check all that apply.

____ Assistance with finding hands-on work on an existing farm
____ Being assigned an experienced farmer as an advisor or mentor (for a reasonable fee)
____ Help with farm design or enterprise development
____ Assistance in finding farm labor or a farm manager
____ A several months long experiential and classroom course in whole farm planning, includes business & financial training.
____ Assistance finding affordable land and or financing

Other (please describe): __________________________________________
Activity Time!
Stages of Organizational Development

Phase 1:
Exploration

Phase 2:
Start-up

Phase 3:
Expansion