Small-scale and beginning farmers are vital to Maine’s agriculture. According to the Maine Farm Bureau, 61 percent of the state’s producers farm one to 99 acres. Additionally, the number of beginning farmers, those who have been in the business 10 years or fewer, has grown. However, the total number of farms in Maine is decreasing. An increase in farm retention is needed—and is possible by targeting education to small-scale and beginning farmers and the professionals who support them. The University of Maine Cooperative Extension is leading a SARE-funded project to meet this need.

The project sought to expand farm educators’ training materials with information on interpersonal communication and relationships. It initially aimed to train 45 service providers, many of whom participate in the Beginning Farmer Resource Network of Maine. Instead, 53 people took part. The program included farmer focus groups, working groups, one and a half days of training and a webinar. A toolkit, one-on-one consultation checklist and a decision-making tool were also developed.

The 53 trained service providers will apply their newly developed skills in one-on-one consultations with 90 farmers, who manage a combined 10,755 acres, with an aim to improve farm retention and farmer lifestyle satisfaction.

For more information on this research, see [www.sare.org/projects](http://www.sare.org/projects), and search for project number ENE16-142.
SARE has awarded a total of 214 grants in Maine since 1988.

SARE’s Impact

- 53 percent of producers report using a new production technique after reading a SARE publication.
- 79 percent of producers said they improved soil quality through their SARE project.
- 64 percent of producers said their SARE project helped them achieve higher sales.

Contact Your SARE State Coordinator

SARE sustainable ag coordinators run state-level educational programs for Extension and other ag professionals, and many help grant applicants and recipients with planning and outreach. Visit www.nesare.org/maine to learn more.

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