Overview & Goals

- The 2013-2015 Northeast SARE “Breaking Barriers” Professional Development Project trained 43 agricultural educators to help beginning farmers:
  - Gain practical tractor operation and maintenance skills;
  - Realistically assess their equipment needs;
  - Make informed decisions that improve farmers’ efficiency, safety and satisfaction with their businesses.

Justification

- Lack of mechanization knowledge can limit farm scale, productivity & business development.
- Many new farmers come from non-farm backgrounds and have limited experience with tractors and machinery.
- Unskilled equipment operation can pose serious physical and financial risks.
- Few organizations in the Northeast offer tractor and equipment education oriented to adults.

Breaking Barriers: Building Capacity for Tractor & Mechanization Education

Beth Holtzman • University of Vermont Extension • Berlin, VT

Impacts

- **Educators:** 31 Extension, nonprofit and farmer educators increased their ability to train and evaluate new tractor operators.
- **Farmer Education:** Within two years, 23 educators delivered mechanization and tractor safety, operation and maintenance education and coaching to 463 new farmers and farm employees.
- **Farmer Knowledge:** All 352 farmers/farm employees who completed follow-up surveys reported increased knowledge of mechanization and safe tractor operation and/or maintenance.
- **Farmer Skills and Confidence:** 342 farmers and farm employees improved skills; 302 reported increases in confidence related to tractor and machine operation and maintenance.
- **Farm Practices:** 152 farmers reported using knowledge gained to make decisions about mechanization; 130 reported implementing changes to farm practices.
- **Organizations:** Five organizations have taken steps to integrate this type of education in their ongoing programs.

Visit the Tractor Resource Hub: blog.uvm.edu/groundwk

Read the full project final report: Search for ENE13-127 in the SARE Project Database at sare.org

Methods

- Online and in-person sessions covering best practices in adult education and effective mechanization and tractor education.
- Development of an online Tractor Resource Hub offering 24/7 access to print and video resources, including instructional materials, resource lists, decision-support tools, self assessments, curricula, planning templates, and more.
- Securing additional grants to support delivery of farmer training, including a project specifically targeting young and beginning women farmers.

Multi-State Reach

- Extension, nonprofit and farmer educators from MA, ME, NH, NY, PA, RI, and VT participated.

Cooperators

- University of Vermont Extension: George Cook, Suzy Hodgson, *Beth Holtzman, Kristen Mullins, Jessica Schmidt.
- Penn State University: William Harshman, Dennis Murphy, Sam Steel

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