**ABSTRACT**

In 2012, a SARE state professional development program, designed to increase the ability of individual agricultural service providers (ASPs) to meet the needs of new and beginning farmers, sparked the formation of the Beginning Farmer Resource Network of Maine (BFRN). BFRN’s continuing high level of activity is a testament to the sustainability of the network structure and the value BFRN offers to participating organizations, agencies, and institutions. BFRN has become a model for maximizing resources and improving farmer services by increasing statewide communication, coordination and collaboration among ASPs.

**BEGINNING FARMER RESOURCE NETWORK OF MAINE**

Mission Statement: BFRN is a coalition of Maine agriculture agencies & organizations working together to connect aspiring and beginning farmers to resources for farm business success.

25 current members representing Extension, state and federal agencies, and non-profit organizations.

Activities:
- Bi-monthly meetings with member updates, coordination of activities, and professional development trainings.
- Online beginning farmer resources directory website (22,865 unique page views in 2017).
- 3 days of hands-on, in-depth workshops at the annual Maine Agricultural Trades Show.

Guiding principles: The network continues only as long as it has value to its members. It has no overhead to support and relies on members for shared leadership.

SARE state program support has included:
- 2014 strategic planning retreat – new leadership and committee structure developed and implemented.
- 2018 impact survey – 24 BFRN members responded. Results are reported here.

**MORE EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT AG SERVICE PROVIDERS (ASPs)**

92% of BFRN members said participating in BFRN has made them more effective in their work as ASPs by:
- Making new connections with other ASPs,
- Knowing personally who to refer clients to,
- Keeping up to date with programs and resources, and
- Having an online clearinghouse of available resources.

BFRN members reported saving on average 6 hours per month as a result of BFRN

*“The relationship and trust that has formed between BFRN members is really what makes the referral process tick ... It’s also inspiring to be part of a team that’s pulling for beginning farmers. It helps you get up and do the work every day, even though it’s quite difficult.”*

**EXPANDED PROGRAMMING FOR BEGINNING FARMERS**

Since 2012, BFRN members have developed:
- 11 new programs
- 8 grants, including 2 new SARE projects:
  - Focusing on Interpersonal Relationships for Greater Farm Viability - ENE16-142, $61,002.
  - Training the Trainers: Enhancing Extension Resources for Beginning Farmers - ENE17-147, $47,107.

Members reported, as a result of BFRN:
- Over 800 farmers have made changes (e.g. business planning and accessing technical assistance),
- Affecting about 40,750 acres and 47,265 animals, and
- Resulting in a total value over 5 years of $8,178,000.