



GNF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SERIES #203A

PROGRAM: BEGINNER FARMERS OF NEW HAMPSHIRE
ORGANIZATIONS: NH RESOURCE, CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL (RC&D) AND NORTH AMERICAN HEIFER INT'L
TARGETED TO: RECRUITS, EXPLORERS, PLANNERS, STARTUPS, RESTRATEGIZERS AND ESTABLISHERS
DATES: 1997 TO PRESENT

Need

Beginner farmers face a number of challenges. Many are financially burdened as a result of changing careers and a lack of knowledge about, or access to, grant funding and farm lending resources. Many are considering agricultural projects for which they are not technically prepared.

The Beginner Farmers of New Hampshire program attempts to identify and make available the resources necessary to meet these challenges. It supports and encourages individuals wishing to start farming or gardening, and those who are currently farming. The program is a farmer-to-farmer network that:

- Connects farmers to the farming community where they can share ideas and information and access technical expertise and agricultural education.
- Helps small-scale and beginner farmers achieve their goals.
- Strengthens farm communities.
- Boosts the agricultural industry and economy.
- Improves the quality of life in New Hampshire.

Program Development

In 1996 the Beginner Farmers of New Hampshire program was organized by a small group of farmers who felt that beginner and novice farmers needed support. This group also saw a community need for this program.

Program Delivery

The Beginner Farmers program organizes and delivers support to farmers in technical areas (livestock management, grazing, conservation, planting, and construction), management, financial, marketing, collaborative or cooperative buying and selling, and goal setting and achievement.

The program also provides training and assistance to help beginning farmers identify what permits they must apply for and what grants are available. The program then helps farmers apply for them.

The major activities of the Beginner Farmers of New Hampshire program are at the county level where groups present seminars on topics such as hay equipment repair, getting started with dairy goats, bee keeping, mushroom farming, financial accounting for farmers, and so on. Besides seminars, techniques used to communicate information to beginning farmers include farm tours, workshops, the planning and execution of marketing projects, and outreach using such avenues as a website and e-mail.

Seminar presenters are frequently drawn from a pool of people knowledgeable in agriculture including the staff of USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Farm Service Agency (FSA), University of New Hampshire Extension (both retired and current), and the private sector.

When practical, presenters are chosen from the program's current membership. For example, in the spring the manager of a major greenhouse operation presented a seed-starting series of four meetings that included a lab, lecture and problem solving.

The opportunity to network with farmers facing similar challenges is an important component of Beginner Farmers. What beginning farmers can learn from others runs the gamut. Some questions asked: Where can hay be bought? Can turkeys with lice be legally processed?

Beginner Farmers of New Hampshire also provides some introductory materials such as "The Beginning Farmer's Resource Guide," which was developed by a number of New Hampshire state agencies. They are also currently compiling some helpful resources and links on their website.

Response

Some of the typical activities of Beginner Farmers of New Hampshire include:

- Organize county and statewide farmer networks.
- Hold monthly network meetings in many counties for local farmers to meet each other and discuss their farms and experiences.
- Organize meetings where speakers present training workshops and farm tours.
- Initiate cooperative activities such as group buying to receive bulk discounts.
- Provide opportunities for members to buy and sell products from each other.
- Help to develop local markets for farmers' products.
- Develop relationships with local, county and state agricultural agencies to meet the unique needs of beginner or small-scale farmers.
- Research potential funding and assistance sources available for farmers.
- Participate as the New Hampshire sponsor of the Tri-State Women's Agricultural Network.

Funding and Partners

Beginner Farmers of New Hampshire enjoys significant organizational, spiritual, financial and developmental assistance from the North American Heifer International Project. It provided the four northern counties of New Hampshire with a major seed-money grant; the six southern counties are currently preparing a grant application.

The Heifer Project also provides funds for several specific purposes such as acquiring and managing group equipment. It conducts a "pass on" program for breeding improvement. In this program, high quality breeding stock is placed with eligible recipients. In exchange, recipients are obligated to "pass on" in the future similar high-quality breeding stock. This is a model of sustainability and community development.

The New Hampshire RC&D provides significant administrative, management and fiscal assistance.

Beginner Farmers has a generous grant from the Growing New Farmers Program to be used for the development of a market program.

The program has obtained several smaller grants for selected narrow projects.

Outreach

Beginner Farmers of New Hampshire is visible because of its website at www.beginnerfarmers.org

Beginner Farmers also enjoys good relationships with the USDA, Cooperative Extension, and New Hampshire's Department of Agriculture. It receives positive local press coverage. Both USDA and NRCS publicize many of our presentations, and federal agencies have generously provided farmers with information about the program. For example, there is a link to Beginner Farmers' website on the front page of New Hampshire's FSA website.

Analysis

- **Successes.** Many of Beginner Farmers' members attribute specific successful farming projects (chickens, beef cattle, etc.) to the support of this program. When state agricultural events occur, Beginner Farmers program is always invited because it is recognized as an important voice of the farming community. The efforts of Beginner Farmers have contributed to an increase in the number of farms in New Hampshire reported in last year's census.
- **Challenges.** One of the biggest challenges is learning to run a viable organization. Farmers typically are independent people, so getting cooperation for mutual benefit is challenging. This is especially so for members who lack knowledge, time, money and skills. The start-up phase of the Beginner Farmers of New Hampshire program is almost over, but the administration of a 'stable' group requires different skills, and we are developing these now.

Next Steps

We are working to establish systems, policies and procedures that make Beginner Farmers of New Hampshire a stable, self-supporting organization. Due to the high level of involvement of outside management, Beginner Farmers has not developed its own sustaining structure, populated with people skilled in administration. All parties realize this, and we are making significant progress to address the issue.

We are working to unify the statewide organization and make the county organizations stronger. Larger issues of policy, infrastructure, and some financial management are handled at the state level. True membership activities usually happen at the county level with events being open to the statewide group.

Understanding this, plus building at the grassroots level and doing more projects that directly include the county members, is crucial to the growth and stability of Beginner Farmers of New Hampshire.

Additional Resources

- Beginner Farmers of New Hampshire's website: www.beginnerfarmers.org
- As our direct sponsor, New Hampshire Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) is a good source for information about Beginner Farmers.
- In northern New Hampshire (Belknap, Carroll, Coos, or Grafton counties), call the North Country RC&D office at (603)527-2093 or contact: Beginner Farmers of New Hampshire,

NH RC&D Area Councils, 719 North Main Street, Room 220, Laconia, NH 03246-2772. E-mail: lisa@beginnerfarmers.org

- In southern New Hampshire (Cheshire, Hillsborough, Merrimack, Rockingham, Strafford, or Sullivan counties), call the Southern New Hampshire RC&D offices at (603)223-0083 for more information. Write to Beginner Farmers of New Hampshire, c/o Southern NH RC&D10 Ferry St., Box 4, Suite 422, Concord, NH 03301. E-mail: bianca@beginnerfarmers.org
- The North American Heifer International Project's website: www.heifer.org

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