

**Program:** Farming for Me

**Organization:** Connecticut Farm Bureau Association Inc.

**Dates:** Began in 2003

**Targeted to:** Recruits and Explorers

### **Need**

There are people in Connecticut who think about entering farming. But to understand their options and to make an informed decision about starting a farming business, they need help to evaluate their goals, resources, skills, knowledge, and financial and land resources.

### **Response**

Farming for Me provides an opportunity for people interested in learning about farming, and about the skills and resources, required to farm, to participate in peer-support study groups. These meet frequently over a three- to five-month period with the support of farmers and agricultural industry professionals.

### **Summary**

Peer-support study groups consist of six to 11 people who are interested in farming. Each group has two to three resource leaders who coordinate the group efforts and assist participants with workbook activities and exercises. Meeting frequently over a period of months, the participants lead themselves through key skills and knowledge areas with their agricultural resource leaders.

Peer-support study groups help participants explore their dreams of becoming agricultural entrepreneurs and provide them with both technical expertise and the ongoing support group of likeminded individuals.

The goals of the program are to assist those interested in farming to:

- Clarify their personal goals and values.
- Evaluate their current financial status and lifestyle.
- Evaluate the benefit of becoming a farmer.
- Access agriculture knowledge.
- Develop contacts and build knowledgeable resources within the farming community.
- Develop increased entrepreneurial thinking skills.

### **Funding & Partners**

Farming for Me is a free program, although there is a small cost for materials. Funding and support come through the Connecticut Farm Bureau Association Inc., New England Small Farm Institute, Growing New Farmers Project and USDA/CREES Initiative for Future Agriculture & Food Systems Program

### **Outreach**

Brochures about the Farming for Me program are available at Farm Bureau meetings, County Fairs and agricultural expositions.

### **Successes**

Participants benefited by networking and learning from farmer/entrepreneurs who are willing to share their experiences in farming and with regulators and marketers. It was encouraging to see the excitement for agriculture's future embodied in these beginning farmers.

### **Challenges**

At times, the lack of regular attendance by participants at meetings and tours was a challenge.

### **Next Steps**

We would like to see beginning farmers who want to learn and are dedicated to the program assisting producers of all commodities and all forms of farming. It would be helpful to form an ongoing support group for these participants so they can continue to reinforce and encourage

each other. Having additional funds to provide more field trips would also be advantageous.

**Resources**

Exploring the Small Farm Dream - New England Small Farm Institute (NESFI)  
Box 937, 275 Jackson St.  
Belchertown, MA 01007  
Attn: Eric Toensmeier, Small Farm Development Program  
Tel: (413) 323-4531  
Fax (413) 323-9594.  
Website: [www.smallfarm.org](http://www.smallfarm.org)  
E-mail: [erict@smallfarm.org](mailto:erict@smallfarm.org).

DACUM Occupational Profile for Northeast Small Scale "Sustainable" Farmer  
New England Small Farm Institute (NESFI)  
(Contact information listed above)

Finding the Niche: Case Studies of Beginning Small – Scale Farmers  
Wisconsin Rural Development Center

**For more information contact:**

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