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Growing New Farmers

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Program: Agriculture and Rural Development Services

Organization: New Jersey Department of Agriculture

Dates: The mid-1970s to present

Targeted to: Prospective Farmers, Explorers, Planners, Beginning Farmers, Re-strategizers and Establishers

Need

The targeted audience needs a central point where it can access information critical to their businesses and the agricultural industry.

Response

The Agriculture and Rural Development Services (A&RDS) serves as a point of resource information for targeted audiences. It provides guidance, reference materials, industry contacts and technical guidance.

The A&RDS program works directly with agricultural producers, farm-related industries and rural communities. One-on-one problem solving, coupled with advocacy for the agriculture industry, has been successful at resolving questions related to economics, environment, taxation, farm-building construction and land use.

The A&RDS efforts are part of rural public policy that provide services needed by the agricultural business sector and rural communities if they are to capitalize on opportunities for economic growth.

Description

While the A&RDS program does not have a loan program for purchasing farm real estate or providing farm-operating capital, it disseminates information and responds to questions on the availability of agricultural financing from federal, state and commercial institutions. The program advises people on the importance of developing a business plan and preparing financial records to obtaining financing. They are also told of asset requirements for financing.

To support agriculture and rural economic development, staff provides

technical support to existing and new agribusinesses in the Garden State, including food manufacturers, that add value to production agriculture.

Regulations often hinder economic development and farm viability. The program offers technical assistance to farmers, architects, engineers, farm-building consultants and agricultural contractors concerning the New Jersey Uniform Construction Code as it relates to farm buildings.

The A&RDS program gives farmers and agribusinesses information on federal and state motor vehicle regulations. This includes information on license plates for farm vehicles (farmer plates), commercial license provisions, and requirements for the International Registration Plan (IRP) and the International Fuel Tax Agreement (IFTA).

Cost savings are a priority for any agribusiness. Taxation of agricultural buildings can place an undue hardship on existing farms and could jeopardize the sale to a prospective farm operation. The A&RDS program provides technical guidance to farmland owners and local property tax assessors on the farm building provisions of the New Jersey's Real Property Appraisal Manual.

Recycling saves valuable landfill space, extends the life of existing landfills and contributes to the Garden State's goal of recycling 60 percent of its solid waste. The A&RDS program provides technical guidance and facilitation on recycling in the following areas:

- * Using leaves and grass clippings to mulch farm fields.
- * Applying non-hazardous, non-contaminated food-processing byproducts to farmland.
- * Nursery and greenhouse film recycling program.
- * Pesticide container and nursery pot collection and recycling.
- * Helping the food processing industry find markets for soon-to-expire and expired food products.
- * Working closely with other agencies on creative recycling solutions for non-traditional materials.

Finally, renewable energy and energy efficiency on farms is another cost savings. The A&RDS provides technical guidance in this area.

Funding

General State Funds appropriations to the New Jersey Department of Agriculture's funds the A&RDS salaries.

Partners

The A&RDS program partners with Cook College, Rutgers –The State University, Rutgers Cooperative Extension Service, the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station, New Jersey Farm Bureau, various New Jersey agricultural trade organizations, USDA, First Pioneer Farm Credit, and various state and county government agencies.

Outreach

Through our websites, we provide basic information to get people started on their quest for information. The targeted audience is alerted to program activities through various

farm newspapers and agricultural and recycling trade magazines, newsletters issued by agriculture organizations, and state and county government agencies. Staff participates in various trade meetings. And word-of-mouth plays a large role in alerting people to the multi-faceted ways the program can help.

Analysis

SUCSESSES: The A&RDS program handles, on average, 1,000 inquiries annually from the target audience looking for help in one way or another. Technical assistance provided by A&RDS has fostered the construction of more than \$10 million annually of agricultural buildings. Over the last 30+ years, staff has seen the second generation take over farms that their parents started with the help of direction provided by the A&RDS program.

CHALLENGES: Maintaining a viable agricultural industry through economic development initiatives. The program must work with other state agencies to ensure barriers are not imposed that may hinder agriculture's progress.

Next Steps

Continue networking with various organizations to share information that will help us better serve the targeted audience.

Additional Resources

The following websites provide information on A&RDS:

- www.nj.gov/agriculture/rural/rurldev.htm
- www.nj.gov/agriculture/rural/renewableenergy.htm
- www.ag.state.nj.us/

Also Growing New Farmers Consortium at New England Small Farm Institute
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