



GNF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SERIES #201A

PROGRAM: BEGINNING FARMER APPRENTICE
ORGANIZATION: PENNSYLVANIA FARM LINK
TARGETED TO: RECRUITS, EXPLORERS
DATES: BEGAN 1999, ONGOING

Need

The Pennsylvania Farm Link program identified two needs that prompted it to initiate a Beginning Farmer Apprentice program:

1. Since fewer young people grow up on farms where they can learn the business from their families, efforts must be made to train new farmers. A good education that includes real-world experience improves beginning farmers' chances for success. Students bound for a career in law or medicine get experience as law clerks or interns; prospective farmers need the same opportunity.
2. Farmers face challenges in finding skilled, qualified employees. If farmers can gain competent employee or partner after apprentice training is completed, they will assist in a training effort.

To address these two challenges, Pa Farm Link, a non-profit organization dedicated to "creating farming opportunities for the next generation," developed a state- and national-registered apprentice program in production agriculture. Being a certified program through Pennsylvania and U.S. Labor and Industry makes the apprentice program similar to those for plumbers and electricians.

Program Development

To develop the Pennsylvania Beginning Farmer Apprentice program, Farm Link:

1. Held focus groups: To determine the needs of high school students considering a career in farming, we held two focus groups with vocational agriculture students. One was in W.B. Saul High School, an urban school, and the rural Manheim Central High School. Students agreed that hands-on experience was important to developing a farm career. The students with more farm experience wanted their educational curricula to include in-depth focus on production agriculture

and less information on general agriculture. All students wanted work experience to include different types of farms to help them determine the best career fit.

2. Review existing apprentice programs: We found that Wisconsin had the only program targeting youth for apprenticeships in production agriculture. We talked with people at Wisconsin's Cooperative Extension and Department of Agriculture and received the program's identified dairy work skills.

Other programs we discovered during our review include:

- A farm apprentice program in Germany where students work under the supervision of a master farmer to eventually become a Certified Farmer or Certified Farm Manager. Unlike apprentice programs in this country, German farmers pay the students, and the government reimburses them.
- Canada has an apprentice style, skill-training program called Green Certificate.
- Minnesota has a farm internship program.

A number of states have sustainable agriculture apprentice programs for adults. These do not have the same criteria as registered apprentice programs with U.S. Labor and Industry.

Targeted schools

Initially, Pa Farm Link targeted high school vocational agriculture students at W.B. Saul High School in Philadelphia, the state's largest and the nation's second largest vocational agriculture school. Saul was a priority in order to give urban youth opportunities to develop hands-on farming skills and to encourage minority participation. (Pa Farm Link contacted Saul's principal in August 1998 to discuss developing the apprentice program.)

Pa Farm Link also targeted two rural schools in the project's first year: Manheim Central High School, Lancaster County, and Kutztown High School, Berks County.

In the second year of the project, seven schools were targeted: Liberty High School in Tioga County and the Lancaster County schools of Delaware County Career and Technology Center, Ephrata High School, Lampeter-Strasburg High School, Penn Manor High School, Warwick High School, and Lancaster Mennonite.

With the cooperation and support of vocational agriculture instructors, Pa Farm Link made two presentations at most of the schools. The importance of vo-ag teachers to the program's success can't be overstated. Student response was generally better at schools where the teachers actively supported an apprentice program. Some schools indicated no vocational agriculture students were interested in entering farming.

So that students can get credit for existing co-op programs while participating in the beginning farmer apprentice program, Pa Farm Link has tried to coordinate its requirements with co-op programs. To do this, we need to consult with vo-ag teachers and to get their support. Support is

more likely to come if students and teachers understand how the apprenticeship program will benefit both groups.

Obtaining partners

During the start-up phase, the program held at least 15 meetings with stakeholders to gain support, determine partners, set direction, and establish guidelines for apprentices.

Program representatives met with people from the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture who expressed support. To develop a program that would be officially registered and meet state and national standards, we met with both the Pennsylvania and U. S. Departments of Labor and Industry. Early efforts to get official status were difficult. But in 1999 Pennsylvania's governor started an initiative on youth apprentices and because of this, we succeeded in developing a youth program for production agriculture. To ensure that our educational program meshed with vocational schools' curricula, we met periodically with the state's Department of Education.

Additional groups that supported the apprenticeship program and helped with outreach efforts include Pennsylvania USDA Office of Rural Development and Penn State University's Rural Leadership Program (RULE). Farm groups that helped enlist mentors and apprentices include: the Pennsylvania Young Farmers, FFA, Pennsylvania Farm Bureau, Pennsylvania Farmers Union, and Master Farmers.

Apprentice and Mentor Experience

The Labor and Industry Training Council officially approved the Beginning Farmer Apprentice program on September 14, 2000. The program, available to students who are at least 16 years old, requires:

- 2,000 hours of work experience.
- 144 hours of related instruction.
- Farmer mentors must pay minimum wage and carry workers' compensation insurance on apprentices.

The project's goal was to place four students the first year. Participating farms and apprentices were primarily located in southeastern Pennsylvania, with the expectation that the program would expand statewide eventually.

In the summer of 2000, the program placed three apprentices:

- A female senior from Saul High School worked on a dairy farm in Lancaster County during the summer and on some weekends throughout the year. Her apprenticeship succeeded beyond expectations! She was treated like a member of the family. Her work skills included milking, cleanup, calf care and breeding skills. She did a presentation at the Farms for the Future Conference in December in Philadelphia and attended DHIA meetings throughout the year. She helped her mentor's children show dairy cattle at the local farm show and was elected to a statewide FFA office, a first for an urban FFA member.

- A male apprentice was placed at an orchard/farm market in Delaware County. His placement worked well. He worked primarily in the orchard in the summer and at the farm market in the fall. As a result of his apprentice program, the student's interests changed to floriculture, and he now works for a local florist.
- Another male student was placed in a landscape/nursery business in Berks County. He has completed over 500 hours of his apprenticeship and works closely with the nursery manager. His job skills include digging trees, landscaping and planting. He needs to develop skills in sales and marketing, customer interaction, machinery operation, and handling fertilizers and chemicals.

Outreach Efforts

Presentations on the Beginning Farmer Apprentice program were made at the Vo-Ag Institute and Young Farmer Annual Conference, and to several local young-farmer groups. We gave teachers background information and copies of the program's standards. Teacher response was mixed: Some were very enthusiastic; others assumed that farming is a dead-end career.

Pennsylvania Farm Link became part of the governor's focus on youth apprentices by participating in Youth Apprentice Day where more than 1,000 students learned about farm apprentice placement.

Outreach efforts to high school students included presentations to vocational education classes at these schools: Kutztown High School, Manheim Central, Ephrata, Lampeter-Strasburg, Delaware County Career and Technology Center, and Penn Manor High School. We also sent every state vo-ag instructor a letter, program brochure and an invitation to the New and Beginning Farmer workshop. At least five students, two teachers, and one farmer-mentor accepted the invitation.

Funding

Grants from the Natural Resource Conservation Service and Mid-Atlantic Consortium (W.K. Kellogg Foundation).

Successes

PA Farm Link successfully placed three apprentices in registered apprentice programs. Apprentices indicated that the experience was valuable and that it would influence their futures. One apprentice used her experience to become the first urban high school student to be elected to a state FFA office. She is currently pursuing a college degree in dairy science. Another apprentice decided to pursue a career in the floral industry as a result of his apprenticeship, and the third is actively pursuing the completion of his apprenticeship. Each mentor stated that the experience was positive.

Initial guarded relationships with Labor and Industry became cooperative and supportive. In fact, we were encouraged to pursue a farm manager apprenticeship.

Challenges

Farmer Apprentice program face five challenges:

1. Continue to develop relationships with school districts and vocational education teachers to meet two goals: improve program participation and destroy attitudes that farming is a dead-end career.
2. Continue to coordinate standards of the apprentice program with those of vocational education.
3. Obtain the support and endorsement of state agencies. This is critical to the program's success but because PA Farm Link is a small non-profit organization, it was challenging to gain support from state departments, schools, and some agencies. A group effort is helpful and recommended.
4. Identify apprentices who want to complete the apprenticeship. To meet this challenge, Pa Farm Link will continue outreach efforts. Once the program can document additional successful apprenticeships, they must be publicized. Obtaining mentors was not as difficult.
5. Secure funding. Labor and Industry is willing to fund individuals for training and work needs. However, funding required to staff the organization which implements the Beginning Farmer Apprentice program is difficult to secure.

Next Steps

In addition to meeting these challenges, Pa Farm Link will continue to meet with vocational agriculture schools, young farmer groups and farm organizations. As success in additional schools is achieved, placements will be easier to secure.

Plans to integrate work standards with job skills identified by the school districts are ongoing. Also, work skills for different types of farms must be defined. Working with the targeted industry, e.g. nursery/landscaping, the program will continue to revise the requirements of different farm enterprises to meet the needs of that industry.

Pa Farm Link's long-range plan includes establishing job skills and educational curricula for farm manager apprentices (journeymen). This category requires 4,000 hours of on-farm experience and approximately 280 hours of instruction. Requirements for the journeyman position will include nutrient management training, borrower training, business plan development and marketing.

Resources:

www.pafarmlink.org

Apprenticeship standards for dairy and nursery/landscape

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