

2014 Final Report for SNE12-07: University of Maine SARE State Program Project

Title: Fostering New Ways of Communicating; Engaging New Types of Farmers: Social Media Trainings, Reading the Farm, and SARE Outreach in Maine

Report Summary

Note: Maine's major professional development program is a collaborative project with Vermont and New Hampshire to increase educator's capacity to use social media tools in providing sustainable agriculture information and education. Debra Heleba is submitting a separate report for that project on behalf of the three states.

Helping farmers improve the sustainability of their farms requires a whole farm approach that recognizes the complex interactions among physical, biological, economic, and social components of a farm. Maine's "Reading the Farm" (RTF) professional development training, developed for the 2008-2010 NESARE PDP, brings together agricultural service providers from a range of agencies and expertise to explore whole-farm interactions, sustainability, and the use of a team approach to address farm issues. For Maine's 2011-2013 PDP, the 2-day RTF program was adapted to address Maine's changing farm demographics by focusing on beginning and women farmers.

Maine offered three RTF trainings (January 2012, November 2013, and July 2014) with the first and third focused on beginning farmers and the second focused on women farmers. Each of the first two trainings began with a half-day session on the unique challenges, opportunities, strategies, and resources for beginning or women farmers, led by an invited expert participant. The group then conducted in-depth case studies of 2 farms including half-day farm visits, group working sessions to develop options and recommendations for the farms, and a final meeting between the training group and farm families. The third RTF training was modified to include a strategic planning session led by a facilitator for the Beginning Farmer Resource Network of Maine (see below).

Thirty-six agricultural service providers participated in one or more RTF trainings. All 36 participants reported in exit surveys that the RTF training increased their understanding about farms as whole systems and the unique issues faced by beginning or women farmers; their ability to listen and identify farmer's goals for their whole system; and their confidence providing practical recommendations and resource information to beginning or women farmers. As well, all 25 follow-up survey respondents reported having incorporated concepts of whole farm systems, and strategies and resources specific to beginning or women farmers in their educational activities as a result of the training, reaching a total of just under 2500 farmers.

The 2012 training sparked the formation of the Beginning Farmer Resource Network of Maine (BFRN). RTF participants identified the need to network and coordinate activities among the diverse agencies, non-profits, and for-profits working with Maine's beginning farmers, and to better connect these farmers to existing resources. Coordinated initially by the Maine SARE State Coordinator, the BFRN developed its mission, membership, and organizational structure; conducts annual cooperative educational programming and outreach; and created and maintains an online resource directory which has reached over 5,000 people (<http://umaine.edu/beginning-farmer-resource-network/>). The BFRN represents a significant increase in Maine's institutional capacity to meet farmer needs.

Finally, the 2012 RTF training also prompted one Extension specialist to develop an entirely new programming area. Child and Family Development Specialist Leslie Forstadt collaborated with agricultural service providers she met at the training to author a new fact sheet series, "Maine Family Farms: Life and Business in Balance", and offer farmer workshops on farm-family balance. Leslie said, "I feel like the RTF training changed the trajectory of my career."

1. Performance Target(s)

Of the 36 agricultural service providers who participate in one of three annual Reading the Farm training programs, 30 will incorporate concepts of whole farm systems into their education materials and consultations with a total of 450 farmers. Thirty educators will also incorporate strategies for addressing issues specific to beginning farmers or to women farmers, and resources specific to these groups, in their educational materials and consultations with 250 farmers.

2. Report on 2013-2014 Milestone Accomplishments

1. The Maine SARE State Coordinator, in collaboration with the BFRN, designs the 2014 RTF training modules and enrolls two beginning farms to participate in the training. March-April 2014.

Completed. The State Coordinator worked closely with the two co-coordinators of the BFRN to design the training. Given that many of the target participants are members of BFRN and had previously participated in prior RTF trainings, we decided to shift the format of this training to include shorter farm case study visits, an evening farmer panel and group discussion, and a strategic planning session for the BFRN. The panel discussion allowed us to focus on the "5-year hump" stage that many beginning farmers go through when they face decisions about scaling up, increasing efficiencies, balancing farm and family, and possibly exiting farming. Instead of bringing in an outside expert, as we had with the two prior RTF trainings, we hired a facilitator to lead the group in the strategic planning session for the BFRN.

2. The Maine SARE State Coordinator recruits 12 agricultural service providers from Extension, NRCS, non-profits, state agencies, and private consultants to participate in the RTF training. March-April 2014.

Completed. Seventeen ag service providers who are members of BFRN signed up and participated.

3. Participants register for the RTF training, which includes verifying the learning objectives of the program provided to them by the State Coordinator. April 2014.

Completed.

4. The Maine SARE State Coordinator interviews the host farmers and prepares a detailed profile of each operation. April 2014.

Completed.

5. The New Farmer Coordinator prepares materials about beginning farmers. May 2014.

Completed.

6. The 12 selected participants read farm profiles and background material on beginning farmers in preparation for the training. June 2014.

Completed.

7. The 12 agricultural service providers participate in a 2-day RTF training. During the training, the participants complete personal Action Plans that outline how they will incorporate the new information and approaches learned into their work with farmers. July 2014.

Completed. The BFRN RTF Training and Strategic Planning Retreat took place July 8 and 9 in New Gloucester, Maine. Instead of personal Action Plans, participants completed Action Plans for the BFRN committees that were created during the strategic planning session. These committees included: Communications, Education/Outreach, Professional Development, Data, and Operations/Governance.

8. Participants complete exit evaluations within 1 month of the program. August 2014.

Completed.

9. Participants complete 6-month follow-up evaluations of the program that include reporting on how they met their Action Plans. December 2014.

Completed.

10. The Beginning Farmer Resource Network of Maine (BFRN) continues quarterly meetings to coordinate activities addressing new farmer issues in the state and identify further needs, and conducts coordinated outreach activities to increase the visibility of the group and its resources. November 2013 through September 2014.

Completed.

11. The BFRN collectively maintains and further develops a web-based descriptive guide to the resources currently available to new and beginning farmers in Maine. The list will be accessible from all of the websites of all of the Maine New Farmer Working Group member organizations. Ongoing October 2013 through September 2014.

Completed. See <http://umaine.edu/beginning-farmer-resource-network/>

3-Year Summary of Activities, Participants, Learning Outcomes and Products

Table 1 –Activities.

Type of Educational Activity Conducted by Project	Number of Each Activity Conducted
Workshop/Field Day – Reading the Farm 2-day Training – Beginning Farmers Reading the Farm 2-day Training – Women Farmers	2 1
On-farm Demonstration	
Tour	
Webinar/Talk/Presentation	
Other on-line training	
Individual Consultations (an estimate is acceptable)	
Other (specify) – Beginning Farmer Resource Network – I initiated this network of Ag Service Providers as an outcome of the first RTF training and supported its development as part of this project.	1

Table 2 – Participants.

The table shows the number of participants by individual program. However, some people participated in more than one program.

In sum:

- A total of 36 agricultural service providers participated in at least one RTF training.
- A total of 25 agricultural service providers participated in the Beginning Farmer Resource Network, including 6 who did not participate in any of the RTF trainings.

Type of Agricultural Service Provider	Number Who Participated			
	2012 RTF Beginning Farmers	2013 RTF Women Farmers	2014 RTF Beginning Farmers	Beg. Farmer Resource Network
Extension	6	8	6	8
NRCS	0	1	1	1
Other Federal/State Agency	1	1	3	5
Other (specify)				
Farm Credit	0	0	0	1
Maine Farm Bureau	0	0	0	1
NonProfits				
Coastal Enterprises Inc.	0	0	1	1
Cultivating Communities	0	1	1	1
Land for Good	0	0	1	1
Maine Farmland Trust	1	1	1	1

Maine Federation of Farmers Markets	0	0	0	1
Maine Organic Farmers & Gardeners Assoc.	5	1	2	2
Soil and Water Conservation Districts	0	2	1	1
Women's Agriculture Network	0	1	0	0
UMaine School of Food and Agriculture	0	2	0	0
UMaine SeaGrant	0	0	0	2
Total Number of Agricultural Service Providers*	13	18	17	25

Table 3 - Learning Outcomes.

	Total Number of Agricultural Service Providers	Total Number of Farmers	Total number of acres or animals the farmers manage, if known
Verified an increase in knowledge, skills, confidence	36	na	na
Verified intention to use knowledge and/or skills learned	36	na	na
*Bulleted list of only the key knowledge and skill areas for which you verified an increase in knowledge and skills.			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding of farms as whole systems whose parts influence each other • Ability to listen and identify farmers' goals for their whole farm system • Understanding of the unique issues and challenges for beginning farmers and/or women farmers • Knowledge of the resources available to beginning farmers and/or women farmers • Ability to provide practical recommendations and resource information to beginning farmers and/or women farmers <p>Specific to women farmers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How farm issues and challenges are influenced by their farm partner status (ex., single, partners with spouse, partners with parent, ...) • The factors and preferences that can influence how women farmers make farm decision, as compared to men farmers • The generalized learning style preferences of women farmers 			

Table 4 – Products.

Type of Information Product Produced	Number of Each Type Produced	
	RTF Women Farmers	RTF Beginning Farmers and BFRN
Fact sheet/Guidance document		
Decision tool		
Website/web content – BFRN website http://umaine.edu/beginning-farmer-resource-network/		1
Article (newsletter, press)		2
Curricula		
Video		
Other (specify)		

3. Performance Target Outcomes and Additional, Unanticipated Outcomes

a. Summarized Outcome Data

Table 5 – Numbers of agricultural service providers taking action

	as a result of RTF Women Farmers	as a result of RTF Beginning Farmers*
The total number of agricultural service providers who incorporated information and/or used skills learned through the state program training activities in their educational activities, services and/or information products for farmers.	10 (100% of survey respondents)	15 (100% of survey respondents)
The total number of farmers these agricultural service providers reached through their efforts.	680	1812

* These agricultural service providers also participate in the Beginning Farmer Resource Network, which has amplified the actions taken as a result of the RTF training.

Table 6 – Actions taken by the agricultural service providers

Place an X next to all that apply	Types of Educational Activities into which Ag Service Providers incorporated information they learned	Number of Each Activity Type, if known	
		RTF Women Farmers	RTF Beginning Farmers and BFRN
x	Workshop/Field Day Beginning Farmer Workshop at the 2013 and 2014 Maine Agriculture Trades Show – Organized by the BFRN. Comprised of 14 1-hour talks over 2 days given by BFRN members on various topics such as accessing land, financing a small business, farm labor laws, and food safety.	4	34 (including 2 hosted by BFRN)
x	On-farm Demonstration	3	3
x	Webinar/Talk/Presentation	5	14
x	Other on-line training	0	1
x	Individual Consultation (an estimate is acceptable)	8	175
x	Fact sheet/Guidance document	2	9
x	Article (newsletter, press)	3	8
x	Web content	3	9 (Including the BFRN website)
x	Other (specify) Beginning Farmer Resource Room at the 2013 and 2014 Ag Trades Show – Staffed by BFRN members to answer questions and provide information.	0	2 BFRN
	College/University course	1	0
	Shared new information with other agriculture service providers	9	66
	Share new information with community groups	3	18

Table 7 – OPTIONAL - Actions taken by farmers

The number of farmers who made a management change as a result of learning from the project activities and/or the trained agricultural service providers?	
Bulleted list of the changes made by farmers	
Number of acres, animals, or other appropriate production units that were affected by these changes. <i>(please enter your best estimate; you may leave this blank if you have no idea)</i>	

Table 8 – OPTIONAL – Additional outcomes as a result of the project

Type of Outcomes Achieved	Number of Each Outcome	
	RTF Women Farmers	RTF Beginning Farmers and BFRN
New working collaboration	12	24
Grants applied for	4	5
Grants or other funds received	4	3
Other (describe)		

b. Outcome Narrative

Thirty-six agricultural service providers participated in one or more RTF trainings. All 36 participants reported in exit surveys that the RTF training increased their understanding about farms as whole systems and the unique issues faced by beginning or women farmers; their ability to listen and identify farmer’s goals for their whole system; and their confidence providing practical recommendations and resource information to beginning or women farmers.

All ten participants from the 2013 RTF training focused on women farmers who responded to a one-year survey reported incorporating concepts of whole farm systems, and strategies and resources specific to women farmers into a great variety of educational activities as a result of the training. The most common actions taken were: making sure to use equal opportunity language (10); making an effort to reach and include women farmers in farm visits, consultations, and educational events (9); listening more and talking less in consultations with farmers (8); actively pursuing female expert guest speakers (7); acknowledging women partners and families in awards and recognitions (4); offered an all-female class (1). In sum, they reached 680 farmers. One respondent said, “The training certainly made me more conscious of the unique challenges faced by women in the agricultural community.”

All fifteen participants from the 2012 and 2014 RTF trainings focused on beginning farmers who responded to a one-year survey also reported incorporating concepts of whole farm systems, and

strategies and resources specific to beginning farmers in their educational activities as a result of the training. Participants reached a total of 1812 farmers with new information through 34 workshops, 14 presentations, 3 on-farm demonstrations, 9 fact sheets, 8 articles, content on 9 websites, 18 community meetings, and individual consultations with 66 ag service providers and 175 farmers.

The most significant impact of the RTF trainings was the formation of the Beginning Farmer Resource Network of Maine (BFRN), which was initiated as a result of the 2012 training. RTF participants identified the need to network and coordinate activities among the diverse agencies, non-profits, for-profits, and institutions working with Maine's beginning farmers, and to better connect these farmers to existing resources. The Maine SARE State Coordinator added the formation and initial coordination of the group to her PDP plan. In this reporting period, BFRN has developed its mission, membership, and organizational structure; conducted annual cooperative educational programming and outreach; and created and maintained an online resource directory which has reached over 5,000 people. The State Coordinator then worked with the new leadership of BFRN to design the 2014 RTF training to identify key areas of programming and resource needs related to beginning farmers and to develop a 5-year strategic plan for the group. See below for a BFRN informational flyer and press release; the BFRN website can be found at <http://umaine.edu/beginning-farmer-resource-network/>.

All 15 BFRN members who responded to the RTF follow-up survey said that they are more effective as individual agricultural service providers as a result of their involvement with BFRN. Some quotes:

"BFRN has made our organization a more effective service provider ... as well as provide an opportunity to improve our collective impact in the state."

"The relationships that I have formed with the other service providers are incredibly valuable to me, and have allowed me to make very effective referrals to the right folks."

"I have a ready resource (the website) to direct people to when they call me with questions about getting money to farm, or what to think about to start farming, etc. And I know more about the different services offered and ag service providers to direct them to."

"My awareness of new and emerging on-line and digital types of technical assistance has increased by 300%. My intellectual grasp of diversity issues/solutions has increased by 200%. My confidence in identifying and then helping new farmers with addressing barriers - income, age, ethnicity, gender, etc. has increased 500%."

"I tend to direct interested municipal officials to the BFRN site to help them see the complexity, challenges and opportunities that beginning farmers face."

"Generally, by knowing more about what other ag. service providers do, I am better able to advise the farmers I work with. Specifically, I met, and am now working with 5 immigrant farmers who I met through a BFRN event."

Finally, at the individual level, the 2012 RTF training prompted one Extension specialist to develop an entirely new programming area. Child and Family Development Specialist Leslie Forstadt collaborated with agricultural service providers she met at the training to author a new fact sheet series and offer

farmer workshops on farm-family balance. Leslie focused her current sabbatical on this topic, and said, “I feel like the RTF training changed the trajectory of my career.”

The Maine Family Farms: Life and Business in Balance series have been viewed 950 times since their publication in early 2014, and include the following factsheets:

- #4800 [Maine Family Farms: Life and Business in Balance](#). An introduction to the series.
- #4801 [Why “Thank You” Matters: Expressing Appreciation](#)
- #4802 [Running Successful Farm-Family Meetings](#)
- #4803 [Farm and Family—Finding Balance](#)
- #4804 [Understanding Roles in the Farm Family](#)
- #4805 [Recognizing the Signs of Farm Family Stress](#)

Performance Target Outcomes

Original Performance Target:

Of the 36 agricultural service providers who participate in one of three annual Reading the Farm training programs, 30 will incorporate concepts of whole farm systems into their education materials and consultations with a total of 450 farmers. Thirty educators will also incorporate strategies for addressing issues specific to beginning farmers or to women farmers, and resources specific to these groups, in their educational materials and consultations with 250 farmers.

Performance Target Outcome:

Thirty-six agricultural service providers participated in one or more annual RTF trainings focused on beginning farmers and women farmers. All 25 participants who responded to follow-up surveys reported having incorporated concepts of whole farm systems, strategies for addressing issues specific to beginning or women farmers, and resources specific to these groups in their educational activities. These include 38 workshops, 19 presentations, 6 on-farm demonstrations, 11 fact sheets, 11 articles, 11 web content, individual consultations with 75 colleagues and 183 farmers; reaching a total of just under 2500 farmers. As a result of the RTF training on beginning farmers, one Extension specialist developed a new programming area for Maine, “Farm-Family Balance”, and the diverse agencies, non-profits, and institutions working with Maine’s beginning farmers formed the Beginning Farmer Resource Network of Maine (BFRN) to better connect farmers with existing resources, coordinate activities, and address unmet needs. All 15 BFRN members who responded to the survey said that they are more effective as individual agricultural service providers as a result of their involvement with BFRN.

4. 2013-2014 SARE Outreach Activities

SARE Outreach activities and number of contacts from November 1, 2013 to October 31, 2014. Number of contacts in parentheses refer to in-depth information sharing.

Event/Activity	Number of Contacts <i>(please enter your best estimate)</i>	
	Farmers	Ag. Professionals
Maine Organic Farmers and Growers Association Farmer to Farmer Conference	350 (4)	20
State of Maine Agricultural Trade Show	500 (15)	50 (2)
Maine Grain Conference	75	10
Maine Vegetable and Fruit School	210 (6)	16
Rogers Farm Field Day	50	8
National Dairy Goat Conference	10 (2)	
Maine Sustainable Agriculture Society	3	5
Direct contacts (phone, farm visits)	9	3



Beginning Farmers Resource Network Provides Collaborative Assistance

Are you a new farmer? Do you need help navigating the process of setting up your business or finding out who can help your new farming business succeed? The Beginning Farmer Resource Network (BFRN) of Maine can help!

The Beginning Farmer Resource Network, established in 2012, is a group of federal, state and local farm service providers who have joined together to assist aspiring, beginning, and transitioning farmers...providing information and technical assistance on everything from soil health to business planning. This coalition of farm service providers supports the whole farm community including agriculture, aquaculture, and forestry. BFRN is dedicated to helping farmers succeed, as well as ensuring that agriculture stays prosperous in the future.

Whether you're an aspiring, beginning or transitioning farmer, the BFRN website at www.umaine.edu/beginning-farmer-resource-network/ is a "toolbox" of information on important issues and concerns for farmers who are starting a business. The website *guides* you by topic - including What to Consider First, Financing Your Farm Business, Managing Your Farm's Woodlands, and Balancing Farm and Family - and connects you with webinars, fact sheets, contacts, and training programs to help you make informed decisions in starting and succeeding in your farm business. You will also learn about each of the coalition's members with a direct link to the agency's/organization's website.

BFRN is working to make farmers aware of the technical and financial assistance available to them so that farmers can continue farming. Farming is on the increase in Maine, and the members of the Network are committed to supporting everyone. According to the 2012 Census of Agriculture data for Maine, between 2007 and 2012:

- The number of Maine farms increased from 8,136 to 8,173
- The number of farm acres increased from 1,347,566 acres to 1,454,104 acres, a 7.9% increase
- Average farm size increased from 166 acres to 178 acres, a 7.2% increase

Note: A farm is "any place from which \$1,000 of agricultural products were produced and sold, or normally would have been sold, during the Census year."

To learn more about BFRN and member agencies, and find the help you need to get started and stay successful, visit BFRN at www.umaine.edu/beginning-farmer-resource-network/...the one stop website for new farmer success. Make sure to check out the "events" section for upcoming workshops and webinars!



Press Release

Contact: Hildy Ellis, 207-596-2040

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Beginning Farmers Resource Network to hold series of workshops at Ag Trade Show

Rockport, ME – (Date) -- Are you a new farmer? Do you need help navigating the process of setting up your business or finding out who can help your new farming business succeed? The Beginning Farmer Resource Network (BFRN) of Maine can help!

The Beginning Farmer Resource Network (BFRN)...a coalition of farm service providers supporting the whole farm community including agriculture, aquaculture, and forestry...will be conducting workshops on various topics for new farmers at the Agricultural Trade Show to be held at the Augusta Civic Center on January 13-15, 2015. Included in the line-up are presentations on Accessing Farmland, Your Woodlot, 2014 Farm Bill, Direct Marketing, Farm Safety, Soil Health, and many more. The complete schedule, topics and locations for these workshops can be found in the Agricultural Trades Show program brochure at the Get Real Get Maine website at www.getrealmaine.com or the BFRN website at <http://umaine.edu/beginning-farmer-resource-network/events/>. The workshops will be held from 9 a.m.-6:30 p.m. on Wednesday, January 14th and from 9 a.m.-3 p.m. on Thursday, January 15th in the Hancock and Lincoln/Oxford rooms. In addition, the BFRN networking room, located in the Knox Room, will be open all day Tuesday-Thursday for an opportunity for an informal talk with a BFRN representative about your farm.

The Beginning Farmer Resource Network, established in 2012, is a group of federal, state and local farm service providers who have joined together to assist aspiring, beginning, and transitioning farmers ... providing information and technical assistance on everything from soil health to your business planning. The BFRN is dedicated to helping farmers succeed, as well as ensuring that agriculture stays prosperous in the future.

This coalition of farm service providers supports the whole farm community including agriculture, aquaculture, and forestry. A BFRN website has been developed that will guide you by topic, including What to Consider First, Financing Your Farm Business, and Balancing Farm and Family, and many other topics. Each topic area of the site will provide you with resources, publications and contacts to help you

make informed decisions in starting and succeeding in your farm business. Go to BFRN's website at www.umaine.edu/beginning-farmer-resource-network/...the one stop website for new farmers...for a "toolbox" of information on important issues/concerns that farmers should think about when starting their business. You will also learn about each of the coalition's members with a direct link to the agency's/organization's website.

Whether you're an aspiring, beginning or transitioning farmer, the BFRN workshops and website will provide you with a variety of useful information.

The coalition is working to make farmers aware of the technical and financial assistance available to them so that farmers can continue farming. Farming is on the increase in Maine, and the members of the Network are committed to supporting everyone.