

University of Vermont
Final Activity and Outcome Summary for the 2011-2014 State Program Project
Deb Heleba

Project Title: Social sustainability on the farm, field-based trainings

Performance Target – Ag Service Providers:

- 18 of 20 agricultural service providers who participate in training will increase their knowledge of social sustainability issues that farm families face; 10 will implement a change in their current work to include social sustainability topics (i.e., entrepreneurship, farm succession, quality of life, social integration).
- As a result, 50 farmers will report a better understanding of these issues, and 20 will report an improvement in at least one aspect of social sustainability on their farms as a result of educational efforts conducted by trainees.

Performance Target Outcomes Reported

10 UVM Extension educators implemented changes to include social sustainability topics in their work that **reached no fewer than 47 farmers**. These changes included:

- looking more broadly at issues of social sustainability
- being more thoughtful of farmer-to-community connections in water quality programming
- incorporating farm succession and community connections discussions in working with farms on entrepreneurship
- including social sustainability questions in follow-up evaluations
- integrating quality of life and profitability goals in labor management programming
- incorporating farm worker health topics into public health classes
- reframing “viability: to include social sustainability

Examples of specific actions by educators:

- 2 increased the focus on social sustainability issues in a business planning course that 20 farmers attended
- 1 is using social sustainability concepts to help frame discussions with farmers to form new farmer-Extension partnerships as part of a youth agriculture program.
- 2 have led development of social sustainability indicators and verification tools for Extension-wide programs to better assess how Extension programs affect farm-level social sustainability.
- 1 changed farmer surveys to better measure farm-level social sustainability.
- **27 farmers** reported a better understanding of social issues and/or reported improvements of social issues on their farms, including:
 - increased communication with family members on management decisions
 - inclusion of happiness and personal satisfaction as part of farm viability discussions
 - use of professional mediation for farm transitions.
 - Remote monitoring of quality indicators to allow more flexible use of time and location
 - Ability to balance work/life better

Additional Outcomes Reported

- 1 participant applied for funding for a project to survey livestock farmers to further assess social sustainability topics
- 1 participant presented a poster titled, “Social Sustainability and Vermont Communities: Outcome Measurement and Programming for Extension” at the Rural Sociological Society 76th Annual Meeting, August 8, 2013.
- 1 participant reported the project influenced the development of an integrated research and extension project looking at labor management decisions on small and medium sized farms.
- The state coordinator delivered 2 poster presentations – at the 2013 Rural Sociology Society Annual Meeting and the 2014 Ag & Human Values Conference

Project Milestone Activities Conducted	Participants
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 field-based trainings with farm families • 3 presentations/workshops at service provider conferences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 17 core participants from UVM Extension • 79 additional service provider from NRCS, other agencies, non-profits, faculty • 5 farmers
Assessments of Learning	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 22 service providers verified an increase in knowledge about social issues affecting farm families • 28 service providers verified an increase in confidence in identifying social issues of importance to farmers • The 17 core participants verified an increase in knowledge and skills in these areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Social sustainability concepts. – Complexities of facilitating change in social behaviors (vs. technical or production-related behaviors). – Farmer perspectives on how farm labor and/or marketing decisions relate to quality of life. – The extent to which farms are able to diversify their activities, expand produce, and/or extend the season to make their farm businesses more resilient. – Ways farmers are making decisions about business development in relation to the quality of life they desire. – Ways farmers are balancing support for their communities with their roles as business owners. – New research ideas and/or partnerships. – Metrics to measure performance and success (that might be used in an outcome-focused project). 	

Participants expressed their assessments of the value of the project to them in these quotes:

I have begun thinking more intentionally about how to incorporate equity issues into my work. I felt like we have been trying to do that inherently, because we work with a lot of women farmers, but it's reinforced my attitude about making sure it's front and center.

This project has helped me weave compassion, sensitivity and more broad assessment metrics into the nuts and bolts of day to day problem solving and education...As a result of this project I have landed on that measure being a "pain-happiness" scale...

Outreach about SARE and Grant Programs and Project

During the 3-year project, the Vermont state program reached more than 1,200 agricultural service providers and 900 farmers with information about SARE grants through 66 outreach events that included exhibits or presentations at meetings and conferences, workshops and webinars.

Examples of the events attended include:

- Organic Dairy Field Day
- NOFA-Vermont Winter Conference
- Vermont Oilseed Producers Conference
- Vermont Grain Conference
- Vermont Farm Show
- Vermont Crops and Soils Field Days
- Farm to Plate Summit
- National Farm Viability Conference
- The Vermont SARE twitter feed grew from 317 to 618 followers over the course of the project.
- The state coordinator developed a VT SARE state program website: www.uvm.edu/vtsare.
- 4 NE-SARE-related blog posts for Women’s Agricultural Network blog:
 - Digging into a Summer of Soil Health (7.2.14): blog.uvm.edu/wagn/2014/07/02/digging-into-a-summer-of-soil-health/
 - Personal Resiliency: The Antidote to Stress (2.14.14): blog.uvm.edu/wagn/2014/02/14/personal-resiliency-the-antidote-to-stress/
 - *Making Social Media Work in Sustainable Agriculture: 7 Lessons Learned* (12.11.13) blog.uvm.edu/wagn/2013/12/11/making-social-media-work-in-sustainable-agriculture-7-lessons-learned/
 - SARE Meets Social Sustainability on the Farm (10.10.13): blog.uvm.edu/wagn/2013/10/10/sare-meets-social-sustainability-on-the-farm/