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New Farmers Given Resources Needed to Succeed

by Stacy Kish, CSREES

The future of Northeast agriculture depends on the next generations of farmers. However, success is hard to achieve as the next generation is faced with unprecedented challenges. The Growing New Farmers (GNF) project established a consortium that supports new farmers in 12 Northeast states—from Maine to West Virginia. >>

IFAFS was authorized to establish a research, extension and education competitive grants program to address agricultural genomics, food safety, value-added products, biotechnology, rural resource management and farm efficiency and profitability.

Kathryn Ruhf and her colleagues at New England Small Farm Institute raised awareness among service providers by creating programs, products, tools and resources, producing research, promoting supportive public policies and building professional skills. New farmers and service providers can obtain information from the project's Web site (www.growingnewfarmers.org). The project's activities address major barriers faced by new farmers in the areas of land access, markets, capital and credit, and knowledge and technical assistance.

The project helps prospective and developing farmers find resources targeted to their needs to help them to succeed. This consortium project generated a strong sense of community. The Web site continues to serve as a "resource portal" with over 3,000 visits per month.

The GNF project is the only regional initiative in the United States that provides a professional support network for new farmers. Nearly 200 organizations and agencies in the 12 Northeast states joined the GNF Consortium. Eighty-four percent of the participating organizations and agencies reported that they continue to use the GNF Web site and resources to help their new farmer clients. Resources available

include a workbook for selecting market outlets, a decision-making tool for farm start-ups, a learning guide for record keeping, a policy toolkit, a study on financial resources and a CD clearing-house of materials for new farmers.

Project leaders categorized new farmers by developing a typology to reflect the wide range of diversity in this audience. Workbooks, guides, Web sites, brochures, farmer training programs, targeted lending programs and courses were developed to match each group's learning needs and preferences. In addition, GNF produced a report that highlights the factors barring new farmers from financial aid and land access. GNF also developed a policy tool kit to better translate public policy issues to develop supportive policies for new farmers.

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