

**A Growing New Farmers Publication**



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**orking with New Farmers:  
Topics in Professional Development**

March 2004

Sponsored by: GNF Professional Development Component

# *A Growing New Farmers Publication*

## **Working with New Farmers: Topics in Professional Development**

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March 2004

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The New England Small Farm Institute  
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# Working with New Farmers: Topics in Professional Development

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# Working with New Farmers: Topics in Professional Development

## Introduction

A primary activity of the Growing New Farmers (GNF) Project is to create and support a Consortium of service providers who work with new farmers in the Northeast. GNF was created to build an effective and enduring “service infrastructure,” an active network of organizations committed to providing programs and services for new farmers. To create this service infrastructure GNF is comprised of many components including Mini Grant Access to Resource projects, Research, Policy and Professional Development. GNF professional development activities focus on offering Consortium members opportunities and resources to enhance and build capacity to support and serve new farmers.

This booklet includes a series of articles focused on Professional Development topics requested by GNF Consortium members.

Topics include:

1. Describing the New Farmer Typology
2. Protecting Published Works
3. Identifying Gaps in New Farmer Programming
4. Developing Targeted New Farmer Programs
5. Using Case Studies and Profiles in New Farmer Education
6. Making Effective Referrals.

These articles can also be found on the GNF website at [www.northeastnewfarmer.org](http://www.northeastnewfarmer.org).

Enjoy

**Cathy Sheils**

GNF Professional Development Coordinator

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**GROWING NEW FARMERS**  
**A northeast service providers consortium**

## **What does the term "new farmer" mean?**

By Cathleen Sheils, Growing New Farmers  
Professional Development Coordinator

As we work together as members of the Growing New Farmers (GNF) Consortium to strengthen and improve programs, resources and services for new farmers, it is important that we begin to use a shared vocabulary and framework to describe our constituency. This common use of terms will help us look at the diverse educational, resource and training needs of all those in this sector according to what kind of "new farmer" they are.

The following discussion is based on *Listening to New Farmers: Findings from New Farmer Focus Groups*. (The full text can be found on the GNF publications page at [www.northeastnewfarmer.org](http://www.northeastnewfarmer.org).)

### I. DEFINITIONS:

There are a number of terms and definitions that apply to this sector: *new farmer*, *beginning farmer*, *young farmer* and *next-generation farmer* are often used interchangeably. However, there may be slightly different meanings to these terms as used by a particular organization.

For example, according to the US Department of Agriculture (USDA), a *beginning farmer* is one who has operated a farm for ten years or less. This definition is used to qualify for USDA beginning farmer loan programs. These loan programs also require that a beginning farmer have at least three years' experience as a farm manager.

According to Farm Bureau, a *young farmer* is a farmer under the age of 35. The Future Farmers of America and 4-H programs work with young people of high school age. A young farmer may also be someone working with the older generation on the family farm.

The term *next-generation farmer* is often used to describe a young person who will be among the next generation of farmers. Sometimes the term specifically suggests the next generation of the family to take over an existing farm. Farmers who

are the next generation on the family farm are likely to be moving through various stages of decision-making and control during the process of the farm transfer.

Other organizations propose a broad definition of a *new farmer*. This definition includes both people who have started farming *and* those who have not yet begun to farm. In this definition, a new farmer includes all of the above, plus people who are considering or planning a farming career.

## II. NEW FARMER TYPOLOGY

Under the Northeast New Farmer Network Project (NENFN), the predecessor to GNF from 1998 - 2001, a series of focus group discussions was held with new farmers throughout the Northeast. A way of classifying -- a typology -- emerged that more particularly describes new farmers. As we strive to improve how we meet the various needs of the region's new farmer clientele, it is important to understand that they fall into different categories depending on factors such as their level of farming awareness, decision-making, commitment and risk.

In this typology, there are two broad categories: *prospective farmers* and *beginning farmers*. Within these, there are six commitment or decision-making stages depending on various factors such as their level of farming awareness, experience and commitment. These stages are: recruits; explorers; planners; start-up; re-strategizers; and establishers. For service providers and educators, it is important to recognize that new farmers have diverse educational, resource and training needs in each of these various stages.

### New Farmer Descriptions:

**Prospective farmers:** Prospective farmers fall into three stages. In the first two stages prospective farmers have not yet begun to farm, or even made a commitment to farm. In the third stage they may work or apprentice on a farm, but are not decision-makers in their own farming activities and do not have a high level of commitment or risk associated with active farming. In these first three stages, they may be taking part in educational or introductory farming experiences such as apprenticeships.

1. **Recruits:** might consider a career in production agriculture if provided with information and connections to agriculture. This includes farm family members and those not from a farm. They could be high school students, or people who want to change careers.

2. **Explorers:** are investigating a farming future. They are gathering information and may be participating in introductory educational programs and/or farming related experiences. This includes next generation farm family members as well as those not from a farm.

3. **Planners:** have made a choice to pursue some sort of commercial production agriculture. They may not actually be farming yet, but are actively planning their farm entry. Farm employees, apprentices and farm family members who do not

have control of farm assets and limited decision making responsibility also fall into this stage.

**Beginning farmers:** Beginning farmers are those who are farming, but have been farming for ten years or less. They also fall into three stages.

1. **Start-ups:** are in their first three years of farming. They can be an employee, manager, or operator on rented or owned land. They have decision-making responsibility and an increasing commitment to farming either in time, equity and/or resources, either on their own farm, a rented farm or on a family farm.

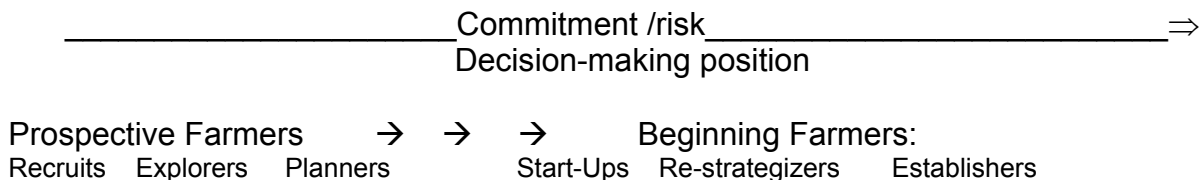
2. **Re-strategizers:** are farmers who are making adjustments in their fourth to seventh years. They have increased decision-making responsibility and commitment to farming as a farm renter, manager or owner. Typically, re-strategizers go through a critical phase of modifying or restructuring their operations.

3. **Establishers:** are farmers who are stabilizing in years eight to ten of the beginning farmer phase. They are on their way to becoming established farmers, and who continue to make changes and improvements to their farm operation.

New farmers who grew up on the family farm are not easily classified in this typology. It's hard to say when they actually "began" farming, or when they moved from planning to actual start-up. These young farmers are family farm members who have varying degrees of decision "influencing" roles on the farm without having farm operator status. They may be highly experienced farmers who actively influence farm decisions, but because of the nature and progress of farm transfer within families, they are not easily classified as planners or start-ups. Because of their unique circumstances and programming needs this group may qualify as a particular subset of new farmers. In many aspects, they parallel the central stages of the new farmer typology.

### III. The New Farmer Progression:

New farmers typically pass through several stages during their farming careers. These stages are associated with increasing degrees of commitment, decision-making responsibility and risk.



*A steady progression of farmers moving through each of these stages is necessary to sustain the agricultural production sector in the Northeast.*

Each stage has definitive (not necessarily exclusive) service and program

needs and requirements -- in terms of *what* is offered and *how* it is offered. Our service provider network can best respond by reviewing the typology categories and determining which groups of prospective and beginning farmers each organization or program is best equipped to serve. Grouping all new farmers together for educational purposes is less likely to meet their needs and less likely to be successful. The most effective programming will deliberately target programs to meet the needs of new farmers in each category.

The next GNF article will focus on the needs of new farmers in each of the six stages.

Each month over the next year, the GNF Professional Development component will highlight a program that targets one or more of the new farmer clientele in the six stages noted above. If you have a program example that you would like to have highlighted, email [crm3@cornell.edu](mailto:crm3@cornell.edu).

Source: Johnson, Sue Ellen, Marion Bowlan, Kathy Ruhf, and Cathleen Sheils, *Listening to New Farmers: Findings from New Farmer Focus Groups*, June 2001. Funded by the Mid-Atlantic Consortium and the NE SARE Program. © New England Small Farm Institute

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February 2004

# GROWING NEW FARMERS

## A Northeast Service Providers Consortium

Professional Development Article Series #102



# Sharing Works Produced by Growing New Farmers Consortium Members

By Cathleen M. Sheils and Marsha Descartes

## **Introduction**

Consortiums are alliances formed to pursue a common goal or venture. They are an effective way for individual organizations and stakeholders to work together to achieve goals that individually groups would not be able to achieve.

The Growing New Farmers (GNF) Consortium is such an alliance. Service providers from 12 Northeast states are working together to develop and promote targeted and effective programs for new farmers in our region.

In the GNF Consortium, members are urged to openly share their findings, knowledge and products with colleagues. As Consortium members, we are encouraged to share our works and endorse their use beyond our organizations.

While sharing, using and, in some cases, amending produced works among Consortium members are a benefit of membership, such use must be in the spirit of honoring original authors and organizations. We can best protect and acknowledge original works by understanding the methods available to protect produced works and to use works produced by others.

"Intellectual property rights" are legal protections defined by federal law granted to the creator of an intellectual property. Intellectual property is information, not physical property. Laws have been put into place to protect the creators of intellectual property. Intellectual property law is designed to encourage creativity and fair competition in the marketplace. It protects the rights of individuals and organizations who have transformed their ideas into property by granting rights to the owners of those properties. Copyright is a legal form of intellectual property protection.

The owner of intellectual property may be the individual developer or an organization, such as a college or university that the individual represents. In the case of an organization, contracts and company policy come into play. If your organization contracts with others to produce works then you need to be clear about who owns those works. When an independent contractor creates a work, the copyright of that work generally belongs to the contractor. A written agreement can spell out who owns what before the work is begun. Therefore, clarifying who will own the property is important. For specific questions about works that your organization has produced, please consult your organization's policies or with an attorney who has expertise in intellectual property law.

## **Copyright**

The purpose of copyright is to encourage the creation of intellectual and artistic works.

Copyright *"is a legal device that provides the creator of a work... the right to control how the*

*work is used*" (The Copyright Handbook, Atty. Stephen Fishman, NOLO 2000). These rights include:

- Reproduction: to make copies of the protected work
- Distribution: to sell or otherwise distribute the protected work
- Creation: to adapt or derive new works from the protected work

A copyright is automatic for works that fall under the copyright act, whether the author files with the copyright office and/or uses the copyright symbol even if a work is not yet published.

A copyright is easily recognized on works that use the symbol © to note protection provided to authors of "original works of authorship" that are fixed in a tangible form of expression. A work that has been created is automatically protected from the moment of its creation. Copyright lasts for the term of the author's life plus 70 years. The copyright symbol can be put on original works by the author without going through a formal costly registration process. It is highly recommended that authors use the copyright symbol to protect and assure credit for their work. After March 1, 1989, a copyright mark is not required to secure copyright protection. The notice is recommended because it eliminates the infringement defense of being uninformed, but again is not required.

Works that can be copyrighted include literary (books, manuals, fact sheets, curriculums, computer software), musical, dramatic, pantomimes and choreography: pictorial, graphic and sculptures; motion pictures, audiovisual and sound recordings; and architectural. View these categories broadly. For example, a computer program and most compilations may be registered as "literary works."

Copyright does not protect names, domain names, titles, slogans or short phrases. It also does not protect ideas, concepts, systems or methods of doing something. You may express your ideas in writing or drawings and claim copyright in your description, but copyright will not protect the idea itself as revealed in your written work. Works that have not been fixed in a tangible form of expression, such as a training program with no written curriculum guide, also cannot be protected by copyright.

The copyright notice should be placed to provide "reasonable notice". The title or following page, or front or back cover are standard locations, but are not the only options. A copyright notice contains three elements:

1. The word Copyright and symbol ©.
2. The year of first publication.
3. The name of the owner of the copyright.

For example: Copyright © 2003 John Doe

You can include both the person's name and organization or name or organization only.

Copyright © 2003 John Doe, NY FarmNet or Copyright © 2003 by NY FarmNet

If it's a published work that is being revised, the copyright would include the dates of the previous copyright and the most current:

Copyright © 2003, 2000, 1996 John Doe, NY FarmNet

In addition to using the copyright logo, some authors also provide statements that let the reader know exactly what the author is protecting and under what conditions. Remember, a copyright is not necessarily a prohibition against any use. It sets the terms by which another may use the

protected work. Specifying those terms in the copyright text will guide colleagues to uses that are consistent with the wishes of the copyright holder. For example:

Copyright © 2003 John Doe, NY FarmNet

All rights reserved. Worksheets may be reproduced by purchasers of this guide for use in conducting workshops; for other uses, contact the publisher. No other part of this work may be reproduced without the prior written permission of NY FarmNet.

Or:

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All rights reserved. All forms of reproduction including facsimile copy of any kind are not permitted.

If a work is prepared over a period of time, the part of the work that is “fixed” on a particular date constitutes the created work as of that date. Copyright gives the owner the exclusive rights to do, and to authorize others to do, the following: reproduce, prepare derivative works, distribute copies, and perform and/or display the work publicly. Only the author, or those deriving their rights through the author, can rightfully claim copyright.

The authors of a joint work are co-owners of the copyright in the work, unless there is an agreement to the contrary. Copyright in each separate contribution to a periodical or other collective work is distinct from copyright in the collective work as a whole. It rests initially with the author of the contribution.

The way in which copyright protection is secured is frequently misunderstood. It is automatic once the intellectual property is expressed in a tangible form such as a publication or recording, or in any written or printed manner including digital. No publication, registration or other action in the Copyright Office is required to secure copyright – the author simply needs to use the symbol and language to secure a copyright.

Though registration is not required, there are certain advantages to doing so. In general, copyright registration, which can be done for \$30 at any time within the life of the copyright, is a legal formality intended to make a public record of the basic facts of a particular copyright. Registered works if done within three months of publication or prior to infringement are eligible for statutory damages and attorney fees in successful litigation. Otherwise, awards are limited to actual damages. To register a copyright, go to [www.copyright.gov](http://www.copyright.gov).

GNF Consortium members should be aware that works created by the federal government are considered in the public domain, thus not eligible for copyright protection. In some cases, intellectual property produced with federally funded grants or contracts is not eligible for copyright. (Become familiar with the copyright and intellectual property policies of your institution or organization, and with contracts such as with GNF.)

### **Fair Use Rule of Copyright Law**

Almost all writers quote or closely paraphrase what others have written. Assuming the material quoted is protected by copyright, do you need permission from the owner to use it? The answer is not necessarily. Under the “fair use” rule of copyright law, an author may make limited use of another author’s work without asking permission. The fair use privilege is perhaps the most

significant limitation on a copyright owner's exclusive rights. The following are usually deemed fair uses:

- Criticism and comment - quoting a work in a review for purposes of illustration.
- News reporting – summarizing an article with brief quotations for a news report.
- Research and scholarship – quoting a short passage in a scholarly work for illustration.
- Nonprofit educational uses – photocopying of limited portions of written works for teaching

### **Copyleft**

In 1983, MIT researcher Richard Stallman developed the concept of "copyleft." It modifies the conditions of a copyright so an intellectual property – software in Stallman's case – is available for the free use of all in order to promote further developments and ideas. Copyleft is not a legal protection and includes the right to make modifications as long as they are also freely available for use by others. Though the property can be freely used, copyleft maintains the ownership privilege, and credit must be given to the developer.

Copyleft contains the normal copyright statement, asserting ownership and identification of the author. However, it then gives away some of the other rights implicit in the normal copyright: it says that not only are you free to redistribute this work, but you are also free to change the work. You cannot claim to have written the original work, nor can you claim that these changes were created by someone else. Finally, all derivative works must also be placed under these terms.

Copyleft is a useful construct for consortiums such as GNF. It encourages sharing and adapting resources while acknowledging and crediting their creators.

### **Practices for authors and users**

The success of the GNF Consortium depends in large part on members' commitment to sharing of ideas, expertise, resources and "works". It encourages maximum sharing -- where creative new tools can be used by many, and built upon to serve new farmers in even better ways. At the same time, the Consortium relies on maximum respect -- honoring the work of Consortium members as colleagues use each others' "works". This means conscious behavior on the part of both creators and potential users of intellectual property.

### **Authors of a produced work:**

- In your material, clearly identify the developer, the date the work was produced and contact information, including the parent organization that may retain copyright if the developer leaves.
- In addition to using the copyright logo, clearly outline procedures for use by others. These may include unlimited free use, written permission in advance, fees for reproducing or purchasing from creator, and any preferred format for crediting.

### **The potential users of a work:**

- Honor copyright protocol.
- Clearly credit, in all cases the original author and organization.
- Do not modify, adapt or reprint a copyrighted work without the author's permission unless it says you may.
- When using a work repeatedly, check with the creator to ensure that the information is still current. This also applies to web pages and other digital information.

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**For more information:**

Applying Copyleft to Non-software Information: [www.dsl.org/copyleft/non-software-copyleft.shtml](http://www.dsl.org/copyleft/non-software-copyleft.shtml)

Consortium for Educational Technology in University Systems  
<http://www.cetus.org/fairindex.html>

Copyright Law of the United States of America <http://lcweb.loc.gov/copyright/>

Copyright and Intellectual Property Legal Resource Information [www.nolo.com](http://www.nolo.com)

Copyright Office [www.copyright.gov](http://www.copyright.gov)

Elias, Stephen and Richard Stim, 2000, *Patent, Copyright & Trademark An Intellectual Property Desk Reference, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition*, Nolo.com:Berkeley California

The Digital Millennium Copyright Act of 1998; [www.loc.gov/copyright/legislation/dmca.pdf](http://www.loc.gov/copyright/legislation/dmca.pdf)

Indiana University Copyright Management Center; <http://www.iupui.edu/~copyinfo>

Resources for federal laws and professional standards;  
<http://www.system.missouri.edu/ip/resources/>

United States Patent and Trademark Office [www.uspto.gov](http://www.uspto.gov)

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June 2003

GROWING NEW FARMERS  
**A Northeast Service Providers Consortium**

## Addressing Gaps in New Farmer Programming

By Cathleen M. Sheils and Marsha Descartes  
GNF Professional Development

To support and sustain agriculture in the Northeast, innovative approaches and services are necessary to recruit and train future farmers. The Growing New Farmers Project (GNF) mission is to support the next generation of Northeast farmers. GNF was formed to develop an understanding of this diverse and important farmer audience and to create programs and services that meet new farmer needs.

GNF Consortium members across the region are already engaged in providing valuable programs and services to new farmers. However, program and service gaps still exist as identified by new farmers who participated in focus groups in 2000 and 2001. Results are published in *Gaps in New Farmer Programs and Services*, the full text of which can be found on the GNF publications page at [www.northeastnewfarmer.org](http://www.northeastnewfarmer.org). The new farmers pointed to gaps in the range and scope of programs and services that target their particular learning needs and preferences.

Although most agriculture programs and services are open and relevant to new farmers, it is increasingly apparent that more targeted programs are necessary to meet new farmer's particular needs. Based on an inventory of new farmer programs completed in 2001 and published in a Directory of Programs and Services for Northeast New Farmers also found at [www.northeastnewfarmer.org](http://www.northeastnewfarmer.org), we have begun to understand that there are new farmer constituencies who would benefit from targeted programming and that there are new farmer programmatic areas that are in need of more attention.

As you review the gaps outlined here, think about how you and your organization can help fill some of them. The descriptions and stages outlined in the New Farmer Typology, found on the GNF publications page at [www.northeastnewfarmer.org](http://www.northeastnewfarmer.org), emphasize this point: Programs and services must target the learning needs and preferences for new farmers in each stage. For example, in Typology Stage One, recruits need a program that provides them with connections to agriculture. But in Stage Four, a startup farmer needs a program to provide actual farming skills and knowledge.

### **Program considerations for each stage must include:**

The level of farming exposure, experience, knowledge and resources of the new farmers in that stage.

- Program delivery – identifying the most conducive learning format for the targeted new farmer audience – classroom, hands –on, tours, discussion group, workshop, on-farm etc.
- Scheduling – determining the best time and day for the targeted new farmer audience, for some audiences weekend programs may be necessary.
- Marketing language. Specifically mentioning the stage of new farmer being targeted. For example, it should be said that a program is, “For new farmers who have one to five years of experience.” Or “for those who are interested in exploring farming opportunities.” This is more effective than general phrasing: “This program is open to all new farmers.”

- Accessibility – convenient scheduling and program location and promotion that is accessible by new farmers. Traditional agricultural publications may not reach the new farmer audience.
- Geographic reach – determining the region you want to target and the number of participants. For example a “hands on” program on a farm may have a limited enrollment from a small geographic region while a one day introductory program may be open to a larger audience from several counties and a statewide New Farmer Conference may draw over a hundred attendees from across the state. Specific topics like rotational grazing or business planning usually are best taught in small audiences to promote discussion then general topics like an Introduction to Farming in New York that can be presented to larger audiences in a more conference type setting.

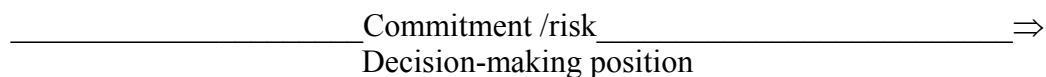
**Gaps by New Farmer Typology Stages**

The New Farmer Typology is used to describe where program gaps exist. Each stage has definitive, but not necessarily exclusive, service and program needs -- in terms of *what* is offered and *how* it is offered.

Our service provider network can best meet those needs by reviewing the typology categories and determining which groups of prospective and beginning farmers each organization or program best serves. The most effective programming deliberately targets programs to meet the needs of new farmers in each category.

Programming is not “one size fits all.” It must:

- Be targeted to new farmers as a group, but also target specific but varied farming interests and methods of production within the larger new farmer group.
- Must address the ways new farmers prefer to learn. According to feedback from focus groups, new farmers overwhelmingly prefer to learn through hands-on programs, such as apprenticing, mentoring, farm tours and visits, and networking with peers at a similar stage of experience.
- Realize that new farmers typically pass through several stages that are associated with increasing degrees of commitment, decision-making responsibility and risk. And each stage has its own educational and service needs. Targeted programming is required for each stage.



*A steady progression of farmers moving through each of these stages is necessary to sustain the agricultural production sector in the Northeast.*

**Typology Descriptions**

**Prospective farmers**



They fall into three stages. In the first two, prospective farmers have not yet begun to farm or even made a commitment to do so. In the third stage, they may work or apprentice on a farm, but they aren't decision-makers in farming activities and do not have a high level of commitment or risk associated with farming. In these first three stages, they may be taking part in educational or introductory farming experiences such as apprenticeships.

### **1. Recruits**

They might consider a career in production agriculture if provided with information and connections to agriculture. The group can include nonfarmers, people raised on farms, high school students, or people seeking a career change.

**Learning Needs** - Exposure to farming and information about the choices and types of farming careers.

**Available Programs** - FFA and vocational agriculture programs in urban and rural high schools. Some of these may involve apprentice programs to introduce farming to those who have no background in it.

**Gaps** - Programs that actively encourage people to consider and enter farming are few. Some examples include farm open houses, farm tours for area school guidance counselors and "Fun on the Farm Day" county programs. There is a need to promote full- and part-time farming as a viable career option in both farming and non-farming communities. Diverse audiences that could be targeted include:

- Vocational agriculture students
- Immigrant groups who may have been farmers in their home country.
- People seeking a career change
- People interested in working land they own.

Given the diversity of people to target, programs must address language barriers. Programs for women, minorities and immigrants are essential.

**Preferences** – Experiences and opportunities to be exposed to positive farming careers and options.

### **2. Explorers**

They are investigating a farming future by gathering information and possibly participating in introductory educational programs and/or farming related experiences. This includes next generation farm family members and those not from a farm.

**Learning Needs** - Practical and introductory information. Exposure to agricultural information and sources of assistance.

**Available Programs** - Local overview and introductory programs and limited informal apprenticeship programs in the region.

**Gaps** - There are a few programs that help guide people in the decision of whether or not to start farming. Such programs are only offered in limited areas in the region. There are limited apprentice programs and many are informal. There are few structured approaches for acquiring basic farming knowledge or to explore the decision to farm or not. There must be greater availability of orientation programs that reach larger geographic areas. These programs should present a realistic picture of farming opportunities and challenges. Apprenticeship programs should provide more experience than what is available on one farm or type of farm. In addition, there needs to be weekend and part-time programs and pre-business planning programs.

**Preferences** - Information targeting local and regional farming conditions. Exposure to various farming methods and enterprises. Workshops or workbooks that assist with enterprise analysis and selection as well as the decision to farm or not based on family and financial goals identified.

### **3. Planners**

They have chosen to pursue some sort of commercial production agriculture. Planners may not be farming yet, but are actively planning their farm entry. Farm employees, apprentices and farm family members who do not have control of farm assets and have limited decision-making responsibility fall into this stage.

**Learning Needs** - Practical information including business planning, land access, credit and financing options, specific farm skills and marketing training.

**Available Programs** - Overview courses, topic courses and workshops, some land access programs and credit options especially through linking programs.

**Gaps** - Relative to recruitment and explorers, there are more courses and workshops to assist new farmers actually begin to plan a farm business. There is a significant need to help planners with land access needs, start up financing options and models of farm entry strategies. There is also a need for some planners to participate in a program where they can learn practical “hands on” skills. Planners not from farm families need more guidance, practical knowledge, skill training and access to agricultural information and resources than those from farm families. Both groups need greater access to credit options and land, including the development of programs to link farm transfer with preservation incentives. Services that can assess and meet the differing levels of need for this group are necessary. The success of Planners depends on their ability to do business, financial planning and marketing analysis including goal setting that includes both business, personal and family goals. They must understand the percentage of family income that must come from farm and off-farm sources.

**Preferences** - Information specific to local farming conditions, opportunities to hear from new and established farmers and interactive workshops. Business planning courses and one-on-one assistance. Opportunity to work on their own business plan including analysis of their ideas and resources.

### **Beginning farmers**

Beginning farmers have been farming for 10 years or less. They fall into three stages.

#### **1. Startups**

They are in their first three years of farming. Startups can be an employee, manager, or operator on rented or owned land. They have decision-making responsibility and an increasing commitment to farming either in time, equity and/or resources, either on their own farm, a rented farm or on a family farm.

**Learning Needs** - Practical and supportive business, financial, and marketing skills.

**Available Programs** - Workshops, Cooperative Extension and isolated local programs supporting immigrant start-up farmers who had farmed in their country of origin.

**Gaps** - It is difficult to determine how many programs actually target farmers in their first few years of farming. There are very limited sources of credit for start up. They need programming that includes practical skill building information and practice around production, farm management, financial management and marketing. There is a need for mentoring programs that provide both management education and support.

**Preferences** - Technical information available regionally. Startups prefer to learn from farmer mentors, farm visits, peer networks, and interactive training and workshops. Potentially, retiring and exiting farmers may fill some of these roles. New immigrant farmers prefer one-on-one support and need programs in their language.

#### **2. Re-strategizers**

These are farmers who are making adjustments in their fourth to seventh years. They have increased decision-making responsibility and commitment to farming as a renter, manager or owner. Typically, re-strategizers go through a critical phase of modifying or restructuring their operations.

**Learning Needs** - Practical assessment skills, knowledge of innovative farming possibilities and alternatives, financial planning, marketing information, and credit opportunities.

**Available Programs** - There are few targeted services and programs available to this group. But they can use programs available for established farmers such as Cooperative Extension and those developed for new farmers that can offer new ideas. Traditional lending sources and some peer lending groups can make small loans and offer other credit opportunities.

**Gaps** - There are virtually no programs targeted to this stage of farming, for those who are reorganizing their farm. Re-Strategizers need technical assistance in analysis of enterprise, production or marketing changes. They also need exposure to how other farmers have made changes and the decision making process they used.

**Preferences** - They prefer one-on-one technical support from service professionals, farmer mentors, and peer networks.

### **3. Establishers**

These farmers are stabilizing in years eight to 10 of the beginning farmer phase. They are on their way to becoming established farmers but continue to make changes and improvements to their farm operation.

**Learning Needs** - Updated marketing information and financial management skills.

**Available Programs** - Cooperative Extension programs.

**Gaps** - Programs that provide information on expansion and diversification.

**Preferences** - Establishers prefer field day and workshop opportunities. Collaboration with service providers works well.

One last category, or subset, of new farmers to consider are those who grew up on a family farm. They are not easily classified and may have unique programming needs. It's hard to pinpoint when they actually "began" farming or when they moved from planning to actual startup. These young farmers have varying degrees of decision "influencing" roles on the farm without having farm operator status. They may be highly experienced farmers who actively influence farm decisions but because of the nature and progress of farm transfers within families, they are not easily classified as Planners or Startups. In many aspects, this group of new farmers parallels the central stages of the new farmer typology.

### **Gaps by Type of New Farmer Program**

From reviewing the program gaps within each typology stage, program gaps essentially fall into these broad categories.

- Introductory Programs
- Land Access Programs
- Hands on Practical Training and Experience
- Production Information and Education
- Financial and Credit Services
- Marketing Analysis and Planning
- Pre-business and Business Planning
- Special Interest Programs that target minority and women farmers

### **What Can You Do?**

We see six things, minimum, that can be done by all of us as part of the GNF Consortium:

1. Refer to the information collected in focus groups with new farmers and from service provider surveys. It can help identify program and service gaps. (Results of both of these can be found in *Listening to New Farmers: Findings from New Farmer Focus Groups* and *Northeast New Farmer Programs and Services Directory 2004*.)

The directory lists programs and services currently available to new farmers. It includes both targeted and relevant programs. Targeted programs are developed and marketed specifically for new farmers, whereas relevant programs are for all farmers.

2. Understand the typology stages, review the gaps, and talk to the new farmer audiences in your community. Identify the gaps that you see. Can you create a program or offer a service that meets one of those gaps?

3. Tap into the service providers. They are in a unique position to promote farming as a viable and satisfying career choice. They can develop services that will support the next generation of farmers.

4. Find a way to build widespread support for and development of apprentice, practice, mentor, peer, and other hands-on programs. These are typically the preferred methods of learning for most of the new farmer groups.

5. Broaden the amount and availability of technical data, including information available for special interest farming such as organic and niche. This is especially important for those Recruits and Planners considering farming as a career change. This group rarely considers dairy farming or animal raising.

6. Give concerted attention to reaching out to recruits in nonfarming settings such as urban areas, and with special groups such as immigrants, minorities, women, or people who may farm part time.

7. Use the GNF Technical Assistance Directory to locate expertise and resources and to identify program partners within the Consortium when you looking to develop a new farmer program.

8. Refer to the GNF Program Profiles booklet for program ideas and delivery strategies.

### **Sources**

*Listening to New Farmers, Findings from New Farmer Focus Groups* (June 2001)

*Gaps in New Farmer Programs and Services* (September 2001),

*What Does the Term "New Farmer: Mean?, A Publication for Growing New Farmers, Professional Development Discussion Series #101* (May 2002).

# **GROWING NEW FARMERS A Northeast Service Providers Consortium**

## Targeted and Relevant New Farmer Programs

By Cathleen M. Sheils and Marsha Descartes

A primary focus of the Growing New Farmers (GNF) Project is to increase the development and availability of programs and services that meet the needs of new farmers. Most programs and service for agricultural producers are open to new farmers, and many of those provide information and training that is *relevant* for prospective and beginning farmers. However, it is increasingly apparent from listening to new farmers that they want more programs that are specifically *targeted* to meet their particular learning needs and preferences. While new farmers can participate in and benefit from programs developed for established farmers, some programming must be designed for new farmers to meet their unique needs.

There is a difference between a program designed for a general farmer audience (relevant) and a program specifically designed for a specific farmer audience based on the experiences and educational needs of those farmers (targeted). To best serve the range of new farmer audiences, providers need to appreciate the difference and design programs and services that consciously reflect that understanding. Both kinds of programming are necessary and suitable to help farmers enter and succeed in farming.

Some programming may not be relevant *or* targeted for certain categories of new farmers. A good example is a farm business planning course that requires producers to have several years' of financial information to plug into budget templates. This program is not relevant for a start-up farmer, and in fact may wind up being not a good use of their time and money. Prospective or start-up farmers who need more basic or background information may be confused or discouraged if they participate in a program that is "over their heads". While at the same time established farmers may get frustrated if a program is to "remedial" for them.

**Relevant** programs are typically designed to meet the needs of a general farmer audience and are usually more targeted to established farmers. These programs may be directed at certain commodity groups, or focus on a particular topic. The degree of usefulness that the farmers in this audience will derive from relevant programming will vary according to their experience and knowledge level. Relevant programs are often aimed at the middle skill or experience range of the audience. Therefore there is some assumption of experience and knowledge. General interest programs are relevant to new farmers but not designed for them. For example, a twilight farm tour or a workshop on integrated pest management may be extremely useful to many kinds of new farmers as well as other farmers.

**Targeted** programs and services are designed to meet the needs of a specific rather than general audience. Programs **targeted** to new farmers take into account the experience, skills, preferred learning methods and educational needs of the target audience. Within the new farmer audience, there are many kinds of new farmers (see [refer to article about typology].) So, a targeted program may be designed for a certain category of new farmer. For example, the New England Small Farm Institute offers a program for people who are not yet farming but are

exploring the idea of farming. A program targeted to pre-starters is offered by Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Morris County, NJ called "*School for Entering a Profitable Small Scale Farming business: A series of day and evening workshops with hands-on training for people without farming experience.*" Other targeted programs might address those farmers who have a few years of farming under their belts, and need support or technical assistance to make adjustments to the farming operation.

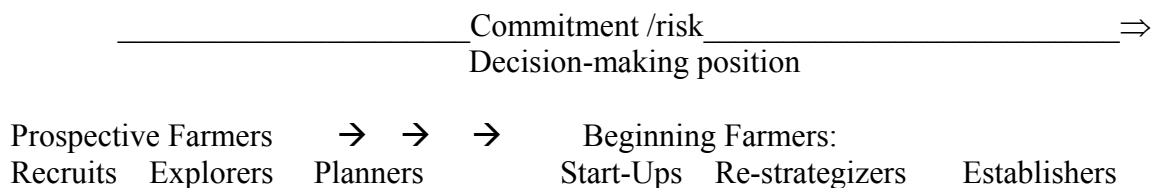
Within the new farmer audience, programming is not 'one size fits all'. Information collected from focus groups with new farmers (see *Listening to New Farmers: Findings from New Farmer Focus Groups*) and from service provider surveys (see *Northeast New Farmer Programs and Services Directory 2001*), can help direct targeted program development. The "new farmer typology" breaks their progress into stages, each with its own distinct educational and service needs. Targeted programming is required for each stage.

New farmers who grew up on the family farm are not easily classified in this typology. It's hard to say when they actually "began" farming, or when they moved from planning to actual start-up. These young farmers are family farm members who have varying degrees of decision "influencing" roles on the farm without having farm operator status. They may be highly experienced farmers who actively influence farm decisions, but because of the nature and progress of farm transfer within families, they are not easily classified as planners or start-ups. New farmers on the family farm have some unique needs and interests that should be addressed by specific, targeted programs. For example, a program on inter-generational communication skills for successful farm transfers.

### Targeted Programming using the New Farmer Typology

#### New Farmer Typology:

New farmers typically pass through several stages during their farming careers. These stages are associated with increasing degrees of commitment, decision-making responsibility and risk.



*A steady progression of farmers moving through each of these stages is necessary to sustain the agricultural production sector in the Northeast.*

**Prospective farmers:** Prospective farmers fall into three stages. In the first two stages prospective farmers have not yet begun to farm, or even made a commitment to farm. In the third stage they may work or apprentice on a farm, but are not decision-makers in their own farming activities and do not have a high level of commitment or risk associated with active

farming. In these first three stages, they may be taking part in educational or introductory farming experiences such as apprenticeships.

1. **Recruits stage:** might consider a career in production agriculture if provided with information and connections to agriculture. This includes farm family members and those not from a farm. They could be high school students, or people who want to change careers.

People in this stage would benefit from targeted program opportunities where farming is introduced to them. Events such as Farm Open Houses, County Fair, Introductory one day programs like “Farming 101,” where various options are identified, basic farming booklets, websites and participation in programs like 4-H and FFA are program examples.

2. **Explorers stage:** are investigating a farming future. They are gathering information and may be participating in introductory educational programs and/or farming related experiences. This includes next generation farm family members as well as those not from a farm.

Targeted programs for explorers need to include practical and introductory programs that provide a greater understanding of production, marketing, financial planning, and start-up issues geared to their level of expertise. Those in this stage have a need for varied apprenticeships and hands-on opportunities. The use of new farmer stories and hands-on experiences are high interest learning methods. The availability of summer and part-time internships, apprenticeships, and employment opportunities in a variety of types of agriculture are important components, as well as the promotion of urban high school vocational agriculture programs. Since recruits can also come from immigrant groups, it is also important to target programs to this population.

3. **Planners stage:** have made a choice to pursue some sort of commercial production agriculture. They may not actually be farming yet, but are actively planning their farm entry. Farm employees, apprentices and farm family members who do not have control of farm assets and limited decision making responsibility also fall into this stage.

They are beginning to identify their enterprise idea, farming location, production methods, marketing channels and financial needs. They may have some farming experience as employees or apprentices, but continue to need practical knowledge. Targeted programming for this area should include links to credit resources and farm/land Farmlink and other land/business acquisition program opportunities are important at this stage. Apprenticeships and mentorships are important learning methods as well as web, workshop, and classroom resources. Learning from peers, established farmers, case profiles, case studies, and other interactive methods are preferred learning experiences to enhance knowledge. Enterprise analysis, marketing and business planning skills become important at this stage and programming needs to take into account differing skill levels.

**Beginning farmers:** Beginning farmers are those who are farming, but have been farming for ten years or less. They also fall into three stages.

**1. Start-ups stage:** are in their first three years of farming. They can be an employee, manager, or operator on rented or owned land. They have decision-making responsibility and an increasing commitment to farming either in time, equity and/or resources, either on their own farm, a rented farm or on a family farm.

Individuals in this stage need more detailed information on alternative farming options, marketing plans, diversification options, and consumer preferences. This is also a time when new farmers tend to go from rented land to owned land. Targeted services would include mentor programs, peer learning networks, technical information concerning marketing, production methods and alternatives, business skills, and financial services all geared to the relatively inexperienced farmer. Linkages to land and credit options are also important.

**2. Re-strategizers stage:** are farmers who are making adjustments in their fourth to seventh years. They have increased decision-making responsibility and commitment to farming as a farm renter, manager or owner. Typically, re-strategizers go through a critical phase of modifying or restructuring their operations.

Workshops and individual trainings using case studies and case profiles are often quite effective during this period as re-strategizers grapple with the cross-roads type of decision-making. They continue to be able to benefit from mentor programs and peer networks as they learn from others how change has been handled and the options available. More detailed technical information as appropriate to the complexity of their farm operations and future farm plans is necessary as they explore marketing and production options and changes. Financial planning and access to credit are also important targeted services at this stage although they typically would have begun to establish a credit history and equity.

**3. Establishers stage:** are farmers who are stabilizing in years eight to ten of the beginning farmer phase. They are on their way to becoming established farmers, and who continue to make changes and improvements to their farm operation.

These operations are relatively stable although change and modification is an on-going process. They are more likely to own their own operations and have the major decision-making responsibilities. This group has less need for hands-on programs such as mentorships and can increasingly benefit from relevant instead of targeted programming as their knowledge base increases. Peer networks and learning through others' experiences continue to be an important component but this group needs current and projected marketing trends, latest technology updates, and fine-tuned business and financial skills.

#### Designing Targeted Programming

There are three ways to design programs and services targeted to new farmers. The first is by topic. There are particular subjects that are especially important to new farmers (more so than to established farmers). These include:

- Access to land – options for rental, ownership, leasing and information about land availability Sources of start up and operating capital – traditional and other
- On-farm skill training – production methods, animal management, machinery and equipment use and repair, land management, pasture management etc.



- Start-up business planning – including feasibility analysis of enterprise selection and use of resources
- Decision-making at all levels from enterprise selection to making business changes in years 4-7.
- Goal-setting, values clarification – including both farm, personal and family.
- Marketing analysis – identification and selection of marketing channels appropriate and profitable for various products and farm enterprises.
- Access to information – identification and how to access sources of information – agency, web, other farmers, farm groups and organizations.

The second consideration is by format. How a program is delivered is as important as its subject matter. New farmers consistently report that they most want to learn from other farmers and prefer hands on and discussion oriented learning. Format considerations for new farmers include:

- Avoid jargon, acronyms and terminology, when used make sure to provide an explanation ie. USDA-FSA, CAFO, AEM, NRCS etc.
- Address appropriate level of knowledge or skills – a program for beginning farmers on crop rotation and management, for example (refer to the typology for ideas)
- Focus on hands-on and farmer-to-farmer approaches – discussion groups, farm tours, on-farm skill workshops
- Build community and networks
- Expose audience to resources – sponsor an agency/organization open house in one location and invite new farmers to increase their exposure to agricultural programs and services available – both public and private.
- Promote less resource- and capital-intensive approaches to farm entry – expose prospective farmers to various models and options to entering farming.

The third consideration has to do with outreach. A program targeted to new farmers is useless unless new farmers know about and are drawn to it. Some considerations include:

- Describe the offering to attract the target audience -- use "targeted" language
- Make the offering as affordable as possible and accessible as possible – think about the location and geographic region you want to target.
- Think about scheduling to reach your targeted audience – you may need to schedule evening and weekend programs to attract perspective farmers and those starting out who may have an off farm job, established farmers are more likely to attend week day programs.
- Remember that new farmers are not as likely to be plugged into existing databases, or farm, commodity and trade groups -- where will you advertise?

### **Modifying Relevant Programs into Targeted Programs**

It is possible to modify a relevant program to more particularly meet the needs of a new farmer audience. For example providing an earlier, pre-program session that introduces and reviews the basic concepts that the general audience would find too fundamental. This special session for new farmers would encourage an interchange of ideas and the formation of questions often stifled by a more advanced presentation. New farmers might also be able to benefit from a

particular curriculum with the addition of a hands-on component or the addition of peer trainers or mentors. There are many creative and effective ways to modify successful services not specifically targeted to new farmers. The important component is the willingness to recognize new farmers as a distinct group with specific needs and preferences.

**Resources:**

Northeast New Farmer Network Publications:

- Listening to New Farmers
- Gaps in New Farmer Programs and Services
- Northeast New Farmer Programs and Services Directory 2004

**All found at [www.northeastnewfarmer.org](http://www.northeastnewfarmer.org)**

**February 2004**



# GROWING NEW FARMERS

A Northeast Service Providers Consortium

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ARTICLE SERIES #105

## Gathering and Using Case Studies and Profiles in Beginning Farmer Education

**By: Cathleen Sheils and Marsha Descartes, GNF**

**Professional Development**

As members of the Growing New Farmers (GNF) consortium we are looking for effective and innovative ways to provide education to new farmers. Through focus groups, interviews, and needs assessments conducted by various GNF projects, beginning farmers consistently say they are most interested in learning opportunities that are based on the practical knowledge and sharing among farmers. Two ways of providing this type of learning is by using case studies and profiles. Both of these formats tell a farmer's story. The case study shares a story and relates a problem and does not include the final outcome. Case studies are used to stimulate farmer to farmer sharing and learning while developing problem solving skills in the learner. A case profile contains a story which includes the outcome and relates the process leading to the resolution. Case profiles are also used as farmer to farmer learning method. Both are based on real-life experiences and can be used as an independent or group learning tool. Case studies and profiles can of course be verbal, where a farmer shares their story during an educational program. For the purposes of this article they are written.

### **What is a Case Study?**

The case study is an educational tool that started to gain popularity in the 1930's, notably at the Harvard business school to engage students using real life situations in the problem solving process. It is currently a popular teaching strategy for topics where decision-making can be a challenging process. Use of case studies shows that there is no one size fits all solutions to a problem. For these reasons, case studies lend themselves well as a beginner farmer education tool, as farming requires a high degree of decision-making skill. The study is a narrative summary of either a real life or fictitious situation or a combination of several situations into one story that contains a problem needing resolution. A solution is not presented or offered. The learner, as an individual or as a group member grapples with solving the problem by brainstorming, discussing and identifying options and solutions. Using case studies in groups creates an interactive, reality based learning environment.

### **Writing a Case Study**

Elements of a good case study include: the history of the situation, relevant information, description of the main characters and the context of the problem written in a succinct manner - usually a half to full page in length. It is important to remember confidentiality when writing case studies. If the farmer requests confidentiality do not use real names or information that could identify the person or persons, using a combination of situations is a good method of securing confidentiality. The study usually ends with a question or two for the learner as a problem solving guide. Some case study writers draw their audience into the situation through the use of quotes and conversation that captures the reality of the family and situation. Dialogue helps maintain interest and can best describe the emotions and important issues of the problem or dilemma. The emotional context of the story is often an important component of the problem and can also illustrate that emotions go hand in hand with dealing with issues on a family farm.

Scenarios appropriate for case studies are many and you will find that a variety of topics lend themselves well to this learning method. Before gathering case studies it is important to identify the educational need that a case study will help address. For example case studies can be used to help illustrate common new farmer problems like locating affordable farm land, accessing start up capital, analyzing the feasibility of an enterprise, pest management challenges and strategies for taking over the family farm. Once the educational need is identified the next step is to generate a list of farmers who best fit the topic area.

Case studies can be written using several methods including interviewing farmers or using a summary of situations that you know of or that are fictitious based on your work with the farm community. You could also ask a farmer to write up the case study based on their experience, a farmer who has a current problem to solve or a farmer who has been through a problem solving experience who wants to share the story.

Often a case study is written from interviews with the person, couple or family who has faced the educational problem. Before gathering the case study information, outline what you want the case study to include and questions you have for the farmer interviewee – if you are doing interviews. Outlining your case study will help assure you collect the most relevant information. The subject of the interview may want their identity disguised and this can be guaranteed by name and location changes. Instructors who consistently use case stories in their teaching repertoire recommend the use of a neutral person who will critique the story for effectiveness and educational content. The interview allows for the collection of rich information and testimonials to use in writing the case study. Case studies can be written from using taped information with the farmer's permission, based on notes taken either by the interviewer and/or a third person who listens and take notes. The usual format for involving and collecting information from farmers is to have an initial phone interview describing the project and why case studies are being collected, asking for the farmers permission to be involved and scheduling time for a face-to-face interview. As writing progresses, additional contacts are normally necessary to follow up on important points or provide clarification. Once the case study is drafted it needs to be provided to the farmer for review and final approval.

Much has been written both in printed form and on the internet on the topic of writing case studies including examples of case studies. Some of these sources are included as references. Common elements of a case study include:

- Introduction including setting and history of the farm
- Description of main characters and personalities involved in the story
- Description of events
- Description of problem(s) and conflict(s)

The ending is usually not an element of a case study. Working through the problems to a workable solution is part of the learning process. However, depending on the goals of the educational program, the real life outcome may be presented at the end to the participants,

providing the opportunity to know what happened and speculate if their solution was also feasible.

### **Using Case Studies with Beginning Farmers**

Using case studies works well in a variety of educational settings where discussion with peers is possible so they can grapple with the issues and problems illustrated by the case study. Case studies help the learner apply the concepts to their own situation while working on someone else's problem. Working on your own problem situation can be uncomfortable in a group setting, but the principles of the case study exercise can be applied at home. Using case studies is also a method of stimulating farmer to farmer learning beyond the scheduled educational event. Because case studies involve active involvement and learning by the participants, relationships develop that go beyond the event.

### **What is a Case Profile?**

The case profile is another format that uses real life situations and illustrates what others have done to solve a problem or deal with a multi-faceted situation like a farm transfer. It is a summary of an individual's or families experience around an identified learning topic. Unlike a case study in a case profile the ending and the steps taken to reach the outcome are known. A profile illustrates to the reader that others have tackled the situation and describes their decision-making process and outcomes. A profile can help illustrate a complex process like a farm transfer by showing how others have accomplished the task. Both success and non-success stories are educational and provide significant learning experiences.

### **Writing Case Profiles**

There is less reference material available in print or on the web on case profiles as exists for case studies. However, some GNF members are using case profiles as an educational tool. NY FarnLink is using case profiles to illustrate the farm transfer process in a booklet titled *Profiles of Innovative Farm transfers in New York*. This booklet contains \_\_\_ profiles. The guidelines used for collecting and using those profiles are the basis for this information.

A case profile summarizes one story around a topic area - several case profiles can be compiled into a booklet of stories around a similar theme or situation such as transferring the farm, getting started in farming or accessing start up capital. If compiling profiles into a booklet it is important that each profile include consistent information.

Before gathering case profiles it is important to identify the educational need and beginning farmer audience (end user) that you want the profiles to focus on. The next step is to identify profile situations that would best illustrate and provide a learning opportunity for the beginning farmer reading the profile. For example the NY FarmLink program identified an educational need around highlighting the diversity of farm transfer strategies available to farm owners. The targeted audience was farm owners who contacted the program for assistance in transferring their farm to the next generation. Many had limited information on the various strategies available and to meet this information need in a cost effective manner a booklet of farm transfer profiles was compiled. The booklet is sent to farm owners as introductory information for their review prior to requesting and then receiving personalized follow up assistance.

Once you have identified the educational need and target audience you need to develop a strategy for identifying and collecting profiles. Like case studies profiles are often written from interviews with the person, couple or family who has faced the educational problem. Before gathering the case profile information, outline what you want the case profile to include and

questions you have for the farmer interviewee(s). Outlining your case profile will help assure you collect the most relevant information. This outline serves as an interviewers guide. The NY FarmLink project involved using several interviewers because farmers were profiled across the state and the use of several interviewers allowed the project to be completed in a few months. One editor edited each profile for consistent information and layout. The interviewers outline that NY FarmLink used to gather case profiles is attached for your review.

The interview allows for the collection of rich information and testimonials to use in writing the case study. Case studies can be written from using taped information with the farmer's permission, based on notes taken either by the interviewer and/or a third person who listens and take notes. The usual format for involving and collecting information from farmers is to have an initial phone interview describing the project and why case profiles are being collected, asking for the farmers permission to be involved and scheduling time for a face-to-face interview. As writing progresses, additional contacts are usually required to follow up on important points or provide clarification.

After the interview is set up, the interviewer prepares through the use of the interview guide. This guide helps the interviewer/writer to gather important and consistent information. As a case profile is a type of story, quotes from the farmer and other individuals involved add interest to the profile and help draw the reader into the narrative. Therefore note taking is important. This can be accomplished through tape recording, note taking by the writer, or note-taking by a helper. Interviewing skills are important, with the writer asking open-ended questions that elicit as much information as possible from the interviewee. Once the profile is drafted it needs to be provided to the farmer for review and final approval.

### **Using Case Profiles with Beginning Farmers**

Case profiles lend themselves to both self directed and group learning environments and can be used with a diversity of beginning farmer audiences. Case profiles can be used with prospective farmers to help them gain an appreciation for what farm career choices are possible and with beginning farmers who are in their early farming years and who could benefit from the experiences of farmers who have encountered similar problems. With the permission of the profile farmer, it is possible for beginning farmers to use the profile farmer as a mentor if contact is allowed and encouraged. Often farmers allow contact information to be shared as part of their profile – always get permission.

### **Case Profile Example:**

#### **Farm Transition Case Profile –Steuben County, New York**

Prepared by Steve Richards, Director, NY FarmLink

**Synopsis:** The following case study is provided as a real example of one type of farm transition. It describes an installment sale transfer of a family farm. The senior generation needed cash from the farm assets for retirement, so they had to sell the farm slowly, over time to the junior generation.

#### **Farm Background**

The Owen farm was established in the early 1900s by Dave Owen's grandfather. The sign on the barn says it was built in 1914. Dave's father, Howard, took over the farm from his father and operated it for more than 50 years.

The farm consists of 430 acres (200 tillable and 25 pasture). The original herd was Ayrshire. The barn contains 42 stalls and a loose housing section was added in the mid-1980s that was used for dry cows and later converted for milking cows.

Dave returned to the farm after graduating from high school in 1978 and, except for a two-year interval, has been there since. During Dave's years of working on the farm, he gradually assumed management of the cattle and crops. Dave's parents, Howard and Helen Owen, kept the income in their name, retained the bookkeeping and made the financial decisions.

### **The Transfer**

Howard decided at age 77 it was time to turn over ownership of the farm to Dave, who had been supplying most of the labor and making many of the day-to-day management decisions. The goal was to keep the farm in the family and provide for Howard's and Helen's retirement. Howard remained active on the farm until his death in 1999 at age 80, at which time Dave's wife, Pat, increased her labor contribution.

The Owens knew cow numbers had to be increased to make the farm transfer cash flow. The decision was made to expand the farm in stages. Starting in 1996, every heifer calf was kept for expansion, then a new barn was built, and, finally, a parlor. This required moving cows between barns to be milked.

### **Financial methods**

The farm transfer process began in 1996 with Howard and Helen gifting half of the cattle to Dave and Pat and selling the remainder to them on a three-year contract. The gifting of the cattle gave Dave something for his "sweat equity" in the farm and made the cattle payments affordable. He had worked for a wage during his years on the farm and owned no farm assets. Dave's parents wanted to structure the payments so the farm would survive the transfer. In 1999, after the cattle were paid for, Dave and Pat began paying for the equipment on a three-year contract. This year, (2003) the real estate will be transferred through a mortgage held by Helen, with Helen retaining lifetime use of the house.

Howard and Helen had no retirement funds other than Social Security and needed the farm payments for living expenses. At the same time they wanted Dave to succeed, so part of the transfer plan was to find a way to accomplish both. This was done by not charging interest on the cattle and equipment contracts. In addition, no rent for real estate and equipment was charged, and the parents paid the school and property taxes. Interest on the real estate mortgage will be gifted back to Dave and Pat. This arrangement has allowed new buildings to be constructed, equipment to be improved, and cattle numbers to be increased since 1996.

### **Legal methods**

The Owens used three legal methods used during the transfer process. There were sales contracts for the cattle and equipment and a mortgage for the land. Helen's will states that if she dies before the mortgage is paid, Dave will settle the balance with his sisters. Finally, Helen has appointed one of Dave's sisters as a durable power of attorney. Dave's sisters had no input into the farm transfer; only some knowledge of how it was structured.

### **The transfer team**

Dave and Pat had an attorney draw up the bill of sale, the power of attorney, and the individual wills. They felt putting more in writing would prevent problems later. They consulted with Cornell Cooperative Extension prior to and during the transfer process. New York FarmNet did a financial analysis of the farm and estimated that the cash needed for family expenses would be limited, even with the proposed expansion. In spite of this, the Owens decided to commence the farm transfer and do without some family expenses, like health insurance.

Another goal was to reduce the cost of the transfer. By keeping the financing within the family there were no “bank” costs, and by spreading income over several years there were minimum tax consequences for Howard and Helen. The attorney fees were the only cost. When the mortgage is finalized, there will be some minimal filing costs.

### **The Future**

Today the herd is one-third Ayrshire and two-thirds Holstein. A Cover-All free stall barn was built in 1999. For three years, cows were walked over to the old barn for milking before a holding area and parlor was constructed in 2002. In 2000, the Owens switched to rotational grazing, building fencing and a pond and installing a water system. Pasture acreage has been increased, and the neighboring farm rented. At present the Owens are milking 82 cows and have 52 heifers. Dave and Pat provide almost all labor with only minimum part-time help.

They plan to add room for pregnant cows in one section of the old barn and improve their calf raising. A heifer barn also is in their plans. At present, heifers are housed outside. More fencing will be installed. Improving crop yields and quality are a major goal.

Dave and Pat feel the transfer will be a success when the mortgage is paid off. Financially, they are better off than before, but at a price. With more cattle and no more labor, they are working longer hours, which decreases the amount of time they can spend with their children.

### **Learning experiences**

Dave would do the transfer again because it kept the farm in the family. Pat says the work is too much and the family is suffering and would not do it again unless some way was found to pay for an employee. As debt is paid down they hope to hire more labor and increase family time. The children have horses and a separate horse barn is being discussed.

Overall the transfer went as expected. But both generations agree that something should have been done sooner to start the farm transfer process. The parents were reluctant to give up control of the finances, and while Dave wanted to do something sooner, he was hesitant to force the issue. As the parents aged, there was concern about what would happen to the farm if either of them had to enter a nursing home. This concern was a major reason for beginning the transfer. But even then, there were issues that had to be worked out, which took some time.

Dave said that having experience with the finances was a problem when he took over. He was aware of the size of the milk checks but had no idea of the amount of the expenses. His advice to anyone considering a transfer is to be involved beforehand in the business end as well as the production end.



## **Case Study Example:**

### **Matt Sawyer, The Sawyer Farm: Case Profile**

Prepared by Steve Richards, Director, NY FarmLink

Matt and Darcy Sawyer have been dairy farming together for 8 years and have used intensive grazing since the beginning. They currently milk about 70 cows on their farm near Locke, New York.

Matt Sawyer started his dairy career as a milk inspector for Sunnydale Farms in 1989. In 1991 Matt met Darcy and they were married in 1992. Darcy was interested in starting a dairy farm, and within two months they started milking cows on a rented farm in Greene, New York. At this location they were milking about 24 cows in a tie stall/stanchion barn with a dump station. The Sawyers quickly decided that this was a lot of work for Darcy, especially with Matt's full-time job at Sunnydale. By early 1993, they had sold the herd of cows and started looking for a new farm site.

In 1994, Matt and Darcy found the ideal site—about 17 acres in Cayuga County. After purchasing the land, they moved a mobile home onto the site and the two set to work building their own freestall barn with a home-made flat barn double 6 parlor. Soon after the barn was completed, Darcy gave birth to their son, Jesse.

As the herd continued to grow, Matt and Darcy built a new double 9 swing parlor in 1998. Matt also decided that he needed to spend more time on the farm and quit his job as a milk inspector in 1999. By 2000, the Sawyers were milking 50 cows on their new farm.

## **Grazing**

The Sawyers started grazing in Greene, New York because their operation was very labor intensive. The farm they had rented had no silo, so all forage harvested had to be dry hay. Being short of help (Matt still had his full time job) and having old equipment, they decided to turn the cows out after the first hay cutting. Although the pastures were large and the grasses native, the cows did relatively well. In fact, the only problem they encountered that first year were deer running through their pasture fences. The pasture system at this first location consisted of a few large paddocks divided with a single wire.

Since moving to their current location in 1994, the Sawyers have intensified their pasture management. Currently, the pasture is divided into several large subdivisions with the cows being given fresh grass each day. Water is provided to the cows in every paddock and the cows are supplemented with a TMR (consisting of corn silage, corn meal, and a protein supplement) as well as free choice dry hay. They keep track of pasture quality through daily visual assessment that is recorded in their feeding records. They are very satisfied with using pasture and feel that it is a key to their farm's profitability. As their farm has expanded, they have needed to alter their pasture management to meet the herd's needs while maintaining high quality forage. However, grazing will certainly be a part of the farm's future.

## Management Style

Matt and Darcy’s mission is to provide a reasonable living for their family by doing what they enjoy most—farming. They characterize their management style as medium production with low input cost, which includes a very low debt-load. The Sawyers rent most of their land and only own equipment that they use frequently, making use of custom operators for hay and corn harvesting.

Extensive record keeping has allowed the Sawyers to track their progress and make good management decisions. Keeping milk income over feed cost as high as possible is one of their main goals. To achieve this goal, Matt and Darcy record daily milk production and feeding information to calculate their feed costs per hundredweight on a monthly basis. When faced with a management decision, they refer to their records and decide what changes will result in the highest margin possible between milk income and feed costs. While the Sawyers don’t find record keeping as one of the most enjoyable aspects of farming, they have found it necessary to make good management decisions.

## Future Goals

Matt and Darcy are very happy with the way things have progressed. Currently, they are striving to make their herd seasonal. Not only will this provide some time off during the winter, but will allow them to manage the cows and calves more efficiently. As of 2001, they have expanded the herd up to 70 cows and plan to stay at this size for the foreseeable future.

### Case Study Questions:

Identify the keys to success for these beginning farmers.

Identify the challenges that this couple will have to address over the next 3-5 years as their farming career progresses.

## Gathering Case Profiles: Example of Interview outline and questions

Prepared by Steve Richard, NY FarmLink & Cathy Sheils, NY FarmNet

### *Business Transfer Case Story Questions*

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**Case Profile Outline:** To achieve continuity and consistency of information collected and for booklet design, each farm is asked to answer the provided interview questions outlined within this booklet. Make sure to ask the questions of all the parties involved in the transfer. Some of the questions may seem to pertain to the owner more directly than the younger generation; ask the questions of each unless specifically labeled “Senior” or “Junior” Generation. You are also encouraged to ask additional questions as they come up throughout the interview. Use the back of the pages for additional notes. The more information collected the better!

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## Profiles of Innovative Farm Transfers in New York

**Project Outcome:** A booklet that features a collection of profiles that depict the many facets of farm transfers in New York, compiled and published for use by Cornell University's outreach programs.

**Project Audience:** The booklet's primary audiences are farm owners or next generation farm owners who are in the pre or early stages of a farm transfer and who are searching for information, ideas, strategies and contacts.

**How Project will be completed:** CCE Educators and FarmNet Consultants will select members of a farm transfer situation (both generations preferred), conduct a face to face interview with those members and write up a draft profile that depicts a farm transfer situation. ***Transfer is defined many ways, but for the purposes of this study the farm transfer scenarios must involve either a complete transfer of management and/or assets. You will have to choose the situation that depicts one of the variety of transfers that are needed to make the booklet as well-rounded as possible.***

**Compensation:** Each Cooperative Extension Association and FarmNet consultant participating will receive ***\$250.00 per interview questionnaire and draft profile completed.*** Payments will be made when an invoice with a completed interview questionnaire and draft profile is received. Farm families that participate will receive a small gift.

**Timeline:** Invoices, questionnaires, and drafts need to be sent to Steve Richards, NY FarmLink at [str4@cornell.edu](mailto:str4@cornell.edu) by ***January 15, 2003.***

### Guidelines for gathering profiles:

- Select a farm transfer scenario in your region. Scenario needs to depict a transfer from one generation to the next or between two parties. ***The transfer can be between family members, non-family members, owner to lessees, owners to farm managers, owners to farm employees etc. We would prefer to have a good mix of small and large farms as well as products other than dairy. For this study, we are requesting 12 general categories of transfers:***

#### Farm Transfer Success Scenarios (6)\*

- Transfer by Selling/Leasing Assets
- Transfer through Inheritance/Gifting (senior generation may not be around).
- Transfer through an Intermediary (trusts, conservation easements, life insurance, like kind exchanges, etc.)
- Transfer through a business structure (stock in corporations, partnership share in LLC or partnerships).

- Combination of the above methods or “other scenarios” (up to 2 of these scenarios are available for interviewing. Have to be different from one another—will have to coordinate with FarmLink to get the right examples).

***\*Topics will be available on a first come, first serve basis. Only one topic per association or FarmNet consultant unless there is a shortage of volunteers—then its all fair game***  
***Farm Transfer Horror Story Scenarios (6)\****

\* These may involve just one generation or another and may not follow the interview questionnaire exactly.

- Farm transfer gone awry when selling/leasing assets
- Farm transfer gone awry with inheritance transfers
- Farm transfer through an intermediary gone awry
- Farm transfer through a business structure gone awry.
- “Other” horror stories methods (up to 2 of these scenarios are available for interviewing. Have to be different from one another—will have to coordinate with FarmLink to get the right examples).

***\*Topics will be available on a first come, first serve basis. Only one topic per association or FarmNet consultant unless there is a shortage of volunteers—then its all fair game***

- Contact the potential farmer interviewees and discuss the project and the reason they have been selected to be interviewed. Share with them that the focus of the interview is to gather information related to their farm transfer and that the information collected will be written up as an educational piece to be used by other farmers who have not yet transferred their farm. Make sure the parties know that the interview will be written up in a profile that will be published.
- Check with the parties first about their comfort level with their profile being written up and published. Ideally it is best to be able to use the families name in the published profile, if your first contact is not comfortable with using their name please contact another. If you are finding that the parties you are contacting are uncomfortable with their profiles being written up using their names, then the profile can be written without using their name, although features of the profile may be identifiable to readers. Confidentiality may not be 100%.
- Set up a time to meet with the interviewees at a location convenient for them. You may want to interview the two transfer parties together or separately depending on their preference, timing and compatibility in meeting together.
- Meet with interviewees. Introduce yourself and the project again. Reassure interviewees that they will be able to review the profile before final printing and that you will make sure to capture their responses as accurately as possible. Thank the interviewees for their time and commitment to the project.
- You can choose to take hand written notes or tape record the interview. Tape recording assures you capture all of the information, but may be time consuming because the information needs to be transcribed. If you choose to take hand written notes it may be difficult to capture the entire conversation or truly listen to the responses. Another option is to take a colleague along with you for taking notes so you can ask the questions and fully

listen to the dialogue. When taking notes please try to capture at least one or two quotes – quotes will be highlighted in the profiles and are very powerful educational statements.

- ❑ As a guide, interview questions have been provided below. Try to ask all of the questions, but use your discretion as to the appropriateness of each question for the situation. Make sure to ask open-ended questions, questions that cannot be answered by a yes or no response. Open-ended questions create more dialogue and will allow you to capture greater responses. Also please ask questions that you may have that are not provided and ask questions during the interview that come up during the conversation. If you are not clear with interviewees responses it is important to check in with the interviewees ie. Have I heard you correctly, is this what you said .....? I want to make sure I head you correctly, is this what you said.....?
- ❑ When writing up your draft profile, please follow the study questions provided. The more information you provide the better, all draft profiles will be edited before final printing. You will be sent the edited version so you can have your farmer interviewees review it prior to printing.
- ❑ If you wish to take the farm family's picture, it would greatly help the final publication. If the family agrees to a picture, you will have to have them sign a permission form (available through the FarmNet office).



## Case Information Worksheet

### Farm Family Contact Information:

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant  
Number

### Participants in Transfer/Farm Operation Profiles:

1 Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Relationship to parties in the business: \_\_\_\_\_

Years in Farming: \_\_\_\_\_ Years involved in the operation being transferred: \_\_\_\_\_

2 Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Relationship to parties in the business: \_\_\_\_\_

Years in Farming: \_\_\_\_\_ Years involved in the operation being transferred: \_\_\_\_\_

3 Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Relationship to parties in the business: \_\_\_\_\_

Years in Farming: \_\_\_\_\_ Years involved in the operation being transferred: \_\_\_\_\_

4 Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Relationship to parties in the business: \_\_\_\_\_

Years in Farming: \_\_\_\_\_ Years involved in the operation being transferred: \_\_\_\_\_

5 Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Relationship to parties in the business: \_\_\_\_\_

Years in Farming: \_\_\_\_\_ Years involved in the operation being transferred: \_\_\_\_\_

6 Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Relationship to parties in the business: \_\_\_\_\_

Years in Farming: \_\_\_\_\_ Years involved in the operation being transferred: \_\_\_\_\_

7

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Relationship to parties in the business: \_\_\_\_\_

Years in Farming: \_\_\_\_\_ Years involved in the operation being transferred: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Business History**

**Past:** What is the history of your farm.

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**Present:** Describe the farming operation today.

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**Future:** The vision for the future of the farm.

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### Farm Transfer Planning

**When did the farm transfer process begin?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Who/What prompted the farm transfer?** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Who is the farm being transferred to?** \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Number
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**What were your goals for the Farm Transfer? Have they been realized?**

1
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2
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3
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**Were there programs or resources in the agricultural community that were helpful when you were deciding how to transfer the farm? \_\_\_\_\_ Describe: \_\_\_\_\_**

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### **Transfer Mechanics: Timeline**

**What Has Been Transferred *Completely*? Describe**

Management Authority:

- Livestock: \_\_\_\_\_
- Young stock: \_\_\_\_\_
- Cropping Operations: \_\_\_\_\_
- Book Keeping and Financial Decisions: \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Non-land Assets:

- Livestock: \_\_\_\_\_
- Young stock: \_\_\_\_\_
- Equipment: \_\_\_\_\_
- Buildings/Facilities: \_\_\_\_\_
- Other (describe): \_\_\_\_\_

Land/Personal Property:

- Tillable Acreage: \_\_\_\_\_

- Non-Tillable Acreage: \_\_\_\_\_
- Farm House: \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**What was the *order of transfer*?**

Management Authority

Livestock: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Young stock: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Crops: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Financial: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Non Land Assets

Livestock: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Young stock: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Equipment: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Buildings: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Land Assets

Tillable Ac: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Non-till Ac: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Farm House: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Is the Farm Transfer Complete?**                      YES                      NO

**What still needs to be transferred OR what will not be transferred? Describe**

Management Authority:

- Livestock: \_\_\_\_\_
- Young stock: \_\_\_\_\_
- Cropping Operations: \_\_\_\_\_
- Book Keeping and Financial Decisions: \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Non-land assets:

- Livestock: \_\_\_\_\_
- Young stock: \_\_\_\_\_
- Equipment: \_\_\_\_\_
- Buildings/Facilities: \_\_\_\_\_
- Other (describe): \_\_\_\_\_

Land/Personal Property:

- Tillable Acreage: \_\_\_\_\_
- Non-Tillable Acreage: \_\_\_\_\_
- Farm House: \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**If there are still items to transfer, what will be the *order* of transfer in the future?**

Management Authority

Non Land Assets

Land Assets

Livestock: \_\_\_\_\_

Livestock: \_\_\_\_\_

Tillable Ac: \_\_\_\_\_

Young stock: \_\_\_\_\_

Young stock: \_\_\_\_\_

Non-till Ac: \_\_\_\_\_

Crops: \_\_\_\_\_

Equipment: \_\_\_\_\_

Farm House: \_\_\_\_\_

Financial: \_\_\_\_\_

Buildings: \_\_\_\_\_

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Transfer Mechanics: Financial**

**What were your main financial concerns going into the transfer?** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Which financial methods were used to transfer the business? Check all that apply**

- Sale of assets
- Leasing of assets
- Gifting of assets
- Assets will be transferred through inheritance (will/estate plan)
- Transfer of assets through an intermediary device:
  - Tax Savings Trusts
  - Property Control Trusts
  - Life Insurance Tools
  - Conservation Easements
  - Other (Like Kind exchanges, Medicaid trusts, etc.)

**Was a financial analysis completed to determine farm viability?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Who completed the analysis?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What was each party's financial standing prior to the transfer? Describe**

1 \_\_\_\_\_

2 \_\_\_\_\_

3 \_\_\_\_\_

4 \_\_\_\_\_

5 \_\_\_\_\_

6 \_\_\_\_\_

7 \_\_\_\_\_

**Senior Generation: Were retirement issues addressed before the transfer?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Should retirement have been addressed sooner?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Senior Generation: Do you have an outside source of funds for retirement?** \_\_\_\_\_

IRA, 401K, SEP, etc.

Spouse's Retirement Plan

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Senior Generation: What are some concerns you still have about retirement?**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**What was your strategy, if any, to minimize taxes (due to farm transfer)?** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Did you have an accountant review your farm transfer plans?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Did you have trouble cash-flowing the farm transfer? \_\_\_\_\_ Explain: \_\_\_\_\_**

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**Did you have to expand in order to transfer the business? \_\_\_\_\_ Explain: \_\_\_\_\_**

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**What were the key financial pitfalls encountered during the transfer?**

- Taxes: \_\_\_\_\_
- Cash-flow: \_\_\_\_\_
- Expansion: \_\_\_\_\_
- Who owned the assets: \_\_\_\_\_
- Retirement: \_\_\_\_\_
- Junior needed more \$\$: \_\_\_\_\_
- Inheritance of other siblings: \_\_\_\_\_
- Other

### **Transfer Mechanics: Legal**

**What were your main legal concerns going into the transfer? \_\_\_\_\_**

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**Which legal methods were used to transfer the business? Check all that apply**

- Sales contracts
- Lease agreements
- Wills/Estate Plans
- Formation of Trusts
- A New Business Entity Formation (**what was it before?** \_\_\_\_\_)
  - Partnership
  - Limited Liability Company (LLC)
  - C Corporation
  - S Corporation

- Buy/Sell Agreement
- Operating Agreement

**Which methods were used to plan for the incapacity/death of a business owner?**

- Designated a durable Power of Attorney for finances/health care
- Designated beneficiaries on payable on death accounts
- An up to date will
- Life Insurance
- Long Term Care Insurance
- A living trust or other means to avoid probate

**Did you put all your business transfer agreements in writing? \_\_\_\_\_ How much was based on trust? \_\_\_\_\_**

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**Did you have an attorney review your business transfer plans? \_\_\_\_\_**

**Do you wish that you had used an attorney or a different attorney? \_\_\_\_\_**

**Transfer Mechanics: Relationships**

**Senior Generation: What were the key considerations in giving up control of the farm? \_\_\_\_\_**

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**Junior Generation: What were the key considerations in gaining management or equity in the farm business? \_\_\_\_\_**

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**How did the transfer affect your working relationships? \_\_\_\_\_**



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**How did the transfer affect your family relationships? \_\_\_\_\_**

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**Did conflict arise during the farm transfer process? \_\_\_\_\_ What were the conflicts and how did you deal with them? \_\_\_\_\_**

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**How did you involve your family members in the farm transfer process? \_\_\_\_\_**

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**How well did you communicate with your family members about the transfer? \_\_\_\_\_**

**Did you have help facilitating family discussions? \_\_\_\_\_ Who? \_\_\_\_\_**

**Do you wish you did? \_\_\_\_\_**

### **Advice to Other Farm Businesses**

**Could you have been better prepared before the transfer? \_\_\_\_\_**

**What resources have you found helpful during your farm transfer? \_\_\_\_\_**

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**What other programs or resources would be helpful in assisting in farm transfers?**

**Did the transfer go differently than you expected it to go? \_\_\_\_\_ Was it more difficult than you expected? \_\_\_\_\_.**

**What aspects of the business transfer were the most difficult? \_\_\_\_\_**

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**If you had to do it all over again, what would you do differently (same)? \_\_\_\_\_**

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**What aspects of the business transfer were critical to the success of the transfer?**

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**How will/do you know that your farm transfer is successful? \_\_\_\_\_**

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**Senior Generation: What would you like to share with other farm owners who are considering transferring the farm to a younger generation? \_\_\_\_\_**

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**Younger Generation: What would you like to share with other young people who are considering working into a farm transfer arrangement? \_\_\_\_\_**

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Would you be willing to speak with other farmers who have questions related to transferring the farm? \_\_\_\_.



# GROWING NEW FARMERS

## A Northeast Service Providers Consortium

Professional Development Article Series #106

### Making Effective Referrals to Help New Farmers

By Cathleen M. Sheils and Marsha Descartes, GNF Professional Development

The Growing New Farmers (GNF) Project is an initiative to provide future generations of Northeast farmers with the support and services they need to succeed. GNF is working to build an effective and enduring “service infrastructure” -- an active network of organizations committed to providing programs and services for new farmers. This active network is the Growing New Farmers Consortium

As a member of the GNF Consortium, you can provide two critically important services to new farmers: information and referral. How often do you get a phone call from a prospective or beginning farmer who has found your name somewhere, or has been referred to you by someone. The caller hopes you can help.

Initially, you may not know exactly what the new farmer is requesting or if you’re the right source of information. If, during the course of your telephone conversation, you discover the caller needs information or help you can’t provide, then ***making a proper referral is the greatest service you can provide.***

As an agricultural service provider, you are not expected to know all the answers or be able to provide information to every prospective or beginning farmer who contacts you. But you do have a responsibility to direct them toward the most helpful and useful sources of information and assistance.

To make an effective referral requires:

- good communications skills
- knowledge of types of referrals to resources, programs and services
- a solid understanding of the referral process

## **Hone your Communication Skills**

Three basic communication skills are essential for making effective referrals:

1. Listening
2. Questioning
3. Clarifying and reflecting

Listening, asking questions, and clarifying and reflecting back what is said, all help bring issues into focus for the caller. And you can better determine what services need to be provided and by whom.

Of course, good verbal skills help you to communicate your intent and your information to the caller. The quality of communication lies in how you begin the conversation. The best approach is to begin with a statement that encourages the caller to share information.

**Example:** “Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_, how may I help you?”

“Thanks for calling me. Tell me what’s going on.”

*These statements invite conversation and allow the new farmer to begin talking about his or her situation and/or ask questions.*

### **Listening**

After you have asked your opening question, listen. It is one of the most important, but often overlooked, skills of communication. To listen effectively you must focus your attention on what is being said without interruption.

**Example:** *Small verbal cues such as “I see,” or a simple “hmm” or “un-huh” during pauses lets the farmer know you are attentive. They encourage the person to continue. Avoid interruptions, even if you feel they are helpful. Saying, “I know what you mean” or “I’ve heard that before” are barriers to communication and convey assumptions that the farmer might take as a cue to stop talking.*

### **Questioning**

During your conversation, encourage the caller to give you as much information as possible in order to provide appropriate help. To do this, you will need to ask questions. Certain types of questions are more effective in eliciting information than others. Generally ask open-ended questions, or ones that do not ask for just ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answers. A question such as “Did New Farmer Bank handle your credit package?” is close-ended. It will elicit a simple yes or no.

**Example:** “Can you tell me more about your specific situation?”

“Can you tell me more about your credit needs?”

These questions encourage elaboration and reflection while allowing you to get clarification and gather relevant information. Phrasing questions in an open-ended format may take a little practice, but the quality of information received in return is worth the effort.

Being familiar with what services new farmers need at various stages will help you ask better questions when talking with the farmer on how to best help.

### **Clarifying/Reflecting Back**

Each new farmer’s situation is unique. You can’t assume that you understand, so you must clarify or check in with the caller to ensure that you do. Here are two techniques to do this:

1. Reflecting. You listen to what is being said and make a statement that summarizes the content. It helps new farmers know that they have been understood.

**Example:** *“Let me see if I understand you correctly. You just said that you are concerned you don’t have an optimal feeding plan for your dairy heifers. Tell me if this is correct.”*

2. **Clarifying.** This technique helps you to understand the situation better. In the process of clarifying, you check back with the farmer to clear up vague and misunderstood, but important, information.

**Example:** *Focus on things you do not understand. “Help me to understand what is not working with your accounting practices.”*

*“Tell me again how management decisions are made on the farm.”*

It is hard to gather the relevant information to make an effective referral without using the skills of clarifying and reflecting back.

### **Types of Referrals**

There are basically two types of referrals you will make:

- Direct referrals
- Research referrals

1. **Direct Referral.** These are services you are able to direct the new farmer to without further research on your part. You may know this data from networking or keeping your own database of referral sources. Referrals may be to a person, an agency, organization or a resource such as a publication or a website.

With this type of referral, you can quickly provide the farmer with the pertinent information for his or her follow up. Information such as the name of the agency or organization, contact person, phone number, location, hours, brochure sent, website address, etc. Direct referrals are made primarily to people, organizations or agencies and to websites. Referrals to people may include farmers, agency or organization service providers. Referrals to a website will require the farmer caller to do some research on their own, but often a useful website is a significant source of information and can be a great referral.

A direct referral does not necessarily lead to the "end answer". But it does provide the inquirer with a solid next step in his or her search. For example, you may receive a call from someone who is looking for specific production information to start a farm operation. You don’t know the answer, but you do know an Extension educator who might have relevant information. You may make a referral to this source because you believe that he or she can provide the caller with additional information and another referral. You direct your caller to this person. The Extension educator may or may not be able to answer the questions, and also further refer your caller to a publication, website or another provider.

These are also helpful referrals. Often prospective and start-up farmers are not familiar with traditional agricultural organizations and so making a referral that may seem obvious to an organization that is very familiar to established farmers is a significant source of information. If you are not able to identify any source of help, then state that as well.

With some direct referrals, it might be a good to call the referral source first to present the farmer’s scenario without using names. Ask if the source can help, especially if you have not been in contact with the referral source in sometime. This is also an opportunity to make sure your information is correct and up-to-date.

Try to avoid making “dead end” referrals. Referrals that may not lead anywhere for a number of reasons: The source does not deal with the issue, does not cover the farmer’s geographic region, the program or service was eliminated, the referral is not relevant to the needs of the farmer caller or there may be specific eligibility requirements. These referrals are frustrating and may damage your relationship with the caller and certainly may discourage the new farmer in his or her pursuits.

**2. Research Referral.** At times you won’t know the most appropriate referral without doing some research. Be direct with the new farmer, telling the person that you are not able to offer the best information or referral and need to do some research to identify appropriate possibilities. Tell the farmer approximately how long it will take you to do this and when you will get back in touch with him or her either by phone, mail or email. Mailing information is a useful and efficient method of making a referral. It also guarantees that the caller has the contact information and perhaps a summary of the organizations services and programs to review before they make contact.

Your research may involve searching the Internet or databases, or contacting organizations and agencies. When calling another person to uncover appropriate assistance, give the details of the situation, respect the farmer’s confidentiality and ask if the agency can help.

### **The Referral Process: Tips for Making Effective Referrals**

- **Inform yourself about what is available in your community, region and state that is applicable to the service needs of perspective and beginning farmers.** As a service provider, you are aware of various services but it's important to continue to network with other service providers by attending meetings, conferences and working collaboratively on projects. Collect business cards and brochures and use these resources to update your information and referral system.
- **Create a useful and accessible information and referral system.** Develop a system for cataloging information on possible referral sources. Referral sources can be organizations, people, publications or websites that you would “refer” or direct a new farmer to for more information or to get questions answered that they have. Your information and referral system can be made up of a combination of things such as a computer database, website directories, printed directories, file folders, or a Rolodex. Often your information and referral system will include both hard copy and computer-based information sources.

The most important feature of a system is that it is accessible when you need it and is kept up to date. It needs to provide the information required to pass along to the new farmer: the organization or agency name, services offered, telephone numbers, contact persons and region served. If you are referring the inquirer to a resource such as a publication, provide accurate information about how to locate or obtain it.

A useful directory (hard copy and on the web) to begin with is the Growing New Farmers Directory of Programs and Services for Northeast New Farmers [www.northeastnewfarmer.org](http://www.northeastnewfarmer.org)

- **Know your limits.** Under most circumstances, we really want to help the person in front of us or on the other end of the phone. However, if the program, information or service we offer is not the best match for the problem or question presented, it makes sense to make a referral.
- When talking to prospective and beginning farmers, **pay particular attention to their expressed and implied informational needs.** A caller may be focused on one particular need and in the course of the conversation you see other needs that can be addressed by agencies or organizations you know of. Share what you see and offer the referrals for the callers follow up.
- **Do your best to locate the best referral(s).** Remember that dead end useless referrals are frustrating. You may have to do some research first before providing a referral.
- **Explain the referral.** Explain the reason for making the referral to the inquirer. Tell the new farmer what experience or knowledge you have about the referral source. Explain the services that the inquirer can obtain from the resource person or organization he or she is being referred to. Personalize the referral by giving the name of a contact person (if possible) and phone number. Prepare the farmer to discuss his or her situation and to write down questions that he or she has before calling.
- **Don't make promises or guarantees.**

As a service provider, you help new farmers in many ways. Making effective referrals is an essential part of helping.

February 2004

