

Transferring Farms and Improving Access to Farmland: A Training Program for Northeast Agricultural Service Providers

Final Report for ENE12-123

Project Type: Professional Development Program

Funds awarded in 2012: \$126,955.00

Projected End Date: 12/31/2015

Region: Northeast

State: New York

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Project Information

Summary:

Problem and Proposed Solution

Current and prospective farmers face significant challenges securing access to farmland in New York and New England. Since 1982, nearly 750,000 acres of farmland in this seven-state region have been lost to development. This fragmentation of the landscape eliminates opportunities, increases costs associated with accessing farmland and heightens the likelihood of conflicts between farmers and non-farming neighbors. Moreover, nearly 25% of the farmland in this region is owned by farmers aged 65 and older. This land will be in a state of transfer in the next decade and is at great risk of being developed. The options available to protect, transfer and access farmland are often complicated and tend to require the involvement of multiple advisors. To address these challenges, American Farmland Trust (AFT) launched the *Transferring Farms and Improving Access to Farmland* project (The Farmland Advisors Project) to help 80 land trust, Extension staff and other agricultural service providers gain mid-level to advanced knowledge about farm conservation, transfer and access options, develop better networks and improve knowledge exchange between agricultural and land trust professionals. The project's goal was that 40 service providers would educate 400 farmers and/or non-farming landowners managing 20,000 acres of farmland about farm transfer and farmland access tools, and help 30 farmers who own/manage 1,500 acres adopt specific farmland access or transfer strategies.

Project Approach

The Farmland Advisors project provided of a series of progressive learning and networking opportunities that included 3 webinars, a 2-day regional convocation, and a series of 12 networking calls devoted to problem-solving and peer-to-peer exchanges. The direct beneficiaries of this program were 80 agricultural service providers from Extension, Farm Credit, state departments of agriculture, farm organizations, and land trusts in New York and New England.

The project also developed 8 fact sheets in both English and Spanish, which provide a lasting resource for the educators and advisors, as well as farmers and landowners. The fact sheets and project webinars are available to the public on the Farmland Information Center website, which is a joint project of AFT and the USDA's Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS):

<http://www.farmlandinfo.org/special-collections/4608>

Outcomes

Participants were surveyed after project activities concluded about their learning and their use of what they learned. In responses from 48 respondents, 80% (38) increased knowledge about finding and evaluating farmland, communications between farmers and landowners, and land conservation; 47 increased knowledge about farmland leasing and how to access educational materials and other resources; and all respondents felt better prepared to work with farmers and landowners as a result of this project.

Thirty seven of the 48 respondents used knowledge gained from this project to educate and directly assist more than 200 farmers and landowners who collectively manage over 14,000 acres of land. Eleven of these 37 advisors conducted trainings for 150 farmers and landowners who manage over 4,000 acres, and 26 provided direct assistance and personalized advice about specific farmland transfer and/or access strategies to another 90 farmers or landowners who influence 10,100 acres. Twelve participants from the Hudson Valley Farmlink Network (HVFN) helped match 30 farmers with farm properties in the Hudson Valley of New York and provided training and direct assistance to 350 farmers and landowners. Another great success of the project is the improved professional connections and support networks forged among the participants.

Performance Target:

During the program period, forty agricultural service providers and land trust staff (beneficiaries) will use the knowledge gained from this program to educate 400 farmers and/or non-farming landowners who own or manage 20,000 acres of farmland about farm transfer and farmland access tools. Twenty of these beneficiaries will work intensively with 30 farmers and landowners that own or manage at least 1,500 acres to adopt specific farmland access or farm transfer strategies.

Introduction:

Current and prospective farmers face significant challenges in securing access to farmland in New York and New England. Since 1982, nearly 750,000 acres of farmland in this seven-state region have been lost to development. This fragmentation of the landscape eliminates opportunities, increases the costs associated with accessing farmland and heightens the likelihood of conflicts between farmers and non-farming neighbors. Case in point, the demand for

remaining farmland has inflated real estate values to the point that farmland in the Northeast is the most expensive in the county. According to USDA, the region's average is \$4,690 per acre, twice as high as the \$2,350 average for the coterminous 48 states, with some states, such as Rhode Island or counties, such as Suffolk County, New York, at more than five to ten times the national average.

One result of these high land values is that farmland leasing is an appealing or necessary alternative to buying land for many farmers, especially younger individuals. Currently, 24% of the farmland used by farmers in New York and New England is leased. However, connecting farmers with landowners who are willing to lease farmland can be difficult and negotiating secure tenure arrangements is challenging. Farmland conservation is another tool that can be used to both assist farmers entering agriculture as well as farmers who are retiring and transferring the farm and/or farm business. Here again, however, the process is complex and often requires the input of multiple, experienced advisors.

Nearly 25% of the farmland in this seven-state region is owned by farmers aged 65 and older, which means it will likely be in a state of transition in the next decade. Land in transition is particularly vulnerable to being lost to development, especially when the landowner does not have a transition plan in place. It is estimated that only one out of ten farmers has a strategy for transferring their farm. Moreover, recent research by AFT, indicates that over 90% of farmers in New York and New England who are aged 65 and over do not have a young successor working with them.

Traditional agricultural service providers need more knowledge and skills to advise farmers on farmland transfer and access strategies. These providers also tend to have little interaction with non-farming landowners (NFLOs), landowners who control a significant portion of the region's farmland. And while land trusts often have better connections to NFLOs, many land trust staff do not know much about farmland transfer strategies, farmland leasing and other access options, including linking and matching resources that can connect farmers with farmland.

In order to address these multiple and overlapping issues - a lack of knowledge about farmland conservation, transfer and access as well as the need for better networking between agricultural professionals and land trusts - AFT launched the Farmland Advisors project. This project enabled 80 Extension and other agricultural service providers and land trust staff to gain mid-level and advanced knowledge about farmland transfer and access options and to build better regional connections and networks. Reflecting the project's focal issues, it was necessary to include the input of multiple advisors on the project itself. Thus, one key aspect of AFT's approach was the inclusion of a steering committee that assisted with curriculum development, facilitated networking calls and edited content in the Farmland Advisors fact sheets.

Participants in the Farmland Advisors project made a two-year commitment to the project, which included a series of webinars, a regional convocation and a series of networking calls. Each of the activities introduced participants to relevant content, expanded awareness about the complex topics of farmland transfer and access and, very importantly, fostered connections between the Farmland Advisors themselves. Participants in the project also completed a number of surveys throughout the project to get their input and assess their knowledge - at the beginning, during, and at the end of the program. Lastly, participants also received eight fact sheets, available in both English and Spanish and many of which include farmer-landowner profiles. These fact sheets will be used by the farmland advisors as they continue

their work with farmers and landowners beyond this project's timeline. These fact sheets, as well as the webinars, are also available to the public and are located on the Farmland Information Center website, which is a joint project of AFT and the United States Department of Agriculture's Natural Resource Conservation Service: <http://www.farmlandinfo.org/special-collections/4608>

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No milestones

Performance Target Outcomes

Performance target outcome for service providers narrative:

Outcomes

Performance Target Outcome Data and Discussion

Participants were surveyed at the end of the project. Of the 48 participant-respondents (respondents), 45 reported gaining professional connections as result of participating in the project. In terms of specific knowledge gained, over 80% respondents indicated that their knowledge increased regarding finding and evaluating farmland, communications between farmers and landowners and farmland conservation; 47 of 48 respondents indicated that they gained knowledge regarding farmland leasing and accessing educational materials and other resources; and, 100% of respondents indicated that they were better prepared to work with farmers and landowners as a result of the Farmland Advisors Project.

The project also resulted in outcomes for farmers and non-farming landowners. In total, 37 advisors - agricultural service providers and land trust staff - used knowledge gained from this program to educate and/or directly assist more than 200 farmers and landowners who collectively manage over 14,000 acres of land.

Nearly $\frac{1}{4}$ of respondents reported using knowledge gained during the project to conduct trainings for farmers or landowners regarding farmland transfer or access issues. This has resulted in over 150 farmers and landowners receiving trainings, which impacts the more than 4,000 acres of land managed by these trainees. Additionally, over $\frac{1}{2}$ of the respondents, 26 of 48, reported using knowledge gained from the project to provide direct assistance to farmers or landowners. As a result, nearly 90 farmers and landowners, who influence over 10,100 acres, have received personalized advice regarding the adoption of specific farmland transfer and/or access strategies.

Finally, 8 fact sheets were developed through the Farmland Advisors project. These fact sheets, which can be used by advisors, as well as farmers and landowners, were developed and disseminated to project participants in both English and Spanish.

- [Final Survey Summary of All Responses](#)

Additional Project Outcomes

Project outcomes:

Milestones

Concise Entry from Annual Report #2: During the 2014 project year, AFT continued to disseminate farmland transfer and farmland access information while also encouraging networking among Farmland Advisors via a series of networking calls in April, May, and June. These calls were very well attended. While 57 different Farmland Advisors participated, many participated on multiple calls, the total number of participants on all of the calls was 124.

AFT and project partner, Land for Good (LFG), also conducted a survey of the Farmland Advisors to assess knowledge gained and to solicit feedback on the networking calls and the project. Forty-eight Farmland Advisors responded to the survey. The survey's results indicated that participants in the Farmland Advisors program have improved their professional connections and support networks, and are more prepared to provide assistance to farmers and non-farming landowners on issues related to farm transfer and farmland access.

Lastly, AFT and LFG have designed, developed, and collected input on eight fact sheets on farm transfer and farmland access. These fact sheets are in their final stages of review and will be completed by summer 2015. They will be distributed to the Farmland Advisors, as well as stored and shared on AFT's Farmland Information Center website at www.farmlandinfo.org. The fact sheet topics include: Beginning Farmer's Guide to Conservation Easements; Determining Rental Rates on Leased Farmland; Elements of a Good Farm Lease; Farm Leasing: Success for Landlords and Tenants; Farmland Access: The Basics; Farmland Owners: Leasing Your Land to a Farmer; Finding the Next Generation for Your Farm; and Fundamental Considerations in Farm Transfers.

Update: Details about the information gathered from the survey mentioned in the above entry is described in the *Outcomes and Impacts - (a) Performance Target Outcome Data and Discussion* section of this report. The Final Survey is also attached within that section. The eight fact sheets described in the above entry are included as attachments in this section of the Final Report.

Concise Entry from Annual Report #1: The *Transferring Farms and Improving Access to Farmland* project achieved important milestones in the past year. More than 10,000 individuals received information about the proposed project with 93 applications being received for the program and 80 participants selected and committed to participate. 78 beneficiaries participated in at least 1 of three 3 program webinars and 74 beneficiaries attended the two-day convocation. AFT and LFG anticipate continued strong participation in the remaining elements of the *Transferring Farms and Improving Access to Farmland* program.

9/1/12: 500 Extension educators, agricultural service providers, land trust staff, and others learn about AFT's *Transferring Farms and Improving Access to Farmland* program.

AFT and LFG distributed a program announcement about the *Farmland Advisors* training program via AFT's E-news and website, personal emails and a press release generated on October 9, 2012. More than 10,000 individuals received the announcement via AFT's E-news and AFT and LFG sent emails to more than 700 organizations in the target audience.

10/30/12: 80 individuals (the beneficiaries) commit to participation in the training program and receive an electronic survey to assess their current level of knowledge with farmland transfer and access tools and strategies.

AFT and LFG established a competitive application process for the *Farmland Advisors* program. In total, 93 applications were received and 80 participants were selected and made commitments to participate in the program. A survey was sent to participants via Survey Monkey to assess knowledge, skills and experience with farm transfers, farmland access and non-farming landowners.

12/30/12: All beneficiaries receive written training materials and information about the webinar series, regional convocation and peer-to-peer learning opportunities.

Participants received information via email and a dedicated Farmland Advisors webpage created at AFT's website.

Update: AFT updated the national website in 2014, which led to changes in how information and materials from the Farmland Advisors project are stored. These materials are now stored on the Farmland Information Center website:

<http://www.farmlandinfo.org/special-collections/4608>.

2/1/13 - 4/30/13: 50 beneficiaries participate in the webinar series to receive basic knowledge about farmland access and transfer tools and training materials.

AFT and LFG organized 3 webinars including:

February 26, 2013 - Farmland Access Tools and Strategies

Speakers: Kathy Ruhf, Land for Good; Ben Waterman, University of Vermont Extension; Jennifer

Hashley, New Entry Sustainable Farming Project

Attendees: 78

March 27, 2013 - Farm Transfer Planning

Speakers: John Jaffe, Farm Credit East; Jerry Cosgrove, Local Economies Project

Attendees: 66

June 6, 2013 - Non-Farming Landowners

Speakers: Kathy Ruhf, Land for Good; Bob Wagner, American Farmland Trust

Attendees: 62

5/30/13: 50 beneficiaries receive an electronic survey to gauge changes in their knowledge about farmland access and transfer tools from participation in webinars.

All Farmland Advisors participants received a second electronic survey and 51 participants in the Farmland Advisors program completed it.

10/30/13: All beneficiaries participate in a two-day regional convocation where they receive mid-level and advanced training about land listing, matching and linking, leasing, affordability mechanisms, land conservation options during the farm transfer process, and other tools.

All Farmland Advisors participants received invitations to participate in the two-day convocation. 76 participants indicated that they would be attending, and 74

beneficiaries attended the event held on November 18th and 19th at the Hilton Albany in Albany, New York.

11/1/13 - 2/28/14: All beneficiaries participate in one or multiple sub-region conference calls (New England or New York) to discuss the tools described at the regional convocation and how to best use them with landowners in their locality.

Update: The timeline for this milestone was shifted from November 2013 through February 2014 to April 2014 through June 2014. In total, 12 networking calls were offered. The call topics were developed with input from the steering committee as well as input from the Farmland Advisors, which was collected via a pre-conference call survey. See above - *Concise Entry from Annual Report #2* - for more detailed information on the attendee numbers.

The call topics included: Agricultural Conservation Easements: A Tool to Support the Next Generation; Fostering Good Landowner-Tenant Relationships; Farmland Affordability: Tools, Methods and Challenges; Farm Transfer and Planning Between Generations; and Engaging Non-Farming Landowners and Farm Access and Transfer Policy. Emails with discussion questions for each call is attached along with this report.

11/1/13 - 4/30/14: 40 beneficiaries receive support as they work to apply their knowledge in organizing workshops, farm meetings and other exchanges to provide basic training to 600 farmers and/or non-farming landowners about farmland access and/or transfer tools. 20 beneficiaries help 30 farmers and/or non-farming landowners to keep land in farming, develop a successful lease, use equity sharing or another business arrangement, or develop a farmland transfer plan.

Update: During the course of the Farmland Advisors project, 37 advisors - agricultural service providers and land trust staff - used knowledge gained from this project to educate and directly assist more than 200 farmers and landowners who collectively manage over 14,000 acres of land.

Assessment of Project Approach and Implementation

AFT is pleased with the approach, implementation and outcomes of the Farmland Advisors project. We would like to highlight two aspects for further discussion:

In-person Convocation Combined with Webinars and Networking Calls

The in-person convocation was an essential component of this project and it was very highly rated by participants in the final survey. However, considering the wide geographic focus of this project, it wasn't feasible to regularly bring the farmland advisors together. The webinars and the networking calls, therefore, were necessary. They provided an on-going venue for the advisors to learn about and discuss topics pertinent to their work and to share examples of challenges and solutions with one another as well as maintain or build connections throughout the wide region served by this project. They were very successful approaches, especially as they were combined with the in-person learning and networking experience of the convocation.

Measuring Outcomes

Another strength of this project was the diversity of organizations represented

by the participants. This improved participant's learning and more thoroughly broadened their connections to other organizations with whom they can work as they take on projects related to farmland conservation, transfer and access. However, because of the diversity of participant organizations, all of whom have very different systems for tracking the outcomes of their projects, it was a challenge to accurately assess the influence they had, as a group, on farmers and landowners. Establishing a more rigorous and shared system for tracking metrics among participants will be a greater focus for future projects.

Attachments

Farmland Advisors Fact Sheets – Please Note, these fact sheets have been created in both English and Spanish. Each fact sheet has been listed here by its English title with a file name for both its English and Spanish versions.

- [Guia de servidumbres de conservacion para nuevos granjeros](#)
- [Determining Rental Rates on Leased Farmland](#)
- [Determinando los precios de alquiler en tierras arrendadas](#)
- [Elements of a Good Farm Lease](#)
- [Elementos de un buen contrato de arriendo de una granja](#)
- [Farm Leasing: Success for Landlords and Tenants](#)
- [Alquiler de granjas: Propietarios y arrendatarios de granjas exitosis](#)
- [Acceso a tierra Agricola: Lo basico](#)
- [Farmland Owners: Leasing Your Land to a Farmer](#)
- [Propietarios de tierra Agricola: El alquiler de su tierra a un granjero](#)
- [En busca de la nueva generacion para su granja](#)
- [Fundamental Considerations in Family Farm Transfers](#)
- [Consideraciones fundamentales en un plan de trasposo de una granja entre miembros de una familia](#)
- [Finding the Next Generation for Your Farm](#)
- [Beginning Farmers Guide to Conservation Easements](#)
- [Cumalitive Milestone Accomplishment Table](#)
- [Farmland Access: The Basics](#)

Assessment of Project Approach and Areas of Further Study:

Future Recommendations

12 participants in the Farmland Advisors project were from organizations that are also members of the Hudson Valley Farmlink Network (HVFN). During the period from 6/1/14 – 5/31/15, HVFN activities achieved the collective result of helping over 30 farmers match with farm properties in the Hudson Valley of New York and provided training, educational services and direct assistance to more than 350 farmers and landowners. The HVFN organizations whose staff participated in the Farmland Advisors project benefitted from the professional development and networking focus of the project.

There is a great deal of work still to be done. HVFN, which is coordinated by

AFT, has the following mission: to ensure the availability of farmland in the Hudson Valley for the farmers of today and tomorrow. For advisors to continue doing this important work will require on-going support. It will require financial support, but also more information and professional development as well as networking (i.e. what are the right questions to ask a retiring farm family in order to assess their goals and needs and then to connect them with the appropriate advisors and/or farmers to facilitate a successful transition to a new generation on their farm). AFT sees a continuing and growing need in the areas of professional development and networking for farmland advisors who are focused on the topics of farmland conservation, transfer and access – in the Hudson Valley, in New York and New England and throughout the country.

Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the view of the U.S. Department of Agriculture or SARE.



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