

4/26/2024

Lori Witmer, one of the things she's focused on is rotational grazing, small herd of beef cattle, goats, sheep, anticipating lambing and thinking about she needs, works full time as spiritual director at a continuing care facility in cambersburg

Stephanie Ciner in Erie, WildField urban farm – grows lots of herbs veggies cut flowers, adding in more perennial crops to her land, trees, shrubs, etc. As she is prepping beds and getting things in the field and paying attention to the soil, working with the urban soil, observing where she has intervened and where tha has helped or harmed, releasing control and noticing what is happening anf not be too attached to the results, noticing all the other beings and creatures

Liz Piriczky – Endless Roots farm outside of Scranton – 11<sup>th</sup> season, 1<sup>st</sup> season as a for-profit – CSA or online farmers markets with pickup location. Transplanting, getting her numbers for CSA.

Michelle Elston – Roots cut flower farm – prepping beds, laying plastic mulch, trying to be present to the spring.

Rachel

Lori - appreciated the way the curriculum built

Lori: My perspective comes from grassroots development – were there things that the participants highlighted in their evaluation – what was it that they were saying / what were the learnings?

The learning circles officially ended in April, at a busy time, so it was difficult to get feedback in terms of surveys.

Amanda: But, after the women presented their plans at the April learning circle, there was conversation/reflection - women were able to ask and answer questions within the group, and the expertise/comfortability and understanding of material within the group was evident.

Liz: It is nice to have a longer-term cohort/support model particularly for soil health because impacts take time, and results happen over time

Farmers are really lacking the business side of things – business/employee management, financial management and strategy, etc. - these could be great one-off events

Michelle – regarding payments/stipends, the program offers value within itself, and saw the stipends as generous amounts

Stephanie: Some of these things would be so valuable for beginning farmers, when I started is when I really wanted to learn and had time to learn and think about things, and I would pay for opportunities, so would appreciate the opportunity for these to be subsidized. Now, I am so busy that I do not feel that I have time to commit, but if I am earning money or it would bring value – questions: who is the audience? What is the goal? Different cohorts for beginning farmers vs existing farmers, because these groups may have different values/intentions

Amanda: Most of these farmers were small-scale in terms of acreage and were also not beginning farmers, so they had a lot of background knowledge (for the most part). The women saw a lot of value in the opportunity to just connect with other women in person and share space/meals/ideas/etc... They were excited to see each other. It was a challenge to find folks who were interested in participating but also had significant acreage

There were 9 women, who all received a participation stipend, and 6 of them applied for and received an implementation stipend

Lori: Interesting to think about paying to learn – I think about one event at Rodale, I paid to be there, and I placed more value on that event because I paid for it and took the time and resources to drive there --> there was something about me putting in the money and energy that made me value it more. I specifically remember the subject matter and it was impactful. Maybe it is not necessarily the stipend that brings people there and gets them engaged, but also the content and what people want to learn and see as valuable

Stephanie: A market in Edinboro recently received funding to offer classes and workshops, but they are not sure what subject matter people want to learn and how to offer it --> online or in-person, travel stipend, what topics, etc. It is nuanced and something I have been thinking about a lot. For me, it really depends on the time of year. But what makes sense? What is the best way to spend this money? The more I think about it the more questions I have. I remember riding my bike 30 miles to go to a PASA event (which gave me a lot of time to think about it and I remember so many of the things they taught us) because I placed value on it and invested time in it

Liz: I feel like we are an island up here in the NE, and a lot of the farmers around here have to drive far to get to events (4-hour drive), so the online stuff has opened up a lot of opportunities for me to attend things. Even in the winter, when I have more time, it is still hard to travel.

Lori: I think there is value in the stipend, and I wouldn't take it away. I remember getting the scholarship and working the PASA conference to be able to go to it, and eating in my car to save money, and I was there because I was making the sacrifice to learn

Stephanie: I also got a scholarship to PASA conference for participating in the soil benchmark study, and I would not have gone without that funding – I felt that they wanted me to come

Lori: The stage of where a producer is will impact what sort of content they are looking for regarding workshops. I am at a stage of deciding if I give up my full-time job (which generates income) or if I want to invest more in my farm business, so I think about workshops that would provide me with management tools and record-keeping.

Lori: I do this because it matters

Michelle: My peers are cut-flower growers, and the two most impactful things that I have ever attended were farm business related (I would travel and invest time for things that will essentially pay for themselves...timing is important, i.e. winter). At a recent event, there was high interest in employee/crew management. Traveled to Denver for the association of national cut flower growers. If you are trying to reach a broad range of farmers, you need topics that are general enough for different production types, we are all trying to run businesses

Liz: We got the PA Farm Vitality grant (and this was the best money we have ever spent). Feeling that we got to establish a more solid grasp on our farm business, working with kitchen table consulting, and I wish I would have had this foundation at the beginning of my farming.

Stephanie: I had some additional thoughts beyond what I wrote in the survey – I am in some of the land justice and food sovereignty and activism spaces. There are entities that own a lot of land and most of the time when they sell it goes to development, but some of these entities want to see the land go to agriculture, and this land access piece is something I am interested about, and I would be interested in meeting about and workshopping some of these topics

Liz: Access to land – always a big issue – workshops about land access and different models to land access (i.e. leasing land)

Michelle: I would also advocate for the flip side – how to sell your land to a farmer

Lori: And finding a good lawyer who advocates for family farms is vital – how do we deal with aging parents? How do we find lawyers who care about the particular issues with family farms and are willing to work with families. Having good legal counsel is really valuable for succession planning

