

REPORT

2017 MSUE Beginning Farmer Webinar Series post-series evaluation
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Background

Michigan citizens interested in engaging in new agricultural enterprises sometimes lack knowledge, experience and technical support to get started. Extension educators and specialists receive numerous contacts from such people seeking basic, start-up information. The Michigan State University Extension Beginning Farmer Webinar Series was developed in response to this need. The success and reported impacts of the series from 2012 through 2016 demonstrated the ongoing need to continue the effort in 2017.

The Michigan State University Extension Beginning Farmer Webinar Series began as an Upper Peninsula regional program. Three Adobe Connect webinars reaching thirty individuals were offered in winter 2012 to provide extended accessibility to information delivered earlier through a set of four face-to-face beginning farmer educational meetings offered in two Upper Peninsula locations. Nearly all webinar participants were Upper Peninsula residents.

Based on the success of the webinars, a series of five MSUE Upper Peninsula Beginning Farmer Program webinars was developed and offered in January through March, 2013 reaching sixty-two people throughout Michigan. In October, 2013, the program was presented to the 'cross-institute' meeting of the MSUE Agriculture and Agribusiness and Greening Michigan Institutes as a pilot cross-institute program. The planning committee was expanded to include a state-wide representation of AABI and GMI educators and the Upper Peninsula regional identification of the program was dropped in favor of a statewide program.

In 2014, the program continued with eleven webinars from January 20 through April 2, 2014 and a twelfth webinar on October 22. Thirteen MSUE educators, one retired MSUE educator and four other MSU collaborators presented webinars, with 311 people registered for a total of 455 webinar views. The 2015 series included twenty webinars featuring twenty three MSU presenters from January 26 through April 20, 2015. One hundred ninety eight participants from fifty-four Michigan counties, twelve other states and three other countries registered for 1,845 webinar views.

In 2016, MSU Extension dropped the Adobe Connect Pro webinar platform and changed to the Zoom Webinar platform. The 2016 series featured twenty four webinars and twenty seven MSU presenters. Two hundred thirty six participants registered for 1,686 webinar views.

The 2017 series consisted of nine webinars featuring nine MSU Extension speakers and one faculty member from Purdue University. The series was promoted through MSU Extension local channels, MSU ANR Communications and eXtension. A total of 334 people registered for 1,927 webinar views. Participants included 284 Michigan residents from 71 counties, 46 people from other states (NY, OH, PA, VA, and WA), and 4 people from other countries (Canada, Zimbabwe, and Turkey).

2016 MSU Extension Beginning Farmer Webinar Series:

	TITLE (Getting started with...)	DATE	PRESENTER(S)	REG # (incl 187 'full series')	INSTITUTE/DEPT
1.	Small vegetable farm systems	1/30/17	Abbey Palmer	218	AgBioResearch, UPREC
2.	Hoop house management	2/13/17	Collin Thompson	220	GMI
3.	Maple syrup	2/27/17	Bob and Sue Battel	212	AABI
4.	Fencing and watering systems for livestock	3/13/17	Jerry Lindquist and Kevin Gould	195	AABI
5.	Blueberries	3/27/17	Mark Longstroth	224	AABI
6.	Crop nutrient management	4/3/17	Jim Isleib	208	AABI
7.	Aquaculture	4/10/17	Elliot Nelson	206	GMI/MI Sea Grant
8.	Planning and operating a mixed fruit orchard	4/24/17	Bob Tritten	234	AABI
9.	Producing and selling eggs	5/8/17	Darrin Karcher	210	Purdue Univ.

Evaluation process

An online 'Survey Monkey' questionnaire was developed by Jim Isleib to assess the overall impact of the 2017 series. An email message containing a link to the survey was sent to 330 participants (4 'opted out') from the 2017 series on May 11, 2017 with email reminders on May 9 and May 30. People completing the on-line survey by May 31 were offered the opportunity to participate in a random drawing to receive a \$50 gasoline gift card. Two cards were awarded to winners after the May 31 deadline.

Evaluation results

- One hundred four respondents were Michigan residents, seven were from other states.
- 111 responses were received from 330 people, for a response rate of 33%.
- The complete report including written comments generated by the on-line Survey Monkey program follows as an attachment.

Summary and 'Public Value Statement'

Q1: Which webinars did respondent register for?

56% of respondents (62) registered for the 'full series'. Numbers of responses from those who registered for individual webinars reflects the general interest in the webinar topics and can be seen in the attached Survey Monkey report.

Selected comments:

- My husband and I enjoyed watching the webinars. We unfortunately missed one webinar, but thankfully the information was sent via e-mail.
- My first webinar at age 56, I thought it was great.
- I found the webinars to be very informative and easy to understand.
- It was wonderful to have so many useful topics covered in such depth.
- I learned something in all of them. Thank you!

Q2: Did respondent view 'live' or 'recorded' webinars?

59% of respondents participated either exclusively, or mostly, on 'live webinars'. The remainder participated by viewing mostly, or exclusively, 'recorded webinars'. Comments indicate that the participants appreciate the option to view recorded webinars.

Selected comments:

- Monday evenings are tough for us at that hour since we have young children and its still during the school year. It is bath time. Recordings were an awesome option for busy young families!
- I have caught up on the webinars that I was not able to attend by watching the recordings. I have also been able to go back for these in case I was needed to double check on information. Very good tool to use.
- The recordings were very important for me. I often did the live webinar for the first hour and then had to go pick up a family member, so I would watch the remainder on the recording.

Q3: Was the webinar series a valuable use of respondent's time?

72% of respondents indicated the webinars were a very valuable use of their time. An additional 27% indicated the webinars were a somewhat valuable use of their time. One respondent indicated that the webinar series was not very valuable.

Q4: Indicate the level of knowledge gained by participating in the webinars the respondent watched.

69% of respondents indicated that they gained 'very much' or 'quite a bit of knowledge'. 25% indicated 'moderate amount' of knowledge gained. 6% indicated 'only a little knowledge gained'.

Selected comments:

- The presenter was very clearly an expert in his field of study and I feel confident that I learned facts. An expert is easily identified by one who can distill complicated concepts into simple ones.
- Already involved in farming I had a base of information to work from. The webinars went deeper into the practices they were presenting and I learned some important details.
- I always learn something not only new but something I can apply in my farm practice.

Q5: *If respondent registered for “full” webinar series (all 9 webinars), how many did they view either ‘live’ or as recordings?*

Only 17% indicated that they had viewed all webinars. 37% of respondents had viewed 6-8 webinars. 18% viewed 4-6 webinars and 27% viewed 0-3 webinars.

Selected comments:

- Some were not in my area of focus but I found them very interesting and opened my thoughts to additional ways that I can expand my farm business model. For instance, we intend to have a commercial kitchen and hadn't considered maple syrup processing as a potential target market but now see that it could fill what would be a gap in the production schedule quite nicely.
- Plan on still watching the ones I missed live.
- couldn't wait for the next one to become available

Q6: *How did respondent self-describe their relationship to agriculture?*

49% indicated they are currently, or planning to sell part or all of their products. 41% indicated they were producing only for home and personal use, no sales. 7% were agricultural industry professionals and 3% were not currently producing any products and don't plan to do so.

Selected comments:

- I'm in the growing phase. I will sell when production is creating volume, approximately selling date is 2018 for some products.
- ...plan to sell product beginning 2020. We are still in the early stages of developing the farm model which includes fruit and fruit processing.
- I am a grower/producer who is starting a new farm venture with the intent of selling products in 2018
- I am starting a farm business and am in the planning stages. I am determining which enterprises are suitable for my land, the markets, and my goals and interests.

Q7: *How many acres of land does respondent currently manage or impact in Michigan for agricultural purposes?*

The median answer from 99 respondents was '5-8 acres'. An approximate average was 50 acres.

Q8: *How many acres of land the responded currently manages in Michigan which are, or will be, influenced by what they learned from the series?*

The median answer from 101 respondents was '2-4 acres'. An approximate average was 16 acres.

Q9: *In what county is the majority of respondent's acreage?*

The largest number of the 107 respondents were from Washtenaw (5), Ingham (6) and Genesee (5). 83 people were from 54 other Michigan counties. 8 people were from outside of Michigan.

Q10: *Which resources mentioned during the series does the respondent plan to use?*

85% plan to use the MSU Extension Beginning Farmer Webinar Series website, 83% plan to use the MSU Extension website, 71% plan to use MSU Extension print bulletins, 66% plan to utilize MSUE educators and offices, 54% plan to use other materials mentioned.

Selected comments:

- Excited to learn more from all MSU sources, excellent information? Thank you
- I've already called an educator for more information
- Have always made good use of my Extension Agent's knowledge. I'm more aware of the websites and will use them more often.

Q11: Does respondent plan to, or has already done any of the listed choices based on what they learned from the series?

- 47% began cultivating a crop in Michigan
- 19% decided not to cultivate a crop due to increased understanding of costs and risks
- 31% diversified or expanded a farm or other ag business
- 23% started a new business
- 19% purchased farm equipment
- 17% began a new livestock or poultry enterprise\
- 15% improved their standing at a current job, or when applying for a new job
- 5% established new business partners

Q12: Has participation in the series resulted in creation of new jobs?

11% of respondents (12 people) indicated that new jobs have been created, totaling 12 jobs

Q13 – 15 (Relate to webinar technology. Details included in attached Survey Monkey report.)

Q16: General impressions, comments and suggestions.

73 comments were categorized into 49 'compliments', 21 'topic suggestions', 12 'improvement suggestions', 7 'complaints' and 1 'other'.

Selected comments:

- Great program, I look for 2018 series!
- I only attended the hoop house webinar but the information I gained was very valuable. I run a hoop house in South Lansing and have used a lot of the advice given during that webinar. Thank you!
- VERY valuable. Thanks for putting these together. Would love some more webinars on sugaring, small/hobby farm stuff (chickens, goats, family cow, etc.)
- I found all if the webinars very interesting and enjoyed them all. I found the presenters had a lot of knowledge i have been seeking as a new farmer.
- We are very glad we signed up for the webinars and will watch them again and also view previous years. Thank you.
- Love the series and love the fact that the presentations are during the non-growing season (winter/early spring).
- Really enjoyed these webinars and the people that presented them. Wish they moved a little faster through the content sometimes.
- My skill level on many items is at beginning. Maybe you could consider more of a hands on webinar. By that I mean if we are dealing with electric fencing, stick with basics like showing and installing the basic fence post connections and wire. Show how to stretch the electric fencing. Real basic stuff. I just happened to pick fencing but apply beginning thought to everything. Maybe you need break down skill levels into different levels. I enjoyed the seminars and the efforts of the presenters. Thankyou
- I love these programs. I am new to farming and love the idea that I can learn from others. I plan to sign up again next year. Keep them coming! It would also be good to offer some programs focused on the business side of farming - legal issues, liabilities, safety, lean, inventory management, marketing, budgeting, etc.
- I enjoy these webinars, and have learned lots. Nice choices of diversified topics. More small, diverse farm topics please!

- I think this is a very valuable educational series. I would like to be on the email list so I receive notice of any webinars earlier so I can sign up for them.
- When planning the next series it may be helpful to solicit topic ideas from past participants to learn what they want to see. I would definitely respond to an email that asked for that info in a few months.
- Handout material available ahead of time would make the presentations more valuable.
- My impression is that many participants are interested in smaller scale, diversified, environmentally and economically sustainable farming models where as many of the educators are teaching commodity agriculture using conventional pesticides, herbicides and cultivation methods. Also, would like more information geared to starting up a farm business such farm planning, evaluating land and other resources, deciding what crops and livestock are best suited to land, how to evaluate markets for various products, how supply chains work, food safety regulations etc. etc.
- Don't forget small farms and operations... The roadside stands the gifts and seals to friends and family members we are out here too passionate and excited and interested
- I love these programs. I am new to farming and love the idea that I can learn from others. I plan to sign up again next year. Keep them coming! It would also be good to offer some programs focused on the business side of farming - legal issues, liabilities, safety, lean, inventory management, marketing, budgeting, etc.

Public value statement:

Public Value Statement

New farm businesses provide jobs, income and increased economic and social stability, and increased food security to rural and other communities. Providing basic, practical information to people interested in, or already engaging in, new farm enterprises of any size helps these small business develop sound production and marketing plans.