Supporting Relationships for Farm Success

Healthy on-farm relationships between spouses, employees, apprentices and family members are vital to a farm’s success.

The University of Maine Cooperative Extension and the Beginning Farmer Resource Network of Maine started a project in the fall of 2016 focused on farmers and social sustainability. The project is supported by a Northeast SARE Professional Development Program Grant.
Today's Participants by Affiliation

Communication Type

What is your most frequently used form of communication with farmers?

What do we mean by Interpersonal Skills?

- **Communication**: Identifying the relationships and roles on the farm and tools to improve communication between family members, farm partners, employees, customers and other decision makers.

- **Decision-making**: Utilize existing tools to prioritize tasks and plan in advance. Have a clear understandings of management roles and responsibilities, and criteria on what decisions can be made by the person in charge and which require all stakeholders' input.

- **Goal-setting**: Develop farm goals that integrate quality of life values and relationship goal criteria into farm decision making.

- **Time Management**: Utilizing existing resources to assist farmers in optimizing farm roles and responsibilities.
Performance Target

45 agricultural service providers increase competence and confidence to understand and respond to beginning farmer concerns about interpersonal relationships, and apply their new skills in one-on-one consultations with 90 farmers who manage 10,755 acres, with an aim to improve farm retention and farmer lifestyle satisfaction.

What are some qualities of successful farmers?

Share your response in the chat box.
Questions?

*Please type your questions in the chat box*

---

**Agenda**

A. Project Overview
B. Toolkit
C. Wrap-up

---

**Project Hypothesis**

Agricultural Service Providers are seeing interpersonal issues arise in consultation with farmers, and service providers will benefit from training to better support farmers in the four project areas of communication, goal setting, decision making and time management.

"Ranchers and farmers are telling us their weakest link is not technology nor information. Their weakest link is human relationship management."

- Robert Fetsch, Colorado State University Cooperative Extension
How comfortable are you in addressing interpersonal skills in 1-on-1 consultations with farmers?

Journey to Competence

From

- Unconscious Incompetence
- Conscious Incompetence
- Conscious Competence
- Unconscious Competence

Where We Started

Includes:

- NESFI DACUM
  - Develop a Curriculum
- Duties & Tasks
  - That Successful Sustainable Farmers in the Northeast DO
- Qualities
  - They HAVE
What's Not Included?

Duties & Tasks

A. Plan Whole Farm
B. Set Up Farm Business
C. Manage Farm Business
D. Pursue Education & Professional Development
E. Nourish Family & Community Relations
F. Manage Farm Labor Resources
G. Manage Tools, Equipment & Supplies
H. Manage Farm Infrastructure
I. Manage Production & Natural Resources
J. Raise Livestock
K. Raise Crop
L. Market Farm Products & Services
M. Review & Re-Plan Whole Farm

Learning Stages

- Recruits / Explorers / Aspiring
- Start-Up Farmers
- Establishing Farmers
- Strategizing
- Refining

0-1 Years Farming
1-2 Years Farming
3-5 Years Farming
4-6 Years Farming
6-10 Years Farming

Dreyfus Model

- Novice
- Advanced Beginner
- Competent
- Proficient
- Expert

Dreyfus Model of Skill Acquisition

- Novice: Knows how to start a tractor, go forward and reverse. Needs supervision and feedback during operation.
- Advanced Beginner: Can run a tractor and needs reminders to properly operate loader or PTO.
- Competent: Can operate a tractor safely.
- Proficient: Can operate a tractor with skill, judging distances and speed appropriate to current activity.
- Expert: No longer consciously thinks about how to use a tractor.
Develop A Curriculum for MAINE Farmers

- NESFI DACUM
- Tasks & Duties
- Communication
- Decision Making
- Development Stages
- Time Management
- Typology
- Development Cycle
- Goal Setting
- Learning Stage
- Competency Scale

Understanding the Framework
Questions?

Please type your questions in the chat box

Agenda

A. Project Overview
B. Toolkit
C. Wrap-up

Toolkit Overview

Why a Toolkit?

When to Use
One-on-One Consultations
BEFORE, DURING & AFTER
What’s in the Toolkit?

- Farmer Typology
- Tips for Acting as a Guide
- Checklist
- Resources

Farmer Typology

Holistic Understanding & Assessment

Farm Development Stages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prospective</th>
<th>Start-Up</th>
<th>Establishing</th>
<th>Strategizing</th>
<th>Refining</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Start-up farmers
- How does this farmer describe their goals for the farm?
- Prospective farmers
- Has the farmer done any type of self-evaluation? (personality test, farming aptitude test)
- Establishing farmers
- Does this farmer have employees, apprentices or others for whom they are a supervisor?
- Strategizing farmers
- How is the farmer approaching the challenges associated with changes to their business?
- Refining farmers
- Are there skills or knowledge that this farmer still needs?
Using the Farmer Typology

- Think of a farmer you’ve worked with……
- What is their development stage?
- What are some of the characteristics that you’ve used to determine this?

Do you have questions about how to identify a farmer’s development stage?

---

Development Cycle

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal</th>
<th>Business</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Development 0-18 Years</td>
<td>Seed Stage&lt;br&gt;Focus is on the launch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Start-Up 18 Years +&lt;br&gt;Post College or Training</td>
<td>Making It&lt;br&gt;Focus is on growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expansion 18 Years - 50 Years</td>
<td>Taking Charge&lt;br&gt;Focus is on ‘team building’ through employees, partnerships or marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maturity 50-70 Years</td>
<td>Sustain &amp; Produce&lt;br&gt;Focus is on Quality of Life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition 50+ Proto Retirement</td>
<td>Sell, Retire, Reinvent&lt;br&gt;Focus is on transitions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

Using the Development Cycle

- Did this person grow up on a farm?
- Do they bring experience from another field to their farm business?
- How has the farm expanded?
- Through marriage, partnership or employees?
- Have the goals of these farmers evolved?
- What will be the legacy of these farmers?
Using the Farmer Typology

• What stage of the development cycle are they in?

• What characteristics indicate this stage?
  *Please type your responses into the chat box.*

• Are you curious to learn more about aspects of this stage?

Learning Stages

- **Novice** – How do skill areas relate to their farm dream?
- **Advanced Beginner** – How are challenges identified? Has a self assessment been done?
- **Competent** – How can they access training or resources to help improve skills?
- **Proficient** – Ready to actively model and teach skills
- **Expert** – Act as allies, by sharing their experiences with others

Using the Farmer Typology

• What learning stage fits their production knowledge?

• How about their communication skills?

• Will these levels of skill be an asset or a challenge based on what you know?

*Questions? Please type your questions into the chat box.*
What’s in the Toolkit?

• Farmer Typology
• Tips for Acting as a Guide
• Checklist
• Resources

Becoming a Guide

What are the characteristics of a good guide?

Share your response in the chat box

The Ladder of Inference

1. Observe
2. Select
3. Meanings
4. Assumptions
5. Conclusions
6. Action

Reflexive Loop

Our beliefs influence what we observe
The Ladder of Inference

Questions about the Ladder of Inference?

*Please type your questions in the chat box*

Active Listening Tips

*Asking open-ended questions*

How will a new well impact your farm?
How will it change your production?
How will it change your finances?
How will it support your farm goals?
Active Listening Tips

**Clarify**

Can you tell me more about the sequence of events?

I’m not sure I understand, could you explain how you reached this conclusion?

Can you remind me who was involved?

---

Active Listening Tips

**Naming the Emotions**

How are you feeling about this challenge?

I’m sensing you are concerned about this. Can you tell me more about what you’re feeling?

What are some of your fears about this choice?

---

Active Listening Tips

**Summarize**

“So what I’ve heard so far is …..”

“What I heard you say was…..”

“These are some of things I’ve heard you say, ….”
Asking “why” something happened or “why” a particular decision was made can be tempting. This approach can trigger a defensive answer which may distract from assessing the situation.

**Words & Phrases to Avoid**

“WHY”

“...I know what you mean”
“...I’ve heard that before”
“...That happened to me once…”
“...In my experience…”

These phrases are barriers to communication and convey assumptions that the farmer might take as a cue(s) to stop talking.

**Words & Phrases to Avoid**

“BUT” or “HOWEVER” or “SHOULD” or “COULD” or “WOULD”

These are phrases which can often draw attention back to you (the listener) as an active listener your goal is to have the attention remain with the speaker.

Try substituting “AND” where you might use “BUT.”

For example, “This business plan is so helpful to my understanding of your farm goals AND I’ll need additional information to assess whether our programs are the right fit for your funding needs.”
Questions About Active Listening?

Please type your questions into the chat box.

Feedback

Before offering feedback, clarify whether your feedback is meant to offer insight or add context to the speaker’s point of view.

Some of these clarifying questions might include:

“What ideas do you have to address this?”
“Is there a specific way you would like my help?”
“Have you seen someone else facing this? How did they approach it?”

Feedback

Ask before you share pertinent information, observations, insights and experiences.

“I have some information that might help with that, would you like to hear it?”
Feedback
If the answer is yes, then keep these tips in mind. Keep the feedback loop open so there is opportunity for the farmer to correct what you may have misheard.

Limit Your Focus
“Well we’ve discussed several interesting aspects of your operation, I can help you most with time management and your goal to finish your business plan this winter.”

Prepare your Thoughts
“Because I heard you say you were having trouble prioritizing tasks on the farm, I suggest you look at this time management tool.”

Keep it Positive & Focus on Improvement
“I like your ambition and I’d love to support you in writing your business plan. I’d like to start by scheduling some meetings and corresponding deadlines.

Referrals
Types of Referrals

Self - You are aware of a resource

Provider - You contact an agency representative

Research - You may need to do more research prior to making a referral.

Effective Referrals
To ensure you have a good sense of the support this person has explored or is currently receiving it is a good idea to ask, “Who else have you been in touch with?” and then--

- Ask for Permission
- Explain the Referral
- Know your Limits
- Get to know the Network
- Verify the Need

Questions?
The farmer may have already indicated how they would like to proceed with next steps. As a guide, you can remind them of their self-described process through use of paraphrasing and/or open-ended questions.

“You’ve told me you’d like to have “________” done. When would you like to have it done by?”

**Following Up**

If the farmer was unable to complete an action item or arrives to a consultation unprepared.

Set a timeline or time frame—work with them on setting a realistic deadline.

Consider if something else needs to be done or learned first. Is this affecting completion of the action item. Ask, “what motivates you?” Consider if follow-up can incentivize them to complete the task.

**Following Up**

What type of follow-up do you use?

*You may type your responses into the chat box.*
Using the Checklist

Please open the document, One-on-One Consultation Checklist. We’ll go through it with some examples.

- Stage of Development
- Conversation Openers
- Area of Focus
- Skill Area (self-rating)
- Feedback
- Next Steps

Using the Checklist

Conversation Openers

What brings this farmer to your office?

What expectations do you have for the meeting?

Using the Checklist

Area of Focus

- Key Phrases
- Approach or Tactics
- Who else?
In this example let’s pretend you are a loan officer.

Jim and Karen come into your office and tell you about how the last two seasons of dry weather have impacted their business and their ability to grow crops for their markets. They tell you about how they have been in business for 4 years, selling veggies at 3 farmers market during the growing season. They don’t own their land. They rent a house and their fields on a year-to-year basis.

Their house well has gone dry several times which has been stressful. They’ve lost crops and are frustrated because this means they can’t meet the consumer demand at their markets.

They’ve met with their NRCS agent who tells them they can put together an application for funding, but they won’t know if the funding will be there until March or April. They have a quote of $5,000 from a well driller.

Case Study

Skill Areas

Are there aspects of communication, decision making, goal setting, or time management in the farmer’s area of focus?

Please type your responses into the chat box.

Using the Checklist

How do Jim & Karen describe their relationship with their landlord?

How able are they to negotiate a longer term lease?

Does their current land meet the needs of their future goals?
Using the Checklist

- **Feedback**
  - Referrals
  - Other Suggestions
- **Next Steps**
  - Deadlines or subsequent meetings
  - Action Plan
- **Resources**
  - Listed by project area

Questions?

---

**Agenda**

A. Project Overview
B. Toolkit
C. Wrap-up

---

**How comfortable are you in addressing interpersonal skills in 1-on-1 consultations with farmers?**

Not Comfortable  Somewhat Comfortable  Comfortable  Very Comfortable
Project Timeline

**2017**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using the Tools &amp; Feedback to Project Coordinators</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**2018**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete Digital Resource Available to Participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January - February</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow-Up Survey (a draft has been emailed to you)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital Resource Available on project website</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Next Steps

- Complete the evaluation (see your email)
- Integrate the Service Provider Toolkit and Checklist into your day-to-day work.
- Ask the project team for help
- Provide feedback about successes, challenges and project materials
- Keep notes for follow-up survey (see your email)

THANK YOU!

We hope that you will leave today with new perspectives and tools to help deepen your understanding of the farmers with whom you work.

**Presenter Emails:**

Elaine Bourne - elaine.bourne@voanne.org
Leslie Forstadt - leslie.forstadt@maine.edu
Abby Sadauckas - absadauckas@gmail.com