



Key Findings Report: Beginning Farmer Resource Assessment & Gaps Analysis

Beginning Farmer Network of Massachusetts | 2016

Summary

The Beginning Farmer Network of Massachusetts' Beginning Farmer Resource Assessment and Gaps Analysis Project utilized a survey and several one-on-one beginning farmer interviews to understand what resources are available for beginning farmers across the state and where gaps exist and can be improved.

The project team widely distributed an online survey, reaching out through several food system & farming listserves as well project partners' websites, blogs, social media, and newsletters. We also attended beginning farmer workshops and events to speak directly to growers about our project.

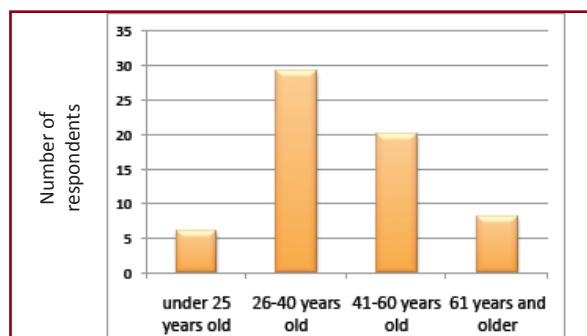
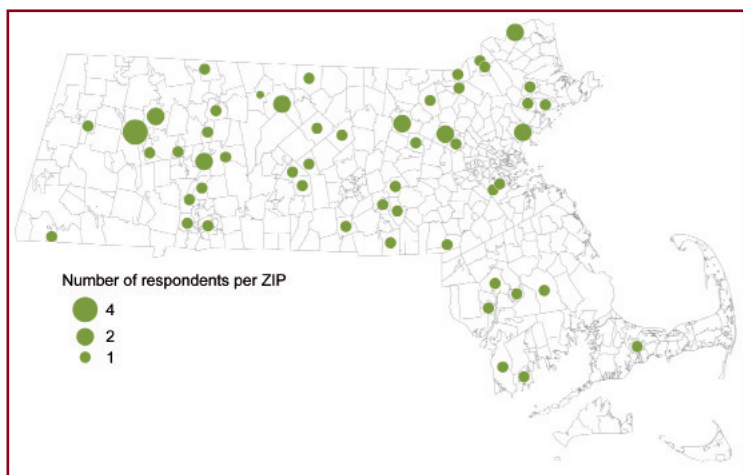
Analysis of data from 63 survey respondents and 13 interviewees revealed that beginning farmers in Massachusetts find strong resources regarding setting up a farm business, whole farm management, and production

topics such as raising crops and raising livestock but that resources need to improve in areas of marketing, managing labor, infrastructure and equipment and tools, and how to nourish community relationships.

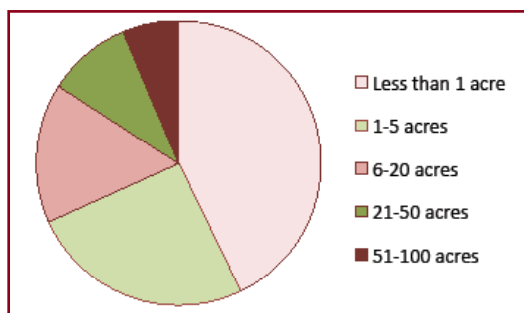
Analysis also pinpointed that many beginning farmers utilize "one-stop shopping" websites for information and prefer video and listserv formats, although farmer-to-farmer networks developed through farming experiences remain a key avenue for information flow and resource gathering. Finally, many beginning farmers spoke to the continuing key challenges of affordable land and start-up capital access, appropriate labor management, and new marketing channels.

As Beginning Farmer Network of Massachusetts moves forward, we seek to find innovative ways to convene service providers around addressing these expressed needs.

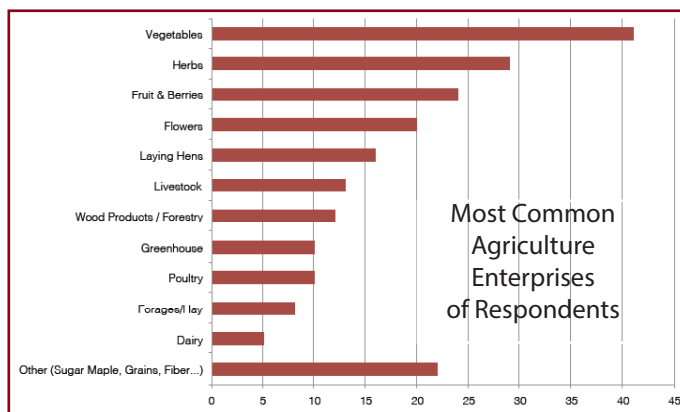
Who were our 63 respondents?



Over 50% of the respondents are 25-40 years old.



70% are farming less than 5 acres.

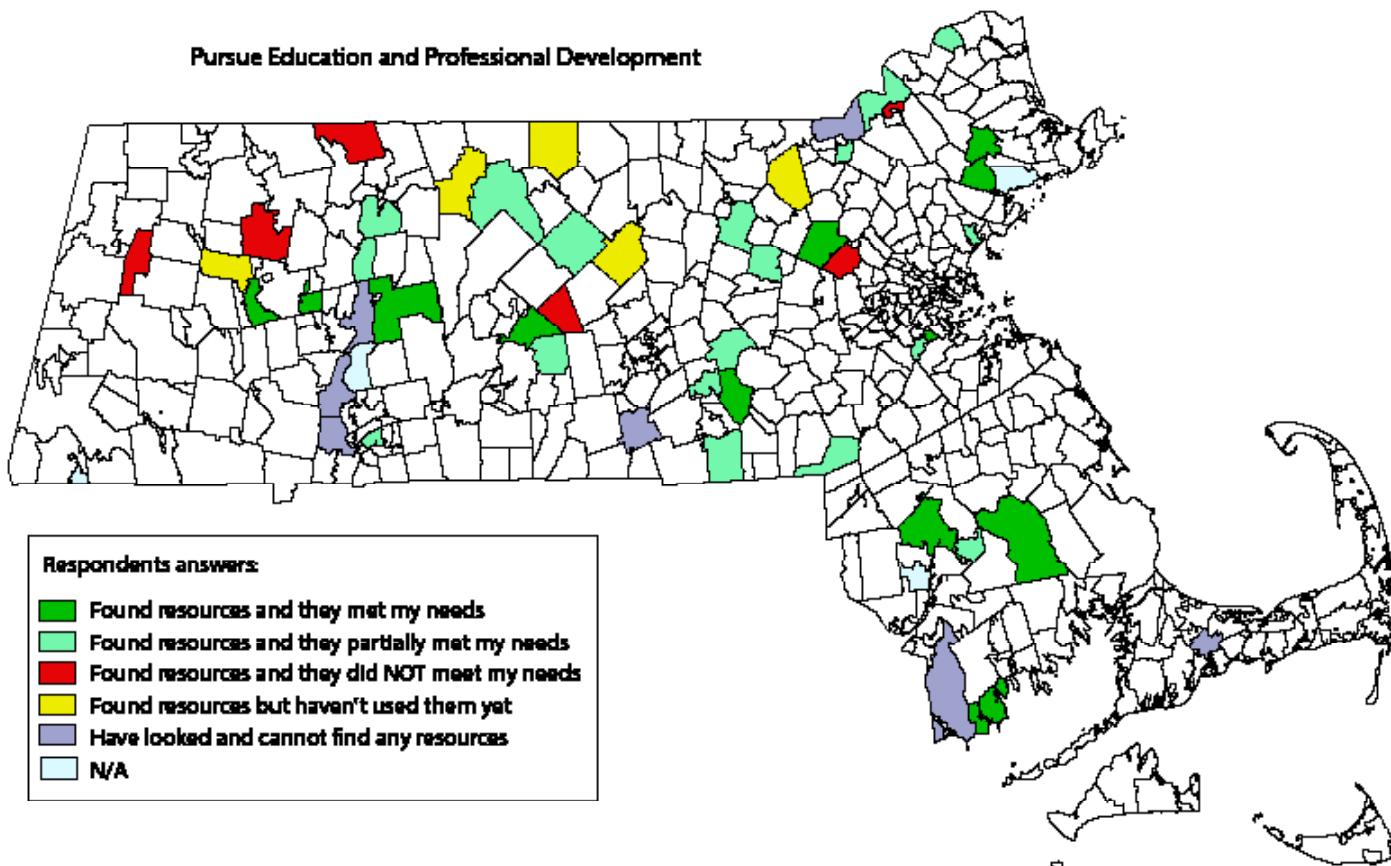


Resources in Massachusetts

- Whole Farm Planning
- Set Up / Start Up Farm Business
- Manage Farm Business
- Pursue Education and Personal Development
- Raise Crops
- Raise Livestock

**For definitions of these categories, please see the last page glossary.*

Pursue Education and Professional Development

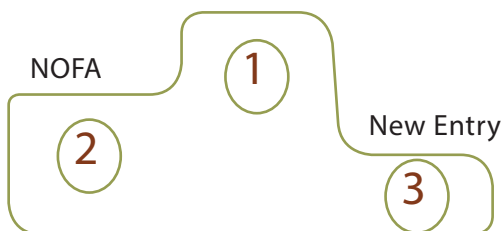


Respondents answers:

- Found resources and they met my needs
- Found resources and they partially met my needs
- Found resources and they did NOT meet my needs
- Found resources but haven't used them yet
- Have looked and cannot find any resources
- N/A

3 Most Helpful Resources

UMass Extension and Stockbridge School



“Multi-service farm support organizations” seem to be the most helpful resource for beginning farmers.

Where do farmers go to learn and get the information they need?

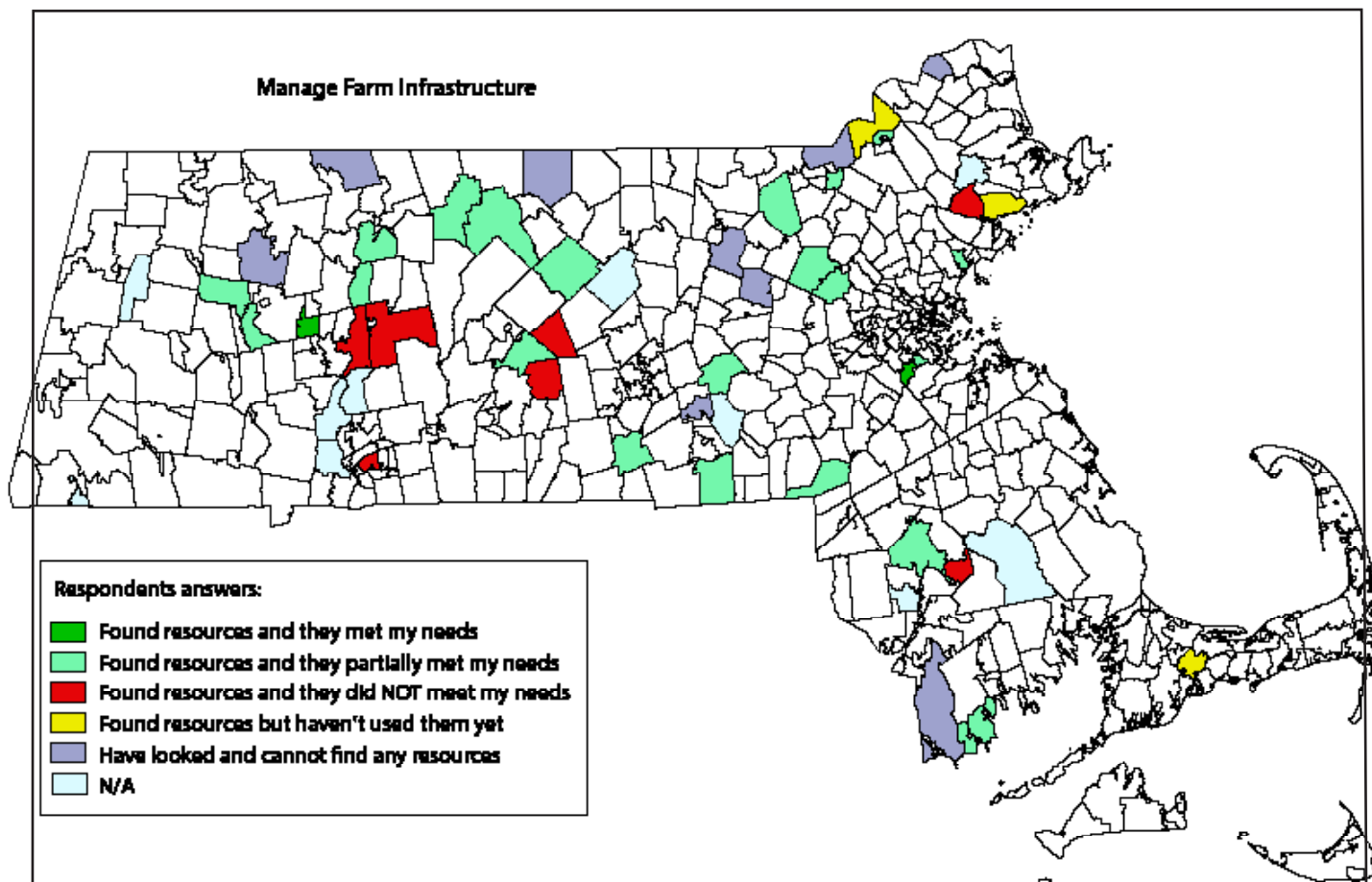
Top 4:

1. Other farmers
2. Apprenticeships
3. List Serves
4. Instagram & YouTube

Beginning Farmer Needs

- Manage Farm and Labor Resources
- Management of Tools, Equipment and Supplies
- Nourish Family and Community Relations
- Manage Farm Infrastructure
- Manage Production and Natural Resources
- Market Farm Products and Services
- Review or Replan Whole Farm

**For definitions of these categories, please see the last page glossary.*



What are the opportunities for building up resources for beginning farmers?

- Videos
- Regional mixers in off seasons
- Case studies on scaling up
- Land access education and inventory
- Information on labor and employment
- Regional and local guides on laws and regulations

Top 3 needs

Business management, money and markets were the top 3 needs expressed by beginning farmers.

They also expressed needs for more information on labor, access to land, local laws & regulations.

Guiding Research Questions

As Beginning Farmers in Massachusetts have access to a wide range of Service Providers and Training Resource, what resources (programs, training, technical assistance, educational workshops, support services) are available for beginning farmers in Massachusetts?

How effective are these resources at meeting the needs of beginning farmers?

What needs do beginning farmers have that aren't currently being met? What are the major gaps that exist in available resources?

Objectives of the Research

Identify gaps and bridge them for a better access to training resources for Beginning Farmers in Massachusetts. Target specific needs of Beginning Farmers.

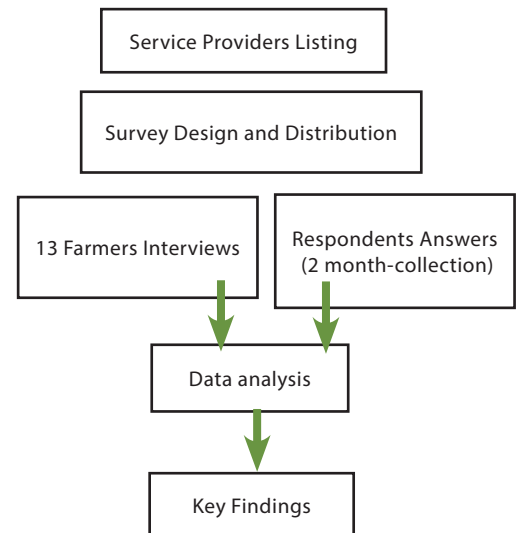
Glossary (from DACUM profile)

- **Whole Farm Planning:** goal-setting, market research, acquiring land, developing production/marketing/financial plans, researching legal requirements, mapping and developing a land use plan.
- **Set up & Start-up Farm Business:** choosing a legal structure, obtaining capital or credit, obtaining permits/licenses/insurance, setting up bookkeeping and record-keeping systems.
- **Manage Farm Business:** collecting payments, bookkeeping – paying bills and taxes, monitoring cash flow, making quick decisions, record keeping – financial, production, sales, managing debt.
- **Pursue Education & Professional Development:** keeping up with production/marketing/management trends, attending conferences/courses/workshops, apprenticing or finding a farmer-mentor, reading agricul-

tural books, magazines, catalogs.

- **Nourish Family & Community Relations:** making time for yourself/family, building relationships with neighbors, participating in community and agricultural organizations/networks/associations.
- **Manage Farm Labor Resources:** preparing seasonal labor and farm safety plans, training and supervising workers, complying with regulations.
- **Manage Tools, Equipment & Supplies:** fabricating new tools and equipment, maintaining and repairing tools and equipment.
- **Manage Farm Infrastructure:** building infrastructure – greenhouses/barns/fences/etc, maintaining and repairing infrastructure.
- **Manage Production & Natural Resources:** managing soil fertility, managing pest/weeds/disease, res-

Methods: How did we identify the gaps?



ponding to unpredictable weather, implementing conservation practices.

- **Raise Livestock:** managing pastures, feeding and watering animals, monitoring animal health, milking/slaughtering and other harvest and processing tasks, managing manure.
- **Raise Crops:** preparing a crop production plan, operating equipment and implements safely, seeding, planting, harvesting, post-harvest handling and storage.
- **Market Farm Products & Services:** Choosing marketing strategies, developing promotional materials, advertising, monitoring competition and market conditions, selling farm products and services.
- **Review & Re-Plan Whole Farm:** preparing financial statements and tax forms, reviewing and analyzing records, revising whole farm plan.

About the Beginning Farmer Network of

Massachusetts (BFN/Mass): BFN/Mass is a collaborative group of farmers and farm service providers dedicated to beginning farmer success in Massachusetts. By creating more space for networking and collaboration amongst Beginning Farmers and Service Providers we hope to bring together people who want to work on similar issues, who want to share information and lessons learned, and who can inspire each other by the work they are already doing.

Grant Information:

This gaps analysis of beginning farmer resources in Massachusetts was conducted with generous support from a 2014 Northeast SARE Partnership Grant ONE14-207-27806

Contact Info

Beginning Farmer Network of Massachusetts (BFN/Mass),
45 Merrimack Street, Ste 500,
Lowell, MA 01852.
www.bfnmass.org
Phone: 978-654-6745 x 104