Supporting Relationships for Farm Success

Begun in the fall of 2016, this project focuses on farmers and social sustainability. The project started with a survey to service providers designed to to better understand the needs of beginning farmers (in their first 10 years) with respect to the social, emotional, and relational issues that arise.

For the purposes of this project, “interpersonal skills” will include:

- **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**: Utilizing existing tools to prioritize tasks and plan in advance
- **Goal-setting**: Developing tools for assisting farmers in prioritization of farm, business and family goals.
- **Time Management**: Utilizing existing resources to assist farmers in optimizing farm roles and responsibilities.

### Project Timeline

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Project Activities</th>
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<td>January – March</td>
<td>Focus Groups &amp; Interviews with Farmers</td>
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<td>Working Group Meetings</td>
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<td>September</td>
<td>Optional In-Person Group Meeting to Review Draft Materials</td>
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<td>October</td>
<td>Day-Long Training</td>
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<td>Webinar</td>
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<table>
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<th>2018</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>Digital Resources Available on Website</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Decline in Farm Operators Farming 5-9 years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Interest</th>
<th>Survey (n=12)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interest by Topic Area</td>
<td>Interest in Participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Skills</td>
<td>Interested in Participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision-making</td>
<td>Possibly Interested</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal-setting</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**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

**Agenda**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9:00 – 9:30</td>
<td>Overview &amp; Introductions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:30 - 9:40</td>
<td>Ag Service Provider Survey Data &amp; Activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:40 - 10:10</td>
<td>Summary Report from Farmer Demographics &amp; Activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:20 - 10:35</td>
<td>Develop a Curriculum for Maine Farmers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:35 - 10:45</td>
<td>Break</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:45 - 11:00</td>
<td>Develop a Curriculum Activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:00 - 11:20</td>
<td>Case Study &amp; Activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:20 - 11:35</td>
<td>Brainstorm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:35 – 12:00</td>
<td>Next Steps &amp; Closing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introductions

- Name
- Role
- Agency/organization
- How do you work with new farmers?
- What do you hope to gain from today?

What do you hope to gain from today?

- Connection with each other
- Multi-generational spectrum of communication, decision making and relationships
- “Tune up” skills for working in the 4 project areas
- See how this group can be a multiplier in increasing these skills
- Increase knowledge of the soft skills
- Communication skills to help farms in transition move forward
- Gain knowledge of the new farmer learning stages & learning about needs
- Help develop tools to ensure they are relevant to diverse communities
- Ways to teach communication skills to students and demonstrate intentionality
Issues that arise in our work with farmers

- Broad range of questions - being prepared
- Sharing knowledge of relational systems (ie communication and needed skill sets)
- Delivering technical information with information regarding business development, farm production - balancing and choosing what to address
- Getting beneath surface issues
- Helping people develop vision & how to communicate that to others
- Recognizing that project area skills affect farm sustainability
- Farmer to farmer versus technology
- Lack of knowledge of full range of options available to clients - what are their options
- Decisions made in conflict with values

Agricultural Service Provider Places of Work (n = 53)

Agricultural Service Provider Places of Work (n = 53)
What Percentage of New Farmers Have you Worked with in the Last Three Years? (n = 53)

- Less than 10%: 10%
- Between 10-24%: 20%
- Between 25-49%: 30%
- Between 50-74%: 40%
- Between 75-79%: 50%
- All (100%): 60%

How comfortable are you in addressing interpersonal skills in 1-on-1 consultations with farmers? (n = 52)

- Not Comfortable: 31%
- Somewhat Comfortable: 29%
- Comfortable: 15%
- Very Comfortable: 25%
How Frequently Do You See Problems of Interpersonal Skills on Farms You Work With?

Frequency of Seeing Problems with Farmers Among ASPs Not Comfortable with Addressing Interpersonal Issues (n = 16)
Familiarity with New Farmer Learning Stages (n = 53)

- Very familiar (a lot of expertise), 26%
- Familiar, 18%
- Somewhat familiar, 26%
- Somewhat unfamiliar, 30%
- Not familiar at all (never heard of it), 17%

Can you recall a time where you were meeting with farmers and felt unprepared to deal with the interpersonal challenges demonstrated by the farmers?
What does this tell us about our role as service providers? Can we think of ourselves as “guides” rather than experts?

- Humility
- Presenting a menu of options
- Gaining trust of participants
- Flexibility / Change Plan
- How to steer production questions to management (ie time & communication)
- Dealing with doubt and uncertainty of new farmers
  - How to ask open-ended questions
  - Lead through vision, plan and career development
  - Supporting whether they go into farming or not
- How to bring up “issues” that farmers may not have asked or recognized
- Working with diversity
  - Language
  - Respecting culture while introducing new concepts (ie time mgmt)
  - Integrating culture with expected business practices
- Family Culture
  - How to recognize it and plan accordingly.

Farmer Years of Experience (n = 50)

![Farmer Years of Experience Chart](chart.png)
Present Challenges (n = 48)

- Time Management: 49%
- Goal Setting: 21%
- Decision Making: 33%
- Communication: 29%

Percentage of Respondents Answering 4 or 5 (very challenging)

Future Interest (n = 48)

- Time Management: 64%
- Goal Setting: 45%
- Decision Making: 57%
- Communication: 70%

Percentage of Respondents Answering 4 or 5 (very interested)
“What skills do you think successful farmers need?”

- **Time**
  - Time for stories
  - Who/How
  - Organization
  - Determining Priorities (Go back to plan)
  - Quadrant Tool (Covey)
  - Journaling
  - Reviewing

- **Goals**
  - Expecting Change
  - Open Mind
  - Journaling as a tool

- **Decisions**
  - Storytelling can inform
  - Communicating vision → benchmarks
  - Who Leads
  - Who is empowered when
  - Explicit
  - What process is used

- **Communication**
  - How To: Meetings & Orientation
  - Making time for stories
  - Listening skills
  - Empathy “I’m concerned”

**Who?**

**How?**
We asked farmers-

“What Are the Qualities of Farmers Whom you Admire?”
Develop a Curriculum

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 Crops
L. Market Farm Products & Services
M. Review & Re-Plan Whole Farm

Learning Stages

- Recruits / Explorers / Aspiring
- Start-Up Farmers
- Enterprise / Establishing Farmers
- Re-strategizers
- Refining

Duties & Tasks

- 0-1 Years Farming: Novice
- 1-2 Years Farming: Advanced Beginner
- 3-5 Years Farming: Competent
- 4-6 Years Farming: Proficient
- 6-10 Years Farming: Expert
### Dreyfus Model of Skill Acquisition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Novice</td>
<td>Knows how to start a tractor, go forward and reverse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Beginner</td>
<td>Can run a tractor, but may need reminders to properly operate loader or PTO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competent</td>
<td>Can operate a tractor safely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proficient</td>
<td>Can operate a tractor with skill, judging distances and speed appropriate to current activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert</td>
<td>No longer consciously thinks about how to use a tractor</td>
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### Design A Curriculum for MAINE Farmers

- **NESFI DACUM**
- **Qualities**
- **Communication**
- **Decision Making**
- **Tasks & Duties**
- **Goal Setting**
- **Classifications**
- **Years in Farming**
- **Time Management**
- **Learning Stages**
- **Competency Scale**
- **Dreyfus Model**
## Develop A Curriculum Activity

### Years in Farming

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years in Farming</th>
<th>0 Years Farming</th>
<th>1-2</th>
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### Time Mgmt
- To-Do List
- Basic Records
- Time for Learning
- Prioritized To-Do List
- Basic Recordkeeping
- Recording how long things take
- Refining & Tracking Records
- Work/Life Balance
- Basic Worker Mgmt
- How Long things take you (you know)
- Spreadsheets developed
- Organized & Maintaining Effective Systems
- Your routine seamlessly implemented
- Refining records in pre-existing systems and questioning adaptations/new systems
- Time Off
- Set training for workers
- Streamlined systems
- Time for Innovation

### Decision Making
- Realize How You make decisions is important to the success of the farm & happiness of the farmers
- Have a prototype of a system and/or have explored several ways of making decisions
- ID the ways that work for this farm and aspects that need revisions and realize there are questions to be asked
- Reimagine systems and delegate roles for systems
- Know which questions to ask
- Refine chosen system
- Have Template & clarity about when, who & how
- Working with outside (off-farm) leadership
- Developing challenging goals

### Goal Setting
- Realistic self-assessment of skills and financial potential
- Do Research on yourself (skills), markets, financial needs
- Develop marketing, production skills
- Systems—identify resources or re-identify (labor needs, marketing, production, time efficiencies)
- Evaluate enterprises you want to pursue
- Re-assess
- Set new goals
- Working with outside (off-farm) leadership
- Developing challenging goals

### Communication
- Recognize pre-set
- ID new communication tools
- ID relational system
- "Who am I communicating with?"
- Practicing in close relationships
- Develop a communication template
- This is HOW we communicate
- Bridging lessons learned
- ID new tools needed
- Getting more confident w/ challenging situations
- Full comfort with anything that comes up
- Equanimity
## Project Timeline

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## Case Study

Alison & James
Brainstorm

What skills & support might be needed?

**Responses**

- Getting on the same page
- Constructive steps for ASP to suggest a break in conversation
- Facts, Facts, Facts – how to restate what you heard and observed while remaining objective
- Resources to refer farmers to – either for more support or to tackle problem/challenge themselves
- Using focus questions
- Acknowledge importance of each

Next Steps

- Evaluation will be emailed to you
- Project team will contact you for feedback about the materials as they are developed
- Optional September 8th meeting
- Day-long Training October 24th

Email Abby, Leslie, or Tori with questions!