

EVALUATION REPORT

2018 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 2017 demonstrated the momentum of the program and the demand for another series in 2018.

The Michigan State University Extension Beginning Farmer Webinar Series began as an Upper Peninsula regional AABI program. In subsequent years, the program has developed into a state-wide cross institute (AABI and GMI) effort, attracting participation from outside Michigan and the U.S.

Program year	# webinars offered	Total # participants	# MI participants	# MI counties represented	# other states represented	# other countries represented
2012	3	30	30	9	0	0
2013	5	62	62	30	0	0
2014	12	291	245	71	19	1
2015	20	183	149	54	12	3
2016	24	220	177	57	18	2
2017	9	331	277	70	19	4
2018	15	303	256	61	14	7

To-date, a total of 68 presenters have shared information with 1,420 registered participants through 88 webinars. Registration for over 9,500 webinar views was received. The presenters consist of MSUE-AABI educators (29), MSUE-GMI educators (10), faculty from MSU departments (14), staff from MSU departments (6), ag agencies and organizations (4) and private farmers (5). All webinars, with exception of a few with technical flaws, are posted on the MSU Extension Beginning Farmer Webinar Series webpage and currently available for viewing without registration or charge.

2018 MSU Extension Beginning Farmer Webinar Series:

	TITLE (Getting started with...)	DATE	PRESENTER(S)	REG # (incl 216 'full series')	INSTITUTE/ DEPT
1.	Seed starting and transplant production	1/17/18	Collin Thompson, W. Garrett Owen	240	GMI, PSM
2.	Reduced tillage vegetable growing	1/24/18	Ben Phillips	230	AABI
3.	Managing your farm woodlot	1/31/18	Julie Crick, Dale Forrester	229	GMI, Maple Syrup Producer
4.	Choosing apple varieties and rootstocks for your new orchard	2/7/18	Amy Irish-Brown	230	AABI
5.	Organic matter basics	2/14/18	Vicki Morrone, Sieg Snapp	232	MSU CRFS, PSM
6.	Fertilizer basics	2/21/18	George Silva	232	AABI
7.	Livestock basics	2/28/18	Jerry Lindquist	225	AABI
8.	Raising rabbits	3/7/18	Katie Holcomb	222	4H volunteer
9.	Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) basics: Am I covered?	3/14/18	Phil Tocco	224	AABI
10.	USDA and SARE programs for beginning farmers	3/21/18	Jennifer Silveri, Dean Baas	229	MIFFS, AABI
11.	Pest management systems compared	3/28/18	Fred Springborn	229	AABI
12.	U-Pick farming	4/4/18	Jim Isleib	228	AABI
13.	Farm business basics #1: Simple essentials of farm accounting	4/11/18	Frank Wardynski	253	AABI
14.	Farm business basics #2: Develop a balance sheet	4/18/18	Frank Wardynski	253	AABI
15.	Farm business basics #3: Calculate farm profitability	4/25/18	Frank Wardynski	252	AABI

Evaluation process

An online 'Survey Monkey' questionnaire similar to those used in recent years was used to assess the overall impact of the 2018 series. An email message containing a link to the survey was sent to 302 participants from the 2018 series on April 27, 2018 with email reminders on May 4 and May 11. People completing the on-line survey by May 15 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 15 deadline.

Evaluation results

- Eighty respondents were Michigan residents, fifteen were from outside of Michigan.
- 95 responses were received from 302 people, for a response rate of 31%.
- 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?

77% 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:

- I registered for the entire series. While I haven't had time to watch all of them, the ones that were most pertinent to our Farm I did participate in or watch already. They were fantastic with the information they provided. I appreciated the option to ask questions for more information, but most of the time the original content answered any that I had. My favorite option is being able to log back in to re watch them
- Farm business basics was very resourceful.
- I learned a huge amount thank you
- I figured it was worth the cost to sign up for all the webinars. I can also later view the recorded webinars if I need to (if I missed class)
- The woodlot and orchard presentations were even more informative than I expected.

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

41% 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:

- Plan to view recorded webinars I missed
- I like the flexibility of being able to watch the webinars on my schedule.
- It was really helpful to be able to review each lesson, using a recording.
- Love the flexibility of having it live and recorded
- It was just tough on my end to make it to the live events but I was so very thankful that recordings were offered.
- I came in halfway they the series so was very glad to have the recorded ones.

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

66% of respondents indicated the webinars were a very valuable use of their time. An additional 33% 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.

72% of respondents indicated that they gained 'very much' or 'quite a bit of knowledge'. 23% indicated 'moderate amount' of knowledge gained. 5% indicated 'only a little knowledge gained'.

Selected comments:

- Depending on the topic, I used the information to brush-up, or to learn new topics.
- I especially appreciated the other source material cited as it allowed me to efficiently research further topics of particular interest to my farming operation
- Some applied more to what we do than others but they were all excellent.
- I especially appreciated the other source material cited as it allowed me to efficiently research further topics of particular interest to my farming operation.

Q5: If respondent registered for "full" webinar series (all 15 webinars), how many did they view either 'live' or as recordings?

40% indicated that they had viewed all webinars. 33% of respondents had viewed 6-8 webinars. 19% viewed 4-6 webinars and 8% viewed 0-3 webinars.

Selected comments:

- Still have plans to get the remaining.
- I like having the library there for when I do have time to view them.
- I have a couple to still watch and fully intend to do so this Spring. All will be watched.
- Watched about half live and the rest as recordings
- Still catching up, will watch all eventually.

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

56% indicated they are currently, or planning to sell part or all of their products. 29% indicated they were producing only for home and personal use, no sales. 8% were agricultural industry professionals and 6% were not currently producing any products and don't plan to do so.

Selected comments:

- Currently have a hobby farm and are now taking the first steps towards making it an actual business, so this series has been VERY helpful!
- Might try a farm stand at some point but I enjoy learning what I can while I can regardless of what we end up doing.
- I would like to start planning to sell.
- Just starting out

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

The median answer from 90 respondents was '1-2 acres'. An approximate average was 10 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 91 respondents was '2-4 acres'. An approximate average was 10 acres.

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

The largest number of the 90 respondents were from Berrien and Washtenaw (6 each) and Marquette (4). 59 people were from 35 other Michigan counties. 15 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 website, 84% plan to use the MSU Extension Beginning Farmer Webinar Series website, 67% plan to use MSU Extension print bulletins, 61% plan to utilize MSUE educators and offices, 59% plan to use other materials mentioned.

Selected comments:

- I have visited many of the web sites mentioned in the webinars and plan to visit others in the future.
- I use MSU resources frequently and find the recommendations by presenters very useful as it can be difficult to sort through all the available info without guidance.

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

Of 61 respondents:

- 54% began cultivating a crop in Michigan
- 44% diversified or expanded a farm or other ag business
- 26% started a new business
- 23% began a new livestock or poultry enterprise
- 20% purchased farm equipment
- 11% improved their standing at a current job, or when applying for a new job
- 5% decided not to cultivate a crop due to increased understanding of costs and risks
- 3% established new business partners

Selected comments:

- My farm business is less than a year old, but it has been operation during 2017. What I learned in the Webinar Series not so much stimulates new operations, as reinforces and improves what I've been doing. The financial record-keeping and tax readiness will be worth my participation in the series, come Income Tax time, 2019.
- Without a farm background to begin with it seems like too many minefields for a beginner. Would probably need to find a mentor or work for someone to start

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

17% of 88 respondents (15 people) indicated that new jobs have been created, totaling 15 jobs

Selected comments:

- We will need to expand our employee base based on the areas of growth.
- Planning on hiring 1-3 seasonal workers
- 1 so far. Greenhouse planting and growing
- More "paid" hours for myself by adding new skills and products to our small farm.
- No new employees but adding to the economy by hiring local builders to build barn.

Q13: What type of device did you use to participate in the webinar series?

Of 94 respondents:

- 86% used a PC or Mac desktop or laptop
- 22% used iPhone or Android phone
- 8% used iPad or other device

Q14. The presenter video (small box on screen showing the presenter talking) added interest and/or value to the webinar.

Of 94 respondents:

- 96% strongly agree or agree
- 2% disagree
- 2% strongly disagree

Q15. Did you experience problems with your internet connection during the webinars you participated in 'live' or viewed as recordings?

Of 92 respondents:

- 82 percent did not experience any problems
- 15% experienced problems a few times
- 3% had bad, or frequent problems

Q16: General impressions, comments and suggestions.

49 comments were categorized into 37 'compliments', 10 'topic suggestions', 9 'improvement suggestions' and 2 'complaints'.

Selected comments:

- Thank you for producing this content. I look forward to continuing to participate in future iterations!
- Good solid basics. Would sometimes like to see info in a little more depth
- I loved the small farm webinar series. I want to replicate it in Ohio. I work for OSU Extension.
- I thought it was a very good program. I feel like I got my money's worth in value.
- What a great program that was right in our family's wheelhouse for starting the process of using and working our new land. I will be consulting this webinar series and other MSU resources in the future! Thank you!!
- Really appreciated the financial portions of the series. It let me know that we're doing things right and provided even more resources to consult. (I've already had a nice chat with our local USDA guy. ??)My husband (farm manager) appreciated the pesticide, root stock, fertilizer and woodlot sections - although he hasn't finished listening to them all yet! We have also been in touch with our local MSU extension office and picked up a soil testing kit to recheck our soil. Thank you!!
- Great series. For a brand new beginning farmer who is a bit undecided in what areas, some of the content was above my level some directly at my level. I think they will prove valuable later as we develop better ideas.
- It's an excellent and very informative series. I like the new shorter format.
- The series was well worth my nominal investment of money and time. The repeated email reminders in advance of the Wednesday evening presentations were useful. Future series might benefit from incorporating video presentations from working farms versus static powerpoint presentations. Would like to see a program on hoop house construction and management.
- Good series that has helped our small farm in the last two years. I look forward to next years class offerings.
- It's difficult to offer suggestions for a program that has already achieved excellence. This is an amazingly useful lecture series.
- This series was very insightful and helpful. You are going to add a u-pick garden in the near future because of the seminar involving u-pick farms.

Public value statement:

Public Value Statement

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