

New Farmers and Ranchers (NewFR): A National Network of Programs Training and Supporting New Farmers and Ranchers

The Need: How do we build the pool of the next generation of American farmers and ranchers to ensure a healthy food supply and strong rural communities? Farmers and ranchers support local and regional food systems that create jobs and deliver safe, healthy, accessible, and affordable food. Today we see growing demand for local food across America as well as increasing consumer demand for higher social and environmental standards across the supply chain. Given this opportunity and pressure, we need to attract new and diverse people to farming and ranching careers.

The number of farmers and ranchers has been in decline for decades. The latest 2012 USDA Census of Agriculture shows a 20 percent decline in new farm startups, with less than 6 percent of the farmer population under the age of 35 and the average age of the American farmer and rancher continuing to rise, now at 58 years. The impact of this decline is compounded by the fact that over 40 percent of farmland will change hands in the next 20 years.

Barriers to entry to farming or ranching for new producers are formidable. They need access to natural resources, significant capital, systems-based knowledge, and the ability to navigate complex markets and demanding regulatory requirements.

The Field Today: Hundreds of beginning farmer and rancher training programs are working to address the barriers and support new producers in communities across America. Beginning farmer and rancher training opportunities range from workshops and courses, to on-farm or ranch internships and apprenticeships, mentoring programs, incubator farms, and higher education based continuing education and undergraduate degree programs. These training programs provide young people, career changers, New Americans, and veterans with an opportunity to explore their interest in farming and ranching as a career and a lifestyle, and to learn the broad range of skills required. The programs continue to grow, largely due to an increase in federal funding through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP) and the "Know your Farmer, Know your Food" effort. Yet, there is variability in the scope and quality of programming and there are ongoing structural challenges to supporting new entry producers.

The Opportunity: The leaders of these programs want to work together to strengthen the field, share best practices, coordinate on policy engagement, and build public awareness. They also want to build better capacity to provide continued entrepreneurial support for their graduates who are making the transition to becoming operators – from mentoring, training, and incubation programs to running commercial farming and ranching operations. *A national network is needed to bring these diverse programs together to strengthen training programs and to bridge the transition between early stage farmer/rancher training efforts and ongoing support for independent entrepreneurs.*

New Farmers and Ranchers (NewFR) will be a nationwide program with regional resource centers that will leverage the work of leading beginning farmer and rancher training programs, establish better coordination between groups, and build their capacity to provide high quality on-farm management experience, including transition support for the next generation of farmers and ranchers. Member organizations will include diverse new and beginning farmer and rancher training and apprenticeship organizations as well as rural development organizations. *For a map of current partners, please see page 6.*

The Plan: We need more farmers and ranchers who can run viable, sustainable operations and provide Americans with healthy, nutritious food. To strengthen the field, beginning farmer and rancher training programs need better communication,

Network Partners (as of March 2016)

Northeast

- New Entry Sustainable Farming Project, MA
- Intervale Center, VT
- Cornell Small Farms Program, NY
- Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association, ME
- Hawthorne Valley Farm Learning Center, NY
- Conservation Law Foundations' Legal Services Food Hub, ME, MA
- Sustainable Food Lab, VT

Southeast

- Federation of Southern Coops, GA
- North Carolina State University's Center for Environmental Farming Systems, NC
- Center for Rural Strategies, Rural Assembly, KY
- Land Loss Prevention, NC

Midwest

- Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship, WI
- Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings Collaborative, MN
- Beginning Farmers of Iowa, IA
- Farm Commons, MN
- Biodynamic Association, WI
- Center for Rural Affairs, NE

Upper Plains

- National Center for Appropriate Technology (MT, AK, CA, MS, PA, TX)
- Vilicus Farm Training Institute, MT
- University of Wisconsin-Madison, O-Grain Organic Extension Program, WI

Southwest

- Quivera Coalition, NM
- Farm Education Resource Network, AZ

West

- Rogue Farm Corps, OR
- Association of Land Based Training (ALBA), CA
- California Farm Link, CA
- Pie Ranch, CA
- TomKat Ranch, CA
- University of California, Santa Cruz Center for Agriculture and Sustainable Food Systems, CA
- National Young Farmers' Coalition, CO, NY

DC

- AGree/Meridian Institute, Washington, DC
- Organic Trade Association, DC

coordination, and networking. And, importantly, as more producer training programs help growers get *started*, there is still a glaring gap in available resources and technical assistance for new producers as they enter the later stages of USDA's defined 10-year start-up continuum.

New Entry and AGree are working to launch *NewFR* as a learning network for beginning farmer and rancher training programs to educate each other, facilitate best practices, increase capacity to support transitioning farmers and ranchers, and address policy issues important to the sector. This new nationwide program will engage diverse groups serving beginning farmers and ranchers, facilitate critical policy conversations, and work at all levels to develop new programs to support beginning farmers and ranchers, including connecting individuals, local organizations, government entities, and the private sector/supply chain companies. USDA is working to integrate programs and policies that foster new opportunities for farmers and ranchers and conduct targeted outreach to engage new producers in USDA programs. Our work will complement and reinforce these programs.

The Work: *NewFR* will address five major areas of work identified by organizations in a July 2015 AGree convening on challenges facing new farmer and rancher training programs:

1. **Raise the Bar** – strengthen existing training programs to provide higher quality services to a larger number of farmer/rancher trainees and graduates, including certification of apprenticeship programs;
2. **Create a Strong Unified Voice** – form a cohesive platform for advocacy at the state, regional, and national levels to achieve needed structural and institutional change;
3. **Promote Careers in Agriculture** – develop a national communications campaign to attract prospective new farmers and ranchers to the industry;
4. **Support “Graduates” in Transition** – provide support services and resources to independent operators and managers who have graduated from existing beginning farmer and rancher programs as they work to establish and scale their operations; and
5. **Connect and Engage Diverse Industry Sectors to Support New Entrants** – build connections to better link graduates to food producers and companies.

Implementation

New Entry and AGree will engage a national advisory group comprised of regional leaders with extensive beginning farmer training expertise to help shape and guide the program. Advisory group members will receive a small stipend for their time and will be expected to participate in bi-monthly conference calls and web meetings; provide input to program design, content, and evaluation; and serve as extended resource connectors to support beginning farmer and rancher program graduates. New Entry, AGree, and the national advisory group will shape the network and begin to conduct the priority activities outlined below.

First, we will strengthen and expand the scope of a new network of farmer and rancher trainers and mentors by:

- Bringing people together, both virtually and in person, to identify the needs of the organizations providing entrepreneurial support for farmers and ranchers and to make plans to address those needs effectively;
- Advocating for structural and institutional change that will remove barriers and widen opportunities for new operators;
- Addressing the needs of traditionally underrepresented groups, often working in hard pressed places; and
- Developing a national communications plan to both educate the public and to attract new agricultural entrepreneurs to the field.

Second, we will implement key strategic initiatives that provide direct services and training to operators through our national network by:

- Developing a nationwide apprenticeship accreditation entity that will ensure quality training and assist groups in attaining accreditation.
- Focusing on access to land, credit and markets, as well as ongoing support systems for new operators.
 - We will bring together broad stakeholders working on *land access*, including public sector programs and private sector interests, conservation and land trust organizations, and other non-governmental organizations to identify ways to strengthen new producers' access to secure, affordable land. New Entry and AGree will work with the network to get those recommendations in place, partnering with others who also know the policy arena in Washington, DC.
 - We will convene the diverse public and private sector institutions and investors who are or can be a source of increased *capital and credit*, including USDA and its Farm Services Agency (FSA), Farm Credit programs, Community Development Finance Institutions (CDFIs), Small Business Development Corporations (SBDC), equity investors and key financial institutions. We will identify mechanisms to increase credit access and conduct the work to implement those mechanisms.
- Working closely with leading corporate advisors in AGree's circle, we will explore concrete ways to *connect new operators with regional supply chains* who can be their market, and, working with our partners, we will begin to make those connections.

Organizational Capacity

New Entry: Founded in 1998, The New Entry Sustainable Farming Project's (New Entry) mission is to improve the local and regional food system by training the next generation of farmers to produce food that is sustainable, nutritious, and culturally-appropriate and making this food accessible to individuals regardless of age, mobility, ethnicity, or socio-economic status. New Entry provides training, career development, and economic opportunity to new

farmers. New Entry also manages two national programs: the National Incubator Farm Training Initiative, a professional development network for incubator farm training programs, and a national technical assistance and professional development program for USDA-funded Community Food Projects grantees.

NewFR builds in part on New Entry's four years of experience establishing the National Incubator Farm Training Initiative (NIFTI). NIFTI is a highly regarded learning community for service providers operating land-based farm incubators. This initiative provides New Entry with the structure and capability to tackle an even larger "umbrella" of beginning farmer and rancher training strategies and program approaches. The tools and resources developed for NIFTI can be adapted to build the capacity of other types of beginning farmer and rancher programs and expand the entrepreneurial support services needed by new farmers and ranchers as they transition from diverse training programs and begin their own farms and ranches.

AGree: the AGree Initiative seeks to drive positive change in the food and agriculture system by connecting and challenging leaders from diverse communities to catalyze action and elevate food and agriculture as a national priority. Since 2011, AGree has met with and convened more than two thousand leaders in food and agriculture and related sectors to better understand the challenges and opportunities facing the food and agriculture system in the U.S. and around the world. AGree has also commissioned research and papers to enhance understanding and promote dialogue. Based on this extensive dialogue and targeted research, AGree's Advisory Committee and Co-Chairs have issued consensus recommendations to tackle critical challenges facing the food and agriculture system. Now focused on implementation, AGree works with partner organizations who eventually assume ownership and leadership roles in its various activities. AGree staff, after a consultative and evaluative process, identified the New Entry Sustainable Farming Project (New Entry) as the lead partner organization that will help further develop and establish *NewFR* as a long-term effort to support beginning farmers and ranchers. AGree is a time-bound initiative that is housed at the Meridian Institute, a not-for-profit organization established in 1997 with offices in Colorado and Washington, DC. Meridian Institute helps people solve problems, make informed decisions, and craft solutions to address society's most complex and controversial issues.

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Map of Network Collaborators

