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More Help is On the Way for New Farmers and Ranchers
*USDA NIFA Apprenticeship Award to New Entry Sustainable Farming Project for
National Farm and Ranch Learning Network*

Washington, DC (August 17, 2016) – A new collaboration will harness the collective power of six new and beginning farmer and rancher apprenticeship programs to create a national farm and ranch learning network. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) National Institute for Food and Agriculture (NIFA) is providing a three-year \$600,000 grant to the New Entry Sustainable Farming Project at the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University to work with five other groups in creating and coordinating the new network.

This national effort comes at a critical time, as USDA data shows that over 40 percent of farmland will change hands in the next two decades. Aspiring farmers and ranchers need hands-on experience, training, and mentorship, which cannot be acquired solely in a classroom. In collaboration with five other leading groups, [the New Entry Sustainable Farming Project](#) (New Entry) is establishing an [advisory committee of over 30 farm organizations](#) to provide nationwide coordination of farm/ranch apprenticeship, shared standards, and/or best practices for meeting clearly articulated learning goals.

“This is an incredible opportunity to bring together a diverse group of apprenticeship training programs to strengthen and share best practices in experiential learning opportunities for beginning farmers and ranchers. Aside from growing up on a farm, new farmers learn best from others in the field. This national learning network will strengthen the quality of apprenticeship programs and help farm and ranch mentors provide the practical skills and training new farmers and ranchers need to operate economically viable operations,” said Jennifer Hashley, New Entry’s Director and project lead on the national initiative.

The need for a network was identified by the [AGree Initiative](#) – an eight-year effort to elevate food and agriculture as a national priority. AGree’s Advisors and Co-Chairs convened leaders from across food and agriculture who collectively called for a national network to help diverse farmer and rancher apprenticeship programs develop a more coordinated approach. After a consultative process, AGree collaborated with New Entry, an innovative leader with technical capabilities in the field of farmer training, to grow a new national network.

“Creating a vibrant pipeline of new farmers and ranchers is a priority for AGree and anyone who cares about American agriculture. We are thrilled by this award and its recognition of the tremendous talents of New Entry at the Friedman School,” said AGree Co-Chair Kathleen Merrigan. “This emerging nationwide network will harness the collective power of organizations across the country and bolster the training, support, and mentorship provided to a new generation of farmers and ranchers.”

AGree will be among the advisors involved in the project. The five programs collaborating with Tufts are: Rogue Farm Corps, OR; Quivira Coalition, NM; Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship, WI; Maine Organic Farming and Gardening Association, ME; and Vilicus Training Institute, MT.

These groups and advisors will identify gaps and develop new resources and training materials for nonprofits, community-based organizations, and commercial farms or ranches looking to improve their management or facilitation of apprenticeship learning programs. Two key goals include the development of a toolkit that explains how to design and deliver a quality, legal apprenticeship program, and a national apprenticeship clearinghouse that offers training modules, project materials, and technical assistance referral services. The new network will offer regional workshops and national webinars to share these resources. It will also explore opportunities to develop post-apprenticeship support services for newly trained producers, such as access to farmland and credit.

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