

Planning for the Next Generation of Farmers: Short-Term Initiatives, Paradigm Shifts, and Real-Time Impacts

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The Northeast Beginning Farmer Initiative is a two-year project funded by the Mid-Atlantic Consortium of the Kellogg Foundation and USDA-SARE. The project is creating a Northeast New Farmer Network for beginning and prospective farmers and service providers.

Our project approaches farm careers and agricultural production as a profession. It targets small-scale, commercial, professional, profit-oriented small farm start-ups throughout the 12 Northeast states. It understands that farming is a resource and a management-intensive enterprise.

The network will identify training resources and training gaps, financial management and land acquisition strategies, and the necessary skills and possible career paths for successful agricultural production careers and enterprises. Pilot projects will create business planning and marketing tools for new farmers.

The project is also looking at innovative strategies to transfer farm expertise and experience - as well as active farm operations and farmland - from one generation to the next. The project is developing apprenticeships and new farm partnership models, linking new farmers with retiring farmers to transfer expertise and keep farms operational. A regional network (Web site and referral directory) will provide the best information for new and prospective farmers in the Northeast on acquiring land, credit, markets, mentors, and production skills.

The Northeast New Farmer Network and other beginning and small farmer Initiatives will be most effective in a technology, services, and market and policy environment that recognizes the importance of small farms to our economy, environment and food system.