Bringing New Farmer Training Into the Information Age: Online Courses, Webinars, and Web Videos

Erica Frenay, Cornell Small Farms Program
Overview

- Activities and Impacts of the NY BFP
- How we’ve integrated a Website, Online Course, Webinars, and Videos to train BFs
- Lessons Learned
- What the Future Holds
NY Beginning Farmer Project

Anu and Erica

+ Ten awesome Extension Educators

+ Incredible funders
Every new farmer in NY has access to the support, information and training they need to be successful.
Guide to Farming in NYS

- Organized as a series of 33 1- to 3-page fact sheets
- Comprehensive reference on Legal, Financial, Marketing, Regulatory, and other critical info.
- Available online from www.smallfarms.cornell.edu
Online Resources

- Website
- Online Course with Webinars
- Web-based Video clips
Regional Trainings

- Offered 10 in-depth trainings in under-served areas of NY
- Primarily focused on business planning
- Didn’t force a standard curriculum
- All trainings included farmer panels
Building Extension Capacity to Support New Farmers

- Trained county offices to recognize and support new farmers
- Provided tools for efficient management of new farmers
- Established a Beginning Farmer contact in every county Extension office
Impacts

- Provided rigorous farm business management training (online or in person) to 362 new farmers
- About half of these have continued developing their farm business
- Seven Extension educators mentored by peers and now offering their own BF trainings
- Extension educators report that new farmers are coming to them more informed, making more thoughtful decisions
- Long-term expanded menu of training options for new farmers, particularly online
Serving a Scattered Audience

In New York State, new and aspiring farmers are typically:

- Geographically scattered
- Time-limited
- Relatively internet-savvy
**Beginning Farmer Website**

- Emphasis on planning process
- Learning modules serve as textbook for online course

- Complements “clearinghouse” of production info at sister site (www.smallfarms.cornell.edu)

http://www.nybeginningfarmers.org
First Online Course

- Was 9 weeks long
- Instructed by county-based extension educators
- Integrated dynamic elements
- Charged $200

- Demand was overwhelming!
We are always asking...

- How to reduce attrition?
- How to make it more interactive?
- How to incorporate more farmers’ voices?
Evolution of Online Course(s)

- Now taught as two short courses - $100 ea.
- New cadre of instructors in training
- Develop new topics based on demand
- Aiming for courses to be financially self-sustaining
Webinars

- Schedule 3-4 per 5-week course
- Always include a conference call line
- Invite farmers to present
- Also use these as an opportunity to demo great resources, like Web Soil Survey
Web Video Clips

- Interviewed 12 NY farmers
- Captured their thoughts in 9 hrs. of on-farm footage
- Assembled a team to distill nuggets of wisdom and compile them into short video clips
- Posted finished clips online
Lessons Learned

1) Charge more! Other online courses in our department charge up to $500 for an 8-week course.

2) Keep online courses 6 weeks or less, and only offer them between mid-October and mid-March, avoiding all holidays.

3) Find as many ways to incorporate farmers’ voices—in websites, videos, and online courses—as possible.

4) Work with a professional to film and edit video footage!
What’s next?

- More production-oriented video and online courses
- Partnering with Greenhorns and others to reach out to high-schoolers
- Continuing to build and support a network of BF service providers
Questions?

Erica Frenay

ejf5@cornell.edu

607-255-9911