



Virginia Beginning Farm & Rancher Coalition Project Survey Report October 2011

Prepared by Matt Benson, PhD Student, Agriculture & Extension Education

Introduction

The Virginia Beginning Farmer and Rancher Coalition Project is a collaborative effort represented by a range of beginning farmer stakeholders across the Commonwealth of Virginia: farmers (beginning and established); higher education; Cooperative Extension; non-governmental organizations; and local, state and federal government agencies. The project is housed in Virginia Tech's Department of Agricultural and Extension Education sponsored through the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program of the USDA-National Institute of Food and Agriculture (Award # 2010-49400-21720).

The goal of the Virginia Beginning Farmer and Rancher Coalition Project is to improve opportunities for beginning farmers and ranchers to establish and sustain viable agricultural operations in Virginia through the development and enhancement of whole farm planning programs, online resources, and farmer mentoring networks. An important step to take in reaching this goal is to identify the needs of Virginia's beginning farmers and ranchers. To accomplish this objective, an online survey instrument was created. The Virginia Beginning Farmer and Rancher Coalition Project survey was designed with direct input from Virginia beginning farmers and ranchers and the service providers who are part of the Coalition.

Survey Development

The Virginia Beginning Farmer and Rancher Coalition Project survey development process started at the end of 2010 with a thorough scan of the literature to determine if external beginning farmer and rancher survey instruments existed. Only one instrument was found which had been developed by Cornell University as part of their 2009 NIFA funded Beginning and Rancher Project. The project coordinators from Cornell were contacted for more information about their survey instrument and project. From these conversations, it was confirmed that Virginia Tech could use the Cornell instrument as a template (model framework). Cornell also provided a second instrument for additional potential questions. From these surveys, the Virginia Tech survey was developed over a period of approximately three months, from February 2011 to the end of April 2011. The project team drafted and reviewed the survey internally several times to complete an initial draft instrument that could be shared with coalition members. From this, this instrument was shared with diverse project partners and coalition members. These organizations and individuals reviewed the survey and provided feedback, comments, and suggestions for improvements. These comments and suggestions were incorporated into further and

final drafts of the survey. Content validity was assured through a review of the instrument by this panel of experts consisting of approximately 47 project coalition members from agriculture, higher education, non-profit organizations, and state agencies (Pedhazur & Schmelkin, 1991). Approximately fourteen individuals were asked to complete a pilot test of the instrument to ensure the online survey instrument functioned correctly. The Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board reviewed the instrument and gave approval for administration.

Survey Design

The survey instrument was finalized into a nineteen page document. The first two pages acted as an introduction to the survey with instructions for completion. The survey instrument was designed in accordance to Dillman, Smyth, and Christian (2009) into three main sections. Section one consisted of fifty seven different items in five distinct categories. The five distinct categories items were placed into included: 1) Production Practices & Management (13 items), 2) Land Acquisition & Tenure (10 items), 3) Marketing (11 items), 4) Self-employment & Labor (9 items), and 5) Business Planning & Financial Management (14 items). Respondents were asked to rank each item on two three point scales (High, Medium, and Low). The first three point scale measured the items level of importance or priority for beginning farmer success. A lower mean item score produced a higher rating of importance / priority while a higher mean item score produced a lower level of importance / priority. The second three point scale measured current level of skill or knowledge of that item. A lower mean item score produced a higher level of skill or knowledge for that item. A higher mean item score equals a lower level of skill or knowledge. Section two consisted of three questions asking respondents about beginning farmer and rancher educational program delivery preferences. Section three asked respondents about their demographics as well as other information about their farming situation. Section three classified respondents into two categories: 1) beginning farmers and ranchers, and 2) service providers. Respondents responded to a subsequent series of questions depending on their selection into one of these two subsamples.

Survey Implementation

The survey was implemented online using Qualtrics for approximately three weeks from April 28, 2011 to May 16, 2011 in accordance to Dillman, Smyth, and Christian (2009). Coalition members were asked to help facilitate the distribution of the survey web link to obtain as many responses as possible. Coalition members that helped facilitate the survey to potential respondents included Virginia Cooperative Extension, Virginia State University, Virginia Farm Bureau, Virginia Association for Biological Farming, Catawba Sustainability Center, Team Ag Ed, Virginia Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services as well as others. Information about the survey was also posted on several agriculture and food-based listservs. Two reminders were sent to project partners and several listservs at the end of weeks one and two. The survey was also available to download from the Virginia Tech Department of Agriculture & Extension Education website.

Survey Results

Survey Response

Two hundred and seventeen individuals accessed the survey web link from across Virginia to participate in the survey. Seventeen individuals who responded and clicked the web link to complete the survey did not identify themselves as part of the target population. Because of this, they were not allowed to proceed with completing the survey. In total, two hundred individuals responded and completed the survey. This consisted of 132 individuals who identified themselves as a beginning farmer or rancher and 68 individuals who identified themselves as a service provider for beginning farmers or ranchers. All data were analyzed using the PASW Statistics 18.0 statistical package (SPSS Inc., Somers, NY).

Beginning Farmers & Ranchers and Service Providers

Section I. Ranking of Items

Level of Importance or Priority

When ranking the level of importance or priority for beginning farmer success for all five categories (from a total of 57 items), respondents stated that “financial record keeping” was the most important priority.

Below is a summary of the top ten items all respondents found when ranking the level of importance or priority for beginning farmer success from all five categories. Four of the top ten items were found to be from the “Business Planning & Financial Management” category. Additionally, four of the top ten items were found to be from the “Marketing” category.

Table 1. Highest items of importance or priority for beginning farmer success in all five categories

Rank	Item	Category	Obs. (n=)	Mean Item Score
1	Financial record keeping	Business Planning & Financial Management	146	1.22
2	Business planning	Business Planning & Financial Management	145	1.24
3	Nutrient management & soil health	Production Practices & Management	164	1.30
4	Identifying a market niche	Marketing	155	1.35
5 (tie)	Weed, pest, & disease management	Production Practices & Management	165	1.36
5 (tie)	Product pricing	Marketing	151	1.36
7 (tie)	Assessing and selecting market options (e.g., marketing channel assessment)	Marketing	153	1.39
7 (tie)	Direct marketing (e.g., farmer's market, road-side stand, on-farm	Marketing	154	1.39

	sales, U-pick, etc.)			
9	Tax planning and preparation	Business Planning & Financial Management	144	1.40
10	Financial risk management for small farms	Business Planning & Financial Management	142	1.42

Below is a summary of the lowest ten items respondents found when ranking the level of importance or priority for beginning farmer success from all five categories. Four of the top ten items with the lowest importance or priority were found to be from the “Production Practices & Management” category.

Table 2. Lowest items of importance or priority for beginning farmer success in all five categories

Rank	Item	Category	Obs. (n=)	Mean Item Score
1 (tie)	Marketing for agri-tourism	Marketing	141	1.93
1 (tie)	Employee compensation strategies (Self-employment & Labor	148	1.93
3	Irrigation systems	Production Practices & Management	158	1.96
4	Transitioning from internship/apprenticeship programs to self-employment	Self-employment & Labor	146	1.99
5	Development of software tools	Business Planning & Financial Management	143	2.00
6	Livestock processing capacity	Production Practices & Management	162	2.06
7	Agronomic crops (e.g., corn, soy, cotton, cereal grains)	Production Practices & Management	161	2.07
8	Third-party farm transfers	Land Acquisition & Tenure	150	2.20
9	Organic certification	Production Practices & Management	163	2.29
10	Using export markets	Marketing	141	2.39

When ranking the level of importance or priority for beginning farmer success for the “Production Practices & Management” category, respondents stated that “nutrient management & soil health” was the most important item. Below is a summary of the top five items from the “Production Practices & Management” category.

Table 3. Highest items of importance or priority for beginning farmer success in the “Production Practices & Management” category

Rank	Item	Obs. (n=)	Mean Item Score
1	Nutrient management & soil health	164	1.30
2	Weed, pest, & disease management	165	1.36

3	Animal/livestock husbandry	163	1.56
4	Tractor and equipment handling, safety, maintenance, and repair	162	1.58
5	Specialty crops (e.g., vegetables, fruit, nuts, herbs, flowers, ethnic food crops)	162	1.59

When ranking the level of importance or priority for beginning farmer success for the “Land Acquisition & Tenure” category, respondents stated that “successful models and case studies for new farm purchases” was the most important item. Below is a summary of the top five items from the “Land Acquisition & Tenure” category.

Table 4. Highest items of importance or priority for beginning farmer success in the “Land Acquisition & Tenure” category

Rank	Item	Obs. (n=)	Mean Item Score
1	Successful models and case studies for new farm purchases	156	1.54
2	Legal arrangements for land purchases and leases	154	1.62
3	Land-based business financing services	152	1.65
4	Credit for land purchase and maintenance	166	1.66
5 (tie)	Assistance with short and long term land leases	155	1.74
5 (tie)	Assistance with renting farmland	156	1.74

When ranking the level of importance or priority for beginning farmer success for the “Marketing” category, respondents stated that “identifying a market niche” was the most important item. Below is a summary of the top five items from the “Marketing” category.

Table 5. Highest items of importance or priority for beginning farmer success in the “Marketing” category

Rank	Item	Obs. (n=)	Mean Item Score
1	Identifying a market niche	155	1.35
2	Product pricing	151	1.36
3 (tie)	Direct marketing (e.g., farmer's market, road-side stand, on-farm sales, U-pick, etc.)	154	1.39
3 (tie)	Assessing and selecting market options (e.g., marketing channel assessment)	153	1.39
5	Marketing value-added products	155	1.52

When ranking the level of importance or priority for beginning farmer success for the “Self-employment & Labor” category, respondents stated that “insurance issues and regulations” was the most important item. Below is a summary of the top five items from the “Self-employment & Labor” category.

Table 6. Highest items of importance or priority for beginning farmer success in the “Self-employment & Labor” category

Rank	Item	Obs. (n=)	Mean Item Score
1	Insurance issues and regulations	151	1.50
2	Farm mentor programs	150	1.63
3	Requirements and regulations associated with farm employment	151	1.68
4	Farm safety training for employees	148	1.74
5	Finding and hiring the right employees	148	1.77

When ranking the level of importance or priority for beginning farmer success for the “Business Planning & Financial Management” category, respondents stated that “financial record keeping” was the most important item. Below is a summary of the top five items from the “Business Planning & Financial Management” category.

Table 7. Highest items of importance or priority for beginning farmer success in the “Business Planning & Financial Management” category

Rank	Item	Obs. (n=)	Mean Item Score
1	Financial record keeping	146	1.22
2	Business planning	145	1.24
3	Tax planning and preparation	144	1.40
4	Financial risk management for small farms	142	1.42
5	Managing debt	143	1.45

Current Level of Skill or Knowledge

When ranking the current level of skill or knowledge for all five categories, respondents stated that “financial record keeping” was the highest level of skill or knowledge item. Below is a summary of the top ten items respondents found when ranking the current level of skill or knowledge from all five categories. These are the items respondents have the most skill or knowledge of. Four of the top ten items were found to be from the “Production Practices & Management” category.

Table 8. Items with the highest level of skill or knowledge from all five categories

Rank	Item	Category	Obs. (n=)	Mean Item Score
1	Financial record keeping	Business Planning & Financial Management	146	1.93
2	Weed, pest, & disease management	Production Practices & Management	165	2.02
3	Direct marketing (e.g., farmer's	Marketing	149	2.03

	market, road-side stand, on-farm sales, U-pick, etc.)			
4 (tie)	Nutrient management & soil health	Production Practices & Management	165	2.04
4 (tie)	Business planning	Business Planning & Financial Management	145	2.04
6	Identifying a market niche	Marketing	154	2.09
7	Managing debt	Business Planning & Financial Management	143	2.13
8	Tractor and equipment handling, safety, maintenance, and repair	Production Practices & Management	163	2.15
9	Specialty crops (e.g., vegetables, fruit, nuts, herbs, flowers, ethnic food crops)	Production Practices & Management	161	2.17
10	Product pricing	Marketing	149	2.20

Below is a summary of the lowest ten items respondents found when ranking their current level of skill or knowledge for all five categories. These are the items respondents have the least skill or knowledge of. Five of the top ten items with the lowest level of skill or knowledge were found to be from the “Land Acquisition & Tenure” category. Three of the top ten items with the lowest level of skill or knowledge were found to be from the “Self-employment & Labor” category.

Table 9. Items with the lowest level of skill or knowledge from all five categories

Rank	Item	Category	Obs. (n=)	Mean Item Score
1	Small loan and peer to peer lending programs	Business Planning & Financial Management	144	2.74
2 (tie)	Using export markets	Marketing	139	2.73
2 (tie)	Third-party farm transfers	Land Acquisition & Tenure	150	2.73
4	Models for farms to pool labor and other resources	Self-employment & Labor	146	2.70
5	Transitioning from internship/apprenticeship programs to self-employment	Self-employment & Labor	144	2.60
6	Legal arrangements for land purchases and leases	Land Acquisition & Tenure	153	2.59
7 (tie)	Credit for land purchase and maintenance	Land Acquisition & Tenure	153	2.58
7 (tie)	Assistance with short and long term land leases	Land Acquisition & Tenure	154	2.58
7 (tie)	Intergenerational farm transfers	Land Acquisition & Tenure	152	2.58
10	Farm mentor programs	Self-employment & Labor	146	2.57

When ranking the current level of skill or knowledge for the “Production Practices & Management” category, respondents stated that “livestock processing capacity” had the lowest current level of skill or knowledge. Below is a summary of the five lowest items from the “Production Practices & Management” category.

Table 10. Items with the lowest level of skill or knowledge from the “Production Practices & Management” category

Rank	Item	Obs. (n=)	Mean Item Score
1	Livestock processing capacity	162	2.56
2	Agronomic crops (e.g., corn, soy, cotton, cereal grains)	166	2.44
3	Food safety and Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) certification	162	2.40
4	Irrigation systems	160	2.36
5	Pasture and hay land management	165	2.29

When ranking the current level of skill or knowledge for the “Land Acquisition & Tenure” category, respondents stated that “third-party farm transfers” had the lowest current level of skill or knowledge. Below is a summary of the five lowest items from the “Land Acquisition & Tenure” category.

Table 11. Items with the lowest level of skill or knowledge from the “Land Acquisition & Tenure” category

Rank	Item	Obs. (n=)	Mean Item Score
1	Third-party farm transfers	150	2.73
2	Legal arrangements for land purchases and leases	153	2.59
3 (tie)	Intergenerational farm transfers	152	2.58
3 (tie)	Assistance with short and long term land leases	154	2.58
3 (tie)	Credit for land purchase and maintenance	153	2.58

When ranking the current level of skill or knowledge for the “Marketing” category, respondents stated that “using export markets” had the lowest current level of skill or knowledge. Below is a summary of the five lowest items from the “Marketing” category.

Table 12. Items with the lowest level of skill or knowledge from the “Marketing” category

Rank	Item	Obs. (n=)	Mean Item Score
1	Using export markets	139	2.73
2	Wholesale marketing	141	2.43
3	Marketing for agri-tourism	139	2.42
4	Cooperatives for product marketing and distribution	152	2.37

5	Product and business branding	152	2.33
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When ranking the current level of skill or knowledge for the “Self-employment & Labor” category, respondents stated that “models for farms to pool labor and other resources” had the lowest current level of skill or knowledge. Below is a summary of the five lowest items from the “Self-employment & Labor” category.

Table 13. Items with the lowest level of skill or knowledge from the “Self-employment & Labor” category

Rank	Item	Obs. (n=)	Mean Item Score
1	Models for farms to pool labor and other resources	146	2.70
2	Transitioning from internship/apprenticeship programs to self-employment	144	2.60
3	Farm mentor programs	146	2.57
4	Requirements and regulations associated with farm employment	148	2.56
5	Insurance issues and regulations	148	2.51

When ranking the current level of skill or knowledge for the “Business Planning & Financial Management” category, respondents stated that “small loan and peer to peer lending programs” had the lowest current level of skill or knowledge. Below is a summary of the five lowest items from the “Business Planning & Financial Management” category.

Table 14. Items with the lowest level of skill or knowledge from the “Business Planning & Financial Management” category

Rank	Item	Obs. (n=)	Mean Item Score
1	Small loan and peer to peer lending programs	144	2.74
2 (tie)	Financial risk management for small farms	142	2.56
2 (tie)	Cooperative equipment sharing	144	2.56
4	Government loan and loan guarantee programs	142	2.55
5	Access to affordable health insurance	144	2.53

Comparison of Top Priorities with Current Level of Skill or Knowledge

Below is a table comparing the highest priority items with the current level of knowledge or skill. The five items highlighted in red represent the highest priorities with the lowest current level of knowledge or skill. In other words, these are the five items that respondents prioritized as most important but had the least knowledge of.

Table 15. Highest priority items compared with current level of knowledge / skill

Rank	Items	Priority Mean Item Rating (highest to lowest)	Knowledge / Skill Mean Item Rating (corresponding score)
1	Financial record keeping	1.22	1.93
2	Business planning	1.24	2.04
3	Nutrient management & soil health	1.30	2.04
4	Identifying a market niche	1.35	2.09
5	Weed, pest, & disease management	1.36	2.02
6	Product pricing	1.36	2.20
7	Assessing and selecting market options (e.g., marketing channel assessment)	1.39	2.28
8	Direct marketing (e.g., farmer's market, road-side stand, on-farm sales, U-pick, etc.)	1.39	2.03
9	Tax planning and preparation	1.40	2.48
10	Financial risk management for small farms	1.42	2.56
11	Managing debt	1.45	2.13
12	Access to affordable health insurance	1.49	2.53
13	Insurance issues and regulations	1.50	2.51
14	Marketing value-added products	1.52	2.27
15	Successful models and case studies for new farm purchases	1.54	2.33
16	Financing options	1.54	2.26
17	Financing grants and low interest loans	1.54	2.51
18	Animal/livestock husbandry	1.56	2.21
19	Tractor and equipment handling, safety, maintenance, and repair	1.58	2.15
20	Cooperatives for product marketing and distribution	1.58	2.37
21	Specialty crops (e.g., vegetables, fruit, nuts, herbs, flowers, ethnic food crops)	1.59	2.17

Section II. Educational Program Delivery

When asked how educational programs and trainings should be made available to best help farmers and ranchers begin farming and stay thriving, from a list of check all that apply respondents stated that they preferred one day workshops best (77%) (n=114). This was followed by mentoring (68%) (n=101), farm tours (66%) (n=97), online materials (63%) (n=93), and a hands-on training course (57%) (n=84), respectively.

Table 16. Preferences for Educational Program Delivery

Educational Program Delivery Method	Obs. (n=)	Percentage of Responses
One-day workshop	114	77%
Classroom-based short course (approximately 2-3 day course)	57	39%
Classroom-based workshop series (approximately 4 weeks over a season on a part time basis)	46	31%
Hands-on training course (approximately 4 weeks over a season on a part time basis)	84	57%
Online Classes/ Webinars	83	56%
Printed materials	83	56%
Online materials	93	63%
Farm tours	97	66%
Consulting	80	54%
Mentoring	101	68%
Internships or apprenticeships	61	41%
Other	9	6%

Ninety three percent of respondents stated online resources, self-help guides, and social networking would be useful forms of education or information for farmers and ranchers in Virginia (n=138). Ninety six percent of respondents stated they would personally use online resources (n=141).

Section III. Respondent Information & Demographics

Beginning Farmer & Rancher Respondents

Beginning farmer and rancher survey respondents were slightly more male (55%) (n=56) than female (45%) (n=46). Ninety percent of beginning farmer and rancher respondents stated they were white or Caucasian (n=90). Four percent of beginning farmer and rancher respondents stated “other” (n=4) while three percent identified themselves as “native American” (n=3). Fifty nine percent of beginning farmer and rancher respondents stated they were 41 years of age or older (n=59). Thirty six percent of beginning farmer and rancher respondents stated they were over 50 years of age (n=36) and four percent stated they were over 60 (n=4). Sixteen percent of respondents (n=16) were under thirty one years of age.

Table 17. Age of Beginning Farmer Respondents

Age	Obs. (n=)	Percentage of Responses
18-20 Years of Age	0	0%
20-25 Years of Age	6	6%
26-30 Years of Age	10	10%
31-35 Years of Age	16	16%
36-40 Years of Age	8	8%
41-50 Years of Age	23	23%
51-60 Years of Age	32	32%
Over 60 Years of Age	4	4%

Seventy six percent of beginning farmer and rancher respondents stated they were an explorer (someone actively planning their farm entry but may not be farming as a career option yet) or start-up farmer (someone who is in their first few years of commercial agricultural production) (n=76). Sixteen percent of beginning farmer and rancher respondents stated they were an establishing farmer (someone who is expanding, diversifying and/or stabilizing their farming enterprise but still within the first 10 years of operation) (n=16). Nine percent of beginning farmer and rancher respondents stated they were a transitioning farmer (family farm members who have decision making roles on the farm without yet having primary farm operator status) (n=9).

Table 18. Beginning Farmer Respondents by Farmer Experience (Category)

Beginning Farmer Experience	Obs. (n=)	Percentage of Responses
Explorer	33	33%
Start-up Farmer	43	43%
Establishing Farmer	16	16%
Transitioning Farmer	9	9%

Fifty four percent of beginning farmer and rancher respondents stated they were an explorer (someone actively planning to start farming) or had less than two years of farming experience (n=54). Twenty five percent of beginning farmer and rancher respondents stated they had two to five years of farming experience (n=25). Twenty two percent of these same respondents stated they had over five years of farming experience (n=22).

Table 19. Beginning Farmer Respondents by Number of Years Farming

Number of Years Farming	Obs. (n=)	Percentage of Responses
Explorer	24	24%
0-2 Years	30	30%
2-5 Years	25	25%
5-10 Years	13	13%
Over 10 Years	9	9%

When asked about their farming background and experience, thirty percent of beginning farmer and rancher respondents stated they had little or no knowledge or hands-on experience (n=30). Ten percent of these respondents stated they had a farm internship, apprenticeship, or farmer mentor (n=10) while eight percent of respondents stated they had learned from spouse or family member (n=8). Twenty percent of beginning farmer and rancher respondents stated they had taken some classes and/or workshops in farming or agriculture (n=20), eleven percent stated they have a degree in an agricultural related field (n=11), sixteen percent grew up on a farm (n=16), and five percent had worked as a management level farm employee (n=5).

Table 20. Respondents by Beginning Farmer Experience

Beginning Farmer Experience	Obs. (n=)	Percentage of Responses
Little or no knowledge or hands-on experience	30	30%
Had a farm internship, apprenticeship, or farmer mentor	10	10%
Learned from spouse or family member	8	8%
Taken some classes and/or workshops in farming or agriculture	20	20%
Have a degree in an agricultural related field	11	11%
Grew up on a farm	16	16%
Worked as a management level farm employee	5	5%

The majority of beginning farmer and rancher respondents (75%) had less than fifty acres under production (n=73). Seventeen percent of these respondents stated they had over 100 acres in production (n=17).

Table 21. Beginning Farmer Respondents by Acres in Production

Number of Acres in Production	Obs. (n=)	Percentage of Responses
None (I am actively planning to start farming)	19	20%
Less than 2 Acres	23	24%
2-5 Acres	12	12%
6-10 Acres	6	6%
11-20 Acres	3	3%
21-50 Acres	10	10%
51-100 Acres	7	7%
101-200 Acres	9	9%
Over 200 Acres	8	8%

From a list of check all that apply, beginning farmer and rancher respondents stated the top five commodities they were currently producing were vegetables (45%) (n=44), fruit (28%) (n=27), poultry (20%) (n=20), beef (20%) (n=20), and greenhouse (18%) (n=18). With all questions that were “check all that apply”, the percentages may not add up to 100%. This is because respondents could check more than one response.

Table 22. Beginning Farmer Commodities Grown or Produced

Commodity Grown or Produced	Obs. (n=)	Percentage of Responses
Dairy	3	3%
Beef	20	20%
Sheep	7	7%
Swine	6	6%
Equine	5	5%
Poultry	20	20%
Other Livestock	5	5%
Fiber	3	3%
Fruit	27	28%
Vegetables	44	45%
Nursery	5	5%
Greenhouse	18	18%
Flowers	13	13%
Feed grains	10	10%

Forages, hay	23	23%
Grains, dry beans, oil seeds for human consumption	4	4%
None (I am actively planning to start farming)	18	18%

From a list of check all that apply, the top five market outlets beginning farmer and rancher respondents are currently utilizing include farmers markets (34%) (n=33), roadside stands (14%) (n=14), home delivery (11%) (n=11), restaurants (10%) (n=10), and a livestock auction (10%) (n=10).

Table 23. Beginning Farmer Market Outlets

Market Outlets	Obs. (n=)	Percentage of Responses
Commodity Markets	8	8%
Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)	4	4%
Home Delivery	11	11%
Wholesale Markets	6	6%
Famers Markets	33	34%
Marketing Coop	3	3%
U-Pick	7	7%
Restaurants	10	10%
Institutional Sales (e.g., farm-to-school, farm-to-hospital, farm-to-prison)	3	3%
Roadside Stand	14	14%
Retail Store	3	3%
Retail Store On-farm	6	6%
Produce Auction	1	1%
Livestock Auction	10	10%
None (I am actively planning to start farming)	25	26%
Other	16	16%

From a list of check all that apply, when asked what types of labor currently being utilized, beginning farmer and rancher respondents stated they are utilizing family (77%) (n=75), part-time employees (13%) (n=13), interns (9%) (n=9), and seasonal workers (9%) (n=9).

Table 24. Type of Labor Utilized by Beginning Farmer Respondents

Type of Labor	Obs. (n=)	Percentage of Responses
None	16	16%
Family	75	77%
Interns	9	9%
Full-time	4	4%
Part-time	13	13%
Seasonal	9	9%
Migrant	5	5%

Eighty three percent of beginning farmer and rancher respondents stated their farm setting is rural (n=81) while eleven percent said suburban (n=11) and six percent stated urban (n=6).

Table 25. Farm Settings of Beginning Farmer Respondents

Farm Setting	Obs. (n=)	Percentage of Responses
Urban	6	6%
Suburban	11	11%
Rural	81	83%

Eighty one percent of beginning farmer and rancher respondents stated their primary market is between 0 and 25 miles (n=58). Sixteen percent of these respondents stated their primary market is between 26 and 100 miles (n=11).

Table 26. Location of Primary Markets for Beginning Farmer Respondents

Location of Primary Market	Obs. (n=)	Percentage of Responses
I sell my products at my farm.	14	19%
0 to 15 Miles	27	38%
16-25 Miles	17	24%
26-49 Miles	7	10%
50-100 Miles	4	6%
101-150 Miles	0	0%
151-200 Miles	1	1%
200+ Miles	2	3%

Service Provider Respondents

From a list of check all that apply, fifty nine percent of beginning farmer and rancher service provider respondents stated their clients are explorers (someone actively planning to start farming) (n=27). Sixty three percent of these respondents stated their clients have zero to two years of farming experience (n=29). Sixty seven percent of respondents stated their clients have two to five years of farming experience (n=31). Seventy six percent of respondents stated their clients have five to ten years of farming experience (n=35). Sixty five percent of these respondents stated their clients have over ten years of farming experience (n=30).

Table 27. Clients of Beginning Farmer Service Providers

Years of Farming Experience	Obs. (n=)	Percentage of Responses
Explorer (someone actively planning to start farming)	27	59%
0-2 Years of Farming Experience	29	63%
2-5 Years of Farming Experience	31	67%
5-10 Years of Farming Experience	35	76%
Over 10 Years of Farming Experience	30	65%

From a list of check all that apply, the top five types of farms beginning farmer service provider respondents are providing support to include specialty crop farmers (83%) (n=38), livestock farmers (67%) (n=31), limited resource farmers (67%) (n=31), diversified crop-livestock farmers (63%) (n=29), and minority farmers (61%) (n=28).

Table 28. Types of Farmers of Beginning Farmer Service Providers

Types of Farmers	Obs. (n=)	Percentage of Responses
Immigrant/Refugee Farmers	10	22%
Migrant Farm Laborers & Farmers	12	26%
Women Farmers	24	52%
Limited Resource Farmers	31	67%
Minority Farmers	28	61%
Transitioning Farmers	27	59%
Specialty Crop Farmers	38	83%
Commodity Grain Farmers	20	43%
Livestock Farmers	31	67%
Diversified Crop-Livestock Farmers	29	63%
Other (please specify)	7	15%

Thirty five percent of service provider respondents stated they work for Cooperative Extension (n=17). Nineteen percent of respondents stated they work for a non-profit organization (n=9). Nineteen percent of service provider respondents also stated they work for local government (n=9). Thirteen percent of service provider respondents stated they work for a higher education organization (n=6).

Table 29. Place of Employment of Beginning Farmer Service Providers

Place of Employment	Obs. (n=)	Percentage of Responses
Cooperative Extension	17	35%
Non-profit Organization	9	19%
Government Organization	9	19%
Higher Education Organization	6	13%
Secondary Education (e.g., high school)	1	2%
Other (please specify organization type)	6	13%

From a list of check all that apply, sixty two percent of beginning farmer and rancher service provider respondents stated they provide information to beginning farmers about “Production Practices and Management” (n=28). Fifty eight percent of respondents stated they provide information to beginning farmers about “Marketing” (n=26). Forty seven percent of these respondents stated they provide information to beginning farmers about “Business Planning and Financial Management” (n=21). Twenty two percent of respondents stated they provide information to beginning farmers about “Land Acquisition and Tenure” (n=10). Sixteen percent of respondents stated they provide information to beginning farmers about “Self-employment and Labor” (n=7). Sixty two percent of beginning farmer and rancher service provider respondents stated they provide information to beginning farmers about a combination of issues (n=28).

Table 30. Information Categories Beginning Farmer Service Providers Provide Support About

Information Categories	Obs. (n=)	Percentage of Responses
Production Practices and Management	28	62%
Land Acquisition and Tenure	10	22%
Marketing Options	26	58%
Self-employment and Labor	7	16%
Business Planning and Financial Management	21	47%
Combination of issues	28	62%
Other (please specify)	3	7%

The top five activities beginning farmer and rancher service provider respondents use to support beginning farmers include training / workshops / conferences (73%) (n=33), consulting (67%) (n=30),

printed materials, videos, informational resource CDs (64%) (n=29), online materials (40%) (n=18), and educational development tools such as curricula, lessons, and train-the-trainer (38%) (n=17).

Table 31. Beginning Farmer Service Provider Activities

Service Provider Activities	Obs. (n=)	Percentage of Responses
Training/Workshops/Conferences	33	73%
Online Classes/Webinars	6	13%
Printed Materials, Videos, Informational Resource CDs	29	64%
Online Materials	18	40%
Mentorship Training	5	11%
Apprentice Training	3	7%
Farm Incubator Programming	3	7%
Land Link Service (Matching Landowners with Land Seekers)	3	7%
Consulting	30	67%
Educational Development (Curricula, Lessons, Train-the-Trainer)	17	38%
Other (please specify)	6	13%

The majority of these respondents were county-based service providers (52%) (n=24). Forty eight percent of these respondents stated they were stated based (n=22) while forty six percent of these respondents stated they were regionally based (n=21).

Table 32. Service Territory of Beginning Farmer Service Providers

Service Territory	Obs. (n=)	Percentage of Responses
County-based	24	52%
Regionally	21	46%
Statewide	22	48%
Online	8	17%
Other (please specify)	4	9%

Beginning Farmers & Ranchers Only

Section I. Ranking of Items

Level of Importance or Priority

When ranking the level of importance or priority for beginning farmer success for all five categories, beginning farmer and rancher respondents stated that “financial record keeping” was the most

important item. Below is a summary of the top ten items beginning farmer and rancher respondents found when ranking the level of importance or priority for beginning farmer success for all five categories. Four of the top ten priority items were found to be from the “Business Planning & Financial Management” category. Four of the top ten priority items were found to be from the “Marketing” category.

Table 33. Highest items of importance or priority for beginning farmer success in all five categories

Rank	Item	Category	Obs. (n=)	Mean Item Score
1	Financial record keeping	Business Planning & Financial Management	101	1.23
2	Nutrient management & soil health	Production Practices & Management	114	1.25
3	Business planning	Business Planning & Financial Management	100	1.26
4	Weed, pest, & disease management	Production Practices & Management	115	1.31
5	Identifying a market niche	Marketing	107	1.33
6 (tie)	Product pricing	Marketing	104	1.34
6 (tie)	Direct marketing (e.g., farmer's market, road-side stand, on-farm sales, U-pick, etc.)	Marketing	107	1.34
8	Tax planning and preparation	Business Planning & Financial Management	99	1.40
9	Assessing and selecting market options (e.g., marketing channel assessment)	Marketing	105	1.46
10	Financial risk management for small farms	Business Planning & Financial Management	97	1.47

Current Level of Skill or Knowledge

Below is a summary of the lowest ten items beginning farmer and rancher respondents found when ranking their current level of skill or knowledge for all five categories. Six of the items with lowest level of skill or knowledge were found to be from the “Land Acquisition & Tenure” category.

Table 34. Items with the lowest level of skill or knowledge from all five categories

Rank	Item	Category	Obs. (n=)	Mean Item Score
1	Using export markets	Marketing	100	2.84
2	Third-party farm transfers	Land Acquisition & Tenure	103	2.80
3	Small loan and peer to peer lending programs	Business Planning & Financial Management	100	2.79

4	Models for farms to pool labor and other resources	Self-employment & Labor	103	2.75
5	Assistance with renting farmland	Land Acquisition & Tenure	105	2.74
6	Assistance with short and long term land leases	Land Acquisition & Tenure	105	2.71
7 (tie)	Credit for land purchase and maintenance	Land Acquisition & Tenure	105	2.69
7 (tie)	Intergenerational farm transfers	Land Acquisition & Tenure	104	2.69
9 (tie)	Government loan and loan guarantee programs	Business Planning & Financial Management	98	2.68
9 (tie)	Legal arrangements for land purchases and leases	Land Acquisition & Tenure	105	2.68

Comparison of Top Priorities with Current Level of Skill or Knowledge

Below is a table comparing the highest priority items with the current level of knowledge or skill. The eleven items highlighted in red represent the highest priorities with the lowest current level of knowledge or skill. In other words, these are the five items that respondents prioritized as most important but had the least knowledge of.

Table 35. Beginning farmer highest priority items compared with current level of knowledge / skill

Rank	Item	Priority Mean Item Rating (highest to lowest)	Knowledge / Skill Mean Item Rating (corresponding score)
1	Financial record keeping	1.23	1.96
2	Nutrient management & soil health	1.25	2.13
3	Business planning	1.26	2.09
4	Weed, pest, & disease management	1.31	2.12
5	Identifying a market niche	1.33	2.19
6	Product pricing	1.34	2.23
7	Direct marketing (e.g., farmer's market, road-side stand, on-farm sales, U-pick, etc.)	1.34	2.13
8	Tax planning and preparation	1.40	2.44
9	Assessing and selecting market options (e.g., marketing channel assessment)	1.46	2.41
10	Financial risk management for small farms	1.47	2.65
11	Managing debt	1.49	2.15
12	Insurance issues and regulations	1.51	2.53
13	Marketing value-added products	1.53	2.36

14	Animal/livestock husbandry	1.56	2.30
15	Cooperatives for product marketing and distribution	1.56	2.49
16	Financing grants and low interest loans	1.56	2.63
17	Access to affordable health insurance	1.56	2.53
18	Tractor and equipment handling, safety, maintenance, and repair	1.58	2.11
19	Specialty crops (e.g., vegetables, fruit, nuts, herbs, flowers, ethnic food crops)	1.58	2.27
20	Product and business branding	1.59	2.37
21	Financing options	1.59	2.35
22	Pasture and hayland management	1.61	2.41
23	Farm mentor programs	1.61	2.66
24	Successful models and case studies for new farm purchases	1.64	2.37
25	Internet marketing (e.g., websites and social media)	1.64	2.24
26	Land-based business financing services	1.65	2.63
27	Cooperative equipment sharing	1.65	2.62
28	Credit for land purchase and maintenance	1.69	2.69
29	Legal arrangements for land purchases and leases	1.71	2.68
30	Business structure options	1.71	2.41
31	Extending the growing season (e.g., greenhouse and high tunnel)	1.72	2.34
32	Small loan and peer to peer lending programs	1.74	2.79

Beginning Farmer Priorities by Farmer Subgroup

Within the survey instrument, beginning farmers were asked to classify themselves by years of farming experience. Below is a breakdown of the top priorities by each of the four beginning farmer sub-groups. For “explorer farmers,” the top priority was found to be “business planning” with a mean score of 1.19. Four of the top ten priority items were found to be from the “Business Planning & Financial Management” category. Three of the top ten priority items were found to be from the “Marketing” category.

Table 36. Top Priorities for Explorer Farmer Respondents

Rank	Item	Category	Obs. (n=)	Mean Item Score
1	Business planning	Business Planning & Financial Management	32	1.19
2	Financial record keeping	Business Planning & Financial Management	32	1.25
3 (tie)	Direct marketing (e.g., farmer's market, road-side stand, on-farm sales, U-pick, etc.)	Marketing	32	1.34
3 (tie)	Nutrient management & soil health	Production Practices & Management	32	1.34
3 (tie)	Weed, pest, & disease management	Production Practices & Management	32	1.34
6	Tax planning and preparation	Business Planning & Financial Management	31	1.35
7	Assessing and selecting market options (e.g., marketing channel assessment)	Marketing	32	1.38
8	Product pricing	Marketing	32	1.47
9	Land-based business financing services	Land Acquisition & Tenure	31	1.48
10	Financing grants and low interest loans	Business Planning & Financial Management	32	1.50

For “startup farmers,” the top priority was found to be “nutrient management & soil health” with a mean score of 1.24. Five of the top ten priority items were found to be from the “Marketing” category.

Table 37. Top Priorities for Startup Farmer Respondents

Rank	Item	Category	Obs. (n=)	Mean Item Score
1	Nutrient management & soil health	Production Practices & Management	41	1.24
2	Identifying a market niche	Marketing	42	1.26
3	Financial record keeping	Business Planning & Financial Management	42	1.29
4 (tie)	Weed, pest, & disease management	Production Practices & Management	42	1.31
4 (tie)	Product pricing	Marketing	42	1.31
6	Direct marketing (e.g., farmer's market, road-side stand, on-farm sales, U-pick, etc.)	Marketing	42	1.33
7	Business planning	Business Planning & Financial Management	41	1.37
8	Assessing and selecting market options (e.g., marketing channel assessment)	Marketing	41	1.41
9	Animal/livestock husbandry	Production Practices & Management	41	1.49

10	Cooperatives for product marketing and distribution	Marketing	42	1.52
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For “establishing farmers,” the top priority was found to be “financial record keeping” with a mean score of 1.19. Five of the top ten priority items were found to be from the “Business Planning & Financial Management” category.

Table 38. Top Priorities for Establishing Farmer Respondents

Rank	Item	Category	Obs. (n=)	Mean Item Score
1	Financial record keeping	Business Planning & Financial Management	16	1.19
2 (tie)	Business planning	Business Planning & Financial Management	16	1.31
2 (tie)	Identifying a market niche	Marketing	16	1.31
2 (tie)	Product pricing	Marketing	13	1.31
5 (tie)	Financial risk management for small farms	Business Planning & Financial Management	15	1.33
5 (tie)	Nutrient management & soil health	Production Practices & Management	15	1.33
5 (tie)	Tax planning and preparation	Business Planning & Financial Management	15	1.33
5 (tie)	Weed, pest, & disease management	Production Practices & Management	15	1.33
9	Direct marketing (e.g., farmer's market, road-side stand, on-farm sales, U-pick, etc.)	Marketing	16	1.38
10	Access to affordable health insurance	Business Planning & Financial Management	15	1.40

For “transitioning farmers,” the top priority was found to be “Weed, pest, & disease management” with a mean score of 1.00. Four of the top ten priority items were found to be from the “Business Planning & Financial Management” category.

Table 39. Top Priorities for Transitioning Farmer Respondents

Rank	Item	Category	Obs. (n=)	Mean Item Score
1 (tie)	Weed, pest, & disease management	Production Practices & Management	9	1.00
1 (tie)	Nutrient management & soil health	Production Practices & Management	9	1.00
1 (tie)	Tractor and equipment handling, safety, maintenance, and repair	Production Practices & Management	8	1.00
1 (tie)	Identifying a market niche	Marketing	9	1.00
1 (tie)	Direct marketing (e.g., farmer's market, road-side stand, on-farm sales, U-pick, etc.)	Marketing	9	1.00

1 (tie)	Marketing value-added products	Marketing	9	1.00
1 (tie)	Financial record keeping	Business Planning & Financial Management	9	1.00
1 (tie)	Business planning	Business Planning & Financial Management	9	1.00
1 (tie)	Managing debt	Business Planning & Financial Management	9	1.00
1 (tie)	Financial risk management for small farms	Business Planning & Financial Management	9	1.00

Beginning Farmer & Rancher Service Providers Only

Section I. Ranking of Items

Level of Importance or Priority

When ranking the level of importance or priority for beginning farmer success for all five categories, service providers for beginning farmers and ranchers respondents stated that “financial record keeping” and “business planning” were the most important items (tied). Below is a summary of the top ten items beginning farmer and rancher respondents stated when ranking the level of importance or priority for beginning farmer success for all five categories. Six of the top ten priority items were found to be from the “Business Planning & Financial Management” category.

Table 40. Highest items of importance or priority for beginning farmer success in all five categories

Rank	Item	Category	Obs. (n=)	Mean Item Score
1 (tie)	Financial record keeping	Business Planning & Financial Management	45	1.20
1 (tie)	Business planning	Business Planning & Financial Management	45	1.20
3	Assessing and selecting market options (e.g., marketing channel assessment)	Marketing	48	1.23
4	Financial risk management for small farms	Business Planning & Financial Management	45	1.31
5	Successful models and case studies for new farm purchases	Land Acquisition & Tenure	48	1.33
6 (tie)	Managing debt	Business Planning & Financial Management	45	1.36
6 (tie)	Access to affordable health insurance	Business Planning & Financial Management	45	1.36
8 (tie)	Legal arrangements for land purchases and leases	Land Acquisition & Tenure	47	1.40
8 (tie)	Identifying a market niche	Marketing	48	1.40
8 (tie)	Tax planning and preparation	Business Planning & Financial Management	45	1.40

Current Level of Skill or Knowledge

Below is a summary of the lowest ten items service provider respondents found when ranking their current level of skill or knowledge for all five categories. Four of the top ten items with the lowest level of skill or knowledge were found to be from the “Business Planning & Financial Management” category. Additionally, four of the top ten items with the lowest level of skill or knowledge were found to be from the “Self-employment & Labor” category.

Table 41. Items with the lowest level of skill or knowledge from all five categories

Rank	Item	Category	Obs. (n=)	Mean Item Score
1	Small loan and peer to peer lending programs	Business Planning & Financial Management	44	2.64
2 (tie)	Tax planning and preparation	Business Planning & Financial Management	45	2.58
2 (tie)	Models for farms to pool labor and other resources	Self-employment & Labor	43	2.58
4	Third-party farm transfers	Land Acquisition & Tenure	47	2.57
5	Access to affordable health insurance	Business Planning & Financial Management	46	2.54
6	Transitioning from internship/apprenticeship programs to self-employment	Self-employment & Labor	44	2.52
7	Insurance issues and regulations	Self-employment & Labor	44	2.48
8	Using export markets	Marketing	39	2.46
9	Development of software tools	Business Planning & Financial Management	44	2.43
10	Requirements and regulations associated with farm employment	Self-employment & Labor	45	2.42

Comparison of Top Priorities with Current Level of Skill or Knowledge

Below is a table comparing the highest priority items with the current level of knowledge or skill. The six items highlighted in red represent the highest priorities with the lowest current level of knowledge or skill. In other words, these are the five items that respondents prioritized as most important but had the least knowledge of.

Table 42. Beginning farmer service providers highest priority items compared with current level of knowledge / skill

Rank	Item	Priority Mean Item Rating (highest to lowest)	Knowledge / Skill Mean Item Rating (corresponding score)
1	Financial record keeping	1.20	1.87

2	Business planning	1.20	1.93
3	Assessing and selecting market options (e.g., marketing channel assessment)	1.23	2.00
4	Financial risk management for small farms	1.31	2.38
5	Successful models and case studies for new farm purchases	1.33	2.25
6	Managing debt	1.36	2.09
7	Access to affordable health insurance	1.36	2.54
8	Legal arrangements for land purchases and leases	1.40	2.40
9	Identifying a market niche	1.40	1.87
10	Tax planning and preparation	1.40	2.58
11	Financing options	1.42	2.07
12	Product pricing	1.43	2.13
13	Nutrient management & soil health	1.44	1.84
14	Enterprise budgets	1.45	2.00
15	Weed, pest, & disease management	1.46	1.80
16	Insurance issues and regulations	1.46	2.48
17	Intergenerational farm transfers	1.48	2.33
18	Assistance with renting farmland	1.48	2.20
19	Marketing value-added products	1.48	2.08
20	Requirements and regulations associated with farm employment	1.50	2.42
21	Financing grants and low interest loans	1.50	2.26
22	Direct marketing (e.g., farmer's market, road-side stand, on-farm sales, U-pick, etc.)	1.51	1.79
23	Assistance with short and long term land leases	1.52	2.29
24	Finding and hiring the right employees	1.54	2.33
25	Animal/livestock husbandry	1.58	2.02
26	Tractor and equipment handling, safety, maintenance, and repair	1.58	2.24
27	Credit for land purchase and maintenance	1.58	2.35
28	Specialty crops (e.g., vegetables, fruit, nuts, herbs, flowers, ethnic food crops)	1.59	1.94
29	Models for farms to pool labor and other resources	1.59	2.58

Survey Limitations & Future Research

One limitation of this survey comes from the sampling strategy used to collect responses. Because the survey needed to be completed within a short timeframe and limited funds were available to develop and implement the survey, a random sampling method was not possible. The convenient sampling method that was utilized limits the external validity of the results. Because of this, we cannot state these results represent the entire population of Virginia residents, farmers, or service providers.

A second limitation of this survey comes from the lower than expected survey response. While the survey response was good, the project management team acknowledges it could have been better. Lower than expected survey response was a result of uncontrollable factors such as the time of year the survey was administered with most farmers spending the majority of their time farming in late April and early May. Because of this lower than expected response, several other data collection methods will be used to develop an understanding of the priorities for beginning farmer success. Follow-up data collection methods may include focus group sessions, key informant interviews, and listening sessions as well as others.

Additional next steps being considered include the implementation of a second survey during late 2011 through early 2012. The project management team may also develop a survey instrument in Spanish to reach the Spanish speaking population of Virginia beginning farmers and ranchers and distribute hard copy versions of the English survey instrument around Virginia to targeted groups and organizations for additional ongoing data collection.

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What are the Needs of Virginia's Beginning Farmers & Ranchers?

A Survey Sponsored by the Virginia Beginning Farmer and Rancher Coalition Project

Funded by USDA, Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP)

Starting a farm is difficult, and succeeding beyond the first few years may be even more so. According to the USDA, beginning farmers and ranchers are those who have operated a farm or ranch for 10 years or less either as a sole operator or with others who have operated a farm or ranch for 10 years or less.

The goal of Virginia Beginning Farmer and Rancher Coalition Project is to improve opportunities for beginning farmers and ranchers to establish and sustain viable agricultural operations in Virginia through the development and enhancement of innovative educational programs, services, and social networks. An important step to take in reaching this goal is to identify the needs of Virginia's beginning farmers and ranchers.

Questions this survey hopes to answer: What resources should be created and made available? What kinds of educational opportunities should be developed? How should these be made available to best help farmers and ranchers begin farming and stay going? Your input is essential to getting this information right for Virginia!

Who should take this survey?

The Virginia Beginning Farmer and Rancher Coalition Project team is seeking input from beginning farmers/ranchers and the service providers who work with them across the state. We are specifically seeking input from individuals who are:

An Explorer (someone actively planning their farm entry but may not be farming as a career option yet)

Start-up Farmer (someone who is in their first few years of commercial agricultural production)

Establishing Farmer (someone who is expanding, diversifying and/or stabilizing their farming enterprise but still within the first 10 years of operation)

Transitioning Farmer (family farm members who have decision making roles on the farm without yet having primary farm operator status).

Service Providers (agricultural professionals who provide education, information, or resource support to Virginia's beginning farmers and ranchers).

What are their highest priority education, service, or resource needs?

As a beginning farmer or rancher, think about the items that appear in this survey in terms of what needs, concerns, or knowledge gaps you have identified or experienced. If you represent a beginning farmer and rancher service provider organization, think about farmer needs in terms of the support and services you or your organization provides, as well as farmer needs more broadly. Think about beginning farmers and ranchers across the full range of small to large farms; specialty crop and commodity crop operations; farms in rural areas and farms in or near urban areas.

The Survey:

The lists of items that follow were identified by beginning farmers and ranchers and the service providers who are part of the Coalition project team. Items are split into categories that fall within a whole farm planning perspective to farm startup. A whole farm planning approach views the farm as a holistic system that involves careful planning to develop strategies for successful farming. We categorized the items in five main areas that are often used in whole farm planning models:

- Production Practices and Management
- Land Acquisition and Tenure
- Marketing
- Self-employment and Labor
- Business Planning and Financial Management.

Instructions:

Your participation in this survey is entirely voluntary. You may choose not to participate or you may refuse to answer certain questions. You can choose to discontinue your participation at any time. Completion of this survey will constitute informed consent. All information collected as part of this survey will remain confidential.

Please rank each item as High (3), Medium (2), or Low (1) priority. As you read the lists you may think, "All these are high priority." Please resist the urge to simply check them all "High"; it is important that we differentiate which items tend to be more important and which tend to be less important.

Then rank your current knowledge or skill level of each item as High (3), Medium (2), or Low (1). This will help us understand what items require the most attention for programming and training purposes.

Completing the survey will take approximately 15 minutes. Our hope is that the resulting information will allow agricultural organizations, beginning farmer service providers, government agencies, and consultants to better serve your needs.

Thank you for taking the time to complete it!

Project Management Team:

Kim Niewolny, Department of Agricultural and Extension Education (Project Director)

Donna Moore, Department of Agricultural and Extension Education

Rick Rudd, Department of Agricultural and Extension Education

Steve Hodges, Department of Crops, Soil and Environmental Science

Matt Benson, Department of Agricultural and Extension Education

Maurice Smith Jr., Department of Agricultural and Extension Education

If questions or comments, please contact Kim Niewolny at:

Kim Niewolny

Virginia Tech

282 Litton Reaves Hall (0343)

Blacksburg, Virginia 24061

Tel: (540) 231-5784

E-mail: niewolny@vt.edu

FAX: To Kim Niewolny: (540) 231-3824

Please answer the following question before you begin the survey:

I am a...

- Beginning farmer or rancher who lives in Virginia.**
(Includes: Explorer, Start-up Farmer, Establishing Farmer, or Transitioning Farmer)
- Service provider who works with beginning farmers or ranchers in Virginia.**
(Includes: agricultural professionals who provide education, information, or resource support to Virginia's beginning farmers and ranchers)
- Non-farmer or non-service provider.**
(Thank you for completing this survey. No further information is needed.)

Section I. Priority Needs

Production Practices & Management

What is the level of importance or priority of the following items related to the education, service, information, or resource needs in the area of production practices and management? What is your current level of skill or knowledge of these items?

	Level of importance or priority for beginning farmer success			Current level of skill or knowledge		
	High 3	Medium 2	Low 1	High 3	Medium 2	Low 1
Animal/livestock husbandry	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Weed, pest, & disease management	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Nutrient management & soil health	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Agronomic crops (e.g., corn, soy, cotton, cereal grains)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Extending the growing season (e.g., greenhouse and high tunnel)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pasture and hay land management	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Food safety and Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) certification	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Conservation Best Management Practices (BMPs)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Irrigation systems	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Livestock processing capacity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tractor and equipment handling, safety, maintenance, and repair	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Organic certification	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Specialty crops (e.g., vegetables, fruit, nuts, herbs, flowers, ethnic food crops)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Other needs or comments:

Land Acquisition and Tenure

What is the level of importance or priority of the following items related to the education, service, information, or resource needs in the area of land acquisition and tenure? What is your current level of skill or knowledge of these items?

	Level of importance or priority for beginning farmer success			Current level of skill or knowledge		
	High 3	Medium 2	Low 1	High 3	Medium 2	Low 1
Successful models and case studies for new farm purchases	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Land linking services between landowners and land seekers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Third-party farm transfers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Intergenerational farm transfers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Legal arrangements for land purchases and leases	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Assistance with renting farmland	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Assistance with short and long term land leases	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Land conservation easements	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Credit for land purchase and maintenance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Land-based business financing services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Other needs or comments:

Marketing

What is the level of importance or priority of the following items related to the education, service, information, or resource needs in the area of marketing? What is current level of skill or knowledge of these items?

	Level of importance or priority for beginning farmer success			Current level of skill or knowledge		
	High 3	Medium 2	Low 1	High 3	Medium 2	Low 1
Assessing and selecting market options (e.g., marketing channel assessment)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Identifying a market niche	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Product pricing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Direct marketing (e.g., farmer's market, road-side stand, on-farm sales, U-pick, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Wholesale marketing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Marketing value-added products	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cooperatives for product marketing and distribution	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Internet marketing (e.g., websites and social media)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Marketing for agritourism	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Product and business branding	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Using export markets	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Other needs or comments:

Self-employment and Labor

What is the level of importance or priority of the following items related to the education, service, information, or resource needs in the area of self-employment and labor? What is your current level of skill or knowledge of these items?

	Level of importance or priority for beginning farmer success			Current level of skill or knowledge		
	High 3	Medium 2	Low 1	High 3	Medium 2	Low 1
Requirements and regulations associated with farm employment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Employee management	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Farm mentor programs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Farm safety training for employees	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Employee compensation strategies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Transitioning from internship/apprenticeship programs to self-employment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Insurance issues and regulations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Finding and hiring the right employees	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Models for farms to pool labor and other resources	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Other needs or comments:

Business Planning and Financial Management

What is the level of importance or priority of the following items related to the education, service, information, or resource needs in the area of business planning and financial management? What is your current level of skill or knowledge of these items?

	Level of importance or priority for beginning farmer success			Current level of skill or knowledge		
	High 3	Medium 2	Low 1	High 3	Medium 2	Low 1
Financial record keeping	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Business planning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Financing options	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Development of software tools	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Enterprise budgets	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Business structure options	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Managing debt	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cooperative equipment sharing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Financing grants and low interest loans	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Access to affordable health insurance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Small loan and peer to peer lending programs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Government loan and loan guarantee programs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Financial risk management for small farms	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tax planning and preparation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Other needs or comments:

Section II. Education Program Delivery

How should educational programs and trainings be made available to **BEST** help farmers and ranchers begin farming and stay thriving? (Check all that apply)

- One-day workshop
- Classroom-based short course (approximately 2-3 day course)
- Classroom-based workshop series (approximately 4 weeks over a season on a part time basis)
- Hands-on training course (approximately 4 weeks over a season on a part time basis)
- Online Classes/ Webinars
- Printed materials
- Online materials
- Farm tours
- Consulting
- Mentoring
- Internships or apprenticeships
- Other

Would online resources, self-help guides, and social networking be useful forms of education or information for farmers and ranchers in Virginia?

- Yes
- No

Would you personally use online resources?

- Yes
- No

Section III. RESPONDENT INFORMATION / DEMOGRAPHICS

I am a:

- Beginning farmer or rancher**
(Includes: Explorer, Start-up Farmer, Establishing Farmer, or Transitioning Farmer)

PLEASE SKIP TO THE NEXT SECTION. THANK YOU!

- Beginning farmer and rancher service provider**
(Includes: Agricultural professionals who provide education, information, or resource support to Virginia's beginning farmers and ranchers).

PLEASE SKIP TO PAGE 16. THANK YOU!

If you are a beginning farmer or rancher:

Please indicate your gender.

- Male
 Female

Please indicate your race.

- White/Caucasian
 African American
 Hispanic
 Asian
 Native American
 Pacific Islander
 Other

Please indicate your age.

- 18-20
- 20-25
- 26-30
- 31-35
- 36-40
- 41-50
- 51-60
- Over 60

Please choose the statement that most closely matches your beginning farmer or rancher status. I am a...

- Explorer** (someone actively planning their farm entry but may not be farming as a career option yet)
- Start-up Farmer** (someone who is in their first few years of commercial agricultural production)
- Establishing Farmer** (someone who is expanding, diversifying and/or stabilizing their farming enterprise but still within the first 10 years of operation)
- Transitioning Farmer** (family farm members who have decision making roles on the farm without yet having primary farm operator status)

Please indicate how many years you been farming.

- Explorer (someone actively planning to start farming)
- 0-2
- 2-5
- 5-10
- Over 10

Which one statement most accurately reflects your farming background and experience?

- Little or no knowledge or hands-on experience
- Had a farm internship, apprenticeship, or farmer mentor
- Learned from spouse or family member
- Taken some classes and/or workshops in farming or agriculture
- Have a degree in an agricultural related field
- Grew up on a farm
- Worked as a management level farm employee

Please indicate how many acres you currently have in production

- None (I am actively planning to start farming)
- Less than 2
- 2-5
- 6-10
- 11-20
- 21-50
- 51-100
- 101-200
- Over 200

Please indicate the products or commodities you currently produce. (Check all that apply)

- Dairy
- Beef
- Sheep
- Swine
- Equine
- Poultry
- Other Livestock
- Fiber
- Fruit
- Vegetables
- Nursery
- Greenhouse
- Flowers
- Feed grains
- Forages, hay
- Grains, dry beans, oil seeds for human consumption
- None (I am actively planning to start farming)

Please indicate the market outlets you currently utilize. (Check all that apply)

- Commodity Markets
 - Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)
 - Home Delivery
 - Wholesale
 - Farmers Markets
 - Marketing Coop
 - U-Pick
 - Restaurants
 - Institutional Sales (e.g., farm-to-school, farm-to-hospital, farm-to-prison)
 - Roadside Stand
 - Retail Store
 - Retail Store On-farm
 - Produce Auction
 - Livestock Auction
 - None (I am actively planning to start farming)
 - Other
-

In addition to yourself, what types of labor do you utilize? (Check all that apply)

- None
- Family
- Interns
- Full-time
- Part-time
- Seasonal
- Migrant

Please choose the statement that most closely matches your farm location. My farm setting is best described as...

- Urban
- Suburban
- Rural

If you are currently selling, approximately how many miles away is your primary market?

- I sell my products at my farm.
- 0 to 15 Miles
- 16-25 Miles
- 26-49 Miles
- 50-100 Miles
- 101-150 Miles
- 151-200 Miles
- 200+ Miles

In what County is your farm located?

If appropriate, please provide additional comments here:

Would you be willing to participate in a follow up interview or focus group to discuss the issues pertaining to beginning farmers in Virginia?

- Yes, please provide your email address
- No

THANK YOU! PLEASE SKIP TO PAGE 19.

If you are a service provider:

How many years of farming experience do your farmer clientele have? (Check all that apply)

- Explorer (someone actively planning to start farming)
- 0-2
- 2-5
- 5-10
- Over 10

What kinds of beginning farmers does your organization specifically provide support to? (Check all that apply)

- Immigrant/Refugee Farmers
- Migrant Farm Laborers & Farmers
- Women Farmers
- Limited Resource Farmers
- Minority Farmers
- Transitioning Farmers
- Specialty Crop Farmers
- Commodity Grain Farmers
- Livestock Farmers
- Diversified Crop-Livestock Farmers
- Other (please specify)

What type of organization do you work for? Please choose one option that fits you best.

- Cooperative Extension
- Non-profit Organization
- Government Organization
- Higher Education Organization
- Secondary Education (e.g., high school)
- Other (please specify organization type)

What areas of knowledge, skill, or support do you provide for beginning farmers and ranchers? (Check all that apply)

- Production Practices and Management
- Land Acquisition and Tenure
- Marketing Options
- Self-employment and Labor
- Business Planning and Financial Management
- Combination of issues
- Other (please specify)

What types of activities/programs do you use in your work supporting beginning farmers? (Check all that apply)

- Training/Workshops/Conferences
- Online Classes/Webinars
- Printed Materials, Videos, Informational Resource CDs
- Online Materials
- Mentorship Training
- Apprentice Training
- Farm Incubator Programming
- Land Link Service (Matching Landowners with Land Seekers)
- Consulting
- Educational Development (Curricula, Lessons, Train-the-Trainer)
- Other (please specify)

Where do you provide education, training, or support service in Virginia? (Check all that apply)

- County-based
- Regionally
- Statewide
- Online
- Other (please specify)

Would you be willing to participate in a follow up interview or focus group to discuss the issues pertaining beginning farmers in Virginia?

- Yes, please provide your email address
- No

If appropriate, please provide additional comments here:

Thank you for completing this survey!

The Virginia Beginning Farmer and Rancher Coalition Project is funded by the USDA-NIFA Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP)

Project Management Team:
Kim Niewolny, Department of Agricultural and Extension Education (Project Director)
Donna Moore, Department of Agricultural and Extension Education
Rick Rudd, Department of Agricultural and Extension Education
Steve Hodges, Department of Crops, Soil and Environmental Science
Matt Benson, Department of Agricultural and Extension Education
Maurice Smith Jr., Department of Agricultural and Extension Education

Please send your completed survey to Kim Niewolny.

Kim Niewolny
Virginia Tech
282 Litton Reaves Hall (0343)
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061

Tel: (540) 231-5784
E-mail: niewolny@vt.edu
FAX: To Kim Niewolny: (540) 231-3824

¹ This survey instrument was adapted from the Northeast Beginning Farmers Project survey instrument titled “Beginning Farmer Barrier ID Ranking: Ranking the needs of the beginning farmer...” Please contact Erica Frenay or Michelle (Striney) Podolec for full information: <http://nebeginningfarmers.org/?page=NYBFP>.