

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:

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Donna Moore, Department of Agricultural and Extension Education
Rick Rudd, Department of Agricultural and Extension Education
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Please answer the following two questions before you begin the survey:

1. This survey was distributed in the spring of 2011 to gather initial information for the Virginia Beginning Farmer & Rancher Coalition Project. Did you complete this survey during the spring of 2011?

- Yes
- No
- I do not remember.

2. 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="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Weed, pest, & disease management | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Nutrient management & soil health | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Agronomic crops (e.g., corn, soy, cotton, cereal grains) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Extending the growing season (e.g., greenhouse and high tunnel) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Pasture and hay land management | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Food safety and Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) certification | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Conservation Best Management Practices (BMPs) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Irrigation systems | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Livestock processing capacity | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Tractor and equipment handling, safety, maintenance, and repair | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Organic certification | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Specialty crops (e.g., vegetables, fruit, nuts, herbs, flowers, ethnic food crops) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

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="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Land linking services between landowners and land seekers | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Third-party farm transfers | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Intergenerational farm transfers | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Legal arrangements for land purchases and leases | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Assistance with renting farmland | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Assistance with short and long term land leases | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Land conservation easements | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Credit for land purchase and maintenance | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Land-based business financing services | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

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="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Identifying a market niche | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Product pricing | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Direct marketing (e.g., farmer's market, road-side stand, on-farm sales, U-pick, etc.) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Wholesale marketing | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Marketing value-added products | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Cooperatives for product marketing and distribution | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Internet marketing (e.g., websites and social media) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Marketing for agritourism | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Product and business branding | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Using export markets | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

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="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Employee management | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Farm mentor programs | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Farm safety training for employees | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Employee compensation strategies | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Transitioning from internship/apprenticeship programs to self-employment | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Insurance issues and regulations | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Finding and hiring the right employees | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Models for farms to pool labor and other resources | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

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="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Business planning | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Financing options | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Development of software tools | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Enterprise budgets | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Business structure options | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Managing debt | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Cooperative equipment sharing | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Financing grants and low interest loans | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Access to affordable health insurance | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Small loan and peer to peer lending programs | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Government loan and loan guarantee programs | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Financial risk management for small farms | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Tax planning and preparation | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

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) award # 2010-49400-21720.

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Please send your completed survey to Kim Niewolny.

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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>.