Farm Works: Supporting beginning, limited resource farmers, including immigrants and refugees, in the Puget Sound Region
Award # 2015-70017-22867

The Beginning Farmer Support Collective: Harmonizing beginning farmer support programs and improving farmland access in King County (WA)
Award # 2017-70017-26954

BFRDP Project Directors Meeting
Sept. 26-28, 2017
Nashville, TN
Farm Works: Supporting beginning, limited resource farmers, including immigrants and refugees, in the Puget Sound Region

Award # 2015-70017-22867

Sarah Collier ❖ Rachel Schindler ❖ Kyong Soh
Tilth Alliance, Seattle, WA

BFRDP Project Directors Meeting
Sept. 26-28, 2017
Nashville, TN
**Purpose:** To provide culturally and linguistically accessible education in production methods, farm business management, and marketing.

**Audience:** Refugees, immigrants, veterans and other socially disadvantaged beginning farmers.
Context: At the intersection of urban and rural

Tilth Alliance Farm Works
Farm Business Incubator
Auburn, WA
Approach:

• Organic Farming Education Program (OFEP)
  
  *Introduction to farming and farm business management*

• Subsidized land leases
  
  *On-site land access, 1/8th acre and up*

• Microloan financing
  
  *Access to capital, support in purchasing supplies and equipment*

• Tilth Alliance Produce (TAP)
  
  *Secured sales and sales training – CSA, wholesale*

• On-site technical assistance
  
  *Continuing improvement & constant learning*

• Co-farming environment and collaborative problem-solving
  
  *Community-building, empowering*
2016 – Project Accomplishments:

- Trained 10 new farmers through 20-week OFEP course
- Provided 188 classroom and field-based instruction hours
- Signed subsidized land leases with 9 new OFEP graduates and 17 returning farmers
- Delivered 3,360 total hours of technical assistance to 26 farmers
- Assisted 15 farmers in microloan financing
- Assisted 7 farmers in moving to off-site locations or farming occupations
2016 – Impact Evaluation:

- Number of new and returning farmers engaged in the program: **26**
- Total gross revenue for all farmers: **$104,000**
- Average net monthly income for returning farmers: **$918**
- Total acres in production: **7**
- Farmers selling through TAP: **22**
2016 – End-of-Season Farmer Evaluation:

- Good communication with TAP food hub is key to farmer success
- Earlier farmer involvement in crop planning would aid in planning
- Soil fertility and watering are challenges requiring additional support
- Ongoing education around crop production, quality control, animal production, and other areas was requested
- Continuing program improvement → 2017
Concluding project year 3 of 3 (2015 – 2017)

Key Outcomes:

- **30** BFRs graduated OFEP training and develop farm business plans
- **24** BFRs signed land leases with Tilth Alliance
- **7** program graduates operate land off-site, with more preparing for 2018
- **3** Program graduates gained enough experience and confidence to become farmer-mentors, with more expected in the future
Best Practices & Lessons Learned:

- Access to land, equipment, and infrastructure (cooler, wash/pack, greenhouse) overcome major obstacles for new farm enterprises.

- Secure markets support financial success for new farmers, instill confidence, and encourage farmers to return for another year.

- Workshops, online resources, and videos throughout the season can provide farmers with important ongoing support and education around topics that are crucial to farm success.
Best Practices & Lessons Learned:

- Advanced business development and marketing support is needed to help businesses scale up and become independent.

- A co-farming environment creates a community of support and facilitates opportunities for labor & resource sharing and mentorship.

- Livestock production ventures require intensive technical and financial support and, ideally, on-site residency.
It’s working!

But challenges still persist:
Outside of the Farm Works program, beginning farmers and ranchers in the region still face a fragmented support system for BFRs and challenges in gaining long-term access to farmland.
• $6B food market
• Strong interest in local produce
• Supportive local government
• Good farmland
• Strong development pressure
• Growing population
• Increasing numbers of aspiring farmers
Needs:

- Coordinated training and support structure
- Improved access to land
- Ongoing technical assistance
The Beginning Farmer Support Collective

*Harmonizing beginning farmer support programs and improving farmland access in King County (WA)*

Award # 2017-70017-26954
Three beginning farmer support programs:
Objectives:

✧ Create a formal partnership
  Between the three organizations, facilitated by King County
✧ Harmonize curriculum and coordinate support systems
  Review curricula and share best practices, develop a system for referral of aspiring BFRs to most suitable program
✧ Provide continuing training
  Provide training through the three organizations’ BFR training/incubator programs
✧ Promote independent land access for BFRs
  Improve and expand the Washington FarmLink web platform
✧ Keep beginning farmers farming
  Provide ongoing technical assistance, especially around land access
Beginning farmer training
(focused in population center)

New farmer land access and ongoing support

(statewide)

Growing pool of successful new farmers
Thank You!

Questions?

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