

## **The Northwest Michigan New FARM (Farmer Assistance & Resource Management) Program**

This is the longer version of the USDA NIFA CRIS **final** report

**Reporting period: 9/1/2010 –12/31/2012**

Entire life of the project

**Outputs that contribute to goals and objectives of the project. Not findings or conclusions. Describe how results have been disseminated to communities of interest or how the project is being shared. Limit 3200 characters and spaces.**

### ***Overall New FARM Program Objectives:***

Objectives of the New FARM Program are to help emerging northwest Michigan farmers: engage in estate planning and other strategies to increase intergenerational farm transfer, decipher challenges and opportunities for increasing competitiveness and market share through alternative-marketing, enhance financial viability through innovative business management strategies, enhance land stewardship and farm safety through technical assistance and advanced training, and develop leadership, decision-making, facilitation, crisis management, communication, team-work, networking, and problem-solving skills.

The entire life of the New FARM program was twenty unique opportunities over 30 months (Nov 2009 to April 2012). Content-focused workshops and events delivered new knowledge to participants. Intentionally process-focused activities, such as field trips, were designed to assist participant skill development and provide interaction with program partners and collaborators.

***Year One Activities*** included classroom study of public speaking, media relations, crisis management, building/ owning a business, marketing, estate/tax planning. Time developing professional relationships between program individuals and guest speakers/MSU staff. Attendance at an international fruit conference. Meeting with local legislators/policymakers in state capitol. Tours of farms, packing houses/processing plants, and retail operations to understand whole food chain. Communication with veteran farmers/industry leaders about MI's agriculture industries.

***Year Two Activities*** included classroom study of labor issues, environmental stewardship, public policy, communication, and agritourism. Touring the Great Lakes region to view value-added agricultural opportunities. Taking an international tour of an agriculture region to better understand global food systems.

### ***Timeline of Outputs – Entire life of Project***

**Nov 2009. Kickoff Event of New FARM Program**

**Dec 2009. Great Lakes Fruit and Vegetable Expo**

**Jan 2010. Economics and Financial Literacy Session**

**Feb 2010. Managing Public Relations and Media**

**Mar 2010. International Fruit Tree Association (IFTA) Meeting and Post-Tour.**

**Apr 2010. Building a Farm Business**

**Sep 2010. Alternative Marketing Strategies Session**

**Oct 2010. Planning for Farm Succession**

**Nov 2010. Meet Lawmakers & State Policy (Lansing Trip)**

**Dec 2010. Business Etiquette**

**Jan 2011. Agriculture Forum: Introduction to NW Michigan's Elected Officials.**

**Feb 2011. Environmental Stewardship**

**Mar 2011. Agriculture Labor Management**

**Apr 2011. Tour to West Central Michigan: Federal Marketing Order Problem Solving Discussion**

**Oct 2011. New FARM member farm tours**

**Nov 2011. Certificates and Branding**

**Dec 2011. Great Lakes Fruit and Vegetable Expo**

**Jan 2012. Planning meeting for international educational Ag Tour**

**Feb 2012. Capstone International Agricultural Trip to New Zealand South Island**

Indirect outputs included media coverage for New FARM events and participant-written contributions of articles to local media outlets on what program participants were learning together. Strong partnerships with other agencies and collaborators as guest speakers, resource and referral attendees in the audience, and co-participants at events created opportunities for networking that show signs of leveraged resources. Results of New FARM program evaluations were shared at the 2012 North American Tart Cherry Industry conference to an audience of 150. A public presentation mostly focused on the international trip was given in April 2012 to about 80 other producers/growers in the region and invited guests of the New FARM members.

**Outcomes /Impact – findings, results, techniques, products developed. Describe evaluation results. Indicate how resources contributed to outputs and outcomes. Limit 3200 characters and spaces.**

Evaluation of the New FARM program was based on a participatory method and included a series of formative and summative evaluations. During the grant period, there were nine process evaluations captured after educational events described in the outputs section. For each, a paper or online survey was administered to New FARM participants after the event. Findings showed significant changes in knowledge by participants specific to the program objectives and event content. An outcome-focused mid-term evaluation was completed in winter 2011 and an end-of-program evaluation was completed in winter 2012. A special qualitative evaluation captured reflective essays from New FARM participants that traveled to New Zealand for the international tour capstone experience.

**March 2010. IFTA Meeting and Post-Tour** All attendees reported the experience of interacting with international scientists and growers as useful. 75% found the tour very useful. About 25% reported they joined the IFTA after this event and another 50% were planning to join in the future but were not yet members. One participant shared, *“I always find that conversations with farmers from other regions and hearing about problems they deal with and practices that they apply are always useful and informative.”*

**April 2010. Building a Farm Business** Participants reported significant improvement on the following: basic knowledge of farm business resources ( $t=-6.70, p<.001$ ), understanding key components of business planning ( $t=-3.70, p<.001$ ), awareness of resources to draw on in starting a new business ( $t=-6.01, p<.001$ ), skills necessary to start or expand a new farm enterprise ( $t=-4.74, p<.001$ ), available resources from specific organizations in Michigan (SBTDC, SCORE, MSU Product Center) ( $t=-6.57, p<.001$ ), and identifying challenges in starting a new farm business or including a value-added crop ( $t=-2.36, p<.05$ ). Participants reported the program provided them techniques for communicating with family members about beginning a new farm enterprise ( $t=-5.22, p<.001$ ) and increased their confidence that they would begin a new farm business in the future ( $t=-2.75, p<.01$ ).

**September 2010. Alternative Marketing Strategies Session** Participants felt completely (30%) or somewhat (70%) inspired by taking the tour of Black Star Farms to consider unique and creative partnerships for their personal growing operations. One participant remarked *“about the importance of creating a strong brand for your products. Branding is something that I have spent a good deal of time worrying about already, but its mention as part of the tour might help tomorrow’s cherry growers think about directions to steer the industry.”* This view shows that while learning on an individual level took place, there is also consideration for how the information can be used by a network of growers in the New FARM leadership program for a unified voice or to support an industry as a whole. A tour of

the winemaking facility was seen as valuable by 70% of the participants, and comments referred to a desire to see more of the process. A tour of the farm's lodging was also covered as an option to diversify within an agritourism model. Yet, only 60% found this part of the tour as valuable to managing their own operations because it was seen as impressive, but not something that others readily wanted to try. Some remarked that the Inn showed the power of diversifying an operation, such as allowing visitors to stay on the farm, but others commented that the Inn was not applicable to what most growing operations could do in the area. The cheese-making part of the tour was very relevant and interesting (88%). Comments from this portion of the tour revealed the speaker's story and personal journey of making a high-end artisan cheese was inspirational and educational. Three separate comments highlight the high satisfaction with this session and the take-away lessons from someone sharing their farming story. *"I thought the focus of starting small, focusing on a product done well, and building slowly were all very applicable."* *"Knowing how they followed their passion to learn and be the best at their craft, enduring hardships, never sacrificing quality and working long hours (still!) is just a great, great story."* *"John's presentation suggested that by offering something unusual that sparks your passion and the interest of your prospective clientele, you can be quite successful in an agritourism venture, even if said venture does not have a demonstrated track record of success in the area."* Other parts of the farm tour participants saw as useful were a tour of hoop houses, conversations about community supported agriculture, adding a bakery/oven to the farm, hosting farm dinners, creating cottage law products, and providing seasonal farm tours and activities. One participant appreciated the openness talking about money. *"He talked a lot about finances, which is really what growers want to know."* Highlights of the event included sharing advice, seeing the actual operations and ideas at work, and hearing about the hardships of others that have tried diversification. *"I think it's important to broadcast the work being done by these creative people. It inspires me to think about ways we can share what we're doing with the public, or with people considering farming. It also makes me want to diversify even more to make sure our business is always interesting."* *"Even though the location of our farm makes agritourism a sort of non-contender, we constantly look at new directions to go with business....While I have a hard time imagining a regular parade of tour buses coming out to visit our farm, I do feel that knowledge of the small-scale, high intensity, and publicly visible model of ag value-added might be applicable on my farm in some way in the future."*

**October 2010. Planning for Farm Succession** Participants reported significant improvement on the following: basic knowledge of how to plan for farm succession ( $t=-3.42, p<.05$ ), understanding key components of farm succession ( $t=-5.61, p<.01$ ), specific knowledge of farm succession ( $t=-5.00, p<.01$ ), awareness of research on farm succession ( $t=-4.82, p<.01$ ), recognition of unique methods of succession for Northwest Michigan growers ( $t=-2.35, p<.05$ ), confidence that planning resources are available ( $t=-3.04, p<.05$ ),

motivation to plan ahead for farm succession ( $t=-2.50, p<.05$ ), and beliefs that planning ahead for farm succession is key and can help keep MI farmers farming in the future ( $t=-2.38, p<.05$ ). Participants indicated in survey comments that the most valuable aspect of the workshop was hearing the pros and cons of why to plan now and why growers should not put off succession planning given that death can be sudden, and that there are several options with taxation and transferring property, and that informed decisions require time to think about and discuss with others.

**November 2010. Meet Lawmakers & State Policy (Trip to Lansing)** Participants reported that overall the two-day event was completely (44%) and somewhat (56%) inspiring and that the visit raised personal importance of the political process to the agricultural sector. Half (50%) of the participants confirmed that the trip helped them personally establish new contacts with industry and/or legislative representatives. Overall, 88% of the participants identified that one to five new contacts were made and increased their network of contacts. Some of the take-away messages from the program at the state capitol included not being afraid to write/talk/email policymakers and that making oneself known to leaders is the best way to get a point across. Visibility seemed to work both ways. As one participant shared, *“I felt that even going to Lansing with the New FARM program made an impression with our legislators.”* Others shared new awareness that lobbying and law-making can be easily influenced by corporations and other organizations that influence new rules that otherwise would have been passed (or failed) based on citizen input. From the survey comments, it was clear that New FARM program members were interested in getting more engaged in the political process after this event and stated that even with some familiarity of the law-making process, it was a nice opportunity to see the Capitol, visit with legislative staff and lobbyists, and brush up on ways to get involved in the political process.

**December 2010. Business Etiquette** Most participants felt they already knew much of the material about table manners and the politeness that is needed in business transactions. Others thought it was a good reminder of etiquette and one lesson was that manners were invented to help other people feel comfortable.

**January 2011. Agriculture Forum: An Introduction to Northwest Michigan’s Elected Officials** Participants reported significant improvement on the following: personal awareness of the newly elected officials in Northwest Michigan ( $t=-310.46, p<.001$ ), understanding of elected official’s feelings about agriculture in the region ( $t=-11.29, p<.001$ ), confidence the newly elected officials will work for agricultural interests ( $t=-6.14, p<.001$ ), comfort asking officials about their opinions related to agriculture ( $t=-4.00, p<.01$ ), and motivation to discuss agricultural issues with elected officials in the future ( $t=-5.45, p<.001$ ). Comments from the survey showed shock how little awareness some elected officials had regarding agriculture. There seemed an equal need and appreciation to hear

the opinions of the officials as well as the elected officials to hear the concerns of the growers and farm operators. Overall, the participants were impressed with the evening and the amount of exposure that occurred politically in one night program.

**February 2011. Environmental Stewardship** At this event, a New FARM program member provided an introduction to Ag and the Environment and 50% of attendees reported that the presentation expanded their knowledge base on the topic. Programs and organizations were highlighted during the event including the USDA/NRCS Farm Bill conservation programs, Farmland Preservations options, a tour of the Grand Traverse Conservation District Boardman River Nature Center, and MDA conservation programs (MWSP and MAEAP). Every topic had the majority of participants indicating that they learned; a little bit, more than a few new things, and enough to considerably expand their knowledge. Survey comments revealed that important contacts within programs and agencies were made from the event.

**March 2011. Agriculture Labor Management** This was a day-long program on agency enforcement and education strategies. Topics covered included responding to media events, crises mitigation, regulatory procedures, immigration issues, housing issues, employer/employee rights and responsibilities, youth employment, farm labor, food safety and food security procedures. 91% would recommend this event to others. 95% reported the event met their expectations on the topics. 96% thought the program was beneficial and 100% reported that the handouts and materials were helpful.

**April 2011. Tour to West Central Michigan: Federal Marketing Order Problem Solving Discussion** Two-day (overnight) trip to West Central region of Michigan that involved problem solving discussions among New FARM participants and industry representatives. Included was a tour of Gray and Company (Hart, MI), Peterson Farms (Shelby, MI), and Indian Summer Co-op (Ludington, MI). Event also included speakers from the Cherry Industry.

**Winter 2011 Mid-Term Evaluation** Since the beginning of the program:

- **61% Changed farming/ growing operations or land management practices.** Eight different topics came up. Examples include three participants trying high density apple production. Two completing MAEAP certification (a comprehensive, voluntary, proactive program designed to reduce farmers' legal and environmental risks). Two made plans or started serious planning conversations related to farm transfers. Two took out new financial loans for land acquisition or leases. One had built a chemical building with NCRS funds. After the tour and program on agritourism and operation diversification, one was trying a farm stand for the upcoming year and another invested in goats.

- **43% Developed or revised a farm plan.** Five reported revising farm plans to include more diversification in crops or business practices. Three had specifically developed an agritourism plan. Two had changed their winery/vineyard plan.
- **30% Started farming and 0% stopped farming or were no longer farming.** Five had started farming. In addition, one person started a new business in addition to farming (a restaurant). And one had expanded their farming operations.
- **100% Changed marketing practices.** This question was met with an overwhelming response. 100% indicated that they had made changes to their marketing plans based on their participation in the program. When probed, participants expressed how the program expanded their networking and therefore awareness of other marketing strategies and outlets in the local area.
- **26% Changed business practices.** Three topics where participants had to use new knowledge: farm transfer plans, finances, and farm land preservation efforts. These were also topics of program activities.

Asked about the benefits of the program – short-term and long-term, this was shared:

**NETWORKING!!!!** Overwhelming response and excitement sensed in sharing this as a benefit already realized half-way through the program. Plus, buying services/goods from others in the program and knowing the networking has created opportunities to recommend products and produce from other New FARM members to others outside of the group.

### Winter 2012 End-of-Program Final Evaluation

- **89% improved their management or leadership roles** on-the-farm because of what they learned being part of the New FARM program.
- **89% applied practical knowledge to improve the sustainability of their farming** operations because of what they learned in the New FARM program.
- **86% plan to seek a leadership position** in the agricultural industry or NW Michigan community in the future.
- **50% assumed a leadership position** in the agricultural industry or NW Michigan community since the beginning of the New FARM program.
- **57% modified or expanded current marketing practices** to begin producing value-added crops since the beginning of the New FARM program.
- **43% had purchased, leased, or taken over family farming operations** since the beginning of the New FARM program.
- **57% increased local food sales**, since the start of the New FARM program, which they believe was connected to their participation. Examples included gaining new customers, joining local farmer markets (3 members), participating in farm-to-school programs, selling jams and other food products locally, and securing new direct sales to brewers (hops) or fermentation viticulture scientists (grapes). Two members had their pork production increase 300%. Another member described being involved in a local food movement event showcasing farm-to-table ideas hosted by local media.

- **50% acted on land stewardship** practices through MAEAP or NRCS programs.
- **48% reported an increase in the amount of food produced** by the farm or growing operation, since the start of the New FARM program, which they believe was connected to their participation. Examples included noticeable improvements in soil fertility for improved crops (cherries), an expanded fruit stand for direct sales, and adding pork to the current operation. Two industries represented in the program are hops production for breweries and apple growing for cider production. These crops are grown and distributed for creation of a product. New FARM members representing this industry also reported improved production including better IPM (Integrated Pest Management), increase in acres planted, and a 40% increase in cider production.
- **38% experienced an increase in farm revenue**, since the start of the New FARM program, which they believe was connected to their participation. Examples included increasing CSA (community supported agriculture) income, increasing pasture-based poultry, adding a hop processor facility, and selling merchandise. Three members (14%) started new agricultural enterprises or started farming altogether.

**New FARM member reflective essays on the International Ag tour had themes.** Essay questions focused on how exposure to New Zealand communities helped bring innovative ideas to Michigan, what new knowledge or practices will be tried or shared with others, reflections on how the international trip created a shared experience that tightened the group, and any other observations during the trip that could possibly impact local food movements, farmland preservation, environmental stewardship, or economics.

Participants also reflected on how their participation in the New FARM program overall assisted in building the resiliency of agriculture in Northwest Michigan. This one member's experience: *"Knowing the next generation of farmers in NWMI is an asset to the viability and resiliency of our community. Having a bond with the people who will be shaping the landscape of NWMI Ag is essential for our economic growth if we are to compete in the global marketplace. Personally, knowing these individuals is a great comfort. The vast expertise contained within this group has pushed me to be a better farmer. Adding to this is the quality driven attitude displayed by the New Zealand farming community. Those invaluable skills and relationships built in this program will make it possible for me to assert leadership in arenas once thought to be inappropriate."*