

Evaluation Support and Technical Assistance EET for Beginning Farmer and Rancher Programs



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Project Summary

What is the project's long-term goal? To support the development of strong, effective, and long-lasting farmer and rancher training programs to ensure that beginning farmers and ranchers (BFRs) can enter the field and establish successful farming businesses.

How will we meet this goal? We will equip BFR training organizations nationally with tools and skills **to effectively conduct evaluations** that clearly document program impact, improve programming, and enable program staff to identify and respond to farmers' needs.



Organic farming mentor Jim Leap with participants in an irrigation workshop for beginning farmers on the UC Santa Cruz Farm. Post-workshop evaluations and other follow up help determine the effectiveness of these types of training efforts, and provide information for improving subsequent workshops.

Objectives

- **Identify and collect existing tools and best practices** for program evaluation
- **Identify gaps** in evaluation outcome measures
- **Create tools** for efficient evaluation development
- **Build capacity** of BFR staff through training
- **Run an online evaluation learning community**
- **Develop a web-based repository** for, and broadly disseminate project products

Collaborative discussions of the evaluation process with BFR staff and stakeholders will be part of the EET project.



Activities & Methods

- **Identify and collect existing tools and best practices** through a survey of current BFRDP project leaders, information collected as part of a previous project leader survey, and general research on existing evaluation tools and instruments.
- **Map the developmental pathways of farmers** in order to understand more about how they progress from novice to advanced beginner – and the steps along the way.
- **Develop and publish an Outcomes List**, including examples of desired outcomes that result from BFR training and outreach efforts. Outcomes will be identified for specific learning domains (agronomic, land access, etc.), audiences (immigrants, women, etc.), different developmental stages (aspiring farmers, start-up farmers, and more experienced beginners), and based on what would be expected to happen over time (short-term, medium-term and long-term outcomes). The Outcomes List will be developed with extensive feedback from project partners, as well as other BFR organization staff to ensure relevancy and utility.



The EET will include an online evaluation learning community for professional development, offering participants a way to actively improve evaluation skills and products.

Activities & Methods (cont'd)

- **Offer webinars to build capacity of BFR staff.** Currently planned topics include: a) Using Evaluation EET Project Tools, b) Creating and Adapting Assessment Instruments, c) Conducting Follow-Up Evaluations, and d) Conducting Evaluation as Part of Regular Practice.
- **Run an online evaluation learning community.** The evaluation learning community provides an avenue for professional development that is participatory and responsive to stakeholder needs. This forum will provide an avenue for broad stakeholder feedback on the project products and on organizations' evaluation strategies and ideas; a place to test strategies for improving training practice; a format to facilitate peer discussion on topics important to participants, etc.
- **Develop a web-based repository for, and conduct broad dissemination of project products.** An online Evaluation EET Repository will be created to house all products, event announcements, and basic project information.
- **Create a summary of feedback** for NIFA's BFRDP team based on stakeholder feedback.

Developing Outcomes

Outcomes over time

Short-term:	Medium-term:	Long-term:
Changes in knowledge, attitudes, skills, awareness or intentions	Changes in behaviors as the result of learning or immediate impacts from those actions	Changes in social, economic, or environmental conditions

- Include at least both short- and medium-term outcomes
- Include long-term outcomes in renewal proposals or long time education organizations

Example of a webinar slide on creating evaluation outcomes. A variety of webinars will help build the capacity of BFR staff to develop and implement effective evaluations.

Outcome Examples
Domain: Community Connection

Short-term outcomes

Knowledge & skills

- Learned the importance of community connection

Attitudes

- Feels confident to connect with potential mentor farmers

Intentions

- Plans to attend connect with established farmers

Medium-term outcomes

Behaviors

- Participated in farmer organizations and meetings
- Obtained a mentor or similar relationship

Results

- Confident can get questions answered

CASFS Apprenticeship Alumni Survey

12. Please identify your farm involvement since graduating from the Apprenticeship Program

Managed/operated

Owned/co-owned

Ran a non-profit farm

Other

Other (please specify)

Examples of tools that will be created (Outcome List) and collected/organized (survey instruments) to help BFR staff develop and implement program evaluations.

Expected EET Project Outcomes

- BFR organization staff should find **conducting evaluations more accessible and efficient.**
- BFR organizations' **evaluation will become more effective**, providing better information to stakeholders.
- Better evaluation tools and practices will also **improve education and outreach activities, thus increasing farmer satisfaction** with programming, and helping them to learn more and ultimately become more successful.