

New Hampshire Beginning Farmer Resource Guide

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BACKGROUND

New Hampshire is a small state, geographically and agriculturally. The average farm is about 141 acres. About 75 percent of farms have fewer than 180 acres, and 41 percent have fewer than 50 acres. There are about 3,000 farms in New Hampshire, up about 20 percent from the last census in 1992. Eighty-five percent of New Hampshire farms have less than \$50,000 per year in agricultural sales, and 60 percent have less than \$10,000. In addition, 50 percent of all farm operators work at least 100 days per year off the farm. As you can see, New Hampshire is truly a small farm state.

On the other hand, two of New Hampshire's 10 counties rank in the top 100 U.S. counties for value of agricultural products sold directly to individuals for human consumption. The fact that most of our farms exist on the rural/urban fringe gives us a tremendous marketing opportunity, which probably accounts for the 20 percent increase in farm numbers since the 1992 census. As you might guess, most of these new "beginning" farmers are small part-time operations.

SITUATION

Many of these "beginning" farmers have not had previous farming experience, and they face a great deal of difficulty getting started in agriculture because they don't know the system. While there is a great deal of information and assistance for new farmers, it is very fragmented among many organizations and agencies, and the new farmers don't know the networks available to obtain information.

BEGINNING FARMER RESOURCE GUIDE

Recognizing the frustration that many of these new and potential farmers were facing in getting basic information, the University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension helped to coordinate a cooperative effort with several key agencies to address the problem. It was decided that a guide could be developed to answer most of the beginner questions. This would provide consistent, uniform information for beginning farmers and save time and effort for the organizations and agencies currently providing information.

The key organizations and agencies providing input and in many cases financial assistance for this project were: the University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension; the New Hampshire Department of Agriculture, Markets and Food; USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service; USDA-Farm Service Agency; the North Country and Southern NH Resource Conservation and Development Area Councils; the Beginner Farmers of New Hampshire; the Farm Credit System; and the New Hampshire Farm Bureau Federation.

COOPERATIVE EFFORT

It is interesting that the theme of this conference is "Building Partnerships for the 21st Century," because building partnerships is exactly what we did to address this situation. All the agencies and organizations sat down and discussed the problem of how the need for getting uniform information to beginning farmers could be met. It was decided that a concise reference folder would be the best medium to convey information. Each agency took responsibility for one or more chapters, independently wrote them, and then brought them to joint work sessions for editing. The completed sheets were compiled into an attractive pocket folder with a color cover. They were distributed through the agencies and organizations at no cost, as there had been enough contributions from support groups to cover the initial printing cost.

All 1,000 copies of Beginning Farmer Resource Guide were distributed in the first year after its release, and the same group met to re-edit and re-print the publication in a slightly different format. The chapter titles were expanded, and they now include the following fact sheets:

1. How to Get Started! Commonly Asked Questions
2. Profile of New Hampshire - Demographics, Soil, Climate, Types of Agriculture
3. Business Development Checklist
4. Acquiring Farm Land
5. Marketing and Distribution
6. Financing Resources for Beginning Farmers

- in NH
7. Agricultural Laws
 8. Federal Income Tax and NH Business Tax Considerations
 9. Pesticide Permitting
 10. Farmland and Wildlife
 11. Available Resources
 12. Educational Publications

There is also a publication titled "Who's Who in New Hampshire Agriculture," which is compiled each year by the New Hampshire Department of Agriculture, Markets and Food.

We are now charging \$7 (the cost of printing) for Beginning Farmer Resource Guide, which we hope will generate funds to re-edit and re-print on a regular basis. The publication is primarily of interest to New Hampshire residents, as the resources and directories pertain to that state. It is also available to others, however, from UNH Publications, 120 Forest Park, Durham, NH 03824.

IMPACT OF THIS EFFORT IN NEW HAMPSHIRE

Beginning Farmer Resource Guide has been widely

distributed and used by people who are new farmers as well as those considering establishing some agricultural enterprise. The Beginner Farmers of New Hampshire organization is attempting to establish chapters in each county and is using this guide as a handbook for new farmers. This organization has also identified the need for an additional resource called "A Road Map to Compliance of Laws and Regulations," which they are developing to help beginning farmers.

This cooperative project has also opened the door to better communication with the agencies and organizations that have responsibilities for providing education, information, and assistance to agricultural producers. We're hoping that this will lead to a better understanding of each others' responsibilities and better, more streamlined programs for beginning farmers in New Hampshire.