

New Entry Sustainable Farming Project

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SINCE 1882

New Entry Sustainable Farming Project

- Our mission:
 - improve our local and regional food systems
 - training the next generation of farmers
 - food that is sustainable, nutritious, and culturally-appropriate
 - accessible to individuals regardless of age, mobility, ethnicity, or socio-economic status.





Program Areas

Establishing feasibility of 4 creative business models to resolve farm hiring, training, and management barriers



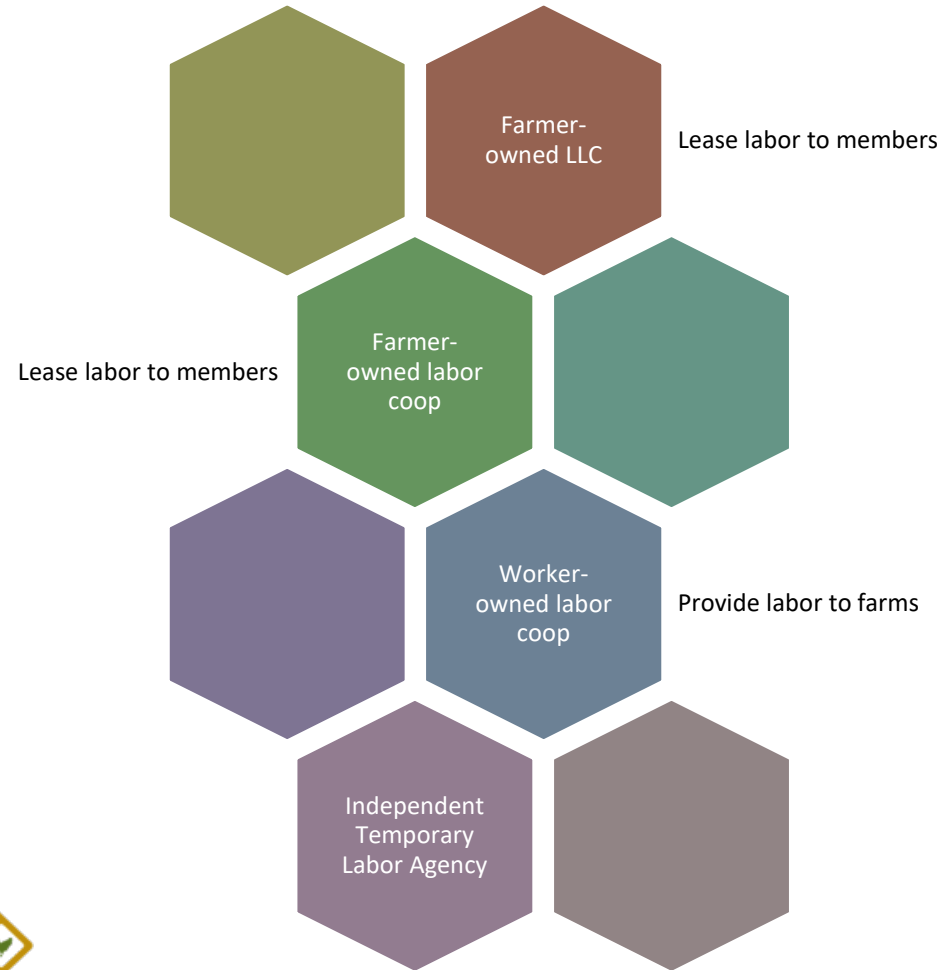
Northeast SARE offers

Competitive Grants

- Farmer
- Partnership
- Graduate Student
- Research and Education
- **Research for Novel Approaches**
- Professional Development Program



Four Prospective Business Models

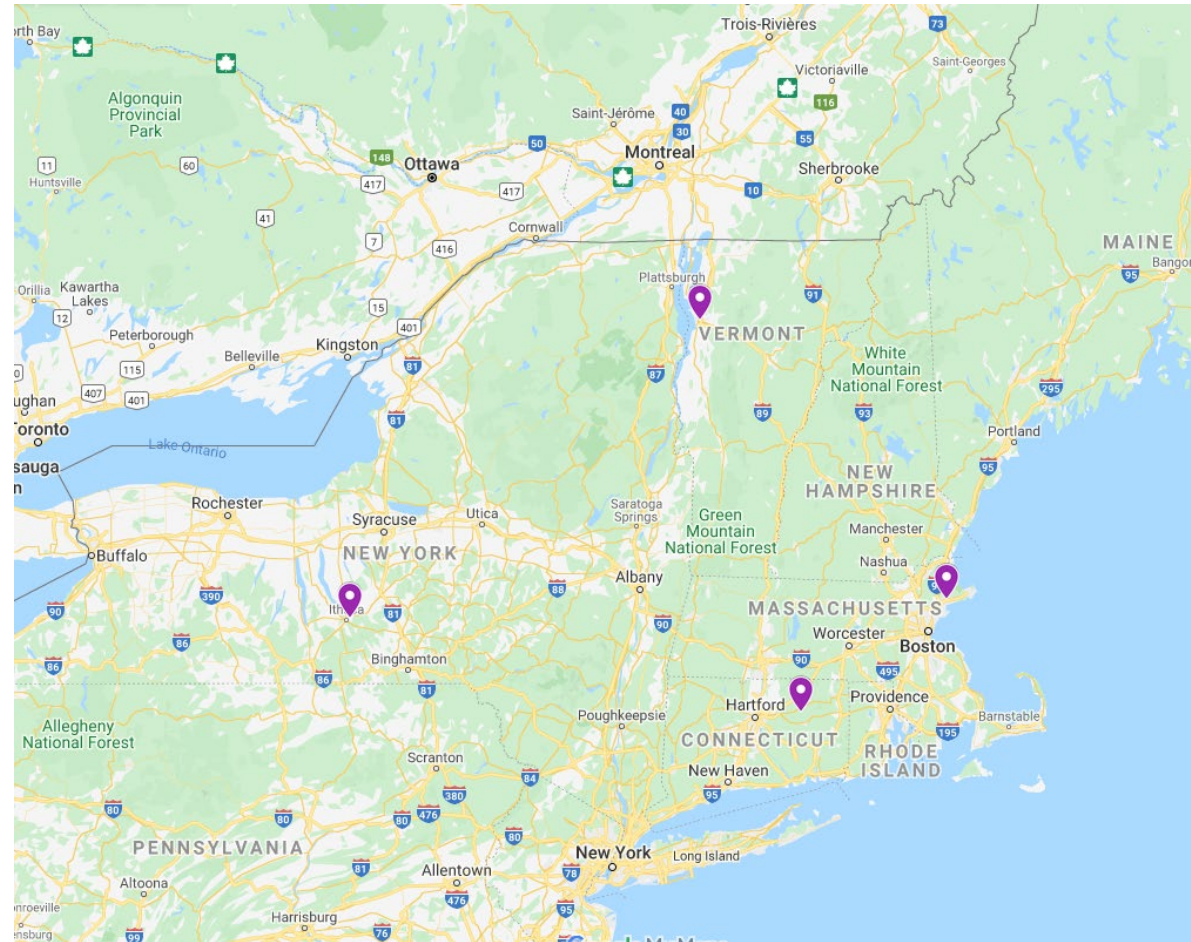


Hypothesis:

- Collaborative farm labor ventures will increase availability of qualified labor available to farmers, reduce hiring, training, and retention costs, address seasonality limitations of employment, and increase benefits and career pathways for employees.
- Farm labor models will align to specific producer and farmworker needs and resources.
- Legal frameworks and implementation strategies to develop collaborative labor business models will provide pathways to adoption and compliance.

Innovative Farm Labor Models – Focus Groups 2020

- Six focus groups in New England
 - University of Connecticut Extension
 - New Entry Sustainable Farming Project (2)
 - University of Vermont Extension (2)
 - Cornell University
- Other partners: Farm Commons, NOFA Vermont; University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension, Cooperative Development Institute, Department of Labor



Key Findings (2020)

- Administration and Finances
- Complexity / Time Commitment
- Recruitment
- Responsiveness to Changing Labor Demands
- Worker Quality/Retention
- Equitable Decision Making / Conflicts of Interest
- Worker Justice



Administration and Finances



- **Viability of proposed labor rate** (\$17 cost of farmers; \$11 to workers); would this pay a manager's salary? Cover additional expenses? *Critical mass?* "Sweet spot" break-even, Range of wages
- **Start-up membership fees** (\$1,000 min investment)
- **Board control and qualifications**
- **Manager** - workload and compensation (find right manager, right \$)
- **Expertise** in managing schedules with an understanding of agricultural operations

Complexity and Time Commitment + *Recruitment*

- Level of involvement in organizational management (too much work?)
- *Where would workers come from? How to find them?*
- *Geographical bounds for farm participation*
- *Vocational stigma (coffee shop? Role of tech?)*
- *Wage competition*
- *Other incentives? dividends, stock sharing, health insurance, tiered wage structures*



Responsiveness to Changing Labor Demands + *Worker Quality /Retention*

- Ability to accommodate on-demand labor needs (similar or diverse?)
- Conflicts in timing of labor needs (floaters? worker preference?)
- Training needs of workers

Retention a top challenge!

- *Incentives to retain workers from season to season* (Career advancement? Benefits?)
- *Establishing strong relationships and shared culture among workers on the farm and the farm operator*
- *Differences in skills / training needed across different farms*



Equitable Decision Making/Conflicts of Interest + *Worker Justice*

- Potential for larger farms to dominate the organization (bigger farms dominate? Trust among members)
- Division of available labor among member farms
- Geographical bounds for farm participation
- Member adherence to procedural requirements
- *Ability to pay living wage*
- *Quality of work environment*
- *Housing availability*
- *Grievance resolution*
- *Stigma/bad rep for labor agencies/exploitation*



Responses to Business Models

• Farmer Owned LLC

- Benefits: *time savings, less administration; income generation*
- Concerns: *equitable decision making; management compensation; large vs small*

• Worker Owned Labor Coop

- Benefits: *worker retention, new employment, recruitment, wages*
- Concerns: *management, peak demand, retention*

• Farmer-Owned Labor Coop

- Benefits: *like core values and equitable voting structure*
- Concerns: *resource commitment, quality of management, similar size farms, power balance and governance*

• Temp Agency

- Benefits: *last-minute gaps, career exploration, easy firing, no startup*
- Concerns: *abuse, exploitation, stigma, temp vs permanent workers*

Overall Impressions

- Some in favor
- Some not in favor
- Some want more details!
- Generally liked:
 - Worker-Owned Cooperative
 - Farmer-Owned Cooperative
 - Farmer-Owned LLC



Recommendations for Second-Round Focus Groups

- Dropped the Temp Agency
- Hybridized the worker-owned and farmer-owned cooperative models
- GOAL: More complete business plan, financial projections, legal implications of proposed model
- Cooperative Models:
 - Farmers as “community investors”
 - Dividends, stock ownership
 - Farmers as “patron members”
 - Serve on leadership/board
 - Equal voting to address equity

Second-Round Facilitation – now (2021)

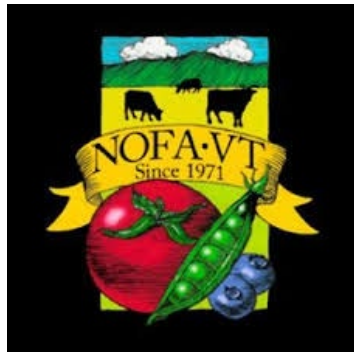
Will this model succeed or fail? *Why or why not?*

- Introduce components of the model
- Ask to rate aspects via survey
- Discussion
- Did peers change your response? *Why / Why not?*
- Revise answer

How do you feel about working under this model? *Why?*

- No right or wrong answers
- How do you feel?
- How do you think your peers feel?

Special Appreciation!



**University of
New Hampshire**
Cooperative Extension



Cornell University
Cooperative Extension



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