

# CCE Grants Program For Innovative Small Farm Education 2005-2006 Final Project Report Form

On completion of your project, please use this outline to prepare your final report. Limit 3-4 pages. Send completed reports to Anu Rangarajan (contact information below). Final reports are due by October 31, 2006. All reports will be posted to the Small Farms Web Site, [www.smallfarms.cornell.edu](http://www.smallfarms.cornell.edu). Thank you!

**Title of project:**     *Chenango County Farmer Mentors*

**Project leader(s) and contact information:**

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**Partner organizations (on *this* project):**

Central New York Resource Conservation and Development  
FarmNet  
Chenango County Chamber of Commerce  
Opportunities for Chenango  
Farm Bureau

**Background situation:**

New Farmers in rural Chenango County face many obstacles as they attempt to get their farms up and running successfully. This project will provide new farmers with training provided by experienced farmers willing to mentor them to show them ways to become successful and avoid the pitfalls that can lead to difficulties as drastic as the loss of their farm.

**Expected outcomes of project:**

The success of this project will be measured by both the number of mentors trained and the number of new farmers who will have access to the mentors and their base of knowledge.

Milestone 1: Team members find 15 successful farmers willing to take the time to be trained on how to help other farmers.

Milestone2: The successful completion of the mentoring program by all 15 farmers selected to participate.

Following their completion of the mentoring program, our mentor farmers will have new skills they can use to pass their knowledge on to others. These skills will be able to enhance the skills of new farmers they reach as part of the program.

## **Project activities:\***

We started out down the path originally planned in our proposal. We held a meeting with 6 of our prospective mentors, a couple could not attend that evening, discussed how the program would work. It was suggested to us by the Small Farms committee that the mentees pay the mentors, so we established that the mentees would pay the mentors \$60 for the first 5 hours, and \$120 for the next 5 hours of time. We also discussed the topics for the workshops. We had originally planned to hold separate trainings for the mentor and the mentees, but the mentors felt that there should only be one set of workshops, with informational sessions for each group, and that the workshop would help draw people to the program.

We set up seven workshops:

March 15: Effective Communications- Presented by Judy Flint, FarmNet, 3 participants

Covered how differences in the way we communicate effect our work and home environments. Due to the low attendance at this workshop, it was reviewed on April 27 and May 18 for the two audiences.

March 30: Introduction to Holistic Management- Presented by Phil Metzger, USDA/NRCS CNY RC&D, 5 Participants. Overview and introduction to Holistic Management.

April 11: Setting up a Bookkeeping Systems You Will Actually Use- Presented by Alice Andrews, CCE Chenango bookkeeper, and experienced farm accountant. 12 Participants. Reviewed accounting systems, the farm account book, and other methods to keep track of your finances.

April 20: Farm Business Planning Tutorial and Refresher- Presented by Jacob Schuelke, Farm Business Management Specialist for the Tompkins, Cortland, Tioga, and Broome Counties Dairy and Field Crops Team. 5 Participants. Review of my business planning is important, how to work on a basic business plan.

April 27: What's it like to be a Farm Mentor- Group discussion led by Rebecca Hargrave and Janet Pfromm- 2 attendees. Review of what the program was going to be like for the farm mentors.

May 4: Rules and Regs of Being a Farm Business- Presented by Maureen Carpenter, Chenango County Chamber of Commerce, Rebecca Hargrave, CCE, supplemented with materials provided by NYS Dept. of Tax. 10 Participants. Overview of the resources available to help people form businesses, NYS ag rules, tax forms, and other things they should consider before forming a business.

May 18: Chenango County Farm Mentoring Program, How to Get Involved- Presented by Rebecca Hargrave, with Erica Frenay, Small Farms, presenting a session on Risk Management. 7 Participants

Each of the workshops was held at the CCE offices from 7-9pm. There was a \$5 charge for attendees (mentors got in free) to help cover the cost of the refreshments and materials.

## **Farmer participation:**

How many farmers were involved in the project overall?

30- 9 planning members or mentors, 4 seasoned farmers who attended workshops, and 16 new farmers

Briefly describe *how* farmers were involved in initiating, planning, doing and evaluating the project.

The project was initiated by requests from new farmers. An initial group of people came together to set initial objectives and write the grant proposal- Bradd Vickers from Chenango Farm Bureau and Nancy Morey from Opportunities for Chenango- both are also farmers.

Once funding was obtained, a larger group got together to plan the program, set guidelines and workshop topics, and were the main pool of people we pulled from for the mentors. Of this group, four agreed to be mentors, and two actually followed through. The two that were able to devote time to helping us were at most of the meetings and spent a lot of time with the new farmers at these sessions. They provided invaluable comments and real life scenarios during the workshops, and made the workshops all that more successful.

Farmer evaluation primarily came from workshop evaluations, conducted only on the Bookkeeping workshop and a final evaluation sent to all participants.

Please attach Participant Registration Forms (including contact information) for all participating farmers.

### **Other participants:**

Alice Andrews- Bookkeeping seminar speaker- CCE Chenango Bookkeeper.

Maureen Carpenter- Business seminar speaker- Chenango County Chamber of Commerce

Jacob Schuelke- Business Planning seminar speaker- TCTB Ag Team

Erica Frenay- Risk Management Speaker- Small Farms Institute

Judy Flint- Effective Communications Speaker- Farm Net

### **Outreach & media:**

To recruit mentors we sent invitations to farmers who had expressed interest in the past as well as other farmers who we thought would make good mentors. We also included a notice in our newsletter.

To recruit new farmers for this project we sent invitations to folks who had participated in our new farmer workshops or who had called/visited the office over the last couple of years. We also put columns and advertisements in our newsletter and advertisements in the local papers.

Posters with the workshop information were sent out to over 100 of the local “public places” for posting.

### **Farmer evaluation:**

What worked well, what didn't work, according to farmers? How do you know? Feedback from participating farmers should be reported.

The workshop series worked exceptionally well. We had pretty good attendance at most of the workshops, and the topics all went over well. The new farmers were able to learn not only from the presenter, but also from the seasoned mentors in the audience. Our mentors came to almost all of the workshops, and took their role seriously to help offer advice and real-world situations where they could. The mentors also willingly stayed after to take to the mentors and help answer their questions.

Our framework for setting up new farmers with mentors did not work well. At the end, we only had one farm looking for a mentor, and they did not match either of our two active mentors (grazing beef and maple syrup, our other less active mentors were grazing dairy and beef and vegetables). If we were to do this again, we would only target one or two commodities instead of a free-for-all of topics.

One other nice conclusion was that our mentors are very much willing to work with people on their own, and many of them would like us to try a similar project again. Potentially setting up another series where we invite seasoned farmers to the workshops to provide additional guidance would be a good start.

### **Farmer impacts:**

What, if anything, are farmers doing (or planning to do) differently as a result of your project?

Many of the mentor farmers and potential mentor farmers are still looking for ways to be involved with CCE, which is a great result. Many new farmers have come to us for site visits and further information about their enterprises, and are looking for some intermediate training. Some of them are becoming more involved helping us deliver programming by hosting workshops or providing program development feedback.

Many of our mentors and potential mentors would still like to help other farmers, and are offering their assistance. A couple of them have hosted workshops at their farms in the past, and are willing to do so again.

**Your evaluation:**

How successful do you think you were in achieving your intended outcomes? What lessons can you share? Keys to success? Pitfalls?

We were only half successful in reaching our expected outcomes. The goal of an actual on-farm farmer mentor program did not come to fruition, but our goals of holding a training series and to link new farmers and seasoned farmers were successful.

Some of our lessons to share are: to focus on one or two commodities, not to try and reach everyone at once

Keys to success: have mentors who are very outgoing and are willing to share information in any setting

**Follow-up activities, spin-off effects:**

Please describe any activities, plans, or possibilities (yours or others') that have resulted from your project.

We continue to provide support for new farmers and are looking at ways to incorporate seasoned and new farmers into programming where they can learn from each other.

**Other comments:**

While the program did not work out the way we intended, we do believe it was a success because of the sharing and network building that happened at these meetings. They were lively, interactive, and all attendees seemed to have enjoyed themselves.

One of the items that was taken out of our budget at the request of the grant reviewers was the fees for speakers line. The thought was that since all the speakers were ag related, we should be able to get them to speak for free. We would like to note that that is an unrealistic idea; even CCE Associations charge each other for time or mileage.

**Supporting materials\***

Suggestions: program agendas, participant lists, handouts, powerpoint presentations, newspaper articles, evaluation summaries, etc. Send one copy of each to: Cornell Small Farms Program, 135C Plant Science Building, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY, 14853. Email: [ar47@cornell.edu](mailto:ar47@cornell.edu). Appropriate materials will be posted on the Small Farms Web Site as links from your Project Report.