

Beginning Farmer & Rancher Team Call

June 8, 2017
10:00am-12:00pm

Attendees:

Stu O'Neill, Rogue Farm Corps
Lindsay Trant, Friends of Family Farmers
Erica Chernoh, Chemeketa Community
College/OSU
Sarah Brown, Oregon Tilth
Lauren Gwin, OSU

Nellie McAdams, Rogue Farm Corps
Megan Fehrman, Rogue Farm Corps
Katrina Van Dis, COIC
Emily Sessoms, Huerto de la Familia
Abigail Singer, Rogue Farm Corps
Anya Moucha (staff support)

MINUTES

Update on the process and history of this BFR group

Stu gave a brief history on the BFR group. They started meeting in 2013 and was primarily composed of representatives from Rogue Farm Corps, OSU Center for Small Farms, Headwaters Farm, and Adelante Mujeres with the intent to coordinate resources for beginning farmers and ranchers. They worked to identify gaps in service and discussed how to prioritize closing these gaps. A few years ago, they put together a timeline of services, which is probably due for update now. The group has tried to find funding sources to fill the gaps in service, but have been unsuccessful. In late 2016, the group applied to be an official work group of OCFSN and was approved at the Convening in April 2017.

Update on the Access to Land team

The Access to Land Team and BFR group each had their own breakout session during the Convening to talk about priorities. They are still gathering information in order to determine what their goals will be. Access to Land had a call earlier this week, but only a few members were on the call, so they didn't want to make decisions. One idea is for the group to be a forum for having more in depth discussion on difficult topics (such as housing). Another option is for member organizations to bring their projects to the committee in order to get advice from the group. Nellie will be calling around and having individual calls with the team members before their next meeting (which is likely to be in September).

Assessment of existing BFR resources

Stu asked the participants to answer the following questions: What does your organization offer beginning farmers and ranchers? What is your target audience? What demographics do you serve? Any changes in how you serve BFRs in the future? What does your org still need to better serve BFRs? He noted that the intent is to take all of the resources from this call and update the resource list.

OSU:

Lauren noted that OSU has a statewide extension program (covering about 18 counties). These offices don't all focus on BFR training, but have resources of different types in these regions. For example, Growing Farms used to be an 18 week course, but is now online and is in experimental phase. Maud has run a program called "Exploring the Small Farm Dream." Have had 2 BFR program development grants. One on online curriculum? Second on more demonstration project/teaching farms/measuring cost of production. Planning on rolling out more in the next few years. Maud also developed the Growing Agripreneurs course. She also runs organic farm that has CSA.

Erika and Javier have been developing Spanish language curriculum in partnership with Huerto de la Familia. The course focuses on basic scientific principles (pollination, etc). It is classroom based, not field based. They have delivered it one time, and will now make revisions and update it.

Lauren noted that the Center for Small Farms and Community Food Systems also publishes Small Farms News and hosts the Small Farms Conference. Extension field faculty often get a lot of calls, which means they have a pulse on what is happening, who is calling, and what the most common questions are. They have a useful publication called "What Can I Do With My Small Farm".

In thinking about their target audience and demographic, Lauren noted that they made deliberate shift to keeping farmers farming. This means they are focusing on profitability, viability, etc. Her colleagues at Sea Grant are interested in learning from this program and seeing what is transferable to a beginning fisher program.

Lauren noted that there is a large demographic of people retiring into farming. They are unique audience because they bring in knowledge from past careers. OSU is thinking about if this demographic needs special programming?

NEEDS: More funding/development

What are the demands for BFR education services? Who are we missing?

ROGUE FARM CORPS:

RFC operates in four areas around the state. They offer classes and farm tours to supplement on farm learning. A few years ago, they added an advanced level apprenticeship, which focus more on managerial aspects, and develop pathways.

They also recently added a farm preservation program to their work. Now they are looking at pathways to becoming a beginning farmer and rancher, and what resources/services do people need after they are done with the program. 2.5 years ago, they started to look at the problems faced by all farmers and ranchers, especially looking at how to preserve land for next generation. Nellie just completed a farm preservation road tour based on study. They brought attorneys and farmers together, learned about people's needs and how to message them. RFC is now looking

into outreach and succession planning. They are monitoring the Agricultural Heritage Program because it would help beginning farmers and ranchers.

Rogue Farm Corps' target audience and demographic tends to be 23-33yr old college educated people looking to do something different with their life. So far, the majority of their participants are Caucasian, but they are trying to increase diversity. In the future, they are trying to develop their advance level program and then hope to connect the two programs and connect older farmers with program participants. They are also trying to expand to other places around the state (such as eastern, north coast, Salem, Hood River). Haven't decided if they're ready to tackle this expansion. There is demand on the farmer side, but they are not sure if there is interest on student side.

NEEDS: what are the demands for services

OREGON TILTH:

Sarah noted that Oregon Tilth's programming that benefits BFRs is connected to OSU so Lauren shared most of their information. They are developing a mentorship program for producers who are transitioning toward organic and will be piloting this soon. It's possible that this could also benefit BFRs, but that is not their target audience. Oregon Tilth doesn't want to be redundant, but they do want to be collaborative. They probably won't expand their BFR work, but Sarah does want to be in the loop.

FRIENDS OF FAMILY FARMERS:

Lindsay is the new organizer for FoFF. One of her roles is managing Oregon Farm Link (a database to facilitate connection between land owners and land seekers). Their target audience is all of Oregon, but she is seeing more concentrated use in the Willamette Valley and from farm seekers. She is focusing on recruiting more land owners and promoting use in the rest of Oregon. She wants to see how to use this group to connect to more land. Lindsay also manages the Oregon Pasture Network, but this is not as relevant to BFR.

For Oregon Farm Link, Lindsay could use partnership opportunities to extend their reach. She wants more people to know that it is available and to know there's a face behind it (not just a website).

NEEDS: partnership opportunities to extend outreach/expand users on OR Farm Link

COIC:

Katrina is mostly curious about who is applying or thinking about applying to the Beginning Farmer Development Program grant. Central Oregon didn't have a small farms agent for many years. Claire is there now. She noted that the region is struggling to support farmers in Bend with changing demographics. She has been thinking about applying for the grant to support Claire. They are starting their third year of working with RFC and she has seen major changes. She noted that she is interested in the "land linking" piece and would like to see that in her community more.

NEEDS: more support for new farmers in CO, especially land linking

HUERTO DE LA FAMILIA:

Emily explained that have farm incubator program where they provide educational classes on business and partner with Extension to provide Spanish language classes. She also noted that the land they were planning on using this year fell through this year due to irrigation issues. They have been desperately trying to find new land, but haven't been able to find even an acre to lease in the Eugene/Springfield area. She has been using Farm Link, but is realizing just how difficult access to land is. She is hoping that part of her job can be expanding opportunities, especially for underserved populations. She noted that we need to consider populations where these resources aren't as easily accessible.

NEEDS: land for program. Expand more service opportunities for Latino farmers

Lauren – Indicators:

Lauren explained that OCFSN has developed a set of indicators. They are currently being incorporated into Rural Communities Explorer. People can look at statewide and county data on these indicators. We have the opportunity to incorporate the number of beginning farmers and ranchers (taken from census data) to the indicators set. She asked the group if they would like to include it. There were no objections.

Lauren noted that the group shouldn't judge our effectiveness based on if this number goes up or down. It's just an indicator.

In the past, the USDA has measured just the number of years on current farm, and now they amended the question to include past farms: "how long have you been farm operator". Lauren thinks that for the purposes of the indicators, the group should just ask about "how many total years have you been farming?" The group agrees. Lauren will move forward with the indicators.

Goals of this group

Over the past year, the group has developed a couple of possible goals:

- Formal gap analysis of services to assess needs and demand. How many BFRs are out there that want our services, what they are getting, what they need, etc.
- Some form of training/coordination among service providers (for example, Lauren's staff gets calls). Consider creating Ombudsman position, farmer development center, or provide coordination on how to answer phone calls from BFRs.
- Expand services and deliver services to underserved communities.

Lauren thinks that we've done a good job of figuring out some general goals. She thinks we should think about how we share that more tacit knowledge that comes with experience. For example, Maud thought it would be nice to sit down once or twice a year with people to see what types of questions people are asking. What are the things we need to know to do this job well? She is not thinking about doing more surveys, but maybe creating case-studies or focus groups of different demographics to think about what worked well and when. Lauren and Gary are working on that a little bit.

Maybe the BFR working group could facilitate this tacit knowledge exchange. Lauren is not county or regionally based faculty so she has felt odd facilitating this. Maybe we could invite folks on each call to talk about what they're seeing on the ground. On these calls we could actually do some storytelling. What types of questions are farmers asking? For example, it would be great to hear what Rowan hears at the Headwaters Incubator Farm.

Stu said it would be great to find a time or afternoon where we could all get together on this. Perhaps we could piggy-back an in-person meeting onto the Small Farms Conference.

Lauren said this is possible. It could be similar to the way OFMA has a meeting and track. She noted that they are just starting to plan for the next conference so she is open to working a BFR track or meeting in. Emily and Lindsay also thinks that could be useful.

Stu said we can also build in storytelling into our meeting agendas. This will help us learn what is happening out there on the ground.

Lauren thinks it could be great to do panel or discussion on BFR at the Small Farms Conference. For example, in the last 10 years, what have we seen in BFR support in Oregon? She will keep thinking about it.

Lauren gets concerned about creating an Ombudsman position because it silos information into one person that not everyone will find. It requires constant funding. She thinks it would be better if we all had the information.

Nellie appreciates Lauren's thoughts about how we can be a better conduit of resources. She is excited about an Ombudsman because it would free up her time. She has been getting lots of questions. She agrees that it would be nice to have wider web of resource providers. Nellie has been tracking some of this information (what questions are we getting, how often questions are getting asked, etc.). If we do an assessment of resources needed, she could bring out this information.

Megan noted that one of her goals is to find ways to reach people who might be BFRs and not know how to access our programming. She would also like to elevate farming and ranching as a profession again and make it look like a viable career choice. She could see a media campaign around the state/country that explains who you turn to if you're interested in farming or ranching. She wants to elevate the profile of farmers.

Lindsay doesn't have much more to add. She agrees with a lot of what was said. She would also like more collaboration/partnership opportunities.

Emily noted that this topic is definitely impacting their incubator program this year. She especially likes the idea of developing the Farm Link. She would advocate for looking at this work through an equity lens and seeing what resources are available to different populations. She wants to ensure there is more inclusivity.

Katrina is interested in reducing duplication. There are a lot of resources out there, but farmers don't know where to go. She thinks it would be nice if there was an online presence that we can direct people to. Maybe we could put this on OCFSN website.

Stu noted that there is general consensus on the main/overarching goals of the group.

Next steps

How do we start diving into these goals?

Lauren requested that the group brainstorm how to start a demand assessment.

Katrina noted that Central Oregon is having a focus group in the fall to assess what their needs are. We could do something similar around the state, asking the same questions, and then aggregate that information. We could use the one in Central Oregon as a pilot and refine it for the rest of the focus groups.

Lindsay thinks this could be incorporated into her outreach trips. She will not be in a focus group setting, but she could talk with group about how to do this.

Emily is interested in what those questions might look like and could help with translating between English and Spanish.

RFC could ask/survey their cohort of students going through the program right now. Megan can also take these questions to her large national group.

Stu imagines that Headwaters Farm, Adelante Mujeres, and RFC's other partners would be willing to ask their cohorts as well. Through these channels, we could have lots of info by this fall or winter.

Lauren has been working with contractor and suggested expanding her contract to get advice on how to coordinate and pull this information together. She and Gary also hosted some focus groups and interviews over the past few years that could serve as previously gathered data.

Abigail noted that these avenues will yield information from people who already know about our programs. She encouraged the group to think back to Megan's question – how do we broaden this to people don't know about us?

Megan suggested that maybe we need to put it out to our networks and hope they will be connected in other ways. For example, she is connected to over 30 groups and universities nationwide. Maybe they can reach students that we otherwise couldn't.

Lauren noted that we should make sure we reach out to rest of agriculture Extension, 4H, and the other avenues through which people enter farming and ranching. It would also be great to reach out to other colleagues who have tried to do this type of assessment.

Lindsay does not have dates for her outreach tour yet and it will be dependent upon funding, but she will be intentionally going out of her existing networking so that more people learn about Oregon farm link. There may be opportunities for collaboration here.

Nellie just did 38 stops around the state that got out of existing networks. This can also be a resource.

Stu asked if everyone would like to be involved in implementation or if there is just a subgroup who would like to keep it moving forward.

At this point, everyone would like to remain in the loop. We will try keep the work moving forward through email and individual calls, but can schedule another group call if necessary.

Does anyone have plans for the USDA BFR grant?

The Small Farms Program is planning on putting in another proposal for BFR Program Development, focusing on their “advanced level” curriculum. They want to learn about new types of things they can develop that will support farmers getting through first 10 years.

It might look good to funders to have a suite of project proposals coming in from Oregon. That way, we can say “we’re doing this work in the context of all this other work happening in Oregon”. There might be opportunities to share information and results.

Stu has been talking with Adelante Mujeres. They are interested in submitting a proposals to support Latino farmers.

Once RFC looks into why their last proposal was denied, they will talk about resubmitting.

Katrina noted that there is interest submitting a proposal from Central Oregon, but she could also tag on to something other people are doing.

Stu suggested that the group think about this a little more. Some of the ideas the group brainstormed today could require funding.

Katrina asked if could we apply for a grant on behalf of this workgroup and do regional specific projects. Stu thinks that is an interesting idea.

Lindsay is not sure of FoFF’s plans. Shari (ED of FoFF) would know better. Stu noted that RFC has worked with FoFF on the last two proposals, along with SOU, OSU, Headwaters Farm, and Adelante Mujeres.

Stu is interested in developing a collaborative proposal on behalf of network. They tried a few years ago, but did not have the benefit of a formal network endorsement. He would like to explore this further.

Katrina would be happy to help write that grant. She noted that she is now a reviewer for LMPP and FMPP on behalf of USDA so she is learning more about how they review grants.

Stu wants to reach out to groups they've worked with in the past who were not on the call today (Adelante and Headwaters Farm).

We have some work to do to keep the demand assessment moving forward and we need to put heads together if we want to work on collaborative grant proposal.

Emily asked for more information on the USDA grant. Stu said he will email her.

Stu noted that he initially thought we might not reconvene for a few months, but because of the demand assessment idea, we should meet soon while there are still BFRs in our programs. He does not have a time in mind yet. Stay tuned for information on a timeline.

To do's

Flesh out demand assessment strategy

- Stu will follow up with other groups not on this call to assess their interests/needs
- Start brainstorming list of questions to include on demand assessment (everyone)
- Schedule another call soon to further discuss and implement

BFRDP grant planning

- Stu will follow up with other groups not on this call to assess interests
- Stu will share some background on previous BFRDP grants with Emily at Huerto