

**Farm Beginnings Collaborative Graduate Survey Report
2015 Growing Season**

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Background and Methods

The online Farm Beginnings Graduate Survey was conducted during the November and December of 2015. All Collaborative member organizations were asked to participate by sending a web link for the survey via e-mail to all Farm Beginnings (FB) graduates. The graduates were asked to limit their replies to 1 per farm or household to avoid duplication. In addition to this report, files containing a summary of all responses and written comments, and the data for the specific organization have been provided to each of the participating member organizations. Two hundred and fifty-two (252) FB graduates/farms from 10 member organizations responded to the survey.

Participating organizations included: 1) Angelic Organics Learning Center (AOLC), 2) Dakota Rural Action (DRA), 3) Foodworks, 4) FARRMS 5) Land Stewardship Project (includes Lake Superior Sustainable Farming graduates), 6) The Land Connection (TLC), 7) Hawthorne Valley Farm Learning Center 5) 8) New Farmer Development Project, 9) Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society (NSAS) and UNC, 10) Maine Organic Farming and Gardeners Association (MOGFA). Farm Beginnings graduates starting the program in 1996-97 through the current year (2014-15) responded to the survey. As the program has continued to increase in size each year, the sample has become weighted more heavily toward recent graduates.

Summary of Outcomes

During 2013, the Farm Beginnings Collaborative prioritized five shared outcomes for the program. The evaluation committee developed the Graduate Survey to measure these outcomes and it was administered for the first time in the fall of 2013, and was continued in the fall of 2014 and 2015. The following narrative highlights aggregate results from the 2015 survey and the following tables summarize the data by organization. Calculated totals (in Table 1) by organization vary slightly from the survey summary values because 12 respondents did not specify their Farm Beginnings program:

1. **Graduates will be engaged in farming:** In 2015, 80% of the respondents were involved in farming either as an owner, manager, employee, volunteer or intern. Sixty-six percent (66%) owned or managed farms. An additional 8% were not involved in farming in the last season, but reported that they plan to start. Sixty-nine percent (69%) of the farm owners/managers had been selling agricultural products for 5 years or less.
2. **Graduates will use sustainable practices.** Ninety-eight percent (98%) of graduates (who were engaged in farming) were using sustainable practices. Sixty-four percent (64%) reported that they had increased their use of sustainable practices since taking Farm Beginnings.
3. **The number of acres in sustainable production will increase.** Over the past 5 years, 61% of the farmers had increased the amount of land they had in sustainable production. Fifty three percent (53%) owned or managed from less than 1 acre to 5 acres. Eighty one percent (81%) of those who were farming owned or managed 40 acres or less.
4. **Amount of sustainably produced food available locally will increase.** Sixty-four (64%) of FB graduates plan to increase their production in the next year. Sixty four percent (64%) of the farms marketed 80% or more of their products directly to the consumer. Fifty-six percent (56%) of farms marketed through farmers markets and 45% direct-to-restaurants. Forty-four percent (44%) sold through CSAs.

Eight-two percent (82%) sold more than 80% of their production within a 200-mile radius of their farm. Seventy-five percent (75%) sold more than 80% of their production within a 50-mile radius of their farm.

5. **Graduates will meet their goals for family income from agricultural production.** During the 2015 growing season, 51% of the farms met or exceeded their goals for family income from products produced on their farm. In the 2014 calendar year, 14% of the farms had a gross income of \$75,000 or more from all farm enterprises. Sixty-three (63 %) of farms had gross income of less than \$40,000, and 38% had gross income of \$5000 or less from all farm enterprise. Fifty seven percent (57%) expected their gross revenue from farming in 2015 to be higher than in 2014.

Figure 1. Percent of Farm Beginnings Graduates Farming by Year

