

impact

University of Idaho Extension programs that are making a difference in Idaho.

Cultivating Success™ grows 49 new sustainable small acreage farmers in Idaho

AT A GLANCE

For nearly 20 years, Cultivating Success™ has contributed to the success of sustainable small farms and ranches in Idaho. Collaborative innovations expanded the program statewide in 2016-2018.

The Situation

Nationally, the average age of farmers has been rising towards retirement age. Without new farmers to take their place, agriculture is facing a future labor and food supply crisis. Small farmers and ranchers are critical to the resiliency, economy and food security of rural areas and necessary for local food access in urban sectors. Appropriate education, strong farmer-to-farmer networks and access to trustworthy resources are key to their initial and continued success.

Idaho is a geographically large state, 83,570 square miles stretched across 44 counties. For almost 20 years, *Cultivating Success™ Idaho*, a collaboration between University of Idaho Extension and the nonprofit Rural Roots, has pioneered sustainable small farm education in very limited regions of the state.

Our Response

In early 2016, with funding from the USDA-NIFA Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program, *Cultivating Success™ Idaho* began a three-year comprehensive program to provide education for new farmers, facilitate access to land, capital and decision-making tools, and strengthen farmer-to-farmer mentoring and to expand efforts statewide.



Farm tours are important in fostering peer-to-peer learning and farmer mentorship opportunities. Photo by Amanda Snyder.

Year One — In 2016, the team, comprised of cooperating farmers and individuals from UI Extension and Rural Roots, offered *Starting Your Sustainable Small Farm in Idaho* using a combination of live presentation and videoconference technology at nine concurrent sites with 145 students completing the course. Curriculum included farm planning, crop and livestock production, and corresponding farm tours which were offered at each site and were also open to additional students. A new *Cultivating Success™ Idaho* website was launched and partnerships with multiple nonprofits were leveraged to plan and offer advanced workshops.

Year Two — Advanced workshops were offered live, at multiple sites, and accessible to other sites via webinar

in 2017. Topics included farm law, wholesale marketing, food safety, farmer-mentor training, financial education, land resource evaluation, funding for farmers and scaling-up poultry operations. Team members also developed and offered a decision-making workshop for those considering whether farming is an appropriate career option, *Is a Small Farm in Your Future?*

Beginning farmers were offered one-on-one mentoring sessions with a farmer-mentor. A total of 15 farmers took advantage of this opportunity.

Year Three — In 2018 the team again offered *Starting Your Sustainable Small Farm in Idaho* at nine sites with 112 students completing the course. The team launched a webinar series on various topics including land access, cover crops, farmer-mentor training, marketing, access to capital and funding for farmers. These webinars were attended by 172 participants statewide.

The team launched the *Idaho Farm Link* website that matches farmers seeking land with land owners. In this third year, the beginning farmer workshop, *Is a Small Farm in Your Future?* had 28 participants.

Cultivating Success™ Idaho Summary Numbers

Metric	2016	2017	2018	Total
Beginner workshops	145	28	140	257
Advanced workshops	22	228	80	330
Webinar attendance	-	-	172	172
Farmers who started a farm-based business	32	-	17	49
Made improvements to their operation	66	219	46	331

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Program Outcomes

Over three years of programming, 49 participants reported starting a farm-based business. Of the 2016 and 2017 students who responded to surveys, 51 percent indicated that they increased their profits due to something they learned in one of the courses or workshops. Of all participants, 331 indicated they made improvements to their farming operation.

Typical of participants, one 2018 student said the beginning course “really helped with resources, soil management, market analysis and getting to know local farmers.” Collectively, when surveyed, over 90 percent of participants indicated knowledge gain in every course offered with most also planning to put a new practice in place.

The project also raised visibility for University of Idaho Extension, Rural Roots and *Cultivating Success™ Idaho*. *Cultivating Success™ Idaho* websites including *Idaho Farm Link* and the Facebook pages received 25,000 hits.

Nine University of Idaho Extension educators with small farms responsibilities throughout the state have been certified as *Cultivating Success™ Idaho* instructors and six farmers were certified as mentors with 63 farmers engaged in mentoring other farmers.

The Future

University of Idaho Extension educators with small farms responsibilities will continue to offer *Cultivating Success™ Idaho* courses and workshops in-person and via webinar. A program specific to U.S. military veterans will begin in 2019 utilizing *Cultivating Success™ Idaho* curriculum. *Starting Your Sustainable Small Farm* will be offered statewide again in 2020 at a number of locations.