



Hi folks,

This is our Farmer Programs Newsletter for October 29, 2021. Please read through all of the grant opportunities and business development opportunities — there are so many ways you can learn and grow this fall! If you're looking for back issues, please contact Nicolas Lindholm; also send any suggestions, corrections or advice regarding this newsletter to nlindholm@mofga.org.

MOFGA's Farmer to Farmer Conference is next week! November 1-7, 2021. Featuring online sessions, in-person farm tours and a virtual intensive on Carbon Farming. The conference sessions will take place on Monday, November 1, Wednesday, November 3, and Friday, November 5, featuring over 20 workshops and 50 speakers. Keynote speaker Gladis Zinati will present her keynote about Linking Soil Health to Plant Health on Monday, November 1. Farm tours are scheduled for Sunday, November 7. Registration required. Suggested fee: \$60; sliding scale, please pay the amount that fits your budget.



Farmer Programs Round-Up

At a recent Farmer to Farmer in the Field workshop, we toured Rainbow Valley Farm, where Jake Bragg has installed Timeless Fence Systems fence posts. These posts are constructed from vinyl scraps gleaned and recycled from the manufacture of windows. Bragg has been working over the past three years to change his cedar posts for this flexible vinyl option, and can't speak highly enough of his investment. He saves time and labor since these posts don't heave from frost, or rot. They are a humane option for livestock just learning about fences, since they flex if an animal spooks and runs through the fence. Participants were also impressed with Bragg's corner post innovation (seen below) as the concrete-filled tire is inexpensive to construct and portable. For more information on quantity ordering and price, contact Jake Bragg at Rainbow Valley Farm in Sydney, Maine.



Grants and Resources

- **MOFGA Technical Assistance Grants** for 2022 now open. This grant opportunity, funded by the Agricultural Viability Alliance, helps farmers, processors and food entrepreneurs access technical assistance for their business (i.e., business planning, market research or expansion, production and scaling up assistance, accessing new markets, etc.). Individual grants will range from \$1,000 to \$2,000, and are capped at \$2,000 per applicant. Application deadline: November 21, 2021.
- **Dairy Business Viability and Technical Assistance Grant** now open. Administered by the Northeast Dairy Business Innovation Center (NE-DBIC), this grant program will provide funding for Northeast dairy processors, producer associations, supply chain businesses and technical assistance providers to enhance dairy farmer and processor business operations and strengthen market opportunities. Projects funded through this program will coordinate technical assistance to benefit multiple dairy producers and processors with the goal of increasing consumption, sales, jobs and diverse markets for regionally produced dairy products. Grants will range from \$10,000 to \$100,000 with a 25% cash or in-kind match commitment required. Application deadline: December 7, 2021.
- **Dairy Food Safety and Certification Grant** now open. Administered by the NE-DBIC, this grant program will provide grants for Northeast dairy farmers, processors and/or producer associations to take actionable steps to improve the safety of dairy products. Projects funded through this program will support increased production safety standards with the goal of accessing new markets. Projects that increase marketability of dairy products will be prioritized. Activities covered by this grant include accessing technical assistance, audits, food safety plan development, training, testing fees and certain infrastructure upgrades. Grants will range from \$10,000 to \$40,000 with a 25% cash or in-kind match commitment required. Application deadline: February 3, 2022.
- **Maine Produce Safety Improvement Grant program** now accepting applications. Administered by MOFGA, this grant program is to help specialty crop growers (including fruits and vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, horticulture, floriculture and nursery crops) to implement on-farm food safety practices, transition to compliance with the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) Produce Safety Rule (PSR), and/or meet market demands for on-farm food safety. This will be our second round of this grant and we found great success in the projects from the first round. Applications are open to both organic and non-organic producers, but must be from Maine farms engaged in production agriculture of specialty crops for commercial purposes that gross at least \$10,000 in annual sales. Application deadline: December 15, 2021.
- **Northeast SARE Farmer Grant program** now accepting applications. The Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) annual grant cycle is now open for Farmer Grants, which are for commercial producers who have an innovative idea they want to test using a field trial, on-farm demonstration, marketing initiative or other technique. A technical advisor must also be involved — often an extension agent, crop consultant, other service professional or farmer with advanced expertise. This year, the cap for each proposal has been raised to \$30,000. Funds can be used to conduct the research project including paying farmers for their time, for project-related materials, for project costs like consulting fees or soil tests, and more. Funds cannot be used for capital costs associated with building a barn, greenhouse or other major farm fixture, starting a farm, or purchasing durable equipment like tractors or computers. Application deadline: November 16, 2021.
- **Pandemic Response and Safety Grant program** now open. The USDA has now opened a new grant program to respond to coronavirus, administered through their Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) for food processors, distributors, farmers' markets and producers to cover measures that were taken to protect workers against COVID-19. Funding can be used for COVID-19-related costs incurred between January 27, 2020, and December 31, 2021, including activities associated with workplace safety measures, market pivots, retrofitting facilities, transportation, worker housing and medical costs. No cost share or match required, with an award ceiling of \$20,000. Application deadline: November 22, 2021.

Services Available

- **Statewide Bilingual Vaccine Navigators** available. Mano en Mano is assisting people throughout the state of Maine, providing vaccine support and services across the entire state. Some of the services they provide are: Spanish language interpretation, vaccination information, help to make an appointment for vaccination, transportation, and help setting up a mobile vaccination clinic at a farm or job site. Their goal is to establish and expand access to educational information and resources throughout Maine in order to support people in making their decision to get vaccinated against COVID-19.
- **Hancock County Energy Audit Program** (for farms in Hancock County). Administered through A Climate to Thrive, this is a reduced-cost energy audit program for Hancock County small businesses and agricultural producers thanks to funding support from the USDA. Energy audits are available to local farmers at only 25% of the full cost of the audit. This program aims to reduce energy costs for users in Hancock County, raise community awareness of the importance and benefits of energy efficiency, and reduce wasteful energy consumption while empowering business owners and agricultural producers in the process.

Business Development Opportunities

- **Farm Beginnings** training program expanded and deadline extended! MOFGA's annual series of workshops is designed for new farmers *and now processors of organic foods* with at least one year of production experience, to help you develop a whole farm or business plan and give you the business skills to implement your plan. Participants in the 10-week course will be with peers in a similar stage of business or farm development. The course will run from late November 2021 to February 2022. Please direct any questions about this program to bdennis@mofga.org. Application deadline: November 5, 2021.
- **MFT's Business of Farming** now open for applications. Maine Farmland Trust has Business of Farming for interested applicants. This year's course has two cohorts to choose from: a diversified farm cohort and a cohort specifically designed for wild blueberry growers. The four-week series of workshops are for experienced farmers who want to analyze their current business model and use the information for decision making. Registration deadline: December 13, 2021. Fee: sliding scale \$25-\$500 with a \$500 seed grant awarded upon completion of program.
- **MFT's Farming for Wholesale** now open for applications. Maine Farmland Trust has opened Farming for Wholesale for interested applicants. This program is for experienced farmers who currently serve wholesale accounts and are ready to scale up significantly. This is a highly-selective, competitive application program. Upon completion of the extensive program, participants will have the opportunity to submit their business plan to compete for an Implementation Grant of up to \$50,000. Registration deadline: November 29, 2021.
- **Maine Farms for the Future (Phase 1) Program** now accepting applications. Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF) has just opened this annual competitive grant program that provides selected farms with business planning assistance and investment support. The Phase 1 grant allows selected farmers to research ideas for change on their farm and work with a business advisor and other agricultural and professional service providers to develop an investment-grade business plan. Application deadline: December 6, 2021.
- **Recipe to Market: Is It for Me?** online workshop. November 17, 2021. Hosted by University of Maine Extension, this is a multi-disciplinary workshop that covers the business and food aspects of starting a food business in Maine. It is intended for entrepreneurs and/or farmers interested in starting a home-based, specialty food business (though it does not cover herbal supplements or commercial processing). Products that will be discussed include but are not limited to: canned shelf stable products, dry mixes and candies/confections. Topics include business basics, an overview of the product development process, licensing/regulations and food safety. Registration deadline: November 12, 2021. Fee: \$25, financial assistance available.

- **MCE's Cultivator Program**. The Maine Center for Entrepreneurs (MCE) is now taking applications from food, beverage or agriculture companies (including farms) that have a proven value-added product and a scalable business model and are ready to grow and scale up. Participants are led by a full-time program manager with 20+ years of food industry experience who works directly with member companies to understand your business and closely monitor your needs and progress. This program includes an initial business assessment, action plan, coaching and mentoring, access to consultant support, and industry-focused workshops and events, culminating with a showcase event to an audience of potential investors, business leaders and journalists at the end of the program. This is a 12-month program with a \$2,500 cost.
- **Entrepreneurship Intensive for Farmers** business training program. January 14-19, 2022. Sponsored and hosted by Stone Barns Center in collaboration with Ideagarden and Blue Hill, this six-day, in-person experiential fellowship gives farmers the opportunity to learn from and collaborate with sustainable farm and food experts, and one another, as they develop business strategies, entrepreneurial skills and sharpen their understanding about how to integrate community and food culture into the ecological potential of their farms. Farmers must enroll with a food producer/processor partner. At the end of the program, participants will leave with a clear growth strategy and a tactical business plan in hand. Stone Barns Center will cover program fees, lodging and meals, along with a \$500 travel stipend. Application deadline: November 14, 2021.
- **USDA Microlearning courses** recently announced. The USDA has created a series of online, free, short lessons in their Organic Integrity Learning Center, designed to help organic professionals access quick training that covers key aspects of a topic in about 10 to 15 minutes. Of note, one new course is "Organic Products Sold at Farmers Markets," where farmers market managers, vendors and consumers can learn about how to identify potentially mislabeled and misrepresented organic products. After completing this course, farmers market managers will be able to explain organic certification requirements to vendors. More courses are being added regularly. Access is free, though you do need to set up an account.

Events

- **New England Vegetable and Fruit Conference**. December 13-17, 2021. The conference will be online this year, and will be a streamlined version of the usual in-person content, with one morning and one afternoon session per day for the one week. Registration required. Fee: \$50.
- **It Takes a Region Conference**. November 8-11, 2021. Hosted by Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group (NESAWG), this year's online format brings together farm and food practitioners across the 12-state Northeast region to learn, debate, collaborate, and innovate ideas and solutions to critical farm and food systems issues. Registration required. Fee: sliding scale \$0-100, scholarships available.
- **Direct Marketing Conference**. November 1 & 8, 2021. Hosted by University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension and New Hampshire Department of Agriculture, Markets & Food, this two-day online conference will bring together a range of speakers, including farmers, to address product and market innovation, with sessions on value-added products, market innovations and best practices. Registration required. Free.

Opportunities for Farmer Input

- **USDA Requests Public Input on New Climate-Smart Agriculture Initiative**. The USDA recently announced that it is seeking public comments on a new initiative designed to create funding opportunities for agricultural producers of commodities produced using climate-smart practices. They are looking for input on how to design the new initiative, which will support funding incentives to implement climate-smart conservation practices on working farm and forest lands. Insights gained through this public comment process will be used to develop a funding program to encourage the adoption of climate-smart practices and promote markets for climate-smart commodities. Public comment period ends: November 1, 2021.

- **Farm Bill listening session**. November 9, 2021. Join members from the Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group and others for a listening session to share your feedback and priorities for Farm Bill programs. You do not need previous knowledge of Farm Bill contents or mechanics to participate — session is open to all, but they will be prioritizing feedback from current farmers, aspiring farmers, people who did but no longer farm, and those who work in farmer-serving roles and organizations. Information from this session will help inform advocacy for the 2023 Farm Bill. Registration required (as part of NESAWG's It Takes A Region Conference — see above).
- **NE-SARE seeks a farmer to serve on the Administrative Council**. Northeast SARE is seeking a farmer to serve on its 20-member Administrative Council (AC), the leadership committee that provides program oversight, grant proposal evaluation and internal policy guidance. The open seat on the AC is one of four that represents farmers. Northeast SARE is committed to diversity in its leadership, and is especially interested in engaging Black farmers, Indigenous farmers and other farmers of color for this role. Administrative Council members are compensated for their time at a rate of \$300/day. Application deadline: December 3, 2021.

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