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Expanding NOFA-NH's "The CRAFT of Farming" – Providing Workforce Development and Technical Education for New Hampshire's Organic Farming Community

NORTHEAST ORGANIC FARMING ASSOCIATION OF NEW HAMPSHIRE

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The Northeast Organic Farming Association of New Hampshire (NOFA-NH) hosted its third annual "The CRAFT* of Farming" Program (*Collaborative Regional Alliances for Farmer Training), in New Hampshire in 2021 with six certified organic farms. With \$2,000 in funding from Farm Credit Northeast AgEnhancement and additional funds from NOFA-NH's operating budget, this program reached approximately 90 farmers, farm workers, homesteaders, gardeners, and eaters through six in-person farm tours during the growing season.

This program built upon its first two successful years of building a peer-to-peer CRAFT network in New Hampshire's Merrimack County in 2019 and virtually in 2020. In addition to focusing on best practices in organic farming, its purpose was improving access to technical education for New Hampshire's small, beginning, and experienced organic farmers and their workforce, increasing public awareness of organic agriculture, and elevating the state's agricultural economy.

With NOFA-NH's support, each participating farm hosted a tour that was open to farmers, farm workers, homesteaders, gardeners, and eaters. Farmers, farm workers and NOFA-NH members attended all tours free of charge. NOFA-NH offered sliding scale pricing for tickets and scholarships to ensure accessibility for all learners.

NOFA-NH was grateful to be able to safely transition back to small, in-person events for this program in 2021. Each two-hour long event consisted of approximately 1.5 hours of a farm tour and discussion of the farm's practices, with the remaining time left for networking and socializing amongst attendees.

Each farm tour focused on a different theme, providing technical education and support for farmers and farm workers by bringing them together in the fields, vineyards, and forests to learn new skills. Discussion topics included: land access, no-till practices, intensive growing, small-scale efficiencies, community partnerships, leasing land, diversification, certified organic maple production, reading the landscape and thinking from an ecological perspective. The first farm tour, which focused on land access, was hosted in collaboration with Vital Communities and Land for Good, furthering the program's reach and creating additional value to the hosts and attendees.

Additionally, NOFA-NH presented information about the 2020 CRAFT Program at its virtual Winter Conference in 2021. NOFA-NH's Winter Conference Coordinator Chadley Kolb and Operations Manager Nikki Kolb hosted a lively discussion with farmers from Work Song Farm, Hip Peas Farm, Kearsarge Gore Farm, SHARA Vineyards (formerly Mermaid Hill Vineyard), Hop N Hen Farm, and Stonewall Farm. Attended by 35 conference goers, the workshop shared outcomes, generated interest in expanding the program, and solicited feedback from farmers about how to best meet their needs through "The CRAFT of Farming." Participating farmers were interested in seeing the program repeated and expanded geographically in 2021, and in continuing to meet virtually to address challenges and share successes as a cohort, resulting in two additional online meetings of farmers in spring 2021.

Program Impact:

- Increased reach of in-person program participation compared to 70 people in 2019.
- Geographical expansion of programming into five counties: Belknap, Carroll, Cheshire, Grafton, and Merrimack.
- Coordinated 6 farm tours for farmers, farm workers and the public during the 2021 growing season, each focused on a different educational topic.
- Surveyed participants to determine how the program impacted their farming knowledge, interest in organic farming careers, and employee recruitment.

"The CRAFT of Farming" Cohort & Farm Tour Dates:

- Winter Street Farm, August 7, 2021: Land Access & No-Till Practices
- SHARA Vineyards, August 11, 2021: Reading the Landscape & Thinking from an Ecological Perspective
- Winnepesaukee Woods Farm & Busy Lizzie's Blooms, August 21, 2021: Intensive Growing in Small Spaces
- Mountain Heartbeet, August 28, 2021: Leasing: Small-Scale Efficiencies & Community Partnerships
- Stonewall Farm, September 11, 2021: Diversifying Your Farm
- North Family Farm, September 18, 2021: Sustainable, Certified Organic Maple Syrup

Here's what a few of our farm tour hosts had to say about the 2021 program:

"We really benefited from getting connected with local nonprofits in the area. We will be able to work with them in the future to expand our operation and enrich the community."
– Abigail Clarke, Winter Street Farm

"It was nice to be with farmers that think about making improvements to their farms and ways to share their assets with other farmers." – Joanne Ducas, Mountain Heartbeet

"Having to share one's opinions and get questioned upon them is a learning experience in and of itself. Further, the opportunities presented by engaging with others can be boundless in talking Ag." – Aaron Lichtenberg, Winnepesaukee Woods Farm

News of this program was disseminated in a press release to media contacts, in multiple NOFA-NH e-newsletters and e-blasts each reaching approximately 3,500 readers per email, via social media posts and ads reaching over 16,000 accounts, and through the local farming and gardening community at farmers markets and via outreach by collaborative groups. NOFA-NH also plans to present information on this program at its virtual Winter Conference in 2022.

We are grateful to Farm Credit Northeast AgEnhancement for helping fund the third phase of this initiative to bring local farmers together to learn from one another and build a strong organic farming community in New Hampshire.

NOFA-NH is seeking funding to continue its “CRAFT of Farming” program and expand into 6 New Hampshire counties in 2022, with the intention of continuing to grow the program in subsequent years. We believe such programs help grow New Hampshire’s agricultural economy and foster the organic community through building farmers’ skills and knowledge and expanding consumers’ awareness of organic food systems. In addition to hosting on-farm events, NOFA-NH aims to facilitate virtual meetings of the CRAFT farmer cohort and virtual workshops on range of topics focused on agricultural justice, land succession and access, entering local markets, and transitioning to organic.

Please visit www.nofanh.org/craft for program information and additional resources.

