

The Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program: An Analysis of Policy Successes and Failures

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Abstract

This study examines the effects of federally-funded agriculture grant programs, specifically the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP). A case study method of analysis was utilized in order to evaluate this policy's effectiveness. It was predicted that the BFRDP was an accessible program that allowed for "collaborative State, tribal, local, or regionally-based network or partnership of public or private entities" to apply for federal funding in order to establish education, training, and mentor programs that would assist beginning farmers and ranchers with the obstacles of starting a farm (e.g. basic farm education, high cost, financial and business planning, marketing, and limited land availability) (USDA, 2011). For the most part, this prediction was supported; however, it was found that applying for a BFRDP grant is a rather complex process, especially for someone who is unfamiliar with grant writing. Moreover, this program is still very new and thus lacks concrete empirical research, mostly due to the use of the USDA's voluntary CRIS (Current Research Information System) reporting method instead of a strict "across the board" verification system. This study draws on data and literature from the United States Department of Agriculture, National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, and various agriculture scholars and journals to provide the public and policy-makers with a better understanding of BFRDP and how programs like this can protect food security.

Keywords: Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP), beginning farmers and ranchers, food security, small farms, and United States Agriculture Department (USDA).

Important Concepts and Definitions

Farmer: a person who owns and works on a farm (land or water used for the raising of animals or crops) or cultivates land. Someone who collects revenue based on success of crop and animal growth.

Rancher: a person who owns, manages, or works on a ranch (an establishment primarily used for raising one type of livestock).

Beginning Farmer or Rancher: “one who has not operated a farm or ranch; or has operated a farm or ranch for not more than 10 years” (Cornell University Law School 2013).

BFRDP: “A competitive grant program administered by the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) that funds education, extension, outreach, and technical assistance initiatives directed at helping beginning farmers and ranchers of all types” (Sureshwaran 2013).

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Introduction

The traditions of farming have become an image of the past. Grandfathers and grandmothers used to pass on family traditions and land to their sons and daughters, allowing them to become their own bosses, stewards of the land, and family providers. With current trends, however, it has become more and more difficult for small family farms to be passed through generations as the price of operating a small farm has become too burdensome. Thus, the sweat, love, and strength that went into herding cattle, planting seeds, harvesting crops, and baling hay are now all swept away with the swift sale of once cherished farm-land. According to Zeigler, a journalist of the *Drake Journal of Agriculture Law*,

Traditional farm families watch their children grow and choose to leave the tradition of farming. Intra-family sales of farmland continue to decline, a poignant fact further sharpened by many farmers' conscious wishes to spare their children the economic distress currently being experienced across rural America.

(2000, 280). The dream essentially shifts from working the earth to sustain one's family, to creating an easy life in a major "booming" city where the economic opportunities are vast. According to Zeigler (2000), "in fact, rural populations continue to decrease at an alarming rate," which creates ambiguity as to who will teach America's youth about farming traditions (280).

According to the National Commission on Small Farms in the 1998 report to the USDA titled "A Time to Act," "small farms have been the foundation of our Nation, rooted in the ideals of Thomas Jefferson and recognized as such in core agriculture policies" (5). That being said, the continuation of small farms and ranches in the United States is one of the most crucial aspects of maintaining a bright future of economic and cultural prosperity—as small farms offer a safe, healthy, and diverse means of ensuring food security.

Since the first English settlers adopted farming methods from their Indian neighbors, farming has been changing in order to expand the scope of crop, dairy, and meat sales. All sales used to be local, until competitive farming was introduced in the nineteenth century (Conkin 2008, 193). Skipping ahead to the twenty-first century and the increase in demand for food, farms have changed immensely in order to keep up with the ever growing population- hence the boom of factory farms and sales overseas, and the bust of small family farms and ranches.

Farm and ranch families only account for 2 percent of the U.S. population, and approximately 21 million people (15 percent of the U.S. workforce) produce and/or sell food (American Farm Bureau Foundation 2012). According to the Environmental Protection Agency, there are approximately 2.2 million farms in the United States (2013). 87 percent of these farms are family-owned, 8 percent are partnership-based, 4 percent are "corporate" farms, and 1 percent are owned by other-cooperative, estates or trusts (EPA 2013). Whereas the high percentage of family farms may appear to be a positive statistic, it should be noted that "family-owned" is not always considered "good" as a family can own a large-corporation farm. Thus, for the purpose of this study, small "traditional" farms (which are a majority of the time family-owned) are the main concern as large family-owned farms push these smaller operations out of business. The USDA classifies family-farms in the following way:

- Very large family farms (101,265) gross over \$500,000
- Large family farms (86,551) gross between \$250,000 and \$500,000
- Small family farms (1,925,799) gross under \$250,000¹

¹ List gathered from: USDA 2010A

The USDA notes, however, that “no classification is ideal, particularly when social factors are involved, but the above typology allows for interesting comparisons across the United States with a focus on the diverse goals and needs of farm families” (USDA 2010A).

The number of farms in the U.S. (2.2 million), moreover, has already significantly dropped since 1935 (6.8 million) by a total of 4.6 million (EPA 2013).

As the number of farmers has declined, the demand for agricultural products has increased. This increased demand has been met (and exceeded) with the aid of large-scale mechanization (the use of large, productive pieces of farm equipment), improved crop varieties, commercial fertilizers, and pesticides. The need for human labor has also declined as evidenced by the increase in agricultural labor efficiency over the past century.

(EPA 2013). It can be assumed, therefore, that the agriculture community is in trouble if corporate farms “take-over,” as they utilize dangerous pesticides, unhealthy hormone and antibiotic injections into livestock, harm the environment with large concentrations of methane gas, and do not support traditional small farm practices.

Most of the U.S. domestic production of food comes from a small number of large farm operations. “The 2007 Ag Census showed that large and very large family farms produced over 63 percent of the value of all products sold, while non-family farms produced approximately 21 percent, and the 1.9 million small farms and ranches (sales under \$250,000) produced approximately 15 percent” (USDA 2010A). These small farms make-up around 48 percent of total farm land, and as “custodians of the bulk of farm assets—including land—small farms have a large role in natural resource and environmental policy” (USDA 2009). This is in contrast to the effects of large farms:

Despite decades of claims to the contrary, industrial farming has not relieved famine or hunger throughout the world. On the contrary, industrial agriculture has fed a culture of over-consumption, particularly in the United States, where large

quantities of food are tossed in the trash while, at the same time, the population is in the throes of an obesity epidemic.

(Sustainable Table 2013).

Furthermore, despite the common belief that large corporation farms are more efficient than small farms, small farms have actually been found to be at least as efficient as large farms, if not more (USDA 1998). There are also lots of hidden costs of large farms that have negative effects on market economies. “An agricultural system characterized by a limited number of large-scale farms does not take into account the loss of market competition when production is concentrated in oligopolistic markets,” which supports the idea that a greater number of dispersed small farms is overall more beneficial than a small number of large farms (USDA 1998). Additionally, small farms offer several benefits that large farms simply cannot supply, including:

1. Diversity—such as with ownership, crops, culture, and landscaping.
2. Preservation of the environment—through responsible management of land (e.g. no pesticides or large concentrations of cattle) and respect of wildlife.
3. Community—farmers who rely on local businesses and services for their needs are more likely to have a stake in the well-being of the community and the well-being of its citizens. Moreover, consumers make a connection as to where their food is coming from.
4. Nurturing and reasonably safe places to raise a family—learn practical trade, children can learn to become comfortable around animals, and farming traditions can be passed through generations.
5. Economic foundations— In many US states, small farms are imperative to the health of the economy (e.g. Virginia).²
6. Preservation of human health— small family farms do not typically “pump” their livestock full of hormones and antibiotics, chemicals that when ingested can cause

² List gathered from: Rosset 1999, 3

humans to become immune to antibiotics. Small family farms also tend to use natural manure fertilizers compared to pesticides.

Thus, even though small farms may appear to be less beneficial than large farms, that is not the case.

Moreover, as farming practices have changed, the expense of maintaining a profitable small farm has increased (as more people turn away from supporting small farms to supporting corporate farms) and farmers have begun to retire at an earlier age with no one to pass their farm to—which results in farmland falling into the hands of large developing agencies. According to American Farmland Trust, “the most recent National Resource Inventory, covering the 25-year period between 1982 and 2007, reveals that more than 23 million acres of America’s agricultural land have been lost to development—an area the size of Indiana” (2012).

The American Farmland Trust also states that “an acre of U.S. farmland goes into development every two minutes,” and “statistics show that less than a third of farms have a designated successor in the family,” which is why a program such as the Beginning Farmers and Ranchers Development Program (BFRDP) is so incredibly important (Toews 2010). BFRDP is a federally-funded program that allows for non-governmental organizations, community based organizations, and academic organizations to apply for a grant to fund a project aimed at assisting beginning farmers and ranchers. Such programs typically offer education, mentoring, training, and hands-on workshops and events in order to increase beginning farmer knowledge and experience. The overall goal of BFRDP is to protect food security by increasing the number of young farmers, who typically end up creating small to medium sized, community, and locally based farms.

The concept of BFRDP was established in the 2002 Farm Bill, but BFRDP only passed with discretionary funding. This meant that in order for BFRDP to get funding, the

Appropriations Committee had to allocate what they saw fit for the program, which ended up being nothing. In 2008, however, BFRDP received “\$75 million mandatory funding, with an additional \$30 million a year authorized for appropriations” (Sureshwaran 2013). Since then, BFRDP has flourished, especially with special funding “for projects serving limited resource and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers, including minority, immigrant, and women farmers and ranchers, and farm workers (25 percent of funding) and community led programs (Witteaman 2009). Moreover, Aimee Witteaman, Executive Director of the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition states:

We have been waiting for this moment for some time and are very excited that the USDA is finally able to award grants to programs aimed at helping the next generation of producers get a start on the land. By providing tools and assistance such as training in business planning and linking new farmers with land, programs funded by the BFRDP promise to help new farmers and ranchers become economically viable land stewards.

(2009). Hence, even though the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program is a fairly new policy provision, the information presented below shows that it has been able to successfully provide many organizations with valuable funding in order to educate, train, and mentor beginning farmers and ranchers.

History of Policy Problem and Past Policies

Review of Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862 and 1880

In order to fully explain the importance of BFRDP, it is imperative to explore the history of federal land grants. The first land grant program was established by Justin Smith Morrill. Morrill was born in Strafford, Vermont in 1810 and was the son of a blacksmith. Not able to afford a formal education, Morrill was self taught, which surprisingly allowed him to become

a well educated man on diverse topics as economics, agriculture, architecture and literature (Cross 1999, 77). Morrill's main life goal was to increase education opportunities for working class families. In 1854, Morrill was elected to Congress, and, with his newly bestowed political influence, he pursued his goal of enhancing the education experience. On February 28, 1856, Congressman Morrill offered a resolution asking the Committee on Agriculture to establish a "Board of Agriculture" and "one or more national agriculture schools upon the basis of the naval and military academies" (Cross 1999, 79). His ideas were rejected, however, because the committee refused to receive the resolution (Cross 1999, 79).

Morrill was not discouraged and continued to fight for education opportunities for the working-class. In an 1858 speech Morrill stated:

We have schools to teach the art of manslaying and make masters of 'deep-throated engines' of war; and shall we not have schools to teach men the way to feed, clothe, and enlighten the great brotherhood of man? Agricultural colleges would not compete with literary colleges since each would serve separate needs. Farmers and "mechanics" needed specialized schools and literature "quite as much as the so-called learned professions." In agricultural colleges, farmers could learn the capability of soils and the benefits of various fertilizers, which grasses produced the best livestock and the most milk, deep plowing and drainage methods, remedies for crop diseases and how to control insects. Tuition would be free, while the sale of crops could help defray expenses.

(Cross 1999, 81).

It took until 1862, however, before Morrill got legislation passed to promote the education of the working class. The Morrill Land Grant Act was signed into law by President Abraham Lincoln on July 2, 1862. This grant provided each state with 30,000 acres of Federal land for each member in their Congressional delegation. The land was then sold by the states and the proceeds used to fund public colleges that focused on agriculture and the mechanical arts. "Although many states squandered the revenue from this endowment, which grew to an

allocation of over 100 million acres, the Morrill land grants laid the foundation for a national system of state colleges and universities” (Library of Congress 2010). Thus, beginning farmer education in the United States for adult and young audiences can be traced back to the introduction of the 1862 and the 1890 Morrill Land Grant Acts (Sureshwaran 2013).

A Brief History of the Farm Bill

After the advent of the Morrill Land Grant Act, the U.S. government did not reach out to American farmers again until after the Great Depression. According to Masterson, “During the Great Depression, most people lived in rural areas, and many families literally risked losing the farm. That's because farmers were producing more food than people were buying, so prices were too low for many to keep up their mortgage payments” (2011). Thus, in an attempt to alleviate poverty in the U.S. as a whole, the government decided to help farmers attack their poverty. In 1933, President Franklin D. Roosevelt established the Agriculture Adjustment Act. “Essentially, the law paid farmers to not grow food on a certain percentage of their land to reduce the market glut. It also called for the government to buy excess grain from farmers, which it could later release on the market if bad weather affected yields” (Masterson 2011).

Five years after the passing of the Agriculture Adjustment Act, Congress turned the law into “permanent” legislation, meaning that the government would produce legislation to help the agriculture based community. Since 1938, therefore, Congress has released a “Farm Bill” every five years. “From 1933 to 1996, the farm bill pretty much ran this way: The government bought and stored massive amounts of grain, controlling its release on the market to prop up prices, and the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture dictated to farmers yearly how much of their land they needed to lie fallow to get paid” (Masterson 2011).

In 1996, the U.S. government decided it was time to let the market dictate farm incomes—because of the high commodity prices that drove farm income to a record \$55 billion in 1996, it seemed like a safe time for the government to “get out of agriculture” (National Center for Policy Analysis 2002). Thus, the Freedom to Farm Act (or the 1996 Farm Bill) was signed into law by President Clinton. The purpose of the 1996 Farm Bill was “intended to gradually move farmers off federal support payments” (Leer 2002). Soon after that, commodity prices began to fall and the government had to step in again. Essentially, Congress decided to backtrack and pursue new farm programs, including the controversial concept of direct payment. Now, regardless of agriculture economic and market conditions, the government will write grain “farmers support checks,” where the “amount of the subsidy is based on farmers’ historical yields and acreage” (Masterson, 2011).

Today, this system is still in place, and the debate regarding support program for farmers continues—especially as the House and Senate are divided on agriculture-related issues. The farm bill was originally designed to ensure that Americans had enough to eat and that our water and soil remained healthy for crop production. Essentially every five years (sometimes more depending on budgeting issues) Congress writes and debates what should be allocated to help farmers. The Farm Bill is omnibus legislation (covers many programs and subjects), which once passed, continues to appropriations—which is where many programs can get cut or not funded (Farm Aid 2010). Moreover, the bill itself is organized by title. The 2008 Farm Bill, called the Food, Conservation and Energy Act, had fifteen titles that covered many different topics (such as agriculture program funding, and energy and environmental conservation). Many new titles are added as the scopes of work become crucial to the agriculture economy (Farm Aid 2010). Thus, no two Farm Bills are the same, as different titles are added and subtracted as needed.

Review of Farm Financial Crisis of the 1980's

After WWII and the passing of the first Farm Bill in 1938, there was a major shift in farming that resulted in a drastic decline in the number of farms (Lobao & Meyer 2001, 107). Specifically, post WWII resulted in the first set of drastic changes in agriculture, such as a heavy focus on domestic production (Agriculture Adjustment Act). Moreover, the New Deal era brought about new changes in technologies and from 1940 to 1980, the farm population declined tenfold (Lobao & Meyer 2001, 107). “The 1980-1990 decade includes the most recent farm crisis...declining real estate values and farm sales relative to their 1980 peak. The increase in both size and number of large farms and decrease in number of smaller farms is accompanied by production polarization” (or division in how food is produced) (Lobao & Meyer 2001, 107).

The seed for the financial crisis was set in the 1970's when institutional and socioeconomic changes took place. The Federal Reserve adopted monetary policy that especially hit the agriculture sector of the economy (e.g. devaluing the dollar and a flexible exchange rate system) (Barnett 2000, 366). Such policies caused complications with managing the economy through monetary policy because the money supply changes could not be reflected in the value of the dollar. These policies, especially the flexible exchange rate, caused the U.S. to depend more heavily on the economies of its trading partners, which is never a good economic plan because if their economies were to crash, so would the U.S. economy (Barnett 2000, 368). Inflation was also a huge problem during this time-period, with inflation rates as high as 11.4 percent in 1974 and 13.5 percent in 1980. Thus, the Federal Reserve decided to restrict the money supply (contractionary monetary policy) in order to combat the high inflation rates (Barnett 2000, 374). By 1986, inflation has fallen to 1.9 percent—which eventually caused interest rates to rise and economic growth to fall (Barnett 2000, 374).

In 1981, President Reagan created the concept of “supply-side” economics, which acted on the premise that by decreasing tax rates the government could stimulate the economy. Along with this came the Economic Recovery Tax Act, which increased the speed at which assets could be depreciated (Barnett 2000, 374). But, Reagan’s expansionary policy was occurring at the same time as the Federal Reserve was practicing contractionary policy—which resulted in increased U.S. debt. Interest rates thus hit the agriculture sector incredibly hard as the rising value of the dollar significantly slowed exports (approximately a 50 percent cut in exports) (Barnett 2000, 375). Nationally, the value of farm assets declined about 300 billion (1981-1987) which caused an immense amount of debt for farmers and the inability to refinance (Barnett 2000, 376).

According to Gorelick, “rural economies in the U.S. also depend heavily on farmers: when 235,000 farms failed during America's mid-1980s farm crisis, 60,000 other rural businesses went down with them” (2000). Moreover, “in just five short years—from 1981 to 1986—an estimated one-quarter of the assessed valuation of America's farmland disappeared” (The Hand That Feeds U.S. 2011). The need of governmental influence to counteract the negative side-effects of these agriculture transitions arose again. Thus, in 1986, Chapter 12 of the Family Farmer Bankruptcy Act was ratified in response to the farm financial crisis (Guru and Horne 2000, 23). According to Shapiro,

Providing a separate bankruptcy avenue for farmers has historical precedent. As part of Congress' legislative response to the Depression, section 75 was added to the Bankruptcy Code in 1933. Its purpose was to permit farmers to rehabilitate via composition or extension agreements with their creditors (1987).

However, this solution to the Farm Crisis did not immediately help farmers as the creditors still held most power over farm plans. If approval was not obtained, moreover, the farmers' options were liquidated. "As a result, one year later subsection (s) was added to section 75 revolutionizing the relationship between farm debtors and creditors" (Shapiro 1987). Thus, farmers were able to begin to rebuild their enterprises.

Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program: The Initial Problem and Solution

The history of beginning farmer educational training can be traced to several previous policies, including the 1992 Agriculture Credit Improvement Act (established a program to financially aid beginning farmers and ranchers and improve the operation of the Farmers Home Administration, and to amend the Farm Credit Act of 1971), the Advisory Committee on Beginning Farmers and Ranchers in 1998 (advises the Secretary of Agriculture on matters affecting beginning farmers and ranchers), and the 2006 Small Farms and Beginning Farmers and Ranchers Regulation Policy (regulation regarding policies affecting small and beginning farmers and ranchers by establishing a framework that would help to ensure their viability) (Ahearn and Newton 2009, 1). Moreover, as the number of Farm Bills continues to increase in the U.S. since 1938, there are several that prove to be especially interesting. For instance, the 2002 Farm Bill, or the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act, introduced the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program.

The Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program was established as a response to an anticipated large decrease in the farmer population. According to Mishra and El-Osta, "The population currently engaged in U.S. agriculture is poised to make a dramatic change - more than

50 percent of current farmers are likely to retire in the next five years” (2007,161). Mishra, Wilson, and Williams continue to add to this fact:

U.S. farmers over age 55 control more than half the farmland, while the number of new farmers replacing them has fallen. For example, the number of farm operators 35 years or younger has declined by 86 percent since the Farm Crisis period, 1982-1987 (Census of Agriculture) and now makes up only 20 percent of farmers and ranchers.

(2009, 161). Additionally, as the cost of operating even a small farm continues to increase, new and young farmers were few in number which led to a call from the farming community for policy initiatives to aid beginning farmers (an initiative led by farmers and non-profit organizations such as National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition). Thus, as previously mentioned, the 2002 Farm Bill included a proposal for beginning farmers titled the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program. As stated the in the 2002 Farm Bill, Section 7405 legislates:

The Secretary [of Agriculture] is to establish a grant program to foster training, education, outreach, and technical assistance for beginning farmers or ranchers. States that such grants shall: (1) be made to a collaborative State, local, tribal, or regionally-based network or partnership of public or private entities; (2) not exceed a three-year term; (3) have a 25 percent matching requirement; and (4) obligate not less than 25 percent of funds for farm workers, and limited resource and socially disadvantaged beginning farmers or ranchers.

(CRS Summary 2002). This initiative, however, never got appropriation funding. According to the Conference Report on H.R. 2646 Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002, there were 64 “yeas” and 35 “nays” on the 2002 Farm Bill overall (CRS 2002). Of those voting “yea” include the bill sponsors, Rep. Larry Combest (TX) and Rep. Charles Stenholm (TX). Another

strong advocate of the 2002 Farm Security and Rural Investment Act and BFRDP was Senator Tom Harkin from Iowa. According to Senator Harkin in the Conference Record of May 7:

The credit title reauthorizes farm money programs. We provide greater access for beginning farmers and ranchers by doing a number of things, such as increasing the percentage that USDA may lend for down-payment loans for beginning farmers and extending the term of those loans. We also take the opportunity to improve a number of the administrative provisions in farm lending programs. There is a very strong rural development title in this farm bill. Rural communities really are part of the backbone of our whole agricultural structure, but they have not fully shared in our Nation's prosperity. For too long they have lagged behind. Rural America needs facilities and services that meet the standards of the 21st century.

(2002). Senator Sam Brownback (KS) also commented in favor of this program:

This bill also addresses a key challenge facing agriculture in the United States: the lack of young and beginning farmers. One of the reasons young people are not going into agriculture today is the difficulty in gaining the credit that is required to start a new farming operation. This bill provides a number of incentives to help young farmers get started.

(2002). Overall, BFRDP was supported in the 2002 Farm Security and Rural Investment Act; however, due to funding availability Senators such as George Voinovich (OH), Susan Collins (ME), and Richard Lugar (IN) opposed BFRDP. According to Senator Voinovich:

According to the most recent numbers from CBO, this bill authorizes at least \$180 billion in mandatory spending over the next 10 years, an \$83 billion increase over existing programs. Increases such as this--an 80 percent spending boost--are irresponsible during times like this and totally ignore that we are at war abroad, trying to strengthen our homeland defense against terrorism and that our economy is in trouble. When you have a situation like this you've got to set priorities and stick to them, even if they force you to make hard choices.

(2002). Thus, even though BFRDP “passed” along with the 2002 Farm Security and Rural Investment Act, this program only received discretionary funding, meaning that once approved this program was turned over to the Appropriations Committee—which never allocated funding. BFRDP, therefore, was politely shoved into the darkness as no mandatory funding was allocated to this program. As Senator Voinovich and many other senators argued, the 2002 Farm Bill was too costly—especially during the beginning of a Middle East war. Programs such as BFRDP, for that reason, were not seen as imperative investments.

Review of 2008 Farm Bill

On June 18, 2008, the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act was passed. The Farm Bill “represents billions of dollars in government expenditures that set the farm, food, and rural policy goals and priorities for the United States. Congress passed the most recent version of the farm bill...authorizing nearly \$300 billion in direct, mandatory spending over the next five years.” (Sureshwaran 2013). But, this bill was an absolute mess. It lacked structure, consistency, viable outcomes, and unhelpful goals. According to Marion Nestle, author of *Utopian Dream: A New Farm Bill: The Farm Bill*,

Favors Big Agriculture over small; pesticides, fertilizers, and genetically modified crops over those raised organically and sustainably; and some regions of the country—notably the South and Midwest—over others. It supports commodity crops grown for animal feed but considers fruits and vegetables to be “specialty” crops deserving only token support. It provides incentives leading to crop overproduction, with enormous consequences for health. The bill does not require farmers to engage in conservation or safety practices.

(2012, 15). One of the only positive results of the 2008 Farm Bill, however, was the Beginning Farmers and Ranchers Development Program.

After the initial failure of the BFRDP funding attempt in 2002, it took until the introduction of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 in order for BFRDP to be successfully funded. Essentially, Section 7410 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 amended Section 7405 of the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002, and made available in 2009 \$18 million to fund BFRDP. The language of the bill reads as follows:

Amends the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 to revise the beginning farmer and rancher development grant program to: (1) establish a \$250,000 per year grant limit; (2) authorize consecutive grants; (3) establish grant criteria; (4) make CCC funds available for FY2009-FY2012; and (5) authorize additional FY2008-FY2012 appropriations.

(CRS Summary 2008). BFRDP most likely passed in 2008 due to strong stakeholder and congressional support, lobbying groups like the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, and available funding. Essentially the goals of BFRDP are to “enhance food security by providing beginning farmer and rancher producers and their families in the U.S. and its territories, with the knowledge, skills and tools needed to make informed decisions for their operations, and enhance their sustainability” (USDA 2011, 6). Furthermore, the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 appropriated \$75 million for FY 2009 to FY 2012 to “develop and offer education, training, outreach and mentoring programs to enhance the sustainability of the next generation of farmers” (Sureshwaran 2013).

Policy Implementation

After the BFRDP was passed in the 2008 Farm Bill, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and department agency National Institute for Food and Agriculture (NIFA) were in charge of moving BFRDP forward. BFRDP was a fairly easy program to implement as the authorizing language for the BFRDP creates a priority for making partnerships and collaborations led by or that include community-based organizations (CBO), non-governmental organizations (NGO), and academic universities/colleges with expertise in new farmer training (NSAC 2009, 3). Thus, the USDA and NIFA are not required to oversee or train employees for the programs that receive the grants. As a result, the USDA and NIFA truly only have to effectively budget, administer grants, create outreach programs for stakeholders, and evaluate the programs; while these are not simple tasks, at least such personnel can focus their attention on the public administration aspect of the program.

According to Rob Hedberg³, Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) Program Director and National Program Leader for Sustainable Agriculture, United States Department of Agriculture:

BFRDP is important because it ensures that we grow the next generation of beginning farmers and ranchers and this program is in the forefront of ensuring that this goal is accomplished. This program is very instrumental in ensuring that beginning farmers and ranchers are provided with the knowledge, skills, and tools needed to make informed decisions for their operations and thus enhance their sustainability.

³ Mr. Hedberg was interviewed via email on March 4, 2013.

(2013). Thus, BFRDP's mechanism for success is that it offers unique opportunities for new and beginning farmers and ranchers to enhance their skill-sets in farm education, business management, production techniques, community building, and marketing, to name a few.

Adam Warthesen⁴, a member of the Land Stewardship Project staff (a non-profit created in 1982 that supports and advocates for sustainable agriculture), also agrees that BFRDP is extremely valuable to the future of agriculture:

This is the only program that specifically supports the training and assistance of BFR. It provides resources to groups to deal with local barriers new farmers face to entry. The program has proven in high demand with 528 applicants over the past 4 years and only 145 grants offered. The collaboration/partnership aspects have been important and the priority on community-based groups or NGO's has been well received and effective. These statutory guidelines provide that program wider use and buy-in from stakeholders.

(2013). Rob Hedberg, furthermore, emphasizes that applying to the BFRDP is not difficult as all information about the program is readily available online. Grant seeking organizations, however, must meet certain eligibility criteria first before applying. The eligibility statement is as follows:

The recipient must be a collaborative, State, tribal, local, or regionally-based network or partnership of public or private entities, which may include: state cooperative extension service; community-based and nongovernmental organization; college or university (including institutions awarding associate degrees); or any other appropriate partner. Others may be eligible to apply.

(Sureshwaran, 2013).According to Juli Obudzinski⁵ at the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC), the BFRDP is very significant as it provides a unique funding pool that would otherwise not exist without the program. BFRDP has provided grants in almost all fifty states as

⁴ Mr. Warthesen was interviewed via email on March 12, 2013.

⁵ Ms. Obudzinski was interview via telephone on February 22, 2013.

well (2013). Essentially, BFRDP awards will be made through a competitive grants process administered the USDA's NIFA agency. Grants will fund three-year projects and budget requests cannot exceed \$250,000 per year. It is important to understand, however, that BFRDP is *not* a program to which individual farmers can apply; the program focuses on the efforts of NGO's, CBO's, and academic organizations to bring beginning farmers together—not to assist individuals looking to start farming (NIFA, 2011). Furthermore, BFRDP has also been able to provide outreach and technical assistance to beginning farmers on one or more of the following topics:

1. Production and management strategies to enhance land stewardship by beginning farmers and ranchers.
2. Business management and decision support strategies that enhance the financial viability of beginning farmers and ranchers.
3. Marketing strategies that enhance the competitiveness of beginning farmers and ranchers.
4. Legal strategies that assist beginning farmers with farm or land acquisition and transfer.
5. Other Priority Topics to enhance competitiveness and sustainability of beginning farmers and ranchers for the next generation.⁶

It should also be noted that there are several types of farmers covered in BRFDP, which is why variety in grant applications is necessary for success. The Virginia Cooperation Extension and other organizations within the agricultural community have also recognized how this program is able to assist a diverse group of farming experiences and backgrounds (Niewolny 2012, 2). These categories of farmers include: “prospective” or explorer farmers (individuals interested in starting a farm or ranch who do not necessarily have a farming background), start-up farmers (farmers in the early stage of their agriculture operation, 1-3 years), re-strategizing

⁶ List retrieved from NIFA, 2011

farmers (farmers who are making changes within their operation after 4-7 years), establishing farmers (farmers who are expanding and stabilizing within 8-10 years), and transitioning farmers (individuals who are family farm members that lack primary operator status) (Niewolny, 2012, 2). Additionally, over the past four years, BFRDP has invested \$70 million or more to expand and reinforce innovative farmer training programs and resources across the country, and has funded 145 projects in 46 states (NSAC 2012).

BFRDP is an annual competitive grant program, which requires NIFA personnel to create a Request for Applications (RFA) through the Federal Register. The RFA is different each year and provides guidance for how BFRDP will be administered and grants awarded. Thus, no year is exactly the same, which can be difficult for those interested in receiving a grant and for those who have to implement BFRDP. This program, therefore, is most difficult to implement during the RFA transitioning period as personnel have to be up to date with grant changes. Moreover, all NIFA BFRDP websites have to be effectively updated with current information which is a very time consuming process.

BFRDP could potentially not receive funding in 2013. Even though the 2008 Farm Bill was extended on New Year's Eve 2012, BFRDP does not currently have newly allocated funding and it is very possible that what happened to BFRDP in 2002 will happen again. This has upset the beginning farmer community, especially the National Young Farmers Coalition. On March 7, 2013, over fifty farmers participated in a Farmer Fly-In, an event organized by the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition.

These farmers essentially swarmed Congress asking representatives to support BFRDP next year—which resulted in over 100 legislative visits over the course of two days (National Young Farmers Coalition, 2013). Legislators were selected for meetings based on their positions

on the House and Senate Agriculture and Appropriations Committees and presented with personal stories and facts about BFRDP (National Young Farmers Coalition, 2013). Overall, most elected officials appeared to support the beginning farmer message: that the government needs to ensure the next generation of farmers and ranchers receive the training and support they need (National Young Farmers Coalition, 2013). But, until that actually happens (which still looks unlikely with the current sequestration) all previously administered grants will be honored by the USDA until their three year grant is over- which for most grant recipients is August 2013.

Policy Evaluation

Policy Evaluation Part One: An Outcomes Synopsis

In order to effectively evaluate BFRDP, it is imperative to understand the scope of this program. The following section, therefore, will take a macro-level analysis approach by outlining FY 2009, 2010, 2011, and 2012 in regards to the accomplishments (and failures) of BFRDP according to the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC), and the Land Stewardship Project (LSP)⁷— all of which offer end of the year outcomes reports on BFRDP. Following this BFRDP outcomes synopsis, four case study evaluations will be conducted based on BFRDP grants.

Fiscal Year 2009- NSAC

NSAC is an “alliance of grassroots organizations that advocates for federal policy reform to advance the sustainability of agriculture, food systems, natural resources, and rural communities” (NSAC, 2013). This organization is a non-governmental organization (funded and supported by other agriculture-related groups such as the Agriculture and Land-Based Training

⁷ Please see Methodology section in the Appendix

Association located in California) that has thoroughly invested its resources in beginning farmer programs for over three decades. “Our investment in the outcome and aim of the BFRDP has been a central plank for our coalition, both getting it authorized and 2002 and getting it funded and off the ground in 2008” (NSAC 2009). Even though NSAC would appear to have biases towards programs like BFRDP, NSAC’s purpose is to support, analyze, and improve such programs—thus, their ultimate goal is to help beginning farmers, not promote government program success.

In 2009, the first RFA was released and resulted in 105 applicants for a BFRDP grant. Out of the 105 applicants, twenty-nine were funded. Of the twenty-nine funded, seventeen (59%) were awarded to universities, colleges and academic institutions, eleven (38%) were awarded to community-based organizations (CBO) or non-governmental organizations (NGO), and one (3%) went to a federal agency (NSAC 2009, 1). Please see TABLE ONE in the appendix to further investigate exact grant cost size. As can be seen in TABLE ONE, larger grants are typically awarded to university/academic based programs—which follows along with the young/beginning farmer education component that BFRDP promotes.

The authorizing language was another component of BFRDP that was analyzed by NSAC. It asked for BFRDP grant recipients to collaborate with other organizations. For example, if a university received a grant, then that specific university should reach out to NGO’s and CBO’s for assistance with their program. On the other hand, if a NGO or CBO received a grant, then they should reach out to a nearby university for program assistance. It was unclear, however, whether or not cooperation ever occurred in 2009. According to NSAC, during “phone interviews and on paper, there was a very broad interpretation of ‘partnerships or collaborations’ by awardees. This left us unable to quantify the merit of these relationships” (2009, 3). It was

also found that CBO's and NGO's were more likely to follow the collaboration clause than universities—which is not necessarily surprising as universities are likely to have more resources available and to have broader support system (e.g. alumni).

NSAC also found inconsistencies within BFRDP recipient's ability to follow the socially disadvantaged clause, which states that 25 percent of the funding that BFRDP has must be put toward use to aid socially disadvantaged farmers, such as women. Most 2009 projects (seventeen out of twenty-nine), however, were “unaware whether they had submitted an application intending or not intending to achieve funding from the 25% set-aside for socially disadvantages farmers and ranchers” (NSAC 2009, 4).

Furthermore, the grants were not regionally distributed equally. Out of the twenty-two states that received grants, the

Midwest received the greatest number of grants while the southeastern U.S. and a block of western states had much lower or absent participation. This compares to total applications, in which the South submitted the second most applications after the North Central region and ahead of the Northeast and West. It is reasonable to conclude that overall proposals from the South did not compete as well as those from other regions.

(NSAC 2009, 4). Thus, not all states were equally given an opportunity to improve beginning farm education by BFRDP for the first year.

Overall, NSAC felt that BFRDP policy implementation could improve regarding grant funding distribution, geographical location, and increasing clarity for programs aimed at the socially disadvantaged. NSAC also recommends that the evaluation criteria becomes stronger and stricter regarding a limit to how much funding goes to university programs as they do not always follow BFRDP protocol. NSAC, however, does support BFRDP and at the end of their 2009 report state that they hope to see BFRDP improve and expand next year.

Fiscal Year 2010- LSP⁸

In February of 2011, the Land Stewardship Project released their report on the BFRDP titled “Progress Report and Recommendations” based on the results of the BFRDP in FY 2010. The LSP is a “nonprofit organization founded in 1982 to foster an ethic of stewardship for farmland, to promote sustainable agriculture and to develop sustainable communities” (LSP 2013). In other words, LSP promotes beginning farmer training, local organization and collaboration of farmers, federal and community based food system development, all of which must be completed in an ethically sound way that promotes protection of farm-land. LSP raises funds for these efforts through donations from religious groups, members, governmental grants, and other foundations and corporations with similar goals. LSP notes in their report that the recommendations made by NSAC in 2009 were integrated into the 2010 RFA created by NIFA.

LSP lists the following changes:

- I. A requirement to clearly identify project partners in the proposed management plan and budget;
- II. A stipulation that only applications with at least 25 percent of the project budget allocated to community based or non-governmental organizations will receive the priority status required by law;
- III. Creation of a new —development grant category;
- IV. Clearer, more specific language related to the minimum 25 percent of funds set-aside for projects targeted to limited resource, socially disadvantaged and immigrant farmers; and,
- V. The addition of multi-year experience in successfully training new farmers as one of the project evaluation criteria⁹

⁸ It should be noted that even though NSAC conducted the BFRDP report for FY 2009, NSAC was not required to conduct a report every year. It can be speculated, therefore, that LSP decided to conduct the report for FY 2010-2012 in order to allow NSAC to complete other advocacy work.

⁹ LSP 2011, 1

LSP mentions, however, that there are still problems occurring with the administration, focus, and delivery of BFRDP grants, such as creating a clear and concise Request for Applications form (LSP 2011, 1).

LSP, like the 2009 NSAC report, highlights the quantitative aspects of BFRDP. For example, in 2012 NIFA received 117 applications for BFRDP as a response to the 2010 RFA. Of the 117 applications, forty were funded for a total of \$18,140,803 (LSP 2011, 2). Furthermore, twenty-five of the forty grants were to CBOs and NGOs compared to fifteen awarded to academic institutions and universities (LSP 2011, 2). Refer to TABLE TWO in the appendix for a summary of grant sizes. TABLE TWO shows that even though NGO and CBOs received a larger number of grants this year, academic and university settings still received more grants in larger amounts.

The LSP report also discusses how effectively BFRDP addressed the issue of collaboration from grant recipients. LSP states that the “2010 RFA made substantial improvements in providing direction to applicants as to what constitutes a partnership or collaboration. This is especially important for those projects not —led by CBO/NGOs but that strive to meet the BFRDP —priority in grantmaking” (LSP 2011, 4). Moreover, the 2010 RFA also addressed the socially disadvantaged clause of the BFRDP policy, which resulted in approximately twenty-four of the forty grants being directed at socially disadvantaged groups. The last issue analyzed by LSP was the geographical distribution of BFRDP grants. TABLE THREE illustrates the numerical aspect of this relationship. In 2010, it appears that the South was able to receive the most grants, which is surprising considering the South was so far behind other regions in 2009. According to LSP, “In terms of grants awarded to CBOs or universities/land grants, the regions saw relatively equitable use of the program, except for the

West where universities/colleges and academic institutions secured 3 times as much funding as did CBOs/NGOs in the region” (2011, 6).

Overall, LSP reports that BFRDP improved as a whole.

These improvements resulted in the better fulfillment of the program priority to fund projects led by or with strong participation from CBOs/NGOs. In our view, this also led to the funding of stronger, more relevant projects. The Evaluation Criteria was also improved in 2010. In general, awardees reported a clearer, more straightforward 2010 RFA compared to the previous year.

(LSP 2011, 6). Thus, it can be concluded that BFRDP policy implementation did improve after the first year of execution; however, there are also still many soft spots that need to be solidified in the next year. The three most important recommendations that LSP makes for further improvement include: (1) achieving CBO and NGO statutory priority by awarding 65 percent of BFRDP grants to CBOs or NGOs; (2) providing advanced notification and outreach regarding when an RFA will be posted; and (3) improving grants.gov and/or the application process as it is difficult to follow (LSP 2011, 8).

Fiscal Year 2011- LSP

In the following year, 2011, LSP again released a progress report about BFRDP. According to NIFA and LSP, in FY 2011, there were 108 applications for BFRDP. Of the 108, thirty-six received funding from BFRDP for a total of \$18,154,513. Twenty-two of the grants (or 61 percent) were led by CBOs or NGOs, thirteen were led by academic institutions and universities, and one grant was led by a trade association (LSP 2011, 2). TABLE FOUR illustrates the grant amount distribution for FY 2011. It can be determined from this table that CBO and NGO recipients still dominate regarding funding allocation. This can also be explored in TABLE FIVE, which offers a historical analysis of grant funding by institution type. CBO and

NGO funding has seen a steady increase as academic institutions experience a slow decline in percentage points. This is surprising considering how one of the first land grant policies, the Morrill Land Grant Act, was aimed towards academic settings.

Regarding the participation and socially disadvantaged clauses, both improved during FY 2011. According to LSP, “The most common type of partnership arrangement was with another NGO/CBO, but also common was a partnership arrangement hybrid of NGO/CBO and universities, colleges or academic institutions” (2011, 5). Furthermore, the projects aimed towards the socially disadvantaged also increased as “seventeen of the projects targeted outreach efforts to socially disadvantaged and limited resource producers. The large majority (15 of 17) focused at least 75% of efforts on those select constituents” (LSP 2011, 6).

Lastly, LSP offers an account of the geographical distribution of BFRDP grants, and in FY 2011 the South was experiencing a lag in grant approval. According to TABLE SIX, the South received only received eight of the thirty-six grants or 22 percent. The South, however, is surprisingly ahead of the Midwest which only received five grants, or 14 percent. The West was the “winner” this year as it received thirteen of the thirty-six grants, or 36 percent.

It can be concluded that the BFRDP program implementation improved during FY 2011 as grant recipients were required to closely follow the grant policy laws, which include partnerships and creating programs that target socially disadvantaged groups. LSP also refers to BFRDP grant recipient’s comments about the flexibility of BFRDP, including its ability to appeal to different contexts, training needs, and production methods. BFRDP recipients did, however, mention that the application process and NIFA review process needed improvement as they were both very burdensome. Overall, however, “increased consistency in the RFAs has provided for a more clear and effective delivery and focus of the program. This has led to the

funding of stronger more relevant projects as well as satisfying many of statutory aims of BFRDP” (LSP 2011, 9).

Fiscal Year 2012- LSP

In the following year, 2012, LSP again released a progress report about BFRDP. According to NIFA and LSP, in FY 2012, there were 109 applications for BFRDP. Of the 109, forty received funding from BFRDP for a total of \$17,886,643. Twenty-six of the grants (or 65 percent) were led by CBOs or NGOs and fourteen were led by academic institutions and universities (LSP 2012, 2-3). See TABLE SEVEN for the historical distribution of grant funding. According to LSP, “this distribution of resources between grant applicant types continues to be an improvement and changing dynamic when compared to 2009 and 2010 when the amount of funding going to university/college or academic institutions was substantially greater than to NGO/CBO’s” (2012, 4). Academic institutions do, however, tend to receive the larger funding amounts. This can be seen in TABLE EIGHT for FY 2012.

Regarding the participation and socially disadvantaged clauses, both can be recorded as improving during FY 2012. LSP found that “most projects included partnerships with one or more NGO/CBO or University partner. Partners represented a wide range or types of organizations” (2012, 6). Moreover, in FY 2012 there were a surprising number of grants that focused on the socially disadvantaged farmers. "Of the forty total awards, thirty-three of the projects targeted outreach efforts to socially disadvantaged and limited resource producers. The large majority (twenty-three of thirty-three) focused at least 75 percent of efforts on those select constituencies” (LSP 2012, 7).

Lastly, LSP offers an account of the geographical distribution of BFRDP grants for FY 2012. During this year, the Midwest received the most grants and share of BFRDP funding while

other regions received almost equal amounts. This is different from FY 2011 as the Midwest received the least. The South, furthermore, received one less grant in FY 2012 than in FY 2011 which places the South and the Northeast receiving 18 percent of grants. See TABLE NINE for a summary of FY 2012 grant distribution.

Overall, many BFRDP grant recipients responded to LSP's reporting survey stating that without BFRDP they would not have been able to do this type of work, such as saving small farms and educating the next generation of farmers. The resources offered were especially important for those who wanted to begin farming. Moreover, the focus on socially disadvantaged groups was seen as a strong point of the program in FY 2012 as it offered such individuals the opportunity to become more professional and knowledgeable in the field of agriculture. Thus, BFRDP policy implementation appeared to overall improve during FY 2012.

Many BFRDP grant recipients, however, are still concerned about the application and review process being too burdensome. According to LSP, one organization felt that "the award process was more challenging than the actual grant-writing process. The correspondence back and forth was really tiring, and I never really understood what they needed" (2012, 10). Nevertheless, over the course of four years, BFRDP has been successful despite a few complaints about the application process. According to Dr. Kim Niewolny¹⁰, a professor at Virginia Tech and Director of the Virginia Beginning Farmer and Rancher Coalition Program (a BFRDP grant product), those who apply for BFRDP are "most likely fluent in grant writing language, thus it is highly unnecessary for such complaints. The process is time-consuming, but the people applying are not farmers, they are staff and faculty at NGOs and universities" (2013).

¹⁰ Dr. Niewolny was interviewed at Virginia Tech on March 1, 2013.

Policy Evaluation Part Two: A Case Study Approach

In this section, four BFRDP grants will be introduced. Typically, BFRDP grants fund three-year programs and require that the grant recipient fill out a CRIS¹¹ report, or a Current Research Information System. CRIS reports allow for NIFA to evaluate the effectiveness of a particular grant and create public record about the outcomes of particular programs.¹² The four programs that will be discussed and evaluated are the: 1) Virginia Beginning Farmer and Rancher Coalition Project, 2) Beginning Sustainability for New and Beginning Women Farmers Through Peer Learning, Mentoring, and Networking, 3) Farmers Growing Farmers: Next Generation Education in Four Learning Stages, and 4) Expanding Local Markets for Rural Farmers and Food Businesses, Buy Fresh Buy Local, North Valley Program. It should be noted that the following programs will either be deemed “successful” or “unsuccessful.” For the purposes of this study, “success” means that the programs successfully implemented the proposed actions/activities.¹³

Case Study One: Beginning Farmer and Rancher Coalition Project

In September of 2010, Virginia Tech created the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Coalition Project (BFRCP) under the guidance of Dr. Kim Niewolny. The overall goal of BFRCP is to “improve opportunities for beginning farmers and ranchers to establish and sustain viable agricultural operations in Virginia through the development and enhancement of whole farm planning programs, online resources, and farmer mentoring networks” (Niewolny 2012, 1).

¹¹ Please see Appendix for an important note about CRIS reports.

¹³ Please see the Methodology section in the Appendix for more information about data evaluation.

Dr. Niewolny decided to start this program in order to attempt to respond to the overwhelming number of individuals who are exiting the agriculture community.

As a result of the increasing number of farmers exiting, the impact on the future of small family farms, the farm economy, and specifically farming communities in Virginia, is potentially very negative. Dr. Niewolny, moreover, claims that Virginia is a unique place as it offers many opportunities for collaboration and community building within the field of agriculture. Thus, through the use of BFRCP, the following outcomes have been created:

- 1) Creation of sustainable educational networks and social support for beginning farmers by developing a Virginia Beginning Farmer Coalition;
- 2) The adoption and implementation of best educational practices, whole farm planning curricula, and guidebook for farm entry in Virginia; and,
- 3) Ongoing participation in virtual and mentoring communities by farmers.¹⁴ It was also predicted that “50 percent of the anticipated participants (300-450) would attempt to become involved in agricultural enterprise, and 20 percent will be operating an enterprise within five years” (Niewolny, Moore, Rudd, Hodges 2010, 1).

The BFRCP is unique in the fact that it has a three-tier approach to expanding opportunities to farmers and ranchers, meaning that project activity will occur at the local, regional, and state levels. Moreover, this project follows a “community-based participatory approach where a coalition of organizations and farmers collaboratively develop and support project activity” (Niewolny, Moore, Rudd, Hodges 2010, 7).

In the first year this program existed, BFRCP hosted three full-day Coalition meetings where 100 beginning farmer stakeholders attended from organizations such as Virginia Tech, Virginia State University, Virginia Cooperative Extension, local, state, and federal government, non-governmental sector, and new and established farmers (Niewolny, Moore, Rudd, Hodges

¹⁴ Niewolny, Moore, Rudd, Hodges 2010, 1

2010, 7). This initial meeting resulted in the BFRCP growing membership to twenty-three beginning farmer organizations. In the second year that this program was in operation, four Coalition conferences were held where 200 stakeholders attended. As a result, membership grew to twenty-six beginning farmer organizations (Niewolny, Moore, Rudd, Hodges 2010, 3). Moreover, there were several helpful activities, including eight farm tours, six consultations, seven webinars, fourteen full or half-day workshops, and thirteen field trainings (to name a few). Dr. Niewolny has also created a website for BFRCP that is very effective and easy to navigate.¹⁵ This website offers a plethora of information about events, conferences, local contacts, information and downloadable brochures, classes, webinars, and newsletters.

Based on the description above and what BFRCP has been able to accomplish in a short period of time, one could declare this project was more effective than not. But, before that conclusion is drawn, it is important to reference the overall goal of BFRDP, which is to increase food security by funding programs that offer the knowledge, skills and tools needed to make informed decisions for farming operations and to enhance overall sustainability.

It is fair to say that this program was successful in creating opportunities for beginning farmers to be educated, mentored, and trained on the different aspects of operating a farm. By creating a coalition (or partnership) with approximately thirty different organizations and stakeholders, BFRCP was not only able to educate beginning farmers and ranchers (95 percent of participants reported that the Coalition is providing suitable education through networking groups, mentoring, face-to-face meetings, webinars, and online resources) but it was able to plant deep roots for continuing the farming dream. For example, nearly 85 percent of participants (54) in the second year of BFRCP Coalition Conference reported plans to start/stay farming and 100

¹⁵ Please visit <http://www.vabeginningfarmer.aee.vt.edu/>.

percent reported new knowledge of extension/other coalition organizations (Niewolny, Moore, Rudd, Hodges 2010, 6). BFRCP was also able to create specific programs geared toward the socially disadvantaged (specifically women, African American, and immigrant farmers comprised 30 percent of participants) to make sure that they were involved in whole farm planning (Niewolny, Moore, Rudd, Hodges 2010, 5).

The one aspect, however, of BFRCP that was not quite as strong as its other components was its CRIS report. Compared to other CRIS reports, it significantly lacked quantitative data on farmer background history, the percentage of participants in certain events, and overall event response. If BFRCP was to improve its evaluation techniques, it would be beneficial for reporting purposes to gather more quantitative data—especially since it approximates that “50 percent of the anticipated participants (300-450) would attempt to become involved in agricultural enterprise, and 20 percent will be operating an enterprise within five years” (Niewolny, Moore, Rudd, Hodges 2010, 1). According to BFRCP’s CRIS report, however, it is unclear if this goal was met—especially since the survey data BFRCP *claimed* they had collected was not presented in their CRIS report.

Synopsis: VA Beginning Farmer and Rancher Coalition Project

Goal(s): To improve opportunities for beginning farmers and ranchers to establish and sustain viable agricultural operations in Virginia through the development and enhancement of whole farm planning programs, online resources, and farmer mentoring networks (Niewolny 2012, 1).

Strategy:

-Three tier approach (local, state, and federal), participatory research methods, and an overall coalition approach.

Events:

-The Virginia Beginning Farmer and Rancher Coalition held conferences in 2010 and 2011 where a survey was released to participants.

-Workshops that focus on sustainable agriculture, marketing strategies, and business and financial planning.

Successful: Yes, in the fact that it has been able to conduct outreach to beginning farmers and bringing farming communities together.

Goal(s) met: Undetermined—the qualitative descriptions were only somewhat helpful. This organization needed to collect more quantitative data in order to secure that their goals were met. Perhaps follow-up interviews of Coalition participants should be conducted. On another note, however, BFRCP did implement the collaboration and socially disadvantaged clauses fairly well.

Case Study Two: Farmers Growing Farmers: Next Generation Education in Four Learning Stages

Another BFRDP funded program that has been successful is the Land Stewardship Project's Farmers Growing Farmers: Next Generation Education in Four Learning Stages, which is located in Minnesota. The LSP has been in existence since 1982 and values stewardship, justice, and democracy. In other words,

the ideal of the Land Stewardship Project is that one day Americans, as a nation, will hold the farmlands of our country in the same high ethical regard we now reserve for our national parks and wilderness areas; and, as individuals, every farm and landowner will strive to leave the land in better condition than when he or she dwelt on it.

(Omaha World Herald 1984). The Farmers Growing Farmers program (FGFP) is unique in the sense that it operates in conjunction with another LSP program called Farm Beginnings. This relationship builds a strong foundation of staff, experience, resources, and opportunities. The director of this program is Amy Bacigalupo and her grant application got approved for a three-year grant (2010-2013) in the amount of \$583,472.

The overall goal of this project is to increase knowledge for at least 1,200 beginning and prospective farmers, including 168 successful farm business start-ups over three years. Land Stewardship Project (LSP) and partners will develop a comprehensive approach to assist

beginning farmers, as they move from exploration to successful farming” (Bacigalupo 2010, 2). Moreover, the long term goal of LSP’s Farm Beginnings program is to increase food security in the region and nationally through the support and training of beginning farmers—and this is being accomplished through FGFP “enhance and improve the delivery of farmer training by piloting new approaches that together with successful existing trainings will provide education and support” (Bacigalupo 2010, 1).

Furthermore, there are three main objectives of this program: 1) provide beginning farmers with new training that moves them from novice to proficient; 2) Increase farm start-up viability through expanded equity building opportunities, training and technical assistance through LSP’s Livestock Loan Program; and, 3) Increase regional understanding, connections, and strategies for land access for beginning farmers and engage established farmers through workshops, educational materials, and a Land Access Toolbox (Bacigalupo 2010, 2). These goals will be met by introducing beginning farmers to experienced farmers through an established, trusted network.

From 2010/09 to 2011/08, FGFP held events such as workshops, field days, and farmer-to-farmer networking, which resulted in the engagement of 330 beginning farmers. Total, however, Farm Beginnings reached out to approximately 630 beginning farmers through farm training, classes, and farmer-to-farmer workshops. The impact of such events can be found in FGFP’s CRIS report. Essentially, at the end of FGFP Farm Beginning’s class, participants were asked to complete a survey asking about their whole-farm planning ability (process for short or long-term decision-making and evaluation that takes the whole farm into consideration (Virginia Beginning Farmer and Rancher Coalition, 2011)¹⁶. Pre-course scores (with a 52 percent response

¹⁶ See Appendix for diagram of the whole-farm planning process, FIGURE A.

rate) range from 1= no knowledge, or 5= highly knowledgeable. Pre-course scores were recorded as a 2.2 and post-course was a 3.9. Thus, from pre-course to post-course, participants experienced a 77.2 percent increase in preparedness in 2010-2011.

The 2010-2011 survey results are lower than those recorded for 2011-2012, which is most likely due to the varying sample sizes (36 participants in 2010-2011, and 25 in 2011-2012). As the survey size was larger in 2010-2011, these results are probably more accurate than the survey results in 2011-2012. In 2011-2012, the pre-course scores were recorded as 2.1 and post course as 4.0. From pre-course to post-course, therefore, participants experienced a 90.4 percent increase in preparedness. These results are most likely skewed because approximately 40 percent of participants in 2011-2012 already managed their own farm, which probably led them to rank their preparedness at a higher than average level. This is in comparison to the 31 percent that managed their own farm in 2010-2011. Farm Beginnings was also able to reach out to an additional 298 participants through their different educational events.

Overall, it can be supported that FGFP has done well implementing their proposed activities and accomplishing their overall goals thus far. Even though this program was not as large of a partnership-effort as the BFRCP at Virginia Tech, it was able to reach out to approximately 900 new farmers, and they still have until August of 2013 to meet their overall goal of 1,200 beginning farmers. Moreover, FGFP was able to improve participant's knowledge and comfortableness with farm planning. Overall, therefore, FGFP was able to satisfy the goal of BFRDP by educating, mentoring, and training beginning farmers through workshops, face-to-face encounters, and class sessions, in order to protect the food security of the United States. It should be noted, however, that the quantitative data that was collected from this organization may be skewed, and thus should be further analyzed.

Synopsis: Farmers Growing Farmers: Next Generation Education in Four Learning Stages

Goal(s):

1. To increase knowledge for at least 1,200 beginning and prospective farmers, including 168 successful farm business start-ups over three years.
2. Long-term goal: To increase food security in the region and nationally through the support and training of beginning farmers

Strategy:

-Pre-course and post-course surveys

Events:

-Workshops, field days, and farmer-to-farmer networking

Successful:

-So far, FGFP has been following set goal paths. But, they still have more time to finish outreach efforts.

Goal(s) met:

-So far, yes, but they could improve collaborative efforts and data collection methods. This program did well in collaborating with other LSP departments (e.g. Farm Beginnings) and establishing trusted farmer networks. However, this program could improve on its community building efforts and create efforts to appeal to the socially disadvantaged groups—as this program does not mention any specific programs for the socially disadvantaged.

Case Study Three: Beginning Sustainability for New and Beginning Women Farmers through Peer Learning, Mentoring, and Networking

Another BFRDP funded program to be analyzed in this study is the Beginning Sustainability for New and Beginning Women Farmers through Peer Learning, Mentoring, and Networking (BSBW), which is located at Pennsylvania State University. This program is unique in the sense that it fulfills one of the requirements of BFRDP, which is that 25 percent of funding must be distributed to support and educate the socially disadvantaged farmers. Thus, as this program targets women, a group that experiences technical and social barriers to success in their farm businesses, BSBW meets this BFRDP requirement. Women, furthermore, have been found to report problems of isolation, such as from other farm networks and information (as women were historically not considered to be “stewards of the land”) (Sachs, Barbercheck, Brasier, and

Hyde 2012, 1). The BSBW program, therefore, established a program that was aimed towards fighting these inequalities.

The overall long-term goal of BSBW “is to improve the sustainability of agriculture and agriculture-related businesses through the development of innovative educational programs and networking opportunities for new and beginning farmers. Our educational programs target women farmers, but will be open to all” BSBW estimated that 300 new and beginning farmers would participate in its educational events and workshops each year. BSBW also predicted that at least “85% of those who attend educational events will increase their knowledge, skills and attitudes and 50% will adopt changes in their business, production, or environmental stewardship” (Sachs, Barbercheck, Brasier, and Hyde 2012, 1). In order to be able to effectively accomplish this and abide by the fact BSBW resides within the socially disadvantaged clause, BSBW will focus on meeting the expressed educational needs of beginning women farmers by creating networks through which beginning women farmers can gain technical information, business collaboration, and social support (Sachs, Barbercheck, Brasier, and Hyde 2012, 2).

Just like the beginning farmers program at Virginia Tech, BSBW has a three-tier model which is divided between the local, state, and federal levels to create networking and educational opportunities, including an annual event with Rodale University. This is important to note as BFRDP grants are evaluated on how well they are able to work with different organizations. Now, BSBW’s funding period from BFRDP has ended; nevertheless, it was able to educate approximately 515 people during BSBW’s field day events and 152 attended the Women in Sustainable Agriculture Conference (Sachs, Barbercheck, Brasier, and Hyde 2012, 3). According to BSBW’s impact report for 2009-2012,

Written evaluations¹⁷ were conducted at each of the field days. We asked questions about improved knowledge, confidence, attitudes, and actions. In terms of improved knowledge, 44% improved their knowledge on three topics, 44% improved their knowledge on two topics, and 7.4% improved their knowledge on 1 topic.

(Sachs, Barbercheck, Brasier, and Hyde 2012, 3). The topics covered were: tractor operation, transition to organic vegetable production, highbush blueberries, and building your own customer base. Thus, it appears as though BSBW was rather successful in improving knowledge and confidence levels of women farmers.

Overall, BSBW was considered successful as it was able to reach out to a significant number of beginning farmers and ranchers in the Northern region of the U.S. BSBW was also able to draw attention to and improve some of the troubles that women farmers must deal with. Even though most women will continue to be feel “inferior” to men when it comes to farming, 80 percent of women participants in the BSBW program reported that they plan to share ideas and interact with one another (Sachs, Barbercheck, Brasier, and Hyde 2012, 3). Furthermore, 44.4 percent of women participants reported that they felt *inspired* to change their farm operation after attending this event (Sachs, Barbercheck, Brasier, and Hyde 2012, 3).

BSBW also partnered with other universities in order to create a larger scope and partake in the partnership clause of BFRDP. Despite the many successes of BSBW, however, it lacked a significant amount of quantitative information. This is a major weakness of BFRDP in general as it appears to not require grant recipients to evaluate their programs in a consistent or quantitative basis- which makes effective evaluation of programs very difficult.

¹⁷ Such evaluations were only performed at the end of each field day. These results are thus not objectively based on pre and post test knowledge.

Synopsis: Beginning Sustainability for New and Beginning Women Farmers through Peer Learning, Mentoring, and Networking

Goal(s): “To improve the sustainability of agriculture and agriculture-related businesses through the development of innovative educational programs and networking opportunities for new and beginning farmers” (Sachs, Barbercheck, Brasier, and Hyde 2012, 2).

Strategy:

-Three-tier approach, and written evaluations were conducted at each of the field days.

Events:

-Annual event with Rodale University, networking and educational events, and field days.

Successful:

-Yes- based on what was reported; however, there were several aspects of this program that could have been reported but were not (e.g. following up with women participants to see if they developed sustainable agriculture planning for their farms).

Goal(s) met:

-Yes- but in order for this to be more strongly supported, more data needs to be collected and added to the CRIS report.

Case Study Four: Expanding Local Markets for Rural Farmers and Food Businesses, Buy Fresh Buy Local, North Valley Program

In September of 2010, the Northern Regional Land Trust applied for and received a BFRDP grant in order to fund a program titled “Expanding Local Markets for Rural Farmers and Food Businesses, Buy Fresh Buy Local, North Valley Program” (BFBLNV). This program received a total of \$49,605 to utilize over a two year period. According to their CRIS report, the Northern Regional Land Trust had several premises that built the base for their program:

First, that rural farm, restaurant, retail and other small businesses require targeted technical assistance and outreach in order to effectively differentiate, direct market, and promote themselves to an increasingly savvy consumer population; and second, that consumer education is an essential component of continuing to expand local food market opportunities, and subsequently, their multiplier effects on the surrounding communities for these

businesses. This is even more critical for beginning farmers and ranchers, as well as those who are socially disadvantaged.

(Watts 2010,2). Essentially, therefore, BFBLNV's overall goals were to target and reach beginning farmers and increase knowledge and awareness about local marketing in their region (Watts 2010, 2). In order to be able to achieve these goals, the BFBLNV project hosted several events, including a kick-off party (that was held at a Buy Fresh Buy Local member's local winery), six face-to-face events, classroom-based workshops, and coordinated with three organizations (Independent Living Services of Northern California (ILSNC), cCHAOS, and the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS)) to conduct targeted outreach (Watts 2010, 3).

In the first year (2010-2011) BFBLNV formed a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), consisting of three county Agricultural Commissioners, two college faculty, the Regional Vice-President of Northern California Farm Credit, the executive director of an economic development agency, UC Cooperative Extension personnel, and other stakeholders in the region, in order to assist beginning farmers and ranchers (Watts 2010, 5). In May 2011, the program gained more publicity by hosting the Buy Fresh Buy Local North Valley (BFBLNV) Local Food Guide kick-off party where a farmer-retailer panel presented on the benefits of marketing food products locally (Watts 2010, 5).

Finally, in 2010-2011 the largest amount of effort went into sending 1,237 survey postcards in order to discover the beginning farmer and rancher needs of the region. The results of the survey revealed that 70% of respondents were currently farming, at least half had less than five years of farming experience, 77 percent wanted to sell through local farmer's markets, and that 50% of were willing to pay and make a time commitment of 4-7 hours per month to participate in workshops (Watts 2010, 7).

One giant flaw in this program, however, was that they did not plan correctly for their targeted audience (beginning farmers and ranchers in the Butte, Glenn, and Tehama County regions of the northern Sacramento Valley). Even though 50 percent of those surveyed were interested in workshops that did not mean that they were committed or that they could have easily accessed the workshops. Furthermore, according to Watts, “BFBLNV is an agricultural marketing program designed for farmers who are currently direct-marketing the products they produce. As a result, we had less new BFBLNV members from the beginning farmer and rancher program than anticipated (as it does not make sense for farmers to participate in the program if they are not yet actively farming) (2010, 4). Another unanticipated outcome was that beginning farmers and ranchers were very hesitant to receive free business consultant services (2010, 4). Moreover, according to the BFBLNV CRIS Impact Report, only six people immersed from the workshops interested in learning more about agriculture marketing services, and only three became members of the BFBLNV. Surveyed guests of BFBLNV workshops (seventy-seven for 2011), nevertheless, did report that:

100 percent felt more knowledgeable as a result of attending the workshops and 88 percent (68 respondents) said the workshops changed their attitude on the subject matter. Seventy-nine percent (58 respondents) said that as a result of the workshops, they would change how they incorporate the topics covered in the workshops into their operations. When asked whether they planned on farming or ranching if they haven't already, 63 percent (48 respondents) said yes.

(Watts 2010, 5). Overall, however, these data points are insignificant as they do not support the overall goals stated by BFBLNV in their application (see Case Study Four Synopsis).

Even though the BFBLNV program had good intentions, it lacked a concrete focus and direction and is considered unsuccessful. The pre-survey was a good concept, especially if this

region had previously lacked beginning farmer programs; however, based on the survey results, this region did not necessarily need this program nor did the farmers want such a program. 70 percent of those surveyed were already farming for at least five years, meaning that they more than likely had a farming plan and a marketing strategy. Furthermore, only 50 percent of those surveyed even showed a desire for beginning farmer workshops- which is a low percentage when such a large and time-consuming investment is required for success (not to mention when one of the program's goals was to increase beginning farmer and rancher knowledge and membership). Thus, unfortunately, BFBLNV is an example of a BFRDP grant that failed to fulfill its goals and assist beginning farmers. It should be noted, furthermore, that BFBLNV's CRIS report was poorly written and data poorly collected. Perhaps if another type of analysis had been conducted, this program would have been a success. But, because of its poor reporting and lack of focus, this program failed to comply with the goals of BFRDP.

Synopsis: Expanding Local Markets for Rural Farmers and Food Businesses, Buy Fresh Buy Local, North Valley Program

Goal(s):

1. Target and reach beginning farmers and ranchers and increase their local, direct marketing and overall sale: An increased presence among BFBLNV members in local farmers markets, grocery stores, and other venues
2. Increase knowledge and awareness of local marketing among beginning farmers and ranchers in our region: An increase in beginning farmers and ranchers in our region by 2%
3. Increase membership in the BFBLNV program among beginning farmers and ranchers: by a minimum of 25%

Strategy:

-Pre and post survey of farming intentions, type of farm, and workshop attendance.

Events:

-Buy Fresh Buy Local North Valley (BFBLNV), Local Food Guide kick-off party was held at a Buy Fresh Buy Local member's local winery.

-Workshops

Successful:

-No, as events and data collection did not line up with overall goals.

Goal(s) met:

-Only goal number two was met with supporting data.

Policy Evaluation Part Three: BFRDP's Overall Accomplishments FY 2010-FY 2011

In order for the evaluation of BFRDP to become complete, it is necessary for the USDA and NIFA's evaluation of BFRDP to be included (which involves outcomes reports from FY 2010 and FY 2011).¹⁸ In FY 2010, NIFA released an outcomes report summarizing what had been accomplished as a result of BFRDP's approval in 2008. According to this report,

More than 5,000 new and potential farmers were counted as participants in BFRDP project training events. Most attended face-to-face workshops or courses, but many also participated in other types of training, including roundtable discussions, hands-on field days, farm internships, and working with mentor farmers.

(USDA 2010 B, 4). This particular outcome is especially exciting for NIFA as one of the overall goals of BFRDP was to train at least 6,000 beginning farmers during FY 2010. Furthermore, about 17 percent of the 5, 339 farmers trained had little or no experience farming, and about 12-16 percent of the 5, 339 farmers fell into the socially disadvantaged category (USDA 2010 B, 5). See TABLES TEN and ELEVEN for further statistical data from FY 2010.

For FY 2011, NIFA released another outcomes report. This report announced that more than 38,000 new and potential farmers participated in BFRDP training programs (USDA 2011, 5). This is another large accomplishment for BFRDP and NIFA as their participation goal for FY 2011 was 25,000 beginning farmers. Another point of pride for BFRDP in FY 2011 was that 85 percent of participants increased their knowledge and skills after attending a training event

¹⁸ Please see Methodology section in the Appendix

(USDA 2011, 7). Please see TABLES TWELVE, THIRTEEN, and FOURTEEN for more quantitative data from FY 2011. TABLE ELEVEN is particularly interesting as it displays the impacts of training initiatives. According to these results, only 26 percent of participants plan to begin farming, which seems a little low compared to the other categories that show scores above 50 percent. This is a great example of why having an across the board method for CRIS reports is so crucial, as the participants mentioned in TABLE ELEVEN could have previously been farmers compared to new farmers; thus, the data could be skewed. If BFRDP is to be improved and continued (assuming that it gets funding this year), therefore, something must be done to improve evaluation methods.

Conclusion and Recommendations for Improvement

The Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program was established in 2002 and finally funded in the 2008 Farm Bill. Since BFRDP was given mandatory five year funding, it has been able to provide resources for agriculture based programs interested in continuing the farming tradition of training, mentoring, and educating the next generation of farmers. BFRDP has also been able to successfully bring attention to the current number of farmers retiring without successors, and to the socially disadvantaged farmers, such as women and minorities. Overall, BFRDP has been widely accepted and embraced by many levels and branches of government, including Congress.

Nevertheless, while BFRDP is extremely helpful in providing education opportunities for beginning farmers and ranchers, it has a very time consuming and onerous application process. It is therefore suggested that the application process be shortened (less paper work for applicants) and the grant award process less burdensome (less paper work for NIFA). Even though the

USDA does not require that BFRDP grant recipients provide verification data (which prevents a lot of follow-up paper work), some of the limitations of the grants in general (such as a three year limitation or the partnership clause) cause some projects extra burdens that could otherwise be avoided and resources put elsewhere. The USDA should also offer grant writing workshops for those who might be new to the process, such as someone in an academic setting who might have superior writing skills, but no experience writing grants. Thus, if prospective applicants were trained in grant writing, NIFA would not have to sort through confusing proposals and the awards process would be able to get started much quicker. The only downfall to grant writing training is that it requires money and certified officials- both of which are difficult for the USDA to provide during current economic times.

From an evaluation perspective, moreover, many changes need to be made in order for the USDA and Congress (as they approve such programs) to be able to see the effect (good or bad) of BFRDP. It can almost be agreed upon across the board that this program is necessary for the preservation of farms and food security; however, if Congress cannot be presented with solid, consistently reported data, funding approval becomes difficult. Thus, even though the USDA does not want BFRDP grantees to feel as though they are being “watched” by the government, perhaps requiring that certain aspects of data collection be completed at the end of training and mentoring programs is not such a terrible idea. After-all, BFRDP grantees, beginning farmers, experienced farmers, and USDA representatives all have the same overall goal- to preserve small farms and protect food security in the United States. If all sides were to collaborate, therefore, BFRDP could improve even more and agriculture practices could soar.

Overall, the BFRDP is a remarkable program that is very unique to all levels of farmers. BFRDP has successfully educated many beginning/young/expanding farmers in farming and

marketing techniques which has allowed the “agriculture burden” to be transferred from the shoulders of those aged fifty-five and older, onto the shoulders of the newly educated thirty-year-olds. With the continuation of programs like this, food security can be preserved and small farms can once again become the backbone of the United States.

Appendix

Methodology

During the policy evaluation of BFRDP, it became increasingly difficult to interpret the data that had been collected by NSAC, LSP, and NIFA. First, it should be acknowledged that NSAC and LSP were not required or “hired” by the USDA to conduct reports on BFRDP. NSAC and LSP are both strong supporters of BFRDP and have the resources (e.g. people, money, technology) to lobby for this policy in Congress. Even though NSAC and LSP may switch on-and-off regarding which organization does the report for a specific year, they both have the same objective: to see BFRDP get another five years of mandatory funding.

Second, it should be noted that due to the poor quality of the CRIS program itself (see below) and the poorly constructed CRIS reports produced by the BFRDP program, it was very difficult to make concrete decisions about whether BFRDP programs were “successful.” As CRIS reports were voluntary, there were many loop holes that programs could jump through to avoid being deemed a failure by NIFA. For example, a program might claim that participants improved their education about sustainable farming methods, but then did not have a pre and post survey to support this “outcome.” Thus, success was based on whether a program was able to (1) clearly state an objective (such as hosting a field-day event once a year), and (B) executing such an activity within the appropriate time frame. Program goals and evaluation methods were also commented on in this study.

Third, in the section titled “Policy Evaluation Part Three,” an overall BFRDP implementation review is conducted utilizing the data collected from the USDA. It is very unclear, however, how and where this data was collected. The USDA is very vague about the number of people surveyed, how the data was aggregated, what the survey questions were, and

how subjects “improved knowledge.” Even though the information collected by the USDA was utilized in this study, please note that there are some “missing links” regarding the quality of this data. As BFRDP has only been in effect for four years, hopefully (after studies such as this one have been conducted) data collection and evaluation methods will improve.

Finally, it should be recognized that just because a program lacks solid data collection or the ability to effectively summarize in a CRIS report, that does not necessarily mean that the program itself was a failure. Thus, a poor evaluation method doesn’t necessarily make for a poor program—it just does not permit for NIFA or anyone else to know whether the program is good (e.g. meets stated goals). The USDA even admits that CRIS reports do not allow for a thorough evaluation to be completed. Nevertheless, a majority of BFRDP do successfully implement the objectives of BFRDP (collaboration, attention to the socially disadvantaged, and promoting food security through beginning farmer education, mentoring, and training).

A Note about CRIS Reports:

It can be supported that a majority of BFRDP funded projects are implementing their described activities and are thus “successful.” However, it should be noted that CRIS Reports are not user friendly as they have a 3,200 character limitation and do not offer much guidance. Moreover, CRIS reports are also very difficult for NIFA and the USDA to evaluate as there is not an “across the board method” to completing a CRIS report. This is because the USDA is required by law to get approval through the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) before data is collected from BFRDP grantees and participants. Thus, NIFA decided not to become burdened with federal paperwork and to just use CRIS reports as an evaluation tool as they already had federal approval. Moreover, BFRDP grantees are not required to complete a CRIS

report, all answers and data reporting is completely voluntary, which makes evaluation of BFRDP even more difficult. Thus, the USDA has set a goal to standardize reporting methods next year by adopting a verification system through federal approval of the OMB (Ritchie, 2013)¹⁹. This verification system would prevent reporting discrepancies and allow for evaluation methods to become more consistent.

Figure A- Whole Farm Planning Diagram (VA BFRCP)



¹⁹ Ms. Ritchie was interviewed via telephone on March 15, 2013.

TABLE ONE²⁰

Dollar range	Number of grants	Total funding per range	Percent of total funding	CBO/NGO compared to Univ/Academic
Up to \$200,000	2	\$225, 515	1.3%	1-1
\$200-\$300,000	1	\$225,079	1.3%	0-1
\$300-\$400,000	1	\$313,278	1.8%	1-0
\$400-\$500,000	1	\$413,820	2.4%	1-0
\$500-\$600,000	10	\$5,415,182	31.5%	4-6
\$600-\$750,000	13	\$9,094,493	52.9%	4-9
Over \$750,000	1	\$1,498,137	8.7%	NA

²⁰ NSAC, 2009, 2

TABLE TWO²¹

Grant size	Number of grants	Total funding per range	Percent of total funding	CBO/NGO.	Academic
Up to \$100,000	4	\$267,829	1.5	4	0
\$100-\$200,000	7	\$973,508	5.4	5	2
\$200-\$300,000	2	\$499,068	2.8	2	0
\$300-\$400,000	5	\$1,761,402	9.7	4	1
\$400-\$500,000	2	\$838,177	4.6	1	1
\$500-\$600,000	5	\$2,828,909	15.6	5	0
\$600-\$750,000	15	\$10,971,910	60.5	4	11

TABLE THREE²²

Region	Number of grant projects	Funding allocated	Percent of grants	Percent of funding
South	12	\$6,371,510	35.1 %	30 %
Midwest	11	\$4,481,096	24.7 %	27 %
West	11	\$4,330,978	23.9 %	27.5 %
Northeast	6	\$2,957,219	16.3 %	15.5 %
Total	40	\$18,140,803	100%	100%

²¹ LSP 2011, 4

²² LSP 2011, 6

TABLE FOUR²³

Dollar range	# of Grants	Total Funding	% of Funding	CBO/NGO compared to Univ/Academic to Trade Associations
Up to \$100,000	4	\$277,582	1.5%	1 to 0
\$100-\$200,000	2	\$252,553	1.4%	2 to 0
\$200-\$300,000	2	\$438,281	2.4%	2 to 0
\$300-\$400,000	2	\$733,924	4.0%	0 to 2
\$400-\$500,000	3	\$1,398,680	7.7%	2 to 1
\$500-\$600,000	6	\$3,295,841	18.2%	3 to 3
\$600-\$700,000	10	\$6,636,360	36.6%	4 to 5 to 1
\$700-\$750,000	7	\$5,121,292	28.2%	5 to 2
Total	36	\$18,154,513	100%	

TABLE FIVE

Historical Distribution of Grant Funding by Institution Type	FY 2011	FY 2010	FY 2009
CBOs/NGOs	54%	50%	34%
Univ/colleges or academic institutions	42%	50%	57%
Trade Associations	4%	-	-
Federal Agencies	-	-	9%

²³ LSP 2011, 4

TABLE SIX

Region	Number of grants	Funding allocation	Percent of grants	Percent of funding
South	8	\$4,415,431	22%	24%
Midwest	5	\$2,900,098	14%	16%
West	13	\$6,881,407	36%	38%
Northeast	10	\$3,957,577	28%	22%
Total	36	\$18,154,513	100%	100%

TABLE SEVEN – Historical Distribution of Grant Funding by Lead Institution Type

Institution Type	FY 2009	FY 2010	FY 2011	FY 2012
CBOs/NGOs	34%	50%	54%	54%
Academic Institutions	57%	50%	42%	46%
Trade Associations	-	-	4%	-
Federal Agencies	9%	-	-	-

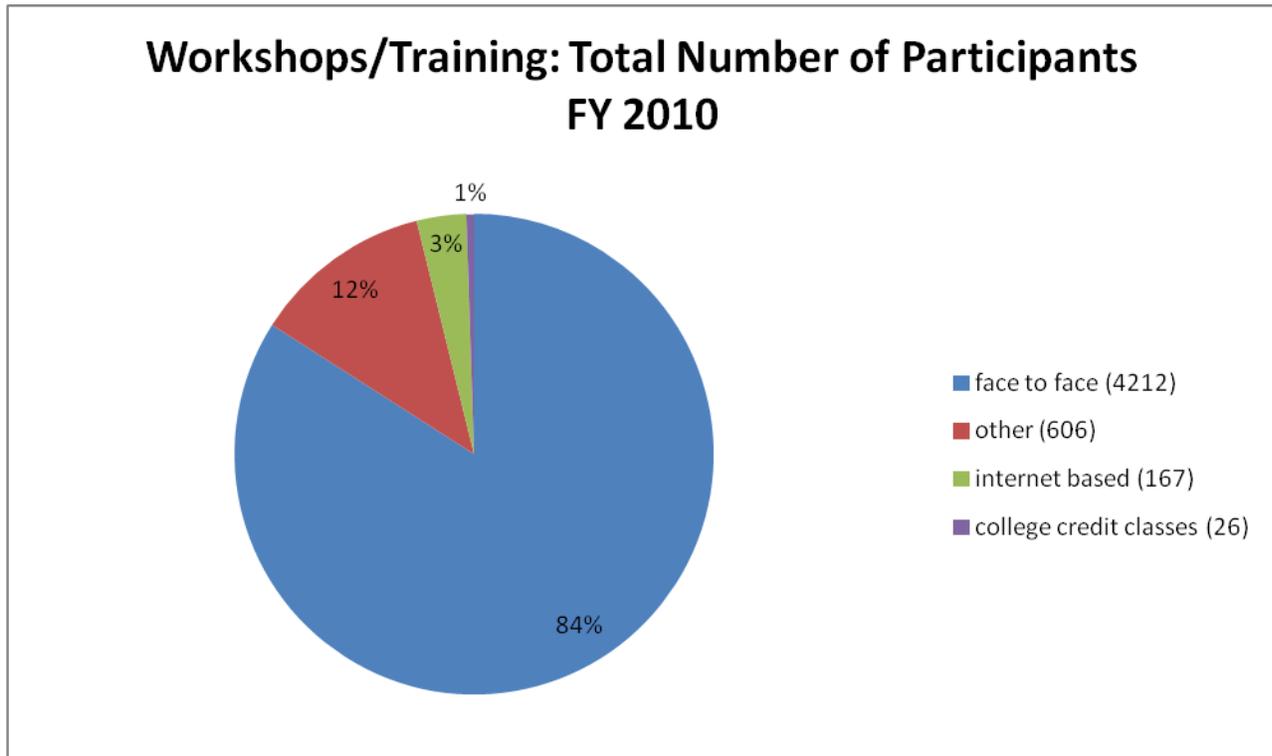
TABLE EIGHT – 2012 Grant Amount Distribution by Range

Dollar Range	Grants	Total Funding	% of Funding	CBO/NGO Compared to Univ/Academic
Up to \$100,000	6	\$373, 862	2.09%	6 to 0
\$100-\$200, 000	2	\$331, 192	1.85%	2 to 0
\$200- \$300,000	0	\$0	0%	0
\$300-\$400, 000	4	\$2, 191, 446	12.25%	5 to 1

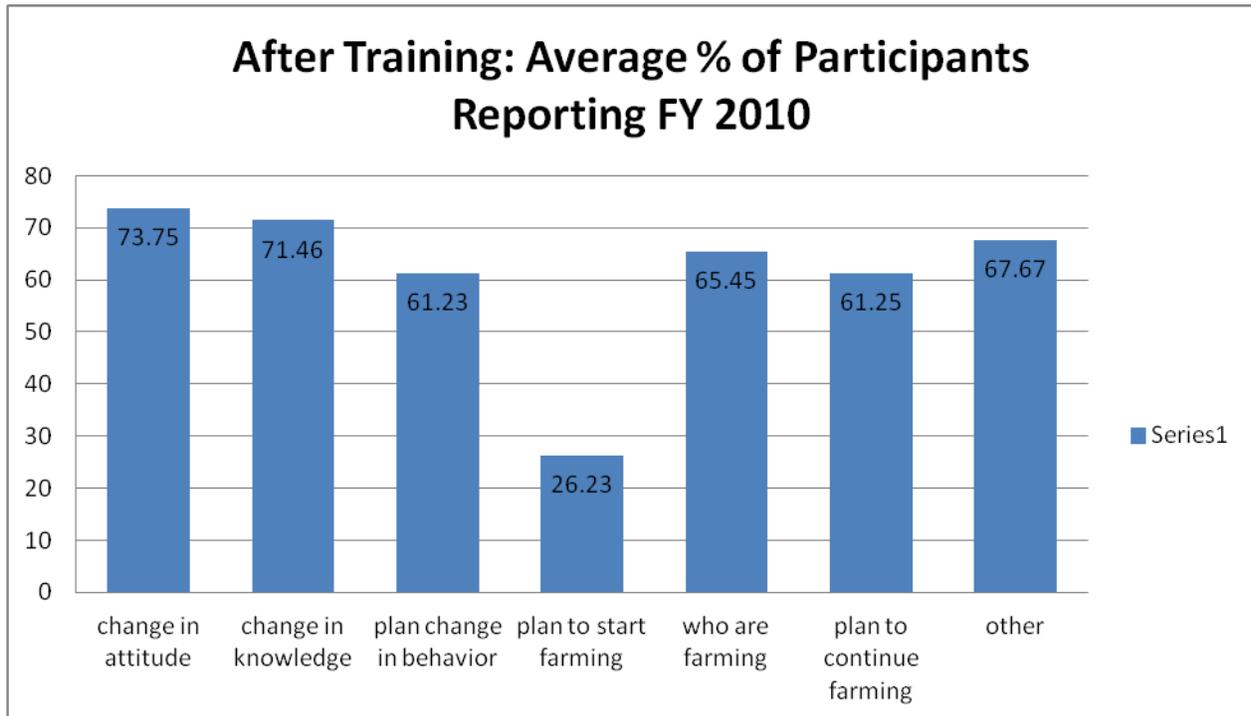
\$400- \$500, 000	4	\$1, 803, 003	10.08%	3 to 1
\$500-\$600,000	13	\$7, 098, 116	39.68%	8 to 5
\$600- \$700,000	8	\$5, 339, 024	29.85%	1 to 7
\$700- \$750,000	1	\$750, 000	4.19%	1 to 0
TOTAL	40	\$17, 886, 643	100%	40

TABLE NINE

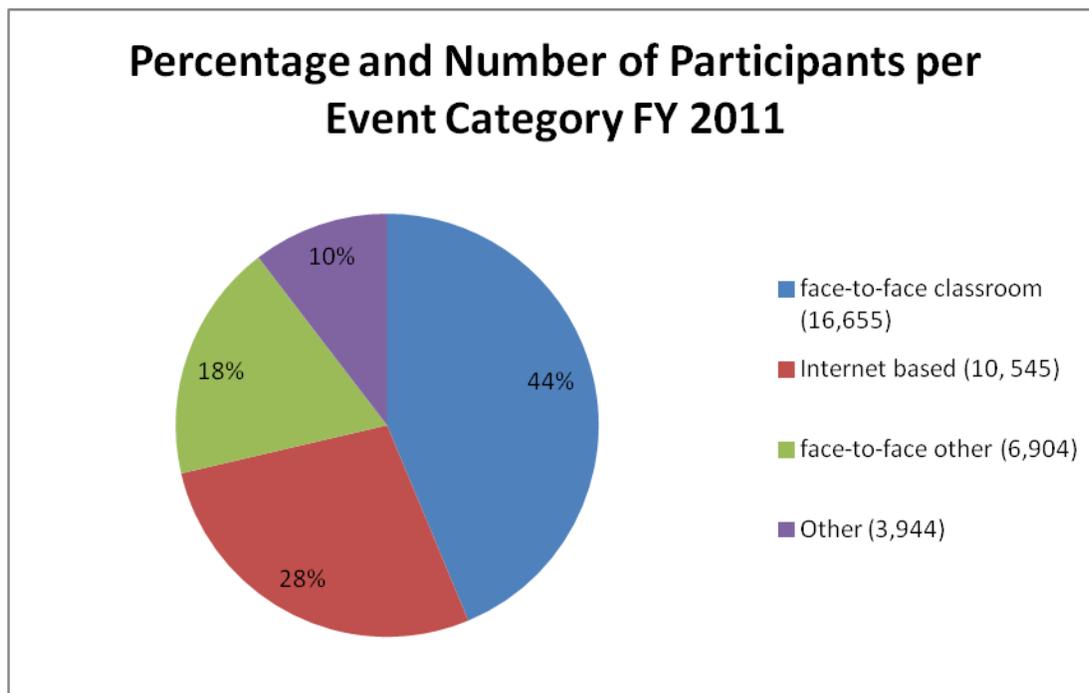
Region	Number of Grants	Funding Allocation	Percent of Grants	Percent of Funding
South	7	\$2, 628, 322	18%	15%
Northeast	7	\$2, 753, 136	18%	15%
West	9	\$4, 761, 228	23%	27%
Midwest	17	\$7, 743, 957	43%	43%
Total	40	\$17, 886, 643	100%	100%

TABLE TEN²⁴

²⁴ USDA, 2010 B Outcomes Report

TABLE ELEVEN²⁵

²⁵ USDA, 2010 B Outcomes Report

TABLE TWELVE²⁶TABLE THIRTEEN: Number of Participants in Each Demographic Category²⁷

Demographic	Number of Participants
Female	6,393
Socially disadvantaged	5,911
Limited Resource	5,203
Currently Farming	4,068
Planning to Farm or Ranch	1,714
Farm Worker	247

²⁶ USDA, 2010 B Outcomes Report²⁷ USDA, 2011 Outcomes Report

TABLE FOURTEEN: Changes in Knowledge, Attitudes, Skills, and Intentions after Training Events²⁸

Change	Participants Reporting	%
Increased their knowledge	8,388	85%
Changed their attitude	3,609	83%
Acquired a new skill after attending training	987	81%
Planned to change their behavior as a result of the training	8, 287	73%
Planned to start a farm after their training	3, 104	45%

²⁸ USDA, 2011 Outcomes Report

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