

DAVIDSON AND SUMNER COUNTIES FARM FUNDAMENTALS

A Hands-on Approach to Educating New and Beginning Farmers

Authors

Shana DeLozier-Los^{1,2} Eryn Bell¹, Andrew Elrod¹

Affiliations

University of Tennessee Extension 1, shana@utk.edu²

Introduction

According to the 2022 USDA Census of Agriculture, Davidson County, Tennessee, has approximately 225 new and beginning farmers. The number of beginning farmers continues to grow as larger farms are subdivided into small-acreage parcels (<15 acres), creating opportunities for small-scale and first-generation producers to enter agriculture.

For this program, a beginning farmer was defined as an individual with 10 or fewer years of farming experience. However, many individuals seeking assistance through Extension programs have little to no prior farming experience but demonstrate a strong interest in learning to farm using sustainable, economically viable practices. As this group grows, we need to provide foundational agricultural education for beginning producers. The Farm Fundamentals program was developed to introduce participants to various farming enterprises while building practical skills in farm business planning, financial statements, and agricultural production practices. The two-day program combined classroom instruction with hands-on learning opportunities, including farm visits with local producers. These visits allowed participants to ask questions, observe real-world operations, and learn directly from farmers about the opportunities and challenges of farming in Middle Tennessee.



Objectives

- The objectives of the Farm Fundamentals program were to:
- Increase participant knowledge of small-scale farming systems and agricultural production practices relevant to Middle Tennessee.
 - Develop foundational farm business skills, including understanding financial statements, enterprise planning, and farm management considerations.
 - Provide hands-on learning opportunities through classroom activities and farm visits that expose participants to real-world farming operations.
 - Connect beginning farmers with local agricultural producers and Extension resources to support future farm development and decision-making.

Methodology

Program Design

The Farmer Fundamentals program was conducted as a two-day educational workshop held on two consecutive Fridays in Davidson County, Tennessee. The program was designed to combine classroom instruction with hands-on learning experiences through visits to local farm operations. A total of 13 participants attended the program.

Educational Topics and Farm Visits

Day One:

Location: Green Door Gourmet

Topics: Agritourism and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farming, farm business management, financial statements, tax considerations, and farm business planning

Farmer Testimonial: Sylvia Gainer, who discussed the opportunities and challenges of agritourism enterprises and strategies for developing and maintaining CSA membership.

Day Two:

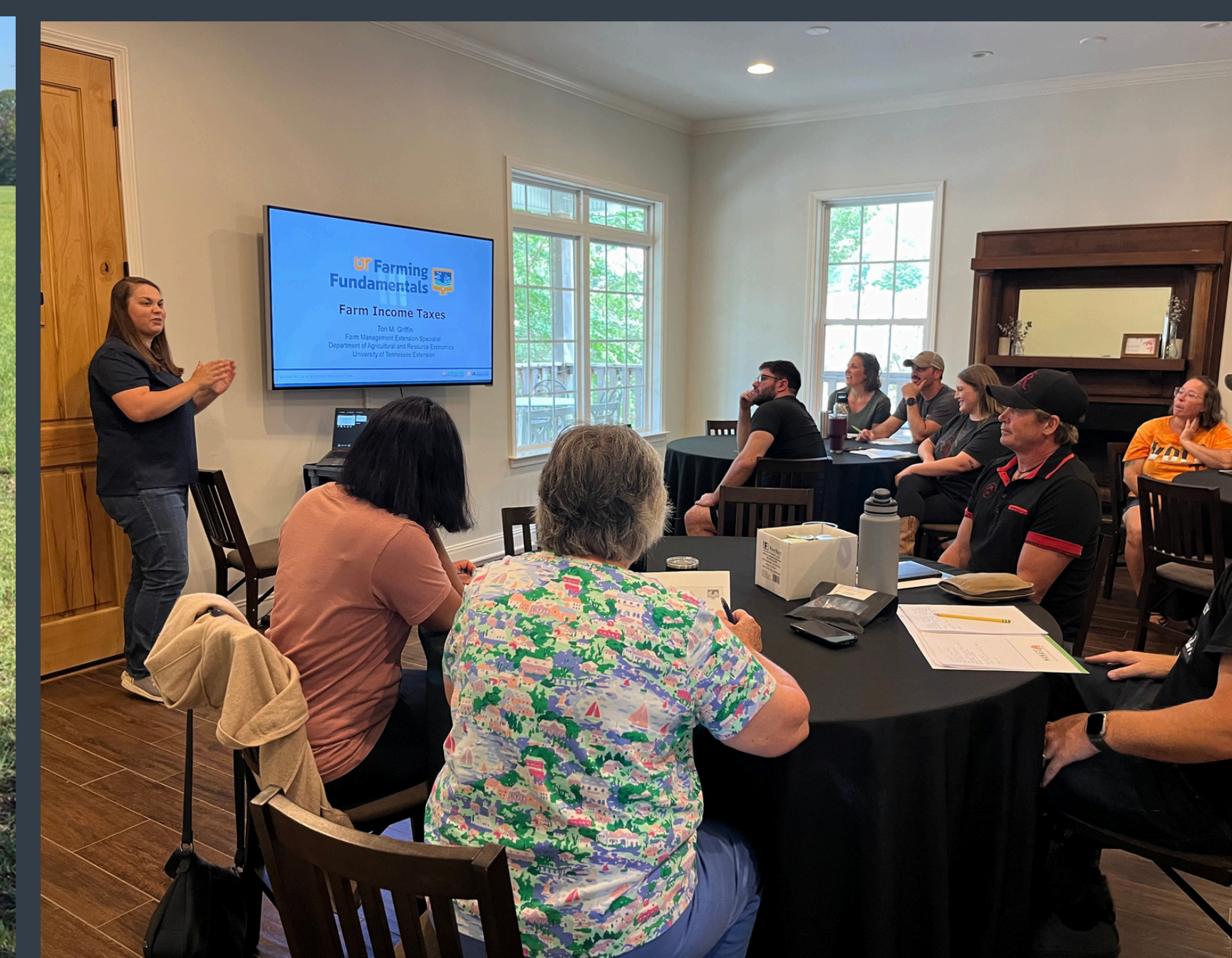
Locations: Strasser Farm, Sumner Extension Office, Bradley Kountry Arces

Topics: Forage management practices, Forage Testing, pasture management, basic beef cattle and small ruminant husbandry practices, soil testing, vegetable and fruit production, and decision-making in crop management.

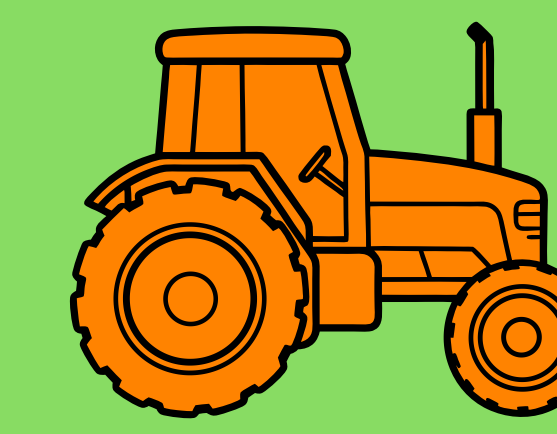
Farmer Testimonials: Bob Strasser discussed the adaptability of farming in rapidly urbanizing areas. Mike and Cathy Bradley discussed current production challenges, including the Bradleys' decision to plant strawberries despite the potential risk of Neopestalotiopsis ("Neo-P"), an emerging and highly aggressive fungal disease affecting strawberry production.

Program Evaluation

Program evaluation was conducted using a post-program survey distributed to participants following completion of the workshop. The survey measured participant satisfaction, knowledge gained, and intended application of information learned. A one-year follow-up survey was also conducted to assess participant progress in implementing farming practices and developing their farm enterprises.



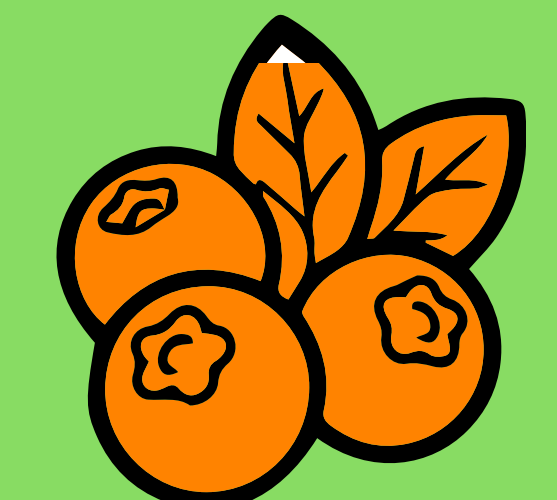
Results



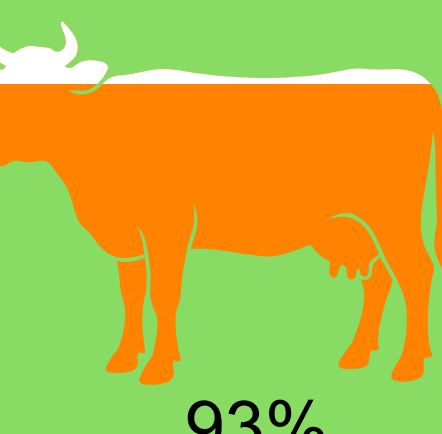
100%
Completion of
program



83% Skill
Adoption



97%
Knowledge
Increase



93%
Recommended
the program to
others

Qualitative Impact: Participants specifically valued the peer-to-peer networking and mentorship from experienced producers. Respondents indicated that hearing "real-world" case studies transitioned their goals from theoretical concepts to attainable, practical first steps for enterprise expansion. These outcomes suggest the hybrid instructional model is an effective pipeline for developing the regional agricultural workforce.

Conclusion

The Farm Fundamentals program demonstrates that integrated educational models—combining classroom instruction, hands-on application, and peer mentoring—effectively equip beginning farmers for success in urbanizing regions.

Key Findings:

- **Knowledge & Skill Adoption:** Participants showed significant gains in business planning, financial management, and production techniques.
- **Network Strength:** Interaction with established producers reduced barriers to entry and fostered the confidence necessary to launch or scale farm enterprises.
- **Systemic Impact:** By connecting new producers with Extension resources, the program reinforces local food systems and promotes sustainable agricultural development amid shifting land-use patterns in Middle Tennessee

Implications for Extension: Continued investment in targeted beginning farmer programming is essential to navigating the transition of large acreage into smaller, diversified tracts.

Key Sources & Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the UT Mangle Team Specialists, Ronnie Barron, and Rebekah Norman for helping deliver educational content. Also, we would like to thank Bradley Kountry Arces, Green Door Gourmet, and Strasser Farms for allowing us to showcase and use their farms to help educate the next generation of farmers.