



GROW LOUISIANA: EMPOWERING LOUISIANA'S NEW AND BEGINNING SUSTAINABLE HORTICULTURE FARMERS

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Introduction

Grow Louisiana is a partnership of academic, cooperative extension, and non-profit personnel that trains new and beginning sustainable horticulture farmers with less than 10 years of experience on small to mid-size farms in Louisiana. State patterns documented the need for a new and beginning farmer training program due to emerging local food system interest across the state, an increase in the number of new and beginning farmers, an increase in urban farming activities, and synergies with local organizations focused on food system development.

The program seeks to assist farmers interested in sustainable agricultural practices and local food systems via a mixed methods approach of classroom sessions, hands-on trainings, field trips, farm visits, and farmer networking.

Program Objectives

Grow Louisiana is the first extension-based, whole farm, year-round training program for horticulture farmers in Louisiana. The program seeks to:

- Provide participants training on sustainable agriculture and business practices through education and experiences that support better decision-making and whole farm plan development.
- Provide participants risk management, marketing, and diversification training to allow for long-term farm sustainability.
- Provide participants formal and informal networking opportunities, information exchange, and mentoring with experienced farmers.

2019 & 2020 Cohorts

- 2019 cohort (New Orleans area, LA). Eighteen urban farmers were selected (12 women and 6 men)
 - Four had established farms & five had immediate access to farmable land
- 2020 cohort (Lafayette, LA). Eighteen peri-urban and rural farmers were selected (13 women and 5 men)
 - Seven were already farming prior to the start of the program

Educational Model



Program Curriculum

Participants engaged in the following activities:

- **Educational Sessions** (spring and fall)
 - Eight-week curriculum offered by extension educators and experienced farmers. Topics 101 in spring; Topics 201 in fall
 - Topics included: vegetable and fruit production, soil management, business planning, marketing
- **Farmer Networking** (summer)
 - Three field days, farm visits
- **Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group (SSAWG) Conference Attendance**
 - 1.5 days vegetable production course
 - Half-day farm tour
 - General conference sessions and networking
- **Assessment:** Quantitative (pre- & post-assessment), qualitative assessment (mid point, end of program)
- **End goal:** Completed farm and business plan addressing the learning areas.



Pre- and Post Assessment – Farm Planning

Statements	2019		2020	
	Mean Pre-	Mean Post-	Mean Pre-	Mean Post-
How would you rate your knowledge about making a Farm Plan? ^a	1.47	2.33***	1.56	1.90
How would you rate your ability to make decisions about making a Farm Plan? ^a	2.07	2.33	1.63	2.2***
How important do you think completing a Farm Plan is? ^b	3.00	2.47***	2.94	2.90
How important do you think a Farm Plan is to the success of your business? ^b	3.00	2.87	2.81	2.80
Perceived need of writing/updating a Business Plan ^a	1.53	2.87***	1.50	1.90

Notes: Statements vary by knowledge, ability, and importance. Results are based on completed responses.

^a Scale used: 1-low, 2-medium, 3-very high

^b Scale used: 1-not important, 2-somewhat important, 3-very important.

T-test significant at the 1% (***), 5% (**), and 10% (*) level, respectively

Program Impact 2019 & 2020

- The pre-assessment identified needs in farm planning and business planning. Business plan completion
 - 2019 cohort: Pre-program (#2), Post-program (#12)
 - 2020 cohort: Pre-program (#1), Post-program (#9)
- Upon attending field days/farm visits (2019 cohort):
 - 86% felt more competent/comfortable with farming.
 - 82% improved their technical knowledge of farming.
 - 73% identified resources/next steps that will help them reach their personal goals and improve their farm/business
- Comments of 2019 & 2020 cohort on business planning
 - “Before the program, I did not realize how much went into creating a business/farm plan”
 - “...great at building a plan and idea around what I want to do”
 - “...decision making, focused vision, and putting those into action”
 - “good business plan...good management skills”
- Inaugural cohort needs assessment led to the improvement of curriculum for the 2020 and 2021 cohorts.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank Catherine Carmichael, Pennington Biomedical Research Center. The authors acknowledge support from U.S. Department of Agriculture National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) grant (Award # 2018-70017-28597).