



# The TSU East Tennessee New Farmer Academy

A program designed to support beginning farmers, retirees and veterans as they explore agricultural opportunities and enterprises.

Jennifer W. Goodrich—TSU Agricultural Extension Agent II & County Director  
UT-TSU Extension Morgan County jgoodr11@tnstate.edu



**What:** The E TN NFA program is the Eastern branch of TSU’s Tennessee New Farmer Academy Program that was originally developed by TSU’s Finis Stribling in Middle TN.

**Why:** East TN is experiencing exponential growth into our rural areas bringing many beginning farmers with lots of ideas and excitement, but limited agricultural experience into our agricultural families. The need for a program that addressed what extension is, what opportunities are available in our area, the rules surrounding safe and legal agricultural production and sales, equipment usage and farm safety was, and is, a significant need.

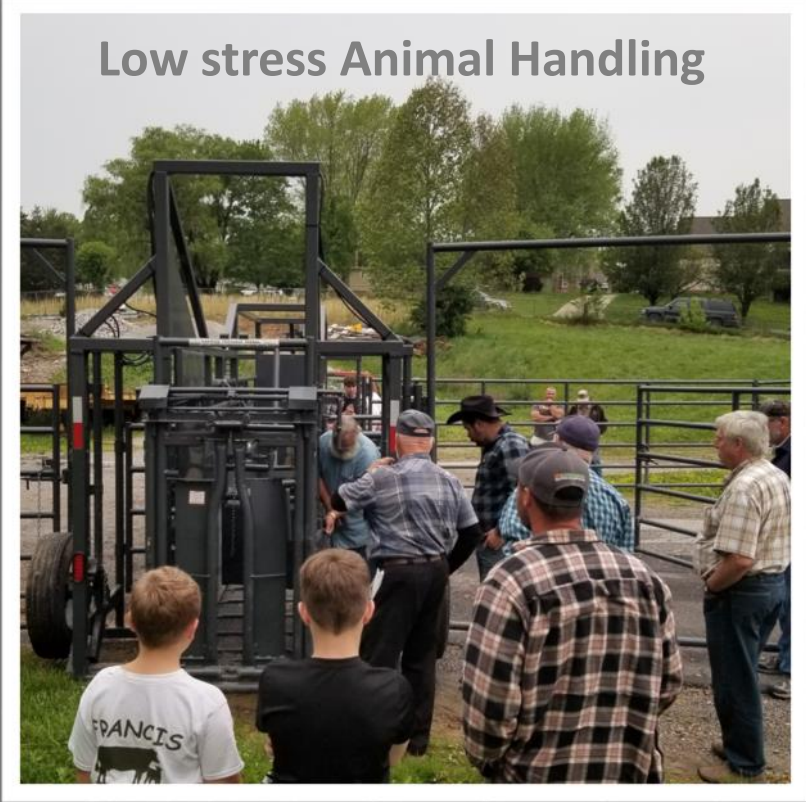
**Pedagogy:** The E TN NFA program is an 8 month program that focuses on teaching concepts, providing research based information and facilitating the hands on experiences and connections necessary to build solid, viable agricultural businesses in East TN. This series is intentionally designed with kinesthetic, visual, logical and social learning styles in mind to best achieve learner understanding for this group of learners.

**Resources Used to facilitate learning:**

- PowerPoint guided presentations paired with an informal, open classroom atmosphere
- Handouts: including fact sheets, research data, SARE publications, commodity budgets
- Field Trips & Field Days focusing on hands on learning as a part of every session
- Intentional unstructured time for questions and relationship building
- Guest involvement in classes (NRCS, Cattlemens’ Assn., USDA, TDA, etc.)
- Check in emails, calls & surveys with participants & one on one site/farm visits

**Program Topics include:**

- Goal Setting, Business Plans and Farm Management
- Forages and Weed Control
- Livestock Production and Equine Enterprises
- Fruit and Vegetable Production
- Timber and Forest Management
- Value Added Agriculture, Marketing and Agri-tourism
- Pollinators and Niche Crops
- Farm Equipment, Maintenance and Safety
- AgrAbility Programs —continuing to farm with disabilities
- Emerging Technologies— how they can be used on a small farm
- Other topics as requested (mushrooms, vineyards, hops production etc.)



**Impacts:** We survey participants at the end of each session, and at the end of each series to discover what they found to be the most impactful. We also follow up with participants post graduation to support them with their expanding enterprises. These one on one visits let us individualize instruction and also facilitate introductions to their county Extension agents to encourage them to build that local circle of support.

**By the numbers—from follow up interactions and surveys**

- 67 participants successfully completed all 8 sessions of the E TN NFA series
- 40 have expanded their livestock operations
- 12 have implemented value added enterprises
- 18 have built greenhouses / cold frames to extend their growing seasons
- 36 have worked with NRCS on conservation projects on their farms
- 17 received TN Dept. of Ag Grants
- 2 received a Farmer Veteran Coalition Grant
- 2 have built very successful non traditional Agribusinesses
- Many shared that they have joined their local Agricultural organizations including Farm Bureau, local Cattlemens Assns. & TN Farmer Veteran Coalition

**What we learned during the process that has helped us continue to improve:**

- 1.The down time in the instructional day is critical for these participants to form the relationships and connections that strengthen their agricultural enterprises in the future. This is especially significant for the veteran population
2. “Keeping it real” and providing enterprise budgets and site tours with producers who share the positives and the challenges of various enterprises helps participants set some realistic informed production goals.
3. Partnerships are essential. Specialists from our Extension family, local, state and federal governmental organizations, county or regionally based commodity groups and associations, all help portray the whole picture of agriculture in our region.
4. Location —you don’t need a super fancy location—this group is happy on the farm, in an old tobacco barn, or covered arena. Where ever they can see the real life practice in action and have some hands on interaction.
5. Handouts and reference material are critical for this audience. We discovered that sending material that they can read prior to the class when I send the itinerary and directions each month was well received and well utilized. This group also likes supplemental material and information about where they can continue their education about the individual enterprises following the class sessions.