Facilitating Farmer Adoption of Climate Resilience Plans

Risk to Resiliency Pilot Cohort

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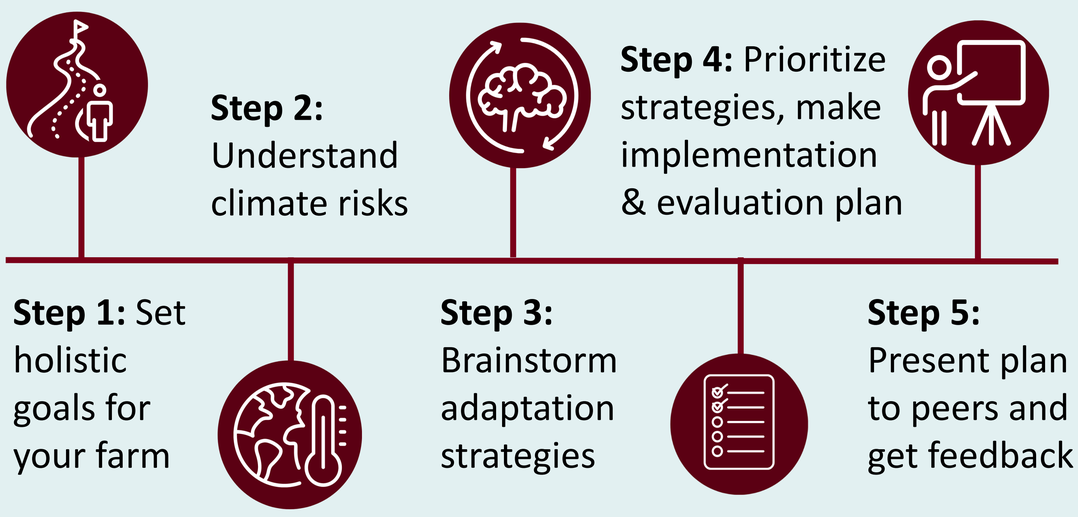
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA EXTENSION

Planning for Climate Resilience

While climate change can feel like an overwhelmingly complex problem, Extension programs can provide approachable guidance to help farmers plan for resilience.

UMN Extension partnered with The Land Stewardship Project to host a pilot program to support farmers in developing comprehensive climate resilience plans. Laura Lengnick (Risk to Resilience LLC), author of the USDA's Adaptation Resources for Agriculture Guide facilitated the program. We followed a five-step process:



- The cohort of 12 farms met 5 times over 10 weeks
- Target audience: diversified fruit and vegetable farmers
- We used a mix of lecture, small group discussion, peer consultation, and individual work to foster a collaborative environment and peer-to-peer learning.

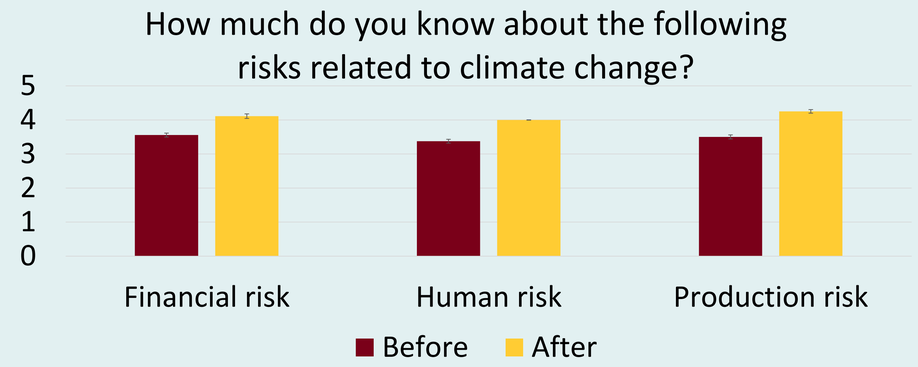
Peer learning circle. Photo: Brian DeVore, LSP

Traditional risk management frameworks tend to highlight natural and physical solutions. Growers were prompted to think more broadly, drawing from five types of resources:

- **Natural:** soil health, crop rotation, water resources
- **Human:** employee training, worker safety & pay
- **Social:** neighbor relationships, community involvement, community resilience planning
- **Physical**: infrastructure, equipment, technology
- **Financial:** holistic planning, grants, incentives, insurance

Outcomes

12 farms made climate resilience plans. Participants improved their knowledge of risk management. They shared that after finishing the program, climate change felt less overwhelming, and they identified new solutions they had not considered before the program.



We followed up with participants one year later. They had already made the following changes:

- Using more cover crops
- Talking about climate change with customers
- Installing solar panels and generators
- Joining community organizations
- Improving employee training, morale, and involvement in decision-making processes
- Changing marketing strategies to minimize risk
- Leveraging NRCS funding to update irrigation

Cohorts 1 (2022) and 2 (2023) at a climate retreat in January 2023. Photo: Brian DeVore, LSP

Takeaways

3 key takeaway from our core team of facilitators:

1. Climate change impacts are often overwhelming, leading to decision paralysis. Understanding and prioritizing risks can help growers begin to implement solutions.
2. Specific tools like irrigation will help us adapt, but our approaches must be broader, more comprehensive, and community focused.
3. Cohort models help us to think more creatively and communally while providing a network of support.

LAND STEWARDSHIP PROJECT