

So, You Want to Farm in Maine?

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Abstract

Current farmers thinking about changing farm enterprises and new farmers interested in starting a farm may lack the skill, knowledge and confidence to investigate their options to start, adapt, and maintain a profitable land-based business. Major issues farmers and potential farmers need to overcome include access to capital, understanding of rules and regulations affecting agriculture operations, and marketing options.

To enhance the business management knowledge, skills, and confidence of new and established farmers, UMaine Extension developed the "So, You Want to Farm in Maine" (SYWTFIM) series. Since 2015, 224 people have participated through face-to-face, video-linked, webinar, live-streamed, Zoom, and archived sessions.

Participants representing part-time farmers, full-time farmers, and prospective farmers attended to learn about agriculture enterprise selection, business planning, record keeping, market research, regulations, and resource identification.

Knowledge change was assessed by a post program evaluation. The 32 participants (13%) who completed an evaluation, reported the following knowledge and understanding gains:

- 73% learned more about setting goals, risks, and land potential.
- 73% learned more about insurance and farm financing.
- 69% learned more about the importance of developing a business plan and the items a farm business plan should include.
- 69% learned more market research techniques that they could implement to refine the knowledge of markets for their agriculture products.

Overall, participants increased their understanding of the 20 major topics presented by 68%. Farm Service Agency provided \$2.7 million in farm direct loans as a result of Maine farmers attending this approved borrower training.

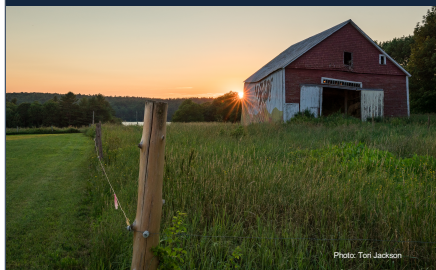


Photo: Tom Jackson

Objectives:

Equip current farmers and those who want to farm with knowledge and skills to start, adapt and maintain a profitable land-based business. Participants will:

- Feel more confident starting a farm-based business
- Develop a business plan
- Learn how Cooperative Extension and other agencies can assist them
- Learn how to market their products

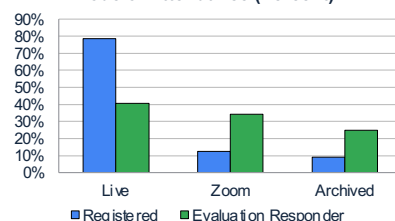
Methods:

- Five weekly sessions
 - Four Instructional
 - One on one farm plan review
- Course text & website
- Speakers
 - Extension staff,
 - Ag Service Providers,
 - Farmers
- Meeting modes:
 - Live on site,
 - Live by Zoom,
 - Archived recordings

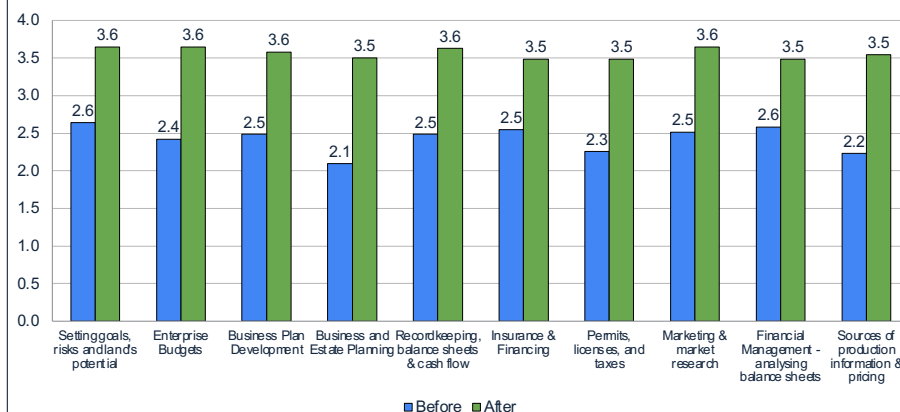
Increased Level of Confidence (Percent of People)



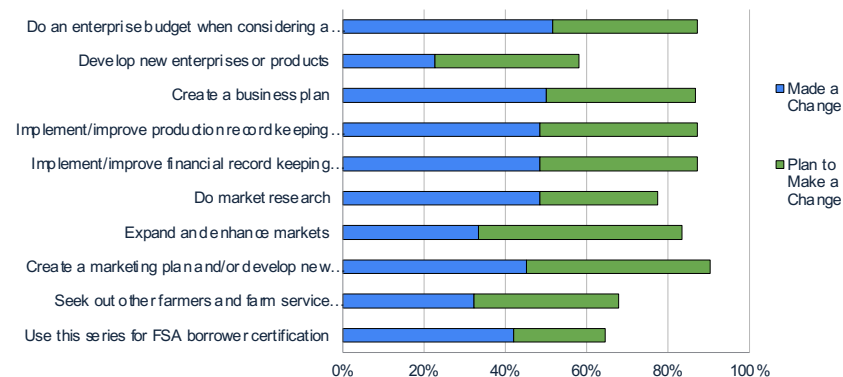
Mode of Attendance (Percent)



Level of Understanding Before and After the Program



Practices Implemented or Planned to Be Implemented As a Result of the Program



Impacts

This workshop series provided valuable training for people to successfully pursue farming as a viable career option. It also introduced UMaine Extension programming to people who had not availed themselves of these educational opportunities.

As a result of completing the training Farm Service Agency provided \$2.7 million in farm loans to participants.

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