



Journal of Food Distribution Research
Volume 53, Issue 1, pp. 7–8

Research Update: “Growing” Sustainable Horticulture Farmers

Marcus A. Coleman^a, Maria Bampasidou^b[ⓧ], and Carl E. Motsenbocker^c

*^aExtension Associate and Director, Grow Louisiana Program,
104 Sturgis Hall, Louisiana State University Agricultural Center,
Baton Rouge, LA 70803, USA*

*^bAssistant Professor, Department of Agricultural Economics and Agribusiness,
234 Martin Woodin Hall, Louisiana State University Agricultural Center,
Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70803, USA*

*^cProfessor of Horticulture and Sustainable Agriculture,
104 Sturgis Hall, Louisiana State University Agricultural Center,
Baton Rouge, LA 70803, USA*

Various extension programs across the country offer educational and practical opportunities for new and beginning farmers. In recent years, Louisiana has experienced a boom in horticultural farm businesses managed by new and beginning farmers. Though access to land and credit are often cited as two primary challenges that new and beginning farmers face, access to market channels and business management skills are also key to building sustainable farm businesses. Moreover, strong social networks where new and beginning farmers can freely exchange ideas, network, share resources, and provide trainings are essential to the development of new and beginning farmers.

This research focuses primarily on horticulture farmers’ perceptions of business management skills and risk management. We used data collected as a part of the evaluation program for the Grow Louisiana Beginning Farmer Training Program (Grow Louisiana), an extension program offered by the Louisiana State University Agricultural Center. Grow Louisiana is a partnership of academic, cooperative extension, and nonprofit organizations to train fruit and vegetable farmers with less than 10 years of experience on small to mid-size farms in Louisiana. Focused on the southeastern region of Louisiana, the program emphasizes sustainable agricultural practices and local food systems. The year-long program offers participants training in whole-farm planning and risk management based on the following principles: (i) sustainable agriculture and business practices, (ii) resource optimization, (iii) objective decision making, and (iv) efficient work

[ⓧ]Corresponding author:

Tel: (225) 578-2367

Email: MBampasidou@agcenter.lsu.edu

practices. The program trained 16 farmers per year and apart from educational training, promotes networking and mentoring among farmers across the state.

This study used a mixed methods approach to analyze program evaluation data from the 3-year program (2018-2021). The first year the program was offered in person, the second year moved to a hybrid model when measures were taken to address participant safety due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the third year was completed mostly online. Data were collected pre- and post-program through needs assessments, interviews, and focus groups with participants. Findings add to existing literature and highlight the importance of business and marketing planning in the development and training of new and beginning farmers. Moreover, the study provides useful information for extension practices considering the variety of methods of delivery by year (i.e., in person, hybrid, online).

Keywords: business management, horticulture producers, marketing, producer perceptions, Louisiana

Acknowledgment

This research update is based upon work that is supported by the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, U.S. Department of Agriculture (Award # 2018-70017-28597).