

Growing Success : Sustainable Farmers Adapting to and

Overcoming Barriers

Madelynn Longley

Advisors: Troy Knight and Diane Veale-Jones



Introduction:

Agriculture is one of the crucial backbones to human existence. The centuries of land cultivation contributes to the evolution of a global society meanwhile it enables civilization to develop into the diverse and expansive capital it has today. Economic cycles, government interventions, and technological advancements have altered the agricultural practices and have standardized a conventional agriculture system that dominates today. Despite the maximized yield benefits this system provides, soil and water pollution as well as extreme resource depletion have come into the foreground of consumers. This newfound awareness and increasing pressure from environmentalists have placed the need for a new agriculture infrastructure system. A new breed of farmers are at the forefront revolutionizing farm practices to be more sustainable and to provide consumers with local and environmentally-friendly produce. However, many of these aspiring farmers encounter barriers too large to overcome due to the dominating conventional agriculture system in place. These barriers range from capital availability; minimal agriculture experience; and a lack of a market support. In order for these new breed of farmers to be successful they must learn to utilize numerous resources to aid in their route to prosperity.

Methods:

For my research, I investigated several primary sources as well as interviewed five sustainable farmers to:

- Explain the changes to the agriculture system since the 1900s by analyzing the major economic events that have supported conventional agriculture.
- Explain conventional agriculture and its advantage and disadvantages
- Explain the sustainable agriculture movement.
- Put a face to the barriers that can prevent success in the agriculture sector.
- Offer solutions and create a model for success for future aspiring farmers.

Sources: "Natural Resources Conservation Service." Programs. Accessed December 01, 2015. <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/>.
 "Journey person Course - Land Stewardship Project." Land Stewardship Project RSS. Accessed December 01, 2015. <http://landstewardshipproject.org/morefarmers/lspjourneypersonfarmtrainingcourse>. "World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms: Linking Volunteers with Organic Farms and Growers." World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms. Accessed December 01, 2015. <http://www.woof.net/>.
 "Renewing the Countryside." Renewing the Countryside. Accessed December 01, 2015. <http://www.renewingthecountryside.org/>



Lisa, Farm Owner and Manager of Bakers' Acres

Barrier: Lack of Capital

Solution: Used grants and different incentives that NCRS offered to grow and expand her farm.

"Without having easily accessible grants Incentivizing beginning farmers to return to the land, I never would have been able to take the risk to start farming and begin on a path toward success."

Chris, Farm Owner and Manager of Great Oak Farm

Barrier: Lack of Financial and Business Management Skills

Solution: The Journey Person Mentorship Program gives farmers a financial and business mentor to help him establish a business plan for his farm.

"If you are going to be a sustainable farmer, then you need to be able to sustain."



Liz and Curtis, Farm Owners and Managers of Dancing the Land Farm

Barrier: Lack of Experience

Solution: Found opportunities on WOOFING website and worked as apprentices for 7 years in CA. Now host apprentices at their farm as a way to pass down the tradition orally. "We get the benefit of passing on our knowledge, which is important because we were apprentices and that is how we learned"

Jim, Farm Owner and Manager of Dancing Bears Farm

Barrier: Lack of Market Growth

Solution: Established relationships over time and seek out markets with the assistance of Renewing the Country Side.

"People can only eat so many vegetables, It takes a lot of time to find avenues to sell through"



Routes to Overcoming Barriers:

Resource	How It Works
NCRS Financial Assistance	Programs offer financial assistance to improve resource conditions and conservation practices
Journey person Mentorship Program	Through Land Stewardship Program, this mentorship program offers advanced farm business planning, mentorship, guidance on balancing farm, family, and personal needs, and a matched savings account. Participants will find ways to make their farms truly and deeply successful.
WWOOFING	World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms links people who want to volunteer on organic farms or smallholdings with people who are looking for volunteer help.
Renewing the Country Side	Builds awareness and support for sustainable endeavors, connects people interested in sustainable rural development to each other, provides practical assistance and networking opportunities for those working to improve rural America, and foster con-

Conclusion:

My thesis' focus is to analyze the barriers that prevent success in aspiring farmers. By interviewing and sharing successful farmers' stories, I am able to offer references or personal testimonies for future aspiring farmers. With the conclusion of my research, I have realized that there is no one-size-fits-all roadmap to becoming a successful farmer in the twenty-first century. Although the barriers that farmers encounter overlap, the paths that farmers take to overcome these barriers seem to differ dramatically case by case. There are a number of regional as well as international resources that can provide aid to overcoming these barriers especially in the realms of capital availability; agricultural experience; and lack of market support. Within each of the interviews I conducted, I discovered that sustainable farmers share similar qualities. These qualities include: adaptability, eagerness to learn, and post-secondary education. To conclude, rather than finding a direct and one size-fits-all route to success, I have discovered successful sustainable farmers poses themselves as goal oriented in providing society with bountiful, yet sustainable harvests each year end.