
Certified Farm Seeker Program Report

Summative Evaluation Report

Evaluation conducted spring 2016



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report describes the summative evaluation findings for The Certified Farm Seeker (CFS) Program survey in Spring 2016. The CFS team sought to understand perceptions, attitudes, and participation of prior and current participants in the CFS program. Started in 2012, the CFS program is designed to provide individuals seeking arming opportunities with the tools needed to successfully demonstrate their farming commitment and vision to interested landowners using curricula to help aide in knowledge acquisition.

This report describes findings in both quantitative and qualitative forms from the Qualtrics survey (N=33). The delivery of the survey was smooth with assistance from the CFS staff for dissemination of the instrument. The instrument was sent to 130 prior participants with two email requests returned. The evaluation team for VBFRC worked closely with the CFS team to develop and pilot the instrument. The dissemination process followed the Dillman method, distributing the instrument a total of three times.

Qualitative data is presented verbatim with minimal spelling and grammar changes for readability.

Recommendations include: 1) streamlining the program offerings, 2) emphasize cost-share component of the program; 3) consider deadlines for program completion; 4) continue or increase integrating coalition and coalition partner resources into the programming process where possible; 5) working to update and improve the database, and 6) continue working on large policy changes, or conversation about policy, with other stakeholders to improve the access of land available to new and beginning farmers.

Next steps: Follow up interviews with volunteer participants

INTRODUCTION

This evaluation report describes the evaluation team's data collection and findings from the summative evaluation of the implementation of a survey instrument to the prior and current participants of the CFS program.

The principal goal of the CFS program is to provide individuals seeking arming opportunities with the tools needed to successfully demonstrate their farming commitment and vision to interested landowners using curricula to help aide in knowledge acquisition.

Working with the CFS team during Fall/Winter 2015/2016, an instrument was developed and piloted using the VBFRC evaluation questions as a guide. The CFS program is an integral part of the VBFRC and warranted its' own instrument due to the nature of the program and request by the stakeholders involved.

This report is presented in three sections: program knowledge, services CFS offers, and demographic data. Quantitative and qualitative data are presented together to most accurately represent the data collected and to inform one another.

METHODS

We adopted a descriptive survey methodology to glean information about the perceptions and attitudes of the CFS program from a participant's point of view. This was a one-time interaction using the Dillman method to distribute the survey instrument over a three-week time period using an IRB approved protocol and in cooperation with staff from CFS. Descriptive studies are usually the best method for collecting information that will demonstrate the relationship and describe it as it exists to the question being answered. This type of survey is often conducted to capture a baseline of knowledge.

Working with the CFS team during Fall/Winter 2015/2016, an instrument was developed and piloted using the VBFRCP evaluation questions as a guide. The CFS program is an integral part of the VBFRCP and warranted its' own instrument due to the nature of the program and request by the stakeholders involved (See Appendix 1).

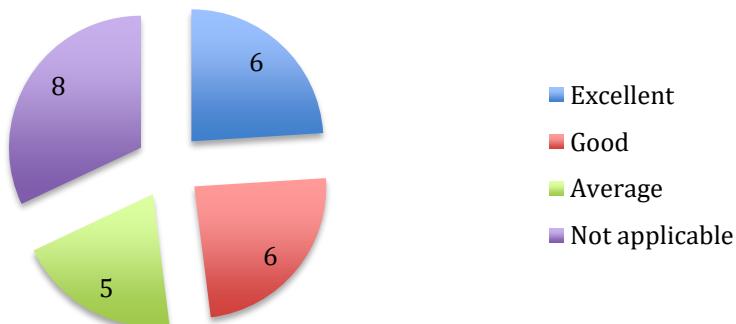
ANALYSIS

Data analysis took place in parallel format with Qualtrics. Qualitative data is reported verbatim with minimal editing. Quantitative data was aggregated using Qualtrics and appropriate graphics were made to best communicate the questions in the instrument.

Program Knowledge



Curriculum (modules) you worked through



Responses=25

What potential barriers do you think participants might encounter that would hinder their program completion?

- Locating a farm that wants to work with them.
- They need that interaction with the staff person.
- Time and encouragement at a local level to get into farming.
- Financial and finding a mentor for their specific program goal. The mentoring is not as robust as I had hoped. Older farmers need to realize they are vital to the success of the program, and need to be encouraged to participate.
- It seems like a huge commitment for someone that is trying to farm full-time like me. I might recommend compressing any educational programs into the months of January and February
- Lack of initial funding
- Not understanding what the program offers.
- Participants limiting themselves, not the program itself.
- Writing a plan
- The cumbersome paper work, not user friendly!

1. Access to diverse role models and developing cross-culturally relevant networking opportunities: I was unable to fully realize the goals of networking opportunities due to the perception that the goals of the program were unobtainable in my State for women of color unattainable. 2. The concept of succession planning is articulated in a way that focuses on transferring knowledge, not the social inclusion facets of land ownership, rural communities, and thus the described "pathway" to farming ownership is less than culturally relevant for

individuals with based on race, ethnicity. 3. The method, or strategies for addressing the historical harm of exclusion of minorities from land ownership was not clearly articulated.

What aspects of Certified Farm Seeker program were most helpful to you?

- \$500 helped on closing costs on our farm
- The one-on-one help of Stephanie Kitchens
- Making a business plan
- The email news updates to let us know of impacts, changes, and opportunities for participants.
- Just the website that enabled me to put myself out there in the search for a property.
- Just knowing about it
- Creating an overall view of the farm I wish to create.
- Cost Share, Access to information
- The knowledge and coaching
- Listings
- They were not helpful. I tried to enroll to help locate and acquire land. Absolutely horrible process. I finally gave up due to the fact that the process was too long and cumbersome. I have since located two properties on my own and purchased them.
- I like the farm-planning template.
- Not many. I found that the Certified Farm Seeker program was for people starting from scratch, rather than those that had already done a fair amount of business planning for their farm. We ended up buying our own property that did not fulfill our farm business plans, because the Farm Seeker program database was less than helpful
- After you write your farm plan you can see on paper what threshold you need to break even, buy equipment, or expand. Also helps see where you are most profitable per acre.
- Writing a business plan and mentoring.
- I decided to hold off until I was better prepared.

Services CFS Offers

Were you aware of the CFS cost share opportunity for 75% of the cost up to...

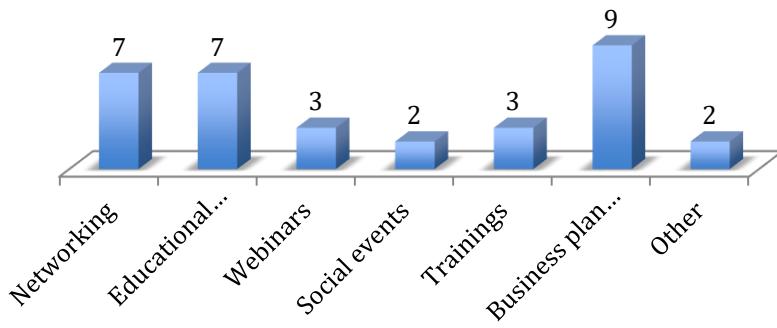


Responses=25

If you were aware of the cost share opportunity and have not used it, can you please share why you have not taken advantage of it?

- No need yet
- Have not found a farming operation to transition into
- I am not at that point yet
- Wanted to do an AI class, don't believe it applies
- I did all the planning myself and did not have any cost.
- Life challenges and finding a farm to transition into in my area.

Which resources has the Certified Farm Seeker program helped you reach related to the Virginia Beginning Farmer and Rancher Coalition Program?



Responses=13

What services could the Certified Farm Seeker program offer to increase your participation?

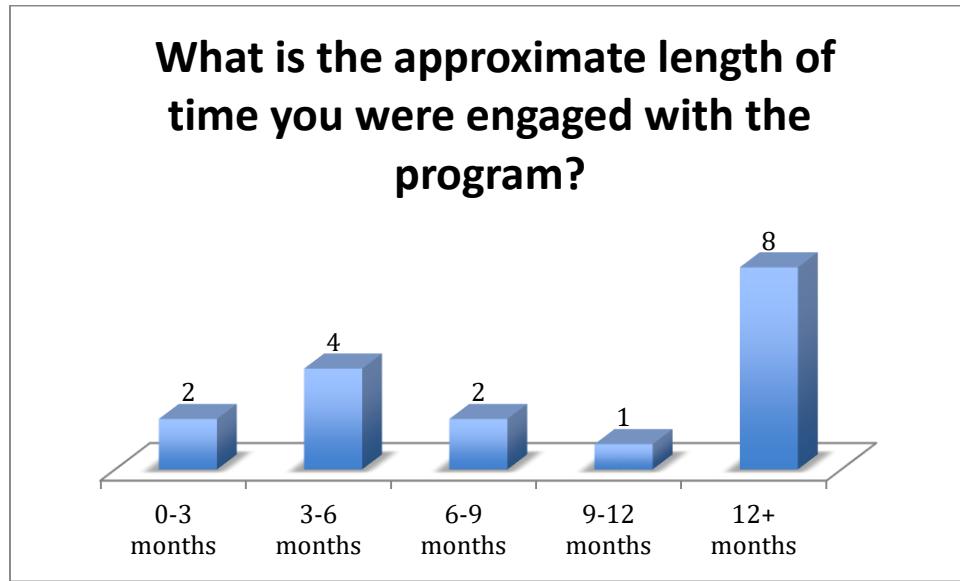
- More cost share programs
- More landowners
- More localized workshops in south side Virginia
- Reaching out to community to find others who would support Community Supported Agriculture in the media through interviews and programs designed to bring these valuable assets to the attention of the shopping public. Strong support of local Farmers Markets, CSAs, etc., is vital for the financial viability of young farmers.
- Possibly some kind of mentor ship program what access to someone for phone conversation.
- Send e-mails with names of potential farmers interested in land and farming opportunities
- Interaction with landowners in specific geographical regions
- Maybe more opportunity for hands on training
- Communication
- They could make it easier to be involved.

- Specific strategies for urban / rural cultural connections
- More social events to meet landowners in person.
- More networking with existing farmers
- More help finding land.

If there is anything you'd like to share regarding your participation in the Certified Farm Seeker program, please enter it below.

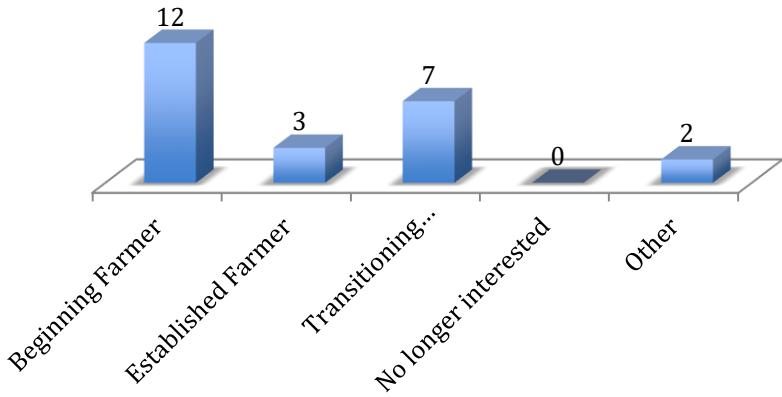
- Thanks for the \$500 for closing on my last 40 acres
- You really need a dedicated individual that will really chase down any possible leads on landowners and is familiar enough with the participants to make the potential matches
- I really love the program wish more retiring farmers would get on board for the next generation
- I am a father of 3 boys. I got divorced in 2008. After 3 layoffs from corporate banking in the eight years I decided to pursue a passion of my youth, organic farming.
- This program helps, it allows for one more leg up in making entry into this difficult field.
- One of your employees met me to view a property and it was great.
- Make the paper work less cumbersome. Actually show some results. Last time I talked to anyone with CFS they hadn't seen land transactions due to the program.
- Still interested
- It's a good program; it's just hard to find land for young farmers.
- Very pleased
- Thanks for having programs to help new farmers.

Demographic Data



Responses=17

What category(ies) do you feel as though you identify with?



Responses=18

Would you please share what motivates your decision either to continue to pursue farming or not to farm?

- It's been a family thing for years. My wife and I are raising our son (and little girl that's on the way) on the farm and would love to grow the businesses. We have 18 Black Angus cattle and a Black Angus Bull but want to reach 30 plus cattle with in the next year. We cannot meet this goal if we do not locate more land.
- Insanity
- It is my passion second only to my faith and my family it is all I have ever wanted to do but I have been told my whole life you can't do that so I guess I let that deter me to throughout my younger years.
- If my husband had lived, we would be farming by now, I am certain. I cannot participate as a farmer on my own. However, I will continue to support local and regional farming through my shopping choices.
- I love working outdoors. I love interacting with the general public at the farmers markets. I love working with chefs and collaborating on ideas of ways to use my crops and their recipes. The biggest problem I see is that traffic at the farmers market is down. Another problem is they allow resellers to bring produce from a wholesaler. That's ridiculous and defeats the whole purpose of a true farmers market. I love growing Pure Clean Food for People. Many of my customers have food allergies and concerns about GMOs and chemical fertilizers pesticides and herbicides. I love the beauty of nature and Marvel at the Wonders I witness on a daily basis. I love to grow heirlooms and save seed. I'm half Italian and started out focused on Italian heirlooms. Now I'm doing heirlooms from all over the world. I think companies like Monsanto suck. I don't believe in GMOs or the use of Roundup. I'm also opposed to sustainable Farmers using the black plastic to control weed pressure. I think if they want to be truly sustainable they shouldn't use that stuff because it ends up in the

landfill. I wish I could get a bio diesel tractor. My ultimate motivation is whether or not I can earn a living farming. I don't want to work a job so I can farm. So this year I have to prove the business model. That is the crux of the matter. If I can make enough money to pay my bills and save a little I will continue farming for the rest of my life.

- Age forcing transitioning out of farming/agriculture
- Overall love for farming continues to drive me to success.
- In my opinion, there is a great need for more fresh food in many areas on this country. There would probably be healthier children, fewer incidents of diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease. People would probably live longer and be happier into their golden years if stores were more responsible in offering a better choice of fresh fruits and vegetables
- Lifestyle. Bringing new calves into the world. Wholesome people.
- Money, asset acquisition, family quality of life
- I see a future as an entrepreneur and food production as an opportunity for meaningful investment in human sustainability.
- Farming is what I want to do. It's the lifestyle I want to live and raise a family in. I enjoy seeing things grow and providing my own food. I will continue my search for a farm.
- It is my life's dream since as far back as I can remember.

FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

In this section, we briefly summarize notable findings and provide recommendations for aspects of the CFS program that directly relate to the data collected. These recommendations are organized under three headings: program knowledge, services CFS offers, and demographics.

◊ Program knowledge

-Focus program components-participants reported positive comments on the curriculum, the staff, and their interactions with the CFS program. Leveraging these resources and finding new or adaptable ways to modify may be useful to the program.

-Capitalize on database awareness and desire-continue to build and increase awareness of the database for farm seekers and farm sellers. Consider how the database can be expanded to include renting, leasing, renting to own, or other types of succession planning partnerships that may exist.

◊ Services CFS offers

-Purposefully market the incentivized portions of the CFS program-CFS offers an invaluable service but many people reported being disappointed due to their expectations not being met or unaware of programs that existed. CFS should consider marketing the program as a whole, but also the incentivized portions of the program. Half of the participants were unaware that CFS had a monetary incentive.

-Tell their stories-many participants shared anecdotes of their time and experience with the program, both positive and negative. Use these stories as information but also reach out for programming purposes. Participants will share more if you ask them and have positive rapport.

◊ **Demographic**

-Look for partnerships-established participants may be willing to serve in more capacity with the CFS program through mentoring, speaking, or other opportunities. New or beginning farmers might want to hear and have access to a broader network of people who went through the same or similar experience.

Appendix 1 – Survey Instrument

Certified Farm Seeker

Q6 The Certified Farm Seeker Program was created and funded in partnership with the Virginia Beginning Farmer & Rancher Coalition Program (VBFRC). The long-term goal of the VBFRC is to improve opportunities for beginning farmers and ranchers to establish and sustain viable agricultural operations and communities in Virginia. We support the development and enhancement of whole farm planning curriculum and training, online resources, social networking, and farmer mentoring. The whole farm-planning curriculum developed by the Coalition has been implemented across Virginia since 2012.

Questions this survey hopes to answer: What are past and current participants of the Certified Farm Seekers Program doing now? How did or does participation in this program influence farm decisions? How have participants used the information from this program to improve, expand or start their farm operation? Did participation in the program lead to other actions related to farming?

You should consider taking this survey if you made an application to or participated in any part of the Certified Farm Seekers Program between 2012 and the end of 2015. The program is conducted by our Certified Farm Seekers (CFS) Coordinator under the guidance of Virginia Farm Bureau Young Farmers and the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumers Services Office of Farmland Preservation through the Farm Link Database. Your interaction may have been online through the Farm Link database, with our CFS coordinator or with leaders of the sponsoring organizations.

Your participation in this survey is entirely voluntary. Should you choose to participate, you will be asked to complete a survey that will take about 15 to 20 minutes. You may choose not to participate or you may refuse to answer certain questions. You can choose to discontinue your participation at any time. There are no significant risks or benefits associated with participation in this survey. Completion of this survey will constitute informed consent. Results of this survey may be published. All information collected as part of this survey will remain confidential.

Should you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the VT IRB Chair, Dr. David M. Moore at moored@vt.edu.

Thank you for considering participating in this survey. If you have any questions about this survey, please contact: Kim Niewolny, VBFRC Program Director, Virginia Tech: niewolny@vt.edu. Visit us at: www.vabeginningfarmer.org

Q1 Knowledge of the CFS staff you interacted with

	Excellent (1)	Good (2)	Average (3)	Poor (4)	Not applicable (5)
Select one (1)	<input type="radio"/>				

Q2 Professionalism of the CFS staff you interacted with

	Excellent (1)	Good (2)	Average (3)	Poor (4)	Not applicable (5)
Select one (1)	<input type="radio"/>				

Q3 Curriculum (modules) you worked through

	Excellent (1)	Good (2)	Average (3)	Poor (4)	Not applicable (5)
Select one (1)	<input type="radio"/>				

Q4 Were you aware of the CFS cost share opportunity for 75% of the cost up to \$500 for approved farm start-up or transition expenses?

	Yes (1)	No (2)
Select one (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

If Select one - Yes Is Selected, Then Skip To If you were aware of the cost share o...If Select one - No Is Selected, Then Skip To Overall, how would you rate CFS the s...

Q23 If you were aware of the cost share opportunity and have not used it, can you please share why you have not taken advantage of it?

Q5 Overall, how would you rate CFS the services you received?

	Excellent (1)	Good (2)	Average (3)	Poor (4)	Not applicable (5)
Select one (1)	<input type="radio"/>				

Q7 What aspects of Certified Farm Seeker program were most helpful to you? (type as much or as little as you like, the text box will expand)

Q8 In what ways can we improve our service? (type as much or as little as you like, the text box will expand)

Q9 After working with the Certified Farm Seekers Program, what issues surrounding farm land access are most important to you?

Q10 What progress have you made toward your agricultural goals?

Q11 Was your goal of connecting with a landowner successful? Can you tell us why or why not?

Q12 Which resources has the Certified Farm Seeker program helped you reach related to the Virginia Beginning Farmer and Rancher Coalition Program? (please select as many as you would like)

- Networking (1)
- Educational materials (2)
- Webinars (3)
- Social events (4)
- Trainings (5)
- Business plan construction (7)
- Other (8)

Q18 What is the approximate length of time you were engaged with the program?

- 0-3 months (1)
- 3-6 months (2)
- 6-9 months (3)
- 9-12 months (4)
- 12+ months (5)

Q19 What potential barriers do you think participants might encounter that would hinder their program completion?

Q13 What category(ies) do you feel as though you identify with?

- Beginning Farmer (1)
- Established Farmer (5)
- Transitioning Farmer (6)
- No longer interested (7)
- Other (8) _____

If No longer interested Is Selected, Then Skip To Would you please share your reason(s)...If No longer interested Is Not Selected, Then Skip To What services could the Certified Far...

Q14 Would you please share your reason(s) for no longer participating?

Q15 What services could the Certified Farm Seeker program offer to increase your participation?

Q16 If there is anything you'd like to share regarding your participation in the Certified Farm Seeker program, please enter it below.

Q24 Would you please share what motivates your decision either to continue to pursue farming or not to farm?

Q17 If you are willing, please email Katie Myer, CFS Coordinator to volunteer for a follow up interview: certifiedfarmseekers@gmail.com