

The Next Generation of Farming in New Jersey

Report on Cultivating the Future of Farming
in the Garden State



State Agriculture Development Committee

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Definitions

Please note the following terms used in this report:

Next Generation Farmer – In this report, *next generation farmer* is used to mean farmers who are entering the industry from farm family backgrounds as well as those entering from non-farming backgrounds.

New and Beginning Farmer – The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) considers anyone who has operated a farm for fewer than ten years to be a beginning farmer. Farmers that meet this definition are also considered next generation farmers.

Established Farmer – A farmer who has operated a farm business for greater than ten years.

Executive Summary

The State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC) is actively developing a Next Generation Farmer Program to help next generation farmers from all backgrounds address the challenges they face when getting started and establishing their own operations.

The overall goal of the program is not to duplicate existing efforts but rather to collaborate with partners to develop a coordinated, comprehensive system to identify, train, equip, and support the next generation of farmers in New Jersey. This includes providing support to a diverse range of next generation farmers, including those from farm families and newcomers from non-farming backgrounds.

Supporting the next generation also means supporting established farmers, such as with succession planning, planning for the next generation of their farm operations, and addressing the common farm viability issues that affect farmers at all experience levels.

The purpose of this policy report is to summarize the current state of next generation farmers in New Jersey – who they are, the challenges they face, and the support that is currently available to them – and provide recommendations for addressing the challenges, filling gaps in programming, and enhancing support. The recommendations are intended to help create a strategic path forward for supporting the next generation of farmers and farm businesses in the Garden State.

Background

Policymakers, farmers, and agricultural organizations in New Jersey and nationally recognize the need to increase support for next generation farmers. The average age of farmers in New Jersey is 58.7, and two-thirds of all farmers in the State are 55 or older (2022 Census of Agriculture). This presents a demographic issue in which many established farmers will be exiting the industry in the next 20 years. Meanwhile, there is a lack of next generation farmers prepared to steward the land base and maintain existing production levels. To address this challenge, New Jersey must determine how to best train, equip, and support those who are looking to get into or advance in agriculture and help them become successful, established farmers.

Traditionally, the next generation has entered the industry and acquired land and farming knowledge from being raised in a farm family or marrying into one, however this is becoming less common. There are also many people from non-farming backgrounds who are interested in agriculture, but it is often difficult for them to navigate the high barriers to entry, even if they have farming experience. Regardless of entry point, next generation farmers face common challenges, such as access to capital, access to land, gaining experience and knowledge, and the everyday issues that all farmers face, including the high costs of running and managing a farm business in New Jersey.

The Legislature and Governor, in recognition of these challenges and the need for a strategic response, provided funding to develop a Next Generation Farmer Program. Work on the program began on May 20, 2024 when the Next Gen Program Team, Brendon Pearsall, Senior Next Gen Coordinator, and Jessica Brandeisky, Assistant Next Gen Coordinator, started with the SADC.

Outreach and Information Gathering

Over the past ten months, the Next Gen Program Team has conducted extensive research and outreach to gather input from the agricultural community on the issues faced by next generation farmers in New Jersey as well as ideas for addressing these challenges.

These efforts included more than 100 interviews and outreach meetings with established farmers, next generation farmers, agricultural service providers, and other interested parties. The Next Gen Program Team also developed online surveys and collected more than 200 responses from the same groups of stakeholders. Their research included examining more than 400 programs, resources, and initiatives from across the country in order to identify promising models that could be adapted for New Jersey. These models are referenced in the recommendations.

The Next Gen Program Team also has been providing direct assistance to next generation and established farmers. This has included responding to general inquiries, providing guidance and resource-referral, and following up with users of the NJ Land Link website, the SADC's linking tool to help farm seekers and farm owners connect regarding farmland and farming opportunities sought/available. Between May 2024 and March 2025, staff assisted more than 120 next generation farmers and 25 farm owners. Providing direct assistance in this manner has also been a form of outreach, enabling staff to connect with many farmers and learn about their challenges and needs.

Variety of Backgrounds, Experience, Readiness, and Needs

New Jersey's next generation farmers come from a variety of backgrounds. Some grew up in farm families, and others grew up in suburban or urban areas without a traditional farming background. Some were involved in 4-H or FFA, some became interested in farming after high school, and others came to farming for the first time after graduating from college or switching from a non-farm career. There also are veterans and active-duty military personnel who are interested in farming and whose unique skills may serve them well in the agricultural industry.

The Next Gen Program Team's outreach and research indicate that next generation farmers have a varied range of knowledge and readiness, depending on their backgrounds and how long they have been farming. While they ultimately face the same overall challenges to establishing and continuing successful farm businesses, they might have different resource and support needs based on their starting point and stage. Therefore, complete newcomers vs. those looking to gain more experience by working on farms vs. those starting or expanding their own business, will benefit from different programs and support.

Similarly, established and next generation farmers involved in farm succession planning and/or involved in planning for the evolution of their farm business to new crops, production methods, or markets would benefit from having specialized support.

Current Support and Gaps

There are a handful of existing programs, resources, and services in New Jersey that are specifically designed to support next generation farmers. A few examples include the Rutgers Cooperative Extension Beginner Farmer Training Program (RU Ready to Farm), which helps introduce newcomers to the industry through educational courses, hands-on training, and a farm business incubator; USDA Farm

Service Agency (FSA) loan programs that set aside a portion of their funding for beginning farmer applicants; NJ Department of Agriculture (NJDA) and Northeast Organic Farming Association of NJ (NOFA-NJ) mini-grants to help small, beginning, underserved, and/or military veteran farmers make key infrastructure improvements or increase food production and marketing; and NOFA-NJ's various training and business planning courses. There are also many programs and services available to all farmers, regardless of experience.

The challenges regarding existing support focus on issues such as funding, capacity, eligibility, awareness, and collaboration. Rutgers, NOFA-NJ, and other non-profits' programs and services for next generation farmers are often all or mostly grant-funded, which limits the organizations' long-term ability to provide and/or expand support. Some loan programs have criteria that make it difficult for some types of next generation farmers to qualify, and some next generation farmers may not be aware of these programs or other support. Currently, there is no centralized, easy-to-use website where people can go to learn about resources and services. There also are limited programs for apprenticeship and mentorship opportunities, and there is minimal support for farm succession planning. Overall support for next generation farmers could also benefit from greater coordination among the agricultural service providers working on these issues in New Jersey.

Challenges

The greatest challenges for next generation farmers in New Jersey, based on feedback from the agricultural community, include the following: access to land; access to capital; gaining education and training; profitable market access; and navigating the agricultural industry and finding support. There are also unique challenges faced by urban growers as well as military veterans and active-duty service members.

Stakeholders also highlighted the following additional common challenges faced by all farmers, whether next generation or established: the high costs of running a farm business in New Jersey; finding skilled and reliable labor; the lack of agricultural processing facilities and support industries in New Jersey; personal expenses such as housing, health insurance, retirement costs, and student loan or other debt; climate change; finding support to diversify; planning for farm succession; and planning for the next generation of the farm business.

Recommendations

The report's recommendations are based on an analysis of the major challenges faced by next generation farmers and opportunities for enhancing, and adding to, existing support. Included are ideas for new programs, resources, and partnerships, some of which could be implemented by the SADC/Next Generation Farmer Program and some of which could be implemented by or with partners. Some ideas would also need action and support from the Legislature and Governor, such as through new or amended legislation.

The SADC could take the lead in developing additional land access programs, official apprenticeship and mentorship programs, and centralized resources, among other ideas. Farmland Stewardship Grants for preserved farms could also be restarted to support farm viability for all farmers, pending available funding. Partners could provide continued and new technical assistance, educational programs, and market initiatives, provided continued and expanded financial support for capacity.

The Next Generation Farmer Program could continue to provide direct assistance to farmers, and it could play a central role in fostering a collaborative network of many organizations in New Jersey working to support the next generation of farmers and farming.

Overall, it will be important for the agricultural community to continue to work together on strategies to address the farm viability issues that affect all farmers. Any efforts to improve the viability of the industry would be a benefit for all farmers – next generation and established – and for cultivating the future of farming in the Garden State.

Introduction and Background

The SADC's Next Generation Farmer Program was initiated on May 20, 2024, with the support of the New Jersey State Legislature and Governor Murphy. The overall goal of the program is to collaborate with Statewide partners to develop a coordinated, comprehensive system to identify, train, equip, and support the next generation of farmers in New Jersey. This involves providing support to a diverse range of new and beginning farmers in New Jersey, including those from farm families, newcomers from non-farming backgrounds, veterans, women, urban growers, and others in historically underserved communities. It also involves supporting established farmers with the next generation of their farm business.

The need for this program is highlighted by a looming demographic crisis in the agriculture industry, both in New Jersey and nationwide. As of the most recent 2022 USDA Census of Agriculture, the average age of farmers in New Jersey is 58.7 years old and climbing. This is higher than the national average of 58.1 years. 66% of farmers in New Jersey are 55 or older, meaning that two-thirds of the State's farmers will likely be exiting the industry within the next 20 years. New Jersey is at risk of losing the accumulated knowledge, expertise, and resources of these farmers unless significant progress is made to connect them to the next generation of farmers. This loss would jeopardize the stewardship of the State's preserved farmland, as a sufficient number of experienced farmers is critical to managing and productively farming New Jersey's 250,000+ preserved farmland acres.

Traditionally, farming has predominantly been a family business, with farms passed from one generation to the next within the family. While this pathway into farming is still followed by many young farmers, it has become less common in recent years. The Next Gen Program Team, during its outreach to the agricultural community for the development of this report, talked with many farmers and agricultural support professionals who shared that the combination of more lucrative off-farm career options and the general difficulty of farming profitably in New Jersey has led many children of farm families to leave the family business behind.

In addition to next generation family farmers who do continue in agriculture, there are many new and beginning farmers from non-farming backgrounds who are eager to and passionate about pursuing farming as a career. These new farmers tend to be incredibly diverse, as are their motivations for wanting to become farmers. Some are recent college graduates drawn to agriculture for personal or social reasons, some are recent immigrants who may have farmed in their country of origin and wish to continue doing so here, and many are career switchers who come to farming with a range of skills, knowledge, and innovative ideas that they are ready to apply to agriculture. These prospective farmers, along with next generation family farmers, face a number of challenges and barriers to their ability to enter into and advance in farming.

The SADC, in collaboration with industry partners, seeks to address the challenges faced by all next generation farmers and create a stable and economically sustainable pathway for them to succeed in farming and become an important part of the State's agricultural industry.

Next Generation Farmers in New Jersey – Census of Agriculture

The 2022 Census of Agriculture does not have information about “next generation farmers”, but it does have information about “new and beginning producers” (those who have operated a farm for 10 years or less), “young producers” (those under 35), and other producer categories based on related characteristics and age ranges.

As of 2022, New Jersey has 18,591 producers operating on 9,998 farms. Of this total number of farmers, 30% are new and beginning. 8% are also considered young producers. Meanwhile, 66% of farmers are 55 and older, and 37% of farmers are 65 and older. Those in the latter category are responsible for managing between 3,608 and 5,284, or 36% to 53%, of all New Jersey farms (they operate 18% of all farms by themselves and between 17% to 35% of all farms as part of a two-producer operation). At a minimum, 3,608 farms, or 36% of all farms in New Jersey, are managed by a farmer who is 65 or older. These demographics highlight the need for farm succession planning and more support for the transfer of land and farming knowledge from one generation to the next.

Table 1: Number and Presence of Producers in NJ

Producer Numbers		
Category of Farmers	Number of Farmers	Percent of total*
All Farmers	18,591	
Established Producers	13,021	70%
New and Beginning Producers	5,570	30%
Young Producers (under 35)	1,456	8%
Producers ages 65 and over	6,889	37%
<i>*Percentages do not add up to 100% due to overlap in categories</i>		
Farms with a ‘New and Beginning’ or ‘Young’ Producer		
Category of producer	Percent of Farms	Percent of All NJ Ag Land Managed by These Farms
New and Beginning Producers	33.8%	22.5%
Young Producers	10.9%	13.2%

Table 2 shows general demographics and statistics for young producers (left side) and new and beginning farmers (right side) in New Jersey. It is worth noting that a significant percentage of all producers, next generation and established, say that something other than farming is their primary source of income (59% of all farmers, 68% of new and beginning producers, and 60% of young producers). Additionally, while 64% of all producers spend some amount of time working off the farm, this rate is higher among new and beginning and young producers, at around 75%. This suggests there is an opportunity to improve the viability of all farm operations. Helping address challenges to profitability will enable producers to spend more time on farming and their farm businesses.

Table 2: New Jersey Producer Characteristics – 2022 USDA Census of Agriculture

Young Producers (<35) – 2022*		New and Beginning Producers – 2022 vs. 2017		
Characteristics	2022	Characteristics	2022	2017
Total # of Young Producers	1,456	Total # of New and Beginning Producers	5,570	4,002
Male	945	Male	3,380	2,226
Female	511	Female	2,190	1,776
Primary Occupation		Primary Occupation		
Farming	589	Farming	1,765	1,273
Other	867	Other	3,805	2,729
Days of work off farm		Days of work off farm		
None	365	None	1,363	997
Any	1,091	Any	4,207	3,005
1 to 49 days	211	1 to 49 days	741	472
50 to 99 days	101	50 to 99 days	361	238
100 to 199 days	149	100 to 199 days	490	524
200 days or more	630	200 days or more	2,615	1,771
Years operating		Years operating		
5 or less	650	5 or less	2,453	N/A
6 to 10	485	6 to 10	3,117	N/A
11 years or more	321	11 years or more	N/A	
Age Group		Age Group		
Under 25	319	Under 25	319	221
25 to 34	1,137	25 to 34	816	558
35 to 44	N/A	35 to 44	1,243	808
45 to 54	N/A	45 to 54	1,051	977
55 to 64	N/A	55 to 64	1,371	953
65-74	N/A	65-74	568	382
75 and over	N/A	75 and over	202	103
Average Age	N/A	Average Age	48.4	48
Producers by race		Producers by race		
American Indian or Alaska Native	3	American Indian or Alaska Native	19	9
Asian	25	Asian	139	104
Black or African American	16	Black or African American	54	22
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	4	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	4	
White	1,397	White	5,316	3843
More than one race reported	11	More than one race reported	34	24
Producers of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish Origin	41	Producers of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish Origin	236	168
Military Service		Military Service		
Never served or only on active duty for training in the Reserves or National Guard	1,424	Never served or only on active duty for training in the Reserves or National Guard	5,261	3808
Active duty now or in the past	32	Active duty now or in the past	309	194

*No data available for 2017

Outreach, Research, and Information Gathering

To guide the development of the report and the program, the Next Gen Program Team conducted extensive outreach to the New Jersey agricultural community and also thorough research on nationwide efforts to support next generation farmers. Outreach efforts took the form of surveys, interviews, focus groups, meetings, and events. It also included conversations with next generation and established farmers while providing direct assistance.

Surveys

The Next Gen Program Team distributed four online surveys to gather input from interested stakeholders in the New Jersey agricultural community. These surveys targeted four groups and received more than 200 total responses:

- Next Generation Farmers – 112 responses
- Established Farmers – 40 responses
- Agricultural Support Professionals – 21 responses
- Other Public Members Interested in Agriculture – 34 responses

Questions in the surveys focused on gathering demographic information, assessing the challenges and barriers faced by next generation farmers, collecting ideas for increasing support, and learning about existing helpful programs and where gaps may be occurring. Established farmers were also asked about the keys to their own success as well as about any advice they might have for next generation farmers.

Interviews, Focus Groups, and Meetings

The Next Gen Program Team conducted more than 100 interviews and outreach meetings with a wide range of New Jersey agricultural stakeholders. This included one-on-one interviews with individual farmers and agricultural professionals, group discussions with staff from agricultural service provider organizations, and meetings with a variety of groups, such as County Agricultural Development Boards (CADB), County Boards of Agriculture, Rutgers Agricultural Agents, and various other boards and committees. The program team also held several focus group meetings with farmers, both in-person and online. The discussions in these meetings were guided by questions similar to the ones used in the surveys.

National Research

The Next Gen Program Team examined over 400 programs and initiatives related to next generation farmer support from across the United States. Areas of focus ranged from training and education to tax credits, land preservation, marketing, technical assistance, and more. Promising programs that could serve as models for New Jersey were investigated further, and meetings were held with staff from some of those programs to learn more about how they were developed and implemented.

Existing Support and Gaps

Identifying the current landscape of support that is available to help next generation farmers is critical to understanding the challenges they face and to assessing where gaps in support may be occurring. Overall, this support includes resources specific to next generation farmers as well as the various programs and services that are available to all farmers. Depending on next generation farmers' background and experience level, they may be able to access, be aware of, or qualify for the specific or general support that exists.

Support Specific to Next Generation Farmers

Listed below are some of the programs and resources specific to supporting next generation farmers as they get started in commercial agricultural production in New Jersey, touching on topics like introductory information, financing, education, land access, and networking.

- New Jersey Department of Agriculture – Administers a mini-grant program for underserved, beginning, and military veteran farmers for enhancing production and marketing of food crops.
- Rutgers Cooperative Extension Beginner Farmer Training Program – RU Ready to Farm – This USDA grant-funded program provides education, hands-on training, and farm business incubator and support services for new and beginning farmers from across the State.
- Northeast Organic Farming Association of New Jersey (NOFA-NJ) – Provides education, training, business planning, mentorship, mini-grants, and community support to next generation farmers.
- NJ Farm Bureau – Hosts a Young Farmers and Ag Professionals group to help next generation farmers meet and network with others in the agriculture industry.
- Veteran Farmers of NJ – Engages and support veterans interested in agriculture and food systems through community building, technical support, and educational opportunities.
- North Jersey Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) – Provides networking, education, training, and grant programs with additional benefits for next generation farmers.
- Foodshed Alliance – SAgE Program – Makes farmland more accessible by offering long-term, affordable leases on preserved farmland, and provides some training support.
- NJ Land Link – A linking service for those seeking farmland and those with farmland opportunities available.
- USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) – Offers financial programs for beginning farmers and houses the State Outreach Coordinator for Beginning Farmers.
- Farm Credit East (FCE) – Offers young, beginning, small, and veteran farmer incentives, such as discounts on programs, services, and interest rates. Also offers the “FarmStart” program, to provide capital, and “GenerationNext”, educational seminars to improve business management skills.
- USDA National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) – Provides financial and technical assistance for improving farmers' agricultural businesses in the context of using good conservation and stewardship practices.
- Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement Program (LFPA) - Provides funding to farmers to sell to food banks at competitive prices. Many next generation farmers in New Jersey have found a market for their products through LFPA.
- Rutgers Sea Grant, Apprenticeship in Shellfish Aquaculture Program (ASAP) - Apprenticeship program for people interested in a career in aquaculture.

Gaps in Support

While these programs and resources can help next generation farmers make progress in various areas, issues such as limited funding, limited staff capacity, eligibility hurdles, incomplete awareness, and lack of collaboration with other programs often limit their reach and effectiveness.

Rutgers, NOFA-NJ, and other non-profits' programs and services for next generation farmers are often all or mostly grant-funded, which limits the organizations' long-term ability to provide and/or expand support. Some loan programs have criteria that make it difficult for some types of next generation farmers to qualify, and some next generation farmers may not be aware of these programs or other support. Currently, there is no centralized, easy-to-use website where people can go to learn about resources and services. Apprenticeship and mentorship opportunities are also limited, and there is minimal support for farm succession planning. Overall support for next generation farmers could also benefit from greater coordination among the agricultural service providers working on these issues in New Jersey.

With these issues in mind, there remain significant gaps in overall support for next generation farmers in New Jersey. The "Challenges" section of the report looks at these logistical barriers and issues further, and the "Recommendations" section focuses on how to enhance support, create new resources, and foster greater collaboration to help address the gaps.

Challenges Faced by Next Generation Farmers

Through input and feedback during the Next Gen Program Team's outreach efforts, the New Jersey agricultural community identified the following challenges as the top issues facing the next generation of farmers in New Jersey:

1. Land access – Gaining secure access to affordable/available land.
2. Capital access – High costs of starting and managing a farm business.
3. Experience – Gaining farming experience and industry knowledge.
4. Support – Navigating the agricultural industry and finding support.
5. Market access – Finding reliable and profitable markets channels.
6. Labor – Finding skilled and reliable labor.
7. Farm transition planning – Planning for succession and new farm operations.
8. Community support – Building connections and a strong network.
9. Challenges unique to urban agriculture.
10. Challenges unique to veterans.
11. Common challenges faced by all farmers.

An important note about this list is that many of these challenges are also areas of concern for established farmers. Each challenge represents one piece of a farmer's farm viability puzzle. The issues that make starting a farm business difficult for next generation farmers are the same kinds of issues that make maintaining a farm business difficult for established farmers.

Finding land that is affordable, whether to start or expand a farm business, can be challenging. Finding skilled labor, maintaining profitable markets, and complying with regulations are issues that are also common to all farmers. Underpinning everything are the high costs of running a farm business in New Jersey. Rutgers has analyzed the 2022 Census of Agriculture and highlighted how many of these costs, e.g., the costs of labor, utilities, fuel, property taxes, and fertilizer, are the highest in the nation and also many times higher than the national average.

Whether starting a new operation or continuing a longstanding one, farmers need to be able to address these challenges and adapt to stay in business. It is important to support not only the next generation of farmers in New Jersey, but also existing farmers and the next generation of their farm.

Challenges and Recommendations

The pages that follow provide more detail on each of the challenges listed above (on a left side page) alongside recommendations for addressing the challenges (on the opposite, right side page) based on outreach, research, and feedback. Addressing the issues would help create a more accessible pathway into farming for the next generation and increase farm viability overall for all farmers.

1. Land Access – Challenges

Farmers and the agricultural community agreed that access to land is the biggest challenge faced by next generation farmers. The cost of purchasing land in New Jersey is exceedingly high and competition is intense, making it difficult for new farmers to get started and for more experienced farmers to expand. Leasing farmland is a more affordable option for starting and building a business but presents its own set of difficulties. Finding land to lease can also be competitive, many parcels lack adequate infrastructure for diverse farm businesses, and short-term leases discourage landowners and farmers from making long-term investments on a farm property.

- **Cost of Purchasing Farmland:** New Jersey has some of the highest real estate values in the country. Farmers must compete with warehouse and housing developers, as well as individuals from profitable non-farming careers who can afford to pay more. Even preserved farmland can be expensive.
- **Lack of Capital:** Next generation farmers who have gained knowledge and experience from working on other farms are often unable to save large amounts of cash, as working on farms pays less than other careers. They do not have a competitive edge in the real estate market, and many report being outbid by large cash offers.
- **Leasing Farmland:** Leasing arrangements are often word of mouth or handshake deals, and many have led to insecure tenure, miscommunication, and soured relationships. Landowners also tend to lease to established farmers, as they have a ‘track record’ and seem like less of a risk than next generation farmers.
- **Types of Agriculture:** Leased land is often used for low-infrastructure row crops like corn, soy, or hay. Without the infrastructure to support diverse farming opportunities, or a guarantee of long-term access, many next generation farmers are unable to find an appropriate arrangement for their farming goals.
- **Awareness of Available Farmland:** Farmers do not always post their farmland for sale or lease publicly, and many farms are sold or leased through personal connections. In many situations, next generation farmers need a degree of luck to be in the right place and the right time to learn about farmland opportunities.
- **Lack of Uniformity in Public Land Leasing:** Different government entities lease their land differently, leading to confusion about how to access it and the types of farming practices allowed.

Farmer Profile: Jess Isbrecht, Green Duchess Farm



After farming for a few years, Jess was offered extensive farmland for lease with access to infrastructure, equipment, and housing upon the completion of a beginning farmer training program. However, after Jess successfully relocated and expanded her diversified livestock operation to this new location, the lease was abruptly terminated after 18 months. The sudden change and uncertain future made Jess hesitant to continue with a year-to-year lease arrangement at that site. Lacking the resources to purchase land, Jess ultimately decided against the second relocation of her farm business and made the difficult decision to close the business and walk away from farming aspirations in New Jersey.

Land Access – Recommendations

Develop a land access program to connect next generation farmers and established farmers.

- Could provide access to land, equipment, infrastructure, and mentorship for beginning farmers.
- Established farmers could be compensated for time via stipends, tax credits, or other incentives.

Design and implement a landowner tax credit to create a financial incentive for landowners to sell or lease land to qualified beginning farmers. (Called a “Beginning Farmer Tax Credit” in other states.)

- Modeled on the 7 states with similar programs.
- These tax credits are generally equal to 5-15% of the lease or sale price.

Develop a New Jersey Farmland Access Program.

- Modeled on programs in MD and DE that involve providing loans to buy a development-threatened farm in exchange for preserving it ([Critical Farms Program](#), [Young Farmers Program](#)).
- And/or modeled on program in RI that involves the State buying and preserving a farm and then selling it to a farmer ([Farmland Access Program](#)).

Explore farmland preservation options that help keep preserved land affordable/available to farmers.

- Based on MA, VT, NY models – voluntary easement provisions that could be added and provide a bonus at time of preservation or potentially after, to encourage future transfers to farmers.

Explore Farmland Preservation programs for farms that do not meet current eligibility criteria.

- Explore development of a parallel preservation program for smaller-sized farms to better fit the needs of many new farmers, as well as urban farmers, more likely to start on a small scale.
- Consider models like [Community Farms Preservation Program](#) (CT) and [Growing for Kane](#) (IL), which also consider economic impact to the local community and food security.

Explore ideas for providing land access through SADC owned land.

- Incubators, more accessible smaller farms divided from larger parcels, long-term lease options administered by a third-party non-profit, lease with option to purchase.
- Bills [S724/A1224](#) would allow resale of county-owned preserved farms to beginning farmers.

Support efforts to make Farmland Preservation Program more attractive to unreserved farm owners.

Develop model lease templates and guidelines to encourage government entities to lease publicly-owned farmland more uniformly and with provisions that allow for a range of agricultural uses.

General – Recommendations

Develop an “Official” or “Qualified” New Jersey Next Generation Farmer Status to qualify next generation farmers for “Next Gen” programs and initiatives. As needed, similarly develop a standard for farmers in general to participate in “Next Generation of the Farm” programs and support.

- “Next generation farmer” status – Could be modeled on ‘qualified status’ that PA uses to determine eligibility for [Beginner Farmer Tax Credit Program](#).
- “Next generation of the farm” programs – Consider modeling requirements based on other existing SADC or NJDA programs for farmers.

2. Capital Access – Challenges

The costs of land, infrastructure, equipment, labor, and inputs have increased dramatically over the past few years while the price point that farmers can charge for their products has not. Traditional commercial lenders generally do not provide financing for establishing new farms or diversifying existing operations. Meanwhile, lenders that specialize in agriculture generally require at least 3 years of farm business experience, farm owner/operator financial records, and collateral to qualify for a loan. Without significant financial management experience, many next generation farmers find it incredibly difficult to get a loan to finance the costs of establishing or expanding their business. New farmers who choose to gain experience by working full-time on other farms are not able to amass, through their farm wages, the capital needed to start on their own.

- **Gaining Capital:** There is a lack of programming to help farmers financially ready themselves to run a farm business, and there is a need for programs to help them access capital, establish a business history, and amass collateral as they gain experience.
- **Grants:** Grants are often structured as a cash match or reimbursement. This can be a significant hurdle if a next generation farmer has minimal capital to begin with and is unable to provide a match or pay the upfront costs to be reimbursed later.
- **Farm Supplies and Materials:** New Jersey has a lack of local farm supply stores, and many farmers report spending extra time and fuel travelling out of state to find what they need. Some agricultural organizations offer bulk purchasing to reduce individual costs, but farmers may need less than what is required for an order or miss the sign up.
- **Costs of Machinery and Equipment:** There are few good options for this challenge faced by all farmers. Accessing farm machinery and equipment through a purchase or loan is expensive, and current rental programs are limited by geography and capacity.
- **Costs of Labor:** It can be difficult for farms to attract and retain employees when competing with other businesses that offer higher wages. Currently, there are no permanent programs that incentivize farm work or offset the costs of hiring farm labor.
- **Farm Production Costs in New Jersey:** Statistics from the 2022 Census of Agriculture highlight the especially high costs of managing agricultural operations in New Jersey when compared to national averages.
- **Cost and Availability of Liability Insurance:** Finding affordable liability insurance is a challenge for all farmers, especially those interested in diversifying their businesses with agritourism activities or value-added production, which carry greater risks.

Farmer Profile: Rebekah Alstede Modery, Alstede Farms



Rebekah is part of the next generation within the Alstede Family that farms 600 acres. Even though she is technically a beginning farmer by USDA standards, she is not eligible for many beginning farmer programs due to the history and value of the farm business that she is inheriting. She faces a barrier in accessing capital to continue the successful operation of the farm.

Capital Access – Recommendations

Restart the Farmland Stewardship Grant Program (farm viability program for preserved farms) with additional benefits for next generation farmers.

- Provides technical assistance to develop updated business plans and grants to implement them.
- Similar program elements to Bill [A727/S1560](#) in current session.

Work with partners to develop tax credits, liability protections, and other ideas that incentivize established farmers to lease equipment to next generation farmers.

- Established farmers may be hesitant to lease out their equipment to new farmers they do not have a close relationship with. Incentives/protections may increase their willingness to lease.
- Models to consider in MN, NE, OH, IL, IA – tax credits for leasing land and/or equipment.

Support organizations that seek to develop ‘aggregated/bulk’ purchasing programs to help reduce individual farmers’ costs for inputs.

- Facilitate collective bulk purchase programs such as NOFA-NJ’s bulk compost ordering program.
- Consider new programs to help farmers aggregate and buy together – possibly a ‘Supply Link Program’.

Develop conservation grants that pay next generation farmers to implement good stewardship practices on preserved farms.

- Incentives that encourage and provide ongoing income for adoption of conservation practices.
- Would help stabilize start-up business while maintaining the farm’s natural resources.

Develop and support programs to reduce overall costs of production and running a farm business.

- Identify areas where the State could play a role in reducing costs, e.g., reducing regulatory fees, updating regulations (to promote affordable liability insurance, etc.), supporting non-profit services, or subsidizing certain purchases.
- Existing NJDA mini-grants, which provide high impact for minimal funds.
- Bill [S1881/A4229](#) in current session would create New Jersey Economic Development Authority (NJEDA) loan program for capital purchases.



Farmer Profile: Jared Krawitz, Closter Farm

Jared, who has been farming for 8 seasons, operates 7 acres to raise diversified produce and livestock in partnership with a landowner he connected with on NJ Land Link. Even with secure land access and capital, Jared finds that the increasing costs of inputs are raising the prices he must charge customers to a point they will be unable to bear.

3. Knowledge and Experience - Challenges

Many new farmers rush to establish a farm business and put the cart before the horse by prioritizing purchasing farmland instead of spending significant time learning about the industry and gaining experience. On the other hand, next generation farmers who have more hands-on experience, such as those from farm families, may need more business management and financial education to grow their businesses. Learning to farm requires ongoing education and training on a wide range of topics, with different farmers having different needs based on their level of experience.

- **Lack of Awareness of Existing Programs and Support:** There are many programs and organizations in New Jersey that support farmers at different levels of experience. As next generation farmers get started, they often report feeling overwhelmed in trying to learn about and understand all the services that are available.
- **Need for Business Planning and Marketing Assistance:** Many next generation farmers are attracted to a career in farming but may underestimate the level of business acumen required to succeed.
- **Need for Technical Assistance for Grants and Loans:** Grant and loan applications are often lengthy, complex, and require an understanding of terminology and project planning that many next generation farmers do not have the time to develop. It can be difficult to find technical assistance providers to help with these applications, and their services may be cost-prohibitive.
- **Difficulty Gaining Hands-On Experience:** Established farmers are sometimes less willing to hire those without any previous farming experience, as they depend on skilled labor to be successful. This can make it difficult for beginners to enter the industry and gain the experience and knowledge needed to advance.
- **Lack of Mentorship:** Traditionally, farmers learned about helpful resources as they advanced by connecting with other members of the agricultural community, including family members. While this still occurs, many next generation farmers come from non-farming backgrounds, are not immersed in the local agricultural community, and do not have a straightforward path to 'inherit' institutional farming knowledge from a mentor.

Farmer Profile: Kelley Davy, Stargazer Fields



Kelley, who does not come from a farming background, purchased an 8.5-acre farm from a retiring farmer who had built a successful agritourism business. After taking over, she discovered that some of the previous activities were not permitted under local zoning laws and that obtaining the necessary permits would require an expensive and time-consuming legal process. Kelly finds it challenging to locate the right resources and navigate the complexities of business planning and compliance now that she is also managing the farm. Finding the right support earlier on would have made a significant difference.

Knowledge and Experience – Recommendations

Develop a Structured Mentorship Program that connects next generation farmers with established farmers for support and guidance.

- Established farmers would be financially compensated for their time and attention.
- Bill [A166](#) in current session includes mentorship program ideas.

Develop a Registered Agricultural Apprenticeship Program for New Jersey.

- Could be modeled on the [Pennsylvania Diversified Vegetable Apprenticeship Program](#).
- Next Gen Program could work with NJ Department of Labor to design and implement.

Create a package of incentives that provides support and protection for established farmers who are open to mentoring, supporting, and/or making land available to next generation farmers.

- Liability protection for established farmers – models are NJ agritourism and equine liability laws.
- Stipends for established farmers – for time providing mentorship or support.
- Tax credits for established farmers – for making land available.

Support the development of primary/secondary school, community college, university, Extension, and non-profit programs and courses focused on farming and agriculture-related careers.

- Support development of agricultural awareness and education at all grade levels.
- Support 4-H, FFA, and high school programs.
- Increase and support community college courses related to the agricultural industry.
- Develop 2-year Certificate Programs through community colleges to ready participants for careers related to agriculture.
- Support development of urban agriculture education programs, e.g., Mercer County Community College's Urban Agriculture Curriculum, in line with State Board of Agriculture and NJ Department of Agriculture plans.
- Work with non-profit, university, and government partners to offer workshops/resource fairs.
- Develop Training/Fellowship Programs for high school and college students to gain experience working on farms and in agriculture-related professions during summer months.
- Support Rutgers Cooperative Extension programming related to next generation farmer education and support.
- Provide tuition support for students entering agriculture-related areas of study.
- Support development of programs focused on agricultural support careers, e.g., mechanics, welding, Extension, and large animal veterinarians (e.g., the Doctor of Veterinary Medicine at Rowan University).
- Support agricultural non-profits that offer technical assistance and grants to farmers.
Ex: Bill [A4997](#) in current session would support funding for NOFA-NJ services/mini-grants.

Support permanent funding for the Rutgers Cooperative Extension Beginner Farmer Training Program (RU Ready to Farm) to enable expansion and long-term planning.

4. Complexity of Navigating the Agriculture Industry - Challenges

A major challenge amongst farmers of all experience levels is not knowing who to reach out to for help on specific topics. While there are many agricultural service providers who can help with a range of issues, many are highly specialized in their areas and report not always knowing who to direct farmers to for issues outside of their purview. This can lead to farmers feeling like they are being “bounced around” to various people unable to help them solve their specific issue, leading to continued frustration and/or disengagement from the system. This can isolate and add additional pressure on farmers to figure things out on their own.

- **Need for a Consolidated Directory:** There is no concise, comprehensive source of all agricultural industry contacts and their related fields nor a single point of contact to help farmers navigate the complex structure of the industry.
- **Regulations:** Farmers report that regulations in general can be complex and confusing. They also note that some regulations are inconsistently enforced and that they find it difficult to find straightforward sources of information, e.g., websites contain outdated information and are not user-friendly. When farmers do reach out to a contact listed on a website, they report that they often are not able to get ahold of anyone who can help. Farmers would benefit from additional assistance and greater organizational capacity.
- **Stress and Trust:** If a farmer spends a significant amount of time trying to find the correct point of contact for their needs during the busiest time of the farm season, they may miss pivotal timeframes for successful production. This leads many farmers to feel extra stress in their moment of need and a general sentiment that their unique needs are not understood. Farmers lose trust in support systems, disengage, and can miss out on helpful future programming.
- **Understanding Program Qualifications:** Many programs use a range of terms to describe which farmers are eligible. Terms like new/beginning, historically underserved, and socially disadvantaged are not well understood and may have inconsistent definitions. This may cause farmers to not to apply for something they may be fully qualified for.

Farmer Profile: Billy Mayer, Jr., Clam Daddy's



Billy is the next generation within his family's aquaculture farm business that has been operating since 1984 hatching and raising clams for sales with local restaurants, seafood markets, and to consumers at a local farmers market. As Billy does not operate on 5 contiguous acres, due to exceptionally high competition from development pressure for New Jersey's waterfront, the business is unable to qualify for Farmland Assessment. It has been difficult for him to find impactful support for the successful continuation of his aquaculture business.

Complexity of Navigating the Agricultural Industry – Recommendations

Establish the Next Generation Farmer Program as the first point of contact to help Next Gen farmers navigate the New Jersey agriculture industry.

- Next Gen Program staff have been providing guidance, resource-referral, and direct support.
- Service involves connecting farmers with the programs and organizations, such as Rutgers Cooperative Extension, NOFA-NJ, and others, that can help them based on their specific needs and level of experience.

Create an easily accessible, centralized statewide clearinghouse website for the New Jersey Ag Industry.

- “One-stop-shop” that would be a valuable resource for next generation and established farmers.
- Could help relieve frustration that many farmers feel when trying to navigate ag industry.

Develop outreach and education resources across variety of platforms and types of media to allow next generation farmers to learn and engage with the industry in the ways that work best for them.

- Develop easily consumable video shorts, podcasts, and similar resources to encourage engagement and help next generation farmers more easily connect with the agricultural industry in New Jersey.

Develop additional SADC or partner services to provide more support with business planning, industry connections, and finding farmland matches.

- Business planning courses
- Succession planning services
- Lists of professional service providers
- Agreement building services – to help with lease development
- Review and consultation for new Land Link site postings
- Develop a guide for “How to Make an Effective Land Link Posting”.

Support the development of the NJ Chapter of the National Young Farmer Coalition.

- [City Green](#), an urban agriculture non-profit that provides farming education, farmers market support, and food security for nearby residents, was developing the NJ chapter of the [National Young Farmers Coalition](#) (NYFC).
- NYFC is a national non-profit that supports young farmers through a variety of initiatives.

Support development of an agricultural ombudsman position in the NJ Department of Agriculture.

- Would serve as important point of contact for farmers with statutory and regulatory issues.
- Could help farmers navigate complex rules and compliance questions.

Farmer Profile: Rebecca Kutzer-Rice, Moonshot Farm

Rebecca and her husband Mark began their successful 9-acre flower farm in 2019 after switching from another career. They connected with their Rutgers Cooperative Extension County Agent soon after acquiring the farm and were diligent in following guidance and recommendations. This network connection, combined with the hard work and diverse skill sets that they brought to the business, has resulted in a successful and rapidly growing farm operation.



5. Market Access - Challenges

In addition to managing a farm and growing agricultural products, farmers must also know how to market and sell what they grow. Many agricultural service providers and established farmers reported that next generation farmers focus their businesses more on what they want to produce instead of who will be purchasing their product(s). Next generation farmers need more support with finding profitable market channels, identifying market niches, and learning how to diversify and expand their operation to establish and run a successful business. While many next generation farmers are drawn or directed to business models that focus on retail and direct-to-consumer marketing channels, e.g., CSAs and farmers markets, such markets are time and labor intensive.

- **Farmers Markets:** New farmers markets can be hit or miss and many of the more established, profitable ones are full and have long waiting lists for new vendors, forcing next generation farmers to gamble on lower trafficked and less lucrative markets. Lower grocery store prices add to the difficulty in setting prices that bring a profit.
- **Wholesale Markets:** While wholesale style markets could provide a more stable market channel and allow farmers to focus more on production and management, many next generation farmers are not producing at the scale and price points required to compete in these markets.
- **Lack of Aggregators:** Third party aggregators that purchase from multiple farms and handle distribution logistics provide a vital service for all farmers by removing some of the burden of marketing and allowing them to focus more time on production and business management. New Jersey currently has very few aggregators that farmers can use, and in some cases these organizations are looking for greater quantities than farmers who are operating on smaller parcels or just starting out can supply.
- **Lack of Local Processing Facilities:** Processing raw agricultural goods, including livestock, into more valuable and desirable products for consumers can provide a farmer with additional income and marketing opportunities. There is currently a dearth of NJ-based processors and farmers generally travel out of state for these services, which is time consuming and more expensive (with travel). Farmers also report issues with processor capacity – it can take months to get an appointment or book a service, which is inherently detrimental to the time-sensitive nature of farming.
- **Zoning that Restricts Diversification:** Zoning varies widely across the state, and farmers can find it difficult to understand what is allowed regarding diversifying their business with agritourism or non-agricultural uses. As farmers look for supplemental sources of income, many report being limited by outdated rules and zoning requirements.

Farmer Profile: David Watts, Watts Organic Farm



After gaining experience working on other farms for 8 years, David was able to purchase 19 acres of farmland from retiring farmers to start his own organic poultry and produce business in 2021. As he has advanced, David has found it difficult to access wholesale and retail market channels that are reliable and profitable. Wholesale opportunities generally require larger scale operations while retail opportunities, such as farmers markets, create additional time and labor costs and vary widely in customer attendance, resulting in repeated financial risk for products with a relatively short shelf-life.

Market Access – Recommendations

Improve and support the Local Food Purchasing Assistance (LFPA) Program.

- Provides a guaranteed market for farmers' products (pending available funding).
- Allows next generation farmers to focus on improving their agricultural production and business management skills instead of pursuing retail markets.

Promote and support Jersey Fresh Local Food for Schools (LFS) Program and increase participation by next generation farmers.

- Enables farmers to sell food directly to schools at fair price and make a profit (pending funding).
- Related Bill [A5093](#) in current session would encourage more purchasing of local food.

Develop a Local Food for Public Institutions Program along the lines of LFPA and LFS.

- Would provide similar benefits for farmers and consumers as LFPA and LFS.
- Bills [S1873](#) and [A4154](#) in current session could help develop a program.

Promote and support market aggregators through grants, tax credits, or other incentives.

- Third-party aggregators could play important role in facilitating market access for farmers.
- Would take the burden of marketing and distribution off of farmers, who could then focus on production and business management.

Establish third-party aggregators to aggregate produce from small farms.


- Would provide market opportunity for farms that may not have enough products on their own.

Develop more third-party processing facilities for value-added products and meat processing.

- Would help farmers increase profits by keeping more of the value of what they grow and raise.
- Bill [S626](#) in current session would provide matching grants for such facilities and other ideas.

Expand Jersey Fresh marketing efforts to increase consumer education about the challenges of farming.

- The need for more consumer education about the realities of farming and seasonality of farm products was mentioned often by farmers and others during the input-gathering for the report.

 A photograph of Tomia MacQueen, a Black man, sitting in a raised garden bed. He is wearing a dark long-sleeved shirt and blue overalls. The garden bed is filled with green plants, and there are other garden beds and a blue shed in the background.	Farmer Profile: Tomia MacQueen, Wildflower Farm <p>Tomia raises livestock and grows culturally relevant, organic produce and seeds on 42 acres and has attributed much of the farm business' success to the Local Food Purchasing Assistance Program (LFPA). According to Tomia, programs like LFPA can help farmers afford to stay in business because they provide a stable market outlet with guaranteed retail rates. Tomia believes that continuing to fund LFPA and the creation of additional programs modeled after LFPA could help next generation farmers as they establish their businesses and improve overall agricultural viability.</p>
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6. Labor – Challenges

Many established farmers reported how it was challenging to find skilled and reliable labor, a problem that next generation farmers will also face as they get started themselves and advance.

- **Overall High Cost of Labor, Including Wages and Benefits:** According to data compiled by Rutgers, New Jersey ranks #1 in the nation for the cost of hired farm labor at 12.9 times the national average. Labor is the greatest cost category for most commercial farms. This cost is often out of reach for next generation farmers, especially those who are just starting out and often cannot afford to even pay themselves.
- **H2A Temporary Agricultural Worker Program:** Though consistently praised as a helpful resource for finding skilled and reliable farm workers, the H2A program is expensive, complex, extensively regulated, requires housing, and generally out of reach for many farmers, particularly those who are new and beginning.
- **Housing:** Current programs for farm worker housing are not workable for most farms as grants are available only to non-profits, federally recognized Indian Tribes, and states/local government, and are focused on improvements or repairs to existing off-farm housing. Programs for on-farm housing that are available to farmers are in the form of loans, which do not offset any of the costs involved in establishing housing for their employees. Potential farm workers may be limited by their distance from a farm and may be dissuaded from taking a farm job without the offer of housing or ability to afford rent in the local area.
- **Health Insurance:** Farm businesses are often unable to offer health insurance plan benefits, making them less competitive when compared to other employers. Health insurance can be particularly important considering the physical nature of farm work.
- **Training New Employees:** Established farmers often look for employees with previous experience working on a farm, as it can be costly and time-consuming to train people who are new to agriculture. There is a lack of programming to support established farmers who otherwise might be interested in training a next generation farmer.
- **Competition from Other Areas of Work:** Potential farm workers are generally more attracted to careers in other industries because they pay higher wages, offer additional benefits (e.g., health insurance, paid time off, retirement plans), and are less physically demanding than farming.

Labor – Recommendations

Create programs to help farmers offset labor costs.

- Additional new program ideas:
 - Program to develop farmer collectives which could then apply for grants to offset the cost of participating in H2A (seasonal farm worker) programs.
 - Program to support a collective pool of workers that could provide part-time labor to multiple farms while providing full-time hours for the workers.
- Possible additional model: USDA’s [Farm Labor Stabilization and Protection Pilot Grant Program](#).
- Potential program that would also involve training next generation farmers:
 - Registered Agricultural Apprenticeship Program, which could open up [GAINS](#) grant funding to offset farmers’ costs of attracting and hiring farm labor.
- Additional ideas in “Farming Experience and Industry Knowledge” section could create opportunities to help attract and afford labor.

Develop a farm labor tax credit to help offset the rising cost of farm labor.

- Bill [A4801](#) in current session would provide a tax credit for a portion of farm workers’ wages.
- Bill [A130](#) in current session would create NJEDA program to fund retaining or creating rural jobs.

Create programs to help farmers reduce labor costs, such as through use of new technology.

Farmer Profile: James Klett, Fairgrown Farm

James rents 40 acres from a non-profit to grow produce and aggregates additional produce from local farmers to support his farm business. He employs 10 full-time staff in addition to 10-15 seasonal workers. James sees the ability to offer full-time benefits, like health insurance, and a competitive wage as a path to viability, and wants to scale his business to offer even more sustainable careers for employees.



7. Succession and Land Transfer Planning - Challenges

Farm succession and land transfer planning can be a complex and expensive process for established farmers, whether they are planning a transfer to a new generation within the family or working with someone unrelated. Agricultural service providers report that established farmers are generally reticent to discuss their succession and legacy plans and often put off the process until a pivotal moment. Not having a plan in place to address costs and issues such as long-term health care, capital gains, continued income, and dividing the land/assets appropriately among heirs can lead farm owners to having to sell their land, as the farm property is their biggest investment and source of equity.

- **Lack of Farm Succession Specialists:** There is great need for farmers to have a network of local advisors with expertise in many different fields, and a nuanced understanding of agriculture, to help develop comprehensive succession plans. Established farmers reported it can be difficult to find and connect with the specialists who can help them.
- **Lack of Financial Support:** Hiring professionals for succession and land transfer planning can be expensive, dissuading established farmers from seeking these services.
- **Difficulty Talking About Personal Issues:** Having conversations about money and death can be difficult, and farm succession requires deep discussions about an established farmer's assets during life and after death, including plans for the transfer of farm business management, retirement planning, and healthcare planning. Farm families may delay these conversations.
- **Time Constraints:** The timing of a farm transfer is critical and should be planned well in advance to be successful. If established farmers have not identified a next generation for their farm business at a critical moment, they may feel increased pressure to sell the farm to whoever can afford it, instead of arranging long-term or lease-to-own arrangements that could help next generation farmers access land.
- **Finding and Connecting Next Generation Farmers with Farmland Owners:** Farmer landowners who want to see their farm legacy continue might not have someone to pass the business on to, either because their children are not interested in managing the family farm business or they do not have children. In these cases, farmers generally reported that they are unable to find an appropriate steward or next generation farmer who they feel comfortable partnering with on a business arrangement.

Farmer Profile: Jim Giamarese, Giamarese Farm & Orchards



Jim's farm has been family-owned since 1941 and offers over 40-acres of pick-your own fruit and vegetables, Christmas trees, and agritourism activities. Jim does not have children to pass the business on to, and he is having trouble finding the 'right' next generation farmer to connect with to successfully operate the business in the future.

Succession and Land Transfer Planning – Recommendations

Help next generation & established farmers navigate land transfer and farm succession processes.

- Support would include assessing where farmers are at and what help they need, resource-referral, and guiding them to organizations and professionals.
- Next Gen Program staff have been participating in American Farmland Trust's Land Transfer Navigator training program to increase capacity to provide this support.

Develop a network of service providers specifically focused on farm succession and transition issues.

- This ecosystem of support would include attorneys, accountants, business planners, financial consultants, mediators, realtors, etc. that farmers and landowners could be referred to.
- Provide trainings to increase professionals' understanding of farm transition issues.

Provide planning grants to help farm families develop farm transfer and succession plans.

- Coordinate Farmland Stewardship Grant Program (farm viability program for preserved farms).
- Bill [A727/S1560](#) in current session has support for developing farm transition plans.

Provide active outreach and support for succession planning with retiring farmers.

- Support could include events that connect established farmers with service provider specialists and/or next generation farmers.

Provide support for evolution of the farm to its "next generation".

- As farms evolve to face modern challenges, they may need or want to change business models, diversify operations, or move to different products and markets.
- Support the "next generation" of the farm business.

Farmer Profile: Robert Fulper, Fulper Farms LLC

As a 4th generation farmer managing his family's 1100+ acre farm, Robert Fulper knows that succession and estate planning is something that most farmers do not want to make the time for in their busy schedule and, as a result, tend to avoid it all together. Robert feels that proactive outreach to farmers, combined with new resources for finding professionals and funding to help offset the costs, could seriously encourage more farmers to start planning to help secure the future they want to see for their farms.



8. Need for Community Support – Challenges

Many established farmers reported that being well connected to the agricultural community was a significant factor in their success. This industry-related support included being familiar with organizations like Rutgers Cooperative Extension, NOFA-NJ, and others and receiving guidance when needed; meeting with and receiving support from their County Boards of Agriculture and similar groups; and connecting with and relying on fellow farmers for general support and resource sharing. This community support helps farmers stay knowledgeable, engaged, and social, which is important for dealing with the many changes, stresses, and uncertainties that come with being a farmer. Next generation farmers may be unaware of these support outlets or may feel too intimidated to engage with them, which can lead to a feeling of isolation and sense of disconnectedness. Not having a support system can be incredibly detrimental to next generation farmer's overall success and well-being, particularly when dealing with the many challenges of farming.

- **High Stress and Feelings of Burnout:** Farmers report that to be successful, they must possess a myriad of skills including but not limited to production, marketing, business management, risk management, financial planning, social media, grant writing, human resources, and soil science, in addition spending long hours and being affected by unpredictable weather and events. As next generation farmers get started and advance in the industry, they will encounter different types of stress each season and may become overwhelmed to the point of leaving the industry.
- **Seasonal Nature of farming:** During the height of a farm season when timing is critical, hours are long, and work can be grueling, farmers must prioritize farm work and are typically unable to take time away from the farm. Ironically, this is when farmers feel the most stress and have the greatest need for support.
- **Stigma Against Mental Health Support:** Farmers generally possess an independent nature and are hardworking, which can lead many to rely on themselves to solve problems. This may prevent them from reaching out to others to discuss issues they may be dealing with.
- **Lack Of Cross-Trainings For Professionals:** There are many professionals that interact with farmers regularly for a variety of services, but there is a lack of programming about how to identify when a farmer may be struggling.
- **Awareness of the Ag Community:** Next generation farmers may not be as familiar with or connected to the main farming organizations in New Jersey. If they are unaware of who could reach out to, they may feel that they are unable to find support.



Farmer Profile: Matt Hand, Hand Picked Farm

With agricultural knowledge and experience from working on other farms, Matt began his own farm business in 2013 growing diversified produce. Matt faced various barriers related to leasing and zoning, which created stress related to the progression and viability of his business and eventually led him to switch careers in 2017 to support his family.

Need for Community Support – Recommendations

Connect next generation farmers to the agricultural community by building support networks and encouraging participation in agricultural meetings and events.

Support networking events to help next generation farmers engage with their peers and established farmers.

Develop affordable healthcare options for farmers.

Develop mental health cross-training events for professional service personnel.

Provide mental health outreach support to reduce ‘burnout’ of next generation farmers.

- Bill [A1230](#) in current session would establish a “Farm Mental Health and Financial Services Task Force” to help farmers navigate the business/financial challenges that may contribute to stress.

Farmer Profile: Gabe Siciliano, Abe’s Acres

A 3rd generation family farmer who is now farming in his 9th year, Gabe grows over 150 varieties of produce on 12 acres for a CSA and farmers markets. Gabe has experienced the long days and intensity of farming and feels that active outreach and mental health support to farmers is an important part of future farm viability, as next generation farmers may not be ready for the demanding mental strain involved with farming and may not know who they can reach out to when there is a crisis.



Joseph Notterman and grandson Gabriel in the same spot, 35 years apart

9. Next Gen Challenges Unique to Urban Agriculture

While next generation farmers in urban settings face many of the same challenges as other farmers, they often lack the same kind of support that may exist in rural areas. They also face certain unique issues that rural farmers may not.

- **Secure Land Access – Urban Zoning and Development:** Next generation farmers who live in urban or near-urban areas face even more difficulties in accessing land, as zoning ordinances typically do not include agriculture and development pressures are exceedingly high. When land is leased, it often is for a short-term with insecure tenure.
- **Small Farm Size:** Urban farms typically do not qualify for the significant protections of the Right to Farm Act. In addition to often being in zones that do not permit agriculture, they need a much greater amount of production income to qualify if they are under five acres.
- **Lack of Urban Ag Specialists / Industry support:** Currently, there is no USDA Urban Service Center in New Jersey to assist urban producers. New Jersey's three most urban counties (Hudson, Essex, and Union) also do not have County Agriculture Development Boards, which could be a local resource providing agricultural policy and program support. Additional resources, guidance, and support to get started also would help.
- **Soil Contamination:** Parcels with the potential space to support urban agriculture often require extensive clean-up or modification before they can be used for food production. Soils might be contaminated with heavy metals from an industrial past, and vacant lots may have been used for dumping sites. Services exist to support soil testing and clean-up, but urban farmers are not always aware of how to access them.
- **Need for Urban Ag Education and Mentors:** A lack of Urban Ag programming makes it difficult for prospective farmers in urban areas to learn how they can become farmers. There are no mentorship programs to help connect them with mentors who have successful urban agriculture operations, from whom they could learn firsthand.
- **Perception of Urban Ag:** Since it can be difficult for all farmers to find profitable markets, efforts to establish urban agriculture operations are sometimes perceived as competition and thus, not supported.

Farmer Profile: Tobias Fox, Newark Science and Sustainability, Inc

As the founder and managing director of a non-profit focused on providing food access, community engagement, and educational opportunities to Newark, Tobias has had to restart his agricultural operation 3 separate times since 2012 due to insecure land tenure. After adopting a lot in 2015 and transforming it into a community garden for three years, Newark SAS spent an additional three years working to finalize the purchase of the parcel in 2021 with financial support from foundations, private donors, and government agencies, and the help of volunteers. The purchase has enabled them to establish a hydroponic greenhouse and commercial kitchen to distribute fresh food to Newark community members in partnership with local farms.



Next Gen Challenges Unique to Urban Agriculture – Recommendations

Implement the recommendations outlined in the 2022 Rutgers Urban Agriculture Report.

- Policy, education, resource and other ideas (some overlap with the recommendations below).

Develop a State-level definition for urban agriculture.

- Should be done in line with State Board of Agriculture efforts to define urban agriculture.
- Would help with the planning and development of additional support.

Promote model zoning ordinances for urban agriculture and encourage their adoption by municipalities.

- Lack of clarity and definitions in zoning ordinances is a major obstacle to the implementation and sustainability of many urban agriculture projects across the State.

Support the creation of food hubs and food aggregators in urban areas.

- Some examples – [Urban Agriculture Cooperative](#) and [Common Market](#).
- Would promote market access for all farmers and improve local food security.

Develop an urban agriculture preservation program.

- Similar to small farm preservation and farmland access program ideas in *Land Access* section.
- SADC should explore options available to the State for preserving farmable urban spaces.

Develop urban agriculture resources, specialists, and mentoring programs.

- Work with Cooperative Extension to increase educational and technical resources to support urban farmers and urban agriculture non-profits.
- Some current bills ([S2186](#), [A1846](#), [A2458](#)) would create programs to support urban agriculture.

Support efforts to establish County Agriculture Development Boards in Hudson, Essex, and Union Counties.

- Would empower local urban farmers and residents to create official plans to guide support for agriculture in their communities.
- Would be key component for participating in any new urban agriculture preservation programs.

Support urban agriculture delegates to the State Agriculture Convention.

- Having additional delegates from organizations that represent the interests of urban agriculture would help to give this group more of a voice when policy priorities are being discussed.

Develop pathways to help urban farmers scale up and increase their production output.

- Urban farmers are a valuable potential source of future larger scale production farmers. They should be encouraged and supported to scale up their businesses to larger plots with more production potential.

10. Next Gen Challenges Unique to Veterans

Veterans and active-duty military personnel who are looking to transition into agriculture face the same challenges as all next generation farmers but may require additional or specialized support from individuals and organizations that understand their specific needs. Conducting outreach to veterans, increasing their awareness of existing farm programs, and helping them engage with these services can be another challenge.

- **Different Challenges and Needs:** Military life comes with unique circumstances and dynamics that are vastly different from what the civilian population encounters. Active-duty military and veterans may have physical and emotional challenges that add to the difficulties of getting started farming.
- **Lack of Ag Programs for Veterans in NJ:** Unlike some other states, New Jersey has a lack of programs focused on agricultural education for active duty-military or veterans. New Jersey does not have a Farmer Veteran Coalition chapter to support existing efforts in the state.
- **Not Identifying with the Term ‘Veteran’:** Not all members of the military identify with the term ‘veteran’ depending on the amount of time they served, their personal preference, or other reasons. A substantial portion of the military population may not partake in ‘Veteran’ programming that is available to them.
- **Need for Greater Targeted Outreach from Trusted Sources:** Stakeholders reported that outreach would be more impactful if it came from individuals/organizations with a military background. Veteran Farmers of New Jersey provides some outreach, but as a new organization, it would need additional support to increase its capacity. Having additional points of contact that can provide trusted guidance would help active-duty military and veterans learn about opportunities in agriculture.
- **Need for Community Support from Other Veterans:** Active-duty military and veterans often seek support from peers who have had similar experiences. It can be difficult for active-duty military and veterans to identify with and feel supported by civilians, especially as they face the stress of establishing or managing a farm business.



Farmer Profile: Ashley Asdal, Riamede Farm

After eleven years on active-duty in the Navy, Ashley now owns and operates a 68-acre apple orchard. According to Ashley, it can be difficult for people who come from different careers to learn about and access the existing agricultural community. Outreach to veterans can be especially difficult, as opportunities are limited to reach them while they are still on active-duty, and veterans may have additional challenges, physical and mental, that can make getting into farming difficult.

Next Gen Challenges Unique to Veterans – Recommendations

Coordinate with partner organizations, including Veteran Farmers of New Jersey, to improve outreach to veterans and active-duty military interested in pursuing a career in agriculture.

Develop programming to utilize Skill Bridge and connect veterans/active-duty military with established farmers to increase education and training.

- Skill Bridge connects active-duty military personnel to gain experience and training in non-military fields during the final year of their service through participation in structured education programs.

Reduce financial barriers by lowering veterans' interest rates on agricultural loans.

- Work with lenders to create lower interest loan options for veterans who have completed agricultural training programs and can show some level of farm experience.

Support a veteran farmer delegate at the State Board of Agriculture Convention.

- Having additional delegates from organizations that represent the interests of farmer veterans would help to give this group more of a voice when policy priorities are being discussed.

Help promote Jersey Fresh's Homegrown by Heroes program.

- Raise awareness of this marketing label among veterans and the public, to encourage its adoption and increase its impact.

Develop incentives for established farmers to work with veterans.

- Similar incentives to those discussed in the *Land Access, Capital Access, and Knowledge and Experience* sections for encouraging established farmers to work with next generation farmers to provide access to land and resources.
- Incentives could include liability protection, tax credits, wage offset for employing veterans, etc.

11. Common Challenges Faced By All Farmers

The challenges outlined in this report are issues that affect all farmers. As next generation farmers get started and advance, and as established farmers continue to farm and evolve, they face the same types of challenges. Access to land, capital, markets, technical assistance, community support, labor, and training on new practices are all critical for maintaining a viable farm operation. Equally important is figuring out how to manage the high costs of inputs and running a farm business. Next generation farmers have the disadvantage of needing to overcome many of these challenges all at once while also lacking the support and resilience that established farmers may have developed over time. As all farmers progress, it also is important to have support to be able to diversify, adapt, and reinvent the farm to meet changing conditions. The following list provides a snapshot of what can make the industry challenging for all farmers.

- Land – Having/acquiring enough land to sustain a growing business.
- Expenses – Affording the costs of inputs, labor, equipment, infrastructure, taxes, etc.
- Regulations – Navigating them and finding the right information for compliance.
- Labor – Finding skilled and reliable labor.
- Markets – Maintaining and creating new profitable markets.
- Education – Continuing to learn about new practices.
- Technical assistance – Connecting with knowledgeable service providers who can help.
- Community support – Having strong networks to mitigate stress.
- Industry support – Addressing the lack of processing facilities and support services.
- Climate change – Unpredictable weather, pest pressure, and disease management.
- Personal expenses – Housing, health insurance, and student loan or other debt.
- Succession planning – Addressing farm and family issues to continue the farm’s legacy.
- Current uncertainty regarding federal programs and funding.
 - Recent federal changes have cancelled important programs and frozen funding.
 - Many established and next generation farmers rely and were counting on these programs and this funding as part of their business models.
- Farm viability planning
 - Planning for how to address the challenges listed above.
 - Finding support to expand, diversify, or reinvent the farm.
 - Planning for the next generation of the farm.

Common Challenges Faced By All Farmers – Recommendations

Continue/enhance existing programs that support all farmers.

Develop new programs, resources, and initiatives that address the needs of all farmers.

Restart the Farmland Stewardship Grant Program (farm viability program for preserved farms).

Develop similar farm viability type programs for term-preserved and non-preserved farms.

Support the work of the statewide Farm Viability Initiative that includes the State Board of Agriculture, New Jersey Department of Agriculture, Rutgers, New Jersey Farm Bureau, and other agricultural entities.

Support the continuation of important federal programs/funding for New Jersey farmers.

Develop and support programs to reduce the costs of production and running a farm business.

Conclusion

New Jersey's next generation farmers come from a wide variety of backgrounds. Some grew up on a farm and are looking to carry on or adapt the family business. Some grew up without farm experience and might be younger newcomers, later career switchers, or others, who are looking to gain knowledge and experience to support a potential farm operation. All will face a range of challenges that include, at the most basic level, access to the land, capital, and markets that are needed to start and scale their businesses. Farming is a challenging industry but also full of opportunities with the right support and guidance.

The SADC and Next Generation Farmer Program can take the lead in developing additional land access programs, official apprenticeship and mentorship programs, and centralized resources, among other ideas. Farmland Stewardship Grants for preserved farms could also be restarted to support farm viability for all farmers, pending available funding. Partners could provide continued and new technical assistance, educational programs, and market initiatives, provided continued and expanded financial support for capacity.

The Next Generation Farmer Program could also continue to provide direct assistance to farmers, and it could play a central role in fostering a collaborative network of the many organizations in New Jersey working to support the next generation of farmers and farming.

If these recommendations are implemented, they will help provide the support that the next generation of farmers and farming in New Jersey needs to thrive. Overall, it will be important for the agricultural community to continue to work together on strategies to address the issues that affect all farmers, an effort that will continue to positively impact consumers, the State viewshed, and local economies as well. Any work to improve the viability of the industry would be a benefit for all farmers – next generation and established – and for cultivating the future of farming in the Garden State.