

The Next Generation of Farming in New Jersey

Report on Cultivating the Future of Farming in the Garden State



Fact Sheet – Overview of the Report

The State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC) on March 27, 2025 adopted a policy report developed by the SADC's Next Gen Farmer Program: "The Next Generation of Farming in New Jersey: Report on Cultivating the Future of Farming in the Garden State".

The purpose of this fact sheet is to provide an overview of the report. The full version summarizes the challenges faced by next generation and established farmers, and it provides 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. To read the full version, visit www.nj.gov/agriculture/sadc/nextgen or use the QR code on the last page.

Introduction

Policymakers, farmers, and agricultural organizations in New Jersey and nationally recognize the need to increase support for the next generation of 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. Next generation farmers include those from farm families as well as newcomers from a non-farming background.

Supporting the next generation of farming in New Jersey also means supporting established farmers. More assistance is needed to help farmers adapt to changing economic times and create the next generation of their farm businesses, work on farm succession planning, and address the common farm viability issues that affect farmers at all experience levels.

Outreach and Information Gathering

The Next Gen Program Team conducted extensive research and outreach to gather input from the agricultural community on the issues faced by next generation farmers as well as ideas for addressing these challenges. This work included more than 100 interviews and meetings with farmers, agricultural service providers, and other stakeholders in New Jersey. It also included developing online surveys and receiving more than 200 responses. The research included examining more than 400 programs and initiatives related to next generation farmer support from across the country.

Challenges Faced by Next Generation Farmers (And All Farmers)

The New Jersey agricultural community identified the following challenges as the top issues facing next generation farmers in New Jersey:

1. **Land access** – Gaining secure access to affordable/available land.
2. **Capital access** – Addressing the 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, diversification, and adaptation.
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.**

Stakeholders highlighted how these challenges are also 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 issues. 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.

Recommendations For Addressing the Challenges

The report's recommendations are based on an analysis of the major challenges and opportunities for enhancing existing support. Included are ideas for new programs, resources, and partnerships. Some ideas could be implemented by the SADC/Next Gen Farmer Program, and some could be implemented by or with partners. Some would also need support from the Legislature and Governor, such as through new legislation. The following is a sampling of the recommendations. See the full report for additional context.

General

- Develop an "Official" or "Qualified" next generation farmer status to qualify for new programs.

Land Access

- Develop a landowner tax credit to incentivize selling or leasing land to qualified next gen farmers.
- Develop a land access program that connects next generation farmers with established farmers.
- Explore ideas for providing land access through SADC-owned land.
- Develop program that provides next gen farmers with loans to buy and preserve threatened farms.
- Explore Farmland Preservation options for small farms that don't meet current eligibility criteria.

Capital Access

- Restart the Farmland Stewardship Grant Program (farm viability program for preserved farms).
- Develop tax credits and liability protections for farmers to lease equipment to next gen farmers.
- Support 'aggregated/bulk' purchasing programs that reduce individual farmers' costs for inputs.
- Support or develop programs that reduce the costs of production and running a farm business (e.g., NJDA mini-grants, farm viability grant program for all farms, loans for capital purchases).

Knowledge and Experience

- Develop a Structured Mentorship Program.
- Develop a Registered Agricultural Apprenticeship Program for New Jersey.
- Create incentives and protections for farmers who are interested in mentoring next gen farmers.
- Support new agricultural education and training programs at all levels.
- Permanently fund the Rutgers Cooperative Extension Beginner Farmer Training Program.

Complexity of Navigating the Agriculture Industry

- Continue Next Gen Program as first point of contact for guidance, resource-referral, and support.
- Create an easily accessible, central clearinghouse resource website for the NJ ag industry.
- Develop services to support business planning, industry connections, and finding farmland.
- Develop the agricultural ombudsman position in the NJ Department of Agriculture.

Market Access

- Improve and support the Local Food Purchasing Assistance (LFPA) Program.
- Promote and support Jersey Fresh Local Food for Schools (LFS) Program.
- Develop a Local Food for Public Institutions Program along the lines of LFPA and LFS.
- Promote and support market aggregators through grants, tax credits, or other incentives.
- Develop more third-party processing facilities for value-added products and meat processing.

Labor

- Develop a farm labor tax credit or other program to help offset the rising cost of farm labor.
- Create programs to help farmers reduce labor costs, such as through use of new technology.
- Support mentorship/apprenticeship recommendations that could help farmers afford labor.

Farm Transition Planning

- Develop a network of service providers equipped to help with farm succession issues.
- Provide planning grants to help farm families develop farm transfer and succession plans.
- Provide grants to help farms diversify, change business models, or evolve their products/markets.

Community Support

- Connect next generation farmers to the ag community's regular meetings and events.
- Support networking events to help next gen farmers engage with peers and established farmers.
- Develop mental health cross-trainings for professional service personnel.
- Provide mental health outreach support for next generation and established farmers.

Supporting Urban Agriculture

- Implement the recommendations outlined in the 2022 Rutgers Urban Agriculture Report.
- Develop a State-level definition for urban agriculture.
- Support the creation of food hubs and food aggregators in urban areas.
- Develop model zoning ordinances for urban agriculture that municipalities could adopt.
- Develop an urban agriculture preservation program.
- Establish County Agriculture Development Boards in Hudson, Essex, and Union Counties.
- Develop programs to help urban farmers who want to scale up and increase production.

Supporting Veterans

- Improve outreach to veterans and active-duty military interested in pursuing a career in agriculture.
- Explore using Skill Bridge to connect veterans/active-duty military with established farmers.
- Reduce financial barriers by lowering veterans' interest rates on agricultural loans.
- Develop incentives for farmers to employ, mentor, or make land/equipment available to veterans.
- Increase awareness of Jersey Fresh's Homegrown by Heroes program.

Supporting All Farmers

- Restart the Farmland Stewardship Grant Program (farm viability program for preserved farms).
- Develop similar farm viability type program for term-preserved and non-preserved farms.
- Support the continuation of important federal programs/funding that help New Jersey farmers.

Conclusion

The SADC and Next Gen Program could take the lead in developing additional land access programs, official apprenticeship and mentorship programs, and centralized resources, among other ideas. They could also continue to provide direct assistance and could play a central role in fostering a collaborative network of the many organizations in New Jersey working to support the next generation of farming. Farmland Stewardship Grants could also be restarted to support the farm viability of preserved farms.

Partners could provide continued or new technical assistance, educational programs, and market initiatives, provided continued and expanded financial support for their capacity. The Legislature could also provide support for specific recommendations as appropriate.

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.

For More Information

To read the full report, visit www.nj.gov/agriculture/sadc/nextgen/ or use the QR code below.

For more information on the report or the Next Gen Program, visit the website above or reach out to the Next Gen Program Team:

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