Pocket Resource Guide for Next Generation Farmers



Cultivating the Future of Farming in the Garden State

State Agriculture Development Committee



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Introduction

Traditionally, the next generation of farmers entered the industry and acquired land and farming knowledge by being raised in a farm family or marrying into one, however this is becoming less common. Many people from non-farming backgrounds also are interested in agriculture, but it is often difficult for them to navigate the high barriers to entry, even if they have farming experience. Overall, the greatest challenges for next generation farmers in New Jersey 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 also are unique challenges faced by urban growers as well as military veterans and active-duty service members. Depending on next generation farmers' background and experience level, they may not be able to access, be aware of, or qualify for the support that exists.

Regardless of entry point, next generation farmers also face everyday issues that all farmers face, including the high costs of running and managing a farm business in New Jersey. Being aware of the support that exists and accessing it is one of the keys to being successful.

Purpose of this Guide

This Pocket Resource Guide highlights the major resources that are available for next generation farmers and provides a starting point for finding specific programs and resources that can support them as they get started and advance in commercial agricultural production in New Jersey. Resource topics include getting started, business planning, financing, access to land, networking, and more.

Next generation farmers can hold onto this guide as they get started and/or advance in the agricultural industry and can refer back to it for helpful resources. You can navigate using the side tabs and keep important notes, questions, and reminders in the 'Notes' pages at the end.

For more information about each resource in this Guide and for additional resources, visit www.nj.gov/agriculture/sadc/nextgen/resources/.

Getting Started in Farming

Agriculture is a dynamic industry with many exciting opportunities for entrepreneurs. However, it is also complex and there are things to consider when deciding to start a farm business. The resources in this section include courses, workshops, guides, programs, and ideas that can be helpful when getting started. Regardless of a next generation farmer's agricultural background, one key is to learn more about the details of what starting and running a farm business requires and where that business could fit within the big picture of agriculture in New Jersey.

Educational Courses and Workshops

- Rutgers RU Ready to Farm - Beginning Farmer Training Program
- Northeast Organic Farming Association of NJ (NOFA-NJ) Educational Programs and Workshops
    - Exploring the Small Farm Dream, tours and workshops, open houses
- Foodshed Alliance Farmer Training webinars
- Cornell Small Farms Program Course – Planning and Funding your Farm Business
- University of Vermont New Farmer Classes

Getting Started in Farming

Resource Guides

Several organizations have created resource guides and websites that cover a broad range of topics for people looking to get started in farming. A selection of these guides and websites, which may have been produced by other states but are adaptable for NJ, includes the following:

- ATTRA – Evaluating a Farming Enterprise
- Farmers.gov – USDA Guide to Getting Started
- New Entry Sustainable Farming – How to Begin Your Small Farm Dream Guide and Farmer Resource Library

Opportunities for Hands-On Agricultural Training

- Rutgers RU Ready to Farm – Beginning Farmer Training Program
- NOFA-NJ JourneyPerson Program
    - For next generation farmers who already have access to land
- Working on local farms
- Opportunities on college farms
- NCAT ATTRA Internship Hub
- Rodale Institute – Farmer Training Program (PA)

Business Planning and Marketing

A career in farming requires business knowledge and acumen to successfully start, advance, and establish an agricultural operation. Additionally, business management skills and a sound business plan are vital for accessing many of the financial resources that are noted in the next section (see page 6). Listed below are several business planning resources that are available for farmers:

- Business.nj.gov – For planning, launching, operating, and growing your business
- New Jersey Small Business Development Center (NJSBDC) workshops
- Rutgers Cooperative Extension (RCE)
    - Beginning Farmer Business Planning
    - Annie's Project – Risk management education program for farmers
- Farm Credit East (FCE)
    - GenerationNext courses for producers assuming greater management responsibilities
    - Harvesting a Profit guide
- USDA – Plan Your New Farm Operation guide
- Small Business Administration (SBA)
    - SCORE Business Mentoring

Agricultural Credit and Financing

The costs of land, equipment, infrastructure, labor, and inputs are significant expenses for farmers. Many next generation farmers find it difficult to get a loan to address these needs and to finance the costs of establishing or expanding their business. Traditional commercial lenders generally do not provide financing for establishing new farms or diversifying existing operations, and lenders that specialize in agriculture typically require at least 3 years of farm business experience, farm owner/operator financial records, and collateral to qualify for a loan. The following resources, including two agricultural lenders, can help you learn more about your readiness to access financing for starting or expanding a farm business:

- Growing Opportunity: USDA Guide to Sustainable Farm Programs
- Farm Services Agency (FSA) – Loans
    - Contact your local office
- Farm Credit East (FCE) – Loans
    - Farm Start Program to help beginning farmers access capital
- NJ Department of Agriculture Grants (typically not for purchasing farmland or operational expenses)
- Farmland Information Center – Find Capital

Site Evaluation

When looking at a property, it is important to assess and make informed decisions about the suitability of the land for different types of prospective farming operations. Site evaluation involves doing due diligence to identify and review a property's agricultural and other characteristics. The following resources can help with understanding and assessing the soil, water, and other natural resources and land characteristics of a property that you might be interested in:

- Rutgers Cooperative Extension (RCE)
  - Contact your local county agent
  - Site Selection Fact Sheet
  - Soil Testing Laboratory
  - Map of Water Testing Labs
- NOFA-NJ
  - Technical Assistance Open Hours
- SADC Lease Planning Worksheet
  - Can help farmers clarify goals and needs.
- USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)
- NRCS Web Soil Survey – Online tool that provides soil data and other information.
- SADC Public Web Map – GIS map with farmland preservation and other layers

Access to Land and Leasing

The cost of farmland in New Jersey is very 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 can present 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. The following resources can help with assessing your readiness to access land, find land access opportunities, and develop a lease:

- SADC
  - Land Access Workshops and Worksheets for Beginning Farmers
  - Leasing Resources
  - NJ Land Link Fact Sheet
- County Board of Agriculture meetings
- Rutgers Cooperative Extension (RCE)
  - County Agricultural Agents
- NOFA-NJ – Open Houses and Classifieds Page
- Foodshed Alliance – SAgE Program
- National Young Farmers Coalition – Finding Farmland Course

Resources for Urban Agriculture

While next generation farmers in urban settings face many of the same challenges as other farmers, the support that exists in rural areas may not exist in urban areas. Urban growers also often face unique issues that rural farmers may not. Listed below are some resources that are specifically designed for urban agriculture:

- NJ Urban Agriculture Portal
  - Rutgers Office of Urban Extension
  - Production, planning, business management, and technical support
- USDA Urban Agriculture webpage
  - Technical and financial assistance.
- NRCS Urban Agriculture Programming
  - Assistance and resources
- Some organizations involved in urban agriculture in NJ:
  - NJ Food Democracy Collaborative
  - City Green
  - Urban Agricultural Cooperative
  - Newark Science and Sustainability Center
  - Communities Revolutionizing Open Spaces (C.R.O.P.S.)

Resources for Active-Duty Military and Veterans

Active-duty military service members and veterans who are looking to transition into agriculture face the same challenges that all next generation farmers face. At the same time, they might benefit from additional or specialized support from organizations that understand their specific needs. The following resources are available to support service members and veterans who are farming or looking to get into agriculture in New Jersey:

- USDA New Farmer Website
  - Veteran Training Opportunities
- Jersey Fresh Homegrown by Heroes
  - Marketing and branding program
- Veteran Farmers of New Jersey
  - Networking and education
- Veterans Business Outreach Center (Small Business Administration)
- NCAT: Armed to Farm
  - Sustainable Ag Training for Veterans
- Farmer Veteran Coalition (National nonprofit)
  - Fellowship Fund Grants
  - Veteran Careers in Agriculture: A Resource Guide

Agricultural Organizations in NJ

Being well connected to the agricultural community can help farmers stay knowledgeable, engaged, and socially connected, which is important for dealing with the many challenges, stresses, and uncertainties that come with being a farmer. See below for some of the major agricultural organizations that it can be helpful to connect and be familiar with:

- Rutgers Cooperative Extension (RCE) / NJ Agricultural Experiment Station (NJAES)
- New Jersey Department of Agriculture (NJDA)
- State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC)
- County Agriculture Development Boards (CADBs)
  - Right to Farm Act questions and issues.
- County Boards of Agriculture
  - Local boards that meet monthly to discuss ag issues and support. To learn more, contact your Rutgers County Agent.
- New Jersey Farm Bureau (NJFB)
- Northeast Organic Farming Association of New Jersey (NOFA-NJ)
- New Jersey Agricultural Society
- USDA Agencies – Offices in New Jersey
  - Farm Service Agency (FSA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Rural Development (RD)

Networking and Trade Groups

Connecting with and learning from other experienced farmers can be helpful for any next generation farmer. Listed below are several agricultural trade groups and networking organizations in New Jersey. Some of these groups, as well as some of the organizations on the previous page, have annual conferences and training events where you can meet with other farmers and agricultural professionals. While there are many additional trade/commodity groups, councils, and associations, the organizations listed below offer a good place to start.

- NJ Vegetable Growers Association (VGA)
- Mid-Atlantic Fruit and Vegetable Convention
- NJ Farm Bureau (NJFB) – Young Farmers and Ag Professionals
- NJ Nursery and Landscape Association (NJNLA)
- NJ Soybean Board
- NJ Horticultural Society
- NJ Agricultural Society – Agricultural Leadership Development Program

Helping with Farm Stress

Running a farm operation is not easy. In addition to spending long hours in the field, farmers must possess a myriad of skills to successfully manage their business. A farmer's operation also could be affected by unpredictable weather and other unforeseen events that could contribute to stress. If you are experiencing stress or becoming overwhelmed, reaching out to your support networks, the local agricultural community, and other resources can help. The list below provides a selection of resources that can help with farm-related stress:

- Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (Call, text, or chat) – Dial 988 for 24/7 free confidential support.
- NOFA-NJ Wellness Initiative
    - On-farm safety workshops and wellness-focused events
- Farm Bureau – Farm State of Mind
    - Resource directory, hotlines, and additional information
- NJ Mental Health Cares – (866) 202-4357
- Cultivemos: A Network for Cultivating Farmer Well-being
    - Links to resources, service providers, publications, hotlines, and podcasts

Next Generation Farmer Program

The Next Generation Farmer Program was established by the State Agriculture Development Committee to support the next generation of farmers and farm businesses in New Jersey. This includes helping next generation farmers from all backgrounds address the challenges they face when getting started, advancing, and establishing or diversifying their operations. It also includes supporting established farmers with succession planning, planning for the next generation of their farm operations, and addressing common farm viability issues that affect all farms.

Current Services

- Helping next generation and established farmers through resource referral, technical assistance, and networking connections.
- Maintaining and supporting NJ Land Link, www.njlandlink.org, the interactive website where farmers and landowners can connect regarding farmland and farming opportunities available/sought.
- Collaborating with and supporting the efforts of agricultural partners working on next generation farmer and farm issues.
- Developing and implementing new initiatives, programs, and resources recommended in the Future of Farming in the Garden State policy report adopted by the SADC in 2025.

Notes


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Cultivating the Future of Farming in NJ

For more information on the resources in this Pocket Guide, and for additional resources and guidance, please visit www.nj.gov/agriculture/sadc/nextgen or reach out to the Next Gen Program directly. Staff are available to discuss your farming plans, share ideas, and provide resources.

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