

Developing Programs for Veterans in Agriculture: How Maine Does It

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Farming with a disability



Identify the Population

- Veterans in Maine: 114K
 - 11% of adult population (Nat'l avg 6.6%)
- Total number of farms in Maine: 7,600
 - 1,400 farms/producers with military service
- United Farmer Veterans of Maine (UFVM) has connected with over 600 veterans either farming or interested in farming
 - Direct Mailings
 - Social media
 - Primarily Facebook (AgrAbility, Extension, MOFGA, UFVM, other farm specific groups)
- Outreach Events (trade shows, fairs, etc)

Barriers to Success

- Coming to farming late in life
 - Lack of farming experience
 - Few apprenticeship opportunities for older “new” farmers with families and other responsibilities
- Brain injury, depression, post-traumatic stress
 - Vision/Business Planning
 - Organization, Bookkeeping
 - Motivation
 - Mental/physical fatigue
- Physical limitations

Educate Veterans-2-Cultivate: Business Development & Assistive Technology Symposium (EV2C)

EV2C: Business Development

- One-on-One business mentors from SCORE (SBDC)
- Farm Financial Planning



EV2C: Workshops

- Farm Stretching
- Circle of Support
- Assistive Technology
(memory, universal design)
- Veteran Farmer Showcase



EV2C

- Resource Fair
- Farmer Panel



EV2C: Make it FUN!

- Swag Bags
- Silent Raffle items
- LOTS OF NETWORKING!
- Survey cohort after the event



EV2C: Outcomes

- 70 participants
 - 27 Veteran farms represented
 - 18 Resource fair participants
- Survey results
 - 80% attended for networking opportunities
 - 80% feel it's important to remain a veteran-only event
 - 53% stated they planned to follow up with their business mentor
- EV2C 2020: Saturday, November 14th

**“More time, more vendors, more presenters,
more Veteran farmers”**

Boots-2-Bushels: Boot Camp for Market Gardeners & Farmers (B2B)

B2B: Competency Based Objectives

- Farmer skill and knowledge for vegetable growers in Maine
 - Long-term productivity and efficiency of soil health.
 - Best practices for crop planning
 - Best practices to optimize high-quality vegetable & fruit production to include integrated pest management
- Business skills required to run a successful farm business
 - Marketing and branding strategies
 - Farm business planning

B2B: Schedule & Location

- 9 Month program: January – September
- VA hospital community garden
- 16 participants including one civilian*
- Jan-Apr: Twice monthly classroom instruction
 - Cooperative Extension and MOFGA educators
- Apr-Sep: Field production
 - 25 member CSA, 16 weeks of food shares
- Field trips to other producers

B2B: Educational Support & Funding

- UMaine Cooperative Extension and MOFGA educators with Maine AgrAbility - veteran outreach coordinator facilitates program
- 2020 funding
 - Disabled American Veterans (DAV)
 - VA Recreation Therapy Department
- 2021 – 2024 (potential funding)
 - VA Farming and Recovery Mental Health Services (VA FARMS) pilot program

B2B: Foster Unit Cohesion

- Private Facebook group
 - Novice to 11+ years farming experience
- Accountability – checking in on each other
 - Passing the word, phone tree
- Share ideas, tips and techniques
- Enable group bulk purchases
- Peer-to-Peer mentoring
- Field work will include workshops & activities
 - Yoga, cooking, mindfulness, tai chi, etc.

FB Comments

“It's my goal to share this with my community - after 40+ countries of travel I find that the greatest impact each of us can make is a positive contribution on a community level.” *Feb. 7, 2020*

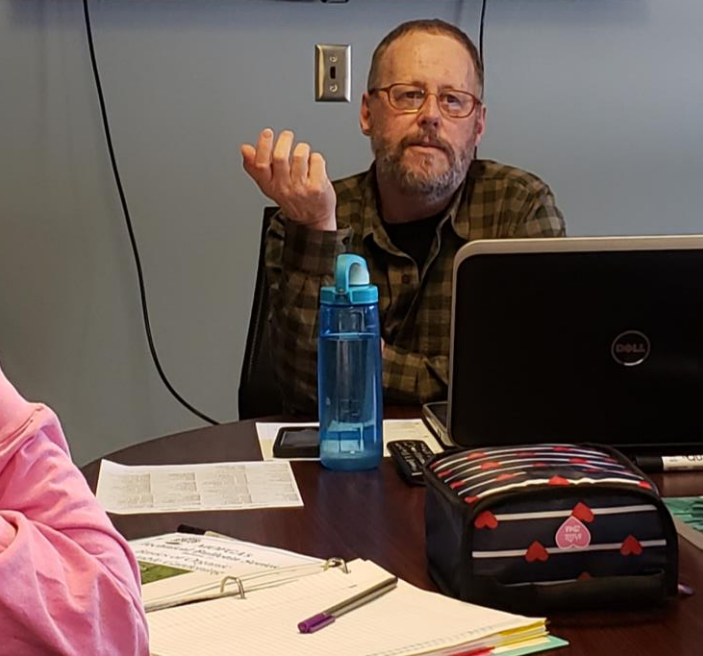
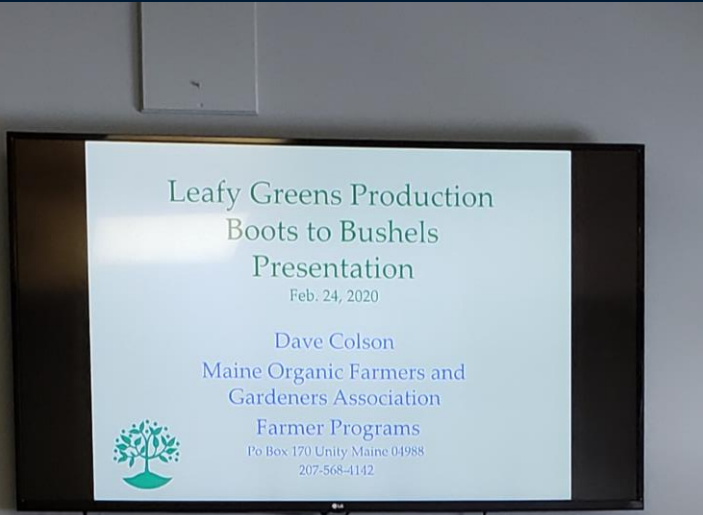
“...having animals and land to be stewards of helps my husband stay connected and gives him a sense of purpose that he's struggled to maintain since retiring.” *Jan. 19, 2020*

My FAVORITE FB comment thus far:

“My husband has budgeted for seeds, will be buying them this week, is determining what will probably sell, planning the plots for the greenhouse/high tunnel, and wants to sell CSA's..... Who is this "new man"? Thank you Boots to Bushels class, sponsored by Agribility [sic]” *Feb. 6, 2020*



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Takeaways

- **Farming is hard:** it's even harder if you are coming to it late in life, and/or struggle with depression, brain injury or PTS
- **Success in the military:** grit, determination, resilience, creativity translate well to farming
- Farm business and entrepreneurial skills **can be learned**
- **Veteran-centric** education and training programs create space for veterans to learn and help each other
- Important to foster non-veteran **farm community integration**

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