



Young New York Fruit Farmers Learn to Mitigate Risk

As the youngest son of a farmer, David Bittner said that when he was in high school, he didn't plan on following in his father's footsteps. Although he knew that he wanted to have a career in agriculture, he never wanted to work on a farm. Well, college taught Bittner a lot of things, but perhaps the most important was "never say never".

During his junior year in college, Bittner decided that the farm was where he belonged. He now works with his father and brother at Singer Farms, a 500-acre farm that produces apples, cherries, peaches, apricots, prunes, plums, pears and blueberries.

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A goal of Bittner's is to one day become a field manager, and through the help of an educational series conducted by Cornell Cooperative Extension titled, "Future New York Fruit Growers," Bittner was able to learn more about what it takes to achieve that goal. The series was led by Mario Miranda Sazo, who received grant funding for the project from the Northeast Center for Risk Management Education. Bittner took part in the program as both a participant and planner, and said that at the onset of the series he "saw a young group of farmers who had little or no ownership in the farm they worked for, and wanted to know more about management and practices of the fruit industry."

The series covered a wide array of topics, such as strategic planning, business financial statements, cost of production models, developing job descriptions, family business planning, hiring the right person, and insecticide 101. Cornell researchers also discussed the current fruit practices and the technology and research behind it. In all, 176 individuals attended more than 30 labor, business and production meetings.

For those with less experience, the sessions proved invaluable to their development as farmers. Said Bittner, "I decided to get involved in this series to gain more knowledge of the industry I'm in. As a college-educated farmer, I gained knowledge of the concepts and theories from college, and the practical application and further education from participating in this programming. I saw the series as a way to know more and network with others at the same stage in work and life as me."

Once averse to a career in farming, Bittner now relishes the role and credits the series with helping him as he works hard toward his management goal. He indicated that learning from the experiences and research of his fellow farmers was extremely valuable, and he explained that some of the participants have started their own group, where they continue the lectures and tours of farms that the Cornell Cooperative Extension project began. "With the group we are gaining skills in not just farming but group work and making ties with other people who I would not have known before the series started. The series has also helped me work toward implementing job descriptions and other tools to make sure everyone knows their responsibilities and what a task is and how it should be done. This will help keep my farm competitive and efficient. With the knowledge I gained from the series, I can work toward keeping the farm I work for going as best I can."



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Section 524(a)(3) of the Agricultural Risk Protection Act of 2000 authorized the Partnerships for Risk Management Education and provided \$5 million dollars annually to be administered by USDA-NIFA. Extension Risk Management Education is delivered through four regional centers that provide grant funding and leadership within their regions.

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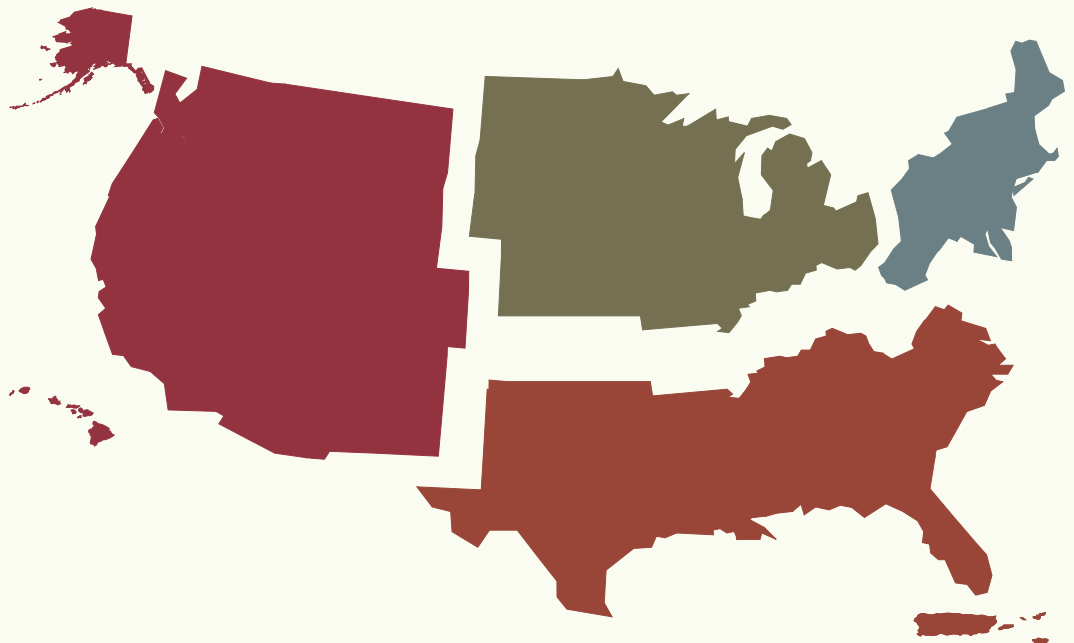
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