



Managing Human Risk on Vermont Organic Farms

There has been a significant increase in issues that small, diversified, and/or organic farmers are facing around employee management, conflict resolution, legalities of hiring decisions, and employee retention. In an online “Farm Labor and Management” survey performed by the University of Vermont Extension, over 240 respondents indicated interest in the topic of agricultural human resource management. In this survey, farmers indicated the following labor-related challenges facing their farms: training employees to work independently; motivating employees for high quality work; and managing employees efficiently for maximum return on labor investment.

To address this need, a team led by **Enid Wonnacott** of the **Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont** developed a project to address the human and legal risks of beginner and advanced sustainable and organic farmers throughout Vermont. Production practices for these types of farming require significant manual labor, resulting in increased risk to farm

functioning and profitability related to labor management. The emphasis of the project was on: a) employee training, management and communication; b) employee motivation and providing leadership; c) labor regulations and; d) labor recruitment, hiring and retention. The team delivered this risk management education in a series of three courses, hosted in two regions of Vermont, for a total of six courses

Ninety-one farmers participated and gained an understanding of the impact human resource management practices have on profitability, production and quality of life. Eighty-five percent of participants reported that they would implement at least one HR management change following the workshops. One hundred percent of farmers who responded to a post-growing season survey successfully implemented HR management changes. Nine farmers worked with a farm adviser to enhance human resources plans and practices for their farms. Project organizers and legal counsel also developed web-based educational materials on labor regulations.



“It was very focused on practical farm-based solutions. Good experience-based perspective that really addresses...farm issues and challenges.”

- Vermont Farmer





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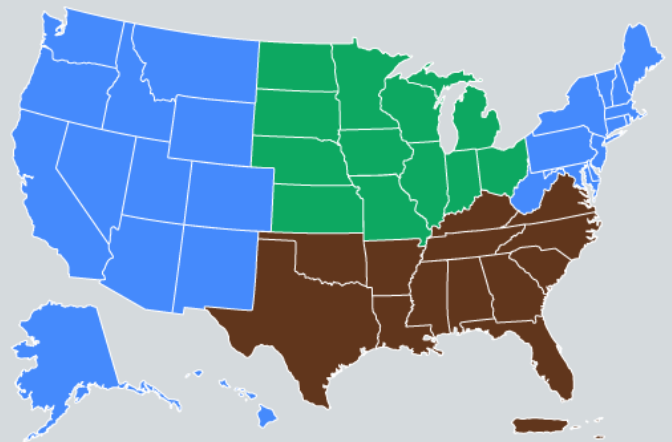
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**“Educating America’s farmers and ranchers
to manage the unique risks of producing food
for the world’s table.”**

Extension Risk Management Education (ERME) is delivered through four regional centers that provide grant funding and leadership within their regions.

Projects are producer-focused, results-based and encourage public-private partnerships. Funded projects must identify targeted results that will help producers manage risk and then describe how the project will measure those results.

Extension Risk Management Education has funded innovative programs that have generated tangible results for producers in every state. ERME is committed to funding results, providing transparent accountability, and encouraging collaboration. View the accomplishments of all funded projects on our website. <http://ExtensionRME.org>



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