



Building farm resilience: on-farm leadership development and human resources training

Human risk such as employee management, labor supply, and communication are a critical issue and area of concern for producers in western **Massachusetts**. **Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture, Inc. (CISA)**, led by Program Director **Kelly Coleman**, developed a program to meet these needs based on a survey conducted in which 35 farmers out of 121 respondents indicated they would like CISA to offer training in human resource topics such as management skills, labor regulations, employee policies, and workplace communication. By creating a positive workplace environment, family and small-scale farms can build resiliency and mitigate the effects of family emergencies and workforce changes to improve their long-term economic viability.

Eighty-three small specialty-crop or value-added producers participated in the program which included 5 workshops, 1 farmer-to-farmer video-conference, 49 one-on-one meetings, and resource materials to learn strategies for on-farm leadership development and best practices in labor management. Topics included cultural humility and dexterity, conflict resolution, performance

management, employee policies, building a positive workplace culture, and employee management challenges unique to the pandemic. As a result of participation, farmers and farm managers increased understanding of employee management and communication strategies, on-farm leadership development options, legal requirements, and best practices in staff training. Farmers and farm managers gained skills to evaluate their own labor management and to begin to implement improvements in their labor management and training efforts. Farm labor management information and tools were adapted and made available online. By the end of the project, 26 farmers had implemented at least one improvement in their farm labor management.

Due to the constraints of the pandemic in 2020, CISA had to shift their resources to meet farmers' emerging needs such as cancelled plans to hire seasonal staffing, sudden market shifts, and management changes that were now put on the back burner. An online resource page with information on new employee management concerns, including a guide to new workplace safety standards, was developed to meet those needs. These resources were well received and allowed farmers to adapt to the new reality and manage the new legal and human risks arising out of the pandemic.

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"We made some sweeping updates to our employee manual based on info we got at the CISA session and ran it by a labor lawyer for review and got confirmation that we were on point."
– Farm Manager

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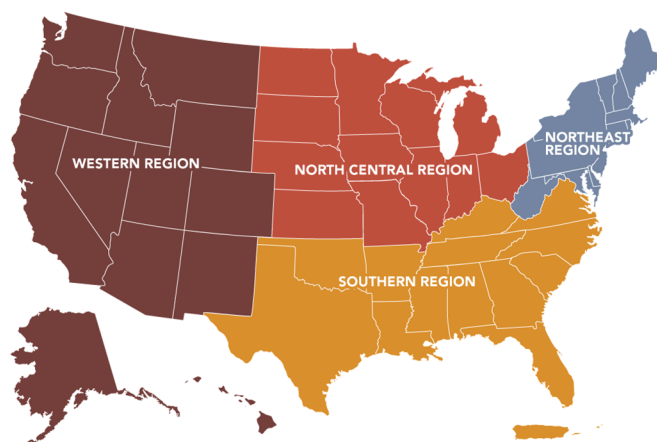
Extension Risk Management Education is supported by
the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture.

“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 education projects that have generated tangible results for agricultural producers in 56 US states and territories. Beginning in 2020, the Centers initiated a new funding opportunity for the delivery of risk management education to agricultural producers underserved by the Federal crop insurance program. Priorities for both of these programs include commitments to funding results, providing transparent accountability, and encouraging collaboration. The accomplishments of all funded projects are available for public viewing on the ERME website:
<http://ExtensionRME.org>



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