

# **Executive Summary from the First Farmer Training Roundtable**

## **Illinois Local Food, Farms & Jobs Council**

Tuesday, November 13, 2012  
Byron Colby Barn - Prairie Crossing, Grayslake, Illinois

### **1. Introduction**

**Will Illinois train enough farmers by 2020 to reach state goals for the growing local food and farm economy?**

**Who is training farmers in Illinois?**

**Where are the gaps in training?**

**How can practitioners work together to fill the gaps?**

To consider these questions and others critical to building a healthy local food and farm economy in the state, practitioners of farmer training in Illinois – farmers, educators and others from farmer associations, community colleges, nonprofits, universities, farm incubators, university extension, state and federal agencies, and more – gathered at the Bryon Colby Barn in Grayslake, Illinois, on November 13, 2012.

The Farmer Training Roundtable was convened by the Illinois Local Food Farms and Jobs Council (ILFFJC). The Council's Farmer Training Working Group formed a planning committee with more than a dozen individuals engaged in farmer training throughout the state. Members of the planning committee are listed in Section 5 below.

The Council's goal is to launch a statewide conversation and motivate stakeholders to engage in collaborative endeavors to fill gaps in farmer training and thereby help reach prepare farmers to meet state goals and the growing demand for local food and farm products. The ILFFJC will continue to support this conversation through future roundtables as desired by stakeholders.

### **2. Background and Purpose**

The Illinois Local Food, Farms and Jobs Council has a legislative mandate "To support and expand programs that recruit, train, and provide technical assistance to Illinois farmers and residents in order to encourage the production of local farm or food products." (from the ILFFJ Public Act - goal D.)

As such, the Council formed a Farmer Training Working Group and empowered it to pursue the following goal, one of seven key goals in the Council's strategic plan: "Convene farmer training program stakeholders (farmer associations, community colleges, nonprofits, incubators, universities, etc.) to advance the legislative mandate and 2020 targets for production and consumption of local food and farm products."

The ILFFJC convened the Farmer Training Roundtable to achieve five major objectives:

- assess state goals in the Public Act (targets for 2020)
- identify farmer training targets to help meet state goals for expanding the supply/demand of local food and farm products
- share models for farmer training in the state and map these assets
- identify gaps in farmer training (programmatic, geographic, numerical)
- identify individual and collaborative action steps among stakeholders to meet the 2020 targets in the Public Act

This Farmer Training Roundtable was intended as the first of up to three Roundtables to be convened by the Council in 2012 and 2013. Others may be held, depending on assessments from the first event, for stakeholders in central and/or southern Illinois. The gatherings are all intended as one-day events.

Anticipated outcomes from the roundtables (as per the ILFFJC strategic plan) are:

- Farmers and educators are aware of program models and gaps in reaching state goals.
- Farmers and educators identify opportunities for collaborative action (sharing of models, curriculum, HR, financial resources, etc) that help to reach state goals.
- Farmers and educators develop a user-friendly communication tool to inform farmers about the web of resources available from collaborative action.
- More prospective, beginning and transitioning farmers gain access to training (production, marketing, land, finance/credit) that makes their local farm operations more viable.

### **3. Agenda, Stakeholders, Process, and Inputs**

The planning committee purposefully chose to organize the meeting around the big questions posed in the introduction above, and to use Open Space meeting facilitation to allow for greater interaction among participating stakeholders. For more information on Open Space facilitation and the final roundtable agenda, see links in Section 6 below.

Second, while the planning committee acknowledges that everyone in the state is a stakeholder in our food system, it chose to focus invitations for the first roundtable on the practitioners of farmer training, those who are most intimately involved in programs directly working with farmers.

To build the invitation list, the committee requested that all ILFFJC directors, guests of the Council meetings, and colleagues contribute names of farmer training practitioners in the state. Then planning committee members were asked to submit names to the invitation list. Calls were made to selected members of the list, who were asked to submit additional names. After invitations were sent out, additional names were submitted by some invitees and other individuals heard about the event through word of mouth. All interested persons were welcomed. In the end, nearly 100 individuals from across the state were identified and invited to the first meeting, and just less than half of them attended. For the full list, see the attachments in Section 6.

In advance of the gathering, invitees were asked to submit a 2-page description of their farmer training programs, and to bring their issues, questions, and topics to be addressed in the Open Space sessions. In addition, attendees were asked to bring along material of any sort (facts and figures, curricula, agendas, case studies) that would help frame and advance the conversation around farmer training.

To prepare for the opening plenary, invitees were asked to read in advance: [Getting Real about Feeding Illinois: Setting the Stage for the Farmer Training](#). The attachment is also listed in Section 6 below.

## 4. Outcomes

### 4A. Will Illinois train enough farmers by 2020 to reach state goals for the growing local food and farm economy?

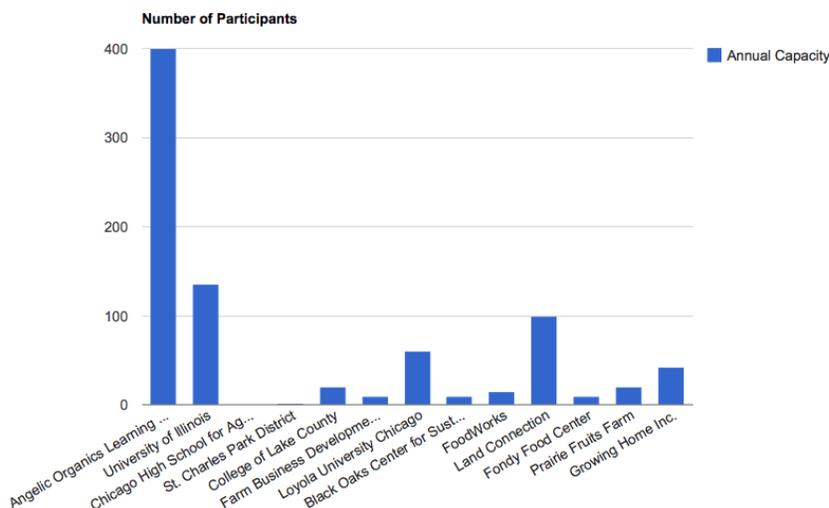
The short answer from attendees was “no”. The current capacity of farmer training programs in Illinois is not great enough to meet the perceived need for new farmers and/or training of farmers for the growing local food and farm economy.

The paper introduced at the opening plenary posited that approximately 10,000 new farmers will be needed by 2020 to reach the state goals. Participants agreed that these numbers are educated guesses and that further research is needed to be able to document and track progress on these goals. See: [Getting Real about Feeding Illinois: Setting the Stage for the Farmer Training](#) in Section 6: Documents.

### 4B. Who is training farmers in Illinois and where are the gaps in training?

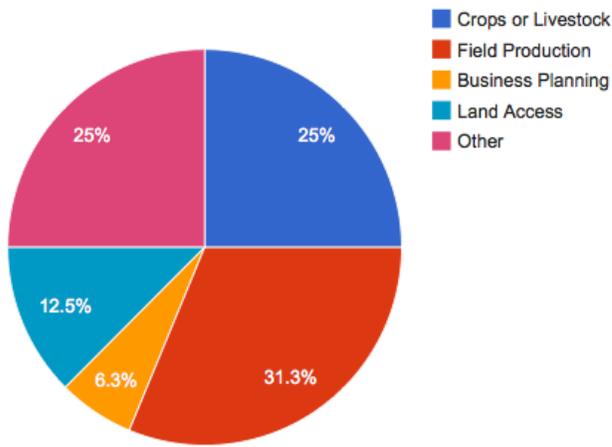
The roundtable stakeholders who attended assembled data from across the state. Though incomplete, it begins to paint a picture of the programmatic, geographic and participant demographics. Here are some of the key findings.

In terms of participants, the thirteen farmer training programs profiled reach 823 farmers each year.



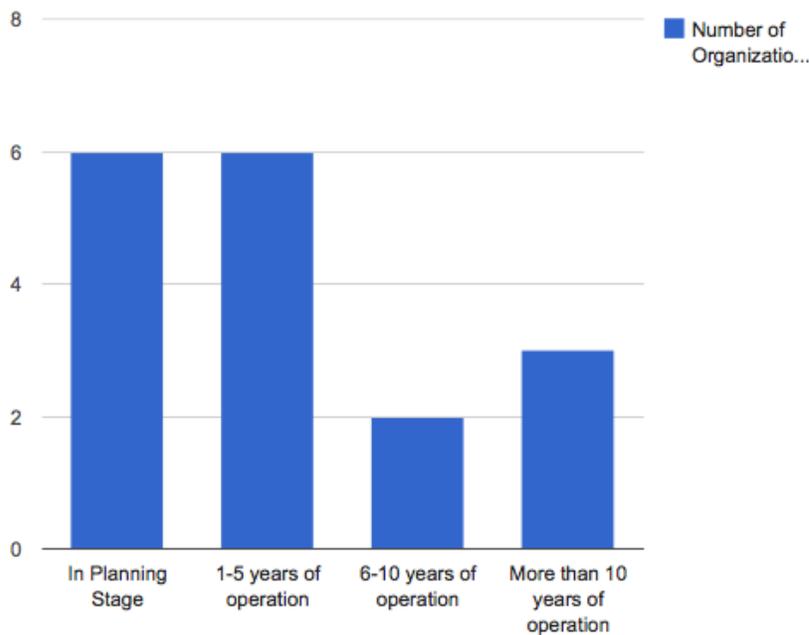
Illinois farmer training programs cover a wide variety of topics, with most focusing on Field Production (31%) and Crops or Livestock (25%). Land access as a primary focus comes in at 12.5% and farm business planning at 6%.

**Primary Program Focus**



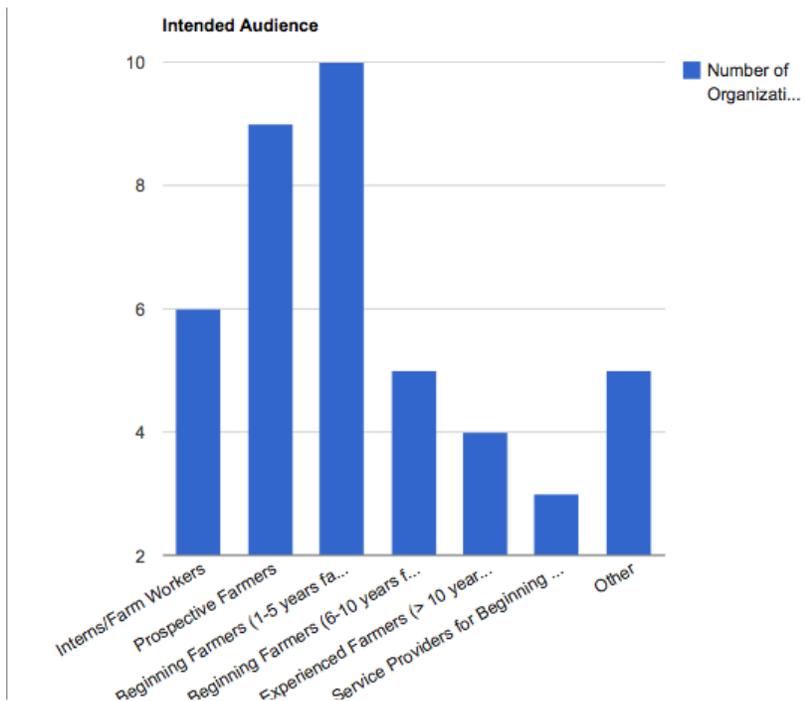
There are farmer training programs in all stages of development in the state, from those with more than 10 years of experience (3) to those in the planning stages (6).

**Program Maturity**

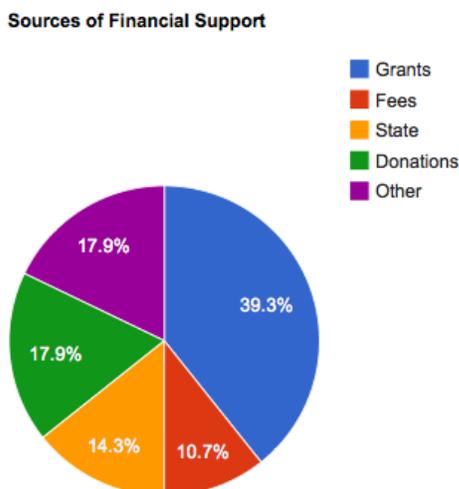


The intended audience varies according to each program, but the greatest number focus on beginning farmers in their first five years of startup (10 programs). After this, the most common audiences are prospective farmers (9) and interns/farmhands (6). A small number of organizations focus on beginning farmers in their sixth to tenth year of

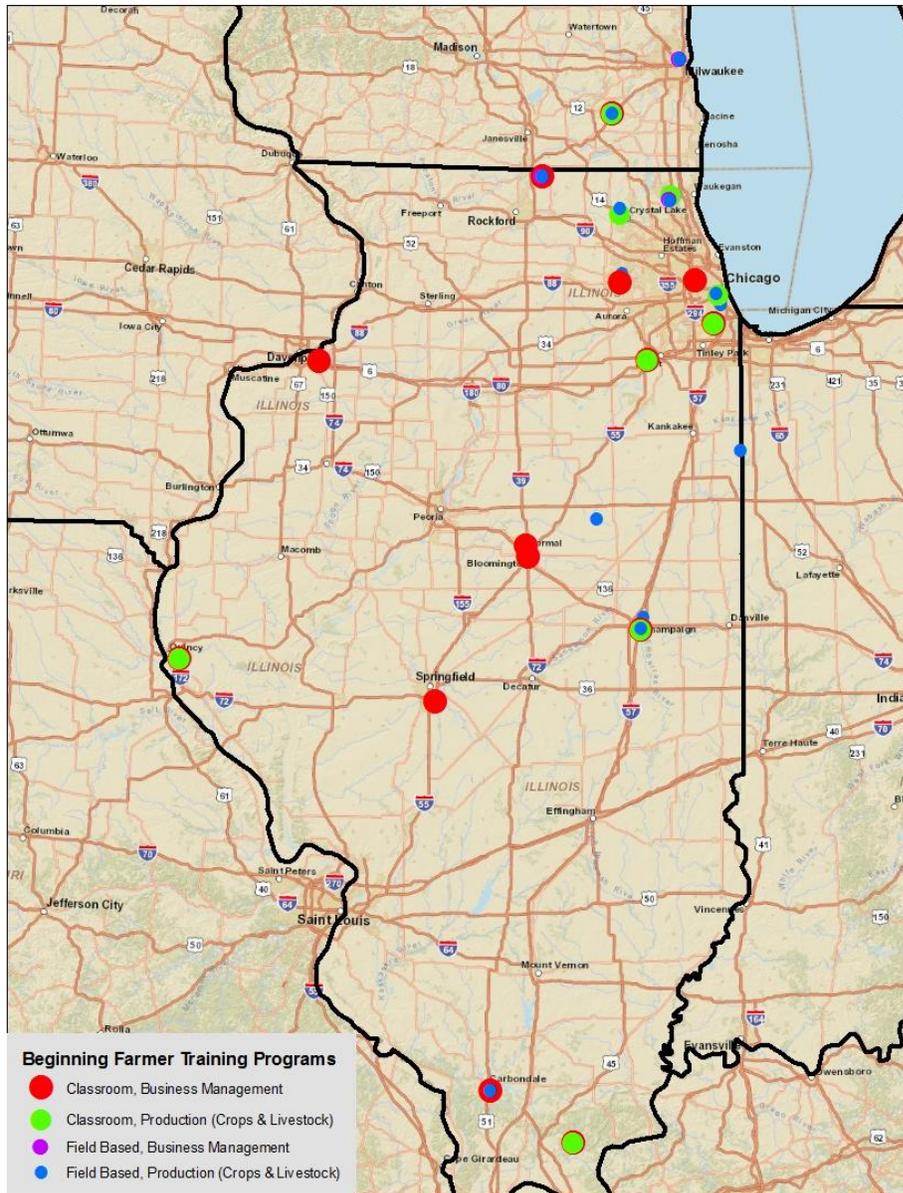
operation, and even fewer focus on experienced farmers with more than ten years of operations. A few programs focus on supporting other farmer training programs.



How is farmer training in Illinois being funded? Currently, 39% of stakeholders report that they are grant-funded (foundations), followed by donations (18%) and other sources (18%). State government contributes to just 14% of programs and fees for services contribute to 11% of program budgets.



Participating programs mapped their programs geographically and programmatically. Programs identified their geographic locations and coupled that with whether they offered field-based or classroom-based instruction around Production (crops and livestock) or Business Management.



From this mapping exercise, the participants raised a series of questions for further consideration and/or research and these are captured in the attachment:

[Notes ActionItems FarmerTrainingRoundtable Nov13 2012.docx](#).

**Note:** An interactive map is under construction and there are plans to host it online in 2013. All stakeholders are requested to update their information on the document [Map\\_BeginningFarmerTrainingPrograms.xlsx](#) (see link in Section 6 below) and to forward updates to [rebecca@learngrowconnect.org](mailto:rebecca@learngrowconnect.org).

#### **4C. How can we work together to fill the farmer training gaps?**

Participants met in small working groups during the Open Space sessions around topics that participants chose to address during the roundtable. The groups focused on:

- Strategic Permanent Farmland Conservation
  - Leaders: AOLC, TLC, Food Works, Liberty Prairie Foundation
- Farmland Access and Access to Capital
  - Leaders: Liberty Prairie Foundation, Larry O'Toole
- Food Access/Security
  - Leaders: Fondy Food Center, Black Oaks Center, CLC
- Building Supportive Communities for Farmers
  - Leaders: Black Oaks Center, Prairie Fruits Farm, Univ. of Illinois, Illinois Community College Board, Spence Farm Foundation, Loyola Univ., Heartland Community College
- Research Project Support and Data
  - Leaders: Loyola Univ.
- Pedagogy and Methodology
  - Leaders: Black Oaks Center, Loyola Univ., Growing Home
- Beginning Farmer Training Programs
  - Leaders: Univ. of Illinois Extension, TAA, Illinois Community College Board, CLC, Fresh Taste, Loyola Univ., Food Works, Spence Farm Foundation, AOLC, McHenry County College

Each of these working groups produced a brief summary of their work, divided into Current State of the Field/Questions, Gaps, Opportunities and Action Steps.

Names of participants are noted in the reports and next to specific action steps. Participants intend to follow up on the action steps of the working groups and to report back to their peers and stakeholders.

For the reports from the working groups and the list of action steps, please see the attachment: [Notes\\_ActionItems\\_FarmerTrainingRoundtable\\_Nov13\\_2012.docx](#).

#### **5. Organizers and Acknowledgements**

The Illinois Local Food, Farms and Jobs Council is tremendously grateful to all the attendees who contributed their time and talents to the roundtable. We are grateful to The Liberty Prairie Foundation for hosting us at the Byron Colby Barn at Prairie Crossing and for the delicious locally-sourced lunch.

The Council is grateful for the months of planning and the team effort of its Farmer Training Working Group. We express our gratitude to all the members of the Roundtable planning committee:

Tom Spaulding (Chair), Angelic Organics Learning Center  
Terra Brockman, The Land Connection  
Kendra Buchanan, Illinois Department of Agriculture

Colleen Callahan, USDA Rural Development  
Deborah Cavanaugh-Grant, University of Illinois Extension  
Dayna Connor, Food Works  
Bill Thomas, USDA National Agricultural Library  
Poppy Davis, USDA Office of Advocacy and Outreach  
Karen Lehman, Fresh Taste  
Donna Lehrer, Farmer  
Lavon Nelson, Illinois Community College Board  
Mike Sands, Liberty Prairie Foundation & Farm Business Development Center at Prairie Crossing  
Rick Weinzierl, University of Illinois

For more information on the Illinois Local Food, Farms, and Jobs Council, go to [www.foodfarmsjobs.org](http://www.foodfarmsjobs.org).

## 6. Roundtable Documents

**See attachment or link for the Roundtable Agenda:**  
[Agenda FarmerTrainingRoundtable Nov13 2012.docx](#)

**See attachment or link for the List of Attendees and Invitees:**  
[Attendees FarmerTrainingRoundtable Nov13 2012.xlsx](#)

**See attachment or link for the paper on Farmer Training Goals presented at the Roundtable:**  
[FarmerGoals FarmerTrainingRoundtable Nov13 2012.docx](#)

**See attachment or link for the Open Space Reports and Roundtable Notes:**  
[Notes ActionItems FarmerTrainingRoundtable Nov13 2012.docx](#)

**See attachment or links below for the List of Program Summaries available online for participating roundtable stakeholders:**  
ProgramSummaryInfo\_FarmerTrainingRoundtable\_Nov13\_2012.docx

- Program summary descriptions:  
<https://docs.google.com/folder/d/0B3jnI2soTfySN0hQQkp4X2V4RkU/edit?usp=sharing>
- Consolidated graphical overview of summaries:  
<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheet/ccc?key=0AnjnI2soTfySdFZ4ZXR3NUZ5b3VkeC11VndHeTBVTEE&usp=sharing>
- Strengths and weaknesses of programs:  
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/11rnUWgZe7xjWUM1yNpwARzVr2VZ8icS99wFYU0s07io/edit>

**See attachment or link for the List of Programs included on the Illinois map:**  
[Map\\_BeginningFarmerTrainingPrograms.xlsx](#)

**See attachment or link for more information on Open Space facilitation:**  
[OpenSpaceDiscussion FarmerTrainingRoundtable.docx](#)