

Facilitating success for BFRs in Washington's remote island communities

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Assisting BFRs through intensive farmer training, workshops, land access, business planning and mentoring

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The goal of this project is to assist BFRs with establishing, growing, and improving farm enterprises in isolated islands in Northwest Washington State.

This project works through five activities:

- Offering full-time experiential training at the Organic Farm School
- Offering numerous workshop opportunities
- Facilitating access to local farmland
- Offering technical assistance on business planning
- Providing a mentoring program linking elder farmers to BFRs.



Farmers-to-Farmland



This project tackles the unique challenges that BFRs face on Whidbey Island and the San Juan Islands of Washington State. The islands are geographically isolated with limited access to regional markets and regional agricultural support services. High real estate values limit access to farmland and prior to this project, there was no coordinated effort to assist BFRs seeking to establish or transition onto a farm enterprise. By providing coordinated access, training and technical support for BFRs, our project hopes to maintain and expand the historic agricultural economy of these islands and the region.



The **Organic Farm School (OFS)** offers an 8-month, full-time experiential training program focused on providing new farmers the skills to build successful small scale farms generating a triple bottom line. The BFRDP grant provided funding to expand the program's student capacity as well as enhance the curriculum to include livestock, grain and mechanics and deepen both the financial management and farm marketing studies. The OFS has a strong success rate with 80% of graduates continuing to farm and 40% now managing farm operations.

Outcomes for the Organic Farm School include training 39 new farmers who start 16 new farm operations.



WSU San Juan County Extension plans and hosts a variety of workshops to serve the BFR community on the islands. Topics so far have included haymaking and nutrition, poultry processing, financial training, building soil and growing forage, tractor maintenance & right sizing equipment, exploring direct and local, wholesale markets, hands on entomology, preparing farmers and processors for FSMA compliance, vet skills, and starting a dairy. As of year two, 95 unique BFRs have attended these workshops.

Outcomes for the WSU workshops series include 70% of participants implement beneficial changes in farm production and business practices.



WSU San Juan County Extension is also organizing and implementing a mentorship program to connect elder farmers with BFRs. Interest in the program was high and eight matches have been made so far with mentees reporting enthusiastically about their increased skill and confidence and their appreciation of the support of their mentors in physical skills, financial management, and morale support during challenging events. All pairs have already met more than the required four times and some are meeting weekly or bi-monthly.

Outcomes for the mentorship program was originally set at 6 successful mentorships but the end number will be much higher.



The **San Juan Island Ag Guild** and the **Whidbey Island Conservation District** are working together on assisting land access and/or land transfers for BFRs by linking new farmers to retiring farmers and/or absentee farmland owners and assisting with assessment of farmland suitability. So far 8 BFRs have accessed farmland through the program and 24 others are currently being assisted. In addition, 20 farmland owners have been assisted in identifying their goals and timelines for transitioning their land to a BFR.

Outcomes for the land access program include assisting 15 BFRs in accessing suitable farmland.



The **Northwest Ag Business Center (NABC)** provides business development resources to farmers and agriculture-related business in northwest Washington. The BFRDP grant is providing funding to support the assistance of BFRs through one-on-one in business planning with attention to market feasibility, financial feasibility, technical feasibility, and management feasibility. NABC also specializes in planning value-added enterprises for farms and is seeking to assist clients in launching a value-added enterprise.

Outcomes include 40 BFRs receiving business assistance while 6 BFRs develop a comprehensive business feasibility analysis and 2 will work on a value-added product development.

