

# Catalyzing Food Entrepreneurship Project: Focus Group Results



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**If you have any questions, please contact:**

**Tiffany Leeper, [tiffanymleeper@gmail.com](mailto:tiffanymleeper@gmail.com), Sustainable Economies Consulting**

**Elizabeth Schuster, [eschuster@sustainableeconomiesconsulting.com](mailto:eschuster@sustainableeconomiesconsulting.com), Sustainable Economies Consulting**





*Photo credit: Natalie Friedrich*

## **Acknowledgements**

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## Abstract

Five focus groups were completed in Spring 2021 to better understand the challenges facing small-scale food producers, and to identify programmatic gaps and training needs that are not currently being met. The hypothesis was that food producers would be willing to pay more for a training that had greater flexibility in timing and/or content offered. Instead, the key finding is that **time** is the most limited resource for these businesses and food producers have an incredibly low tolerance when it comes to the risk of wasting time on an ineffective training. Food producers are willing to pay more, and are more willing to participate, in trainings (1) that have been recommended by peers or trusted experts; (2) that are led by an individual who has proven success in their business/industry and understands the local market; and (3) that lead to tangible actions that will directly improve their business. Also, the team hypothesized that producers would prefer in-person trainings, but that hypothesis was not supported either. Generally speaking, producers place high value on having both in person and virtual opportunities for trainings, and like having multiple options for format. These are preliminary results based upon the initial five focus groups, and more research is needed to understand the factors influencing the training and programmatic needs of food producers and their willingness-to-pay for those programs.

## Overview

The goal of the Catalyzing Food Entrepreneurs (CaFE) project is to understand the role of non-profit organizations in supporting value creation for small-scale food producers. Partial funding for the CaFE project came from a grant from Ohio State University's Initiative for Food and AgriCultural Transformation, a Discovery Themes program. The project deliverables include synthesizing and assessing data from:

- At least 5 focus groups of food producers
- 5-10 case studies of similar types of food business incubators
- 1,500 food producers surveyed from across Ohio and the region
- Review of local trends in land use and sustainability practices
- 1 pilot training on meat science and marketing to test producer willingness to participate

This report covers the first component: focus group sessions with farmers and food producers. These sessions were designed to understand what trainings and programs would be most helpful for food producers or farmers, with an emphasis on value-added agricultural production. The responses will also inform the development of the survey that will go out to more than 1,500 food producers.

## Methodology

Elizabeth Schuster and Tiffany Leeper of Sustainable Economies Consulting organized and facilitated the focus group sessions. The team facilitated discussion in 5 focus group sessions and spoke with a total of 36 food producers and farmers.

Participants were recruited with the help of several project partners including Farm Bureau, Local Roots Market and Café, Countryside Conservancy, ACE-Net, the Center for Food Innovation at Oberlin, and OSU Extension. Partners helped organize the location and recruited participants through their own channels. In some cases, the project leads assisted in finding participants. Participants were given \$100

for their time and participation as an incentive. A flyer was developed by the project leads and is included in Appendix A.

Sessions were 2 hours long with a 10-minute break halfway. Participants also completed a brief survey at the end of each session. The focus groups were held in a large, conference-type room with room for spacing and locations were aimed to be within the participants' home county.

The initial aim was to host most of the sessions in January and February to avoid the busy planting and farmers' market season. However, due to unexpected administrative delays out of the control of the research team, they were hosted in February, March, and April. Multiple counties were covered to gain a variety of participants. A few complications made it challenging to recruit participants and two focus groups that were originally scheduled needed to be canceled. Feedback received is that it was a combination of it being busy season and that some participants did not come due to the pandemic.

1. **Focus Group 1:** Took place February 18 in Wayne County and included some producers from Medina and Ashland Counties.
2. **Focus Group 2:** Took place March 4 in Wayne County and included some producers from Holmes and Ashland Counties.
3. **Focus Group 3:** Took place on March 18 in Summit County and included some producers from Cuyahoga and Medina Counties.
4. **Focus Group 4:** Took place on March 26 in Athens County and included some producers from surrounding counties.
5. **Focus Group 5:** Took place on April 27 in Lorain County and included some producers from Ashland County.

## Focus Group Results

Participants ranged from beginning farmers/food producers (1 year or less) to experienced farmers (family farms that had operated for more than 2 generations and food businesses with extensive distribution and outlets). A wide variety of businesses were represented including small, cottage food producers to mid-size farms that produced on more of a commodity scale. Many produced niche products like hops, specialty crops, heirloom vegetables, heritage-bred livestock, and certified-organic products.

In each focus group session, certain problems were identified that were unique to specialized groups of producers – for instance, hop growers and beer producers may have different problems than a honey producer. Also, some cultural differences exist. For instance, Amish farmers will not utilize government grant programs but are interested in other financing options. Nonetheless, there were several themes that were fairly consistent across the focus group sessions.

**Table 1. Barriers that food producers and farmers face.**

<b>Barriers</b>	<b>Description of Barriers</b>	<b>Resources needed</b>
<b>Lack of time</b>	Nearly every participant indicated they have ideas as to how they may expand or improve their business, but simply did not have the time to do it all.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help in recruiting, vetting and training reliable staff; Help in navigating HR requirements.</li> <li>• Participants said they spend a significant amount of time trying to educate consumers in order to create loyal customers, but they wish they didn't have to do so much of this. As one participant said "It's a full time job in itself."</li> <li>• Creative marketing and branding solutions.</li> <li>• Accounting and bookkeeping assistance.</li> <li>• Legal assistance.</li> <li>• Collaboration with others in their network, including access to shared resources.</li> <li>• Financing and funding opportunities. Many are available but not all producers know how to access them.</li> <li>• <b><i>In many cases, new programming is needed that does not yet exist</i></b> (examples noted in Appendix C).</li> </ul>
<b>Access to finance/capital to expand</b>	Some participants were savvy in navigating sources of capital including small business loans and government grant programs. Others had little knowledge in this aspect.	
<b>Cash flow</b>	For larger producers who participated, this might mean challenges with planning around harvest, processing and distributing. An example of a cash flow problem for smaller producers is not having enough cash to buy a label machine, resulting in paying more for labels in bulk.	
<b>Steady/Manageable growth</b>	How to balance growth while managing limited resources.	
<b>Distribution</b>	Identifying and successfully accessing viable markets for their products.	
<b>Staffing</b>	Recruiting, vetting, and training reliable staff. Managing the various considerations once staff is hired (workman's comp, insurance, etc.).	
<b>Navigating Regulations</b>	This includes labeling, compliance, and navigating conflicting information from various government regulatory bodies; sales direct from farm; etc.	
<b>Advocacy.</b>	Having their voice heard by lawmakers and elected officials. Specifically, several participants indicated that regulations are not keeping up with the innovations in farming.	
<b>Legal/Business Structure</b>	This applies largely to start-ups and included what legal structure works best for them. This also applies to an existing business diversifying into a new area and how to structure with very different revenue sources.	
<b>Misinformation</b>	Combatting misconceptions in the general public or managing expectations about what it means to buy local.	
<b>Limited Land</b>	Challenges finding and affording acquisition of new land and considerations associated with it including high taxes and urban sprawl.	

**Current Groups or Resources utilized.** Participants shared numerous examples of how they were currently problem-solving and what resources they have already used. Based upon the discussion in the focus group and also through follow up questions on the brief survey at the end of each session, the list of groups and resources is extensive.

- **Farmers and food producers in their network.** Self-curated farmer/producer networks such as those naturally developed through participation in farmers markets. Participants also explicitly noted family members as a valuable source of information.
- **Trade groups and conferences.** Many participants found great value in collaborating and networking within the industry and enjoy learning from one another. Groups mentioned include OEFFA, Mid-Ohio Growers Conference, Herbal Academy, and Hop Growers Association.
- **Universities.** OSU, OSU Extension, and educational programs and resources from other universities as well, such as the LCCC Sustainable Agriculture program.
- **Google and YouTube.** For better or worse, many participants are relying on the internet to answer questions, and often not finding the answers they need.
- **Instinct.** They approach problem-solving intuitively and practically, often by observing competing products on the market (what is most cost effective or beneficial in the long run).
- **Trial and Error.** Many participants enjoy experimenting and trying new things to see what works and what doesn't.
- **Government, institutional and nonprofit.** A range of groups were mentioned, such as the Health Department, ODA, Farm Bureau, ACEnet, Small Business Development Centers (and SCORE) and others.
- **Local businesses.** Local business staff such as bankers, lawyers, accountants.
- **Books and podcasts.** A percentage of individuals do still reference books, textbooks, workbooks and audiobooks. Podcasts are starting to increase in popularity in some demographics.

**What skills would they like to hone or adopt?** What knowledge are they missing?

- **Advocacy**-how to have their voice heard especially since confusing and onerous government regulations were listed as a barrier.
- **Marketing** including social media, branding, telling their story, growing their customer base.
- **Product development:** how to strategically test out an idea.
- **Pricing/Cost analysis** and how can we help producers collaborate in figuring out and lowering costs. **Supply chain management.**
- Quickbooks/**Accounting/One-on-One.**
- Scaling up/**Manageable growth.**
- How to access grant **funding.**
- Taking on partnerships or how to cultivate and manage **investors.**
- Localized answers to business questions. They can figure out the big solutions, but the small steps that involve **local resources** are trickier to navigate and find.
- **Risk assessment.**
- **Succession Planning** (scaling down).
- Inclusivity and **diversity training.**
- Labeling/navigating **government regulations.**

- Some participants also indicated they would just like motivation, empowerment, and encouragement.

**The second half of the sessions focused on hypothetical trainings.** This is where we identified what made the potential trainings and programs appealing to farmers and food producers.

#### Logistical considerations

- Mixed results as far as online or in-person. While some participants preferred in-person training, most liked the option of online as well, to have services “on-demand” to refer to at their convenience.
- Most groups indicated they liked shorter, more focused courses and sessions but no consensus.
- Must be held in the off-season... not during peak farmers market or planting/harvest. **January-March** is the best time of year.
- Avoid Friday and Saturday as these are spent preparing and attending farmers markets. Early during the week is best.
- Some trainings must be in-person: those that are hands-on, on-farm or on-site, involve a taste test or demonstration, and those that involve discussion.
- Offering childcare and/or a meal does help.

Program deliverables. As noted above, TIME is a significant limited resource for farmers and food producers. With that in mind, programs must be worthwhile.

- CONSISTENTLY each group stated that they prefer to learn **from industry specific, reputable, proven speakers.** They want to learn from someone who has been in the trenches and “gotten their hands dirty.”
- They also value Peer-to-Peer learning and networking.
- Must be applicable right away and provide a work plan or “next steps” that are manageable.
- Programs that offer a connection are valuable. If the participant can walk away with a business card or phone number of a person to contact for help/guidance, that had value.
- One session focused heavily on the idea of a pre-training survey, noting that they were more likely to attend if they could respond to a survey ahead of time to allow the trainer to further customize the topics to meet the producer needs.

#### Willingness-to-Pay

- Most hypothetical trainings varied depending upon the topic and depth of material covered, ranging from free to \$300.
- In addition to the financial investment, it is important to remember that this is an investment of their TIME.

## Survey Results

At the end of each focus group session, a short survey was filled out by participants. A total of 36 surveys were completed. The full survey results are shown in Appendix B.

Noteworthy were the vast diversity of specialty products and also the range for the number of years their food or farm business has existed. Also, number of full-time employees was lower than expected, averaging at just 3 employees per business. It’s unclear why the majority of businesses who participated were small-scale, as the flyer did not directly state that participants must be small-scale producers. The



larger, 1,500-person survey that will be implemented through this project will be a good opportunity to get responses from mid-size businesses that were missed in the focus groups.

Producers were also surveyed about accessing new markets. While a majority – 61% of respondents – reported success in accessing new markets, they also noted many barriers and challenges. It appears that the majority of their successes have been word of mouth or opportunism. There were relatively few who had a well-developed strategy for entering new markets.

For future staffing needs, the most common need listed was around marketing and/or social media. In terms of the format of trainings, learning from peers was the most desirable option. Here are the results, also listed in Appendix B:

**Table 2. How appealing are various formats of trainings.**

Format	Score*
Learning from peers	4.4
1-on-1 technical assistance	4.4
Online fact sheet	4.0
In person 1-day workshop	4.0
2-hr webinar	3.9
Printed fact sheet	3.8
In-person 2-hr class at night	3.5
In person course, 1 hour a week for 2 months	2.8

\*Based upon a 5-point Likert Scale, with one as very unappealing and 5 as very appealing.

Finally, a hypothetical training was proposed, and two-thirds of respondents noted they would be willing to register:

*Consider if you had the opportunity to attend an in-person training in your County, that is focused on design and labeling of packaging for food products, and it was a 4-week class, with one nightly class offered each week. Would you consider registering for this training?*

However, respondents emphasized that to make a real decision about a training, they would need more information, such as:

- Is there someone in my network who would recommend the training?
- Who is the person leading the training? What is their bio? Do they understand local markets?
- Who else will be attending the training? Can I also use it as a networking opportunity?
- Will you be sending out a feedback survey before the training begins to allow us to vote on topics, so you can further customize the training to meet our needs?
- What materials will we receive?

## Conclusions

A summary of common themes that emerged:

- Time is a very limited resource often leading to limited capacity.
- Producers spend a lot of time every week Googling and doing internet searches and making phone call to hunt down information. The information may be available, but it is hard to find and leads to a lot of time lost.
- Producers see trainings not only as a chance to learn something new, but also as inherent networking opportunities.
- It's crucial that whoever leads a training be trusted, have some knowledge of the local context, and have some specific knowledge to food and agriculture.
- Offering both online options for people to digest as needed, and in-person options for hands-on trainings and discussions is important.

Any program or training that is offered must have guaranteed deliverables such as a work plan, valuable connections, and proven success. Often, making the information easy to access and quick to absorb would result in more producers taking advantage of it. As one partner stated, "Much of the information food producers need is available, it's just hard to find. Most producers don't have the time to track down everything they need." Trainings also should be customized to the local conditions and if possible, even include names of local contacts.

In addition to focusing on training, nonprofit organizations should explore time, resource, and money-saving programs for farmers and food producers such as helping them find reliable staff, develop marketing materials and campaigns, and bulk buying.

Participants overwhelmingly said they prefer to learn from experts with proven results based on experience. Many were skeptical of academic trainers and even experts in business who were not specifically experienced in farming or food production. They even indicated that they wanted their legal and financial guidance to come from someone with experience in farming and/or food production.

Also of note, for almost all participants, their chief motivation is not profit. They want to grow their businesses and be sustainable, but it is more about manageable growth so that they can offer a quality product than to maximize profits. In some cases, farmers were concerned more with how they can afford to responsibly manage their land and ensure that it passes onto the next generation.

Lastly, it is important to note that the farmers and food producers tend to collaborative rather than competitive. In most cases, they do not view their fellow producers as competition. Because of this, there is the opportunity for them to learn from each other but also a skepticism for anyone outside their sphere.

## Appendix A. Flyer to recruit participants in the focus groups



**Project name:** Catalyzing Food Entrepreneurship

**Project goal:** To understand the role of non-profit organizations in supporting value creation for small-scale food producers.

**Date/Time:**

**Duration:** 2 hours (with short break)

**Location:**

**The CaFE Project will be hosting focus groups in February and March 2021.**

### We're looking for individuals who are involved in:

- Value-Added Food or Beverage Production
- Specialty Crop Production
- A Niche Farm or Food Business
- Production Agriculture
- Other Food and Agricultural Ventures



### And who are looking to:

- Venture into value-added foods
- Looking for help to start up, transition or expand
- Looking for commercial kitchen or shared processing equipment space to rent
- Branch into new markets like direct-to-consumer, restaurant, or wholesale
- Increase their sustainable stewardship of the land and/or local economy

The purpose of these focus groups is to advise the creation of future kitchen and business incubators, including **FoodSphere: the Entrepreneurial Center at Local Roots**, a partner for Local Roots Market and Cafe in Wooster, Ohio.

Participants are compensated **\$100** for their time and input.

**To participate, contact** \_\_\_\_\_.

This project is partially funded by The Ohio State University's Initiative for Food and Agricultural Transformation (InFACT), a Discovery Themes program.

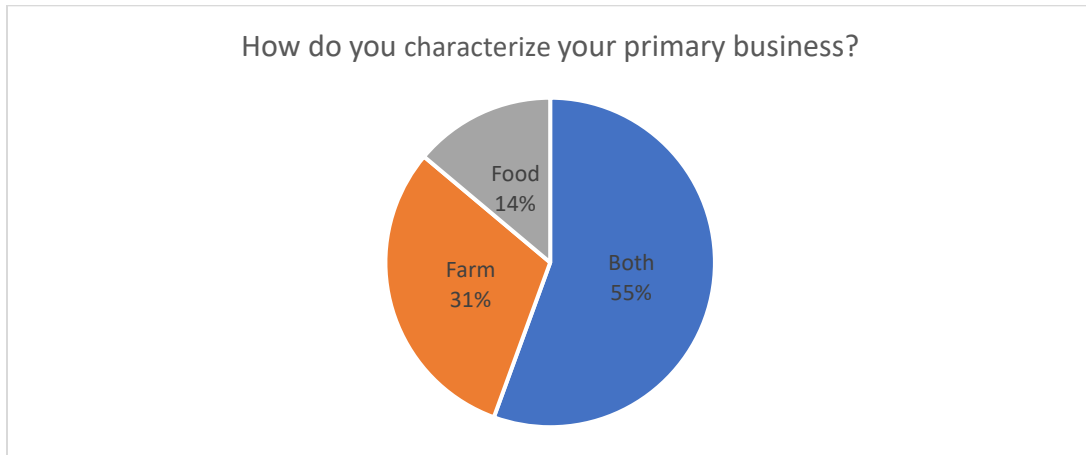


## Appendix B. Survey questions and results

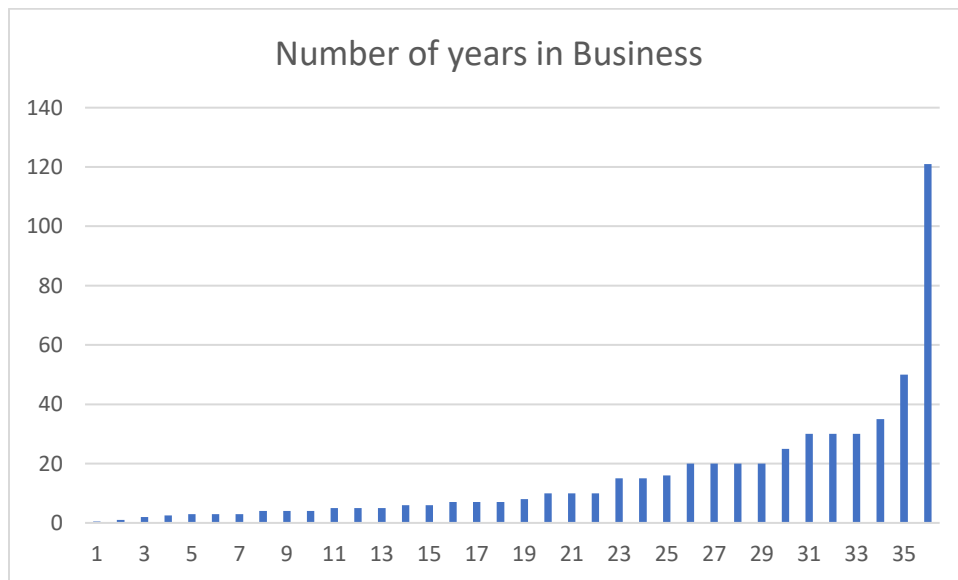
### Survey questions

We realize many of you have more than one business. Select one that you consider your “primary” farm or food business when you answer the questions. Only include farmland which you own and operate – do not include land that is rented out and operated by others.

- 1) How would you characterize your primary business that you own? (please select one)
  - a. Food business
  - b. Farm
  - c. Both a food business and a farm



- 2) Number of years your food or farm business has existed. If there are breaks in between, ignore the breaks and add up the year your business/farm has been in operation. Number of years: \_\_\_\_\_



3) How many full-time equivalent employees do you currently have for your primary business, including yourself and family members? \_\_\_\_\_

a. Number of parttime or seasonal employees you had in 2020: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Average number of full time employees</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Avg. number of parttime/seasonal in 2020</b>	<b>3.6</b>

4) What types of food or beverage products do you sell? (list only the main ones that you sell)



5) Where do you currently sell your products? (choose all that apply)

- a. Auction
- b. Cooperative
- c. Farmers market
- d. Restaurant
- e. Grocery
- f. Distributor
- g. Online
- h. Other (describe): \_\_\_\_\_

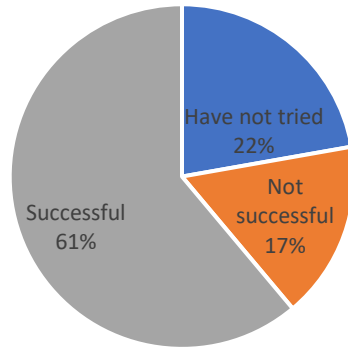
RESPONSE:

The answers were fairly evenly distributed across all of the categories, with producers selling at anywhere from one to five different outlets.

6) Consider one product you sell which you are trying to expand into new markets. Which product is that? Write the name of the product or write “not applicable” if you are not trying to expand into any new markets and move on to question 7.

- a. One product you are trying to expand into new markets: \_\_\_\_\_
- b. Have you been successful into expanding into new markets? **Yes or No** (circle one)
- c. If yes, explain how the process has been.
- d. If not, please describe the barriers.

Have you been successful at expanding into new markets?



<p><b>If yes, how has the process been?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Since COVID it has been a great experience to have locally grown meats in our store from our farm</li> <li>• finding direct market to consumer</li> <li>• giving samples, visiting businesses, word of mouth</li> <li>• I have increased selling wholesale to one small grocery and one food distributor</li> <li>• We have been to many farmers markets</li> <li>• when there are connections it is much easier</li> <li>• challenging from the standpoint of distance to market</li> <li>• minimally successful through sharing social media posts</li> <li>• cold calling b2b customers; dropping off samples and information</li> <li>• having a distributor for SE OH has helped greatly. Trying to get distribution outside of the southeast Ohio area has been harder.</li> <li>• partnering with other farms</li> </ul>
<p><b>If no, please explain the barriers.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I need to learn how to expand production. Trying to keep up with current sales.</li> <li>• time to properly set up online market to reach local and national buyers</li> <li>• still in our infancy, building our brand</li> <li>• time is a big issue</li> <li>• point of sale resources, time, money, not knowing what direction to go and then how to market it</li> <li>• to enter into distribution market, you need large inventory. We need to add on to achieve this and the capital funds are the hard part.</li> <li>• the restaurants now have such a specific need for certain products so the issue is trying to sell remaining beef that the restaurant doesn't need.</li> <li>• Finding new butchers</li> <li>• Limited capacity of refrigerated storage and the time pressures limiting my abilities to sell to more distributors.</li> <li>• Distance to market</li> </ul>

7) Consider the following formats for trainings. Rank on a scale from 1 to 5 how appealing each format is to you, with 1 being unappealing and 5 being highly appealing. Use the table below to rank your level for each item:

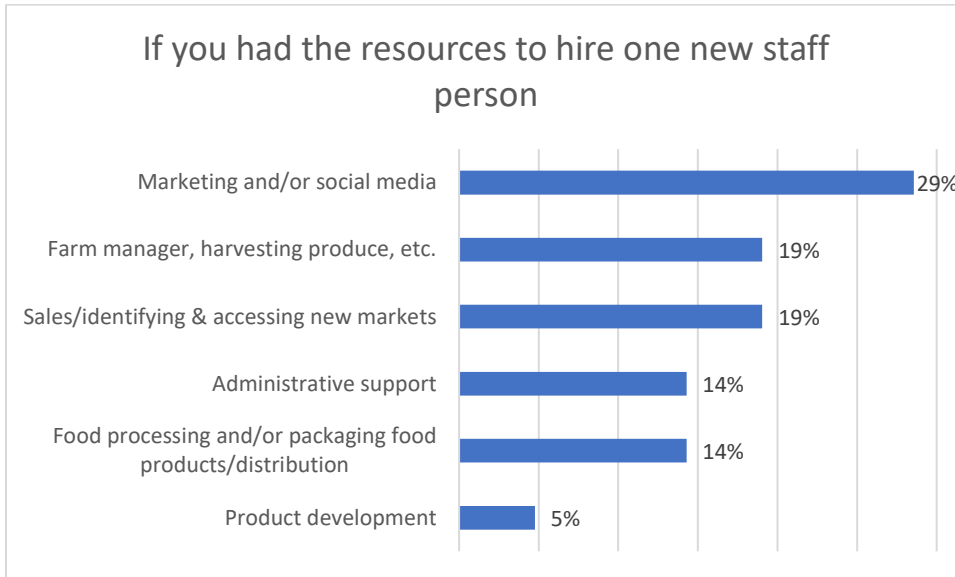
Very unappealing	Unappealing	Neutral	Appealing	Very appealing
1	2	3	4	5

	1	2	3	4	5
A 2-hour webinar that can be watched at any time of day					
An in-person 2-hour class at night					
In person 1-day workshop					
In person course, 1 hour a week for 2 months					
One-on-one technical assistance with an expert					
Learning from your peers via monthly meetings with similar producers to share ideas					
Printed fact sheets or guides					
Online fact sheets or guides					

RESPONSES:

Format	Score
Learning from peers	4.4
1-on-1 technical assistance	4.4
Online fact sheet	4.0
In person 1-day workshop	4.0
2-hr webinar	3.9
Printed fact sheet	3.8
In-person 2-hr class at night	3.5
In person course, 1 hour a week for 2 months	2.8

8) If you had the resources to hire one new staff person tomorrow, please describe in 2 sentences or less the job description.



9) Consider if you had the opportunity to attend an in-person training in your County, that is focused on design and labeling of packaging for food products, and it was a 4-week class, with one nightly class offered each week. Would you consider registering for this training?

**Yes or no** (Circle one)

- If yes, how much would you be willing to pay for such a training? \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- If you said no, how likely would you be to consider attending if these incentives were offered. Use the table below to rank your level for each item:

Very unlikely	Unlikely	Neutral	Likely	Very likely
1	2	3	4	5

	1	2	3	4	5
Free Childcare were offered during the training					
At the end of the training, you were guaranteed access to one new market					
At the end of the training, you receive a free, one-on-one consultation on branding and packaging design					
The first day of the training is free and you then can decide if you want to enroll in the rest of the training for \$400 after attending the first day					

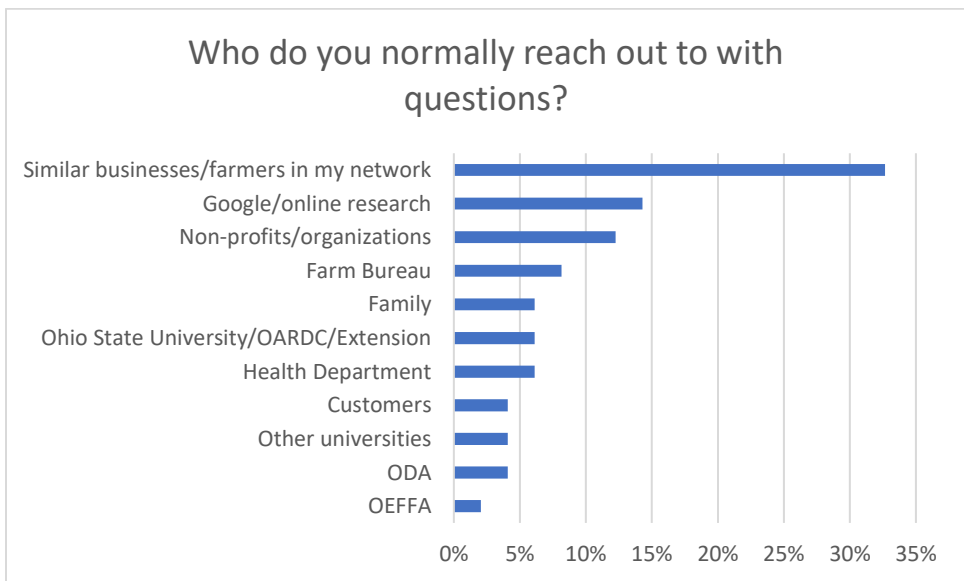


We guarantee that your revenues would increase by 5% in the next year.					
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RESPONSES:

<b>Would you consider registering for this training?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One-third said: NO</li> <li>• Two-thirds said: YES</li> </ul>
<b>If yes, how much would you be willing to pay for such a training?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Range: \$0-400</li> <li>• Most frequent response: \$100</li> <li>• Average value: \$98</li> </ul>
<b>How likely would you be to consider attending if these incentives were offered?</b> (followed by average ranking)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At the end of the training, you receive a free, one-on-one consultation on branding and packaging design: <b>4.0</b></li> <li>• We guarantee that your revenues would increase by 5% in the next year: <b>3.6</b></li> <li>• At the end of the training, you were guaranteed access to one new market: <b>3.5</b></li> <li>• The first day of the training is free and you then can decide if you want to enroll in the rest of the training for \$400 after attending the first day: <b>3.1</b></li> <li>• Free Childcare were offered during the training: <b>2.5</b></li> </ul>

10) Who do you normally reach out to with questions on health regulations, cash flow and pricing, or sales and pitching a new product?



11) Consider your familiarity with the following topics. Rank 1 if you are unfamiliar with the topic and are unsure how to manage this topic in your business. Rank 5 if could describe the topic in your own words and feel confident in handling this topic in your business. Use the table below to rank your level for each item:

Quite unfamiliar	Unfamiliar	Unsure	Familiar	Very familiar
1	2	3	4	5

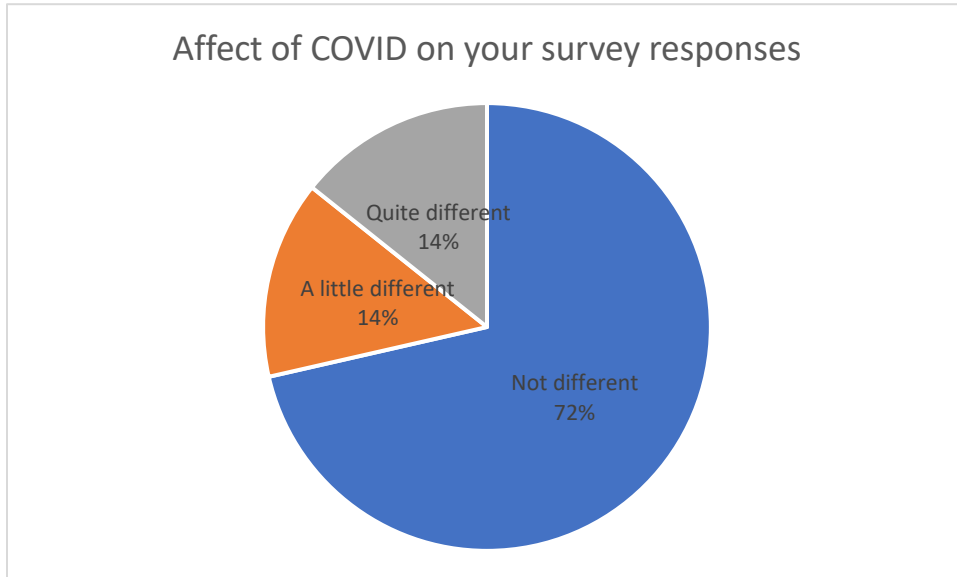
	1	2	3	4	5
Cash flow management					
Product differentiation/branding					
Customer acquisition					
Market access					
Advertising and promotion					
Payroll/new staffing					
Product distribution					

RESPONSES:

Topic	Average ranking
Cash Flow Management	3.9
Product differentiation/branding	3.9
Customer acquisition	3.6
Product distribution	3.6
Market access	3.4
Advertising and promotion	3.3
Payroll/new staffing	3.3

- 12) Overall, how do you think your responses to this survey are affected by COVID? (select one)
- a. My responses were not much different now than they would have been before COVID
  - b. My responses are a little different than they would have been before COVID
  - c. My responses are quite different than they would have been before COVID

RESPONSES:



## Appendix C. Design your own program results

The second half of each focus group involved a “Design your own program” activity. Below are examples of programs that participants created during this process.

### FIRST FOCUS GROUP

- A one-day workshop to cover:
  - Pricing and cash flow (1-1.5 hours)
  - Advocacy and lobbying (1 hour)
  - Marketing and Branding for three hours (from 9-noon)
- Format: 1-day in-person workshop
- When: Tuesdays would be best, in the winter
- Other criteria:
  - Have an after-hours for networking
  - Good, trusted speakers with proven experience
  - For pricing and cash flow, it would need to cover supply chain management and production because the timing around those aspects are hardest to plan for
  - Save marketing for the afternoon because people will look forward to it
- Willingness-to-pay: \$75-100

### SECOND FOCUS GROUP

The second focus group designed two trainings, one for startups and one for existing businesses who want to scale up.

- A Business incubator training for startups:
  - Brand development and marketing
  - How to access grants and low interest loans
  - Business plan
  - Setting your initial budget (and how do you project expenses)
- Format: Online, 1-hr per topic, 4 hours total, spread over multiple days
- When: did not specify a time of year
- Other criteria:
  - The sessions should be recorded so you can listen to them at any time
  - One possibility – what if you get a business plan out of this at the end?
- Willingness-to-pay: This should be free. There are a lot of programs out there for startups that are free, so that’s the expectation.
  
- A Business accelerator training focused on:
  - Scaling up while taking into consideration Risk Management
  - Pitching to investors and creating new partnerships
  - How to increase market access and how to pitch products to grocery
  - How to move into co-packing

- Format: 2-day in person
- When: winter
- Other criteria:
  - For this type of training, trust is even more crucial – must be high quality, trustworthy speakers with proven success.
  - For risk management, it would be helpful to come up with a plan for what to do if things don't work out
  - If the speakers were available for some one-on-one questions after the workshop, that would be a game changer. We would pay more for this.
- Willingness-to-pay: \$250

### THIRD FOCUS GROUP

- Three separate trainings to cover these three topics:
  - How to legally bring value-added products from farm to business (not direct to consumer)
  - How to become a USDA processor and do more livestock processing
  - Water quality, stewardship and grants for those
- Format: 3 separate 4-hour trainings. In-person, classroom style where participants can have dialogue and brainstorm with each other.
- When: winter
- Other criteria:
  - The water quality training was requested by farmers in a slightly more urbanized county
  - Must have actionable items at the end of the training to make it worthwhile, e.g. here are three steps you can do immediately after leaving this training.
  - Trainings should be led by peers with experience in that area
- Willingness-to-pay: Between \$40-100. We'd be more likely to go with the higher end if there is a giveaway – a guide, checklist, some take home material.

### FOURTH FOCUS GROUP

Please note that starting with our fourth focus group session, we changed our language from “Design a training” to “Design a training or program.” This seemed to yield slightly different responses. This group also designed two different programs.

- A one-on-one bookkeeping program:
  - Consultation on how to get use Quickbooks and improve bookkeeping
- Format:
  - Meet once a quarter for one year, for 1.5 hours per session
  - Have homework assignments sent by email ahead of time and these assignments can be discussed in the meeting
  - Allow for occasional questions and check-ins in between quarterly meetings
- When: all year

- Other criteria:
  - Accountants can charge around \$50-75/hour so for this to be an appealing program, it would have to be less than the market rate
- Willingness-to-pay: \$250
  
- Internship Program
- Format:
  - Have a non-profit gather together applications and screen applicants
  - This may work better for seasonal positions
  - Could be a paid or could get credit towards a school program
  - Could be nice to vary the tasks so the individual feels they are getting more experience – everything from social media to food processing
  - It could work to have it a rotating position across multiple businesses
- When: all year, though April – October are the most important months
- Other criteria:
  - Workplace insurance needs to be considered. Is it the business or the non-profit who is responsible?
  - The employees need to be trained – who does that, the non-profit or business?
- Willingness-to-pay: \$75 per intern obtained

## FIFTH FOCUS GROUP

This group designed two trainings.

- A social media series:
  - Promotion
  - Content
  - Social Media (e.g. FaceBook/Instagram) data & analytics
  - Branding
  - Tools
- Format: 2 times a month for 3 months, with a follow up one year later. Hybrid with some lessons done virtually and then discussion and guidance in person.
- When: not specified
- Other criteria:
  - Conduct a quick feedback survey **before** the people participant to better refine the training to meet their needs.
  - Would be willing to pay more if there were “hands on” time in class to implement some of the tools discussed
  - The person giving the training needs to have some experience working specifically with food and farm businesses
  - Some might find it appealing to offer the first 1-2 classes for free before they have to commit

- Willingness-to-pay: \$50-\$150. As noted above, having a hands-on component would drive the higher WTP.
  
- Grant support program
  - An online website you have access to that serves as an information hub with grants available and related resources that you can only access if you have registered for the grant program
  - Guidance on how to write a grant
  - Access to grant writers
- Format: a one-time seminar (1-2 hours), with the online website available ongoing. A point person to answer questions as needed.
- When: not specified
- Other criteria:
  - People would like if this included opportunities to network with peers and learn from peers who are also looking into grants
- Willingness-to-pay: Free at first, pay if you are actively pursuing a grant (up to \$300).