

# FARMER SUPPORT ECOSYSTEM

## BACKGROUND

The US food system faces a crisis brought on by an **aging population** of farmers, **climate change**, and **population growth**. Barriers to entry prevent those that would be interested in farming from starting agricultural businesses. One of the principle goals of this Capstone Project has been to fully understand those barriers in order to create relevant and effective strategies for addressing them.

To **lower barriers to entry and success**, The Farm Collaborative is launching the Farmer Support Ecosystem, which seeks to **knit together** proven programs, experienced partner organizations, and new support services to establish a **continuum**, by which new and young farmers and ranchers can launch their careers and thrive.

There are already many training and technical assistance programs available for farmers. However, these resources are hard to navigate, sometimes unaffordable, and not fully developed on a local level. The work this Capstone Team has done has helped to create a foundation for **connecting existing resources to interested parties** and to **analyze gaps** and **opportunities for further resource development**.

## PROJECT SUMMARY

The purpose of the Farmer Support Ecosystem is to **provide more opportunities** for all farmers and ranchers, especially those who are young and/or are from diverse backgrounds, to thrive in starting and maintaining a business in the agricultural sector. The current population of farmers within the United States is aging rapidly with one third of farmers being 65 years of age or older. While there are a huge variety of reasons why the farmer and rancher population is aging, **the number of barriers to entry into the industry has prevented young people** from starting a career in agriculture; perpetuating the cycle of an aging system.

Improving the opportunities available to those wishing to enter the agricultural industry is one way some of these looming problems can be addressed. The Farmer Support Ecosystem will address these concerns by offering a continuum of services and resources to support farmers and ranchers at every stage of their journey.



**“Farming is a mighty river of discomfort, with eddies of beauty, truth, and joy.”**

*-Colorado Farmer Interview*

## METHODS

In order to develop a plan to launch the Farmer Support Ecosystem, the Capstone Team:

1. Used Primary & Secondary research of the barriers that prevent these farmers or would-be farmers from successfully participating in the profession through an extensive **literature review** and through **Farmer & Rancher interviews**.
2. **Identified resources and programs** that have been shown to help aspiring farmers and ranchers overcome barriers.
3. Drafted a Deployment Plan using a **Strategic Planning framework** with **strategies & tactics** to guide the steps, and **outputs & metrics** as a means of evaluation, to ensure the Ecosystem achieves its purpose.
4. Is using **Rapid Prototyping model** to obtain feedback on website layout, accessibility and function.



## DELIVERABLES

1. A **White Paper** to determine the best course of action for developing the FSE and provide a foundation for future teams to understand the background information and thinking behind early decisions regarding the Ecosystem
2. A **Deployment Plan** for the first three years of the Farmer Support Ecosystem; designed to ensure a successful launch of the program
  - a. A **Replication Plan** to act as a blueprint for developing a similar resource network in other locations, allowing other organizations to replicate the FSE in other regions
3. A **Prototype** of the FSE website to incorporate the lessons learned throughout the research process into a usable modality for connecting farmers with resources and partner organizations.

80%

of farmer interviewees mentioned community connections that helped their business succeed.

100%

of farmer interviewees highlighted the financial barriers as a primary barrier to entry.

33%

of farmer interviewees specifically mentioned that they received funding from NRCS programs, such as EQIP.

## INTERVIEW THEMES

This word cloud represents the most commonly mentioned words & phrases across the interviews



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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