Key Resources for Getting Started in Connecticut Agriculture

The New Farmers’ Bucket List

To view online go to: http://ctfarmrisk.uconn.edu/

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GETTING STARTED

1. The CT Agricultural Business Management Guide is a comprehensive business planning and management tool prepared by UConn Extension. A clear business plan will be required for most loans and grants. UConn Extension’s Farm Risk Management program has business planning resources.

2. The Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.) Sec. 1-1(q) provides the legal definition of “farming” and “agriculture” in the State of Connecticut.

3. Become familiar with CT Dept. of Agriculture Programs, Services, and Grant Opportunities.

4. Visit a USDA Service Center and introduce yourself to staff at Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) and Farm Service Agency (FSA). You may be eligible for free conservation planning and technical assistance with NRCS as a first step toward financial assistance for conservation practices. FSA can provide free maps of the property you are farming. *TIP: Starting in your first season, be sure to record your production history, including number of acres farmed, pounds harvested and dollars generated. This will be very helpful in future years as you begin to explore agriculture loans, grants, and insurance that may require your crop history.

5. Familiarize yourself at the outset with your town’s zoning to see what is allowed for farming and retail operations. A few towns have Agriculture Commissions that can help orient you to farming in your community. The CT Farm Bureau Association’s Advocacy Toolkit provides fact sheets on state and local tax programs, land use regulations, farm to market information and, more. If you have questions or concerns about local agricultural regulations, or local tax programs that you may be eligible for (including PA 490), contact Joan Nichols at CT Farm Bureau Association for help: JoanN@cfba.org

6. Seek out state associations for producers of poultry, sheep, fruit, vegetables, honey, maple syrup, ornamentals, milk, timber, and more. Producer associations have very useful resources, expertise about crop-specific tools and infrastructure, and hold regular meetings, and networking events.

7. There are dozens of trainings offered each year by agriculture service providers, including UConn Extension’s Solid Ground Farmer Trainings. Sign up for service provider e-news (see page 2) to receive their training announcements.

8. For smaller, diversified farms in Connecticut the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) administered by FSA might be of interest since it provides catastrophic coverage for crops not eligible for regular crop insurance. All crop insurance resources are available at UConn Extension’s Farm Risk Management and Crop Insurance website.

9. Access free legal assistance from Legal Food Hub for issues such as land acquisition/transfer, estate issues, taxes, contracts, and corporate formation, among others.

10. Match up with a business mentor through SCORE to help you through the process of starting-up and maintaining a new business. USDA and its partners across rural America are working with SCORE to support new farming and ranching operations, and identify and recruit mentors with a wealth of agricultural experience.
FINISHING FARMLAND

- Learn how to understand your soils through free maps and data using the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Web Soil Survey.

- Soil testing is available through the UConn Soil Lab and the CT Agriculture Experiment Station.

- Farmland listing services for sale or for lease are available through Connecticut Farmlink. TIP: If renting, secure a written lease since most grant and loan programs require a 5-year (or more) lease for eligibility. Consider adding language that permits you to install conservation practices and buildings.

- Additional farmland listings can be found at New England Farmland Finder and New England Landlink.

- Contact your Town Planner or local Agricultural Commission to enquire about municipal land parcels available for lease.

- Loans to purchase farmland can be obtained from USDA Farm Service Agency.

- See UConn Extension’s resources on farmland leasing or consult the Farmland ConneCTions toolkit.

- Land for Good offers extensive tutorials, worksheets, as well as consulting to help farmers navigate the challenges of accessing farmland.

TAXES

- Register your business with CT Dept. of Revenue Services and obtain a Sales and Use Tax Permit (Form Reg-1). Certain items are taxable and you must collect state sales tax. The CT Dept. of Revenue Services can provide you with guidance on what is taxable. You are not required to obtain a sale and use tax permit if you raise and sell tobacco, fruit, vegetables, and board horses or are involved in dairy farming.

- Obtain a Farmers Tax Exemption Permit (Form REG-8) from the CT Dept. of Revenue Services. This permit enables you to purchase farm business related supplies free of sales tax.

- Become familiar with CT Department of Revenue Services laws that apply to farmers (Farmers Guide to Sales and Use Taxes, Motor Vehicle Fuels Tax, Estimated Income Tax, and Withholding Tax).

- Check with your town assessor to determine if your farmland is classified as farmland for property tax purposes. Review the PA 490 Guide and the PA 490 webinar developed by CT Farm Bureau Association.

REGISTRATIONS AND LICENSES

- Obtain a Pesticide Applicators License through the CT Dept. of Energy and Environmental Protection in order to use herbicides and pesticides on your property.

- Obtain any and all CT Dept. of Agriculture licenses and permits that are required by your agricultural business. Also check with the Department for animal health, identification and interstate movement requirements if your business involves livestock, including equine, and/or poultry.

SERVICE PROVIDER E-NEWS

- Connecticut Department of Agriculture’s Connecticut Weekly Agricultural Report, send request to mark.hood@ct.gov.

- UConn Crop Talk: CT Vegetable & Fruit Crops Newsletter, send request to mackenzie.white@uconn.edu

Pest Messages

- Vegetable, send request to mackenzie.white@uconn.edu

- Fruit, send request to mary.concklin@uconn.edu

- Greenhouse, send request to leanne.pundt@uconn.edu

- UMass Veggie Notes listserv, subscribe at http://extension.umass.edu/vegetable/

Agricultural Messages & Updates

- Dairy & Livestock news, send request to joyce.meader@uconn.edu

- Soil Health, send request to raymond.covino@ct.usda.gov


- CT Farm Bureau’s news magazines are available at www.cfba.org
• Obtain other relevant state and municipal licenses and permits, such as those required to control wildlife that damages your crops and those specific to aquacultural businesses.

SELLING YOUR PRODUCT

• Ensure customers identify your products as local by branding them as Connecticut Grown, using the CT Dept. of Agriculture’s Identity Standards, and by using the agency’s free marketing resources, including price cards/point-of-purchase materials, directional signage, and programs such as farmers’ market nutrition, and farm-to-wholesale (restaurants/schools/institutions/healthcare/retailers).

• UConn Extension has assembled a tool for choosing where to sell - Finding Your Market: A CT Farmer’s Guide to Selling Their Farm Products Directly to Consumers.

GROWING YOUR PRODUCT

• New England Vegetable Management Guide
• New England Tree Fruit Management Guide
• New England Small Fruit Management Guide
• New England Greenhouse Floriculture Guide
• UConn IPM
• UConn Plant Diagnostic Laboratory
• USDA Certified Organic Standards

FINANCING IMPROVEMENTS

• USDA Farm Service Agency has a selection of loan programs, including loans for operation expenses and equipment. FSA’s Microloan Program may be of particular use for start-up capital, inputs, and infrastructure. For more information about FSA loan programs, contact Ron Clark, 860-319-8073.

• The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) of USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service offers financial and technical assistance to address conservation improvements, including installation of high tunnel systems, energy efficiency systems, soil health practices, livestock practices, nutrient management systems, and water conservation irrigation systems. Program payment rates can reach 90% for Beginning, Limited Resource, and Socially Disadvantaged farmers. For more information on EQIP, contact your local service center at: https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/ct/contact/local/

• The Farmland Restoration Program administered by the CT Dept. of Agriculture provides funding for qualifying projects that reclaim farmland through removal of invasive species, clearing of trees and stumps, exclusion fencing, pond renovation, erosion control, and more.

• The CT Dept. of Agriculture’s competitive Farm Transition Grants provide matching funds to Connecticut farms and agricultural cooperatives to expand, diversify, and improve existing operations in conjunction with a sound business plan.

• The Organic Cost Share Program, administered by the CT Dept. of Agriculture, can reimburse USDA Certified Organic farms and processors 75%, up to $750, of annual certification costs.

• The FarmStart Program of Farm Credit East offers seed capital (up to $75,000 line of credit) to farmers in their startup years.
USDA Rural Development offers Value-Added Producer Grants to help agricultural producers enter into activities that add value to their products (e.g. feasibility studies, business plans).

Northeast SARE (Sustainable Agriculture & Research Education) Farmer Grants are available to commercial farmers who want to test a new idea using a field trial, on-farm demonstration, marketing initiative, or other techniques.

ENERGY

Energy-saving improvements can reduce energy costs and improve efficiency. Energize CT can help with expert advice, resources, programs, incentives and financing tailored to your needs.

The CT Farm Energy Program provides technical assistance to agriculture producers by increasing awareness about energy conservation and efficiency opportunities while facilitating innovative renewable forms of energy on Connecticut farms.

USDA Rural Development offers Rural Energy for America Program (REAP) Loan Guarantees and Grants which provide assistance for energy efficiency improvements and the purchase of renewable energy systems.

FOOD SAFETY

Learn about Produce Safety, the Food Safety Modernization Act Produce Safety Rule and Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) trainings offered by UConn Extension’s Food Safety Program.

CT Farm Bureau Association has assembled Resources for Processing Farm Grown Fruits and Vegetables in Your Farm Kitchen.

Contact the CT Department of Agriculture for information regarding GAP Audits for producers. 860-713-2580

Contributors:

UConn Extension
Connecticut Department of Agriculture
Connecticut Farm Bureau Association
Connecticut Farm Energy Program
New Connecticut Farmer Alliance
Northeast Organic Farming Association of Connecticut
USDA Farm Service Agency of Connecticut
USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

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