

# Beginning to Intermediate Farmer and Rancher Program Development: Formative Evaluation

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## Background

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With an acute awareness of barriers to farming experienced by Socially and Historically Disadvantaged Farmers, Farmshare Austin (Farmshare) desires to develop services particular to Central Texas that meet the needs of a diverse farming community and create greater equity for all who desire to enter farming. One of the long-term goals of this project is to get more skilled farmers, particularly those with disadvantaged backgrounds, growing food sustainably in Central Texas (see Logic Model in Appendix G). Farmshare endeavors to reach this goal by building out a comprehensive educational pathway to farming, including programs intended to empower and support beginning and intermediate-level farmers.

Farmshare graduated its first class of Farmer Starter students in the spring of 2015, and has had new cohorts every season since. Farmer Starter is a hands-on 5-month intensive program offering a strong foundation for beginning farmers with little or no experience. Building on Farmer Starter, this project will lay out the next steps along the education pathway for farmers who have passed the entry level stage but are not quite ready to begin their own farms.

Farmshare recognizes that truly impactful programming must grow out of the needs and preferences of those they wish to empower. To that end, Farmshare sought out a partnership with Dell Medical School's Division of Community Engagement and Health Equity (CEHE) to collect data from beginning farmers that have historically faced greater barriers to farming to identify what their needs are for training and how that training can best fit into their day to day lives. This data will lay the groundwork for a more robust and equitable farmer training support system shaped by and grounded by the needs of beginning farmers and ranchers.

A formative evaluation of the beginning to intermediate farmer training program includes targeted data collection from beginning to intermediate farmers and ranchers (BFRs). The formative evaluation addresses the following evaluation outcomes:

- Identify barriers to starting a farm in Central Texas, particularly for socially disadvantaged BFRs.
- Identify barriers to accessing farmer training in Central Texas, particularly for socially disadvantaged BFRs.
- Identify advanced BFR training and technical assistance needs and preferences in Central Texas, particularly for socially disadvantaged BFRs.
- BFR focus groups participants feel more confident about finding support/asking for help.

## Equity Framework

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The USDA defines socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers (SDFRs) as those belonging to groups that have been subject to racial or ethnic prejudice. SDFRs include farmers who are Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Hispanic or Latino, and Asian or Pacific Islander. Another way this group is commonly defined is with the acronym, BIPOC, being Black, Indigenous, People of Color. For some but not all USDA programs, the SDFR category also includes women.<sup>1</sup> The USDA defines beginning farmers and ranchers as those within their first 10 years of farming and beginning to intermediate farmers and ranchers

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/farm-economy/socially-disadvantaged-beginning-limited-resource-and-female-farmers-and-ranchers/>

as those with less than 5 years of experience farming or ranching.<sup>2</sup> Farmshare desire is to explore what comes beyond entry level training, and considered intermediate farmers as those who have had some entry level training, but who may not be ready to start their own farms yet.

For the purposes of this investigation, socially or historically disadvantaged BFRs are farmers and ranchers with at least 6 months to 5 years of experience, who identify as female and/or non-white only. Farmshare includes training and education in farming practice as experience. In addition to consideration for the USDA's priority populations, Farmshare has a priority of creating an inclusive, supportive farming community that takes into consideration other populations that can face disparate challenges, such as low-income and LGBTQ.

Farmshare is in the process of developing an organization wide equity framework that will be utilized to assess current and future activities across the organization against a defined equity standard. They also recognize the need to adopt a shared equity lens, including inclusive language when collaborating with other organizations to build out programming, especially when working with farmers who identify as BIPOC.

## Data Collection Methods

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Three data collection methods were utilized to generate feedback from BFRs: surveys, focus groups and interviews. Data was collected primarily during a slower part of the farming season, in January and February, with a few final interviews taking place in March when the spring season picks up. Questions utilized across methods were developed in collaboration with Farmshare and with input from other Beginning Farmer service providers and stakeholders in Texas (See Appendix A). All partners have expressed support for this project and are interested in receiving and learning from the data, as well as using the data to explore future collaborations for beginning farmer support.

## Target Population

The target population for this evaluation are beginning farmers and ranchers with 1-5 years' experience who have worked, are working, or are planning to work in Central Texas. The target number of participants was 20 individuals who have gone through an entry level training program and/or have experience farming and who have a career goal of working in agriculture. The aim is to have at least 50% of the sample identify as socially or historically disadvantaged BFRs, i.e. female and/or non-white, aligning with USDA definitions. Participants in this evaluation were recruited directly by Farmshare Austin, including Farmer Starter alumni, and other BFR service providers in Texas, such as Austin Community College's Sustainable Ag program and Texas State University's Ag program. (A full list of service providers contacted to assist with recruitment is included as Appendix A).

## Survey

The survey collected demographic and other data from beginning farmers and ranchers in Central Texas which will help Farmshare tailor their training program to their potential client base. The survey included detailed questions regarding preferences for farmer training, such as format, components, seasonality, time of the week, length of the program, etc., and took about 10-15 minutes to complete. The target was to collect survey data from 40 BFRs in Central Texas. Survey participants were recruited via partner organizations who sent out an email and flyer (Appendix B) through their listservs. Survey participants who

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ers.usda.gov/agricultural-act-of-2014-highlights-and-implications/beginning-farmers-and-ranchers/>

provided contact information received \$25 compensation from Farmshare for their time completing the survey.

## Focus Groups

Focus group questions were crafted to draw out information regarding client needs and barriers to training and starting a farm in Central Texas that potentially could be addressed through a training program. Focus groups were 90 minutes in length and were held in person and online. Focus Groups were conducted with Farmer Starter alumni and other Central Texas farmers with 6 months-5 years of farming experience who are planning to farm in Central Texas. The target was to recruit 20 participants for three to four focus groups with 5-7 participants in each group. In addition, at least 50% of the focus group participants should self-identify as “socially disadvantaged” as defined above by the USDA.

Focus group participants were recruited at the same time as survey participants via the flyer and email sent out to partner organizations. The survey included a question that allowed respondents to indicate interest in participating in a focus group and provide contact information. In addition, a focus group registration form also provided data that was used to screen potential participants. Focus group participants were intentionally selected with a range of ages and incomes, a mix of genders, race/ethnicity and farming experience. (Farmers with less than 6 months or more than 5 years’ experience were ineligible to participate). One focus group was dedicated specifically for individuals who identified as BIPOC. Focus Group participants received \$75 compensation from Farmshare for their time.

## Interviews

Interviews were conducted to reach individuals that had not been able to participate in either the survey or focus group, had participated in a beginner training program and were actively farming. Interviewees were identified by staff at Farmshare Austin. While some interview questions (Appendix C) overlapped with the Focus Group questions (Appendix D), the interviews allowed respondents more time to generate ideas and create their ideal training or support program as they thought about what they needed for the next step in their farming journey. Interview participants received \$75 compensation from Farmshare for their time.

## Data Management and Analysis

Survey and focus group registration data was collected using Qualtrics survey software and stored in the University’s password-protected cloud storage system, Box. Focus Groups were recorded with the consent of participants and audios were stored in Box to assist in note taking and transcription.

Survey data was aggregated and analyzed to provide descriptive and summary statistics. Focus groups and interviews were analyzed thematically along with open-ended survey responses. Data from surveys, focus groups and interviews were triangulated to inform the results of the formative evaluation, including barriers and challenges, and recommendations about program content and operations, summarized under the results section.

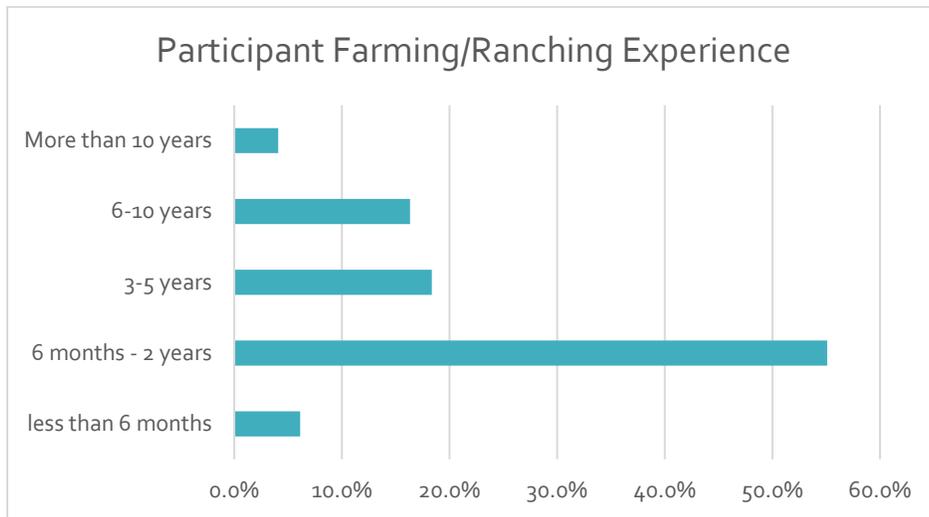
# Characteristics of Participants

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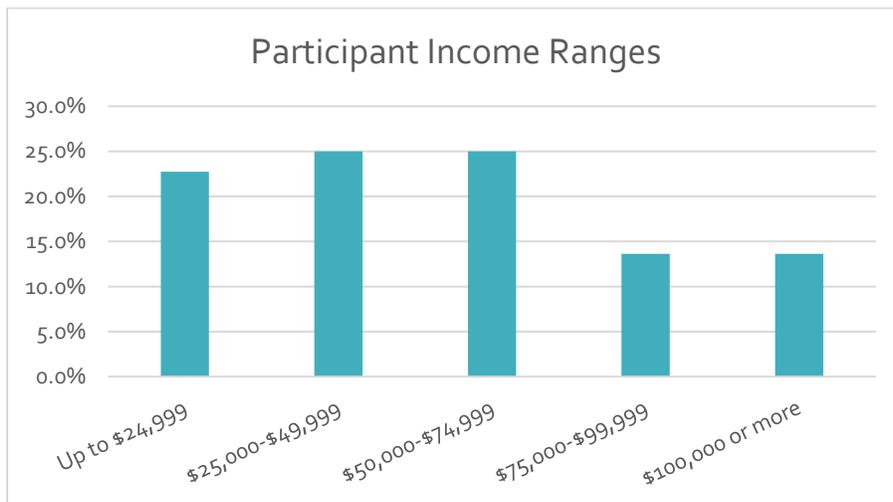
## Demographics and Experience

Data was collected from a total of 49 unique BFRs, through surveys, focus groups and interviews. Validated responses were analyzed from 39 individuals who completed the survey, 15 focus group participants and 7 interviewees, with some overlap between groups. The target to reach 40 BFRs through surveys and 20 BFRs

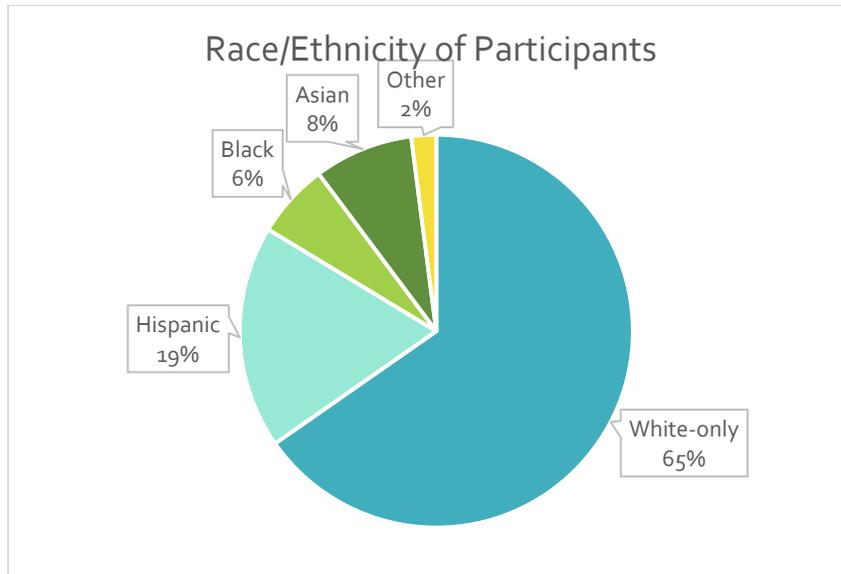
through focus groups was nearly achieved. A target was not set for interview participants, but was intended to round out focus group responses. In addition, Farmshare hoped to have at least 50-75% of the sample of socially or historically disadvantaged BFRs, and that target was also met, with 69.4% of participants self-identifying as BIPOC and/or female. A little over a third (36.7%) of participants were Farmer Starter Alumni. Over half 59.2% currently reside in Central Texas, a little over a third (36.7%) reside in other parts of the state, and 4% reside in other states, but were Farmer Starter alumni with recent experience farming in Central Texas. The range of years of experience for the sample was less than 6 months to over 10 years, with the majority (73.5%) falling into the BFR range of 6 months to 5 years' experience.



Excluding focus group participants for whom income data was not provided, there were a wide range of incomes represented by participants (n=44), although the majority (72.7%) had incomes under \$75k/year.



About twice as many females participated compared to males (63.3% vs 30.6%) with the remaining 6.1% identifying as genderqueer/non-binary. The majority of participants (77.5%) were between 25 – 44 years of age and a third (33.3%) of the sample was BIPOC or non-white only.



## Career Aspirations

Career goals varied for participants and could be categorized into three groups: 1) Traditional Farming Business, 2) A Cooperative or Communal Model, 3) Educational. Most BFRs wanted to go into business for themselves or were already farming for profit, for example, contributing to a CSA or Farmer's Market. The second most common type of farming was a cooperative or communal style farm with shared land, labor and skills. Some wanted to combine their cooperative with educational programming or a non-profit. Most who preferred a communal model weren't interested in being profitable, but had a primary purpose to serve the community. Combining farming with educational programming was also highly desired among participants. Some wanted their homestead or community garden on their property to be used for educational purposes as well as supplying food for themselves and/or their small community. Some were interested in nutrition education and some were interested in teaching farming skills, using the farm to host educational events or workshops. Less common, two respondents said they didn't want to own their own farm and were content managing someone else's. One person with a larger plot of land wanted to lease his land out to other farmers or ranchers, understanding the dilemma many BFRs face in accessing land, and not having a clear plan for what to do with his own.

## Farming Goals

The survey asked farmers and ranchers to list out their short, mid, and long-term goals. BFRs goals varied greatly, as they were in very different stages of their farming/ranching journey. Some were immersed in education and training, while others were working on someone else's farm and a few had started their own business on their own land or leased land. Short-term goals were defined as those that could be accomplished in the next 1-2 years. Most short-term goals were learning focused – working on an agriculture-related degree, or farming education program or working on someone else's farm to learn from them, including formal apprenticeships. Some BFRs were at the place where they were ready to purchase land, while others were a bit further along and were interested in increasing farm production, sales and profits.

Mid-term goals were defined as those that could be accomplished in the next 3-5 years. The most common response for these goals was acquiring one's own land or lease for farming, ranching or homesteading, which was also the most common response for long-term goals (6-10 years). These two goals, mid and long-

term, had the most overlap, with commonalities including employing others to work on the farm and increasing production or profits, which was slightly more common in the long-term goals. In both the mid and long-term, farmers expressed the desire for their businesses to be running smoothly, that is to have gotten past the start-up phase. One of the mid-term goals that was not seen in either the short or long-term was the need to begin community engagement and outreach, particularly for BFRs interested in having a non-profit or community-oriented operation. Similarly, hosting educational and teaching opportunities at their farm cropped up mainly as a long-term goal. Another unique long-term goal was that BFRs hoped to have stopped relying on other income streams and begin farming full-time by the 6-10 year mark.

## Results

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### Barriers to Starting a Farm

Focus Group participants and Interviewees identified common barriers they are facing to getting a farm operation up and running or achieving some of their farming-related goals. The most cited barrier was access to land, especially those in Central Texas that are worried about the affordability of land in the area with rising costs, and having to purchase land farther away or lease for lack of other options. Others have decided to lease land for now as a temporary solution, but they also recognized some of the downsides to leasing. A real concern is that they are making an investment in the land to get it to produce, which takes a lot of effort, and they worry about the land being sold out from under them, or having to just start over again and again. Even so, leasing is still seen as an attractive option for those who can't afford to purchase land but want to go ahead and start their business. There is a strong desire for land ownership but it feels out of reach for many BFRs.

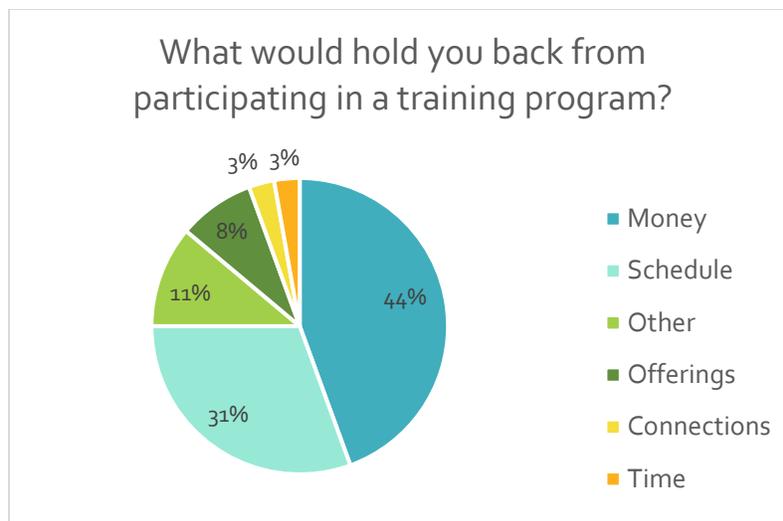
Many mentioned various financial barriers to running a farm. The most common barrier is tied to land acquisition, including acquiring sufficient savings, having the capital to invest in purchasing the land and start-up farming costs, and understanding the financing options that are available to them. Beyond that there were ongoing financial concerns. A real worry expressed by some BFRs was cutting back on the time they have to invest in their farming operation so that they can work and pay bills. One BFR who is managing someone's else's farm said, *"I worry about being a production farmer/owning my own farm, I just don't think it's sustainable economically from what I'm seeing."* Another farm manager said *"I wonder about the viability long-term of the American family farm as a model for having a successful and impactful farming operation, especially for people that don't already own family land or don't come from substantial means."* They recognized the need for specific financial and business planning to analyze costs and potential profits for their farming operation before getting too far along. Some BFRs that have land mentioned that they were making tough decisions about investments and needed help figuring out where to get funding to keep their operation going and also develop a smart investment strategy to use the resources they have wisely. Others mentioned the physical limitations they face to be able to dedicate the time needed to be productive, and were wanting help from others – whether paid, volunteer or exchange-based.

The third most common barrier was not having a business plan and/or marketing strategy. BFRs recognized that marketing is a necessary aspect of the work, but have little experience or understanding of how to do it in a way that doesn't take up all of their time – time when they could be farming. One BFR stated how lost she feels with all the online marketing options, *"When you are more old school, what do you do for marketing? Because with the technology today, how do you go about incorporating that, where do you start?"* Other barriers that were mentioned were needing help planning out what to do with their land, including restoring existing assets on the land, and assistance planning crops. Others mentioned the need for a mentor to help

with very specific questions they have about the particular area of farming they are struggling with. One BFR shared that she'd appreciate a mentorship program, *"where you can confidentially say - these are the problems I am currently facing, what do you think I should do? What do you think my options are? Having someone to bounce things off of, at least once a month [during] a 1-1."*

## Barriers to Participating in Training

Survey participants were asked what would hold them back from participating in a training program (Q14) and were given options to choose from. Of those, the amount of money it costs (44%) and having the right fit with their schedule or lifestyle (31%) were the most important, followed by having the right offerings or components (8%). Results were almost identical for BIPOC and female BFRs, with slightly more concern for having the right fit with their schedule or lifestyle (35%). Least important for all BFRs were having connections to the right people or resources and the amount of time it takes. One survey respondent mentioned that distance to the location was also important and another mentioned the opportunity costs of participating, *"When we talk about money it costs, I don't mean the program as much as the time and energy it takes away from investing in other sources of income to be able to afford to live and do [the] program."* A focus group participant that lives outside of Central Texas had a similar concern: *"It wouldn't be feasible for me to travel and spend so much time at some other site. Every hour even spent traveling is an hour I'm not farming here...It would have to be online because of the travel thing."*



## Training and Technical Assistance Needs and Preferences

### Logistics

Survey Questions 15-21 covered the logistical aspects of the program. Most survey respondents were interested in a part-time in-person training experience, at either one year or 3-6 months intervals for 3-10 hours per week, mornings or evenings on Mondays and Fridays.

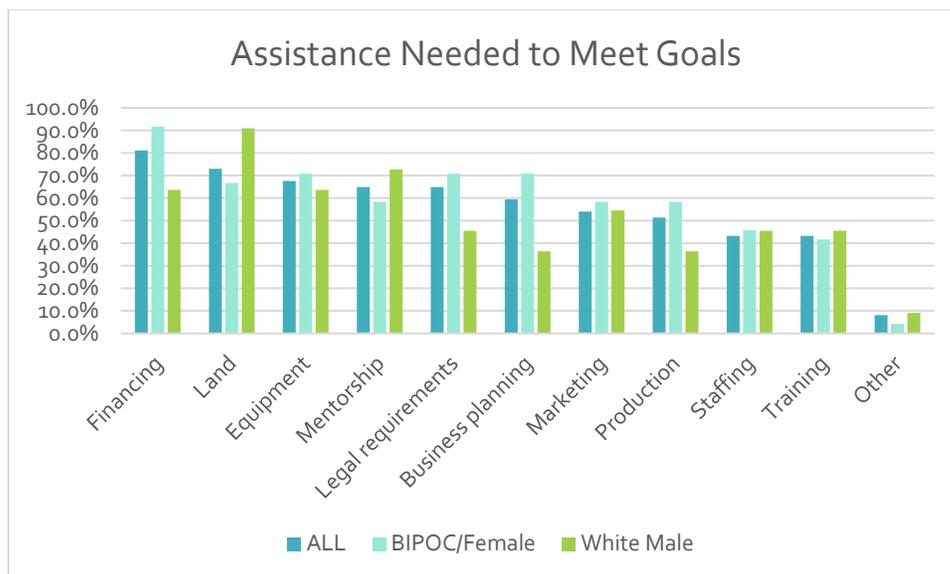
About half (53%) of survey respondents said they preferred an in-person training. The other half were divided between: a live online event (13.9%), a pre-recorded online training (16.7%), or had no preference (16.7%). Evenings (30.6%) and mornings (30.6%) were preferred times to meet compared to afternoons (13.9%). Those that selected they'd prefer to meet in-person, slightly favored meeting in the morning (31.5%) to the evening (25%). Over half (55.6%) of survey respondents said they'd prefer to meet on weekdays compared to 16.7% that said they'd prefer weekends. The best days to meet were Mondays and Fridays, followed by Thursdays. The worst days were Saturdays and Sundays.

Most survey participants preferred a time commitment of 3-10 hours per week (42%), followed by 1-2 hours (25%) and 11-20 hours (25%). The least favored option was 21-40 hours a week. When asked what the most amount of time they could dedicate to an educational opportunity, a part-time training experience was the leading response, followed closely by 1-2x per month (28.6%) and a couple of hours a week (25.7%). Very few respondents were on either extreme of looking for a full-time experience or a 1-time event. In terms of length of the training experience or opportunity, most survey respondents were looking for at least a year (40%) or 3-6 months (37%). More of those that were interested in a year or longer, preferred 3-10 hours a week.

### Program Structure

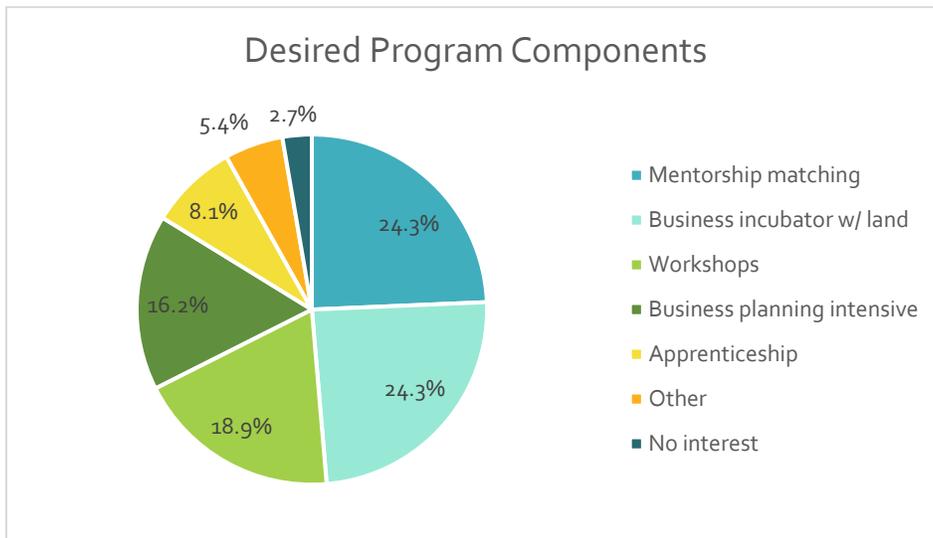
Two survey questions (Q12-13) helped identify the types of technical assistance, services, supports and training content that would be helpful for beginning to intermediate farmers and ranchers. The first was a follow-up to respondents identifying their short, mid and long-term farming and ranching goals. The survey question that followed was *“Think about the type(s) of assistance that would help you reach your goals. What services, resources or supports do you need now and in the next few years?”* Respondents were given a list of options to choose from (see graph below for percent breakdown of all responses).

The most common response was “all of the above,” but looking at the most selected responses individually, the greatest need skews heavily towards capital: financing (start-up costs, loans, financial management), land (acquisition and ownership) and equipment. Mentorship also ranks high on the list as well as understanding legal requirements (certifications, licenses, and regulations). For BIPOC and/or female BFRs, there is an even greater desire for help with financing, legal requirements and business planning, whereas white males ranked land and mentorship highest. Other responses included assistance with storage and distribution, connecting with others who want a communal farmstead, and making a living: *“How to be a farm worker and learn, but afford cost of living in Central Texas. How do you financially make it all work without overextending yourself...?”*



The second survey question asked *“What must be included in an educational opportunity to make it worth your while to participate?”* Respondents were given a list of options to choose from (see graph below for percent breakdown of all responses). The most attractive options were matching to a mentor (24.3%) and a business incubator with access to land (24.3%) followed by workshops (18.9%) and a business planning intensive

(16.2%). Of note, white males overwhelmingly selected mentorship as the top desired component (45.5%) of just three options; whereas responses from BIPOC and female BFRs were more spread out across all options, with the business planning intensive (26%) and incubator with land access (22%) being the top choices.



### Educational Content

Of the survey respondents who said they were interested in workshops, the desired subject matter varied quite a bit. Similarly, desired educational content varied widely for interviewees, however business planning, budgeting and financing, marketing, people management and land surveying were commonly cited. In addition, deeper dives into very specific types of production and specific skills were suggested, listed below. A few BFRs recommended that participants be able to select which workshops or classes they want to participate in, based on their needs and interests, and could go even deeper in their understanding by apprenticing at a farm that uses those specific techniques. One Farmer Starter alumna said she and her colleagues really needed a year of work after Farmer Starter to decide what type of farming they want to go into, to know what type of additional training they might need. A list of the responses from the survey and interviews are provided below.

Table 1: Workshop topics BFRs expressed interest in:	
<b>Business planning</b>	<b>Fundamentals</b>
Agritourism and learning how to be successful at leading teaching events or providing educational opportunities on the farm.	Crop planning, rotation, succession planting, crop families
Land trust/cooperative farming models	Soil types, soil management, composting
Marketing, social media	Animals: chickens, livestock, etc
Market analysis, connecting to buyers	
<b>Financial</b>	<b>Specific Production Methods</b>
Bookkeeping, funding, grant opportunities	Korean Natural Farming
Record keeping	Agroforestry
Land acquisition	Hydroponics or aquaponics
<b>Legal Regulations</b>	Permaculture

USDA processing facilities and commercial kitchens	Locally specific regenerative livestock production trainings
State licensing requirements for eggs and value-added products	Propagation, specifically orcharding and trees, berries and fruits
Regulations and certifications	<b>Specific Skills</b>
	tractor maintenance and welding, proper use of machinery
	Food preservation, proper handling of food from harvest to market

### Key Program Components

Interviews with BFRs centered on the idea of going beyond Farmshare’s Farmer Starter program or a similar beginner-level program to provide the skills, knowledge and resources BFRs needed to accomplish their goals of farm ownership and production, a cooperative or educational farm. Several ideas emerged about what the “Farmer Starter 2.0” could include. In terms of subject matter, it was suggested that the current Farmer Starter program focus mainly on farming basics, such as soil health, growing techniques and disease/pest management. While the 2.0 version could focus more on the business side of things, diving deeper into developing a business plan, more than it is currently covered in 1.0. A Farmer Starter Alumna shared about their experience in the program, *“You had the science of growing food and the business of growing food...It was a lot of information at once. You need to get one part down, and then do the other part.”* With less business content, Farmer Starter 1.0 could also be general enough for individuals who aren’t interested in for-profit farming, for example those who said they wanted to homestead for personal or community use, to start a non-profit or communal farm, or use their farm for educational opportunities. For the 2.0 course, they suggested a heavy focus on topics like land acquisition, site selection, land surveying and planning, financing, marketing and budgeting. Then “2.0” could be geared more to those farmers who want to go into for-profit farming, providing that deeper dive that alumni said was missing from Farmer Starter 1.0. Another option to consider is having different sections of the program for those interested in non-profit and for-profit farming.

Another alumna said, *“People don’t know what they need until they figure out what they want to do. Broadly, Farmer Starter introduces you to everything but once you start working in other places and decide, ‘I want to work in that market,’ then more advanced knowledge seems to be helpful.”* For some of the more specific or niche topics (like aquaponics, KNF, and livestock production), they suggested bringing in guest speakers, having farm field trips or workshops or setting up an apprenticeship to learn how to best implement these specific methods that aren’t used at Farmshare. They suggested that these deeper dive workshops and apprenticeships be optional to allow for students to pick and choose what they want to learn more about or gain experience in.

BFRs highlighted the need for the program to be flexible and accommodating, especially considering that some may have their own farm or farming jobs that don’t allow them to be on site for half the year. They suggested having evening and weekend options and would like to see remote learning options, including

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*I like the idea of doing pre-recorded videos [of lessons with] articles or readings...that could be done in their own time. Farming is so hands on – so it is necessary to have things in-person-too. [Online lessons can provide] a basic understanding of the content before they come, then spend time in-person discussing, problem solving and doing the work.”*

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asynchronous learning with pre-recorded sessions that can be taken at any time. They also recognized the importance of having in-person activities – either at Farmshare or at other farms with supervision to ensure appropriate execution of the skills learned.

Some BFRs were familiar with Farmshare’s Cultivator program and felt that this was an important next step after participating in Farmer Starter, in a safe environment. One participant described it as an opportunity for *“people [to] build skills without having to risk their entire livelihood.”* Specifically, the Farmshare Cultivator is a 6-month program that gives Farmer Starter Alumni the opportunity to put what they’ve learned into practice by producing a specific quantity of crops on a 1/5 acre of Farmshare’s land, to distribute through Farmshare’s Fresh for Less Mobile Markets and Curbside Delivery food access programs. A few built upon this model by suggesting that Cultivator start off with raw land that needs to be built up and amended so it can be used for production. On the other hand, another Cultivator participant stated that having dependable soil health was an important part of the program because it requires less investment and less risk. They said that students should participate in Cultivator for at least two growing seasons (Spring and Fall) to get a full sense of what it’s like to produce year-round in Central Texas. They also thought Cultivator participants should have to secure buyers outside of Farmshare and Fresh for Less Mobile Markets, to give them a chance to experience what it’s like to find, secure and maintain customers. Finally, they suggested that Cultivator be supervised by other farmers at other locations, recognizing that there is a physical limit – of space, time, and resources – for Farmshare to dedicate to the program alone. Having other farms host Cultivator participants would allow more BFRs to participate in this experience.

Similarly, BFRs liked the idea of having a business incubator where there was less risk involved with getting a business started, and had shared investments and resources. One of the Farmer Starter alumni said *“Having something like an Incubator program would be invaluable...a space to develop a skill set and be economically stable while doing that.”* Another desired component of the Farmer Starter “2.0” was access to a lending library of tools, equipment and other resources and training on how to use them. One farmer suggested that farmers who are willing to participate share when equipment and tools are available for sharing via a calendar rental system. They’d also like help connecting to land owners who are leasing out land as another option for getting started without having land available themselves. Farmshare’s Land Link program connects farmers and ranchers looking for land to landowners in Travis, Williamson, Bastrop, Hays and Caldwell Counties. Finally, Farmer Starter Alumni highly appreciated the help Farmshare’s education director provides and understand that her time is limited serving current Farmer Starters and alumni. One former Farmshare Cultivator participant said, *“I do really well working with a mentor. I miss the weekly meetings through Cultivator because of the built-in accountability - being able to talk something out. I am trying to adjust to not having that anymore.”* They recognized the need to have a dedicated mentor they can reach out to at any time for help and guidance, someone who is further down the road in the specific area of farming or ranching they want to pursue and can be trusted. BFRs also expressed the need for guidance on how best to utilize a mentor and manage that relationship effectively.

## Collaboration Amongst Service Providers

Lots of ideas emerged for how farmers and ranchers could better collaborate with one another that could be explored with other BFR service providers in Texas. Farmer Starter Alumni in particular acknowledged that a lot of their current network was grown through their participation in the program. Some BFRs suggested that the network go beyond Farmer Starter alumni to have a greater reach and audience. There were four specific suggestions that are elaborated on below: events, matchmaking, apprenticeship and mentorship, and online resource hub.

## Events

BFRs recognized the need for ongoing learning in their field, and also the desire to network, build relationships and learn from other farmers and ranchers. They suggested mixers or get-togethers and meet-up events at different farms – some for purely social interaction or others that are more formal workshops. One farmer stated, *"I like the idea of organized meet ups for different niche markets."* She said she saw a similar program in another state with *"a monthly meet up for farmers at different farms and you would have a specific topic that would be education based and then a Q&A, you would tour the farm and then have a potluck after."* This desire is particularly strong after years of social isolation and limited connections beyond the internet. They stressed that these events should be open – not restricted to Farmshare alumni or other networks, and could be open to other farms or *"friends of Farmshare."*

## Matchmaking

Beyond networking and casual getting-to-know-you events, BFRs also desired a more formal structure for making connections. They wanted a way for alumni to be able to connect with others that have similar interests, for example, permaculture or aquaponics. This was especially noted for farmers whose goal is to have a cooperative or communal style farm. They recognized the need to have the right group of people, with a mix of knowledge and skills to make it work. Similarly, some farmers are interested in collaboratively working together on a CSA or other sales model, or to support one another during times of crop failure or other crises that farmers may face in production. Even those who have more traditional farming businesses said they'd need help with physical labor and wanted to connect with others who were willing to pitch in or exchange services. Similarly, some BFRs needed very specific assistance, drafting a greenhouse restoration plan, planning out a large plot of land, with financing options for land or developing a marketing strategy. They were looking to intentionally connect with individuals with the skill sets they were missing - consultants that could help them overcome some of the hurdles they faced to move forward.

## Apprenticeships and Mentorship

Another formal way BFRs desired to connect was matching BFRs to a particular farm for apprenticeship or farmer for mentorship based on their needs, plans, and the type of farming they want or need to learn more about. There may be an opportunity to work particularly with the Sustainable Food Center and The Central Texas Young Farmers Coalition, who one BFR mentioned are looking to build out their roles as a "connector" for farmers. One Farmer Starter alumna suggested building off of the program's final project by facilitating connections to potential partnerships and more experienced farmers to help students put their ideas into action. She recognized that it could be an opportunity to *"facilitate generational knowledge transfer."*

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*"There's got to be an easier way to gain knowledge without starting from scratch for everything."*

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## Online Resources

BFRs are looking for better online resources. Several ideas emerged for a shared web space that could include: help identifying pests and diseases, a forum to help answer common questions, or chat feature for live help, job postings, a calendar of educational and social events, land listings, and educational opportunities like farmers starter and others. They said that knowing where to look for certain information or who to ask is extremely important. So much time is spent seeking out information from a variety of sources online, in books, you tube videos, podcasts and Instagram, among others. One more experienced farmer (~5 years) said *"There is certainly a wealth of resources around, but there's not a centralized place to find those though. When I first moved to Texas, [I saw the need for] a directory – here are the resources for where you are in your farming career."* One focus group participant said they'd like access to

a network of farmers to tap into and ask questions. They said that it would be nice if there was a consolidated space for that information and it was available for farmers beyond Farmer Starter alumni.

## Limitations

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Data collection for the formative evaluation began with the launch of a survey that would be sent out through Farmshare's partner organizations (Appendix A). These organizations serve beginning Farmers and Ranchers across the state of Texas and therefore seemed a good vehicle for sharing the paid survey opportunity. The survey received a very high response rate initially, but unfortunately many of the responses could not be verified as accurate. Some of the responses had IP addresses from other states or countries, and were obviously submitted in batches, with several coming in at almost exactly the same time and having near identical responses. In addition, some of the names and email addresses appeared to be false. After extensive data cleaning and investigation on the part of the evaluator and one of Farmshare's staff, including validating IP addresses, the majority of survey responses were eliminated from the study. While disappointing, the goal was to have an accurate representation of BFRs needs, preferences and desires, which was achieved through the 39 remaining validated survey responses.

In addition, some of the individuals who signed up for the focus groups had falsely represented their identities and experience, and were based in other countries. Four such individuals participated in focus groups but did not receive compensation, nor were their responses analyzed since they could not provide evidence of ever having been trained, farmed, or having the intention to farm in Texas. The evaluator and Farmshare have learned valuable lessons about preventing data fraud that will be applied in the future, such as additional security measures for survey entries and fact-checking prior to focus group participation.

Finally, focus group participation was slightly lower than desired, with the initial goal being 20 participants and having captured 15, excluding the four whose responses were dismissed. It was discovered that some of the focus group registrants had also been unverifiable, after they had been selected to participate based on demographic factors. If they had been excluded from the sample initially, more of the "real" registrants would have been selected to participate. In order to round out the sample and receive more specific ideas and recommendations on programming, a decision was made to add interviews with individuals who were currently farming or managing farms and farmer-starter graduates. Having these more intimate one-on-one discussions led to a better understanding of the needs and desires BFRs have for additional assistance getting to the next stage of their farming/ranching journey.

## Key Takeaways

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### Participant Characteristics

The target number of participants for the evaluation was 20 individuals total, with at least 50% identifying as socially or historically disadvantaged BFRs. Data was collected and validated from a total of 49 unique BFRs, through surveys, focus groups and interviews, with about 69% of participants self-identifying as socially or historically disadvantaged (BIPOC and/or female).

### Barriers to Starting a Farm or Ranch

The first outcome of the evaluation is to identify barriers to starting a farm in Central Texas, particularly for socially disadvantaged BFRs. Land ownership feels out of reach for many BFRs. The most frequently cited barrier across data sources was access to farmable land, especially for those living in Central Texas who are

witnessing rapidly rising costs in the area. Land access was also the second highest barrier for BFRs reaching their goals. Having the capital to invest in purchasing land and/or start-up costs for their farm or ranch is a challenge and many aren't aware of or don't know how to get financing. 92% of socially disadvantaged BFRs identified financing as their main barrier to accomplishing their goals. In addition, BFRs expressed concerns about balancing their investment of time and funds with being able to support

themselves financially. Another commonly shared barrier to starting a farm or ranch was needing a business plan and marketing strategy. They recognized the importance of marketing, but lacked understanding of how to do it so that they still have time to dedicate to growing crops or raising livestock. Business planning and understanding legal requirements were the second most common barrier for socially disadvantaged BFRs reaching their goals, but not as much of a concern for non-socially disadvantaged BFRs. BFRs said they needed more guidance on how to plan their investment, the steps they should take and realistic growth they should expect. Without this assistance, some were stuck in analysis paralysis or second guessing their decisions.

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*Because of my economic situation, I have no choice but to try some type of stable salary income. Which is generally not the case with a lot of farms. That's not to say that you can't get there. It takes a long time to establish yourself well enough get to that point. I've found it exceedingly difficult to strategize a way to do that for a lack of access to land and not having a certain amount of capital*

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## Barriers to Accessing Training

The second outcome of the evaluation is to identify barriers to accessing farmer training in Central Texas, particularly for socially disadvantaged BFRs. Most BFRs identified the potential program costs and having the right fit with their schedule as the greatest potential barriers to participation, the latter being slightly more of a concern for socially disadvantaged BFRs. With concerns about the amount of time it takes to start and then be profitable, many BFRs expressed having to balance farming or ranching with having another job to be able to make ends meet. They presented several ideas for how the program could be designed to accommodate their schedules, outlined in the next section below.

## Needs and Preferences

A third outcome of the evaluation is to identify advanced BFR training and technical assistance needs and preferences in Central Texas, particularly for socially disadvantaged BFRs. Five main needs and preferences rose to the top. 1) The current Farmer Starter should focus just on farming basics and move the business side of things to the next "2.0" course for a deeper dive into business planning and marketing, land acquisition and site selection and planning. That way, the farmer starter fits a range of desires (from non-profit, to homestead, to farming for profit) and the next course is reserved just for those who want to go into farming for profit. 2) To allow for flexible schedules, include evenings and weekends or asynchronous (not live) recorded sessions that students can do on their own time. Offer some online learning and some in-person activities. 3) Offer trainings and workshops as optional through farm visits and apprenticeships to learn specific skills and techniques in niche farming and ranching (aquaponics, regenerative livestock production, high tunnels, etc). 4) Modify and expand the Cultivator program. Students should participate in the Cultivator for two growing seasons and be required to obtain buyers outside of Farmshare's programs. They could have Cultivator sites outside of Farmshare that are supervised by other experienced farmers to allow for higher participation. 5) The combination of a business incubator with a lending library and Land Link

would include leased access to land, resources, tools, training and mentorship. Students could be matched with mentors to receive hands-on support and guidance, but needed more direction from Farmshare on how to best manage the relationship (such as having healthy boundaries).

## Finding Support

A fourth and final outcome of the evaluation is that BFR focus groups participants feel more confident about finding support/asking for help. While the evaluation did not include follow-up with focus group participants, there was some evidence of increased confidence and self-reflection about the type of help needed during the data collection process. BFRs expressed the desire to network, build relationships and learn from other farmers and ranchers and suggested informal meet-ups. One interviewee connected to The Central Texas Young Farmers Coalition said that they were planning to start in-person meet-ups again soon that provide those opportunities. BFRs also wanted to match themselves with others who have similar interests to potentially work together. The focus groups provided BFRs an opportunity to meet or connect in this way, albeit informally, and some shared contact information to stay connected to one another. A more formal matchmaking opportunity is desired. Farmer Starter alumni expressed gratitude for the resources and information provided by the program director, and would like a consolidated space, like an online hub for information available for folks beyond Farmer Starter alumni. Participants were enthusiastic about these ideas for getting support and seemed ready to pitch in to make them happen with some organizational support from Farmshare or others. The dissemination of the findings from this report to participants and follow-up survey will provide an opportunity to collect more data to provide additional evidence for this outcome.

## Next Steps

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### Future Activities

As mentioned earlier, Farmshare is in the process of identifying an organization-wide and program specific equity lens to help them guide their work according to equity standards. The Farmer Starter program and next iteration will allow for them to apply and test their model, and make additional refinements as needed.

There are additional areas of inquiry that Farmshare could explore to augment or complement the data herein. One BFR suggested to get feedback directly from farmers who are a bit farther along in their journey (6-10 years). While collecting data from more advanced farmers and ranchers goes beyond the scope of this project, there is the opportunity to share back findings and get feedback at conferences and from other BFR service providers. Another BFR suggested forming a group to build out the idea of having a communal or co-op style farm. BFRs that were interested in pursuing this model recognized that a key component of its success was having the right partners at the table. Thus, forming a planning committee around this idea could serve both the purposes of laying out a plan, and bringing interested talent together. Another idea that emerged from the group that may fall outside of the scope of the Farmer Starter 2.0 was developing a Central Website or hub where farmers could go to seek out information to help them at different stages in their journey. This would be a huge endeavor that could be explored with additional support.

### Dissemination and Application of Findings

The intention of this project is to lay a foundation for next steps for beginning to intermediate farmer education and training, both as an organization and within a wider collaboration across Texas and beyond. The results of the data reflect the needs and preferences of those individuals Farmshare aims to serve. The results impact the development of Farmshare's programming and will be shared with Farmshare's partners

for them to use to inform their own programs. This report will be shared with the public via Farmshare's website and intentionally sent out to other BFR service providers who expressed interest in the study. Farmshare will also host an online meeting with its partner organizations (Appendix A) to present and discuss the results of the formative evaluation, Farmshare's plans for applying the data to its own programming and explore ways that they can collaborate to fill the needs identified.

At the Southern Family Farm and Food Systems Conference in August 2022, Farmshare will present the findings of the evaluation as well as their plans for programmatic development that were influenced by the results. This will give Farmshare another opportunity to explore further collaborations as well as gather survey feedback about the plans and have intentional conversations with attendees of the conference.

Farmshare will also share the results of the evaluation with the participants of the focus groups, interviews and survey, providing an outline of strategies intended to meet their needs and preferences. They will include a brief survey so that they can share feedback about their experience being a part of the evaluation, including their comfort with asking for support – directly addressing outcome 4, and their impression of the findings from the evaluation. There may be an in-person or online discussion as well for those that are interested. Farmshare will use this opportunity to build on and critique existing ideas and further evaluate BFR attitudes towards the summary and Farmshare's response. This gives Farmshare a chance to test the findings and receive additional feedback to help solidify their implementation strategy. For example, one area of feedback that could be helpful is narrowing down the long list of very specific workshop topics that BFRs suggested (table 1).

Farmshare is also applying for additional funding from the USDA to implement the programming based on the data gathered from this study. If awarded, Farmshare will engage in a 3-year program implementation cycle to put into practice what they've learned from BFRs, partners and stakeholders.

## Appendices

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- A. Partner Organizations
- B. Recruitment Flyer
- C. Survey
- D. Focus Group Guide
- E. Interview Questions
- F. Equity Lens Exercise
- G. Logic Model

## Appendix A: Partner Organizations

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### Austin Community College Agriculture Sciences Division, Austin, Texas

<https://dmcat.austincc.edu/agricultural-sciences/>

“The Agricultural Sciences program at ACC focuses on ecological farming, quality of life and farm profitability. Designed to provide you with both agricultural production knowledge and business skills training, courses range from foundational principles in soil science to marketing. Hands-on instruction at the campus student farm helps you cultivate a working knowledge of ecological farming practices and the seasonal processes.”



### The Central Texas Young Farmers Coalition, Austin, Texas

<https://www.centraltexasyoungfarmers.org/>

The first Texas chapter of the National Young Farmers Coalition, the Central Texas Young Farmers Coalition “has a mission to support young and beginning farmers through education, connection and advocacy. The chapter seeks to engage Central Texas farmers and farm-adjacent folks by organizing monthly meetups, a Facebook group and listserv.”



### H.O.P.E. for Small Farm Viability, Harlingen, Texas

<https://www.hopeforsfs.org/>

“HOPE provides education and training to individuals interested in growing, preparing, and selling their own organic food for self-sustainability. We are passionate about sharing our knowledge of farming and healthy eating with the residents of the RGV (Rio Grande Valley).”



### The Sustainable Food Center, Austin, Texas

<https://sustainablefoodcenter.org/>

“Sustainable Food Center transforms the food system to nourish our health, land and livelihood. Our work supports local, small to mid-sized farms so they can thrive. We also increase access to healthy, local food and offer education and resources to help individuals and families maintain a healthy diet.”



## Texas Center for Local Food, Elgin Texas

<https://texaslocalfood.org>

“The Texas Center for Local Food provides education, research, and technical assistance to create regional food systems in Texas that support prosperous family farms, healthy Texans and vibrant rural economies”



## Texas Small Farm and Ranch Community Based Organization, College Station, Texas

<https://tsfrcbo.org/>

“Established to reach the goals of strengthening USDA outreach efforts to limited resource, traditionally underserved, and underrepresented farmer rancher customers to ensure USDA and coordinate program delivery outreach efforts in counties throughout Texas.”



and

## Texas State University Small Producer’s Initiative, San Marcos, Texas

<https://www.smallproducersinitiative.txstate.edu/>

“The Small Producers Initiative (SPI) is a program housed in the Department of Agricultural Sciences at Texas State University. Our mission is to provide research, outreach and extension to historically under-served small and mid-sized farmers and ranchers in Texas. Small and mid-sized farms are defined as those with a gross cash farm income (GCFI) of less than \$499,999. This includes starter farms under 1 acre to ranches or farms of several hundred acres.”



## Appendix B: Recruitment Flyer

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### BEGINNING TO INTERMEDIATE FARMERS & RANCHERS

*Tell Us What You Need*

#### **PARTICIPATE IN A GROUP DISCUSSION**

90 MINUTES OF YOUR TIME. 3 DATES TO CHOOSE FROM  
PARTICIPANTS GET A \$75 GIFT CARD. [REGISTER HERE.](#)

#### **SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS VIA SURVEY**

15 MINUTES OF YOUR TIME. THE FIRST 50 RESPONDENTS WILL GET A \$25  
GIFT CARD. SCAN THE QR CODE OR CLICK THE [SURVEY LINK.](#)



Funded by Farmshare Austin with a USDA grant

## Appendix C: Survey

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### Beginning to Intermediate Farmer and Rancher Survey

#### Survey Intro

Community Driven Initiatives (CDI) is working with Farmshare Austin to develop services, resources and supports for beginning to intermediate level farmers and ranchers in Central Texas. This survey helps Farmshare understand your needs and desired to create relevant programming that resonates with those it serves.

By continuing this survey, you are providing consent for CDI staff to view your responses and give Farmshare a summary of the combined, de-identified survey responses.

Your participation is completely voluntary and your responses are confidential. Any personal information you provide will be removed and results will be summarized before sharing the results with anyone. If you have any questions about this survey, contact: [Marianna.Espinoza@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:Marianna.Espinoza@austin.utexas.edu)

**Thank you for your input!**

#### Section 1

The following demographic questions will help us understand beginning farmers and ranchers to help us cater programs and services to better meet your needs.

Q1 What is the Zip Code where you live? \_\_\_\_\_

Q2 How old are you?

- Under 18
- 18 - 24
- 25 - 34
- 35 - 44
- 45 - 54
- 55 +

Q3 What is your gender identity?

- Male
- Female
- Transgender Man
- Transgender Woman
- Genderqueer/non-binary/other gender minority
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

Q4 What is your race and/or ethnicity? (Select all that apply)

- Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin
- Black or African American
- White, Caucasian
- Asian or Asian American
- American Indian or Alaskan Native
- Middle Eastern or North African
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

Q5 What is your employment status? (Select all that apply)

- Full time work for an employer
- Part time work for an employer
- Independent contractor for a company (like uber driver)
- Self-employed in your own business
- Unemployed and looking for work
- Unemployed and not looking for work
- Full time student
- Part time student
- Homemaker or full-time parent/care-taker
- Retired
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

Q6 Type of Current Farming/Ranching Occupation

- Not currently farming/ranching
- Volunteer/intern
- Apprentice
- Farm/ranch worker
- Administrative staff
- Management
- Business Owner or Executive

Q7 What is your annual household income?

- Up to \$24,999
- \$25,000-\$49,999
- \$50,000-\$74,999
- \$75,000-\$99,999
- \$100,000 or more

## Section 2

### *Your Farming and Ranching Experience and Education*

Q8 How long have you been farming or ranching? (Include time in ag schools, apprenticeships or learning programs, working on farms, or running your own farming or ranching business).

- less than 6 months

- 6 months - 2 years
- 3-5 years
- 6-10 years
- More than 10 years

Q9 What type of experience do you have farming and ranching? (Select all that apply)

- At home gardening/animal husbandry
- Community gardening
- Running my own farm or ranch
- Working or volunteering on someone else's farm or ranch
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

Q10 What type of farmer or rancher training have you received? (Select all that apply)

- Family/Home-based (grew up working on a farm or ranch)
- On the Job (Worked on a farm or ranch)
- Informal training (youtube, books, short online courses)
- College or University degree in Agriculture or Animal Husbandry
- Formal farmer/rancher training program (specify) \_\_\_\_\_
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

### Section 3

#### *Your Farming and Ranching Goals*

Q11 Think about what type of lifestyle you would like to have as a farmer/rancher over the next 10 years. Write out your short, mid and long-term farming and/or ranching goals that will help you achieve that lifestyle in the spaces below.

- Short-term goal: In the next 1-2 years, I would like to... \_\_\_\_\_
- Mid-term goal: In the next 3-5 years, I would like to... \_\_\_\_\_
- Long-term goal: In the next 6-10 years, I would like to... \_\_\_\_\_

Q12 Think about the type(s) of assistance that would help you reach your goals. What services, resources or supports do you need now and in the next few years? (select all that apply)

- Land (acquisition, ownership, etc.)
- Equipment
- Financing (start-up costs, loans, financial management, etc.)
- Staffing
- Training
- Mentorship
- Legal requirements (certifications, licenses, and regulations)
- Business planning
- Marketing
- Production
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

### Section 4

#### *Training Needs and Logistics*

Q13 What must be included in an educational opportunity to make it worth your while to participate?

- Apprenticeship
- Mentorship matching
- Business planning intensive
- Business incubator with access to land
- Subject specific workshops (specify what subjects you are interested in) \_\_\_\_\_
- Other \_\_\_\_\_
- None, I'm not interested in educational opportunities at this time

*Skip To: End of Survey If What must be included in an educational opportunity to make it worth your while to participate? = None, I'm not interested in educational opportunities at this time*

Q14 What is the main thing that would hold you back from participating in an educational opportunity?

- The amount of time it takes
- The amount of money it costs
- The fit with my schedule/lifestyle
- Having the right offerings/components
- Having the right connections (to people, resources)
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

## Section 5

*Answer the following questions assuming that you would be interested in and able to participate in an educational opportunity.*

Q15 Would you prefer online or in-person?

- In-person
- Online - Live
- Online - Pre-recorded
- No preference

Q16 In general, what times of day would work better for you?

- Mornings
- Afternoons
- Evenings
- No preference

Q17 Would you prefer weekdays or weekends?

- Weekdays
- Weekends
- No preference

Q18 Are there any days of the week that you absolutely **would not** be able to participate? (Select any that apply)

- Monday
- Tuesday
- Wednesday
- Thursday
- Friday

- Saturday
- Sunday

Q19 What's the most amount of time you'd be willing and able to engage in an education opportunity?

- One-time event
- Once or twice a month
- A couple of hours a week
- Part-time training experience
- Full-time training experience

*Display This Question: If What's the most amount of time you'd be willing and able to engage in an education opportunity? = A couple of hours a week OR = Part-time training experience OR = Full-time training experience*

Q20 About how much time would you be able to dedicate per week to an education opportunity and related activities?

- 1-2 hours
- 3-10 hours
- 11-20 hours
- 21-40 hours

Q21 Considering your needs and the amount of time you can dedicate, about how many months would you be willing to commit to an ongoing educational opportunity?

- 1-2 months
- 3-6 months
- 7-11 months
- 12 months or more

## Section 6

### *Invitation to Participate in a Group Discussion for Compensation*

Q22 Would you be interested in participating in a group discussion to provide more input on your needs as a new farmer for compensation?

- Yes
- No

*Display This Question: If Would you be interested in participating in a group discussion to provide more input on your need... = Yes*

Q23 Which of the following options work for your schedule to be able to attend a group discussion? (Select all that apply)

- Friday, January 28th in-person at lunch during the TOFGA conference (lunch will be provided)
- Tuesday, February 1st between 1pm-5pm online via Zoom
- Wednesday, February 2nd between 1pm-5pm online via Zoom
- None of the days and times work for my schedule

*Display This Question: If Which of the following options work for your schedule to be able to attend a group discussion? ... = None of the days and times work for my schedule*

Q24 If none of the above options works for your schedule, what works better for you? (Select all that apply)

- Weekdays
- Weekends
- Mornings (8am-12pm)
- Afternoons (12-4pm)
- Evenings (4-8pm)

*Display This Question: If Which of the following options work for your schedule to be able to attend a group discussion?... = Friday, January 28th in-person at lunch during the TOFGA conference (lunch will be provided)*

Q25 \*You must register separately for the [TOFGA conference](#) to participate in the group discussion at lunch on the 28th.

*Display This Question: If Would you be interested in participating in a group discussion to provide more input on your need... = Yes*

Q26 Please provide your contact information and we will be in touch with more details about the group discussion

- First Name \_\_\_\_\_
- Last Name \_\_\_\_\_
- Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_
- Email \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D: Focus Group Guide

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### Beginning Farmer Focus Group – Question Bank

*Aim: understand aspirations, challenges, barriers and desires for programming*

1. When did you know you wanted to be a farmer?
2. If your farming journey was likened to climbing Mt. Everest - Where would you say you are in your farming journey? (At the summit? At base camp? At a resting place? Climbing? Getting started? Contemplation? Viewing from an airplane?)
3. What do you picture, when you think of yourself as being a successful farmer? (What's your summit look like?)
4. What are some of the challenges you have faced starting a farming business? [OR What are some of the challenges you face as a farmer who identifies as BIPOC that non-BIPOC farmers do not face?]
5. What has been your biggest struggle in getting to the next step of your farming journey? Where are you feeling stuck now, in moving forward?
  - a. What are your main concerns or barriers with moving your farming/ranching plans forward to reach your goals?
6. If you were to participate in a program that helped move your business forward, what would it have to offer to entice you to participate? (What would you recommend be included in a training program or educational opportunity? Or what would the ideal program look like?)
  - a. What is the main thing that would hold you back from participating in an educational opportunity?
7. In what ways have you felt supported by the community where you farm? Or how do you feel like your community could be more supportive?

## Appendix E: Interview Questions

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### Intermediate Farmer Interview Script

*Aims: Understand challenges in getting business off the ground; Identify helpful services and supports; and Generate ideas for programming.*

8. Tell me about your farming/ranching experience
  - a. When did you know you wanted to be a farmer/rancher?
  - b. Where would you say you are in your farming/ranching journey?
    - i. [If they have not started a business yet] Where do you see your farm career heading?
  - c. What does success look like to you? (prompt is ownership the goal?)
9. What are some of the challenges you have faced in the first few years of starting a farming/ranching business?
  - a. What was your biggest struggle in moving your business forward?
  - b. What do you continue to struggle with?
10. What do you wish you had known when you were getting started?
  - a. What resources do you wish you had access to?
  - b. What resources and supports have been the most helpful to you?
  - c. What resources do you feel like you still need to get you to your vision of success?
11. If you could design a program that helped beginning farmers and ranchers (who have 2-5 years' experience), what would it include?
12. Have you felt supported by the community where you farm/ranch? If not, how do you feel like your community could have been more supportive?

# Appendix F: Equity Discussion and Exercise

## Developing an Equity Framework

Farmshare Austin Staff Meeting  
03/14/2022

## Definitions: Equity and Inclusion

- EQUITY**
  - The World Health Organization defines as "the absence of avoidable, unfair, or remediable differences among groups of people, whether those groups are defined socially, economically, demographically or geographically or by other means of stratification"
- INCLUSION**
  - Equitable access to resources, capabilities and rights.
- EXCLUSION**
  - Unequal access to resources, capabilities and rights.
  - Consists of dynamic, multi-dimensional processes driven by unequal power relationships intersecting across four main dimensions - economic, political, social and cultural - and at different levels including individual, household, group, community, country and global level

## CASE STUDY



- What practices have produced inequities for farmers of color?
  - <https://www.foodtribe.com/2022/01/20/learn-black-farmers-use-ml-to-plant/>
  - <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/27/us/politics/black-farmers-600-ml-f.html>

## DISCUSSION: getting it out on the table

- How might systemic inequities inhibit certain individuals from getting into farming or being a successful farmer?
- Take 5 minutes to write down all the possible things that get in the way
  - Think about both the macro-level (education, employment opportunity, legislation, cultural norms), and the micro-levels (income, occupational status, social networks - around race, gender, religion, etc).

## Equity in organizations

- EQUITY LENS OR FRAMEWORK**
  - A set of principles, goals and objectives outlining an organization or group's commitment to addressing equity and inclusion and minimizing inequity and exclusion.
  - <https://www.politicalrisk.com/food-systems/equitable-food-system-resources-guide>
- EQUITY TOOL**
  - They was an organization or group operationalizes their equity framework or lens, through a set of measurable standards with which to assess their own equity.
  - Tool could assess policies, practices, or programs. (Hiring practices, recruitment for programs), budgeting policies, etc.)
  - <https://racialequityalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/GA58-Report-Equity-Toolkit.pdf>

## Putting thinking into action

- Think about the systemic inequities that were identified. Which of those systemic inequities should form the foundation for the equity lens?
- How would that lens look different if you are talking about Farmshare's other program? Would other inequities rise to the top?
  - Min Spec round 2: take 3 minutes **individually** to highlight the top ones that are the MOST likely to affect the population Farmshare is serving, **circle** out the less common ones
  - Get in pairs and talk it out. Where are there similarities. Where are there differences? Try to reach consensus in 3 minutes. 2 minutes.
  - Get in 4s and talk it out. 7 minutes.
  - Let's share out as a group and see if we can identify those aspects of the equity lens that must be included. 7 minutes

## Group Share

- Land Access**
- Knowledge transfer (generational, etc)**
- Access to capital**
- Priority- creating inclusive communications
- Recreating a supportive farming community
- Affording classes and farming
- Income**
- Access to resources**
- Language barriers (including business terms)
- Representation in leadership and farming community (racial, queerness, gender, socio-economic, immigration status)

## Next Steps

- Framework Examples:
  - Can be used as templates for developing your own equity framework.
  - Volunteers to lead the development process?
- "An equitable food system is one that creates a new paradigm in which all - including those most vulnerable and those living in low-income neighborhoods and communities of color - can fully participate, prosper, and benefit. It is a system that, from farm to table, from processing to disposal, ensures economic opportunity, high-quality jobs with living wages, safe working conditions, access to healthy, affordable, and culturally appropriate food, and environmental sustainability" - Policy Link**

## Equity Framework Examples

- Rogue Farm Corps Equity Statement: <https://www.roguefarm.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Rogue-Farm-Corps-Equity-Statement.pdf>
- Managing Inequalities Project: Revisiting Social Equity and Justice through Agriculture (See framework aligned with the management and ML) <https://www.earthjustice.org/sites/default/files/2022-09/Managing%20Inequalities%20and%20Justice.pdf>
- Road Trust's Farm to City Work: Rural Equity Framework <https://www.roadtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Road-Trust-Farm-to-City-Work-Rural-Equity-Framework.pdf>
- San Francisco's Rural Equity Guide for Food Hubs (see framework on page 10 and principles on page 11) <https://www.sfbayareafoodhubs.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/San-Francisco-Rural-Equity-Guide-for-Food-Hubs.pdf>
- Midwest Young Farmers Coalition, Rural Equity Framework <https://www.mycfarmers.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Midwest-Young-Farmers-Coalition-Rural-Equity-Framework.pdf>

## Appendix G: Logic Model

From the Ground Up: Developing Farmer Training Based on the Needs & Barriers of Beginning Farmers in Central Texas Logic Model					
<i>Situation: While we now have several entry level farmer training programs in Central Texas, there is a gap in the pathway for continuing farmer education. We aim to identify the needs, barriers and preferences of BFRs in Central Texas in order to design programs that are informed by those we wish to support, with particular attention to understanding the unique needs and barriers of Socially Disadvantaged Beginning Farmers.</i>					
Inputs	Outputs		Outcomes -- Impact		
	Activities	Participation	Short	Medium	Long
Farmshare's current BFR training programs – Farmer Starter, Farmer Cultivator and Farmshare's Assistant Farm Manager program -- Strong relationships with alumni of Farmshare's current BFR programs -- Strong relationships with other orgs supporting farmers & BFRs -- Connected to national BFR training networks that provide resources and models -- Non-Profit organization with farmers on staff	Focus groups with BFRs to identify the needs, barriers and preferences of BFRs for ongoing training and support in years 1-5 of development -- An analysis and summary of the findings of the focus groups -- Internal strategic planning for BFR programming based on the discoveries in the focus groups with an equity lens -- Collaboration building with other BFR service providers through sharing the study and exploring ways we can	Farmer Starter Alumni and other BFRs with 1-5 years of experience who will be compensated for their time and input -- Dell Medical School Division of Community Engagement and Health Equity -- Farmshare Staff -- Texas Based BFR service providers and training programs	Needs, barriers and preferences of BFRs are identified -- The groundwork for collaboration amongst BFR service providers in Central Texas is laid -- Strategies for supporting an increase in equity for current and future BFR programming are identified -- Strategies and programming to meet the needs, preferences and barriers of Socially Disadvantaged BFRs are developed in collaboration amongst BFR service providers in Central Texas --	A clear, comprehensive and equitable farmer training pathway for Texas BFRs -- A network of organizations and entities collaborating effectively to create an integrated support system for local farmers and BFRs -- BFR's gain skills & confidence needed to get closer to farm management or start their own farms -- BFRs gain financial literacy and business planning skills and access to resources	A thriving, supportive and diverse network of local farms sharing resources and knowledge -- An increase of Socially Disadvantaged BFRs in farm management and ownership -- An overall increase of economically and environmentally sustainable farms in Texas -- More food being produced and consumed locally in Texas -- A regional agriculture system resilient to a changing climate and

<p>-- Grant funding and earned income from farm sales and workshops -- Located on a working farm</p>	<p>come together to give more robust and equitable support to BFRs moving forward</p>		<p>Programs that meet the needs of advanced beginning farmers, beyond entry level, are developed.</p>		<p>other unforeseen stressors</p>
<p><b>Assumptions</b></p>			<p><b>External Factors</b></p>		
<p><i>Socially Disadvantaged BFRs have unique needs, barriers and preferences that must be understood and honored in order to support them with robust and equitable programming.</i></p>			<p><i>Systemic racism in the food system, agriculture, and government programs and policies that have created barriers to trust with Black, Indigenous and Farmers of Color, as well as barriers to resources.</i></p>		