

SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE &  
FOOD SYSTEMS FUNDERS



## Public-Private Partnership Possibilities in Food Systems

This session will focus on the challenge of how to leverage public and private funding streams to effectively assist food system projects. It will be an opportunity for foundations to strategize with key federal agency staff and to learn how tools like the USDA “Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food” Compass can be useful in planning funding strategies for food systems. The goal of this session is to seed ideas for future public-private partnerships in three key theme areas: beginning farmers/ranchers; farm to institution; and healthy food access. The session will require participants to engage in active conversation.

### Moderator

**Elanor Starmer**, *coordinator of USDA’s Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food Initiative, USDA, DC*

### Speakers

**Greg Horner**, *Senior Program Officer, Cedar Tree Foundation, MA*

**Alison Rotel**, *Health Improvement Program Manager, Blue Cross Blue Shield, MN*

**Matt Russell**, *Grant Officer, Farm to School Program, USDA, DC*

**Sivapathasun “Suresh” Sureshwaran**, *National Program Leader, Beginning Farmer Rancher Development Program, USDA, DC*

**Joani Walsh**, *Deputy Under Secretary, Marketing and Regulatory Programs, USDA, DC*

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### INTRODUCTION // Elanor Starmer

USDA’s role in this space: USDA is the largest food-system funders in the US, but at same time is one of the most constrained; 24 different agencies, each with numerous different programs, often resulting in siloing. The Know Your Farmer Know Your Food initiative was created to overcome these silos and has a significant educational component.

USDA structure: national office, but many decisions made in state offices; (including = field agencies: rural development, natural resource conservation program, etc.) → provides ways for state and local organizations to plug into USDA

Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food Compass = map resource of funded programs; available

online.

## PANEL INTRODUCTIONS

- Suresh: Works with small farms, local/regional food system, and Beginning Farmers and Ranchers Development Program (BFRDP), which is a farm bill program; 2011: 38,000 people took classes related to the BFRDP
- Alison Rotel: Organization is focused on increasing access to healthy food and a few projects on decreasing access to unhealthy options
- Greg Horner: Has reviewed proposals from BFRDP. Recommended that funders look where large national funders (i.e. USDA) funds and then try to figure out how your foundation can dovetail or work off of this to make both efforts most effective.
- Matt Russell: There is a Farm to School person in each of 7 regional offices. FTSP allocates up to \$5M per year, and is in its first year of grantees (65 total, including both Implementation and Planning grants); types of activities supported vary widely.
- Arthur Neil & Jim Baron (transportation and marketing)

*[Workshop then broke down into three breakout groups to discuss and exchange ideas for future public-private partnerships in three key theme areas: (1) beginning farmers/ranchers; (2) farm to institution; and (3) healthy food access.]*

Notes from the **Beginning Farmers & Ranchers Breakout Group** (Greg Horner and Suresh):

- Senate version of FB has more funding for BFRDP than the previous Farm Bill; however, the House version has less. Suresh says that it is almost certain that the program will be included in the new Farm Bill, but some of the existing and previously funded BFRDP programs might collapse in the interim waiting for a new farm bill = opportunity for private foundations to step in.
- Importance of understanding what is funded and not funded; matching programs; what could be set up to make it easier for a public-private partnership?: (1) communication & clarity: what do the private funders want; (2) relationships with experts.
- **\*\*If interested in serving on BFRDP review panel, email Suresh with resume\*\***
- BFRDP grantee criteria:
  1. Target audience, who are you serving?
  2. How are you addressing this audience?
  3. Number of people project reaches
  4. Diversity of issues
  5. 25% match needed, can be in-kind, and tentatively locked in at time of submitting application

- Suresh: Land access is the greatest unaddressed issue that is preventing people from becoming independent farmers even after they go through training programs
- Ian McSweeney: Partnership potential? FRPP extra points for leasing land to beginning farmers.
- Molly Andersen: Is there a standardized set of skills that should be offered? Advantages/disadvantages of this? Example in England, apprenticeship programs need to offer certain things to be deemed an official apprenticeship program.
- BFRD program graduates are viewed favorably by FSA.
- BFRDP tracks an exorbitant amount of data as part of the process of continually justifying the program's existence. Is this info confidential? Proposals (accepted or rejected) are confidential and thus not available to private funders.
- USDA BRFDP can't fund policy work, lobbying, buying land, construction, farm machinery. Can pay for training, internships, educational materials, meals for work related.
- BFRDP stakeholder webinar in Sept/Nov: put feedback about the BFRDP in writing or via webinar. Can email letters to Suresh.
- Opportunity to scan the trends into the future: looking at climate change, where will farming migrate to based on a changing climate.

**CONCLUSIONS from breakout groups:**

A better philanthropic & public feedback loop is needed. Need to figure out how to identify gaps in funding from both ends. Example: Funders Network for Smart Growth programs are jointly incubated between public and philanthropy.