

WHY GET INVOLVED IN A LOCAL FARMERS NETWORK?

With your long hard hours, and the dozens of priorities you juggle at once, you may ask “Why add another thing to my to-do list?!”

According to those who have made the efforts to connect with other nearby farmers, a variety of benefits more than justify the time commitment involved. The list below is to give you some idea of the rewards in store for those who choose to form a local farmers network.

Gaining new knowledge and skills

Farming is incredibly knowledge intensive, and farmers are an innovative bunch. Sharing innovations prevents each farmer from having to reinvent the wheel on their own. Exchanging knowledge and ideas can be rewarding on a personal level, and when that learning is put into practice it can mean better yields and more efficient systems.

- An Indiana farmer achieved much higher potato yields based on a tip from a local farmer on how to get a better handle on the Colorado potato beetles.
- Farmers in Wisconsin got together for a roundtable discussion to share their experience in labor management and crew leadership.
- Eastern Massachusetts farmers got together to hear from an extension agent and share their approaches to dealing with fungal diseases during the particularly wet year of 2009.

Improving the bottom line

New knowledge gained from a network can mean time and money saved. Pooling products and joint marketing can increase revenues and provide access to new markets. Bulk ordering on things like soil amendments or animal feed translates into major cost savings. Here are a few examples, but there are many other options!

- A New York farmer organized a bulk order for harvest bins that saved an average of \$720 for each of the 15 participating farmers.
- Five farmers in Colorado pool their products each week to supply several local restaurant accounts. Alone they could not supply this profitable market.
- Three farmers in New York teamed up to purchase and share a new potato-digger that they wouldn't have been able to afford individually. They estimate the investment will pay for itself in 2-3 years.

A sense of community

Even the most independent-minded farmers can enjoy the social aspect of participating in a network. It's meaningful to connect with a group of people engaged in similar work, and we've heard from lots of farmers that the biggest benefit they get from their network is plain old fun! Aside from the fun though, many farmers point to the value of having a network of folks you can count on for advice and assistance when you most need it.

- A Wisconsin farmer says “it feels good to see others doing similar work, you could feel out on the fringe if you didn't have a network.”
- A New York farmer adds that being able to borrow supplies or equipment from neighbors when equipment breaks or he runs out of something is literally priceless.