

Risk to Resiliency 2022 Pilot Cohort Evaluation

Program overview

Farmers from twelve vegetable farms associated with Land Stewardship in Minnesota and Wisconsin participated in a 5-session pilot workshop series with the goal of developing climate resilience plans for their farms. The series was facilitated by Laura Lengnick of Risk to Resiliency LLC, with local facilitation led by Nick Olson and Annelie Livingston-Anderson from Land Stewardship Project. Natalie Hoidal (UMN Extension) participated as a local technical advisor, and Anna Racer (LSP) assisted with evaluation.

The series followed a basic five step process:

1. Gather and summarize information about your agricultural operation using the holistic goal framework and a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats analysis.
2. Explore current and expected climate change effects in your region
3. Review climate risk management strategies and associated practices
4. Evaluate selected climate risk management practices to identify those that are a “best fit” for your farm operation
5. Develop a climate resilience plan.

Participants met five times over a 10-week period. Meetings were 2.5 hours long and included a mix of lectures, work time, and farmer-to-farmer discussions.

In addition to the cohort, Land Stewardship Project and UMN Extension hosted a series of four farmer forums related to climate resilience for a wider public audience. Evaluation results from this series are shared at the end of this report.

Cohort participant feedback

Participant feedback was solicited through a quantitative survey hosted on the Qualtrics platform, and through 1:1 telephone interviews.

Motivation for participation

Growers signed up for this training due to concerns about what climate change will bring. Participants shared: “One of the biggest unknowns going forward is climate change”, and “it feels so big and so overwhelming to think about”, but “working through it in a structured way [is] important.” “Business is really dependent on climate change and can have a really big impact.”

In addition to the content, they were also attracted to the series because they saw it as an opportunity to be in community with other growers. Multiple people expressed that the format of multiple sessions with a small group is appealing as an “opportunity to dive deeper with other farmers” and “deepen relationships”.

Participants shared that climate change has been “at top of mind for years”, and that they were excited to “see if they were on the right track”, and explore “digging in deeper, tools, where to allocate resources.”

Learning gains and satisfaction with content

Survey participants ranked their understanding of financial, human, and production risks before and after participating in the cohort. Nine of the twelve participants filled out the evaluation, and for all three categories, they reported improving their understanding of risk and risk reduction.

Please share your understanding of each topic before and after completing this cohort process.

		No understanding	Limited understanding	Moderate understanding	Good understanding	Complete understanding
Financial risk	Before	0.0%	0.0%	44.5%	55.5%	0.0%
	After	0.0%	0.0%	11.1%	66.6%	22.2%
Human risk	Before	0.0%	0.0%	62.5%	37.5%	0.0%
	After	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%
Production risk	Before	0.0%	0.0%	50.0%	50.0%	0.0%
	After	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	75.0%	25.0%

Participants were also asked to provide feedback about the various tools used in the cohort process by ranking their usefulness on a scale of 1-5. Overall, group discussions and the climate resilience planning worksheets were the most valuable tools used; the SWOT analysis was the least useful (though still ranked over 4).

Tool	Average rating (1-5)	Std. deviation
Group discussions	5	0.0
Climate resilience planning worksheets	4.63	0.48
Holistic goal	4.5	0.71
Presentations	4.5	0.50
Climate resilience planning guide	4.38	0.48
SWOT analysis	4.13	0.60

Participants also shared feedback about the content in 1:1 interviews. Some of the things participants took away from the experience included:

- Hearing the science about what is coming in terms of climate change
- It was helpful to have a plan
- New solutions they were not thinking about prior to the series
- Learning that small things can make a difference too
- Practical takeaways
- “It now feels less overwhelming”
- Feeling validated about current practices
- Having a bigger picture assessment paired with individual steps
- Specific ideas of what to do next from other farmers

A few participants commented that they appreciated that the content was well suited to farmers who are in the middle of their careers, who often felt left out of programming, which tends to focus on beginning and transitioning farmers.

Satisfaction with format

In 1:1 interviews, participants shared that they appreciated the balance of technical content and lectures to peer to peer learning opportunities. Some themes about the format included:

Peer to peer learning: In general, participants were very enthusiastic about the peer to peer learning opportunities. One participant shared: *“I especially appreciated the ability to come together in community and talk with other farmers about our experiences, hear advice, laugh and feel part of a broader supportive community.”* Another shared: *“It’s so good to learn from one another and to know that this group will still be there to support me after the class ends.”*

Structure: Participants appreciated having structure to frame climate resilience, which can feel like such a big challenge that it’s hard to know where to start with adaptation. The use of worksheets and a formal structure allowed people to approach the content piece by piece and

think holistically about the problem before jumping into solutions. One participant shared: *“I liked the conceptual frameworks of resilience that I hadn’t engaged with or known about before.”* Another shared: *“Things on the final plan were already in the works but the plan was super helpful.”* Participants also appreciated being pushed to think about resilience holistically. Participants shared: *“It made me think deeper about topics I thought I’d already figured out”* and *“Laura L challenged me to think about climate change more holistically”*.

Satisfaction with instructor

Please share feedback about the facilitator Laura Lengnick					
	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
<i>Laura was knowledgeable about the topics presented</i>	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
<i>Laura presented the information effectively</i>	0%	0%	0%	25%	75%

Advice for next iterations of this program

Participants were asked for feedback about how the program could be improved, and what they would like to see moving forward.

Improving the cohort

Critiques of the cohort centered primarily around the format. A couple of participants requested more time for peer to peer learning, specifically for brainstorming as they developed their plans, and for sharing the details of their plans with one another. Participants shared varying opinions about conducting the training in-person vs. via Zoom; while many were happy with the Zoom format, some participants hoped for at least one in-person gathering.

A couple of participants also critiqued the content of the series as “too jargony” or “too technical” and felt that the content could have been presented in a more approachable manner.

Finally, a few participants expressed interest in expanding the program beyond vegetable farmers to move beyond “our vegetable bubble” and engage with other types of farmers including larger conventional neighbors. On the other hand, other participants preferred to learn together with other vegetable farmers. While some participants felt strongly about doing this

program within a close geographic proximity to engage with neighbors, others did not feel strongly about it at all, and preferred to be in a cohort based on shared experiences.

Support moving forward

Participants expressed a desire for continued programming in a couple of key areas:

Continued relationships: Many participants asked for opportunities for the group to continue meeting. Proposed models for this included annual meetings, regular group check-ins, and pairing program graduates to check in with each other regularly. Farmers said this would help them feel supported, learn about how other peoples' approaches are going, and would be a good way to keep them accountable to their plans.

Additional content: Beyond the workshop series, participants asked for continued climate change related educational offerings in a variety of formats including articles, podcasts, field days, and Zoom sessions. They want to see what others are doing and continue to learn from one another.

Evaluation of farmer forums

To accompany the cohort, the Land Stewardship Project and UMN Extension hosted a series of four farmer forums related to climate resilience for a wider public audience. These gatherings each highlighted one farm / farmer and a resilience practice that they use on their farm. Farmers and topics were chosen based on feedback from growers in the cohort. Topics included:

- Managing time, employees, and people efficiently and effectively on a vegetable farm
- Updating irrigation system to be more resilient
- Incubating beginning farmers on your vegetable farm and providing mentorship
- A round-table where three farmers who participated in the cohort shared their resilience plans and reflections about the process.

An average of 38 farmers attended each event; between 25%-35% of attendees filled out an evaluation. 63% of attendees were beginning farmers, 11% were established growers, 13% were crop consultants, and 13% were gardeners.

Learning gains: How much new, useful information did you learn from what was presented today?

	Nothing	A little	Some	A lot
<i>Time & people management (n=14)</i>	7.1%	14.3%	78.6%	0.0%
<i>Irrigation (n=11)</i>	0.0%	9.1%	45.5%	45.5%

<i>Incubating new farmers (n=10)</i>	0.0%	10.0%	10.0%	80.0%
<i>Climate resilience plans (n=12)</i>	0.0%	16.7%	41.7%	41.7%

Behavior change: Do you plan on changing a practice based on what you learned today?

	Definitely not	Probably not	Probably yes	Definitely yes
<i>Time & people management (n=13)</i>	0.0%	38.5%	61.5%	0.0%
<i>Irrigation (n=11)</i>	0.0%	9.1%	54.5%	36.4%
<i>Incubating new farmers (n=10)</i>	0.0%	30.0%	50.0%	20.0%
<i>Climate resilience plans (n=12)</i>	0.0%	16.7%	58.3%	25.0%

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