

## WORKING TOGETHER: APPRENTICESHIP & AGRICULTURE

*This document summarizes a May 2020 call for ASE & SAE grantees. The call featured speakers from the Wisconsin Bureau of Apprenticeship Standards, Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship (DGA), FairShare Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Coalition and University of Wisconsin (UW) Extension Dane County, and UW-Madison. Speakers discussed resources and promising practices in Registered Apprenticeship in the sector.*

### ABOUT THE SPEAKERS

- The Wisconsin Bureau of Apprenticeship Standards is the arm of Wisconsin's Department of Workforce Development that oversees and registers apprenticeships. Because of Wisconsin's strong agricultural sector, the Bureau of Apprenticeship Standards often works with farmers and industry organizations to develop agricultural apprenticeships. For more information, email Owen Smith, Program and Policy Analyst, Wisconsin Bureau of Apprenticeship Standards, at [Owen.Smith@dwd.wisconsin.gov](mailto:Owen.Smith@dwd.wisconsin.gov).
- DGA was developed as a way to support farms by building their labor and infrastructure. The organization brings in farms seeking to expand their workforce and workers seeking long-term employment and a comprehensive learning environment. For more information, reach out to Joe Tomandl, III, Executive Director of DGA, at [joe@dga-national.org](mailto:joe@dga-national.org).
- The FairShare CSA Coalition is a group of roughly 50 farms that sponsor the organic vegetable apprenticeship program. Initially launched with help from DGA, the program has also partnered with UW-Madison and the Wisconsin Technical College System. To find out more, reach out to Claire Strader, Organic Vegetable Educator with FairShare CSA Coalition and UW Extension Dane County, at [claire@csacoalition.org](mailto:claire@csacoalition.org).
- UW-Madison partnered with FairShare CSA Coalition to help design and build the organic vegetable apprenticeship program. To learn more, contact Julie Dawson, Associate Professor, Department of Horticulture, UW-Madison, at [dawson@hort.wisc.edu](mailto:dawson@hort.wisc.edu).

### WHY APPRENTICESHIP WORKS IN AGRICULTURE

Farming requires holistic knowledge, which traditionally has been passed down along familial lines. As family farms grow rarer, that hands-on knowledge, which is difficult to learn in a classroom setting, can be passed down through an apprenticeship. Farming apprentices are incentivized to complete programs like FairShare's organic vegetable apprenticeship program because the Registered Apprenticeship Program gives them credentials and opportunities for employment and loans.

### A LOOK AT APPRENTICESHIP IN AGRICULTURE TODAY

Unregistered farming apprenticeships have existed for quite some time. There has been a move recently to register to gain credentials and the benefits that accompany them. DGA started in Wisconsin and now has programs in 15 states. There is a two-year, 3,000-hour hybrid model that includes 2,700 hours in the

field and 300 hours in a classroom. DGA uses administrative partners, mostly nonprofits, that help with training. They have training coordinators who work on the ground to help oversee instruction. They also coordinate events and refer people to training opportunities to further bolster the program. They have 48 current apprentices and 36 who have graduated.

In the organic vegetable industry, there is less familial training, as well as less land ownership, so there is a need for apprenticeship to bolster the labor force. The organic vegetable farm manager apprenticeship is the first competency-based program in Wisconsin and usually lasts two farming seasons, taking an estimated 2,500 hours to complete.

## CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### ***Look for ways to ease the burden of running an apprenticeship program for individual farms.***

Individual farms are often unable to take on the administrative tasks and costs associated with sponsoring and running their own individual Registered Apprenticeship Programs. By convening subject matter experts via an industry intermediary to help build out and perhaps even sponsor the program, the benefits will often outweigh the costs for individual farms.

***Virtual resources can be useful in rural settings.*** Agricultural communities are also often rural, so finding ways to decrease the need for transportation across hundreds of miles is key to being able to keep apprentices on track. DGA created a virtual school that is registered with their state education program, so individuals in all states can use this instruction for their apprenticeship programs. Virtual job boards have also been useful for DGA to find individuals interested in signing up for their program.

***Funding can be a challenge for nontraditional apprenticeships such as those in agriculture, so be creative.*** While some grant money is available for program development and wraparound services, funding for agricultural apprenticeship programs can also be found through the U.S. Department of Agriculture, as well as via conservation groups for specific projects or initiatives. Unlike fields that have more apprenticeship-centered grant opportunities, finding funding opportunities for agricultural apprenticeship programs may require looking for funding from nontraditional apprenticeship sources.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- The [Apprenticeship in Agriculture and Food Systems](#) page on Workforce GPS offers program examples, outreach materials, and other resources to help expand apprenticeship in the agricultural sector.
- The [Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship](#) website provides information on their program model and case studies on its successes.
- The [Organic Vegetable Farm Manager Apprenticeship](#) website, hosted by UW Madison, provides information on its curriculum and other resources.