**Excerpts from New Entry Sustainable Farming Project 2002-2007 Strategic Plan**

**Overview:** Assumptions, beliefs, theories, and principles underlie the vision of the New Entry Sustainable Farming Project (New Entry). The project vision guides development of goals and mission, and of the strategies to realize or actualize them. The strategic plan focuses on the articulation of nine broad strategic themes as priorities, and incorporates specific sub-themes and objectives for each.

**Core Values underlying the New Entry mission include:**

* Small-scale enterprise-driven agriculture is a viable approach to farming and can be successful in New England given current social, political, and economic environments;
* Farming can enhance the quality of life for immigrant [or other beginning] farmers; contributing to household and community food security, economic development and financial self-reliance
* Farmland and small-scale, family farm enterprises and need to be preserved as part of sustainable, local and regional food systems in Massachusetts and the Northeast;
* Farmers are valuable members of our society and the economy;
* Farm skills and experience should be handed down to the next generation;
* A sustainable local and regional food system provides an alternative to the globalization of food and can contribute to greater food security of the overall population
* Availability of fresh farm produce contributes to healthy, nutritious diets;
* Immigrant and refugee groups desire access to culturally preferred foods;
* If given access to appropriate resources, the next generation of U.S. farmers will include recent immigrant groups;
* Full participation of New England’s farm community is essential to helping immigrant [and beginning] farmers succeed in the short term and become fully active constituents of that farm community over time.
* Successful farm enterprise requires creative and dynamic strategies in production and marketing;
* Sustainable farming methods that foster and maintain soil fertility, water quality, and other ecological priorities are essential to the local, national and global environmental integrity, and agriculture practiced by project participants should incorporate these practices;

**Beliefs and Assumptions of the New Entry Sustainable Farming Project Include:**

1. Beginning farmers should address farming from a comprehensive (whole farm) framework in order to succeed. The framework’s broad components are outlined above and in an attachment [*not included here*];
2. ‘Success’ for the farmer may be seen as an specific outcome such as “farming independently on 5 acres of land”, or as multiple goals or outcomes such as business success, farming sustainably, farming as a way of life. Temporally, it may also be seen as a progression toward some articulated vision (e.g., doing well initially on one acre but wanting to ultimately operate a large farm enterprise);
3. Immigrant [and Beginning] farmers - lacking sufficient resources, training, etc.- need our (project) assistance to begin a process toward farming successfully in the USA (Northeast);
4. An immigrant or beginning farmer project (FSP – Farm Service Provider) providing such assistance should consider (how to address) all needs of farmers from this whole farm perspective; in combination, this creates the ‘holistic framework’ – combining the elements of project and farmer.
5. The FSP will set up programs and services to assist farmers to address some or all of the components of a whole farm approach, in the context of the goals they and partners, funders, and others establish.
6. The process of moving toward end-points by the farmer will be significantly shaped by the interface of the project, the farmers, and other stakeholders - their approaches to providing assistance, timeframes, and stages of development, implementation protocols, and priorities; and, therefore, farmer involvement is a critical element shaping this process.
7. “Success” from a project perspective may be considered as helping farmers achieve a set of progressive outcomes assumed to contribute toward the realization of their farming goals. What this “success” means may vary greatly. Various farmers will want to farm at different levels, and the project staff, partners and funders have different perspectives as to what constitutes progress or achievement programmatically and in terms of farming.
8. Farmers’ capacities (language, farming experience, resources, etc.) will have a significant effect on the farmers’ goals and also on what assistance the project may want or need to provide them to help them achieve their goals.
9. The relationships established between and among farmer participants, the FSP, collaborators, and the broader community are integral elements of this process; and of overall project and farm enterprise viability.
10. The FSP will (need to) address organizational capacity needs (resources, staffing, management, partners, community, etc.) in relation to providing programs and services and in building/maintaining relationships with farmers and collaborators.
11. The broader environment (global farming conditions; farming policy; broader socio-economic factors; funding, land availability; viable markets; overall farm sector infrastructure, community support) is also a critical component of this framework and influences viability and “success” of the farmers and the FSP, and therefore must also be addressed in a holistic framework.
12. Successful immigrant [and beginning] farming must creatively adapt to these conditions, particularly through a market-driven approach to farm enterprise.

**Theoretical / conceptual approaches influencing the New Entry Sustainable Farming Project framework:** The underlying goals and structures of New Entry are based on three approaches to agriculture and food systems. The first is sustainable agriculture / food systems, the second is whole farming systems, and the third is agricultural risk management.

**1. Sustainable agriculture:** The University of California Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program (UC SAREP) describes sustainable agriculture as follows: Sustainable agriculture integrates three main goals--environmental health, economic profitability, and social and economic equity. Sustainability rests on the principle that we must meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Therefore, stewardship of both natural and human resources is of prime importance. Stewardship of human resources includes consideration of social responsibilities such as working and living conditions of laborers, the needs of rural communities, and consumer health and safety both in the present and the future. Stewardship of land and natural resources involves maintaining or enhancing this vital resource base for the long term. A systems perspective is essential to understanding sustainability. The system is envisioned in its broadest sense, from the individual farm, to the local ecosystem, and to communities affected by this farming system both locally and globally. An emphasis on the system allows a larger and more thorough view of the consequences of farming practices on both human communities and the environment. A systems approach gives us the tools to explore the interconnections between farming and other aspects of our environment.

**Sustainable Food Systems:** Because farms and immigrant farmers operate not just on farmland but within their overall communities in which they live and practice agriculture, New Entry broadens its approach to sustainability to include social and environmental factors affecting communities. The following is a definition of a community food system provided by UCSAREP that incorporates these elements:

“A community food system is a collaborative effort to promote sustainable food production, processing, distribution and consumption in order to enhance the environmental, economic and social health of a particular place. Farmers, consumers and communities are partnering to create more locally based, self-reliant food economies. One of the most important aspects of these Community projects is that they increase resident participation to achieve the following goals:

* Improved access by all community members to an adequate, affordable, nutritious diet;
* A stable base of family farms that uses less chemical and energy-intensive production practices and emphasizes local inputs;
* Marketing and processing practices that create more direct links between farmers and consumers;
* Food and agriculture-related businesses that create jobs and re-circulate financial capital within the community;
* Improved living and working conditions for farm and food system labor; and,
* Creation of food and agriculture policies that promote local or sustainable food production, processing and consumption.

**2. Whole farming planning and whole farm management approaches:**

Numerous frameworks exist for whole farm planning. According to the Minnesota Whole Farm Planning Working Group, Whole Farm Planning is a four-step process, which can be used by the farm family to balance the quality of life they desire with the farm's resources, the need for production and profitability, and long-term stewardship. Whole Farm Planning is distinct from other farm planning approaches because it ties all the planning farmers do together for the whole farm and bases it on the long-term vision the farm household has for itself and the farm in the future. It is farmer controlled, voluntary, and flexible. The plans are owned by the farmer and the information contained in the plans is confidential. Benefits of Whole Farm Planning include maintaining or improving profitability while enhancing sustainability. Whole Farm Planning can also lead to protection and enhancement of the quality of soil, water, and other natural resources on and near the farm. More important, the planning process helps the farm family define long- and short-term goals, which lead to an improved quality of life, and a better relationship with the community.

Whole farm planning and holistic management represent farmer-centered approaches to sustainable agriculture that should be the focus of the New Entry’s overall design and program strategies. It should address all the components that constitute these frameworks, and determine the types of assistance that it seeks to provide in that context, and the responsibilities of the farmers, the project, including partners, in addressing all these components for a successful and sustainable farming enterprise.

**3.** Risk Management Approaches to Agriculture

USDA’s Risk Management Agency (RMA) has funded New Entry for [many] years. During this period, the agency and its partners have developed comprehensive strategies and tools to educate and promote use of risk management approaches to farm enterprise. New Entry staff and partners have attended multiple trainings by RMA where these resources have been provided, and the project has increasingly incorporated these strategies into planning and implementation. A synopsis of Risk Management Agency approaches is available from the Risk Management Agency website: [www.rma.usda.gov](http://www.rma.usda.gov)

The uncertainties of weather, yields, prices, government policies, global markets, and other factors can cause wide swings in farm income. Risk management involves choosing among alternatives that reduce the financial effects of such uncertainties. Five general types of risk are:

* **Production risk** derives from the uncertain natural growth processes of crops and livestock. Weather, disease, pests, and other factors affect both the quantity and quality of commodities produced.
* **Price or market risk** refers to uncertainty about the prices producers will receive for commodities or the prices they must pay for inputs. The nature of price risk varies significantly from commodity to commodity.
* **Financial risk** results when the farm business borrows money and creates an obligation to repay debt. Rising interest rates, the prospect of loans being called by lenders, and restricted credit availability are also aspects of financial risk.
* **Institutional risk** results from uncertainties surrounding government actions. Tax laws, regulations for chemical use, rules for animal waste disposal, and the level of price or income support payments are examples of government decisions that can have a major impact on the farm business.
* **Human or personal risk** refers to factors such as problems with human health or personal relationships that can affect the farm business. Accidents, illness, death, and divorce are examples of personal crises that can threaten a farm business.

**New Entry 2002-2007 Mission Statement:** The mission of New Entry is to assist immigrants with agricultural backgrounds to successfully re-enter farming in Massachusetts. The broader goals of New Entry are to support the vitality and sustainability of the region’s agriculture, to build long term economic self-reliance and food security among participants and their communities, and to expand access to high-quality, culturally appropriate foods in underserved areas through production of locally-grown foods.

**New Entry Vision Statement for 2007:** New Entry is a model program that uses holistic farming strategies to assist immigrant farmers to succeed in developing sustainable agricultural enterprises. New Entry collaborates with agricultural networks, academic institutions, and the broader community to promote sustainable farming and food systems. The New Entry Vision Statement is shaped by staff hopes and dreams for three core areas of growth that will aid in the achievement of this vision. These three areas form the central “strategic themes” or priority issues around which New Entry program operations are defined:

**Enhancing Project Capacity (structure, staff, and programs):**

* New Entry has a clear mission, and well-defined goals and outcomes that drive programs and policies.
* New Entry plans well-defined programs with clear budgets and raises sufficient funds to implement them.
* New Entry operates a farm site and training center that houses the program staff and is the locus of T&TA activities.
* New Entry has sufficient staff with the knowledge, skills and experience to effectively carry out its programs. Staff diversity reflects the communities served by the project.
* New Entry retains, reviews, and promotes staff internally.
* New Entry provides long-term professional development opportunities for staff and values human capital.  Creating an environment where staff feel valued and are able to succeed and grow professionally is key to our project because our work is relationship-based.

**Enhancing Farmer Capacity (training and technical assistance services, access to farmland, crop production and marketing techniques):**

* New Entry has a comprehensive T&TA curriculum that provides farmers with the skills, knowledge, and experience to become successful entrepreneurs.
* New Entry facilitates farmer's access to land, markets, and other resources needed to succeed at each level of production and farming enterprise.
* New Entry assists farmers to achieve economically viable agricultural enterprises that they sustain and build on.
* New Entry assists increasing numbers of participants to become self-reliant economically viable farmers who function comfortably within the local / regional farm community.
* New Entry farmers are empowered with a sense of ownership of the project because they shape and implement project activities.
* New Entry promotes innovative farming and marketing enterprise strategies.
* New Entry farmers use ecologically sound agricultural practices

**Enhancing Community Capacity (community members, project partners)**

* New Entry operates within a foundation of mutual respect, trust and understanding among staff, farmers, partners and the wider community.
* New Entry has multi-sector partnerships that provide broad resources essential to farmers and to program viability.
* New Entry promotes effective communications among staff, partners and farmers in order to evaluate and enhance program services.
* New Entry has a (board/steering committee) that includes partners, farmers and other stakeholders to provide support and accountability.
* New Entry serves as a model for other immigrant and beginner farmer programs by conducting outreach and providing information.
* New Entry builds relationships with similar programs to promote learning, sharing of lessons learned, and the exchange of resources.
* New Entry has broad public and institutional support.
* New Entry has a strong mutually beneficial relationship with each of the communities within which it operates.
* New Entry promotes food security in the local communities where it operates.
* New Entry provides education and advocacy about the importance of immigrant [and beginning farmer] participation in local farming.