



## American Farmland Trust

### Farmland for the Next Generation: Training the Trainers to Help Beginners Secure Land and Succeed in Agriculture

#### LAND ACCESS TRAINERS

##### **Nathan Aaberg**

Liberty Prairie Foundation  
Grayslake, Illinois

Nathan Aaberg is the director of conservation and working lands at the [Liberty Prairie Foundation](#), located in the Prairie Crossing conservation community in Grayslake, Illinois. Through this role, Nathan leads the Foundation's farmland access work in north-eastern Illinois, which began in 2014 in partnership with the leading land trust in the region—Openlands. Prior to joining the

Foundation, Nathan worked for Conserve Lake County in several roles, including Director of Development, Associate Director and Interim Executive Director. During his 10 years at Conserve, Nathan helped the organization transform from a local conservancy into a major county-wide land trust, preserve over 440 acres of open space, play a leadership role in the Liberty Prairie Reserve and more than double Conserve's annual operating budget. Nathan developed a career in the environmental field after a number of experiences, including volunteering for restoration workdays. This led to his work writing grants and developing communications for Friends of the Chicago River, an urban river restoration group. Prior to Friends of the Chicago River, he worked for Mitsubishi International where, among other things, he managed the export of Winnebago motorhomes to Japan. Nathan earned his undergraduate degree from the University of Wisconsin – Madison and a master's degree in East Asian Studies from the University of Michigan – Ann Arbor. Nathan also lived and studied in Japan for one year. A favorite memory is the day he spent helping his host family harvest rice from their nearby field.



##### **Lillian "Ebonie" Alexander**

Black Family Land Trust  
Durham, NC

Ebonie Alexander is Executive Director of the [Black Family Land Trust, Inc.](#) (BFLT). The BFLT is a niche land trust and one of the nation's only regional land trust dedicated to the preservation and protection of African-American and other historically underserved landowners land assets. Since joining the BFLT in 2009, Ebonie designed and implemented the African American Land Ethic and Wealth Retention and Asset Protection (WRAP) programs. Together these two programs have assisted landowners to retain family ownership and control of more than \$12.5 million of their land assets during the past five years.



A native of Maryland, Ebonie has degrees in Public Administration and Nonprofit Management and lives in rural Virginia on land that has been in her family for generations. Ebonie is a proud Virginian, avid reader and lover of history; she can trace her family's history in Virginia to 1757.

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**Kevin Athearn**

[Suwannee Valley Agricultural Extension Center](#)

University of Florida /IFAS Extension

Live Oak, FL



Kevin Athearn is a Regional Specialized Extension Agent primarily serving North Florida. He has lived and worked in various parts of the United States, including Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Maine and Florida. He has a Ph.D. in agricultural economics and diverse work experience, including working as a farm hand and teaching university classes. In his current position he provides research-based information, analysis and Extension education to assist farmers with business start-up, marketing and financial management. He collaborates with county agents, academic specialists and industry professionals to develop and deliver programs for beginning farmers.

**Felicia Bell**

RD & S Farm, LLC

Brandon, MS



Felicia Bell of [RD & S Farm, LLC](#) was born into agriculture—what most people today would call homesteading. Her family sustained themselves from the land with food. It was instilled in Felicia that helping others is very important to your very existence as a producer but the values associated with community. Over many years she has learned new technologies (i.e., methods and practices) for small producers that would be inexpensive or a DIY project to lessen the burden of cost but increase their viability as a farm enterprise. These experiences have provided her with wonderful opportunities such as sustainable agriculture project development, board member assignments and ag specialist for National Center for Appropriate Technology. Felicia believes that everyone deserves the option of healthy food and that with the collective effort of small sustainable farmers across the country, this can become a reality.

**John Berry**

Penn State Extension

Emmaus, PA



After 20 years milking cows, raising pigs, cutting timber and tapping maple trees—“we sold our farm and got real jobs.” John Berry has been with [Penn State Extension](#) since 1997. As an agricultural marketing educator, most of his time is spent working on marketing and financial management issues. He has been around novice farmer education and training, both as a novice farmer and with Extension. John holds an AAS in dairy science, a BS in animal science, an MBA, has completed an Executive Food Marketing Program and is a certified farm business transition coordinator. Penn State Extension is launching a new business transition / business management succession program in fall 2017.

**Erica Buswell**

Maine Farmland Trust  
Belfast, ME

Erica Buswell is the Vice-President of Programs at [Maine Farmland Trust](#), where she supports the development and implementation of the organization’s farmland protection, farmland access, and farm viability programs. She has chosen to do food systems work because she knows that good things happen when people come together around food. As a result of attempting to help beginning farmers of all stripes attain secure farmland access, she knows she’s fortunate to have a piece of land in Searsport, Maine, to call home, where she and her husband have created a homestead they hope will feed them well into the future.



**Dr. Siddhartha Dasgupta**

Aquaculture and Agricultural  
Economics and Marketing  
Kentucky State University  
Frankfort, KY

Sid Dasgupta is an agricultural economist, agribusiness and agricultural marketing specialist. He had two decades of experience in helping small-scale farms in the United States. He has worked in Texas, Idaho, Arkansas and Kentucky. His current appointment at [Kentucky State University](#) involves research and extension, which he uses to advise farmers and help them to make more informed farm-management decisions. One of his interests and hobbies is to investigate the profitable adoption of low-investment and low-risk systems on small, limited-resource and beginning farms.



**Suzanna Denison**

WNC Farmlink  
NC State University Extension  
Asheville, NC

Suzanna Denison is the director of the Western North Carolina (WNC) FarmLink program, which is a partnership facilitating successful relationships between farmers looking for land to farm and landowners aspiring to keep their farm and forest land in agriculture. In partnership with NC FarmLink, [WNC FarmLink](#) maintains databases of both available farmland and farmers looking for land and works with landowners and farmers to ensure an appropriate and lasting match is made.



### **Colette DePhelps**

Northern District, University of Idaho Extension  
Moscow, ID



Colette DePhelps is an Area Extension Educator in Community Food Systems at University of Idaho. Based in Moscow, Idaho, Colette's primary programming area includes the 10 northern counties of Idaho. She has more than 20 years' experience working with farmers, community members, non-profits, government agencies, Washington State University and the University of Idaho to develop community food systems and offer educational workshops, conferences, field tours, webinars and online courses for small farms and beginning farmers.

Colette is currently working with the [Idaho Cultivating Success](#)<sup>™</sup> program to expand options for beginning farmer education, land access and farmer-to-farmer mentoring. She also works in the areas of food systems literacy and assessment, expanding Idaho markets for small farms, community lending and farm-to-school. Colette serves on the Western Center for Risk Management Education Advisory Council, the Moscow Food Co-op Board of Directors and the Palouse-Clearwater Food Coalition Steering Committee, and she chairs the Palouse Prairie Charter School Wellness Committee. Prior to working with Extension, she served as the Executive Director and Special Projects Director of Rural Roots, Inc., an Idaho-based small farm organization. Colette holds a M.S. in Environmental Science from Washington State University and a B.S. in Environmental Studies from Western Washington University. In her free time, she enjoys kayaking Idaho's lakes, hiking in the mountains, eating local food and riding on Idaho's backcountry roads.

### **Chris Elder**

Whatcom County Planning and Development  
Deming, WA



Chris Elder works full time for Whatcom County Planning and Development Services staffing the Purchase of Development Rights Program that aims to reduce development pressure on prime agricultural lands through enactment of agricultural conservation easements. He owns Coyote Bank Farm, growing mixed vegetables on 1 acre alongside the South Fork of the Nooksack River. He is one of the founders and the president of the Twin Sisters Market, a collaborative mobile farmers' market serving an identified food desert in East Whatcom County. He serves as the Chair of the Community Food Coop's Farm Fund Committee and as the Instructor of Washington State University Extension's Whatcom County Sustainable Small Acreage Farming and Ranching course.

Chris enjoys spending time with his wife and two daughters out in rural Whatcom County, goes rafting every chance he gets and is grateful to be a part of an active farming community.

**Wyatt Frass**

Center for Rural Affairs (CFRA)  
Lyons, NE

Wyatt Frass is Assistant Director of the Farm and Community Program for [CFRA](#). He has 20 years' experience leading CFRA projects on beginning farmers, sustainable agriculture practices, alternative markets and community-based economic development. Previous work includes 15 years in natural resource conservation with federal, state and local agencies in several states. He has degrees in Wildlife Conservation and Range Management from the University of Wyoming and Montana State University. He lives in northeast Nebraska with his wife's small flock of sheep, a passel of laying hens and a large garden.

**Heather Gessner**

South Dakota State University Extension  
Sioux Falls, SD

Having grown up on a diversified operation raising cattle and hogs, as well as corn, soybeans, oats and alfalfa, Heather Gessner now uses her knowledge as a Livestock Business Management Field Specialist for [SDSU Extension](#) at the Sioux Falls Regional Center to help area producers. Since joining SDSU Extension in 2001 she has been providing farmers and ranchers with enterprise analysis, budget spreadsheets, marketing education, as well as estate and transition planning, education and assistance.

**Ariga Grigoryan**

University of Wisconsin Extension  
Hayward, WI

Ariga Grigoryan is the Community, Natural Resources and Economic Development Educator in [University of Wisconsin Extension](#) and works in Sawyer County and Lac Courte Oreilles Tribe (LCO). Her work focuses on boosting community food systems as an economic and community development opportunity. Some of these projects have been implemented in partnership with the LCO Tribe and include beginner producer programs and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers. Ariga also works on strengthening local farmers markets, food cooperatives and Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs).



She has a Master's Degree in "Natural Resources and Peace" from the United Nations University for Peace located in Costa Rica. Previously, Ariga worked internationally in sustainable development and agricultural research for development. In this capacity, she focused on agricultural transition in post-Soviet countries enhancing new agricultural practices and reviving old marketing ties.

**David Harper**  
Pee Dee Land Trust  
Florence, SC



**David** has more than 25 years of experience in all aspects of land conservation and farmland preservation in rural and urbanizing regions in the MidAtlantic and Southeastern United States. He has worked with landowners and land trusts to preserve more than 5,000 acres of farm and forest land, with focus on integrating farmland preservation with local food system development and addressing land access needs for beginning farmers. David currently serves as Executive Director of the [Pee Dee Land Trust](#) in Florence, South Carolina, and as co-chair of the Rural Resource Coalition of South Carolina, which works to strengthen rural communities by promoting sustainable economic development. He assists his wife Caroline with producing natural, locally grown indigo dye for her business, Chi Design. David holds an undergraduate degree in Political Science and City and Regional Planning from the University of California at Berkeley and a Master of Regional Planning degree from the University of Pennsylvania, where he designed and taught a graduate course on land conservation.

**Kelly Henderson**  
Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association (OEFFA)  
Columbus, OH



Kelly Henderson is an Ohio native with a passion for revitalizing rural and urban farm communities in the heartland. She received her bachelor's degree in horticulture and natural resources at The Ohio State University and master's degree in agricultural and Extension education at New Mexico State University. Kelly has cultivated community leadership through agricultural education programs in the Midwest and Southwest regions where she worked within various contexts of the food system, including: natural resource conservation, food and agriculture curriculum development, regional food system needs assessments, intergenerational community development and organic certification. In her current role as the Begin Farming Program Coordinator at [OEFFA](#), Kelly develops educational programs to train aspiring and early-career, organic and sustainable farmers in the greater Midwest region. OEFFA's Begin Farming program work includes: an apprenticeship program, beginning farmer focused farm tours, workshops and networking events, a mentorship program, the Heartland Farm Beginnings® course, and matching landowners with land seekers to coordinate land access and farm succession efforts. Kelly is dedicated to work that increases farmland access and improves long-term success of our future farmers in ways that are ecologically sound, socially just and economically viable.

**Joy Kirkpatrick**

UW Center for Dairy Profitability  
Madison, WI

Joy Kirkpatrick has worked in University of Wisconsin Extension for 24 years. She began her Extension career as a county-based educator. In 2004 she became the Outreach Specialist for the University of Wisconsin's [Center for Dairy Profitability](#). In this position she collaborates with colleagues to provide educational programs and information on farm succession planning. Kirkpatrick received both her BS and MS degrees from Southern Illinois University – Carbondale.



Joy has extensive experience facilitating farm succession discussions with farm businesses and farm families. She has written articles on retirement planning for farmers and taught seminars throughout the United States on farm succession facilitation.

**Katie Painter**

Global Gardens at Jannus, Inc.  
Boise, ID

Katie Painter is the full time project coordinator for [Global Gardens Refugee Agriculture Program](#) at the Idaho Office for Refugees. She has filled this role since 2008. She manages two incubator farms in Boise and connects refugees with the land, resources and training they need to garden or to begin farm businesses. She also works with a Native American group on the Duck Valley reservation to grow food in gardens and hoophouses, and to begin a farmers' market on the reservation. Katie is a part of ISED's curriculum development program for refugee farmers and enjoys meeting with her colleagues around the country to further develop curriculum and best practices for this target audience.



Katie has a B.S. in Biology and Spanish from St. Mary's College of Maryland and an M.S. in Ecology and Tropical Conservation and Development from the University of Florida. She has been working with small farmers around the world since 1999. Her experiences include Peace Corps work in Agroforestry Extension in Paraguay, research with organic cocoa bean producers in Brazil, assisting with the development of a national extension program for coffee growers in Angola, and consulting on short projects in El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico and Florida. Katie currently homesteads in Garden City, Idaho, with her partner and two young children.

**Dave Renn**

Community Food and Agriculture Coalition  
Missoula, MT

Dave Renn is the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Program Manager for CFAC, the [Community Food and Agriculture Coalition](#), in Missoula, Montana. He coordinates trainings and workshops to help beginning farmers and ranchers create sustainable farm businesses. He also manages the Farm Link Montana website to connect BFRs to land, jobs, mentors and information. He is passionate about growing food, throwing frisbee, climbing rock and brewing beer.



**Cindy Roberts**

NJ State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC)  
Trenton, NJ

Cindy Roberts is Development and Training Coordinator for the [NJ State Agriculture Development Committee](#) (SADC), the agency that leads New Jersey’s farmland preservation efforts. Cindy identifies educational needs and conducts and oversees training for preservation partners. Prior to that, she was the SADC’s Southern Regional Preservation Program Coordinator. Before joining the SADC, Cindy worked for 13 years for The Trust for Public Land as a Senior Project Manager covering southern New Jersey. Cindy earned a Bachelor of Science degree from Cook College, Rutgers University, in Environmental Planning and Design.



**Charles Roohr**

NJ State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC)  
Trenton, NJ

“Chuck” Roohr has served 16 years as staff to the NJ State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC) in varying capacities from working with the Right to Farm Program, Direct and Fee Simple Acquisition Programs, and for the last 8 years, as Manager of the [Stewardship Program](#). In this capacity, he oversees annual monitoring efforts on more than 225,000 acres of preserved farmland statewide and handles all post-acquisition easement requests and compliance issues.



Chuck is a graduate of Delaware Valley College of Science and Agriculture with a Bachelor of Science in Biology. Having grown up on his family’s vegetable and livestock farm in Burlington County, NJ, Chuck maintains his connections to real-world agriculture by way of getting his hands dirty on an almost daily basis at the family operation.

**Liya Schwartzman**  
California FarmLink  
Santa Cruz, CA



Liya Schwartzman has been working in partnership with farmers on behalf of [California FarmLink](#) as its Central Valley Regional Program Coordinator since 2010. She has supported hundreds of farmers and ranchers in accessing land, securing strong tenure agreements, exploring financing, and facilitating farmland and business succession plans. Liya also directs farmers to a variety of resources from FarmLink, its partners, and service providers nationwide.

She is a frequent speaker at workshops and conferences on topics of importance to beginning and retiring farmers and ranchers. Liya was born and raised in the suburbs of Los Angeles and graduated from UC Davis with a B.A. in Nature and Culture. She now resides in America's Farm-to-Fork Capital, Sacramento, and enjoys all the fruits and vegetables that California has to offer.

**Andrew V. Sorrell**  
Office of Farmland Preservation  
Virginia Dept. of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS)  
Richmond, VA



“Andy” Sorrell grew up in the suburbs of Richmond, Virginia, but happily moved to the countryside after college. He studied environmental planning and public administration at Virginia Tech and proceeded to work for rural Virginia local governments as a county planner managing governmental programs and solving problems for the public and local officials. Andy has managed the [Office of Farmland Preservation](#) at VDACS since 2013; he works to keep land in active agricultural use connecting local governments, farmers and others to resources that preserve farm land. In addition, Andy manages the Virginia Farm Link and Virginia Century farm programs. Passionate about rural Virginia, Andy has served on the Executive Board of the Virginia Rural Planning Caucus since 2008. In his free time, he raises a large garden and explores the James River with his family.

**LyTanya Toomer-Brown**  
Federation of Southern Cooperatives  
Pass Christian, MS



LyTanya Toomer-Brown received her B.S. degree from University of Maryland University College and her J.D from Southern University Law Center (SULC). She served as the Teaching Assistant for the Mediation Clinic at SULC and is a Certified Mediator in Louisiana as well as Mississippi. She has mediated many cases in such areas as family disputes, disputes among teens, landlord/tenant, as well as agriculture issues. Since graduating from SULC, LyTanya has served as Lead Instructor for the Paralegal Program at Virginia College in Biloxi, MS, as well as an Adjunct Instructor for the Business/Paralegal Studies Program at Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College. In 2009, she developed the Mississippi Agriculture Mediation Program that has been certified through the United States Department of Agriculture and currently serves as Director.

**Jennifer Tucker Visitacion**

Guidestone Colorado/Colorado Land Link  
Salida, CO

Jenn Tucker Visitacion is the Executive Director of [Guidestone Colorado](#), a non-profit organization dedicated to growing a vibrant agricultural future through education, community building and partnerships. Guidestone Colorado supports the next generation of farmers and ranchers through Colorado Land Link, a program that supports land access and farm succession through connecting farmers to resources and opportunities and deepening the networks of support. With a background in natural resources, business and leadership development, Jen provides strategic planning and business coaching support to farmers, farm businesses and food systems organizations.

