

Veterans Farms  
Project Evaluation  
3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter Report  
January 1, 2015 – December 31, 2015

Prepared By:  
Bruce Waite Ph.D.  
Common Thread Alliance  
P.O. Box 385, Melrose FL. 32666  
352-222-5644

# Veterans Farms PROGRAM EVALUATION

## Veterans Farms Project Evaluation

### Introduction

Veterans Farm was established in 2010 by Adam and Michele Burke as a handicapped accessible farm for disabled combat veterans. After Adam, a Purple Heart veteran, returned home from his deployments with multiple wounds of war. His vision was to create an organization that would provide an emotionally supportive and nurturing environment where veterans would receive core vocational training services and intensive case management aimed at helping them return to society as contributing members. Through the *Enhancing Veterans Farm Fellowship Program*, Veterans Farm's aim is threefold provide outreach/ train veterans for a sustainable economic career in farming, offer veterans a strong support mentoring system and provide the resources they will need to start their agriculture ventures. Veterans Farm, won a Beginning Farmers and Rancher Development Program grant to help returning combat war veterans develop the fundamentals of private farm related businesses that will be sustainable over the long term. The grant will hasten the Veterans Farm progress toward a comprehensive farm based training program that will focus on the needs of those post war veterans including those who suffer from traumatic brain injury, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and other combat related injuries. In addition, the program focuses on junior military personnel who have not had the opportunity to gain extensive technical skills or training.

### Background

Pursuant to the terms of the agreement with the USDA Beginning Farmers program, Bruce Waite Ph.D. through Common Thread International Inc. was engaged to perform the program evaluation. Common Thread International Inc., (dba the Common Thread Alliance) is a 501 © 3 not for profit organization which is proficient in agricultural program quality assurance and evaluation. Dr. Waite has an advanced degree in organizational development with a focus of workforce development programs for workers with barriers.

The evaluation will be structured to examine the stated program goals through a process of event observation, examination of documents and operator provided information.

The program has three general goals:

## Veterans Farms PROGRAM EVALUATION

- **Increase the number of combat war veterans served by the *Enhancing Veterans Farm Fellowship Program*.**
- **To expand and further refine upon the existing Veterans Farm innovative mentoring model.**
- **Increase access to farmland among beginning farmers through leases and purchases.**

### Methodology

Veterans Farms intended to achieve their goals through the provision of 5 annual outreach events, eligibility determination, and the provision of program services leading the program applicants to the desired program outcomes. The events were to be scheduled quarterly at convenient locations throughout Northeast Florida. The events would run for 3 -6 hours and would be comprised of numerous speakers who would present on topics of interest to beginning farmers. The intention was that from the list of attendees some percentage would express an interest in the program and as such will apply for more services from Veterans Farms.

Extensive outreach and recruitment was planned through various media channels including email, web announcements and social marketing. The advertisements would be targeted towards soon to be or recently separated veterans.

The event activities would include information-training sessions performed by various community speakers. The speakers would discuss numerous topics covering practical issues on farming business, farm finance, grants and markets, and lending. Subject matter experts were to be recruited from a pool of existing farmers, government officials and representatives of lending institutions. Many of the presenters would also veterans.

The evaluation of the program was based on the development and approval by Veterans Farms of an evaluation plan.

**During the reporting period there were three events planned and executed.**

#### **The First Event:**

On March 7, 2015 Veterans Farms at a location provided by Anheuser Busch Farms Inc. held the first of five events. The event was held in a rural farm

## Veterans Farms PROGRAM EVALUATION

setting located at 1613 Lem Turner Rd. In northern Duval County. Even though the weather was somewhat inclement with cold temperatures and wind, it was highly attended with over 200 participants who signed in. The evaluator attended the event.

The speakers and the audience sat under an open-air pavilion on the edge of a picturesque pond.

The event was marketed using a combination of email, social marketing, web based marketing and posters/flyers distributed to multiple stakeholder groups and public media.

The agencies represented by the speakers also had informational tables set up where additional representatives were providing information and advice to conference attendees. The speakers were provided with amplified sound and projection equipment where they could provide additional information using power point and other graphics. There was free food and refreshment provided to the attendees.

The evaluator observed each of the presentations and on the whole the information appeared to be well presented and complete on the part of each speaker. The list of topics covered appeared to be holistic and succinctly targeted to the needs of both veterans and beginning farmers.

During the event the evaluator spoke to several consumers questioning them on several customer satisfaction aspects of the program. There were no negative comments made concerning either the length of the event or the completeness of the information. Many of the attendees I spoke to stated that they intended to enroll in the Veterans Farm program. Information provided by Veterans Farms, which indicated that out of 219 individuals who registered 171 had their eligibility, tested and were deemed eligible. This would appear to represent an enrollment rate of 78%.

Additionally, the evaluator interviewed about 30% of the presenters. The majority expressed an impression that the event met their expectations and that they thought the event was a success.

## Veterans Farms PROGRAM EVALUATION



Attendees at the First Event

### **The Second Event:**

On May 16, 2015 Veterans Farms presented the second New Beginning Farmer/ Rancher development workshop. The event was held at the Jacksonville Equestrian Center located at 13611 Normandy Blvd. in Jacksonville Florida, in a large indoor training area. The facility was climate controlled and well suited to the activity. There was plenty of available parking and the facility was fully accessible. The event was well attended and presented full three hours of various speakers, speaking on farming related topics. Additionally, the Veterans Farm staff was available before and after the speakers to provide individual information to attendees. The speakers included participation from Florida Organic Growers, The Farm Credit of Florida, Wealth Watchers Inc., USDA AMS, USDA RDS, and the NRCS. In addition there were speakers from LWS Grants Consulting, Gateway Business Advisors and Eat Your Yard Jax. There was a comprehensive array of topics that included topics on marketing, farm finance, financial planning and grant writing. Several speakers also addressed some technical topics such as organic certification and urban farming. The speaker organizations were on hand before and after the event to provide individual consultation also. The speakers seemed well informed on their topics and well received by the audience. There were 83 individuals who were registered and

## Veterans Farms PROGRAM EVALUATION

signed in but many other people were in attendance so the apparent attendance was somewhat higher.

During and after the event the evaluator spoke to between 5-8 participants and asked each for feedback on the program content, how they received notification of the event and if they intended on following through with the program. One person had already finished some portion of the program and commented that they felt the program was “excellent”. Most had heard of the program through various media and all stated that they thought the content was helpful. This information was gathered on an informal basis and as such was intended to obtain some qualitative sense of the impact on the program.

The general impression was that the content had the desired impact and there was a high level of enthusiasm.

As with the first event, the event was marketed using a combination of email, social marketing, web based marketing and posters/flyers distributed to multiple stakeholder groups and public media.

As with the first event, the speakers were provided with projection equipment where they could provide additional information using power point and other graphics. Handouts of each program service were also available to the attendees. There was free food and refreshment provided to the attendees.

The evaluator observed each of the presentations and on the whole the information appeared to be well presented and complete on the part of each speaker. The list of topics covered appeared to be holistic and succinctly targeted to the needs of both veterans and beginning farmers.

Information provided by Veterans Farms, which indicated that out of 83 individuals who registered 57 had their eligibility, tested and were deemed eligible. This would appear to represent an enrollment rate of 69% generated by the event.

Additionally, the evaluator interviewed about 20% of the presenters. The majority expressed an impression that the event met their expectations and that they thought the event was a success.

Additionally, Veterans Farms videotaped the workshop and posted it on the Veterans Farm website where it is accessible after an individual completes a cursory registration. The imperative for this is based in the number of apparently eligible and interested veterans who live too far away to effectively travel to the facility or the physical presentations.

## Veterans Farms PROGRAM EVALUATION

The initial efforts to migrate to virtual style training appear to be successful with a total of 216 persons who have viewed the courseware for a significant amount of time to be considered as participation in the training activity. From that domain 39 persons have contacted Veterans Farms to be considered for service and 13 have traveled to the farm for services. According to the Veterans Farm Executive Director, many persons from this venue have commented that they have transportation and housing barriers that prevent them from coming from other parts of the county to attend. There is however a high interest in the program and what it has to offer.

### **The Third Event:**

On August 22, 2015 Veterans Farms presented the third New Beginning Farmer/ Rancher development workshop. The event was sponsored by Veterans Farms and was co-sponsored by Wealth Watchers Inc. Wealth Watchers is a not for profit organization that like Veterans Farms serves veterans who wish to establish themselves in agriculture. Their stated goal "Assist veterans with increasing their knowledge and participation in the agriculture business and creating opportunities to create and grow small businesses and family farms" appears to be consistent with the goal sets of Veterans Farms.

This was the only event held during the third quarter. The event was held at the Old Florida Museum's Pioneer Barn located at 259 San Marco Ave. St. Augustine Florida, in a large enclosed post and beam barn that had been reconfigured as a public meeting space. The facility was climate controlled and well suited to the activity. There was plenty of available parking and the facility was fully accessible. The event was well attended and presented full three hours of various speakers, speaking on farming related topics. As noted before the event was co-sponsored by Wealth Watchers Inc. who provided staff to facilitate the event. Adam Burke, Veterans Farms Executive Director, provided the opening speech and other Veterans Farm staff were available before and after the speakers to provide individual information to attendees. The list of speaker included participation from the USDA, other agricultural focused and veterans support Organizations. In addition, representatives from Wealth Watchers presented extensive information on the services available through their organization. There was a comprehensive array of topics that included marketing, farm finance, and financial planning. The speaker organizations were on hand before and after the event to provide individual consultation. The speakers seemed well informed on their topics and well received by the audience. There were 65 individuals who were registered and signed in but many other people were in attendance so the apparent attendance was somewhat higher. With a show of hands about 80% of the attendees were veterans.



## Veterans Farms PROGRAM EVALUATION

During and after the event the evaluator spoke to between 5 participants and asked each for feedback on the program content, how they received notification of the event and if they intended on following through with the program. There were no negative comments on the program content.

Most had heard of the program through various media and all stated that they though the content was helpful. This information was gathered on an informal basis and as such was intended to obtain some qualitative sense of the impact on the program.

The general impression was that the content had the desired impact and there was a high level of enthusiasm.

As with the first and second events, the event was marketed using a combination of email, social marketing, web based marketing and posters/flyers distributed to multiple stakeholder groups and public media.

As with the first and second events the speakers were provided with projection equipment where they could provide additional information using power point and other graphics. Handouts of each program service were also available to the attendees. There was free food and refreshment provided to the attendees.

The evaluator observed each of the presentations and on the whole the information appeared to be well presented and complete on the part of each speaker. The list of topics covered appeared to be holistic and succinctly targeted to the needs of both veterans and beginning farmers.

Information provided by Veterans Farms, which indicated that out of 65 individuals who registered 54 had their eligibility tested and were deemed eligible. This would appear to represent an eligibility rate of 83% generated by the event. Additionally, of the 54 who were eligible, 36 moved into services at a rate of 67%.



# Veterans Farms PROGRAM EVALUATION



## VETERANS FARM

### **New Beginning Farmer Rancher Development workshop**

Hosted by Anheuser Busch Farms

Location: 16163 Lem Turner Rd Jacksonville, fl 32218

March 7<sup>th</sup> 10am -1pm

**Introduction:** Veterans Farm 5 minutes (Mission, scholarships, 3 month training fellowship available)  
Pass out program.

- 1) 10am Guest speaker David Nistler UF IFAS extension agent. (local ag resources and training)
- 2) 10:20am Guest speaker David Bearl (Food Safety) UF IFAS
- 3) 10:40am Guest speaker Dr. Amy Wagenfeld PHD/Occupational Therapy, Rush University and Veterans Farm board member. (Farming with a disability)
- 4) 11am Guest Speaker Carmen Franz (FOG) Florida Organic Growers Ass. Title: Community Food Project Coordinator.
- 5) 11:20am Wealth Watchers President Carrie Davis. Presenting (grant opportunities for veterans)
- 6) 11:40am Michael O’Gorman, Founder of the Farmer Veteran Coalition Presenting (Home Grown by Heroes label, grant opportunities, land acquisition).
- 7) 12:00pm Guest speaker FSA Hugh Hunter (FSA loans, grants lending)
- 8) 12:20pm Guest speaker Regina Thomas Farm Credit (lending, credit).
- 9) If time allows (10 minutes) USDA (AMS) Richard Marowski (using the USDA label to sell products) ( Mr. Marowski will be available to speak after event or during break to individuals interested).

An Example of the Promotional Materials

# Veterans Farms PROGRAM EVALUATION

## **Event Performance Summary:**

The performance data collection strategy used as an evaluation of the events was based upon a plan developed jointly with Veterans Farms. The plan was based on the original objectives determined by the grant agreement. The performance data was categorized into four areas with an additional aggregation of quartile performance.

### Quantitative measures:

- How many events were held
- How many attendees as reflected on the sign in sheet
- How many attendees were determined eligible
- How many attendees received a service

### Qualitative measures:

- Observations of the events
- Examination and discussion of the marketing activities
- Informal interviews with attendees
- Informal interviews with Veterans Farm staff
- Informal interviews with speakers

# Veterans Farms PROGRAM EVALUATION

## Baseline Projected Performance and Evaluation Plan:

Vet Farm Beginning Farmer Program Evaluation					
Objective	Work Plan	Standards	Expected Outcomes:	Documentation	Deliverables from Vet Farm
Increase the number of combat war veterans and served by the Enhancing Veterans Farm Fellowship Program	5 training events will be held within the grant period. Each event will be three hours long. Each event will cover topics relevant to each of the program objectives.	<p>Involvement from outside service providers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Florida Farm Credit Bureau</li> <li>• Florida Agricultural Extension</li> <li>• Clay County Extension</li> <li>• University of Florida IFAS</li> <li>• VA Loan Representative</li> <li>• Food Buyers and Brokers</li> <li>• Rural Development Reps</li> <li>• USDA Experts</li> <li>• FL Organic Growers</li> </ul> <p>Marketing outreach through various media outlets including social media</p> <p>Participation in events by qualified attendees</p>	<p>Presentations from each group at each event</p> <p>Access to events from interested qualified individuals</p> <p>51 eligible veterans will be served through the two events</p>	<p>Copies of agendas showing listed participating providers</p> <p>Written documentation of each modality of marketing through a marketing log</p> <p>Eligibility determination through application and sign in sheets showing name of attendee and eligibility status</p>	<p>Copies of the outreach event agendas will be provided to the evaluator as to document that each of the listed presenters are present and participating in the event. Copies will be provided at the end of each event.</p> <p>An ongoing record of all marketing activities will be maintained and will list type of marketing, the resources and what type of outlet is used. Copies of this log will be provided to the evaluator at the end of each event or in the 10 week of the quarter.</p> <p>The evaluator will be provided documentation of each participants eligibility for the program. This may include a copy of an application or copies of letters of eligibility. This will be provided to the evaluator at the end of each session or on the 10 week of the quarter.</p>
Expand upon the existing Veterans Farm innovative mentoring model.		<p>Event will cover the following topics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organization history</li> <li>• Vision and Missions of the Program</li> <li>• Overview of Mentoring Program</li> <li>• Characteristics and circumstances of the target audience</li> <li>• Mentor and Staff roles</li> </ul>	The event will produce 15 interested mentors who will sign up to the program	Documentation of interested through completed applications	Copies of an application or a signed statement of interest from each mentor will be prepared and provided to the evaluator after each session or on the 10 week of the quarter.
Increase access to farmland among beginning farmers through leases and purchases		<p>Each workshop will include participation from the following persons or groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tim Armstrong</li> <li>• Brian Lapinski</li> <li>• University of Florida IFAS</li> <li>• Francisco Arroyo</li> <li>• Fog</li> <li>• Funding Sources Government</li> <li>• Funding Sources private</li> </ul> <p>Each event will include participation of eligible individuals</p>	<p>Presentations from each group at each event</p> <p>40 Beginning Farmers will acquire access to land by the end of the grant</p>	<p>Copies of meeting agenda showing participation of presenters</p> <p>Signed statements of program outcome from each new farmer</p>	<p>Copies of the teaching event agendas will be provided to the evaluator as to document that each of the listed presenters are present and participating in the event. Copies will be provided at the end of each event.</p> <p>Copies of signed statements from participants will be provided to the evaluator 30 days before the end of the 4 quarter documenting the satisfaction of the objective.</p>

## Veterans Farms PROGRAM EVALUATION

### Quartile Performance Per Event:

DATE	EVENT DESCRIPTION	# OF ATTENDEES	# DEEMED ELIGIBLE	# WHO RECEIVED SERVICE	# OUTCOMES WITHIN THIS QUARTER
3/7/2015  1 <sup>st</sup> Quarter	New beginning farmer/rancher workshop	219	171	143	143 received consultation, case management, referral, business plan training/land acquisition training. USDA resource training, agriculture training.
5/16/15  2 <sup>nd</sup> Quarter	New beginning farmer/rancher workshop	83	57	57	57 received consultation, case management, referral, business plan training/land acquisition training. USDA resource training, agriculture training.
2 <sup>nd</sup> Quarter	New Beginning Farmer Training videotaped and posted on YouTube available through secure registered login and direct email	216 *  * Over half were pre-registered the others were alerted through word of mouth	39	39*  * Geographic distance prohibited individuals from traveling to the training site	39 received consultation, case management, referral, business plan training/land acquisition training. USDA resource training,

## Veterans Farms PROGRAM EVALUATION

DATE	EVENT DESCRIPTION	# OF ATTENDEES	# DEEMED ELIGIBLE	# WHO RECEIVED SERVICE	# OUTCOMES WITHIN THIS QUARTER
					agriculture training.
3 rd. Quarter	New Beginning Farmer/Rancher Workshop	65	54	36	36 received consultation, case management, referral, business plan training/land acquisition training. USDA resource training, agriculture training.

### Year End Performance Summary:

Based on information provide by Veterans Farms untested but warranted as accurate by the organizations Executive Director the following terminal performance was achieved:

- 87 veterans met with the program face-to-face and received assistance with planning and training.
- 386 veterans received online training through the program.
- 67,305 individuals who visited the Veterans Farm website to receive information.
- 715,167 website hits.
- 37 veterans who began farming during the program period with an additional 7 in the beginning stages of starting.

The performance plan called for five events. The three physical events that were held were supplemented with two additional online events through the Veterans Farm electronic training curriculum which consists of the same informational events as the physical sessions.

In evaluating both the quantifiable data as presented by Veterans Farm and the qualitative observations by the evaluator it appears that the program is exceeding

## Veterans Farms PROGRAM EVALUATION

expectations in both its desirability on the part of Veterans who wish to become farmers and the number of persons who have made the commitment to attend.