



THE ALABAMA
SUSTAINABLE
AGRICULTURE
NETWORK

ASAN UPDATE

Winter 2017-18

Published Quarterly

SEED SAVING 101: HOW TO ENSURE TRUE-TO-TYPE SEED

By the Sand Mountain Seed Bank

In part 2 of our seed saving series, we will cover plant selections, which directly relates to population size, cross pollination, and isolation distances.

This really boils down to understanding the biology of the specific plant species you are wishing to



Creek tobacco flowering, photo credit: Dove Stackhouse

save seeds from, and what it takes to maintain the full complement of genetics it needs to breed true, or be “true to type,” generation after generation. When you plant your

saved seeds, they need to have sufficient genetic diversity to produce the same type of

(Continued on page 4)



2017 FOOD & FARM FORUM:
Watch out for photos and a thorough report-back in the Spring 2018 ASAN Update!

AND INSIDE, page 3: Photos from September's Graze: Birmingham!

BUSINESS BRAINSTORMING WITH A BUSINESS MODEL CANVAS

By Karen Wynne

If you're like most of the farmers and business owners I know, your brain is swirling with potential enterprises. Hemp, Brussels sprouts, alpacas, homeschool farm tours, hydroponic cilantro, your grandmother's sweet potato biscuits, and farm vacation rentals might all be careening around in your skull, ready to pay off the farm if you could just take action. Why not take some time this winter to look at some of those ideas, throw out the unlikely, and help your brain focus on the promising? New tools make it easier to sort through your business plans, and they work well for non-profits too.

General Eisenhower said “Plans are nothing. Planning is everything.” It is one thing to think through your ideas and assumptions critically and thoroughly, and another entirely to stick to a plan

once you've developed it. Planning is not a one-and-done activity – you'll make plenty of tweaks or major changes once you get going.

The Business Model Canvas was originally developed about ten years ago, and has taken off as a way to work through your business concept. The canvas is one large page that covers the basic components of your business and sorts them into building blocks. You can work through the canvas one build-

(Continued on page 8)



Author Karen Wynne presents to a group of entrepreneurs taking the CO.STARTERS business development course in Huntsville. Photo courtesy Rocket Hatch

2018 SSAWG CONFERENCE COMES TO CHATTANOOGA

Winter is the season for farmers to regroup, assess the past season and plan for the season to come – to pull together knowledge, tools, and resources to try something new, or do something differently. Conferences and other gatherings – like ASAN's own Food & Farm Forum! – are ideal places for this exploration. They are convening places, sites of learning, and much more. The Southern Sus-

(Continued on page 7)

See page 7 for a full schedule of winter conferences around the Southeast!

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Letter from ASAN Board President	2
Graze: Birmingham!	3
National Young Farmer Survey Results	10
Upcoming Events	11

LETTER FROM THE ASAN BOARD PRESIDENT



Hello fellow Alabamians,

A college buddy from Maine once told me that winter weather in Alabama is a crapshoot. Anyone who has spent a week in Alabama

during December knows exactly what he is talking about. You can be bundled up to the nines one day and wearing shorts and a t-shirt the following day. That is one of the characteristics of the Humid Subtropical Climate that Alabama is classified as.

When it comes to growing food, this provides Alabama with several major advantages.

We can grow food year around without large energy inputs. If you plan your garden well and grow winter hardy vegetables in the cool months, you can make it by with just a sheet of plastic! I have a cattle farmer friend who loves vine ripened tomatoes (who doesn't right?). When he heard that we don't need supplemental heat to grow food year around, he planted his tomatoes and stuck them in his greenhouse. When they didn't make it through a cold spell, he promptly confronted me. Though losing a

crop is no laughing matter, as friends we had a hearty (hardy?) laugh. He had planted a summer vegetable when he should have planted a winter one.

If you planned on a winter garden but haven't gotten around to it, it's not too late! We have transplanted cool hardy crops like kale and swiss chard as late as Thanksgiving into the high tunnel. For crops that bolt easily (i.e. spinach, Asian greens), we wait until after the Winter Solstice (Dec. 21) when the days start to lengthen again. Trust me, if I can make it through the winter with one sheet of plastic over the vegetables, you can too.

If you are still needing expertise or have some to share, you should attend one of our Food and Farm Forums. Perhaps you can connect with an ASAN member near you and grow something together. We are a resourceful group, we share our knowledge and expertise and when possible our time and resources. Over the past 6 years that I have been a member of ASAN, I have found that our members represent the best of Alabama. I have no doubt that there is an ASAN member not too far from you that either could use help growing or is willing to share their knowledge to help

you grow healthy food for yourself and your family.

Be sure to keep up with our calendar to know what is happening in and around the state <http://asanonline.org/events>.

Sincerely,

Charles Walters
ASAN Board President

CULTIVATE ASAN

We will be presenting the results from our 2017 strategic planning process "Cultivate ASAN" — and sharing some of our preliminary plans, based on what we heard from you — at the Food & Farm Forum Dec 8-9, 2017. We will also publish a summary in the Spring 2018 issue.

First off, THANK YOU to everyone who contributed to this process. Just as the strategic planning process is ongoing, our conversation is ongoing with our members and broader community about who ASAN is, what vision we seek to manifest, and what consider our niche in the road towards that vision.

Please feel free to share your thoughts on these or any concerns, anytime! Write us at info@asanonline.org, or call us at (256) 743-0742.

CONTRIBUTORS: WINTER 2017-18

The Sand Mountain Seed Bank is a collection of open-pollinated, locally and regionally adapted seed varieties collected and lovingly maintained by Dove Stackhouse, Charlotte Hagood, and others. Learn more at https://savetheseed.net/wiki/Category:Sand_Mountain_Seed_Bank.

Karen Wynne runs Crotovina, an ag consulting firm that helps small farmers find their niches and build successful businesses. She lives in Huntsville, and also farms at Rosita's Farm in Hartselle.

Charles Walters is ASAN's Board President and a farmer at River Oaks Farm in Millbrook. A native of Linden, he currently lives in Montgomery with his wife and daughter.

Alice Evans is the Executive Director of ASAN. She is a native of Huntsville, and now lives in Birmingham.

Note: so that our small staff and devoted all-volunteer board can fully commit to our strategic planning work this year, the next several issues of the ASAN newsletter will be shorter — 12 pages instead of 16. The newsletter will continue to feature news, resources, and perspectives FOR and FROM the full breadth of our wide, diverse network, and we will continue to distribute it in paper and electronically. We still — of course — gladly welcome your feedback, suggestions, story pitches, and other contributions!

ABOUT ASAN:

The mission of the Alabama Sustainable Agriculture Network is to support conservation practices, families who grow and consume natural food and fiber, and the communities where they live. ASAN provides peer-to-peer education, training, and networking opportunities to our broad network of farmers, gardeners, food-based businesses, agricultural resource organizations, and community leaders. We are a membership-based organization that seeks to improve the lives of small farmers and rural and urban communities and make a positive impact on the state's environment and health.

We define sustainable agriculture as farming that supports families and communities while conserving natural resources. We embrace the breadth of overlapping ways — ecological, economic, social, historical, etc. — that together, we can build a more sustainable food system. Find out more at <http://asanonline.org>.

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AN “OUTPOURING” OF THANKS FOR ANOTHER FANTASTIC GRAZE!

2017's *Graze: Birmingham* tested the mettle and the spirits of our farmers, chefs, and supporters — about an hour and a half before the event was set to start, the sky opened up and dropped all the rain it had to offer. Everyone took shelter together under the nearest market tent. We laughed and sopped up water and improvised... until right at 5:00pm (the event's scheduled start time), the rain stopped. The sun even cast a rainbow across the sky, and later lit up the clouds beautifully as it was setting — it made for quite a beautiful scene. Leave it to a group of farmers and chefs to be comfortable with improvising and rolling with the punches. We couldn't be more grateful to all of them, as well as to the volunteers, musicians, and of course, the *Grazers* themselves for making this third-annual event such a wonderful, enjoyable success!

Thank you to Bre Saxon and Say Bre Photography for the fabulous photos featured here!

Thank you to our amazing food/drink providers: Belle Meadow Farms, DSR Farms, Grandview Farm, Hepzibah Farms, Heron Hollow Farms, Marble Creek Farmstead, Mt. Laurel Farm, Petals from the Past, River Oaks Farm, Snow's Bend Farm, Southern Foothills Farm, Stillwater Farm, Walden Farms, Avondale Common House & Distillery, Chez Lulu/Continental Bakery, Downstairs Diner at East Lake UMC, El Barrio, Golden Temple, Highlands Bar & Grill, Little Savannah, Pelham Culinary Arts, Revolve Kitchen & Brew, Sprout & Pour, Thyme Randle / the Underground Cooking Academy, Tropico, The Atomic Lounge, Herb Inc., Harvest Roots Ferments, Avondale Brewing Company, and Jones Valley Teaching Farm!

Thank you to our sponsors: We are so grateful for the generous support of Piggly Wiggly Birmingham, for helping make this year's event possible! Many thanks also to Harpersville Family Medicine, Oak Street Garden Shop, Highlands Bar & Grill, Avondale Brewery, Pepper Place Market, and the Cahaba Group of the Sierra Club for their support!

Thank you to our stellar volunteers, businesses and organizations who donated to our raffle table, and so many more of y'all who contributed to the ongoing magic of this event. We love you!



SEED SAVING (CONTINUED)

(Continued from page 1)

plant you started with in the first place.

So, as you select a plant to save seeds from, your first consideration should be whether you can grow a healthy crop, based on the amount of space and time you can dedicate to this particular plant and its particular cultural needs. Next, to further narrow down your choice of plants, here are some general guidelines of what you need to be aware of, to produce true to type seeds.

Plant Life Cycle

Is your plant an annual or biennial? If your plant is a biennial that is planted as an annual, like beets, swiss chard, carrots, and many in the Brassica family, they will require vernalization (cold period before they will start to flower) in order to produce a seed crop. To produce a seed crop we normally plant these crops in the fall and harvest seeds early next spring when they flower and set seeds. If your plant is an annual like melons, squashes etc. you will be able to collect seed in the same season.

Population Size

Now you must consider population density, or how many healthy, surviving plants are needed to mature and set seed, for the seed produced to have the required genetic diversity for true to type seeds as described above. Like most things it varies from species to species, but most vegetable plants need at least 20-50 plants. However corn requires 200-300 plants planted in a block to ensure good pollen coverage. Remember, these are only minimums. More is always better, because genetic diversity contributes to the plant's ability to adapt to its environment based on the array of traits it has at its genetic disposal. It will help them deal with disease, drought, insects, etc.

Cross-Pollination

All plants within the same species will cross pollinate, so to be safe it is wise to



Russell Stackhouse "outstanding in his field" with crop of cucuzzi squash, which, since it is actually an edible gourd, will cross with other gourds but not squash. Photo credit: Dove Stackhouse

only grow one crop from each species unless you have the space to isolate them. For example in the *Cucurbitaceae* family there are 5 species of squash: *Cucurbita pepo* (many pumpkins, summer squash / zucchini, acorn squash, and some ornamental gourds), *C. maxima* (hubbard, buttercup), *C. moshata* (butternut, cheese pumpkin), *C. argyrosperma* aka *C. mixta* (cushaw), *C. ficifolia* (not widely known). So you could plant one of each of these species in your garden without them crossing, but you could not plant a zucchini next to an acorn squash without it crossing.

These distinctions are not always obvious or intuitive. You can plant a green bean, lima bean, dry bean like October beans, and a field pea in the same garden without them crossing. Make sure you know what species you are working with. If you don't or can't know the particulars of the species, err on the side of caution and only plant one from the entire family until you learn more, especially if you have limited seed someone gave you.

A note about Latin names

Many seed catalogs have the species name listed with the variety. The name will appear as two words, written as *Genus species* (for example, with *Cucurbita pepo*, *Cucurbita* is the genus

and *pepo* is the species). Two varieties must share BOTH genus and species in order to be able to cross-pollinate. Sometimes the genus is abbreviated (as above) to a single letter.

Method of Pollination and Isolation

Another question to consider is, how is your plant pollinated? By wind, by insect, or is it self-fertile? In most cases it's more than one way. For example, while beans are self-fertile or self-pollinated, and are often fertilized before insects do their duty, the insects still transfer pollen, so it is wise to plant beans of the same species about 300' apart. With wind-pollinated crops like corn, okra, beets, chard it is wise to only plant one variety and be able to isolate it by 2-3 miles from others.

Be aware of what your neighbors are growing so their GMO or hybrid varieties (especially corn) don't cross-pollinate your plants. I accomplish this by planting my corn a month later than the neighbors, so that the two plots aren't tasseling at the same time. Okra is harder; I am lucky and I don't have any neighbors who grow okra and I grow only one variety per year. Beets and chard, which are biennials as mentioned above, are overwintered and go to seed before spring-planted crops are doing their thing; just be sure only one of those are grown.

If I want to grow more than one kind of tomato I have 2 spots that are separated by 600'. The *Brassica* family is another confusing one. Cabbage, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, kale, collards, cauliflower, and kohlrabi are all the same species (*Brassica oleracea*) and all will cross with each other. Siberian kale and rutabagas share the *Brassica napus* species. Turnips, napa cabbage,

(Continued on page 6)



Horse beans, with pods almost a foot long and individual beans almost 1" long. Photo credit: Dove Stackhouse

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SEED SAVING (CONTD)

(Continued from page 4)

and bok choy are in the *B. rapa* species. So, Russian kale and Siberian kale will not cross. Turnips and bok choy will cross with each other but not with cabbage or rutabagas.

Isolation distances have been mentioned and of course are specific to each species. You will also notice a difference in distances if you are growing seed commercially or in your back yard. Usually the distance is doubled for commercial growers to provide additional insurance against cross-pollination.

Distance also doesn't have to be the only method employed for isolation. For home gardeners, as you grow in confidence you can grow two of the same species in your garden, employing more active methods to isolate them depending on their method of pollination, like building cages with netting to keep insects out, or bagging corn or okra (very time consuming).

Diligence and Recordkeeping

Finally, be sure to be diligent in your observations, paying attention to your plants and recording the milestones in its life, including dates and notes about seedling, transplanting, flowering, and fruit set, and notes about overall vigor, weather conditions, diseases and whether the plant had resistance. Choose to save seeds from the healthiest plants and the best fruit, which is usually the first. On our farm, we mark the fruit we want to save with string or tape so we don't eat them by mistake.

You must also pull out plants that are diseased, have off-type blossoms, or have other traits you do not wish to have. This is the hardest for me to do, but if you want high quality, true-to-type seed, you must be merciless.

Refer to the Fall 2017 ASAN Update for the first part in this series. Part 3 will appear in Spring 2018 and will focus on harvest and processing!

All of these are merely general guidelines; you must research your plant to find specifics. There are good books on the subject: Susan Ashworth's *Seed to Seed*, and *Organic Seed Grower* by John Navazio. Southern Exposure Seed Exchange has great downloadable information on their website, www.southernexposure.com.



Author Dove Stackhouse speaking at the 2016 Seed Celebration in Huntsville, photo credit Alice Evans



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WINTER 2017-18 CONFERENCES AND GATHERINGS

For farmers and others in the sustainable food movement...

- November 10-12 — **Black Farmers and Urban Gardeners (BUGS) National Conference**, Atlanta, GA
- November 16-17 — **Alabama Fruit & Vegetable Growers Association (AFVGA) Annual Conference**, Clanton, AL
- Nov 30-Dec 1 — **Georgia Farmers Market Association's Food For Thought Conference**, Lawrenceville, GA
- December 3-5 — **75th Annual Professional Agricultural Workers Conference (PAWC)**, Tuskegee, AL
- December 8-9 — **ASAN Food & Farm Forum**, Nauvoo, AL
- January 17-20 — **SSAWG Conference**, Chattanooga, TN (see article below)
- January 26 — **Green Coast Council Sustainability Summit**, Mobile
- January 21-22 — **Southeastern Soil Summit**, Atlanta, GA
- February 3 — **Alabama Beekeepers Symposium**, Clanton, AL
- February 14 (tentative) — **West Georgia Farmers Cooperative Small Farm Conference**
- February 15-16 — **126th Annual Tuskegee Farmers Conference**, Tuskegee, AL
- February 16-17 — **Georgia Organics Conference**, Augusta, GA
- March 16-18 — **Alabama Water Rally**, Montgomery, AL

Details at <http://asanonline.org/events>. Know a conference or major gathering that's missing from this list? Let us know! Email info@asanonline.org and we'll add it to our events calendar.

18), including four 1 1/2-day short courses (Wednesday + Thursday morning), four 1/2-day mini courses (Thursday morning), and five different themed field trips to area farms (Thursday afternoon), which give space for attendees to dig deeper into a specific topic.

Don't forget to bring seeds to share at the Thursday evening seed exchange, and leave time to visit the exhibits and posters in the

trade show that runs throughout the general conference. There are mixers on Thursday and Saturday evenings and plenty of other conference activity to fill your days. The full conference schedule is available at <http://www.ssawg.org/2018-conference-program>

SSAWG (CONT'D)

(Continued from page 1)

Sustainable Agriculture Working Group (or SSAWG) hosts such a conference annually in late January that many will tell you is THE can't-miss conference for sustainable farmers and sustainable food system advocates in the Southeast.

Held for the past two years in Lexington, KY, the conference moves this year to Chattanooga, TN, the closest it has been for many Alabamians since it was held in Mobile, AL, in 2014 and 2015. The general conference runs all day Friday and Saturday January 19-20, 2018, and features more than 50 educational sessions, plus additional networking sessions.

Session topics include sustainable and organic production, in fields and in high tunnels; grazing and healthy livestock management; enterprise and business

management; in-field and online tools; vegetable and flower production; marketing innovations; local food systems; farm and food policy; research and education; justice and equity; and more. The conference is meant to appeal to seasoned farmers with years of experience as well as those just getting started. One of SSAWG's points of emphasis is that all of the conferences 90 presenters are not only experts in their respective topics, but carry extensive *practical*, "field-tested" experience.

There are also pre-conference offerings on Wednesday and Thursday (January 17-



Left to right: snapshots from the conference trade show and educational sessions, and map of SSAWG attendees at the 2017 conference in Lexington, KY. Photos courtesy SSAWG.

CANVAS (CONTINUED)

(Continued from page 1)

ing block at a time in whatever order you choose. Most people recommend writing ideas on sticky notes to stick on each area on the plan. As you develop your plan, you can update it easily by switching out or adding sticky notes.

Also, there is something satisfying about taking the really awful ideas (yes, we all have them), crumpling them up and throwing them away.

One of my favorite canvases (pictured at right) is from CO.STARTERS, a planning program developed in Chattanooga by the Company Lab. It breaks your business into eleven key components. Here is a brief rundown:

Customer

Understanding who exactly your customers are makes reaching out to them much easier. There are many reasons why people pass up grocery store options: freshness, flavor, environmental impact, economic impact, nutrition and health, and community are a just a few. But you'll also want to think about when and how – are your customers juggling soccer games on Saturday mornings? When does he like to shop for the week and what else is he buying? Do they cook all week or make one gourmet meal on the weekend? Or does she not cook, and only buys peaches and blueberries? Is his budget tight or does money fall out of his wallet when he opens it?

If you are selling directly to the end user, you have a great opportunity to ask your customers what they like, what they can't find, and why they shop with you. Not that they'll all give you the same answer, but you should be able to identify some trends.

Problem, alternatives, distribution, and solution

What problem are you solving for your customer? Is she looking for meat from animals that have been raised humanely, or

vegetables without pesticide residues, or just interested in seeing her neighbors and your smiling face every Tuesday afternoon?

It is hard to compete with the convenience of a grocery store, especially now that they are delivering straight to the customer's door. And organic is pretty easy to come by now in the supermarket. But if your customer is interested in freshness, and flavor, and getting to know the person that grows their food, then you still have some leverage. They could grow the food themselves, of course, or possibly get it from another farm, of course, but that's where you want to sell yourself as the best solution.

Benefit, advantage, and message

Once you have some idea how you solve your customer's problem, you can start developing a specific message to reach your customer. If your customer is interested in pesticide-free produce, "Fresh-Picked in Eutaw, Alabama" won't tell them much, but it is appealing if she wants something that hasn't been sitting in a cooler for a week or two.

You probably have different groups of customers, so the market at the hospital may get a slightly different message than the Instagram feed you set up for your millennial customers. And speaking of Instagram, your message isn't just words.

A picture of a happy pig in a pasture or sunrise veggie harvest can convey a wealth of information about what you raise and how, and why your product is the best option.

Revenue, startup needs, and costs

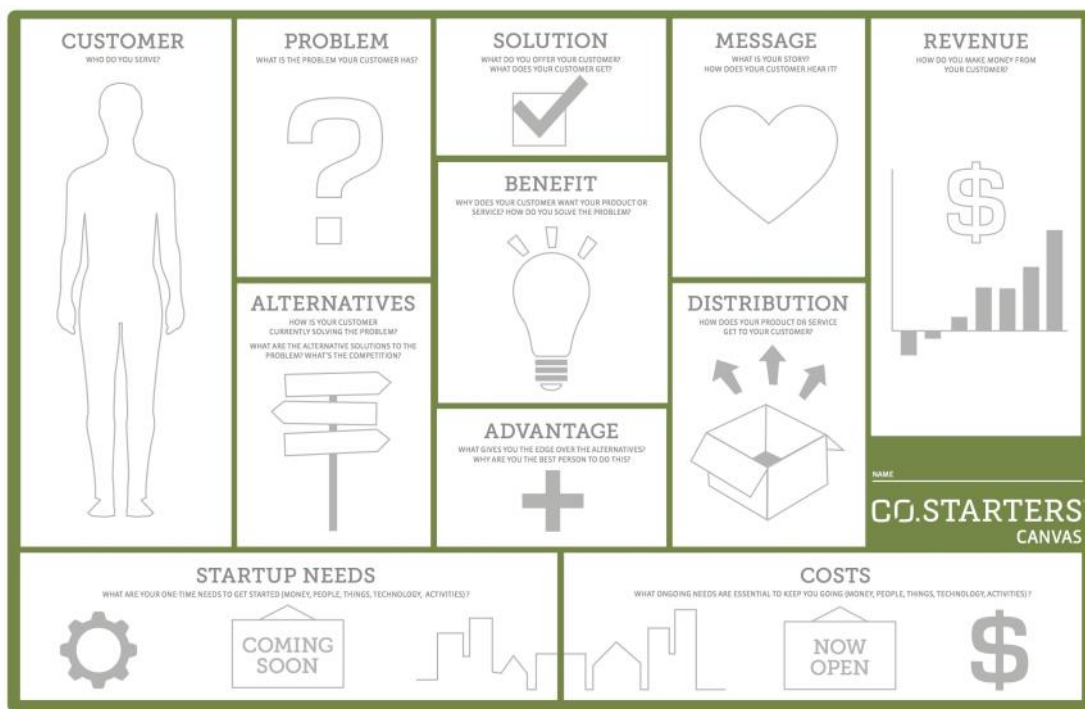
Of course, it's important to do the math. How much do you expect to make? Can you produce and sell enough, minus expenses, and realistically end up with what you're hoping for? How much will it cost to get things off the ground? Do you need a \$250,000 processing facility, or just a canopy, table, and chalkboard to go to the farmers market? Do you need a hoe or a new green tractor?

Keep in mind there are costs to get started, and then the ongoing costs of doing business. Plus you'll want to look at fixed costs, which you'll have every month no matter whether you sell anything or not (loan payments, basic utilities, feed), and variable costs that correspond to your production and sales levels (market fees and supplies, water bills, seeds).

Okay, so the truth is, this does not fit on a sticky note. I recommend a spreadsheet or at least paper, a calculator, and a pencil with a good eraser, and probably a few other sets of eyes.

If you're working with a non-profit, most of the concepts above still work. For

(Continued on page 9)



CANVAS (CONT'D)

(Continued from page 8)

your customer, you'll want to consider the clients that receive your services as well as the funders that pay the bills, and figure out how to make sure you address the needs of both.

Testing and refining your concept

Those are the eleven components on the CO.STARTERS canvas. Other canvases break things down differently, and you may find more space for building blocks like resources and partners on other versions. Whatever canvas you end up using, the overall idea is the same.

Once you've worked through your concept, but before you go out and plant that 50 acres of kohlrabi, you'll want to get some feedback. One way is to start asking potential customers if they would buy your product. Don't be shy! If you find that there are just not that many people eating that much kohlrabi slaw, or that they will not pay \$4 for a bulb because the organic

kohlrabi farm down the road sells it for way less, or that no one likes kohlrabi but they are desperately looking for fennel, you can head back to the canvas, crumple up your sticky notes and revise.

Once you have a product and system that has potential customers and seems to work on paper, figure out what your minimum viable product would be. Hopefully someone already has told you, "Start small." If not, let me be the first. Can you rent or borrow some land and equipment and plant a small crop the first year? Can you process chickens on the farm or take them somewhere not too far before you build that expensive facility? I prefer to lose a little money while figuring things out rather than losing a lot. And there are a lot of things to figure out!

A Business Model Canvas assumes that your product itself is doable. Farmers make things look a lot easier than they are, so please start off by seeing if you can actually raise the product. Factors like weather, pests, labor, and supply from other farmers can really ruin a good idea.

More planning fun

If you like the Business Model Canvas, check out other planning resources like the One-Page Business Plan and SWOT analysis (just search online or ask me for directions). And if you really do want to write a business plan, the University of Minnesota's AGPLAN helps you develop a plan online. There are plenty of other options out there, these are just a few.

And sometimes it's nice to work on your plan with a group of other entrepreneurs as a class. My favorite option, CO.STARTERS (costarters.co), is offered through the Shoals Chamber of Commerce, REV Birmingham, and nearby in Chattanooga, TN, and Rome, GA. Other programs like Kauffman FastTrac (fasttrac.org) also provide opportunities to sort through your business with a small group and trained facilitator.

Studies show that if you write down a goal, you are significantly more likely to accomplish it. Now's the time to get started!



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NATIONAL YOUNG FARMER SURVEY RELEASES RESULTS

According to the 2017 National Young Farmer Survey, America's new generation of young farmers expect to overcome major barriers to their success in agriculture, including access to land, affordable health care, and mounting student loan debt; but success will require deliberate policy change at all levels of government. The survey was conducted by the National Young Farmers Coalition (NYFC) in partnership with Dr. Kathleen Merrigan, Executive Director of Sustainability at George Washington University and former U.S. Deputy Secretary of Agriculture.

"The time is now for our country to help young farmers defy the odds, preserve farming as a livelihood, and revitalize our nation's rural economy," said Lindsey Lusher Shute, Executive Director and Co-founder of NYFC. "This report proves that there are thousands of young people ready to build new farms in the United States, but we've got to do our part and make sure that they will succeed."

The survey, conducted with 94 partner organizations, collected data from 3,517 current, former, and aspiring U.S. farmers under 40 years of age. The top challenge cited by young farmers is land access, particularly finding and affording land on a farm income. It is also the main reason why farmers quit farming and why aspiring farmers haven't yet started.

A ground-breaking survey of young farmers and ranchers

"America desperately needs young people to repopulate our farm and ranch lands. This survey reveals the daunting

challenges they face. As policymakers sit down to write our next farm bill, I hope they pay attention to these survey findings," said Dr. Merrigan. "If nothing more is done to help transition young people into American agriculture, we will be importing all our food."

NYFC reports that young farmers surveyed are capitalizing on the demand for local food by selling directly to consumers and growing a diversity of crops and livestock. The survey also indicates a generation of producers strongly committed to environmental stewardship, with 75% of current young farmers describing their practices as "sustainable," and 63% describing their farming as "organic," though many of them have not sought certification.

Like their millennial counterparts, young farmers surveyed by NYFC were highly educated and increasingly racially diverse, and despite challenges and relatively low income, the survey found high optimism: 63% of respondents said they are making or eventually would make sufficient income to meet their life goals.

"Things are changing in American agriculture and our perceptions and policies need to keep pace," said Dr. Merrigan. "This survey reveals that it's no longer Old MacDonald of storybook fame. Rather, it's Ms. MacDonald, a college graduate who didn't grow up on the farm and considers her farming practices to be sustainable or organic."

How lawmakers can help young farmers

Considering these findings, NYFC calls on lawmakers to enact the "Young Farmer Agenda," a slate of policy reforms based on survey findings which includes: addressing



YOUNG FARMER TOP CHALLENGES



youngfarmers.org

land access and affordability; helping young farmers manage student debt; increasing the skilled agricultural workforce; enabling farmers to invest in on-farm conservation; improving credit, savings, and risk management opportunities for young farmers; and addressing racial inequity among farmers. (See full policy recommendations at <http://www.youngfarmers.org/policyplatform/>.)

Young farmers need consumer, community, and business support

"Ensuring the success of our nation's newest farmers and ranchers requires deliberate policy change at all levels of government," said Shute. "It also demands the support of every stakeholder—individuals, communities, and businesses."

NYFC calls on supporters to act: help grow your local food economy; rent or sell farmland to young and beginning farmers; enable your business to be part of the solution; and join NYFC to add your voice to the young farmer movement.

The full survey, including the executive summary, charts, policy recommendations, and stakeholder action steps, is available at <http://www.youngfarmers.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/NYFC-Report-2017.pdf>.

The above links and more at <http://www.youngfarmers.org/survey2017/>.

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MEMBERSHIP LEVEL

Donations and annual dues are tax-deductible.

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_____ Business or Organization: \$200

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\$_____ **TOTAL enclosed**

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Not sure if you need to renew? Check your address label to see when your membership expires.

Please mail checks made out to ASAN to:
PO Box 2533, Birmingham, AL 35202.

UPCOMING EVENTS

DETAILS AT WWW.ASANONLINE.ORG/EVENTS

Dec 8-9 – Nauvoo

ASAN Food & Farm Forum

January 21-22 — Atlanta, GA

Southeastern Soil Summit,

February 16-17 — Augusta, GA

Georgia Organics Conference

January 17-20 – Chattanooga, TN

Southern SAWG Conference

February 3— Clanton

Alabama Beekeepers Symposium

February 17—Jemison

Tree Fruits in the Home Garden Workshop

January 26 — Mobile
Green Coast Council Sustainability Summit

February 14 (tentative) —
West Georgia Farmers Cooperative Small Farm Conference

March 16-18 — Montgomery
Alabama Water Rally

January 27—Jemison
Small Fruits in the Home Garden Workshop

February 15-16 — Tuskegee
126th Annual Tuskegee Farmers Conference

March 24—Jemison
Citrus in the Home Garden Workshop

We include "News From Your Neighbors", "Classifieds and Resources" and "Upcoming Events" on page 10-11 of every newsletter, where we feature updates both personal and professional, on ASAN members and friends: anything from a new farm, to a new baby.

These listings make existing resources known to others, and help spread the word for those looking to connect. Connecting people in this, the barest-bones of ways, we hope to provide a jumping-off point for folks to connect on their own in deeper ways.

Submissions are open to anyone. Have something you want us to publish? Send it to alice@asanonline.org or (256) 743-0742.

Submit your event to our calendar!

Email alice@asanonline.org, and be sure to include:

- Name of event
- Host group and contact info
- Location (including full address)
- Date/time
- Price
- Link to event website, Facebook event page, and/or flyer, if there is one.
- Short (3-4 sentences) description of the event written in "third person" (i.e. "XYZ Club invites you to join them for their annual meeting" vs "join us for our annual meeting")
- Send details in the body of the email, not simply a flyer or attachment. We can link to something already online but can't upload or transcribe a PDF flyer.

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along with the form on page 11! **Thank you for supporting ASAN!**