



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Natural Resources Conservation Service

Maine

Conservation Innovation Grant



Innovative Strategies for Teaching Conservation Practices to Low Literacy, Limited Resource Beginning Farmers

Grantee Name: Cultivating Community

Agreement Number: 69-1218-13-6

Period Covered: Sept. 2013-Aug. 2015

Funded Amount: \$74,275

Innovation: Integrate implementation of Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) contracts with appropriate teaching methods to build knowledge and skills of participants with regards to soil conservation practices. This in turn will also strengthen the viability of their agricultural businesses. Assist immigrant and refugee farmers to build successful farm businesses consistent with their culture, lifestyle aspirations, and individual goals, that utilize sustainable conservation practices.

Focus: Improve soil health and environmental quality in southern and central Maine by supporting low literacy, limited resource farmers in adopting appropriate conservation approaches and technologies.



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Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) are competitive grants that stimulate the development and adoption of innovative approaches and technologies for conservation on agricultural lands

From 2013 to 2015 the project worked with 28 producers, 23 of whom were Somali-Bantu, and used various teaching methods to build the new farmers' skills and knowledge about soil conservation practices.



These practices at the New American Sustainable Agriculture Project farm in Lisbon included: mulching; drip irrigation; cover crops; crop rotation; and integrated pest management. The group of producers covered a range of educational levels, from university-level training to no formal education. Most had limited English proficiency, but had previously farmed in their countries of origin.

The initial goal was to provide the farmers 80 hours of technical farming assistance annually, but because the team from Cultivating Community relied more on individualized assistance than workshops, they actually exceeded that goal and more than doubled the number of hours of technical assistance each year.

RATES OF PRACTICE ADOPTION BY FARMERS UNDER GRANT

PRACTICE	2014	2015
Mulching	72%	65%
Drip Irrigation	63%	94%
Cover Crop	63%	72%
Crop Rotation	82%	92%
Integrated Pest Management	80%	88%