Presentation: Linking farmers to resources on the path to establishment (one non-profit’s story)
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The Quote: Farm linking is a spectrum of attitudes, techniques, and tools that promote sharing, collaboration, aggregation, ad hocracy, and a host of other newly-enabled types of social cooperation. (stolen "The New Socialism," Wired, June 2009.)

The Meaning: There’s a lot going on in "farm linking" already. The goal is not to develop grant-limited programs that recreate what is already on the market. Rather, facilitate access to market resources in a business model that works.

North Carolina Farm Transition Network’s Mission: "To assist experienced and aspiring farmers in the effective transition of farm businesses." (with tagline: Partnering to serve farmers in transition)

Founding environment/conditions: Serendipity and self-preservation
- Founding team (led by NC Farm Bureau) represented top agriculture organizations representing statewide networks (infrastructure), but representatives themselves weren’t farmers or farm owners State-level funding resources: Master Tobacco Settlement (two grant funds)
- Founded during the 2004 Tobacco Buyout (rural-scape production "transition")
- Hired of a director without a farming background who was more interested in legal aspects of farm transition (which would heavily influence direction of programming)
- Growing interest in "farmland preservation" (the new buzzword)
- Growing interest in Voluntary Agriculture Districts (delivery infrastructure)

Formation of NCFTN: "I know a lot of farmers who have no one to farm their land."
- Conduct succession planning survey
- Farm estate planning education
- Develop resource website
- Develop mentor program
- Develop apprentice program
- Develop professional referral program

Strategic Work Plan: Sustainable planning or cop out?
- Chicken Factor: Pursue land links or pursue activities that could draw in sustained funding? (RMA, SRRMEC, etc.)
- Do what can be accomplished, that’s easy to grasp (ie. success programs, website, survey)
- Continue and develop education campaign and infrastructure to reach landowners and established farmers
• Use infrastructure to help farm owners plan for the future, but identify those willing to grant access to resources (skills, equipment, land)
• What platform for resources? How make sense of multiple platforms?
• Target professional advisers to serve landowners and farm families (program revenue)
• Three prong approach: Planning the Future of Your Farm, the Rural Lands and Agribusiness Update, and Landlink, on www.ncftn.org.

Five-Year Observations: Through the dim lens of non-profit subjectivity
• Intergenerational transfers of assets are taking place, over extended periods of time between individuals with established relationships (longer than a funding cycle)
• There is an active marketplace of on-farm training that is producing next generation farmers at all scale levels
• There is land available for farming, but requires younger farmers to pioneer into rural areas
• Land does not, and has not, paid for itself with agricultural production; land long in production can pay for costs of land new in production
• Transferring land quickly is expensive for at least one, if not both, buyer and seller (transferring wealth has tax consequences)
• There are a lot of families who want to "keep the farm" (or at least members of those families) and are willing to expose themselves to ideas that will help them
• Keeping land in agricultural production requires a strong non-economic personal value system of the owner
• The system for reaching landowners is still vertically integrated, posing challenges to collaboration. Key is creating a credit or policy or sale of product win for the local coordinator of programs.

The Challenge: How does an organization capture enough of the "farm path" to be economically relevant? (ie. what is the business model)

The Solution: Develop low cost platform to provide actual resource opportunity linking through established landowner/farmer outreach and education infrastructure.

The Proposal: THE FARM PATH COLLABORATIVE (BFRDP application)
• Continue pressure on landowner and established farmer base with varying levels of education programming (Keep the Farm general updates, Planning the Future of Your Farm intensive planning, special topics [ie. new farmer leasing])
• Continue to build web and print resources (use in education programming) to address gaps in beginning farmer and landowner education
• Use landowner/farmer education to build opportunity marketplace (land and skills linking)
• Increase access for landowners and farmers to professional advice and services (continuing education programming)
• Strive to maintain leadership role in coordinating delivery of farm path resources through technology, continued product and education format development