

Zipparo Poster Abstract
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Cultivating the Next Generation of Vermont Farmers
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This program reflection illustrates the development, implementation, and future of Vermont's newest and most innovative youth farm business program, the Vermont Youth Agricultural Individual Account Program (Youth Ag IDA). By demonstrating the program's philosophical approach, its components, and impacts on participants, we will prove that the program is a crucial part of preparing the next generation of Vermont's farmers, helping secure the state's agricultural future. The UVM Center for Sustainable Agriculture, which is part of UVM Extension, and nine national partners, launched two-year Agricultural IDA pilots throughout the country, as part of a community of learning. Funded through a USDA-NIFA Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development grant, the national partners established baseline data, with the goal that the program, originally seen in the Farm Bill, will someday receive federal funding. Vermont's project enabled youth who are engaged or interested in agriculture to explore the challenges and opportunities of managing their own commercial enterprises. Seventeen qualified youth farmers, age 13-21, built financial literacy, business equity and management skills by participating in the Youth Ag IDA program, the first of its kind in the United States. Differing from the other national pilots, in its age limits, our program developers saw a gap in farmer development in that age area. Now at the end of the program, using the skills they learned in the program, along with the cash match they earned, participants have launched their own farm businesses. This kind of early adoption of careful financial and business management allows young farmers to get off on the right foot, as they move into a career in agriculture. As farmers retire in the state, this program will ensure that there is a well-trained force of next generation Vermont farmers.