

Heirloom Institute for Agricultural Entrepreneurship provides entrepreneurial alternatives to individuals in underserved populations through training, education, mentorship, networking, and support in development of sustainable agriculture and agriculture-related enterprise. We combine traditional (heirloom) agricultural know-how with innovative methods and technologies to assist individuals in the target populations to achieve economic stability and to promote the development of sustainable agricultural practices.

Summary of Need and Opportunity for Our Programs:

The rural and semi-rural character of Eastern Connecticut is threatened by multiple factors. Most prominently, the region has not fully recovered from the economic crisis of 2007. Vacant lots, empty commercial buildings, and derelict properties dot the landscape of many towns and the surrounding land areas. The region may be ripe for takeover by land developers, but large-scale development threatens to irreversibly change the rural character that is Eastern Connecticut's most valuable asset. At the same time there are significant opportunities that demonstrate positive trends on which to capitalize. 2016 USDA Census of Agriculture lists New England as one of the most prominent areas in the country for a growing local food movement. In 2019, the Connecticut State legislature introduced SB 1063 to establish a task force to improve farmland availability for new farmers.

The Heirloom Institute addresses these needs and opportunities by encouraging entrepreneurial development in the agricultural sector.

Our primary goals are:

- Maintain and develop the agricultural heritage of New England
- Recover and preserve agricultural traditions by pairing them with new agricultural methods and technologies
- Develop opportunities for emerging agricultural entrepreneurs
- Attract the growing class of senior entrepreneurs to agricultural opportunities
- Promote the value of community
- Contribute to the local economy

Our aim is to promote agricultural opportunities in Eastern Connecticut by addressing both the needs of our target populations (described below) and the economic opportunities of the region while addressing the sustainability of the traditional agricultural character of the region.

The primary groups we serve are:

- **Mature Entrepreneurs**—The demographic in the US with the greatest number of entrepreneurs is the 55-64 age group. Many of these individuals become entrepreneurs in their so-called Golden Years instead of retiring. Some of them are pursuing a life-long dream to own their own businesses, but the vast majority want an alternate income to augment retirement or are unable to retire because they lack adequate retirement funds. Individuals in this age group are increasingly interested in lifestyles that include connection to community and to the land. Training in agricultural entrepreneurship is an increasingly attractive option that is not often recognized by initiatives that target, instead, younger, emerging entrepreneurs.

- **Emerging Agricultural Entrepreneurs**—Although they are a smaller percentage of the entrepreneurial class, we work with young entrepreneurs whose interests may lie in agriculture. Many millennials who might otherwise choose a farming career, however, lack the money and experience to successfully transition to farming and agriculture as a business venture. We provide training, networking, and resources for finding opportunities, matching emerging entrepreneurs to experienced individuals and institutions, and provide workshops and other training services. Because many young people are unaware of these opportunities, we actively seek young entrepreneurs interested in developing start-ups in agriculture and agriculture-related businesses.
- **Transitioning Seniors**—As seniors live increasingly longer, they often outlive their spouses, friends, and relatives. A growing movement in the US is for single seniors to co-locate with one or more other senior citizens in residential cooperatives. Although in its initial stages, this trend is likely to become increasingly attractive to the active elderly. These self-designed, self-operated retirement collectives are ideally suited for semi-rural areas of New England, where proximity to towns and cities means that farm dwellers still have access to needed services and amenities.
- **Urban-rural agricultural enthusiasts**—We encourage and support development of urban/municipal gardening as a means of promoting agricultural enterprise and the values of community.

Heirloom Entrepreneurial Programs

Senior/Youth Learning Groups—Onsite learning groups combine mature adults and young emerging entrepreneurs in order to achieve our central aim of for the exchange of traditional knowledge and skills coupled with new-cutting edge innovations on a topic by topic basis. We aim to enhance community interaction and mentoring opportunities between these two demographic groups.

Workshops and Training – Active outreach to identify, foster, and support both senior and emerging entrepreneurs. We provide support resources, training and technical assistance in startup ventures, networking opportunities, and learning.

Art and Urban Gardens—We research successful community garden models that incorporate public art and performance space for replication locally. We provide expertise and facilitation in developing those models for Eastern Connecticut

Wellness Cultivation – Workshops and seminars by licensed wellness practitioners support the connection between healthy living and agricultural lifestyle, capitalizing, especially, on the burgeoning local food movement. Our wellness program provides information on self-care to support healthcare regimens for seniors and youth, two demographic groups with the least access to regular care.

Internships – We have a commitment from UConn’s program in arts administration to provide interns for art and agriculture programs, such as the urban gardens, and for outreach to our target populations.

Key Personnel:

Bruce Hoppe, Director

Cheryl Verseau, Licensed Wellness Practitioner

DeVereaux Consulting, LLC: We have engaged the services of DeVereaux Consulting to provide expertise in agricultural and heritage entrepreneurship. Constance DeVereaux, principal manager, served as a Colorado State heritage and agriculture mentor, and has worked extensively in cultural and creative district development in the US and internationally.