



MINNESOTA STATE

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March 11, 2019

Legislative Reference Library
645 State Office Building
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Dear Sir or Madam,

Enclosed please find two hard copies of a report required by Minnesota Statutes § 2015 Session Law, Chapter 69, Article 1, Sec. 4, Subd. 3 concerning Minnesota State student veterans to agriculture pilot program. Copies of this report, "*Veterans to Agriculture Pilot Program*," were delivered to Representative Connie Bernardy, Chair of Higher Education Finance and Policy Division Committee; Senator Paul Anderson, Chair of Higher Education Finance & Policy Committee; Representative Cheryl Youakim, Chair of Education Policy Committee; Senator Carla Nelson, Chair of E-12 Finance and Policy Committee; Representative Jeanne Poppe, Chair of Agriculture and Food Finance & Policy Committee; and Senator Torrey Westrom, Chair of Agriculture, Rural Development and Housing Finance Committee.

Please contact me, mary.rothchild@minnstate.edu if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Mary Rothchild, Senior System Director for Workforce Development

c: Ron Anderson, Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs
Melissa Fahning, Government Relations





March 11, 2019

Academic and Student Affairs

Veterans to Agriculture Pilot Program

Minnesota State

Veterans to Agriculture Pilot Program

2015 Session Law Chapter 69, Article 1 Section 4, Subdivision 3 established a pilot program at South Central College, North Mankato, to support a veterans to agriculture program. The legislation reads:

“The veterans to agriculture pilot program shall be designed to facilitate the entrance of military veterans into careers related to agriculture and food production, processing, and distribution through intensive, four to eight week academic training in relevant fields of study, job development programs and outreach to potential employers, and appropriate career-building skills designed to assist returning veterans in entering the civilian workforce. Upon successful completion, a student shall be awarded a certificate of completion or another appropriate credit.”

The legislation was reauthorized with an additional appropriation of \$175,000 in fiscal year 2018 and \$175,000 in fiscal year 2019. This report is a synthesis of 2018 activities.

Background: Need to replace retiring farmers

The Minnesota State Demographic Center identified the average age of Minnesota farmers to be 55 years of age based in the 2012 agriculture census. The Center also identified a shift to older farmers as principal business operators. The 2012 census reported 8,880 principal operators age 75 or older and an average age of 57 years. There are currently 74,542 farms with 60,000 owned or operated by older individuals (over 80 percent).

The 2014 farm bill authorized USDA to establish a Military Veterans Agricultural Liaison to serve as a resource in assisting veterans and potential veteran farmers in participating in agricultural programs. Many of the USDA programs support individuals with respect to farm or ranch businesses. The Congressional Research Service has identified several resources to assist beginning farmers and ranchers that are veterans and other underserved groups with priority funding and set-aside funding for veterans.

Investigation of Employment Needs in Agriculture in Minnesota

In the fall of 2015, South Central College’s department of agriculture surveyed the employment needs of thirty-three businesses in the region in the short term (1 year) and in the long term (within the 5 years). The regional survey reflected 375 employment opportunities in short term and 663 employment opportunities in five years. The



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employment opportunities were represented in the following agriculture career pathways: Agribusiness Office and Administration, Agricultural Mechanical Systems, Plant Systems and Animal Systems.

Industry partner focus groups were surveyed on employment needs, challenges for employment, and opportunities to employ veterans in their respective companies. Industry partners provided inputs and services to farmers in Minnesota and were selected based on a willingness to work with hiring veterans in their companies. Employers identified four core principles for successful employment in agriculture and related fields: (1) safe operation of equipment, (2) basic agronomy or livestock knowledge, (3) agricultural communication and terminology, and (4) business operation procedures.

Each fall since 2015, events have been hosted to encourage employment in agribusiness with over 60 representatives from agribusiness organizations. Each year, employers have indicated a growing need to support knowledge of and employment in the agriculture sector. Employers cite anticipated retirements, a shrinking population in rural areas, and a concern about institutional knowledge and experience leaving the industry as trends. They appreciate the opportunity to partner with education to continue messaging the need to grow a talented, diverse and skilled workforce in agriculture.

According to the Minnesota Department of Agriculture's 2018 Annual Bulletin, "Minnesota's farm and food sector has always been a powerful economic engine. Our farmers, and agricultural production and processing industries generate over \$112 billion annually in total economic impact and support more than 431,000 jobs."

Findings and Accomplishments

Pursuant to the legislation, South Central College and partners in the Southern Agricultural Center of Excellence have completed the following curriculum and program delivery work:

Development of three certificates for entry into agriculture careers:

- Agribusiness  Agronomy Certificate - providing support, input and logistics in agriculture.
- Farm Business Management (FBM)  Certificate - providing a beginning farmer the education and support to establish his/her farming enterprise and business structure.
- Sustainable Micro Farming Certificate  Certificate - hands on - hands in the soil and producing greens and vegetables for local markets and how to establish this form of entrepreneur business in agriculture.



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South Central College has shared FBM  Certificate with eight colleges in Minnesota State that provide Farm Business Management (FBM) instruction. The FBM curriculum is a statewide curriculum available to all of Minnesota's FBM instructors. The certificate has been approved by each respective college through a curriculum committee and through the Minnesota State system office. The curriculum has also received approval from Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs.

The following activities have been undertaken to reach veterans and to encourage employment or business ownership in agriculture:

- Continued outreach to 32 County veteran service officers in Southern Minnesota to promote the certificate programs. Service officers were also invited to agriculture career fairs along with veteran organizations.
- Worked with Southern Minnesota Office of Minnesota Assistance Council for Veterans (MACV) case workers on short term training needs of individuals and arranged for a representative of MACV to serve on Minnesota State's Southern Agricultural Center of Excellence advisory committee.
- Worked with Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) veteran representatives with employment opportunities in rural Minnesota. DEED has reported that agriculture is a rapidly expanding industry statewide – with over 25 percent growth in jobs in the agriculture sector.
- Coordinated with Defense Fellow – Office of Congressman Tim Walz to focus on veterans outreach program at USDA and worked with Congressman Tim Waltz field staff on rural Minnesota employment opportunities for veterans.
- Researched public and private educational offerings (for credit and non-credit short term training) to assist veterans in agriculture and related business.
- Arranged permission to use "AgWarriors" logo for promotion of veterans to agriculture on the website AgCareers.com

Veterans to Agriculture – progress 2017 - 2018

Education:

- Veterans to Agriculture Toolbox has been provided to interested colleges and universities.
- Military courses and occupations have been reviewed for alignment to Agriculture VETS*, the Veterans Education Transfer System.
- A sustainable micro farming course was offered in spring 2018 (and in 2019).



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- FBM fall professional development retreat in Saint Cloud provided an update for all eight colleges and faculty in attendance on program status and encouragement to seek support of veterans. In addition, we are seeking self-reporting of veteran status for inclusion in Farm Business Management Education 2018 annual report.
- Promoted veteran education at the post-secondary summit of Agriculture, Food & Natural Resources faculty with twelve Minnesota State colleges.
- The eight Minnesota State colleges offering Farm Business Management (FBM) are promoting awareness for veterans interested in agriculture. The FBM colleges are: Alexandria, Central Lakes, Minnesota West, Northland, Riverland, Ridgewater, South Central, and St. Cloud Technical and Community College. Annual FBM advisory meeting included awareness to industry and college representatives.
- South Central College is constructing a high-tunnel greenhouse to provide a new learning environment for students.
- Supported Minnesota West Community & Technical College with financial support to host a seminar in grain marketing and farm transition planning. Textbook support for veteran farmers attending the seminar.

Promotion and Awareness

- In January 2018 (and 2019) a promotion of agriculture careers to veterans was broadcast on 19 radio stations (fifty 30 second messages) in the areas of Ada, Albany, Alexandria, Benson, Crookston, Faribault, Fergus Falls, Little Falls, Luverne, Mankato, Marshall, Morris, New Ulm, Pipestone, Rochester, Roseau, Thief River Falls, Wadena and Willmar.
- Vets to agriculture was included in a special section sponsored by Southern Minnesota Media, called Southern MN Century Strong, in October 2018. The ad was a full page for veteran assistance in agriculture (20,000 circulation).
- Annual Report for FBM – 3,900 publications distributed to 1,420 farmers in southern Minnesota; promoted AgSPARK, Ag Warriors, and Veterans to Agriculture.
- AgSPARK business card promotion to Minnesota State veteran service locations and to local businesses.
- Coordinated promotion of “Beyond the Yellow Ribbon” with Minnesota Association of Agricultural Educators at two “Veterans Stand Down” events in southern Minnesota.



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Challenges for Pilot Project: Possible future activities to support veterans

- There is currently no approved non-credit short term training in Minnesota recognized by a college or Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA). Approval process in each college is separate and can require significant time. In addition, new programs require Minnesota State system office approval and MDVA approval to allow individuals to use their educational benefits
- It is challenging to promote agriculture to veterans due to limited contact information and needed support from county veteran service officers for outreach. Specifically, identifying individuals for the  Program has been challenging.
- There is a future opportunity to develop programs in urban agriculture that are credit based.

Logos:

