

CPA Info #342

March 2025

Resources for Beginning Farmers in Tennesseeⁱ

This fact sheet provides a list of resources that are available to beginning farmers in Tennessee and the Extension agents and specialists who serve them. These resources are useful in planning considerations when selecting enterprises, evaluating costs and returns, understanding regulations, developing a business plan, and identifying funding opportunities.

Resources include websites that offer educational information about programs designed to assist farmers, such as those provided by the University of Tennessee and Tennessee State University Extension, Tennessee Department of Agriculture, USDA, Farmer Veteran Coalition of TN, Tennessee Farm Link, and others. These resources also include information about the agricultural sales and use tax exemption in Tennessee, production budgets for various crop and livestock enterprises, and other tools used in decision making.

The business planning links are to factsheets from the University of Tennessee Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics, developed January 2023.

Some of these resources were developed specifically for Tennessee farmers, and others are intended for use by farmers in all states. While this list is not intended to be all-inclusive, these resources have been proven to be useful to Extension agents and specialists working with beginning farmers in Tennessee.

The number of new farmers and ranchers over the age of 35, as well as the amount of acreage in these farms, continue to rise for new farmers and ranchers in Tennessee, according to the 2022 Census of Agriculture. This will help to ensure a “new generation” of beginning farmers and ranchers – regardless of age or production choice – and this could prove to be especially important to the continuation of agricultural production in the United States.

Noting the 2022 Census of Agriculture, the following information can be gained concerning new and beginning farmers, defined by USDA as someone who has not operated a farm or ranch, has operated a farm or ranch for not more than ten years, and meets such other criteria as the

Secretary of Agriculture may establish.¹ The number of producers counted as new and beginning farmers in Tennessee in 2022 totaled 31,696, rising by 743 from the 2017 figure of 30,953. The percentage of male producers is 61%, and females are 39%. Those whose primary occupation is farming is 26%. The average age of a new and beginning farmer is 48.2 years, up slightly from the 2017 age of 47.4 years. A breakdown of the age groups is as follows:

- Under 25 years of age : 5.60%
- 25 – 34 years of age : 15.00%
- 35 – 44 years of age : 21.00%
- 45 – 54 years of age : 21.50%
- 55 – 64 years of age : 22.50%
- 65 – 74 years of age : 11.40%
- 75 years of age plus : 3.00%

New and beginning farmers who served in the military are 9.60%.

This publication aims to provide a list of resources for beginning farmers in Tennessee and the Extension agents and specialists working with them. It should be noted that the educational information provided at these websites should serve as a starting point since each farmer has a unique set of resources, challenges, and opportunities that should be considered. This fact sheet will provide information that will give relevant, appropriate, and timely materials to those interested in starting a farm.

University of Tennessee/Tennessee State University Resources

- University of Tennessee Extension - UT Extension helps Tennesseans to improve their quality of life and solve problems through the application of research and evidenced-based knowledge about agriculture and natural resources, family and consumer sciences, 4-H youth development, and community development. Extension offices in every Tennessee County. <https://utextension.tennessee.edu/>
- Tennessee State University Extension - Tennessee State University's College of Agriculture, Human and Natural Sciences (TSU/CAHNS) is a federal, state and county partnership dedicated to developing knowledge in agriculture, human and natural resources, and the life sciences and to making that knowledge accessible to sustain and enhance the quality of human life. <http://www.tnstate.edu/extension/>
- Center for Profitable Agriculture - The Center for Profitable Agriculture provides educational programming and technical assistance to Tennessee farmers interested in

¹ "USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture," <https://www.nifa.usda.gov/grants/programs/beginning-farmer-rancher-development-program-bfrdp> (accessed July 12, 2023).

adding or expanding a value-added enterprise to improve farm income. Evaluating the costs of starting a new enterprise, navigating regulatory issues, and identifying a potential market are some of the many challenges farmers may face when considering a value-added enterprise. <https://cpa.tennessee.edu/>

- **Tennessee AgrAbility Project (TNAP)** - Since 1994, Tennessee AgrAbility educates and assists Tennessee's farmers, farm workers, and their family members who have disabilities so they can increase their independence and productivity. TNAP is a partnership with the University of Tennessee Extension, Tennessee State University Extension, TN Technology Access Programs, The STAR Center of Jackson, TN, and the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education and Communications. TNAP works with beginning farmer programs to help transition veterans with disabilities wanting to farm or remove barriers to farming with assistive technology, the Farmer Veteran Coalition of TN, the Homegrown by Heroes marketing program, and the TSU Tennessee New Farmer Academy. <https://agrability.tennessee.edu/>
- **UT Center of Farm Management** - The UT Center of Farm Management facilitates Extension, Teaching, and Research programs on farm financial management in Tennessee and across the Mid-South. The Center focuses on meeting the needs of Tennessee producers and enhancing long-term profitability and sustainability of agriculture enterprises in Tennessee. <https://farmmanagement.tennessee.edu/>
- **AgVOLs Veterans in Ag** - The Tennessee **AgVets Opportunities on FarmLand** (TN AgVOLs) Program is a partnership of TN agricultural service providers. The aim is to increase the participation of transitioning service members (TSM) and veterans in agriculture. Program activities will focus on connecting military personnel with disabilities and aspiring veteran beginning farmers with the technical assistance, education, financial support, and hands-on training needed to succeed at launching new or expanding existing agricultural businesses in TN rural communities. AgVOLs partner organizations include lead applicant non-profit Appalachian Resource Conservation & Development Council, The University of Tennessee (UTC&M, TN AgrAbility, UT Extension), TN State University's TN New Farmer Academy, Fort Campbell (the largest military installation in TN), Farmer Veteran Coalition of TN (FVC TN), TN Department of Ag Home Grown by Heroes, and USDA. <https://farmmanagement.tennessee.edu/agvols-veterans-in-ag/>
- **Tennessee New Farmer Academy** – Since 2014, the Tennessee New Farmer Academy has been a seven-month certificate program designed for those with an interest in becoming agricultural entrepreneurs. Ideal candidates for this program include those who are new to agriculture, those who wish to transition into agriculture from another field such as military service or private sector work, or those who are looking for a post-retirement opportunity. <http://www.tnstate.edu/extension/NFA.aspx>

- University of Tennessee Market Highlights - Tennessee Weekly Cattle Market Reports; Crop, Livestock, Milk Market Comments and Farmers Market Price Report.
<https://arec.tennessee.edu/extension/tennessee-market-highlights/>
- University of Tennessee Organic & Sustainable Crop Production - The purpose of the University of Tennessee Organic and Sustainable Crop Production Program is to involve more Tennessee farmers in organic production in order to increase farm income and to provide an alternative to keep the family farm in the family. Organic production has the potential to increase profits by reducing the use of off-farm inputs and providing consumers with locally grown, high-quality organic products in a rapidly growing market where the demand is greater than the supply. Our mission is to lead, inspire, discover, and advance organic and sustainable production locally and globally. <https://vegetables.tennessee.edu/organic-sustainable-crop-production/>
- University of Tennessee Extension Budgets - Field crops, livestock, forage, tobacco, and vegetable budgets. <https://arec.tennessee.edu/extension/budgets/>
- University of Tennessee Extension Decision Aid Tools – Tools include the Buy/Sell Margins Calculator, Fencing Budgets Calculator, Fertilizer Cost Calculator, Hay Cost Calculator, and other beneficial decision-aid tools.
<https://arec.tennessee.edu/extension/decision-aid-tools/>

Business Planning Links:

1. D197A Business Planning for Agricultural Operations
2. D197B Business Planning for Agricultural Operations: Business Description
3. D197C Business Planning for Agricultural Operations: Marketing Plan
4. D197D Business Planning for Agricultural Operations: Financial Plan
<https://arec.tennessee.edu/publication-series-planning-for-agricultural-operations/>

University of Kentucky Resources

- Center for Crop Diversification – The Center for Crop Diversification is a specialty-crops focused Cooperative Extension organization based out of the University of Kentucky College of Agriculture, Food and Environment. Even though the work is with the University of Kentucky, the impact of the work focuses throughout the region of surrounding states. <https://www.uky.edu/ccd/>
- Vegetable Budgets - These links direct the user to crop budgets for selected crops. Budgets may be printed and used as a starting point to create a crop budget specific for one's farm. Budgets are from the University of Kentucky Extension's Center for Crop Diversification. <https://ccd.uky.edu/resources/budgets>

- Custom Machinery Rates Applicable to Kentucky, 2022 – This site provides information on custom farm work rates by reporting an average final rate, 15% below average rate, and 30% above average rate. [Custom Machinery Rates Applicable to Kentucky \(uky.edu\)](#)
- Kentucky Center for Agriculture and Rural Development (KCARD) - The Kentucky Center for Agriculture and Rural Development (KCARD) is a non-profit organization established to facilitate agricultural and rural business development in Kentucky. We provide educational opportunities, technical assistance, and business support services to new and existing agribusinesses. KCARD works closely with the University of Kentucky but is not part of the university or the state department of agriculture. <https://www.kcard.info/>

USDA Resources

- United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) – Information on how to start a farm for Beginning Farmers and Ranchers. <https://www.farmers.gov/your-business/beginning-farmers>
- Tennessee Farm Service Agency (FSA) - FSA offers loans, loan guarantees, and other financial assistance to new and beginning farmers. Loan programs include Beginning Farmers and Ranchers Loans and the Microloans Program. <https://www.fsa.usda.gov/state-offices/tennessee>
- NRCS – Natural Resources Conservation Service in Tennessee - NRCS uses natural resources conservation programs to help people reduce soil erosion, enhance water supplies, improve water quality, increase wildlife habitat, and reduce damages caused by floods and other natural disasters. The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) helps with funding for high tunnels and on-farm energy initiatives. This incentive-based program provides technical and financial assistance for conservation systems. <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/conservation-basics/conservation-by-state/tennessee>
- Value Added Producer Grants - This grant program helps agricultural producers enter value-added activities related to the processing and/or marketing of new products. The goals of the program are to generate new products, create and expand marketing opportunities, and increase producer income. Applicants may receive priority if they are a beginning farmer or rancher, a socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher, a farmer or rancher cooperative, or if proposing a mid-tier value chain. The application period varies annually. <https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/value-added-producer-grants>

Tennessee Department of Agriculture Resources

- Tennessee Department of Agriculture – TDA offers educational information and several programs to assist agricultural businesses, producers, and forest landowners. <https://www.tn.gov/agriculture.html>

- Tennessee Department of Agriculture; Community Supported Agriculture – This site provides information about this unique marketing agreement between the producer and the customer. <https://www.tn.gov/agriculture/farms/produce-nursery/ag-farms-csa.html>
- Tennessee Department of Agriculture Business Development - This division of TDA provides information and services for prospective or expanding organizations. TDA will work with other state and local agencies to provide a central hub for businesses. TDA will also work with other available resources that will include the Center for Profitable Agriculture and Forest Products Center of the University of Tennessee. <https://www.tn.gov/agriculture/department/business-development-division.html>
- Tennessee Department of Agriculture Beginning Farmer Resources – A reference page of resources for those wishing to begin a farming operation. <https://www.tn.gov/agriculture/farms/beginning.html>
- Tennessee Agricultural Enhancement Program (TAEP) - TAEP was established in 2005 to provide cost-share funds to agricultural producers to make long-term investments in Tennessee and communities. Application A applies to projects involving livestock, such as equipment, genetics, working facility covers, livestock solutions, and grain storage. Application B applies to projects in producer diversification sectors—specifically agritourism, fruits and vegetables, honeybees, horticulture, and organic and value-added products. Application C applies to projects involving large-scale poultry growers. The application period in recent years has been October 1-7. <https://www.tn.gov/agriculture/farms/taep.html>
- Agriculture Enterprise Fund - This fund awards grants to those starting or expanding agricultural, food, and forestry businesses, nonprofits, local governments, and other entities in Tennessee or those whose project will be in Tennessee. Applicants must demonstrate a strong potential for impact on local farm income, access to markets, increased capacity, or agricultural innovation. <https://www.tn.gov/agriculture/businesses/aef.html>
- Specialty Crop Block Grants (SCBG) - This grant program is designed to enhance solely the competitiveness of specialty crops. These crops are defined as “fruits, vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, horticulture, and nursery crops, including floriculture.” Projects must directly impact multiple Tennessee producers. <https://www.tn.gov/agriculture/businesses/business-development/scbg.html>

Sustainable Agriculture Resources

- **ATTRA Sustainable Agriculture** - ATTRA is a program developed and managed by the National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT). Most of the funding for ATTRA is through a cooperative agreement with the United States Department of Agriculture's Rural Business-Cooperative Service. ATTRA is committed to providing high-value information on a host of topics and technical assistance to farmers, ranchers, Extension agents, educators, and others involved in sustainable agriculture in the United States. <https://attra.ncat.org/>
- **Southern SARE** – The goal of Southern SARE is to support the family farm, promote conservation, and strengthen communities through sustainable agriculture strategies. <https://southern.sare.org/>
- **Southern SARE Producer Grants** - Any farmer/rancher is eligible to apply for a Producer Grant to conduct a research project that will help develop sustainable production and marketing practices. A farmer may submit one proposal in a grant cycle. The website lists the maximum funding amount, eligible expenses, and how to apply: <https://www.southernsare.org/Grants/Grant-Programs/Producer-Grants>

Veteran Farmer Resources

- **Farmer Veteran Coalition** - The mission of the Farmer Veteran Coalition is to mobilize Veterans to feed America. Links to the Farmer Veteran Fellowship Fund, Homegrown by Heroes marketing logo, Farm Financing, Farming Resources, and Business Resources are available at the Farmer Veteran Coalition website. Farmer Veteran Coalition of TN is the tenth state chapter. <https://www.farmvetco.org/> Contact your regional representative of [the Farmer Veteran Coalition of Tennessee - Home \(fvctn.org\)](https://www.farmvetco.org/tenn/)
- **VETSA, Veterans Employed in Technology and Service in Agriculture** – A pilot program designed as a 12-month intensive experience with formal and informal coursework, immersive, hands-on participation in active farming and research projects or certification programs providing professional skills with a shorter time commitment. <https://www.agricenter.org/vetsa>
- **Farm Safe** – Farm Safe from Agricenter International is a free set of safety training courses designed to reduce the number of on-the-farm injuries. <https://farmsafe.org>

Additional Resources

- Appalachian RC&D “The Field School” – A beginning farmer training program that provides students with an overview of small-scale farming in East Tennessee. <https://arcd.org/field-school/>
- Tennessee Farm Link - The Tennessee Farm Link Program strives to help seekers of farmland and farmland owners find each other. <https://tnfarmlink.org/>
- North Carolina State University Beginning Farmer Program - Resources for beginning farmers and new producers on the business of farming and local food production. <https://localfood.ces.ncsu.edu/local-food-production/local-food-new-producers/>
- Cornell University Small Farms Program - General resources include videos, tutorials, and online courses for beginning farmers and small farm operators. <http://smallfarms.cornell.edu/resources/beginning-farmer/>
- Center for Farm Financial Management - This center is located at the University of Minnesota and provides educational programs and software tools that are practical, timely, and applicable to real-world situations. AgPlan provides a template for rural business owners who want to develop a business plan, and the Ag Risk Library contains thousands of documents, videos, and presentations on agriculture risk and farm management topics. <https://www.cffm.umn.edu/>
- farmdoc - This program from the University of Illinois began as an early effort to create a comprehensive information system for farm decision-making. Excel spreadsheet tools aid users in performing financial analysis, assessing investment decisions, and evaluating the impacts of various management decisions. <http://farmdoc.illinois.edu/>
- Agricultural Marketing Resource Center - A national information resource for producing and marketing value-added commodities and products. Information about energy, fiber, and food markets and industries with links to related resources are also provided. <https://www.agmrc.org/>
- Tennessee Fence Laws - Tennessee Farm Bureau Federation’s publication on “Tennessee Fence Laws” https://www.tnfarmbureau.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/TN-Fence-Laws-Bro_1.pdf
- Understanding Tennessee’s Greenbelt Law - This website provides information to those with questions about the Agricultural, Forest, and Open Space Land Act of 1976, the law commonly known as the “greenbelt.” <https://comptroller.tn.gov/boards/state-board-of-equalization/sboe-services/greenbelt8.html>

- **Agricultural Sales and Use Tax Exemption** - Certain items are exempt from sales and use tax when sold to holders of an Agricultural Sales and Use Tax Certificate of Exemption. Information about which agricultural items qualify for the exemption and how to get a Certificate of Exemption are available on this website.
<https://www.tn.gov/revenue/taxes/sales-and-use-tax/exemptions-certificates-credits/agricultural-exemption.html>
- **Cornell University Meat Price and Yield Calculator** - A pricing tool designed to allow farms to enter their own data and profit goals and then price their meat with the assurance of meeting those goals.
<http://calculator.meatsuite.com/>
- **Farmer & Rancher Education (Farm Credit)** - Farm Credit makes loans to farmers and supports rural communities and agriculture with credit and financial services.
<https://farmcredit.com/about>



Programs in agriculture and natural resources, 4-H youth development, family and consumer sciences, and resource development.
University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture, U.S. Department of Agriculture and county governments cooperating.
UT Extension provides equal opportunities in programs and employment.

ⁱ Written originally by Troy Dugger and Hal Pepper, Center for Profitable Agriculture, August 2019; Revised by Troy Dugger and Hal Pepper, May 2021; Recently Revised by Troy Dugger, Eileen Legault and Joetta T. White, Center for Profitable Agriculture and TN AgrAbility Project, July 2023; April 2024; March 2025.