Objective 2: Socially support soil health producers with peer working groups, mentoring, and technical assistance

Methods

The FARMS project began providing social support for participants by facilitating a formal mentorship network (Figure 1). In this network, six long-term practitioners were assigned an average of three mentees with less experience in soil health management. In addition, FARMS aided the development of the network by hosting more than 30 producer events, and assisting with 1-to-1 producer connections.

Analysis was conducted using (1) semi-structured interviews to explore barriers and motivating factors for adopting soil health practices, and (2) social network surveys to measure the development of producer social networks over time.

Results

Participant responses in semi-structured interviews revealed that producers found the social support in FARMS to be the most valuable aspect of the program. It provided opportunities to gain new farming knowledge, explore ideas with other producers, and foster comradery around farming-related challenges.

The vast majority (88%) of participants also reported that the social networking aspect of the program had a positive impact on the challenges and stress they face related to farming.

Support Network Growth

![Network Growth](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Baseline</th>
<th>After Year 1</th>
<th>End of FARMS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Density</td>
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<td>18%</td>
<td>29%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Isolates</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Additional Findings

**Friendship Network**

The Social Network Analysis for FARMS included an examination of several different types of networks (i.e. support, friendship, teachers, mentors, etc.).

Across the board, producer networks developed significantly over the course of the program, landing at dense core-periphery networks in 2023. This is a resilient network structure that shifts the burden of fulfilling network roles from one or two individuals to a core group of individuals.

**Motivating Factors**

Year 1 interviews with producers reported the top three reasons for why they chose to participate as (1) to learn about soil health, (2) for the financial incentive or economic value, and (3) for the mentorship and networking opportunity.

At the end of FARMS, **100 percent of participants reported they intend to continue soil health management**. Witnessing tangible soil health benefits on their farm was the highest reported reason for wanting to do so.

**Motivating Factors to Join FARMS**

- Learning about Soil Health / research...
- Financial incentive / economics
- Mentorship / be part of a group
- Aligned to mission / current plans and...
- Support to complete project
- Soil test
- Flexible / progressive programming...
- Help with a new practice
- Build reputation for stewardship
- Systems approach

![Download the full social evaluation report from the FARMS project here!](QR_CODE_URL)