A Qualitative Exploration of Entrepreneurial Learning among Small-Scale Farmers and Ranchers in Southern Arizona

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Abstract

Small-scale farmers who participate in local food enterprise (e.g., farmers’ markets) are challenged by a number of market uncertainties, which include unpredictable consumer purchasing patterns, seasonal variations in production capacities, and relatively small customer bases. Unfortunately, farmers turned local food entrepreneurs have limited access to business training and consequently rely overwhelmingly on experience and experimentation to guide their business decision-making. This article draws on qualitative data to explore how farmers who participate as vendors in Southern Arizona farmers’ markets develop entrepreneurial knowledge and skills. Recommendations for how Extension educators can enhance the entrepreneurial learning of small-scale farmers are provided.

Keywords: small-scale farmers, local food enterprise, entrepreneurial learning, farmers’ markets