

Building a Better Farm Bill with Business Technical Assistance

WHAT IS BUSINESS TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE (BTA)?

BTA covers a wide range of one-to-one services offered to farm and food business by non-profits, state agencies, private consultants, and extension services. Customized to meet the unique needs of individual businesses, these services provide coaching, skill development, and planning around financial and labor management, marketing and business strategies, farm transfer and succession, and access to land and capital. BTA services give businesses the skills and support needed to succeed long-term.

WHY IS IT NEEDED?

The onset of the pandemic and its associated market volatility, supply chain disruptions, and inflationary pressures have required of farm and food businesses an increasing degree of savvy and flexibility in order to remain viable. These recent challenges have also further illuminated the deep historic, systemic, and ongoing barriers facing farmers and food entrepreneurs of color, who have been structurally denied opportunities to access capital, land, technical support, USDA programs, and broader professional advancement for generations. Those who received BTA over the past few years were far more equipped to pivot their operations to access new markets, meet new demand, address customer and employee safety, and improve financial record keeping to access relief funding and inform decision-making.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF BTA?

- **Address historic inequities and help underserved farmers and food businesses thrive** – BTA helps socially disadvantaged entrepreneurs overcome systemic barriers. Diverse service providers offer culturally appropriate BTA to better support BIPOC, women, LGBTQIA+, new immigrants, and other underserved communities, particularly when funding is prioritized for service providers with a proven track record of working with these businesses.
- **Create jobs and strengthen rural communities** – BTA supports businesses from their early stages to maturity, helping them to thrive and create jobs in rural communities that need them. One state found that two years of BTA increased net income by 62% and improved annual growth in job creation.
- **Build a more resilient food system** – In addition to helping businesses become more nimble in the face of disruptions, increasing BTA will make the food system more resilient by supporting business development along local and regional supply chains.
- **Produce new opportunities for the next generation** – Some providers offer succession planning, as well as support for new and beginning producers in finding land, market opportunities, and access to capital, a critical role given that 40% of our farmland will change hands in the next twenty years.
- **Improve conservation outcomes** – Profitable businesses with longer-term plans are better able to invest in conservation practices that improve soil health, air and water quality, and increase resiliency to climate impacts like flooding and drought.

HOW CAN MORE BUSINESSES RECEIVE THE BTA NEEDED TO SUCCEED?

Currently, there is no single program dedicated to funding BTA for farm and food businesses. Thus, service providers generally rely on smaller, short-term sources of funding offered through a wide array of federal programs. *To build a more resilient food system, the next Farm Bill should include dedicated funding for BTA, delivered in the form of multi-year grants to public and NGO agricultural service providers with a history of providing this type of assistance and a track record of success, particularly in working with historically underserved producers.*