

ASSESSMENT OF YOUNG AND BEGINNING PRODUCER PRACTICES IN
MONTANA

by
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ABSTRACT

The agricultural industry is at a turning point regarding the labor force in the United States. The average age of the existing labor force continues to increase and fewer young and beginning farmers and ranchers (YBFR) are entering production agriculture. The purpose of this research was to gain a better understanding of the experience of YBFR entering production agriculture and the working challenges they are facing. This phenomenological research study utilized semi-structured interviews with active YBFR in Montana to examine their experiences. Following analysis, seven different themes surrounding the experiences of YBFR in Montana were revealed.

- Access to land, capital, and equipment is a significant barrier for a YBFR to enter production agriculture.
- Developing a network of peers and finding a mentor within production agriculture is a valuable tool for a YBFR.
- The use of governmental YBFR programs has a positive impact on the experience.
- Crop insurance is a valued risk protection tool for YBFR operations.
- Support from family members and industry peers positively impacts the financial and intellectual experience of a YBFR.
- Continuing formal and non-formal education on the latest technologies and industry practices can assist a YBFR in creating a competitive business.
- A thorough understanding of production costs on an agricultural operation will allow a YBFR to make fact based, objective decisions that lead to a more profitable operation.

In conclusion, these seven themes were shared across participants to explain what and how they experienced being a YBFR in Montana. Further research should be conducted to better understand the impact of networking, mentorship, and the costs of production.

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INTRODUCTION

The United States agricultural workforce is at a turning point. Since 1982, the average age of the primary operators of agricultural operations in the United States has increased 2.0% annually (NASS, 2012). According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), the average age of principal farmers increased by 2.0% between 2007 and 2012 and is expected to continue to rise (USDA, 2012). Among the principal farmers in the United States, 33.0% of the population is 65 and older (NASS, 2012). This is a significant portion of operators that will need to be replaced within the next five to ten years with young and/or beginning farmers and ranchers (YBFR). The USDA also reported that among principal farm operators, 84.16% are 45 years of age or older (NASS, 2012). Similar to U.S. statistics, the average age of Montana farmers and ranchers is 57.8 years old and continuing to increase with limited interest of the younger generation to replace the aging workforce (USDA, 2007). This USDA data is alarming to the agricultural community as our society depends on food and fiber to feed a growing population. The return of YBFR to rural communities plays a significant role in the sustainability of the agricultural industry as well as rural community development. Much of the rural communities across the U.S. depend on the return of YBFR and other individuals for job creation, to decrease population loss, improve economic prosperity, and add to human and social capital (Cromartie, 2015).

The agricultural industry contributes almost \$1 trillion dollars annually to the United States economy making up a 5.50% share of the U.S. gross domestic product

(USDA, 2012). The United States agricultural sector provides 11.0% of the U.S. employment and 15.0% in Montana (USDA, 2012). Beyond statistics illustrating the importance of agriculture in the United States economy, the industry also provides a viable platform for family businesses. Family farms are crucial to the success of rural communities across the nation as they make up 97.0% of the agricultural industry's farming operations (2017, AERS). This dependence on family farms makes the retention of YBFR even more crucial to sustain the industry in the future. The industry is in a transition period that will witness a large portion of its current operators moving towards retirement with a shortage of producers interested in taking over the operation. This shortfall could be overcome with YBFR returning to the farm, expanding their operations, and absorbing acreage that does not have a generational heir interested in farming or ranching. The return of these YBFR can provide sustainability not only to the agricultural industry labor force, but also to rural communities (Ahern, 2011). The issue of YBFR returning to agriculture has taken center stage in legislation over the last ten years and as a result, new programs and policies have been developed to assist YBFR who are entering production agriculture (Ahern, 2011).

YBFR face many barriers when entering agricultural production. Some of these barriers may include limited capital resources, land resources, and risk mitigation tools compared to an established farmer or rancher (Reid, 2009). With these limitations, there is possibly less incentive for the next generation to take over a farming operation. In the 2012 agricultural census, USDA reported that the number of beginning farmers decreased 19.60% (NASS, 2012) due mainly to the aforementioned limitations. This decrease in

YBFR will have a greater impact on states that depend primarily on the agriculture sector for income, such as Montana. According to the Montana Agriculture Statistics, the number one industry in the state is agriculture generating \$4.23 billion in sales of agricultural products (USDA, 2012).

The USDA has taken notice of this growing issue and developed programs to assist rural community growth. Agriculture Secretary Sonny Purdue recently announced funding investments to increase access to education, workforce training, and health care in rural communities (USDA, 2018). The Farm Service Agency (FSA) has created loan programs specifically for young, beginning, and small producers to help alleviate barriers. According to a USDA 2010 report, FSA had allocated \$1.1 billion dollars in direct loans to young and beginning farmers. While these programs have been utilized, there is still a lack of the younger generation returning to production agriculture in the United States (USDA, 2007).

The structure and sustainability of the agricultural workforce will depend on the successful transition of the next generation into ownership of today's family farms and ranches. However, this endeavor is limited by access to capital resources, land resources, and risk mitigation tools compared to an established farmer or rancher (Reid, 2009). These limitations to young generations of producers will need to be addressed to be able to feed the growing population of the United States and the world. The United Nations (2017) estimated that the world population will grow to 9.8 billion in the year 2050. Feeding this growing population will require the world agricultural industry to increase production by 70% (Northoff, 2009). The ability to achieve this goal by 2050 is

dependent on the sustainability of family farms into the next generation of producers. Without a sustainable workforce population entering the agricultural field, it is likely that the industry will fail to meet its production goals. Research based around the challenges and opportunities facing the producers in agriculture and educating YBFR is crucial to the future of the industry.

The agricultural industry is a crucial aspect of small-town economies in Montana. One area specifically well known for its reliance on agriculture is the Golden Triangle in North Central Montana. This region of Montana is predominantly a dry land production area with a solid foundation of YBFR in similar operations. The Golden Triangle produced 2.9 million acres of wheat and barley in 2016 and responsible for 38.8% of all crop sales and 25.3% of livestock product sales in the state (USDA, 2017). Taking these factors into consideration, this research project aimed to uncover the experiences of Montana YBFR in the Golden Triangle who have achieved financial stability in their operations.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of the study was to describe the experiences of established young and beginning farmers and ranchers in Montana from entry to establishment of the operation.

The objectives of this study were as follows:

1. Describe what Montana young and beginning farmers and ranchers experience from entry to establishment of their agricultural operations.
2. Describe how Montana young and beginning farmers experience entry into and establishment in their agricultural operation.
3. Describe the essence of common experiences of being a Montana young and beginning farmer and rancher entering into and establishing an agricultural operation.

Definition of Terms

For this study, the following terms will be defined as follows:

1. Golden Triangle: The North Central area of Montana with the three main points of the triangle identified as Conrad, Great Falls and Havre. More specifically the Golden Triangle includes the following counties: Glacier, Pondera, Teton, Cascade, Toole, Chouteau, Judith Basin, Fergus, Petroleum, Blaine, Phillips, Hill, and Liberty County. (Natural Resource Conservation Service, Map of Montana Regions based on Use and Resource)

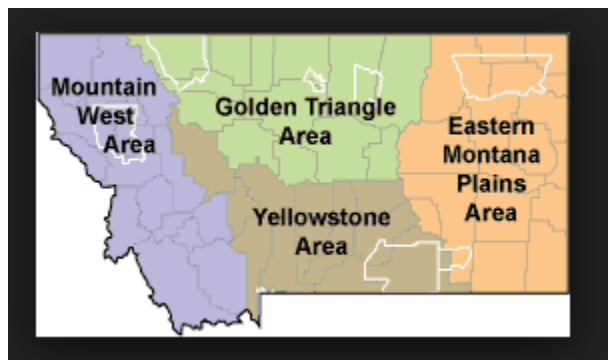


Figure 1. Natural Resource Conservation Service, Map of Montana Regions based on Use and Resource

2. Asset: The entire property of a person, association, corporation, or estate applicable (Merriam-Webster)
3. Liability: Something (such as the payment of money) for which a person or business is legally responsible (Merriam-Webster)
4. Young, Beginning, Farmer/Rancher: 35 years of age or younger, and/or ten years or less of farming experience (Ahearn, 2009)
5. Entity: An association, corporation, partnership, proprietorship, trust, or individual that has legal standing in the eyes of the law.
6. USDA: United States Department of Agriculture (Ahearn, 2009)
7. FSA: Farm Service Agency. Agency tasked with providing capital to farmers and ranchers as well as administering all farm programs (Ahearn, 2009)
8. Practices: Systematic exercise for proficiency (Merriam-Webster)
9. National Agricultural Statistics Service: Agency tasked with conducting surveys on every aspect of United States Agriculture and reporting these results (USDA, n.d.)
10. ARMS: Agriculture Resource Management Survey (Ahearn, 2009)
11. Farmers and Ranchers: Any individuals or entities that participate in the food and fiber industry.
12. Sustainable Agricultural Operation: Greater than 50% of the individual's gross income is from farming.

Assumptions

The following assumptions exist for this study:

1. YBFR answered the interview questions completely and honestly.
2. Producers in North Central Montana have similar experiences establishing and operating their small grain farms.
3. All producers operated a dry land small grains operation.

Limitations

Limitations for this study are as follows:

1. Data was primarily a collection of opinions of individuals and is based on their individual experiences.
2. Utilizing interview questions allows for variability in responses possibly limiting common themes of traits among the population.
3. Results reflect the data of YBFR that met the criteria and cannot be generalized to the entire production agriculture population.
4. Authors Subjectivity Statement:

The author of the research presented is employed as a farm loan officer for Northwest Farm Credit Services. Specifically, the lending position is focused on young and beginning producers. The author is also a current YBFR producer as defined by the USDA definitions in a cow calf operation. These experiences have

provided prior knowledge to the challenges and barriers that face YBFR. For this reason, additional reviewers were included in data analysis to avoid personal biases affecting the results and personal experiences were not discussed in the research study.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There is a significant amount of research regarding the subject of young and beginning farmers (YBFR) entering production agriculture. A review of research has provided support for the narrative of substantial barriers facing YBFR entering production agriculture. Most of the research reviewed revolved around three basic research topics. Most notably; the aging population of our nation's producers, significant capital and land resource acquisition issues, and identifiable operational practices that correlate positively with farm and ranch financial performance (Ahearn, 2009; Mishra, 2009). Most of this research used quantitative methods and data from the USDA Agriculture Resource Management System (ARMS). The ARMS is a collection of financial and operational data provided by agricultural producers similar to a census. Researchers commonly use the ARMS data to conduct analytical studies to determine issues facing YBFR. Much of the research has drawn conclusions on crucial traits of YBFR that have made them successful and barriers that have made it difficult to enter agriculture.

Within this scope of research, there was limited literature that provided a firsthand perspective to the issues YBFR face when entering agriculture. For example, most of the research uses the ARMS database to find traits that positively correlate with the farms return on assets (ROA) (Ahern, 2011; Ahern, 2013; Mishra, 2009). However, primarily using ROA could misrepresent the true essence of experiences that have made individual producers financially successful due to the reliance on one financial measure.

Barriers Facing Young and Beginning Producers Entering Agriculture

Numerous barriers face YBFR entering the field of production agriculture. A review of the research shows the acquisition of farmable real estate, ability to secure operating and real estate financing, as well as the amount of startup capital are among the most commonly cited barriers (Mishra, 2009). YBFR are twice as likely to be real estate tenants compared to other more tenured producers who own the land (Mishra, 2009). This higher rate of tenancy as opposed to land ownership can reduce the producer's opportunity to gain equity on the property and makes them subject to variable renting rates. This lack of access to real property coupled with competitive land rent prices can make entry into agriculture difficult.

Agricultural real estate prices have continued to increase since the 1980's creating a market where only established producers can afford to acquire real property (Ahern, 2011). With the lack of access to real estate property, most producers must have off-farm income to subsidize the farm and provide a stable income. In 2009, on average, beginning farmers earned \$38,775 from farming and \$71,059 from off-farm income (Ahern, 2011). This extra income not only provides monthly cash flow, but also provides the family with health care which has become one of the largest expenses for farming families (Kauffman, 2013). With high land leases and purchase prices on agricultural property steadily increasing, YBFR access to credit is critical. However, with the 2008 housing crisis, credit providers have tightened loan standards. These standards are now more

conservative when it comes to lending to YBFR that typically pose a greater credit risk compared to their more tenured peers (Kauffman, 2013).

According to the USDA (USDA, 2012), farmers under the age of 35 years old held more than 20% less equity per farm than the average across all farms. This lack of equity could create a challenge for real estate financing to YBFR as most agricultural lenders require anywhere from 30-40% down on farm ground. To compensate for the lack of capital, research has found that lenders will often require family members to assist with YBFR loan applications as note signers or to pledge collateral (Kauffman, 2013). Access to funding can also depend greatly on the status of the economy as well as the outlook of the agricultural sector (Barry, 1981). A study conducted by Barry (1981) on the credit risks for farmers illustrated that there is an inverse, or negative correlation between fund availability and loan demand in agriculture based on market conditions. This lack of balance between financing and liquidity can extremely limit the ability of YBFR to sustain their operation through the narrow margin years when market conditions are poor.

Traits of Successful Young and Beginning Producers

Previous research examined producer practices that have made YBFR financially successful (Mishra, 2009; Katchova, 2009). According to a study conducted by Mishra (2009), “Increasing the number of decision makers on the farm, engaging in value-added agriculture and having a written business plan” are proven characteristics of successful farmers and ranchers (p. 175). These traits were positively correlated with the return on

assets annually above their peers in the ARMS survey data set. The data also revealed that having more than one decision maker creates a positive impact on the operation. Typically, the other decision makers are spouses or close family members that assist in collaboration and making decisions to produce greater results on the farm. Other beneficial producer traits included those who were able to reduce variable costs, participate in risk management strategies, such as government farm programs, and keep track of income and expenses (Mishra, 2009). These results provide a starting point to traits and practices that may influence financial success on their operation.

Additional valuable practices of YBFR include the adoption of technologies, genetically modified crops, as well as advances in precision agriculture (Adhikari, 2009). A research study confirmed a positive correlation between the adoption of genetically modified cotton and increased profitability (Adhikari, 2009). Although this study focused on just one industry, the results offer useful information for those that are considering experimenting with genetically modified crops and new technologies. While there are no genetically modified wheat and barley strands, the research demonstrates the impact early adoption of new technologies can have on operations. The results of the literature published are thought provoking; however, they also typically utilize the USDA ARMS survey data comprised of thousands of producer participants across the country in a wide array of commodities and business practices. The diversity of this data set can make it difficult for individual producers to incorporate the research recommendations and conclusions into their personal operations. Having a business plan and participating in governmental programs may be too broad of categories for individual producers to

readily transfer into their operation. Commonly producers view these strategies as important but are unsure of where to start, or how to implement them into their specific operation. Research must help identify strategies that can be implemented immediately into agricultural operations that can make timely impacts.

Programs Implemented to Assist Young and Beginning Producers in Agriculture

Given the amount of challenges YBFR must overcome, research into federal programs is warranted. The federal government's increased support for new and beginning farmer loans has been a consistent effort for the past 20 years (Sureshwaran, 2011). To assist young producers, legislation was passed that resulted in specific YBFR assistance programs, such as the Conservation Title of 2008 Food, Conservation and Energy Act (FECA). The FECA provided two extra payments to Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) real property owners that returned their real estate to production agriculture and leased it to an YBFR. This is commonly known as the TIP (Transition Incentive Program) program (Sureshwaran, 2011). This incentive provides a landowner with a compensated benefit to find a young and beginning producer to lease their ground.

The Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Farm Service Agency (FSA) also offer financial loan programs for YBFR. The NRCS has two specific programs- the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). The EQIP program supports an agricultural producer's ability to "implement land management conservation practices that optimize environmental benefits on working agricultural land" (NRCS, 2018, p. #1). The CSP

program pays agricultural producers to implement conservation practices on their farm or ranch that meet conservation standards. Typically, contracts are five years and can consist of annual payments with a minimum of \$1,500 (NRCS, 2018). Both programs set aside funds to ensure that prior to fund depletion, young and beginning producers are allowed access (Sureshwaran, 2011). The FSA also provides assistance programs for YBFR. Currently, FSA will provide direct and guaranteed loans to beginning farmers and ranchers who are unable to obtain financing from other lenders (Sureshwaran, 2011). These loan programs, similar to the NRCS programs, are available to both experienced and young producers. However, these programs have funding specifically set aside to ensure that young and beginning producers can take advantage of the benefits. In addition to programs for conservation, the FSA also administers direct payments to producers as a part of their Agriculture Risk Coverage and Price Loss Coverage programs. (USDA, n.d.)

Originally, the 1996 Federal Agricultural Improvement and Reform Act introduced production flexibility contracts (PFC). This program was extended into the 2002 and 2008 Farm Bills and still exists today. The primary way for farmers to access this program is to enroll their deeded acres and make payments based on historical prices and yields rather than the crop year experienced (Kropp, 2011). One interesting aspect of these direct payments is the impact on YBFR. Due to the direct payments based primarily on the number of acres in operation, YBFR typically receive less direct payments on average compared to their more tenured peers who own more land. There is a positive correlation between an experienced farmer's direct payments and term debt coverage ratios (Krop, 2011). These results may indicate a bias for more experienced farmers and a

reduction in opportunity for YBFR with payments based on size and distribution. The increased payments to larger producers, who are larger owners of deeded ground, also reduces the likelihood of large producers liquidating deeded acres in order to provide cash flow in difficult commodity price economies.

Another federally supported program is crop insurance. Research indicates that participation in risk management programs, such as crop insurance, has led YBFR operations to increased financial success (Mishra, 2009). The federal crop insurance program has been in existence since 1938 and has been an important piece of every farm bill since its inception (Glauber, 2013). Currently, the federal branch that oversees the crop insurance program is the USDA's Risk Management Agency (Edwin, 2001). There are a multitude of insurance products available to farmers depending on the desired protection of the crop, yield, or revenue. Producers can also purchase insurance products that protect against singular perils like fire, hail, or multiple perils, such as drought, disease, pests and other climatic hazards (Barnett, 2014). While crop insurance does provide a tool of risk mitigation to all producers, the costs associated have historically driven low participation unless premiums were subsidized (Glauber, 2013). With higher subsidy levels, the participation in crop insurance has steadily increased over time. However, with increased participation, the cost and benefits of the program have been debated heavily in Congress. In 2011 alone, the federal government spent \$7.5 billion in premium subsidies and producers received a total of \$5 billion in direct payments through their insurance policies (Glauber, 2013). On average, for every dollar producers pay in premium, they receive approximately \$1.88 back in insurance indemnities (Goodwin,

2001). While this coverage paid to producers is significant, the overall benefit of the program is still debated among Congressmen as well as researchers. While some research indicates that any use of risk mitigation tools will have a positive effect on YBFR (Mishra, 2009), the true inherent value of crop insurance has not been researched thoroughly.

Overall, a review of the literature identifies significant challenges that YBFR are facing in terms of access to real estate, operating capital, financing, and inability to purchase ground. These challenges are significant and have produced an industry with a lack of new and young operators. Those YBFR who have adopted business plans and involve more than one decision maker have been more financially successful than those who have not. Additionally, YBFR operations should carefully consider utilizing new technologies and engage in risk protection programs that allow them to become more efficient and sustainable throughout minimal margin years. Although these findings offer pertinent information, further investigation of YBFR business practices, traits and risk protection programs are needed. There are a significant number of programs available to YBFR; however, it is important that more research on the utilization of these programs is conducted to better understand their effectiveness and assistance to YBFR operators.

Theoretical Framework

A critical career resource framework focuses on four main categories that are easily identifiable: human capital resources, social resources, psychological resources, and career identity resources (Andreas, 2012). These resources are identified as variables that are

crucial to individual career success. Human capital resources are typically skills that allow individuals to be proficient in their job performance, including but not limited to “education, experience, and training and cognitive ability” (Andreas, 2012 p. 374). Social resources can be defined as the network of resources that individuals are able to construct as well as their ability to use that network to generate information and influence (Alder & Kwon, 2002) The social resource trait is important for careers and is an outlier in the four as the only external resource. It is critical for individuals to develop a strong network peers, mentors and family members that can provide support and guidance. The Psychological resources which are best described as the outlook or resolve of the individual, consist of the common components of optimism, hope, self-efficacy, and resilience (Andreas, 2012). The last resource of the framework is the career identity resource. Similar to the psychological resource, the career identity resources revolve around an individual’s mental state and outlook. However, the main contrast between the career identity resource and the psychological resource is the focus on the individual’s career and job at that present time. Career identity is best described as an individual’s understanding of who they are and how their work is meaningful to them (Andreas, 2012). Primarily, career identity resources are focused on a individual’s career goals, occupational interest, values, and the overall importance of the individual’s work regarding their feeling of self-importance (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; Meijers, 1998).

These four resources have been identified as important characteristics for successful career development. Further, it is important that all four resources are present and allocated equally; a deficiency in one area cannot be compensated by a strong

resource in another category (Andreas, 2012). Using all four resources provides a strong foundation for successful careers across industries, and agriculture is no exception.

YBFR who are building their careers in agriculture and have found success will likely possess all four resources and depend on them for their progression throughout their career.

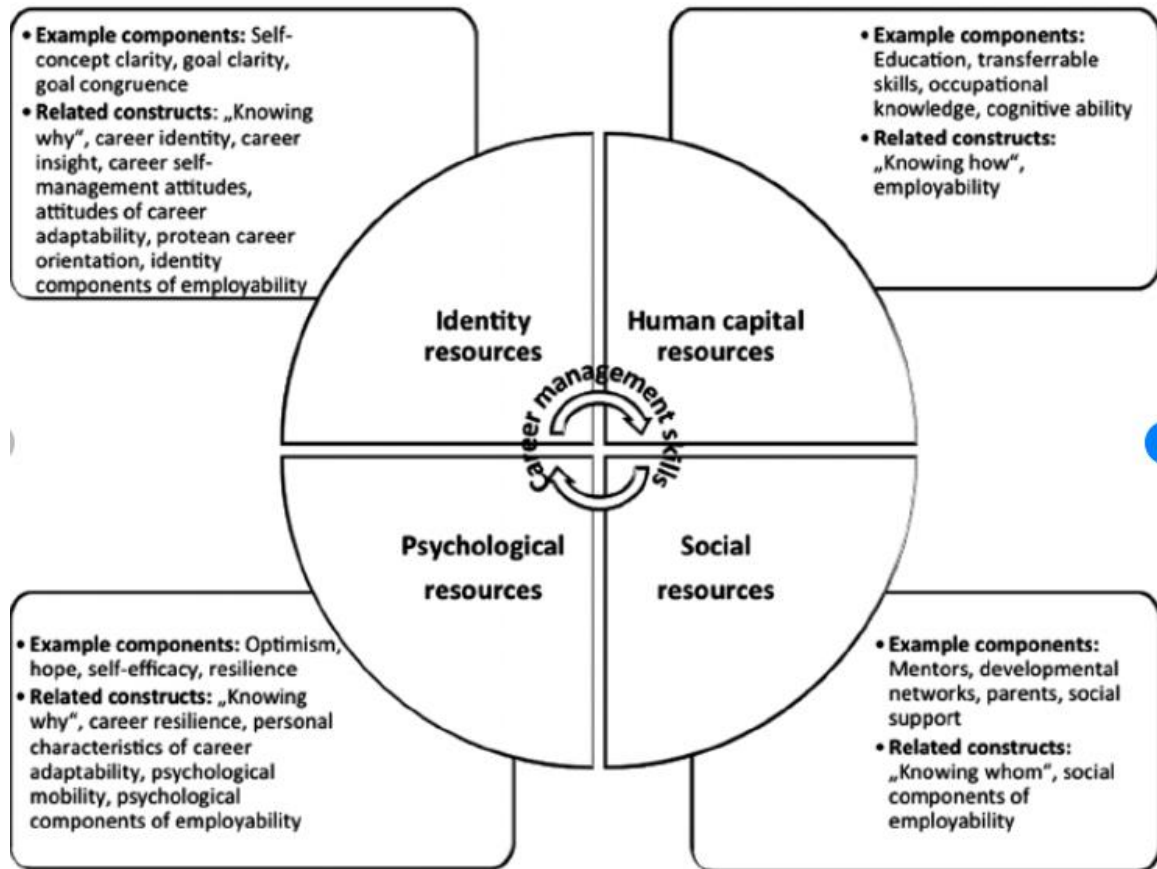


Figure 2. Integrative framework of four career resources, with example components and related construct of each resource domain. (Andreas, 2012)

METHODOLOGY

Previous research has identified various practices and experiences that young and beginning farmers and ranchers (YBFR) likely face in their careers (Mishra, 2009). A phenomenological research approach was utilized in this study to gain a better understanding of the experiences of established YBFR in Montana from entry to establishment of their operations. Phenomenological research is useful to obtain “rich, detailed descriptions of the phenomenon being investigated” (Eddels-Hersch, 2015, p. 252). This approach allowed for an in-depth understanding of the decision-making process that YBFR face when entering and working in production agriculture (Creswell, 2013).

Phenomenology is the study of the lived experiences of individuals regarding a specific phenomenon or environment (Creswell, 2013). Phenomenology research is designed to inspect a phenomenon in society or an environment and to provide context of the phenomenon for a more concrete understanding (Groenewald, 2004). Two main objectives of phenomenology research are to describe what the individuals experienced and how they experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). For this study, the phenomenon was; being a young and beginning farmer and rancher. It is imperative to examine the perspectives of individual agricultural producers regarding their experiences entering and sustaining within the industry. This individual perspective can inform other producers about operational and financial practices that have been successful and unsuccessful. Individual perspectives, as opposed to conclusions drawn from the analysis

of Agricultural Resource Management Survey (ARMS) data, manifested specific practices and their implementation. Using AMRS data is a useful tool to better understand the financial and statistical impact that business and operational practices have on YBFR operation, but it also fails to provide context to how the practices are used. A deeper description of the practices and strategies used by YBFR that provides context allows future YBFR a guide to implementation into their own operation.

It is essential in phenomenological research that the author removes all previous biases and prior experience of the phenomenon as to not influence the data collection or analysis (Kumar, 2012). This process of removing all biases and providing “transcendent subjectivity” in phenomenological research was accomplished through “bracketing” (Husserl, 2001; Kumar, 2012, p. 793). Bracketing has been defined by Kumar (2012) as the process of

- (a) “separating the phenomenon from the world and inspecting it; (b) dissecting the phenomenon to unravel the structure, define it, and analyze it; and (c) suspending all preconceptions regarding the phenomenon, and confronting the subject matter on its own terms, to ensure that the researcher holds in abeyance any preconceived ideas while he or she is listening to, interacting with, and analyzing the stories of the participants” (p. 793).

Bracketing plays a key role in the success of phenomenological analysis and provides the researcher the ability to describe the phenomenon in a way that captures the personal experiences of the research participants. (Husserl, 2001) The role of bracketing can only be effective when the researcher fully removes all biases and personal experiences prior

to data collection and analysis, referred to by Kumar as “transcendental subjectivity” (p. 793). In order to do so, researchers conducting a phenomenology study must omit their own personal experiences and biases (Husserl, 2001; Kumar, 2012). The author’s experiences were listed in the limitations of the research.

To further ensure there was no inherent bias in the results of the research, a expert review of data was conducted. After experts completed their review of the data and identified significant themes, a data analysis debriefing session between researchers was conducted to reduce bias (Guba, 1981). The debriefing session also affirmed that data saturation was reached. Data saturation is not necessarily a point in the data that no new ideas are presented, instead saturation is acknowledged when the collected data develops themes or theories sufficient enough to explain the phenomenon or experience. The adequacy of the data is not determined by the number of participants, rather the quality of the data and responses that furthers the understanding of the phenomenon being studied (O’Reilly, 2013).

Confirmation of data saturation was dependent upon independent reviews. Each reviewer highlighted significant statements, sentences, and quotes relating to what and how the participants experienced the phenomenon, or horizontalization. Then, clusters of meaning were developed from these statements into “themes” and shared in the debriefing session. Next, the researcher constructed a textural description of what the participants experienced and a structural description of how they experienced the phenomenon. Finally, the textural and structural descriptions were combined to write a composite description that presented the “essence” of the phenomenon, including

common experiences written as descriptive passages (Moustakas, 1994, p. 61). Accuracy and credibility was further established through use of direct participant quotes and member checking (Guba, 1981; Creswell, 2014). This process ensured accurate representation of the data without researcher bias.

Sample

The population for this research is Montana YBFR. Since the data collection method was a semi-structured interview, it was crucial that the parameters of the research proposed allow sufficient inquiry to provide ample data without over saturation (Creswell, 2013). Research has shown that data saturation occurs when common themes are recurring in data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2013). Also, if the instrument of data collection and/or the population is homogenous in nature, the sample size of the population can produce ninety percent of the results that a large sample size would within the first 12 interviews (Guest, 2006). Using guidelines from other phenomenology research studies, it is recommended that five to twenty-five individuals are interviewed for the best results (Creswell, 2013). For these reasons, the sample for the research included eight full-time YBFR that depend on agricultural income as their primary source of income. The sample consisted of strictly dry land small grain farmers in the Golden Triangle area of Montana. Similar farming practices, commodities, and location aimed to produce results that can provide comparable experiences of being a YBFR from this area and exclude outliers which may be seen in producers in a diverse array of operations. Research indicates that in order to produce practical results, participants should be

selected according to specific criteria relevant to the purpose and objectives of the research (Guest, 2009). Therefore, it was projected that the results would reach a saturation point at eight to ten participants.

Finally, in order to select full-time YBFR who have built a sustainable agriculture operation, participants were included if they received a recommendation from their primary financial lender. A YBFR was deemed sustainable based on their ability to consistently produce at least 50.0% of their gross income in the sale of farm products. This process of recommendation provided sustainable and well-established YBFR able to reflect on their experiences and give insight into their operational practices. Lastly, all participants had a minimum of three years of experience managing the operation and fit the USDA criteria for a YBFR of being 35 years old or younger and 10 years of experience or less (Aheaern, 2009). The criteria of three years of experience provided participants who have had enough experience in the industry to provide dependable results and real industry experiences while not limiting the participant pool by increasing the minimum experience to 5 or 7 years.

Data Collection

Key informant interviews YBFR in the Golden Triangle in Montana were conducted to better understand specific experiences of producers and how they are responding to working issues. A semi-structured interview approach allowed for open and transparent responses that provided direct and concrete results to the research inquiry

(Tashakkori, 2003). The Montana State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the proposed research protocol. An informed consent was provided prior to the interview informing participants of the purpose of the study and their rights. Participants were notified on the informed consent of anonymity and confidentiality of their responses.

The most impactful data for a phenomenological study is audio-recorded interviews that are transcribed and analyzed for common themes (Priest, 2002). Interviews allowed participants to provide in-depth insight into the challenges faced when entering production agriculture, as well as business and production practices and strategies that have been successful and unsuccessful. Each interview followed a semi-structured format that provided consistency in the questions presented, while also allowing for additional probing based on participants' answers. All participants were given pseudonyms to remain anonymous to solicit open and honest answers. Each participant was asked to provide their age, number of years as an operator of their operation, and type of operation prior to the interview to verify fit for the research. To ensure that the participants were knowledgeable about their industry and providing accurate responses, a set of three questions were asked prior to the actual interview.

1. What are the average yields on your operation for spring wheat or winter wheat?
2. What are the average prices that you have sold your spring wheat or winter wheat for over the last two years?
3. How much a bushel did the FSA Price Loss Coverage program pay out last year?

The above questions were constructed to provide an opportunity for the participants to demonstrate their reliability in the interview process. All of these questions have answers that should fall within specific ranges if the participants are being accurate and transparent. Their responses were evaluated, and their accuracy and reliability acknowledged when analyzing their responses to the main interview questions.

The interviews lasted between 30-45 minutes, and were conducted over the phone and audio-recorded. The questions were provided to the participants prior to the interview in order to allow them time to prepare and process the questions. The following 12 questions were asked by the researcher to each participant.

1. What were the most significant challenges you experienced when you entered the agriculture industry as a principal operator?
 - a. What strategy, practices, or resources did you use to overcome these challenges?
 - b. Of any of the practices or strategies you mentioned, which one would you most recommend to a new and beginning farmer or rancher to adopt?
 - c. Do you depend on your agriculture operation as your only source of income? If not, what other sources do you rely on?
2. What operational and financial decisions have had the greatest impact on your success as an YBFR?
 - a. Are there specific financial tools or experiences with a financial lender that were meaningful to your experience as an YBFR?

- b. What has been the impact of risk management tools, including crop insurance on your experience as an YBFR?
 - c. How have USDA agencies (FSA, NRCS, BLM, or others) impacted your experience as YBFR?
3. What educational experiences have greatly influenced or impacted your experience as an YBFR?
- a. Are there specific sources of information that you rely on? For example a mentor or general knowledge base?
 - b. Specific experiences throughout your career that have had the greatest impact on your success or failures?
 - c. FSA, extension, or any other educational programs that have positively impacted your operation and transition into the agriculture industry?

Data Analysis

Research conducted using a phenomenological analysis approach requires the ability to collect individual descriptions of the phenomenon while preserving the spontaneity of the experiences (Jasper, 1994). The following steps of conducting phenomenological research and analyzing the data are based on the design of Moustakas (1994) who organized the process into 8 specific steps (p. 61-62):

1. The first step for a researcher is to determine if the research problem is best analyzed using a phenomenological approach. These research problems commonly require multiple individuals experiencing the same phenomenon.
2. The phenomenon must be identified by the researcher and all assumptions addressed.
3. Data collected from multiple individuals who have experienced or are experiencing the phenomenon. Data can be collected from multiple data collection tools; however, it is typically gathered through in-depth interviews.
4. Participants in the interview are posed two specific questions. First “What have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon?” (p.61), and second “What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of the phenomenon?” (p. 61). Other questions permitted to be included in the interview should typically supplement these two primary questions to provide a common and structured theme in the responses.
5. Data analysis is completed by highlighting significant statements, sentences, and quotes that show how and what the participants experienced, known as horizontalization.
6. Researchers analyze all transcribed responses and highlight themes (p. 61) that provide an understanding of the phenomenon. These statements are then clustered into clusters of meaning (p. 61) that provide themes of the data.
7. Statements gathered into themes are then used to provide a description of individual experiences and provide context to the responses. These significant

statements are used to write a “description of what the participant experienced (textural description)” (p. 61). The themes are then also used to write a “Textural description” defined as “the context or setting that influenced how the participants experienced the phenomenon” (p. 61).

8. The final step is to construct a “composite description that presents the essence of the phenomenon, called the essential, invariant structure (or “essence”)” (p. 62). The essence portion focuses on the common experiences of the participants and imparts understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomenon.

These detailed steps outline the process of gathering, analyzing, and reflecting on the responses and key themes developed through the data to provide insight into the phenomenon. It has been stated that reflection through this process “provides a logical, systematic and coherent resource for carrying out the analysis and synthesis needed to arrive at essential descriptions of experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 47).

RESULTS

Knowledge Check Questions

All eight participants were asked three questions regarding yields and program payments over the last year that demonstrated their knowledge of their operation and the industry. Participant responses were compared to USDA NASS data from 2017 to ensure accuracy of the knowledge check. This approach helped establish the credibility of participants to continue with the research study.

Participant #1 Structural Description:

Participant #1 is a YBFR from the Golden Triangle area and operates a small grain dry land farm. The participant's operation has historically been a conventional dry land operation producing spring wheat, winter wheat, chickpeas, and lentils. The participant was raised on a small grain farm in the same area where he currently runs his operation today. From a young age, participant #1 was driven to come back to his family's small grain operation and operate a farm for himself. However, the high startup costs and significant lack of access to capital for the YBFR presented a significant challenge to entering agriculture on his own:

I guess entering the industry trying to get your own operation setup in agriculture, access to capital and funds is a big one. I mean, you've got high climbing land prices versus diminishing returns. And, and when you start off, at least in my situation, you start with little to zero assets. So, one of the biggest, I'd say one of the biggest struggles to overcome would be actually getting into the industry and

making it cash flow. So, you know, working two jobs to make your farm work, I would say be one of the bigger ones.

This explanation from the participant illustrates multiple challenges that were faced including; minimal beginning net worth, significant capital requirements due to startup costs, limited access to capital due to experience and age, and lastly diminishing returns in the industry for all producers. This response encapsulates the primary issues faced by YBFR and was echoed throughout the other participants. The challenges of a lack of access to funds and limited asset base was balanced by Participant #1 finding a career that he could pursue while also running his full time agricultural operation:

Well when I knew I was wanting to be a full-time farmer, you know, for a long time, but I knew that was going to be a tough situation to get to just dive right into. So, I wanted a job that kind of fit my farming practices well, so when I went to school, I wanted to do something that sort of lends itself to my farming career. So, I got involved in grain merchandising, which I guess would be, you know, that's something that's really played well, to my, to my farming side of the practice by being on top of the grain markets. And so not only am I working in my nine to five job, I'm also helping out my production in my folks and my grandmother's production agriculture business as well, because I'm always on top of the markets. So one of the strategies I would say, is making having a second job in town and making that second job be provide value to your farming operations as well.

Participant #1 is currently a grain merchandiser while also operating his dry land farm on a full-time basis. Participant #1 also feels that his job assists him in leveling a playing field that leaves YBFR at a disadvantage upon entering production agriculture.

When you have to be able to operate better than other people in the industry, even though it's not direct competition, you have to know your numbers. So one thing that's benefitted me and I would suggest to other people is, , know your numbers before you start while you're doing it, don't know what it costs you to grow a bushel of grain or bush or chickpeas or hundred weight, of barley or, flax or, you know, it's important to know what cost you have into it. And that allows you to make decisions that are not emotionally based. If you have an understanding of your input

and your cost of production entirely, you can make decisions based on numbers and returns versus emotions and feelings.

This cost-based approach decision making allows Participant #1 to gain a competitive advantage among his colleagues in the industry who may have large operations of scale and more competitive advantages due to size and experience. Working as a grain merchandiser provides Participant #1 with intimate knowledge of the markets which he uses to his advantage in his farming operation

My training for my job and the job that I do working on futures and options have really allowed me to put some put a lot of my risk as far as the technical commodity down into the futures exchange. And then I take it, you know, it takes a load off my mind when I'm not sitting on the fence. Like right now, today, just as a side spring wheat was down 14 cents and basis was down about 20 (cents). So you went from \$5.75 spring wheat to about five and a quarter spring wheat, one day, and it's I mean, my impact from that happening today is very limited. So educational learning how to use marketing tools and marketing plans to secure your success. That's been the most impactful education piece while I've been in operation for me.

Participant #1 also acknowledged that due to size of most YBFR operations, the risk-taking ability is reduced compared to a more established operation. To overcome this challenge Participant #1 uses risk mitigation tools:

I mean, it's (crop insurance) a necessity that's obviously important to your operation. It's not something anybody enjoys using risk management tools. But as far as being a successful operator, I think they're really important, especially for young producers, takes a lot of your risk away that mother nature provides and passes it on to somebody else for a premium and without it, you know, I mean, I think the risk could be too high for a lot of people. So with the impact for me, it's mostly been paying premiums I've been fortunate enough to not have many disasters that required risk management tools. But I always participate in the market because I think of it as a necessary cost to secure my interest in my businesses.”

Participant #1 Textural Description:

To overcome the challenges presented, Participant #1 described different strategies and tools that he implemented that had an impact on his experience as a YBFR. Upon entering production agriculture, Participant #1 understood that he was at a slight disadvantage compared to more experienced producers and stressed that his ability to overcome this challenge is attributed to his understanding of his operational finances and costs. “The biggest thing I would say is know your numbers, know them well, and make decisions based on those numbers.” Having a strong understanding of his operational expenses provided the ability to foresee opportunities in other commodities and different management techniques:

One of the operational (decisions) that has had the most success for me has been willing to try things when I mean when, for example, when chickpeas, you know, we've been raising pulse crops my dad and I have for probably, six or seven years now. And when Chickpeas kind of got started around here we were, we kind of knew what to expect because we had experienced in them and so one of the operational advantages was being able to jump into adaptive market and take advantage of a market that is going to be a pretty high dollar cash crop when the opportunities is there versus like, a lot of people do this year jumping in after the rallies over so operationally having flexibility and the confidence to try things new crops.

Along with understanding the costs of production for different commodities,

Participant #1 shared how keeping up on the latest technology and cropping practices

impacted his experience as an YBFR:

You know, stay technologically advanced enough that you're comfortable to try new things monetarily one thing that's really I think, led to my success has been able to come up been able to work into a continuous crop rotation that not only help maintain the quality of my land so in other words I'm not losing acres to saline leaks or alkali and also help bump up my profit margins by increasing my production over more acres. When a traditional you know we've done it for years

method would be a two thirds one third crop fallow that would have let me probably into a you know, could potentially change the Winter Wheat yields maybe to the lower side, but it's also kept me into some of these diverse crops that have helped me cash flow over the years on small acres.

Participant #1 described his experience of moving away from standard farming practices that most experienced farmers in his area utilize by seeding a crop on two thirds of the acres and leaving one third vacant/not seeded or “fallow”. This practice has traditionally been used by farmers in the area to increase soil health and provide the ground a year of rest before reseeding the next year to wheat again. Participant #1 has adapted his farming practices by replacing fallow ground with pulse crops. These pulse crops also have a positive impact on the soil health consistent with fallow acreage, with the added benefit of generating cash flow annually. This strategy is not without risk as he mentioned, “changes the Winter Wheat yields maybe to the lower side” but it has also allowed him to increase his profits/acre which can be crucial for an YBFR’s operational success.

Participant #1 acknowledged the impact that having a network or peers and a mentor has had on his experience as a YBFR:

Yeah, I have four or five specific people that I work really closely with, as far as planning, you know, what I'm going to do with my crops, how we're going to market them, what our plans are, what do we see coming down the pipeline. And so a lot of ideas. So the most impactful information sources is other successful farmers. And most of them, a couple of us, two of them are younger, and the rest of us are, you know, they're older producers that have been in the game time and see some of the things so gives you chance to bounce ideas off of people, that have been in the business a long time and also try some new things for some people that are maybe have a little more enthusiasm and aren't quite in as much coast mode. So mine would be like, I guess you'd call that a group of mentors or peers that you are comfortable with. And I'm talking like, your whole operation, you know, I mean, they know what you made what you got for it, everything else.

This process of developing a group of peers allows him to share his experiences and challenges with a group of informed industry peers who can assist one another with advice and feedback. In order for this to be beneficial, he added, “be willing to take advice from people that are successful.”

Another aspect that affected the experience of Participant #1 is the presence and use of YBFR loan programs, as well as USDA farmer programs:

I used the farm service guarantee and I had the Ag vision program with Farm Credit. And I think that if they were both, I mean, huge helps for me. And I would definitely say they've been very essential to my success by having somebody that's willing to work with you when you're, like we started the conversation off assets are very limited to start with, and they, you know, as long as you've got a plan, and you, you know, trust the people you work with they are willing to work with you.

These programs allowed Participant #1 to have access to capital despite his limited asset base and financial attributes common among YBFR. The use of these programs paired with the use of USDA programs allowed Participant #1 to further his success in the industry:

They're (USDA agencies) very valuable, they've impacted my experience positively they've provided me with several programs that I use to my advantage on my farm. I'm participating CSP (conservation stewardship program) program I have some acres and CRP (conservation reserve program) I was able to participate in a TIP (transition incentives program) program which allowed me to get into some acres on lease that otherwise probably wouldn't been able to come into so maybe the programs in and the availability has been impactful. I don't have a lot of experience with the people side of those departments, because most of my stuff is taking care of pretty briefly, it doesn't take a lot of communication time, but I know they're always there if I want to if I did have questions or if I didn't have concerns, but for me, I think they provide a lot of valuable tools.

These programs, which are available to all YBFR, provide assistance and tools that have a positive impact on their operations.

Participant #2 Structural Description:

Participant #2 is a YBFR from the Golden Triangle area who was born and raised on a small grain dry ground operation. Participant #2 was able to return to his family operation and work as an employee while also starting his own agricultural production operation. While working as an employee on his father's operation, Participant #2 approached this as a career devoted to a lifestyle as opposed to an occupation. "The way I got into it is my dad got me started back, what it was 7 years ago, I got my own entity.... , I don't treat it as a job. It's, it's more of a lifestyle. So, I guess there really is no challenges to me. I just, I enjoy what I do. So, it just comes naturally. Let's put it that way." While entering an established operation as an employee and starting your own operation under the entities umbrella removes the majority of capital and land challenges, it also can present family and communication issues:

You know, I guess the hardest thing is working with family. You know, I get along with my parents. 100% my dad's my best friend. I may have had one, we've had one disagreement since I've been back for 10 years. And other than that, he's boss and that's the way it is, and then you get married, and then your wife brings a different view to the situation. And it's tough juggling both ends of the stick.

Juggling business and family is a common challenge for most family farms. "No, that's probably the biggest challenge I run into is not necessarily keeping everybody happy. But, you know, explaining it on both ends looking out for the wife and the parents." Another challenge of returning to a family run agricultural operation can be

implementing new technology or strategies that all participants in the operation agree with:

I mean, let's put it this way, it's tough to teach an old dog new tricks. So, you know, the first couple times we had to go over the wheat three times well, geez, that that was just tough go around for dad, then we start throwing some other things at it, so usually what I do is I'll take a 160 or a 320 and experiment with and say, hey, look, this is this is what we got back out of this is what we have into it. So, you know, it's obviously paying for itself and then we'll apply that to the whole farm. And that has been the biggest challenges is, you know, trying to bring it into the whole situation when you're talking about a 20,000-acre place.

Participant #2 described the process of evolving chemical application practices and the strategy used to implement them to convince others that they will work. He stated, "That's the biggest challenge. I think there's multiple ways to skin a cat and the way my dad has done it and the way my Grandpa has done it their whole life you know, obviously worked but... can we bring more to the table?" This process of working with multiple generations is common on family farms and can present significant challenges to the YBFR experience.

Added benefits of working on a family-based operation are the reduced equipment costs on starting an operation through trading equipment for labor, and the advice and mentorship from an experienced farmer. "Like I told you when you started, my life has been pretty easy having backing with my dad where I don't have to buy equipment up front." Being able to trade labor for equipment use can significantly reduce the overhead costs and reduce the challenge of access to capital for purchasing equipment. Participant #2 described information and guidance from experienced

producers as invaluable, “Just down home experience from Dad, I've gotten more from that than I ever have in a classroom or book.”

Participant #2 Textural Description:

Most of the challenges and experiences noted by Participant #2 revolved around the family-based operation structure. Given the numerous aspects of a family operation, Participant #2 shared his perspectives regarding the experience of transitioning into a family operation while also running his own personal operation. As a YBFR, he acknowledged the importance of crop insurance as a risk mitigation tool. “It’s backing, let’s put it that way. If you have a total failure, you know, we can get the money back out of it.” He also discussed the impact that his parents have had on his experience. When asked, he said that his dad was not only a mentor, but a main source of industry information, “(One) hundred percent of the time. No questions asked. One off the top my head, and you may find this simple but seeding depth, you know, how deep should we plant in this situation? This that and the other thing, boom, right there. He's got the answer for me. My dad.” He acknowledged the impact his dad has had on educating him in the importance of networking, “How to treat people, you know, I mean, how he treats people. I tried to treat people treat people how you want to be treated. I feel in this world, it's all about connections to who you know, and I've learned that from him.”

While family support clearly had a profound impact on his experience as a YBFR, this was also shaped by the outlook and passion that he brings to his operation:

When you start looking at surrounding areas, these young farmers, they are younger kids our age think they're entitled to everything. Well, you're not entitled to anything. And that's how they look at it. They go to their mom and say, hey, I'd like to this farm this 320. Would you give me this 320? And I have three siblings. I have two sisters. So I don't feel that I'm entitled anything but I work here every day.

This notion of not being entitled with the opportunity to work in a family operation was first presented to Participant #2 at a YBFR event:

And the last day, this guy walks in and says, you aren't entitled to anything on your farm and you kind of sit in your chair and start listening and you know, that's how I look at it. I'm not entitled any this, I have to earn what I get here. And that's how I look at life. I mean, they don't have to let me come back my parents, but they have and that's how I look at it.”

Participant #2 responses illustrate some key practices and experiences that have allowed him to overcome those challenges associated with working in a family operation and having a positive experience in agriculture:

Participant #3 Structural Description:

Participant #3 is an organic small grains producer located in the Golden Triangle. This participant did not grow up on an agricultural operation and is not originally from the area where he now runs his business. He entered agriculture working for various farms and ranches throughout Montana and eventually worked for a large well-known organic producer in the Golden Triangle area. Over the last two years, the operator made it known that he wanted him to lease the operation so that he could slow down and retire. Participant #3 explained this was a unique opportunity that allowed him to overcome the lack of access to land that confronts many YBFR. “We were pretty fortunate having land

leased out to us and you guys at Farm Credit were pretty good at working with us on getting the capital to do it. So in that regard, for us, it was pretty easy. I can see where a lot of people would have a hard time getting hands-on land as it seems to be a rare commodity.” Being able to transition into an operation on a leased basis where you have been working was a positive aspect of his experience. However, with no family support, Participant #3 still had to confront the challenge of equipment costs and building an equipment line to farm the leased acres. “I guess trying to set up with the right equipment, you know, spending the money wisely, not blowing a ton of money and making sure that the equipment and what you do spend your money on is going to have a return for you, making sure that you're not throwing good after bad.”

While building his equipment line Participant #3 also experienced the importance of understanding contracts and purchase agreements for equipment:

We got into a combine deal that went less than stellar and, in the future, you know, he demanded full payment up front. And then when it came time for the combine delivery, it wasn't ready and it was pushed us back halfway to harvest, we finally got our combine on, so I would say, you know, knowing to not pay up front because they keep a little bit back, so they have more incentive to keep up their part of the deal.

While the leased operation from Participant #3's employer provided a land base, there was still the issue of finding capital to finance the operating costs. “I guess they (Farm Service Agency) had to put a guarantee on our line of credit for the farm operating note, so we were able to get into this program, without that we wouldn't have been able to.” Participant #3 explained that due to his limited asset base and financial history, the Farm Service Agency had to put a guarantee on his operating line of credit with the third-

party lender. A unique aspect to taking over a leased operation where you have a close relationship with the owner is the opportunity for mentorship and knowledge sharing that is typically common in family operations:

So working for my employer for you know, I worked for him for two years before we took over the lease and that was my good experience with organics and how to figure out that, you know, it's not a this is wrong, throw this chemical at it type thing, you get, to plan ahead so you don't have the wreck instead of fixing mistakes.

Participant #3 Textural Descriptions:

The opportunity to work into the succession of an agricultural operation as an employee versus a family member is a rare opportunity among YBFR. Participant #3 agreed that this opportunity allowed him to get started in agriculture and recommends a similar path for all YBFR looking to get into agriculture that don't have a family operation.

If I was just out of the dark trying to get into it, I'd look for a mentor or somebody that was doing that. I would work with them closely to get set up on getting into it, you know.... And finding somebody that has the same philosophies and angle that you're trying to take towards agriculture.”

Working closely with the owner and old employer allowed Participant #3 to avoid costly mistakes in his first year and rely on someone with significant experience on the ground being farmed:

I guess working with our employer has worked for the last few years. It's kind of framed our method here you know, and we're kind of in a different situation where we worked for him for a few years manage it and my business partner managed it for a few years and then we're still on the same ground where just have the opportunity to lease it now. So we can have history with this ground which has definitely helped, definitely made the first year go smoother than if we had just walked in on a brand new piece of land our first year.”

Participant #3 mentioned the importance of relying on a successful mentor with a depth of knowledge regarding the industry. “What, you know, what has worked, what hasn't worked and or he's seen over his 37 years and organics.”

He also discussed the importance of how using risk mitigation tools such as crop insurance and forward contracting has reduced the overall risk in starting an agricultural operation.

Well, we use crop insurance, we had some hail this year that we're able to make claim on, we try to contract as much as possible beforehand, leave some of our crops so we can play the market towards the end and see where we're at. But, we use both, you know, currently get contracts ahead of seeding and then also insure it so that we don't end up with wreck on our hands.

Using these tools has reduced the risk exposure and allowed him to reduce concern regarding the variables of the cash grain market and Mother Nature.

Participant #4 Structural Description:

Participant #4 is a YBFR who is currently in the process of transitioning his purchased farm from a conventional farm to a certified organic farm. The participant purchased the farm one year ago moving his operation from out-of-state to Montana. Previously, the operation was a 100% certified organic small grains operation. Since moving up to Montana, Participant #4 has been undertaking the process of how to transition his historically conventional ground to an organic operation, which will take three years to fully complete. Similar to other producers, Participant #4 cited access to land as the primary barrier to entering production agriculture:

I think the hardest thing was finding land and that's one thing I feel like we've kind of got, you know, blessed or lucky or whatever, every time we've kind of got the

land that's the one thing is, you know, we've worked really hard and every time we finally been able to put a land deal together, I just thought, Oh, man, we're really fortunate to be able to do this, because it seems so hard.

In his responses, Participant #4 mentions being “blessed” when referring to being able to lease out his family operation from his parents while they took a five-year furlough:

So, how it worked out for us was we'd we started out by leasing some family ground... But we kind of just got lucky with that farm lease, my parents, they were talking about going on a church service mission and getting a farm manager. And anyway, we were able to work out a deal for a five-year lease. And so that's how we got started.... So, we did that, we had a five-year lease with them. And then at the end of that, it was, again, like a situation where, okay, you're five years up, we're back.

Once the lease was up, Participant #4 needed a new lease or ground to farm, especially since he had already purchased the equipment necessary to operate his family's operation for those five years:

By the end of the five years, we were just frantically looking around for anything we could lease or buy. And, and we were just, you know, looking all over spending a ton of time networking and stuff. And then we eventually, right in that last month when the lease was up, we found this place up in Montana. So that's, how we found this place was through the Montana Organic Association conference we went to, and that's how we met the seller.

He explained that he was able to find a new operation through networking and attributes a lot of his positive experience in his early years to his network of peers. Similar to other participants, a lack of access to capital was another hurdle that had to be overcome to establish an agricultural operation. “Because none of the bankers we talked to at first, we had pretty much zero net worth, we're just starving college kids. So we couldn't have done it without the Farm Service Agency stuff.” In order to also appear

more professionally prepared and have a better chance of securing financing, the participant made sure he understood the paperwork and financial documents required for running an agricultural operation:

We did have to put together a balance sheet and all that stuff, you know, have our income, a loss and everything, but we were kind of doing that before, I guess. I think when we first started my mom, she did the books for my parent's farm. And when we first started, I went in, and so she does all the taxes, I went in with her and learned how to do all the taxes and took notes on that. And then we still hired a CPA to help make sure we're doing everything.... So I think that was kind of where we learned how to do the books and everything like the financial side of it, but I'd always kind of been interested in entrepreneurship. And so I kind of had taught myself all that kind of stuff already, I guess, coming into it.

Having an established understanding of the finances and record keeping assisted in securing financing and making objective decisions that positively impacted the experience. This participant also noted that the operation tried to diversify their income from different agricultural sources to improve cash flow:

“When we were frantically trying to save up a down payment for a farm, we did do some other stuff, but it was all farm related. We did seed cleaning, we did some custom cutting and we did some organic seed brokering but and we're still kind of doing some custom stuff up here, custom tillage, custom cutting, but it's all related to the farm somehow.

Also discussed as an important factor is mitigating risk in agriculture through the use of crop insurance:

When we first started our first year, or maybe our first two years, I can remember there was no organic crop insurance. Um, so that was one thing that changed and was a really big help. Because at first it was like we were pretty exposed to risk... So I realized, oh, shoot we better, (get) this insurance thing is really important. And, so then we started doing the crop insurance. So, I guess at first we didn't really, it was kind of just a risk that we were taking, and we got fortunate. And then later on, we started using the crop insurance and specifically the organic pricing and stuff that they let you do now.

Participant #4 Structural Description:

As an additional risk mitigation tool, Participant #4 decided to farm organically which he viewed as a way to offset the risk presented in the conventional cash grain markets:

I guess generally marketing specifically doing the organic program has been really big for us, just because I feel like it's a way where if you're, and maybe I don't want to say this, because then there'll be more organic farmers to compete with, but it seems like it's a way that we found out okay, as young farmers with not a huge amount of acreage can maybe put in a little bit more work, and then still be able to compete against the bigger farms out there.

This competitive edge allows a YBFR to level the playing field with larger conventional producers and is one reason that organic farming is an attractive alternative for YBFR. Participant #4 not only viewed this as a competitive edge to compete with conventional farmers, but also wanted to market his grain above or at least at the same prices as his organic peers:

And even within just the organic market, we tried to be aggressive in our marketing plan and being willing to talk to Mills out of state. We sold a fair amount of grain up here to Montana, even from out-of-state, just because we were able to find these little niche markets that happen to want exactly what we had grown that year. We had a certain bake quality or whatever that mill was looking for, which is able to give us a little bit of a premium over what the other guys around us we're doing.

He added that this competitive edge of marketing grain outside of the state can result in 10-20% increased premiums for grain crops due to producing organic versus conventional grains:

I feel like doing that as an organic farmer is a whole lot easier than the conventional farmer because we had we had the extra dollars that we could afford to ship it to Montana. I mean, now, it's like, if I had to ship my wheat (conventional) down (to

another state), take like \$1 a bushel out of it. So we've just lost 40% of the price of wheat by shipping it that far, whereas organic is a lot smaller percentage. So we had a little more flexibility and working with people farther away and finding those markets that gave us a little extra premium.”

This competitive advantage allowed him to overcome some of the significant challenges of land and capital, while also saving for a down payment on real estate for the future. In order to overcome the challenge of access to land, equipment, and capital, this participant also sought out Farm Service Agency (FSA) to assist in his operation. “So the thing that helped us was, we did do some FSA, we did the FSA equipment loan. And that's how we got started with all of our equipment.” The equipment financing by FSA provided the ability to purchase equipment with less stringent underwriting standards and at a lower rate than traditional lenders, so he could farm his parents lease on a five-year term. Similarly, to the equipment loans through FSA, the operation also used FSA financing to purchase their operation in Montana:

And then we also use got to use more, once we were paying off the other FSA loans. We finally got those pretty close to taking care of, and then we got some more money from them for the down payment program, FSA Down Payment Program, and then we did the rest through North West Farm Credit Service.”

The presence of FSA allowed him to overcome some of the main barriers to entry for YBFR and provided an opportunity for a transition into Montana. Participant #4 stressed the importance and positive impact FSA financing had on his experience as an YBFR: “I think I think if you're getting into it, I probably say FSA (is) number one, just because you almost have to do that.” Another highly praised practice responsible for his success as an YBFR was networking and finding a mentor in the area:

Number one, definitely...we try to just find the best neighbor that we feel like, just ask around whoever is kind of known as being a really good farmer in the area. And then we try and pretty much copy them, we realized that if we could, at least just be on par with one of the best people in the area, that's probably the best we're going to do. So we tried to pretty much just copy. Okay, when are they planning? How deep, you know, asking them a bunch of questions.... then to networking and thinking about it, if it was a beginning farmer that didn't grow up on a farm or something, because I've wondered about having friends asked me, well, how were you able to get into farming? And I think it would be possible to just be harder, they just have to build up a relationship with a farmer to a point where they could get a lease or whatever with not a lot of experience.

Not only does having a mentor and peer group allow producers to share knowledge and experiences, it can also be a valuable tool to understand competitive disadvantages compared to your peers:

I think it was our second year and I'd gone in and sold a bunch of our crop like, in January or February, and I thought I was doing really good... a good price and everything. But then in August, when the neighbors are harvesting, the one neighbor in particular they were kind of our mentors who we are copying, I found out that they were getting \$1.50 more per bushel than what we were getting. So anyway I figured out like how much that was coming out of our pocket, we were just shipping to the same mill and everything and that was when I kind of vowed that I was going to (figure out) how get the highest price that we did for the rest of our lives down there. We had we always got the highest price because we were putting in a whole lot more work. But, I think that was it was an experience that was really impactful and made us motivated to want to do our homework on the marketing and all of our lessons learned are kind of like that we did horrible, and then we try to do better.

This experience motivated him to improve his marketing skills and learn a valuable lesson. Another major influence on Participant #4's operation has been the formal education and university information. Participant #4 has a Master's degree in Plant Science and heavily relies upon university publications to assist in decision making:

I did end up going back to get my masters So that was, that was a big one on the agronomy side of things to have kind of understanding just how a plant works. And I think that was one thing going into it, especially in the organic industry. I'd say there's a greater number of snake oil salesman, then maybe just in conventional

agriculture, And people, try to sell you different products and things like that. And I think that was the biggest thing that helped me to at least understand the dynamics of how a plant gets nutrients, and how does soil moisture affect that and everything. (This) kind of helped me realize, okay here's some routes we can go down that probably have a potential (for) working and here's some that probably don't, or whatever.”

This baseline education allowed him to rely on his own knowledge to understand which tools made operational sense for his business. Similarly, he used University publications to better understand the industry and avoid mistakes or pitfalls:

So, I really like digging into the university publications and looking into the trials because it's more of a concrete of this worked. And here's the actual number of the yield increase or whatever their study rather than just oh, it looks pretty good. You know, this seems to be working type things.

Lastly, Participant #4 explained his experience with USDA entities and the programs that have influenced his operation and experience as a YBFR:

Yeah, the one I haven't talked about was NRCS (Natural Resources Conservation Service) and that helped us. We had a CSP contract that whole five years we were leasing down there, and that was a big help, because it was a lot of the things we were doing as far as transitioning to organic and some of the conservation stuff we needed to do for our organic program coincided really well with the CSP program. So we were able to get some financial assistance to do that. And it was kind of nice to have at least some kind of income coming in that we knew, we are for sure going to get regardless of how our crop did that year.

Participant #5 Structural Description:

Participant #5 is a YBFR from the Golden Triangle area who started an organic small grains dry land farming operation. He is not originally from the area where he farms and is currently leasing his operation. When discussing the primary challenges to entering agriculture as an operator as opposed to an employee, he cited the struggle of moving from hired labor to a management position:

I was preparing to make something happen if I had to leave. And so, then I didn't feel as helpless and dependent on my employer. And then that allowed me to say, look, I need more, give me this and present an opportunity to him that I see. Help me with it or not, I'm not saying give them an ultimatum. But to be more firm, because you could be and if he doesn't go for it, then I have to make a move somewhere else. So I was able to be very confident in myself, because I was preparing other pathways that I could take, if I had to, that were probably just as good as far as, like a job or that kind of thing. And that allowed confidence with my employer to push for what I needed.

This participant described his strategy to prepare himself and his family for alternative employment options if his employer was unwilling to move him into a management position or assist him with his own operation. While the participant never had to provide his employer an ultimatum, he prepared himself through education and skillset development to have multiple options if his current career path didn't progress with his current employer. Not only did he prepare himself to have options to leave, he also strived to treat his job as if he were making management decisions in his own operation:

I was able to be very confident in myself, because I was preparing other pathways that I could take, if I had to, that were probably just as good. And that allowed me confidence with my employer to push for what I needed. And then I like to think what would I do if this was mine? And so I didn't always have to go my employer or the owner, or somebody else. (I asked) what should I do here? How should I do this? A kind of a self-driven type aspect to it, or you just figure things out.

Participant #5 cites this self-driven mindset that drove his transition into becoming a full time small grain operation and feels that this strategy could be used by all YBFR, even in family operations.

After moving into an ownership position, he had to address the need for equipment to operate his newly leased farm ground. Fortunately, most of the equipment was included in the lease of the newly acquired farm ground, except for a few key pieces

of equipment. Participant #5 discussed the importance of managing capital expenditures for YBFR and the experiences that he went through:

Financial is probably equipment purchases because that plays a big role. It's just the truth in business but if you go newer, less break downs and just better fuel economy. You go older, its cheaper machinery, you might have more breakdowns and lower fuel economy, so trying to balance that stuff you know because, new brand new would be awesome. But a new beginning farmer can't afford that. You would almost guarantee yourself no break down time in the busy season, but you can't afford it.... What do you need? Versus what do you want versus what is smart? Because if I have to bite the bullet and pay another 10 grand a year on a tractor, it fit perfectly, that might be better than not...so, need versus want versus what's smarter?

Here, Participant #5 describes the decision-making process of weighing efficiency with overall costs that will reduce margins and add to production costs. This process is especially crucial for YBFR due to typically smaller operations with reduced risk-taking ability. Once he was able to secure the land and equipment, there was still operating, and equipment capital needed. He described the benefit of using YBFR loan programs to assist with startup costs:

Okay, so there's a couple things that (help) like the bankers to help set up beginning farmers and ranchers. And there's that program where we signed stuff through the FSA and are guaranteed more or have a better guarantee is that the way it works... when we started, we didn't have any money.

Participant #5 described the process of a third-party lender securing a FSA guarantee on the operating line of credit for the lender to take a risk on a YBFR with government backing if the loan were to fail.

Participant #5 Textural Description:

Participant #5 described tools and aspects of his operation used to overcome the challenges faced and how he implemented them. For example, he discussed the importance of hiring experts to assist you with subjects or areas of operation that are crucial to a successful experience:

When we started, we didn't have any money, so we didn't like hire a lawyer and we just went with what we could find on the internet for what kind of business structure to set up. When things weren't so tight and we did have some money, we talked to a lawyer who gave us some tips and we're set up with a big accounting firm.. Another thing with this lawyer, that's the r&d credit through an account that has this professional skills that most beginning farmer and ranchers don't know. He suggested a CSP program, through the NRCS. Which depending on how our business is structured, you can get more money through that program. But it's sort of like you add good things to your farming practices, like strip farming, instead of farming 1,000 acre block or different crops or mixed crops or putting in one row strips or different things like that, if you can qualify for the program, you're talking like 40 to 80 grand, and then I'm going to make this happen myself. I don't need those kind of things. Because I don't want to depend on them. But it's there and I qualify, so might as well make things easier is the way I see it.

This experience with an outside attorney and accounting firm provided experienced mentorship and guidance that most YBFR are missing and can be crucial. One of the recommendations from the attorney was to use USDA programs, such as the CSP program. He explained the importance of having a good relationship with the USDA agencies to ensure producers are taking advantage of programs that exist to help their operation:

FSA on the other hand, they've been really awesome, they are way on top of everything. And when I was managing, I was about to be late with something, they email me and say, when we need this signed, can you get that done? Or like this year they had a market facilitation program that has to do with tariff issues, though they pay 14 cents per bushel of wheat harvested, and I had no idea about that. And I go in there and they say, Oh, yeah, I know about this sign up. And so, then I get a two Grand check in the mail. And then I'm supposed to get another two-grand next

year because they're so helpful.... I had a guy tell me that some government employee's work for the government, some work for the people, you got to find the ones that work for people. It's hard to find or hard to know, but that's what you look for.

Similar to other producers, Participant #5 also discussed his use of crop insurance as a risk mitigation tool:

My feeling on that kind of insurance for like, winter wheat especially, it is the lowest risk itself, especially if it's on a fallow field. I'm not to convinced that I need that other than its required with banking right now. But I collected 15 grand this year on hail insurance. And that's after the premium so it was well, well, worth it this year so I'm pretty sold on hail insurance and spring crop normal crop insurance now, not so much on Winter Wheat

Using crop insurance allowed him to feel less exposed to the risk of farming and the weather and improved his experience entering production agriculture. Another important factor cited is the tool of networking:

The network you build is very valuable. And start in the beginning. Even if you think our jobs (are) just getting from point A to B, it's a stepping stone and I'm going to build the biggest network right away. And I remember being told that in college I'm like, what do you mean and how you do that? It's not that tricky. Just whoever you do business with, or anyone you cross paths with that you sell grain or buy parts from, get their number in your phone and find out who's the best at that because I don't have to be the best at banking or law or my books or fixing tractors. But if I know who's the best and for the money, you know who the best is for the right price. That's good enough so when you go to the seminars and stuff, there's some networking, mostly with other producers, that's been the most beneficial because like the Northwest Farm Credit (seminar) one, I already knew the bankers there, I wasn't necessarily networking with my loan officer. But the other producers, they're figuring out what's working for them. And so, it's kind of a side benefit of the educational plus of seminars, conferences and stuff.”

This concept of networking and finding the experts in their field to surround yourself with was a large factor in his success and experience in agriculture. With a supportive network of experts and advisors, Participant #5 feels reduced pressure to be the “best” at the multiple aspects of running a production agriculture operation.

Participant #6 Structural Description:

Participant #6 is a YBFR that operates a small grain operation mainly focused on dry land production with some irrigated ground as well. He grew on a small grain operation and now farms in conjunction with his family's operation, "It's just too early to tell. I've been farming with my dad for years, but actually being out on my own since 2017. So I'm learning as we go through." Due to family support, he has been able to secure ground and equipment but describes the paperwork and financial aspect are the primary challenge to his success. "(The) paperwork side of everything, just book keeping and trying to keep everything straight, and then getting around to tax season so that everything comes out at a level is probably the hardest thing." In order to diversify his income, he also secured off farm employment to supplement his farming income and reduce risk exposure from only having one income source. "I work as a ditch rider for the canal company here... So busy during irrigation season getting water to everybody." His off-farm income is also in a field closely related to his agricultural operation that keeps him informed on the current status of irrigation water and district changes. To further reduce risk, Participant #6 uses crop insurance as a risk mitigation tool and views it as another expense of doing business:

I asked to carry hail insurance and that did pay off in 2017. I did get hailed on and so that worked out good. Paid my premium and then some and then this year of course, no hail, which was good. But then it's just another added expense but ... it's good to have it.

Participant #6 also noted the importance of using technology to reduce costs and ensure fertilizer and seeding application were efficient and effective. “I guess probably the best thing that I've been doing is to get a better idea of what I need for fertilizers and seeding, and soil testing... a good idea what you're putting in the ground there. Getting the best results out of the field that you can.” While soil testing is a common practice among YBFR, he feels that it gives him a level of confidence that the input costs are being used effectively.

Participant #6 Textural Descriptions:

Facing the challenge of book keeping and financial record keeping, Participant #6 turned toward technology and added new computer software to his operation. “I’m still having growing pains learning how everything works... using QuickBooks and trying to self-teach a little bit more. So, trying to work through it.” This software program allows him to feel more in control of his finances and has made tax season less of a burden. To improve his financial expertise and management, he sought out the assistance of a lender that provided financial management tools specific to YBFR programs.

North West Farm Credit is my experience with bankers. Everybody has been really friendly and helpful, and if you have a question, they are more than willing to answer it for you... your opening budget worksheet is probably about the best tool that I've used from them. Just figuring out what you need for your operating note. And they have that in an excel based program, and that seems to be pretty slick.

Using an operating budget worksheet to project the expenses for the next operating year gives this participant more confidence in his operating line, commitment amounts, and the outlook for the year. Participant #6 explained that his positive

relationship with FSA and other USDA agencies has improved his overall experience as a YBFR:

You got to go in and certify all your acres. Then there's this program, I think this year they had that MSP program, which I didn't know about. I'm sure I got emailed on it, but you got 14 cents a bushel on your certified yields. And so that was a good one.. It's all to do with the tariffs. Yeah so, they had a 14-cent incentive on wheat in this area so that was a good one to catch. And it's a good thing that they let me know about it too."

By having a good relationship with FSA and keeping up on the paperwork required by the agency, he was able to secure an extra fourteen cents per bushel for his operation. This additional premium for his crop increases the profit margin and reduces the risk in the cash grain markets. This relationship is one of two cited as important to his operation, the second being his father as a mentor. "I'd say that the biggest impact on me has been working with my dad since I was a kid and learning from him and watching how everything gets done. Participant #6 views his dad not only as a mentor, but also as his primary source for all information regarding farming and the industry.

Participant #7 Structural Description:

Participant #7 operates a small grain dry land farming operation in conjunction with his family's operation. Since moving back to the family farm, he has accrued more leased ground annually and was able to purchase some deeded ground to add to his operation. He attributes family support as playing a significant role in his operation's success, "Biggest issue I've had is having enough equipment. And if it wasn't for getting equipment from my dad, I would be up a creek and not be able to do the number of acres

that I can right now.” With family support, he was able to solve one of the primary issues facing YBFR, access to affordable equipment:

I'm pretty lucky in that I had access to my dad and my uncle's equipment and they don't pay me anything. I just work on their farm for equity, or as payment for use of their equipment. So, it's actually worked out really well for me that way. And slowly over the years, I've started to buy equipment and fully work to get equipment that is in my name.

Working with a family operation has multiple benefits including access to equipment and access to knowledge and mentorship.

I'm just kind of learning what goes into the logistics of running everything, just kind of learning from dad mostly is where I've gotten most of what I know now Yeah, it's been a real learning experience being around in the last five years and see how things have changed since I've been back and all the new challenges that we face. And it's been really just a kind of cool to learn from him this little time here.... My dad is definitely the knowledge base. It's really nice to be able to bounce question off of him and see what he thinks and, and because he's done well.

The added benefits of sharing an operation and combine can be very beneficial for a YBFR. Since moving back to the family farm, Participant #7 was operating in a sliding commodity market that saw Spring Wheat and Winter Wheat drop in price. To compensate for the reduced prices, he improvised and introduced new crops into his rotations, “The use of peas and lentils on what would be fallow ground and not having nearly as many as a fallow as ten years ago, or farmers 10 years ago or did.” He praised the use of a diverse crop seeding plan and how it can reduce the risk of depending too much on the price of the commodity alone.

Participant #7 Textural Description:

To reduce risk, Participant #7 used crop insurance as a risk mitigation tool:

Pretty significant, especially when a lot of the land when you first lease it coming out of CRP, the crop insurance pretty much saves you the first year because you're not going to get much production off of it probably the first two years so it's a good safety net for young farmers when they're leasing land that's coming out of CRP.”

The use of crop insurance reduces the risk for ground coming out of CRP due to the possibility of low production in the first year. Farming ground that is coming out of the CRP program is common for YBFR due to the use of the FSA Transition Incentive Program (TIP).

The TIP program has helped a lot. FSA pays the first two years' worth of lease to the farmer, the landlord, while transitioning back into production so definitely that's probably the biggest impact they've had told me... they continue the CRP payments for two years while you're transitioning into production again, so it's less than I didn't have to pay the lease for the first two years, essentially.”

The TIP program allows YBFR to farm ground for minimal or no lease payments to the landlord due to the ability to receive CRP payments if they lease their ground to a YBFR. Participant #7 described a passion for agriculture and cited it as one of his main motivations to build a small grains operation similar to his family's operation:

I would say that when I was younger, just getting to ride the combine. And then finally, when I thought I got to run a combine by myself that just kind of locked it in for what I knew I always wanted to do... I haven't really had a specific moment where it's this is going to make me successful or not. I guess it seems like you'll do anything to not let it fail. So once you have that fire, you could be 12, you could be one, you could be 40, if you get that fire, it just never really dies and makes you want to do anything to keep things going.

The passion and drive created a strong emotional attachment to his work and the lifestyle that agriculture operations require for a positive experience.

Participant #8 Structural Descriptions:

Participant #8 is a YBFR that owns and operates a dry land small grain farm in the Golden Triangle. Participant #8 attended college and has now returned to the family operation where he has taken over management of his own operation and some ground farmed by his family. Upon moving back, he was faced with the challenge of finding real property to start his operation:

The most significant (challenge) would have been coming home and trying to compete with farmers that were already established ... trying to get either buy ground or lease ground that wasn't established, I didn't have any financing didn't have any equipment of my own. Luckily, I was able to lease equipment from my dad. Financing was probably the biggest hurdle when I came home trying to compete with guys who'd been in this area, and have been established for 20 plus years, as opposed to me coming home and essentially starting with nothing and trying to either beat them out to rent ground or beat them out buy ground.

Participant #8 returned to the farm with minimal assets and needed capital to start his operation. To secure capital, he sought out specific YBFR lending programs that would allow him access to capital at less stringent underwriting guidelines.

I started working with Farm Credit right away and their young beginning farmer program, and that was probably the best possible thing for me. They give a young producer a lot of opportunities. And then as far as being able to take over a ground, I took over a lot of ground that some people necessarily didn't want. I took a lot of ground that was previously in CRP and broke it out for people and kind of did some harder stuff that some people weren't necessarily willing to do.

The ground coming out of CRP is typically difficult to farm for the first two years due to the significant time of rest. Participant #8 was able to secure leases through FSA's TIP program and once the ground was back into traditional farming practices, he was able to continue to lease the farm ground through an extended lease. This opportunity allowed a YBFR access to ground that would otherwise be bid out of reach by a larger farmer in the area if not for the relationship established in the first two years out of CRP.

To further enhance his ability to expand his operation, he applied for direct financing from FSA:

FSA has impacted (me) pretty substantially. My operating note is FSA guaranteed, which makes it possible for me as a beginning producer to get my operating load known and I also have land finance with them for really incredible interest rates that were quite a bit quite a bit lower for a young and beginning producers compared to many other lending institutions.

As such, he was able to purchase ground within his first three years of operating due to the direct financing from FSA and secure a loan rate well below traditional lending rates. This availability of financing provided an avenue to compete with larger and more established farmers in the area on land purchases.

Participant #8 Textural Description:

Participant #8 claimed having a strong mentor and network base as a significant factor in the establishment of his small grain operation.

Both operational and financial, having the greatest impact on my success has just been seeking out advice of older people who've been doing this a while. , Whether it be someone in the lending industry, someone who's also in the ag industry and as a producer, and then anyone in the first couple years attending any sort of

workshops...getting a better understanding of how financials work, and trying to gain as much knowledge as I can.

The presence of a strong network of knowledge helped gain a strong understanding for the key aspects of the industry as well as how to run an operation. A lot was learned was from growing up on a family small grain operation:

As far as mentors, I have both my dad and my Grandpa who helped me a lot... a lot of advice. And then also just in general, anybody who's been in the community and been involved in agriculture for a while, is more than happy to give a young producer advice if you just ask them for it.

One lesson learned from the mentorship process was to understand your cost of production and when the cash grain markets are net positive, it is prudent to market grain:

I watched both my dad and my grandpa be fairly successful for quite a few years. I remember specifically, one point when the wheat markets were trending up towards the \$20 range, as soon as they hit what they could make some money out, they sold and there were guys holding out waiting for \$25 a bushel and they ended up watching it fall back down again. I've kind of always follow that logic. Once you get to a point where you can make money and break even, you probably need to be looking to market your grain, you can't always wait for it to continue to climb.

With the significant risks in agriculture, most producers implement risk mitigation tools to offset the risk presented by weather and the grain markets. Participant #8 uses crop insurance to offset the risk of weather, "I would say that the impact of crop insurances for myself as a young beginning producer has been very high with the multi-peril, crop insurance... the subsidies that we get for it, making it so available to everyone. Without it, it'd be too much risk as a young producer for me to probably even do what I do." He also emphasized that his experience in farming has been positively impacted by his formal and non-formal continuing education:

First impact would have been studying business, at MSU in Bozeman that got me fairly well prepared to come home and be on the farm. And then after that any outside seminars or anything like that, whether it be Montana grain growers, or business seminars or workshops that farm credit has put on, they've just helped me hone my skills and have a deeper understanding of some of that sort of stuff.... The Next Generation conference... I've been attending that and as far as events go, that seems to be a pretty good one. They get a lot of good speakers talking about a wide range of topics. Definitely something you can go to and walk away having learned at least one thing”

The continuing education informs on the latest technology and cropping practices which allows flexibility with seeding decisions. This education has provided a smooth transition into increased pulse crop seeding over the last two years as wheat prices have dropped.

Essence

The essence in phenomenology is the analysis of a collection of common experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2013). These common experiences become the themes of the research that participants shared and provide context to their experiences. As structured in the methodology of the research, themes were developed from participants' statements using peer examination of data. Once horizontalization was completed, themes were identified by reviewers and the commonalities were identified as the “essence” of the results. These themes provide context for the reader to “understand better what it is like for someone to experience that” (Creswell, 2013, p. 62). The themes expressed in the following essence of the experience were:

- Access to land, capital, and equipment is a significant barrier to enter production agriculture

- Developing a network of peers and finding a mentor within production agriculture is a valuable tool for YBFR
- The use of governmental YBFR programs has a positive impact on the experience
- Crop insurance is a valued risk protection tool for YBFR operations
- Support from family members and industry peers positively impacts the experience of YBFR financially and intellectually
- Continuing formal and non-formal education on the latest technologies and industry practices can assist YBFR in evolving their operations to give them a competitive edge
- A thorough understanding production costs on an agricultural operation will allow YBFR to make fact based, objective decisions that lead to a more profitable operation.

The YBFR does not have it easy when starting an agricultural operation on their own. While some come from a family farming background, this is not always the case. There are many challenges along the way regardless of family and farming history. Access to land, machinery, and capital were the most common challenges facing YBFR as they started their production agricultural operation. Most participants returning from either college or off farm work found it difficult to compete with established producers in securing these resources. Established producers have a significant advantage over YBFR in financial resources as well as risk taking ability putting YBFR at a competitive disadvantage. Finding land and securing financing for capital needed to start an operation was overwhelming for the YBFR. They felt deficient in experience, knowledge,

finances, and resources, but worked tirelessly to overcome these obstacles. This was expressed in the following statements:

- “Financing was probably the biggest hurdle. When I came home, trying to compete with guys who'd been in this area, and have been established for 20 plus years, as opposed to me coming home and essentially starting with nothing, and trying to either beat them out to rent ground or beat them out buy ground.”
- “The most significant challenge would have been coming home and trying to compete with farmers that were already established or trying to get either buy ground or lease ground that wasn't established, I didn't have any financing or any equipment of my own”
- “I think the hardest thing was finding land”
- “We've worked really hard and, but every time we finally been able to put a land deal together, I just thought, we're really fortunate to be able to do this, because it seems so hard”

This position of inadequacy for the YBFR is often compounded by having little to no assets when starting their operation making access to capital difficult. As one participant stated, “Access to capital and funds is a big one. I mean, you've got high climbing land prices versus diminishing returns” and “When you start off, at least in my situation, you start with little to zero assets.” This limited asset base makes qualifying for credit from lenders difficult for the YBFR and limits their ability to access land and equipment immediately. Other producers in the area with more experience and financed capital can purchase ground and equipment at higher prices due to their excess acres to spread costs.

Some YBFR are able to put together a deal for equipment which heavily relied on family support and trading labor for the use of equipment. “I’m pretty lucky in that I had access to my dad and my uncle’s equipment and they don’t pay me anything. I just work on their farm for equity, or as payment for use of their equipment. So, worked out really, it’s worked out really well for me that way. And I’m slowly over the years I’ve started to buy equipment and fully work that get equipment that my name is on.” Another participant described his labor trading experience, “(The) biggest issue I’ve had is having enough equipment. And if it wasn’t for me, sweat equity, getting equipment from my dad, I would be up a creek and not be able to do the amount of acres that I can right now.” For those YBFR that have this unique opportunity, it can be a way to build a business over time without a significant financial investment.

The YBFR values networking and having a mentor as significant influences on their experience. References to these influences were present in the responses of every participant. YBFR realize the benefits of having a network of peers and a strong mentor for professional growth and success. YBFR share ideas, seek knowledge, and appreciate having a sounding board for ideas from this network.

- “Number one, the mentor thing, we try to just find the best neighbor that we feel like is kind of known as being a really good farmer in the area. And then we try and pretty much copy them...at least just be on par with one of the best people in the area, that’s probably the best we’re going to do.”
- “We were spending a ton of time networking and stuff.”

- “We found this place, the Montana organic Association conference and that's how we met the seller”
- “Networking... just have to build up a relationship with a farmer to a point where they could get a lease or whatever with not a lot of experience.”
- “, Seeking out advice of older people, who've been doing this a while, whether it be, you know someone in the lending industry, someone who's also in the ag industry, a producer in the industry, and then any sort of workshops...getting a better understanding of how financials works, and trying to gain as much knowledge in all there is”
- “Be willing to take advice from people that are successful.”
- “Connecting with people who you're going to have relationship for a long time and then also being provided a service that isn't available to you”
- “The most impactful information sources are other successful farmers.”
- “A group of mentors or peers that you are comfortable with... they know what you made, what you got for it, everything else”
- “Yeah, informed peers I'd say.”
- “Montana next generation conference with where they get a passable speaker in there that have a lot of different experiences. And that's usually it's a really good experience just for the networking alone.”
- “The network you build is very valuable. And start in the beginning. I'm out of here in a year just build the biggest network you can right away. ... going to the

seminars and stuff, there's some networking, mostly with other producers, that's been the most benefit.”

- “If I was just out of the dark trying to get into it, I'd look for a mentor or somebody that was doing it...work with them closely to get set up on getting into it”
- “Finding somebody that’s got the same philosophies and angle that you're trying to take towards agriculture.”
- “I feel in this world, it's all about connection to who you know, and I've learned that from him.”

Networking and finding a mentor were the most common discussion topics for YBFRs and full of passion. The quotes demonstrate a tremendous amount of emphasis placed on finding mentors and networking. YBFR refer to having a mentor as the first piece of advice that they would relay to a fellow YBFR who was just starting their operation. The impact of networking and mentorship is clearly as significant as any other management tool or experience that the YBFRs have gone through.

In order to overcome the challenges regarding access to land, machinery, and capital, YBFR use programs specifically designed for them. Most useful programs are administered by NRCS and FSA which include the TIP, CSP, and CRP programs. Lender specific YBFR programs have also reduced underwriting guidelines and provided benefits for being a YBFR. While use of these programs is not surprising, the positive impact that they had on the YBFR operation and overall experience is noteworthy. FSA programs are particularly beneficial to those transitioning into their own operations,

specifically if leasing CRP land, as it reduces initial production costs for the YBFR and continues to provide financial benefits to the land owner.

- “I guess the tip program has helped a lot, FSA pays the first two years’ worth of lease to the farmer, the landlord, while transitioning back into production so that definitely helps ... that's probably the biggest impact”
- “They (FSA) continue the CRP payments for two years while you're transitioning into production again, so I didn't have to pay the lease for the first two years, essentially.”
- “I take a lot of ground that was previously been in CRP (TIP Program) and broke it out for people and, did some harder stuff that some people weren't necessarily willing to do”
- “I was able to participate in a TIP program which allowed me to get into some acres on a lease that otherwise probably wouldn't been able to come into so maybe the programs in and the availability has been impactful”

YBFR have been positively impacted by the TIP, or Transition Incentive Program, administered through FSA. Use of this program was a common strategy used by YBFR to overcome the challenge of the lack of land available. Beyond the TIP program, YBFR use FSA and other YBFR loan programs as a resource for access to capital, including direct financing and FSA-Guarantees for third party lenders.

- “Northwest Farm Credit Services has specific programs for beginning farmers and ranchers. And so we are ... guaranteed more or have a better guarantee”
- “I used the farm service guarantee.”

- “Um FSA has impacted pretty substantially, my operating note is FSA guaranteed, which makes it possible for me as a beginning producer to get my operating loan and I also have ground and land finance with them for really incredible interest rates ... quite a bit lower for a young and beginning producers compared to many other lending institutions.”
- “We did the FSA equipment loan and that's how we got started with all of our equipment.”
- “We got some more money from them for the down payment program, FSA Down Payment Program, and then we did the rest through North West Farm Credit service.”
- “I probably say FSA number one, just because you almost have to do that. Because at first, we had like, pretty much zero net worth.... So we couldn't have done it without the FSA”
- “I started working with Farm Credit right away and they're young beginning farmer program, and that was probably the best possible thing for me they give a young producer a lot of opportunities”
- “I would say probably any of the tools that farm credit made available through their ag vision program making it easier having worksheets to get a budget set up for every year, to get balance sheet set up, and then also the Farm Credit FSA loans, both were very beneficial for me”

Using FSA financing along with lenders that have specific YBFR programs allows access capital at lower interest rates and purchase machinery, equipment, and real estate. The impact of these programs on a YBFR's success goes beyond access to capital. Many felt that finding a lender that shares their vision and optimism for their operations significantly impacted their experience. The willingness of lenders to take a chance on YBFR and believe in their vision provides a sense of confidence and accomplishment that a lender would invest in them.

YBFR also utilize other USDA and FSA programs for excess income through sustainable management practices, such as CSP or CRP contracts.

- “NRCS that helped us, we had a CSP contract that whole five years we were leasing and that that was a big help,”
- “He suggested a CSP program, through the NRCS. Which depending on how our business is structured, you can get more money through that program. If you add good things to your farming practices, you can qualify for the program.
- “I think they're very valuable, they've impacted my experience positively, they've provided me with several programs that I use to my advantage on my farm I'm participating in the CSP program I have some acres in CRP ... the programs and the availability has been impactful”

These programs add benefits to increase income through management techniques, some may already be implemented. Both the CRP, and CSP programs increase the ability to build a strong relationship with USDA agencies. Similar to building a strong network,

YBFR value their relationship with FSA and NRCS organizations and see it as a critical business strategy. Having a strong relationship with the local USDA agencies can allow producers to be informed of all the latest programs and upcoming deadlines for incentives and payments.

- “The FSA they’ve been really awesome their way on top of everything. They had a market facilitation program that has to do with tariff issues, ... and I had no idea about that. ...they're so helpful.
- “I had a guy tell me that some government employees work for the government, some work for the people, you got to find the ones that work for people. It's hard to find or hard to know but that's what you look for. The FSA has been that way ... they've been really helpful.”

YBFR entering the business want to have risk protection on their investment. One common risk mitigation strategy is crop insurance as it provides a sense of security. YBFR view crop insurance as a valuable tool that allows them the necessary risk protection on their crops as they enter into agriculture.

- “I would say pretty significant, especially when a lot of the land when you first lease it coming out of CRP, the crop insurance pretty much saves you the first year....so it's a good safety net for young farmers when they're leasing land that coming out of CRP”
- “there was no organic crop insurance. So that was one thing that changed and was a really big help...at first, we were pretty exposed to risk”

- “I realized...this insurance thing is really important. So then we started using crop insurance”
- “The impact of crop insurance for myself as young beginning producer has been very high without the multi-peril crop insurance, and the subsidies that we get for it. It’d be too much risk (without crop insurance) as a young producer for me to probably even do what I do.”
- “Its backing, let’s put it that way. If you have a total failure, we can get the money back out of it.”

YBFR highly value the security that risk mitigation strategies bring to their business. The feeling of security and risk protection are primary benefits of crop insurance that help offset their increased exposure to loss. YBFR invest in crop insurance as it provides them with a monetary benefit on any loss claims on their operation and provides a sense of security. With the use of crop insurance, producers feel less exposed to the risk of mother nature. Overall, this business decision helps to reduce anxiety and concern of a total crop and operational failure.

YBFR need family and community support to be successful in their business. A valued financial and operational strategy implemented by YBFR is to use machinery and equipment in exchange for labor. Family members are also respected mentors that provide guidance for YBFR as they start their operation on their own. Community support can be expressed in many ways with one example being as a community member

transitioning into retirement and leasing their property to a local YBFR. This support from the community and experienced producers assists YBFR entering an operation.

- “I’m learning, what goes into the logistics of running everything just kind of learning from dad. It’s been a real learning experience being around him the last five years. It’s been really cool to learn from him this little time here.”
- “My dad is definitely the knowledge base...It’s really nice to be able to bounce questions off him and see what he thinks”
- “My parents, they were talking about going on a church service mission and getting a farm manager. We were able to work out a deal for a five-year lease. So that’s how we got started”
- “I think when we first started my mom, she did the books for my parent’s farm. And when we first started, I went in with her and learn how to do all the taxes and took notes on that.”
- “I have both my dad and my Grandpa who helped me a lot...a lot of advice. And then also...anybody who’s in the community... anybody who’s been in the community and been involved in agriculture for a while, is, more than happy to give a young a young producer advice if you just ask them for it.”
- “I worked for him for two years before we took over the lease and that was good experience with organics and how to figure out...to plan ahead so you don’t have the wreck instead of fixing mistakes.”

- “The way I got into it is my dad got me started back...7 years ago”
- “I don't treat it as a job. It's, it's more of a lifestyle.”
- “Having backing with my dad where I don't have to buy equipment up front”
- “The biggest impact on me has been working with my dad since I was a kid, learning from him and watching how everything gets done”

Having a community or family mentor is a major influence on the success for YBFR. Many cite this as the reason for their ability to build their agricultural operation. YBFR experiences are diverse with transitioning into the business, leasing, or taking over family or community lands. In some cases, the owner operator has no heirs that wished to take over the operation and were more than willing to serve as a guide for the non-family YBFR that desired to take on management of the operation. Commonly, the operational owners have such a strong desire to see the YBFR succeed, they provide reduced costs for access to equipment and real estate. While these opportunities are most common for YBFR that have family operations, there are opportunities for those who were not raised with an agricultural background to work with a community member to take over management of their operation.

Keeping up with the latest cropping practices and new technologies has allowed YBFR to adapt and evolve their operation to balance commodity risks. Diversifying production is an important consideration for YBFR. The consideration of cropping advancements such as the use of pulse crops to reduce the amount of fallow acreage on the operation can provide extra cash flow on lean years. YBFR prioritize continuous

learning that keeps them up to date on the latest practices and alternative strategies to maximize flexibility on their operations. This mindset of embracing new technologies has allowed them to build their operation in new, profitable ways.

- “The use of peas and lentils on fallow ground...not having nearly as many fallow acres as farmers ten years ago had, has helped our soil health”
- “I got my masters from Utah State. So, understanding the agronomy side of things has helped understanding, how a plant works.”
- “People, try to sell you different products. And I think having my masters was the biggest thing that helped me to at least understand, the dynamics of how a plant gets nutrients, and how soil moisture affects the plant. Which made me realize, okay, here's some routes we can go down that probably have a potential of working and here's some that probably don't”
- “I really like the university publications and looking into the trials... because I like that because it's more of a concrete of this (cropping strategy) worked. And here's the actual number of the yield increase rather than just oh, it looked pretty good”
- “I guess the biggest impact would have been studying business, at MSU in Bozeman that got me fairly well prepared to come home and be on the farm. And then after that just any outside seminars, whether it be Montana grain growers, or business seminars or workshops that farm credit has put on.”

- “This is the third year now. The Next Generation conference (extension) that they have. I've been attending that and.... that seems to be a pretty good one. They get a lot of good a lot of speakers talking about a wide range of topics. Definitely something you can go to and walk away having learned at least one thing”
- “One of the operational (strategies) that has had the most success for me has been, be willing to try things”
- “Having flexibility and the confidence to try new crops and stay technologically advanced enough that you're comfortable to try new things. Monetarily, I think that is one thing that's really, I think, led to my success.”
- “The biggest challenge I think is there's multiple ways to skin a cat and the way my dad has done it and the way my Grandpa has done their whole life has obviously worked but, can we bring more to the table?”
- “Probably the best thing that I've been doing....is probably soil testing.... Getting the best results out of the field that you can.”

Education is a well-defined priority for YBFR to build a strong knowledge base prior to entering production agriculture. Most were aware of their desire to enter the industry as an operator and made specific decisions to prepare themselves by taking coursework in business management and plant sciences. Others pursued the experience of learning by working on agriculture operations and constantly approach it as their own. As one YBFR states, “I like to think what would I do if this was mine? ... what should I do here? How should I do this, using a self-driven type aspect to it, or just figure things out,”

This passion for learning and keeping current on the latest industry practices expresses YBFRs desires to make their operation successful. “Once you once you get that fire, I guess it seems like you'll do anything to not let it fail. ...if you get that fire it just never really dies, and it just makes you want to do anything to keep things going”

A key factor to run a YBFR operation is understanding the production costs for all commodities within the operation. Producers who understand their cost of production are able to make decisions based on what is best financially. It is critical to understand the “break-even” price point and how to market grain at a point that provides a margin.

- “You have to know your numbers (break-evens, input costs).”
- “Know your numbers before you start...it’s important to know what it costs you to grow a bushel of grain or a bushel of chickpeas or a bushel of barley or, flax...it's important to know what cost you have into it. That allows you to make decisions that are not emotionally based. If you understand your input (expenses) and your cost of production entirely. You can make decisions based on numbers and returns versus emotions and feelings.”
- “Know your numbers, know them well, and make decisions based on those numbers”
- “We tried to be really aggressive in our marketing plan, being willing to, talk to Mills out of state. We sold a fair amount of grain up here to Montana, from Utah, because we were able to find these little niche markets that happen to want exactly what we had grown that year...I feel like doing that as an organic farmer is a whole lot easier than the

conventional farmer because we had we had the extra dollars that we could afford to ship it to Montana.”

Understanding the cost of production allows the YBFR to make better decisions with capital purchases and how they affect profitability on a per acreage basis. This approach allows YBFR to compare the efficiencies of new equipment to the costs of used equipment on their operation.

- “Equipment purchases, play a big role... The truth in business is, you go newer, there are less break downs and better fuel economy. You go older it’s a cheaper machine, but you might have more breakdowns and lower fuel economy so trying to balance those costs, with the desire to have a brand-new machine (is difficult). But a new beginning farmer you can't afford it (new machinery)”
- “It’s important to weigh what do you need? Versus what do you want? Versus what is smart? (regarding equipment purchases)”
- “Trying to get set up with the right equipment, spending the money wisely, not blowing a ton of money and making sure that the equipment...is going to have a return for you, making sure that you're not throwing good after bad”

To be successful, the YBFR must understand the costs of production in an operation and how every variable impacts the profit margin. All YBFR entering production agriculture should have a thorough understanding of costs and expenses prior to starting an operation.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research aimed to better understand the experience of YBFR entering production agriculture. At the onset of the study, the purpose was to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by YBFR, as well as the tools, attributes, and strategies that are currently in use to make YBFR operations sustainable. It is clear through the testimony of eight different participants that there are common professional practices shared from participant experience in the industry.

The seven different themes presented in the results also directly relate to the theoretical framework of successful career development presented. The human capital resource is represented by a lack of access to land and capital for YBFR, the use of governmental YBFR programs and their impact, the use of crop insurance as a risk protection tool, and lastly, the continuation of formal and non-formal education. These themes are similar in the fact that all of them are based around occupational knowledge, cognitive ability, and industry skills (Andreas, 2012). Career identity was evident in participants' responses that articulated a desire to build a successful operation that allowed them to live the lifestyle that comes with working in the agriculture industry. One participant explained, "Once you get that fire... you'll do anything to not let it fail... you want to do anything to keep things going." This statement demonstrates the focus and goal clarity that YBFR have and how it has influenced their career success. Both developing a network of peers and having family support themes tie directly back to the social resource of the framework. Both themes are founded in having a support system of peers, mentors and or family members who provide knowledge and advice to assist career

success. Lastly, the psychological resource is represented by the theme of understanding the cost of production that participants cited as crucial for their ability to make the correct operational decisions. This theme, similar to the psychological resource, provides individuals with the ability to make fact-based decisions instilling a feeling of self-efficacy and optimism in their operations.

It is evident that the participants consistently referred to seven different themes regarding their experience in the industry. The lack of access to land, capital, and equipment is a serious issue facing all YBFR that plan to enter production agriculture. While this challenge was acknowledged in the review of literature (Mishra, 2009; Ahern, 2011), the results indicate it is the primary problem facing YBFR. This finding confirms previous findings that indicated the acquisition of farmable real estate as well as the ability to secure operating capital as the primary barriers to entry for YBFR (Mishra, 2009). All participants referenced at least one of the three assets as a barrier to entry to the industry and each discussed how they used business practices or tools to acquire all three. One surprising aspect of the responses regarding the barriers to entry was the factor of competition from more experienced and established farmers. While the presence of competition from more experienced farmers has been cited as an aspect of why farmable real property is scarce (Ahern, 2011), the impact it is having on YBFR was evident in the participant responses. Established farmers are typically out bidding younger and less experienced farmers on leases to a point that even if YBFR had the operating capital to take on the lease, the price would create a negative net margin. Larger more established producers can absorb these losses due to their size and hold the lease until grain prices

increase and the lease is at a net positive margin. This competitive advantage of the more established and financially secure producer will continue to reduce YBFR access to real property and may reduce the number of farmers in an area to a few large farmers controlling most of the farmable acreage. This competitive nature between peers is primarily limited to farming assets, the acquisition of excess land and equipment allows larger farms to potentially bring back future generations to their operations. In the years to come the agriculture industry will need to reflect on this changing aspect of the industry and make a conscious decision to either combat it or allow for this transition of larger farms to control more acreage. Further research should be conducted to better understand the impact that YBFR have on the agricultural industry and what consequences may be presented if there is a further decline in the amount of YBFR entering production agriculture into the future.

While these challenges were presented in all participants, each found specific strategies that allowed them to persevere and ultimately succeed. These strategies demonstrate the amount of resourcefulness, self-determination, and flexibility that YBFR require to be successful in the industry. Participants discussed the use of FSA programs, trading labor for equipment use, and implementing new and evolving technologies into their operations. For a YBFR to be successful into the future, it is likely they will have to adopt a similar approach of resourcefulness as well as increase their ability to be flexible with emerging practices. These results confirmed previous research that the use of new technologies, genetically modified crops, and precision agriculture (Adhikari, 2009) have a positive impact on the experience of YBFR. While all of these traits were evident in the

participants' responses, having a structured business plan as an important tool was rarely mentioned. While this finding does raise curiosity regarding previous research on the subject using ARMS data to identify business practices or strategies that positively impacted YBFR operations (Katchova, 2009; Mishra, 2009). A closer analysis of the responses uncovers that the primary aspects of a business plan including cash flow analysis and risk protection strategies are present. While these strategies have been structured to fit an agricultural operation, each participant described specific aspects of their business plan and how they approach their operation. However, it should be noted that further contextualization of previous research findings (Katchova 2009; Mishra, 2009) is required to provide future YBFR and researchers an explanation regarding the implementation of successful strategies. Without the context of how exactly a business plan impacts the experience of YBFR, it is difficult to understand how it should be used to benefit YBFR operations, or the correlation it may have on a positive financial impact on the return on assets (ROA) of YBFR. Further research should be conducted into the context and use of business plans and their financial and experiential impact on YBFR that explores their use and not only their existence and the correlating ROA.

In addition, further research should be conducted to better understand the impact that YBFR have on farming communities through their innovation and willingness to try new cropping practices as well as new technologies. Participants discussed their early adoption of new cropping practices, including the use of pulse crops, as a primary reason for their success and indicated that on family operations, they were the primary driver behind the decision to use pulse crops. Since 2013, pulse acres seeded in Montana have

increased 155.00% according to the Montana Department of Agriculture. It is likely that the increase in pulse crops is correlated with the amount of YBFR introducing pulse crops to an area. Further research should be conducted to further investigate this correlation and understand the net benefit of YBFR to a population.

Extreme importance was placed on building a network of industry peers and having a strong mentor. Each participant discussed the significant impact that their group of peers or mentor has had on them and the importance of continued networking. When asked if they could relay a piece of advice to future YBFR, the results were overwhelmingly to place significant resources and time into networking. While the scope of this research is confined by the personal experience of YBFR in the study, further research should be conducted to better understand the financial, and operational impact that peer networks and mentors have on YBFR. The networking and mentor theme was unique and may be a key attribute to assisting YBFR having success into the future. Further research should investigate the exact benefits that YBFR are receiving from their networks and understand the process of building a network of peers and acquiring a mentor. This finding may also have an impact on the extension branch of universities that may be able to provide further networking events that provide increased exposure to industry peers for YBFR in the area.

Lastly, the significance of understanding the exact cost of production for all commodities or enterprises is a crucial skill for YBFR. This skill or attribute has been discussed as important; however participant responses acknowledged that the understanding of cost of production allows objective, fact-based decision making which

lead to operational and financial success. Further research should be conducted to better understand not only the impact that understanding the cost of production has on operational success but also how YBFR are developing these skills. Are there resources outside of a mentor or family member that YBFR can easily obtain regarding the cost of production for all commodities in their area? How accurate are these sources? Would a network of peers that develop cost of production for the area benefit all YBFR in the area? These are all questions that should be researched further to improve the understanding of how YBFR are experiencing entering production agriculture.

The purpose of this research was to gain a better understanding of the experiences of YBFR that have built agricultural operations. It is the purpose of this study to serve as a guide not only for future research, but also as a guide for future YBFR. The results of this research effectively illustrate seven different themes experienced by the participants that will provide new YBFR entering agriculture with a guide of potential challenges and effective business practices to overcome these challenges. This research also uniquely provides contextual explanation to how these business practices and strategies are implemented in existing operations. With this contextual knowledge, future generations of YBFR will be able to avoid the pitfalls of the participants and adopt their successful practices early. While this research is intended for the YBFR community, it will also serve as a jumping off point for extension, FSA, and other agencies charged with the education of YBFR. It is recommended that this research be used as a testimonial to the experience of the YBFR operators within the industry today to serve as a baseline for further research and discussion. The results also provide advocacy for future investment

in YBFR programs from FSA and agricultural lenders that clearly serve a vital role to YBFR.

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