



BattleGround to Breaking Ground

Background

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service developed Texas AgrAbility in 2008. Texas AgrAbility assists farmers and ranchers with disabling and/or chronic health conditions to start or stay engaged in agriculture operations. In 2011, program staff began to notice a push from USDA to support military veterans with and without disabilities to engage in production agriculture operations. A one-day workshop, *BattleGround to Breaking Ground: Agriculture Workshop for Military Veterans (BGBG)* was developed with the help of USDA to support this mission. Through these workshops, some basic knowledge topics are addressed, such as available funding sources, business planning resources for veterans, etc. While the workshops assisted more than 500 veteran and other farmers/ranchers, veterans were still struggling with accessing funding for equipment and land, as well as obtaining experience. In 2015 the BGBG program was expanded into a year-long educational program that includes a second online business planning phase and a third phase that provides agriculture production courses through online courses, field days, and hands-on learning opportunities. The program conducts 5-6 one day BGBG workshops across Texas every year. Participants can be selected for a seat in Phase 2 & 3 through a competitive application process or participants can choose to skip the application and selection process by paying tuition. The program utilizes a cohort/team model and opens applications in the summer and winter for spring and fall cohorts.

Relevance

American farmer/ranchers are disappearing at an alarming rate. With the average age of the American producer at 57.5 years old, our nation's food security could be challenged over the next 20 years. Many veterans are pursuing self-employment and turning to agriculture-based enterprises to accomplish their goals. Many military members come from rural areas and when they transition out of the military, they wish to return to these areas; however, unemployment in rural farming areas is higher than urban areas. Many veterans also struggle to transition to civilian life after leaving the military. Farming and ranching has become a highly sought after career for many veterans providing opportunities for self-sustainability, therapeutic healing, meaningful and flexible self-employment, and continued service, among other benefits.

The most challenging barriers for veterans entering into production agriculture are access to capital and access to land. Veterans seeking funding for their farm enterprise have faced several lender challenges in qualifying for financing. Among those challenges are creating viable business plans, obtaining relevant education, and acquiring skills and experience.

Research has shown that this population is able to achieve higher levels of financial performance if they have a complete business plan and utilize standard financial management practices. Participants of BGBG Phase 1-3 graduate the program with these foundational skills that are integral to any successful agriculture operation.

BGBG Target Audience:

Military Veterans



Active Duty Military



Family Members of Veterans & Active Duty



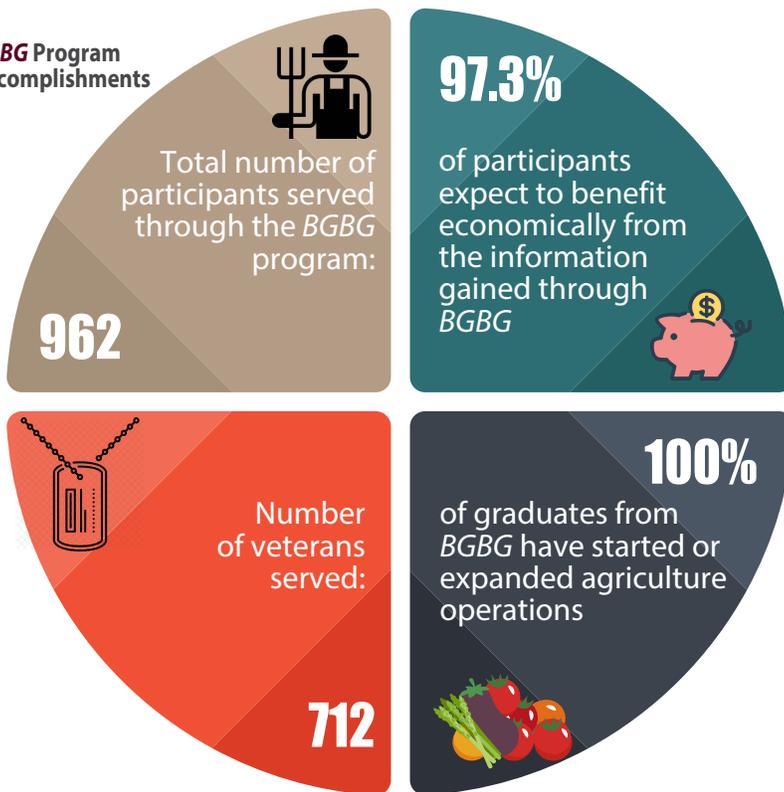
All Beginning Farmer/Rancher non-veterans



BGBG is funded by the USDA National Institute of Food & Agriculture

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BGBG Program Accomplishments



BGBG goals:

- Increase the number of veteran and other new and beginning farmer/ranchers through:
 - Face-to-face and online educational training in farm management and production-specific agriculture practices
 - Individualized educational planning and guidance to support diverse agriculture business interests
 - Hands-on learning opportunities connected to online course content
 - Peer-to-peer mentor support

To accomplish these goals BGBG will:

- Enhance the sustainability of Texas' new veteran beginning farmer/ranchers
- Offer an array of veteran transitional and disability support services to reduce self-employment barriers for veterans (particularly those with disabilities) to enter into production agriculture by providing veterans the knowledge, skills, and tools needed to make informed decisions to start, establish, and manage successful agriculture enterprises

BGBG Participant Benefits:

1. Development of a business plan and have it professionally reviewed
2. Education in business planning including goal setting, risk management, business management, operations planning, financial planning, veteran resources, and more
3. Online and hands-on education in agriculture enterprise production
4. Hands-on skill building with mentors and/or through educational workshops
5. Individual Education Plans developed specifically for each participant, including referrals to additional programs
6. Disability specific technical assistance to improve overall quality of life and increase farm and ranch sustainability
7. Assistance in applying for additional programs including financial assistance (grants, loans)
8. One-on-one veteran transition services and coaching
9. Connection to a network of veteran farmers/ranchers and other veteran support organizations

The **BGBG** project is a 3-phase training program conducted over 12 months, providing veterans with hands-on training and financial planning.

Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
<p>BattleGround to Breaking Ground Ag Workshop</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural Business Ideas • Business Planning Basics • Resources • Funding for agriculture operations 	<p>Online Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 16 weeks of business planning courses • Individual Education Plan • Community of Practice • Develop your business plan! 	<p>Production Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentorship • Hands-On Training • Production Agriculture Online Courses

Apply

BGBG graduates receive:

1. Certificate of Completion
2. Connection to local Technical Assistance Teams
3. Increased access to funding for agriculture operations