



BEGINNING VETERAN FARMER  
**OPERATION  
GROW**

★ ALABAMA EXTENSION ★  
ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF  
AGRICULTURE & INDUSTRIES

**Operation Grow** empowers Alabama veterans with agricultural training, mentorship, and resources. This growing community is succeeding with hands-on skills, valuable connections, and the tools to thrive. Learn more and support the program at [www.Operation-Grow.com](http://www.Operation-Grow.com).

**Direct Partnerships**

- Operation Grow is a partnership with the Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries (**ADAI**) and the Alabama Department of Veteran Affairs (**ADVA**).
- Operation Grow is part of the Governor’s and ADVA’s **Alabama’s Challenge Initiative** for suicide prevention ([www.vetsforhope.com](http://www.vetsforhope.com)).

**Major Objectives**

- **Training.** Hands-on, on-farm, and online training for veterans interested in agriculture (integration of technical, experiential, and social learning).
- **Network.** Connect veterans with other support agencies, institutions, and nongovernmental agencies to extend the current knowledge base and monitor new needs.
- **Sustainable Support.** Connect veteran farmers with mentors for farming success. An equipment loan program will also be available for grassroots support.

**Major Outcomes and Impacts**

**100%**

Participant recommendation to other veterans for training and networking

**70%–80%**

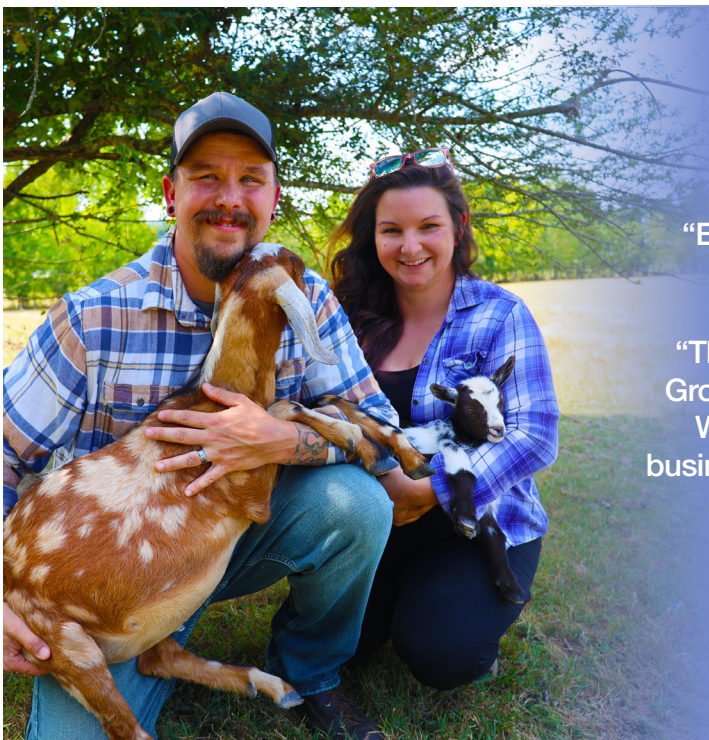
Immediate usefulness of hands-on equipment training

**67%**

One-on-one usefulness of farm planning sessions

**90%**

Information usefulness from Operation Grow Bootcamp



**Veteran Testimonials**

“We are in the planning stage; this program is perfect!”

“Every bit of actionable information is critically valuable!”

“Operation Grow team is very responsive!”

“Through the classes that have been put on by Operation Grow, we have gained a wealth of knowledge for all areas. Whether you are a backyard farmer, whether you have a business, whether you are a commercial farmer, you should get connected to your Extension office.”

Video testimonial:

[https://youtu.be/fbSRmu\\_lE-E?si=nbGYW096uyImiSiy](https://youtu.be/fbSRmu_lE-E?si=nbGYW096uyImiSiy)

# Major Veteran Aspirations and Outputs



**Growth:** from 50 veterans in 2022 to 189 veterans in 54 Alabama counties in 2024.



**Gender Breakdown:** 17% female veterans and 83% male veterans in the program.



**Advisory Panel:** 52% veterans, including mentor farmers.



**Communication:** balances training and networking.



**Experience:** 72% beginning farmers; 18% experienced farmers seeking diversified agriculture.

**Training Needs:** specialty crop production (fruits and vegetables) on small acres, livestock production, and marketing training.

**Major Barriers:** lack of land, labor, capital, and equipment; need for business training.

## Communication System

### Print Resources

Farming handbooks, slide charts, and bulletins are provided free to all veterans. Veterans receive marketing materials at exhibitions and networking events and a welcome packet at registration.

### In-Person Training Events

Operation Grow Bootcamp, Operation Grow Demo Days for equipment training

### Virtual Training Events

Operation Grow Connect for networking among veterans (mentor farmer-led event)

### Grassroots Support

Veteran support with county Extension coordinators, regional Extension agents, Veterans Service Offices, community-based organizations, and mentor farmers.

### Social Media Resources

Operation Grow group on Facebook (for veterans only), Alabama Extension Commercial Horticulture Channel on Facebook (open to all), YouTube channel for equipment training (<https://www.youtube.com/@OperationGrowAL>)

### Digital Resources

Operation Grow website, e-newsletters, blog articles, impact report on the Alabama Extension website, Farming Basics Mobile App at <https://youtu.be/HZub3M1yz1A?si=2H6V6QF3bi0QngQO>, Farming Basics Online Course (2-part series) at <https://youtu.be/6e9n8XMU9B0?si=C9V0zSXIOXc7IY8f>, and event registration pages available at no cost to participants.