



LAND
STEWARDSHIP
PROJECT

Land Stewardship Project Fact Sheet #8

Farm Beginnings®

Updated:
Dec. 2013

Rotating in a New Generation of Farmers

www.farmbeginnings.org

What is Farm Beginnings?

Farm Beginnings® is a Land Stewardship Project (LSP) initiative that provides participants an opportunity to learn firsthand about low-cost, sustainable methods of farming.

Farm Beginnings started in 1997 when a group of south-east Minnesota farmers called the “Wabasha County Give A Damns” approached LSP with concerns about where the next generation of farmers would come from. These farmers saw a need for a program that would combine classroom instruction and on-farm mentoring.

What resulted was an initiative that has its roots in the philosophy that farmers learn new techniques and management systems best by networking with other farmers. The first LSP Farm Beginnings classes began meeting in southeast Minnesota and later expanded to other regions.

Why is it needed?

Making a go of it in farming today can be very difficult. However, a growing group of farmers are showing that through the use of low-cost techniques, creative marketing and whole farm planning, one can develop a farming operation that is economically viable and provides a good quality of life.

Studies show that a major barrier to adopting “sustainable” farming methods is lack of information and first-hand knowledge related to such systems. A Northwest Area Foundation study found that farmers adopting alternative production methods were more likely to be successful if they were part of some sort of formal or informal network of like-minded farmers.

Another potential barrier to getting started in farming is lack of access to capital. A 2003 survey of farmers, lenders and agricultural educators in Minnesota and Wisconsin found that not having a good business plan was a major impediment to getting financing for alternative enterprises.

By providing a good foundation in business planning while creating the opportunity for participants to network with established farmers, Farm Beginnings helps knock down two major barriers to the adoption of innovative agricultural systems.

The Farm Beginnings course

Farm Beginnings classes begin in the fall of each year and meet throughout the winter. Class participants learn goal setting, financial planning, business plan creation, alternative marketing and low-cost sustainable farming

techniques. Participants are encouraged to develop a sustainable business plan that enhances their quality of life and helps them achieve their goals—a plan that factors in sound environmental practices while being economically viable. Established farmers and other professionals such as lenders and agricultural business instructors present at the seminars, providing a strong foundation of community resources, networks and contacts for those interested in farming. These relationships often last long after the formalized course is concluded.

The highlight of the winter classes is a set of presentations given by beginning farmers outlining their goals and how they plan on achieving them. At the conclusion of classes, Farm Beginnings moves onto the land itself, where participants take part in a series of on-farm field days during the spring and summer. At these field days, innovative farmers demonstrate firsthand how they raise food and fiber using methods that are economical and environmentally sound. The on-farm education component is a critical part of the learning. Participants find themselves touring a variety of farms in addition to having a

one-on-one experience with a specific farmer. Throughout the 12-month course, participants are encouraged to utilize established farmers as mentors.



How successful is Farm Beginnings?

- ✓ During the first 16 years of the initiative, more than 600 people have completed the Farm Beginnings course in southeast and western Minnesota alone.
- ✓ Farm Beginnings graduates are engaged in a broad spectrum of farming enterprises, including beef, dairy, hogs, meat goats, poultry, wholesale vegetables, Community Supported Agriculture, organic grains and specialty products such as cut flowers.
- ✓ Farm Beginnings has served as a model for a nationwide community-based beginning farmer support initiative called the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (www.csrees.usda.gov/fo/beginningfarmerandrancher.cfm), which is administered by the USDA.

Continued on reverse page...

Is Farm Beginnings right at this time?

The Land Stewardship Project offers “Farm Dreams,” an entry level, four-hour, exploratory workshop designed to help people who are seeking practical information on whether a farming career is the next step for them. It’s recommended as a precursor workshop for those who are considering taking Farm Beginnings. See www.landstewardshipproject.org/morefarmers/farmdreams or call Nick Olson at 320-269-2105.

Are you in the MN, IA, WI region?

If you are a beginning farmer in the Minnesota region who is interested in learning more about Farm Beginnings, there are several ways to get started:

◆ Driftless Region

(SE Minn., Western WI, NE Iowa)

- Karen Benson (class registration)
E-mail: karenb@landstewardshipproject.org
- Dorian Eder (class information)
E-mail: dori@landstewardshipproject.org
- Karen Stettler (general information)
E-mail: stettler@landstewardshipproject.org
Website: www.farmbeginnings.org
Phone: 507-523-3366
Address: P.O. Box 130, Lewiston, MN 55952

◆ Prairie Region

(Western Minn. & NW Iowa)

- Amy Bacigalupo (general information)
E-mail: amyb@landstewardshipproject.org
- Nick Olson (class information)
E-mail: nicko@landstewardshipproject.org
- Richard Ness (class information; Holistic Mgt. classes)
E-mail: rness@landstewardshipproject.org
Website: www.farmbeginnings.org
Phone: 320-269-2105
Address: 301 State Rd., Suite 2, Montevideo, MN 56265

◆ Lake Superior Region

- Cree Bradley
Website: www.farmbeginnings.org
Phone: 218-834-0846
E-mail: cree@landstewardshipproject.org

Farm Beginnings in other regions

Besides Minnesota, Farm Beginnings is in Illinois, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota and New York. LSP and the groups listed here make up the Farm Beginnings Collaborative:

◆ Central Illinois Farm Beginnings

- Terra Brockman
The Land Connection

Phone: 217-840-2128
E-mail: terra@thelandconnection.org
Website: www.thelandconnection.org

◆ Stateline (Illinois) Farm Beginnings

- Tom Spaulding/Jenny Meyer/Sheri Doyel
Angelic Organics Learning Center
E-mail: tom@learngrowconnect.org;
sheri@learngrowconnect.org;
jenny@learngrowconnect.org
Website: www.learngrowconnect.org

◆ Southern Illinois Farm Beginnings

- Dayna Conner/Devin Brown
Food Works
Phone: 618-319-0542
E-mail: dayna@eatsouthernillinois.org

◆ Nebraska Farm Beginnings

- Gary Lesoing
Nemaha County Extension
Nebraska SARE Coordinator
Phone: 402-274-4755
E-mail: glesoing2@unl.edu
- William Powers
Executive Director, Nebraska Sustainable Ag Society
Phone: 402-525-7794
E-mail: healthyfarms@gmail.com

◆ Hudson Valley (New York) Farm Beginnings

- Rachel Schneider
Hawthorne Valley Farm
Phone: 518-672-7500, ext. 105
E-mail: rachel@hawthornevalleyfarm.org
Website: www.hawthornevalleyfarm.org

◆ North Dakota

- Annie Carlson
FARRMS
Phone: 701-486-3569
Fax: 701-486-3580
E-mail: info@farrms.org; acarlson@farrms.org
Website: www.farrms.org

◆ South Dakota

- Frank James/Heidi Kolbeck-Urlacher
Dakota Rural Action
Phone: 605-697-5204
Fax: 605-697-6230
E-mail: heidiku@dakotarural.org;
fejames@dakotarural.org
Website: www.dakotarural.org



This fact sheet is brought to you by the members and staff of the Land Stewardship Project, a nonprofit organization devoted to fostering an ethic of stewardship for farmland and to seeing more successful farmers on the land raising crops and livestock. For more information, call 612-722-6377 or visit www.landstewardshipproject.org.