



Farm Beginnings®

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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 southeast 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 economically 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 10-month course, participants are encouraged to utilize established farmers as mentors.

The Livestock Loan Program

In a further effort to help people get launched in their farming careers, Farm Beginnings has partnered with Heifer International to provide a zero interest revolving livestock loan for qualified beginning farmers. The Livestock Loan Program helps farmers build equity while supporting them with a continuing education component.

How successful is Farm Beginnings?

- ✓ During the first dozen years of the initiative, more than 380 people have completed or are enrolled in the Farm Beginnings course in southeast and western Minnesota.
- ✓ Over 60 percent of those graduates are farming.

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- ✓ Over 6,000 acres of land is owned, rented or otherwise farmed by Minnesota-region Farm Beginnings graduates.
- ✓ Farm Beginnings graduates are engaged in a broad spectrum of farming enterprises: beef, dairy, hogs, meat goats, poultry, wholesale vegetables, Community Supported Agriculture, organic grains and specialty products such as cut flowers.
- ✓ Sixty-six percent of the course graduates who are farming say their net farm income has increased since taking Farm Beginnings. The average net farm income increase is \$12,500.

Are you in the MN, IA, WI, SD 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 Stettler (general information)
E-mail: stettler@landstewardshipproject.org
- Parker Forsell (Farm Beginnings Collaborative)
E-mail: parker@landstewardshipproject.org
- Karen Benson (class registration)
E-mail: ispse@landstewardshipproject.org
Website: www.farmbeginnings.org
Phone: 507-523-3366
Address: P.O. Box 130, Lewiston, MN 55952

◆ Prairie Region

(Western Minn., SE S. Dak., NW Iowa)

- Amy Bacigalupo (general information)
E-mail: amyb@landstewardshipproject.org
- Nick Olson (class information)
E-mail: nicko@landstewardshipproject.org
Phone: 320-269-2105
Address: 301 State Rd., Suite 2, Montevideo, MN 56265

Farm Beginnings in other regions

Besides Minnesota, Farm Beginnings is now in Illinois, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota and the Hudson Valley of New York, as well as the Lake Superior region in north-east Minnesota and northwest Wisconsin. LSP and the groups listed here make up the Farm Beginnings Collaborative:

◆ Central Illinois Farm Beginnings

- Deborah Cavanaugh-Grant (Greenview, Ill.)
Phone: 217-968-5512
Cell: 217-341-0398
E-mail: cvnghgrn@illinois.edu
Website: <http://central.illinoisfarmbeginnings.org>

◆ Illinois: The Land Connection

- Kathy McGroarty-Torres (Evanston, Ill.)
Phone: 847-570-0701

Fax: 847-570-0711
E-mail: kathy@thelandconnection.org
Website: www.thelandconnection.org

◆ Illinois: Stateline Farm Beginnings

- Tom Spaulding/Sheri Doyel/
Tracey Hall (Caledonia, Ill.)
Phone: 815-389-8455
E-mail: tom@learngrowconnect.org
E-mail: sheri@learngrowconnect.org
E-mail: tracey@learngrowconnect.org
Website: www.learngrowconnect.org

◆ Lake Superior-NW Wisconsin/NE Minnesota

- Cree Bradley (Two Harbors, Minn.)
Phone: 218-834-0846
E-mail: cree@lakesuperiorfarming.org
Website: www.lakesuperiorfarming.org

◆ Nebraska

- Gary Lesoing (Auburn, Neb.)
Phone: 402-274-4755
E-mail: glesoing2@unl.edu
- William Powers (Lincoln, Neb.)
Phone: 402-525-7794
E-mail: healthyfarms@gmail.com
Website: www.nebsusag.org

◆ New York

- Rachel Schneider (Ghent, N.Y.)
Phone: 518-672-7500, ext. 105
E-mail: rachel@hawthornevalleyfarm.org
Website: www.hawthornevalleyfarm.org

◆ North Dakota

- Britt Jacobson/Karri Stroh (Medina, N. Dak.)
Phone: 701-486-3569
Fax: 701-486-3580
E-mail: info@farrms.org
Website: www.farrms.org

◆ South Dakota

- Frank James/Heidi Kolbeck-
Urlacher (Brookings, S. Dak.)
Phone: 605-697-5204
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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.