



Farm Beginnings®

Updated:
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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 was launched in 1997 and from the beginning has had 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, whole farm planning and strong connections to established farmers, 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 firsthand knowledge related to such systems, as well as an inability to access adequate capital.

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 program

The Farm Beginnings program exists to help beginning farmers in all stages of their farming career — from entry-level assessments and a four-hour “Farm Dreams” exploration workshop, to our 10-month strategic planning class, as well as participation in on-farm field days, winter workshops and mentoring experiences through our farmer network.

The aim of the Farm Beginnings program is to facilitate the growth of the participant from novice to experienced farmer all within the context of an active network where beginners, advanced beginners and veteran farmers share best practices and mentor one another as part of an agricultural community.

After some experience, many individuals take a more serious path toward farming through Farm Beginnings classes, which begin in the fall of each year and meet throughout the winter. Class participants learn goal setting, financial plan-

ning, business plan creation, alternative marketing and low-cost sustainable farming techniques. They are encouraged to develop a strategic plan for their farming business 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.

At the conclusion of classes, Farm Beginnings moves onto the land itself, where participants join LSP’s farmer network and take part in a series of on-farm field days during the spring, summer and fall. Participants find themselves touring a variety of farms and attending skills sessions, in addition to having one-on-one experiences with specific farmers.

Throughout the 10-month course, participants are encouraged to utilize established farmers as mentors.



How successful is Farm Beginnings?

- ✓ During the first 14 years of the initiative, more than 500 people have completed the Farm Beginnings course in southeast and western Minnesota.
- ✓ 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.
- ✓ Farm Beginnings has served as a model for a nationwide community-based beginning farmer support initiative called the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (<http://www.csrees.usda.gov/fo/beginningfarmerandrancher.cfm>), which is administered by the USDA.

Is FB right for you at this time?

LSP’s Farm Planning and Skills Assessments package provides a way for prospective or beginning farmers to determine where they are at with their goals and what area of Farm Beginnings is the right fit for them at this time. For details, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/fb/tracks.html,

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or call Parker Forsell at 507-523-3366.

LSP also offers “Farm Dreams,” an entry level, four-hour, exploratory workshop to help people who are seeking practical information on whether sustainable farming is the next step for them. It’s recommended as a precursor workshop for those who are considering taking Farm Beginnings. For details, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/fb/farm-dreams.html, or call Nick Olson at 320-269-2105.

Farm Beginnings in the Minn. 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:

→ Land Stewardship Project, Lewiston, Minn., Driftless Region (SE Minn., Western WI, NE Iowa)

Web: www.farmbeginnings.org

Phone: 507-523-3366

- Karen Benson (class registration)
E-mail: ispse@landstewardshipproject.org
- Aimee Finley (class information & on-farm workshops)
E-mail: aimee@landstewardshipproject.org
- Parker Forsell (Farm Beginnings Collaborative, farmer network, winter workshops)
E-mail: parker@landstewardshipproject.org
- Karen Stettler (general information & land access issues)
E-mail: stettler@landstewardshipproject.org

→ Land Stewardship Project, Montevideo, Minn., Prairie Region (Western Minn., SE S. Dak., NW Iowa)

Web: www.farmbeginnings.org

Phone: 320-269-2105

- Amy Bacigalupo (general information)
E-mail: amyb@landstewardshipproject.org
- Nick Olson (class information & on-farm workshops)
E-mail: nicko@landstewardshipproject.org
- Richard Ness (class information; Holistic Mgt. classes)
E-mail: rness@landstewardshipproject.org

→ Lake Superior Sustainable Farming Association, Two Harbors, Minn. (NW Wis./NE Minn.)

Web: www.lakesuperiorfarming.org

Phone: 218-834-0846

- Cree Bradley (class coordinator)
E-mail: cree@lakesuperiorfarming.org

The Farm Beginnings Collaborative

Since 2005, LSP has been partnering with other organizations to offer the Farm Beginnings training model across several states. The “Farm Beginnings Collaborative” is a national alliance of independent regional groups of farmers and farmer-training support organizations. Here is a listing of Collaborative members:

♦ Illinois

Stateline Farm Beginnings (northern Ill. & southern Wis.), Angelic Organics Learning Center, Caledonia, Ill.

- Tom Spaulding/Sheri Doyel

Phone: 815-389-8455

E-mail: tom@learngrowconnect.org

E-mail: sheri@learngrowconnect.org

Web: www.learngrowconnect.org

Central Illinois Farm Beginnings, The Land Connection, Sidney, Ill.

- Micah Bornstein

Phone: 217-688-2570

Fax: 217-688-2086

E-mail: micah@thelandconnection.org

E-mail: info@thelandconnection.org

Web: www.thelandconnection.org

Web: <http://central.illinoisfarmbeginnings.org>

♦ Nebraska

Nebraska Sustainable Ag Society, Ceresco, Neb.

- William Powers

Phone: 402-525-7794

E-mail: farmbeginningsnebraska@gmail.com

Web: www.nebsusag.org/farmbeginningsnebraska.htm

University of Nebraska – Extension, Auburn, Neb.

- Gary Lesoing

Phone: 402-274-4755

E-mail: glesoing2@unl.edu

♦ New York

Hawthorne Valley Farm, Ghent, N.Y.

- Rachel Schneider

Phone: 518-672-7500, ext. 105

E-mail: rachel@hawthornevalleyfarm.org

Web: www.hawthornevalleyfarm.org

♦ North Dakota

FARRMS, Medina, N. Dak.

- Annie Carlson

Phone: 701-486-3569

Fax: 701-486-3580

E-mail: info@farrms.org

Web: www.farrms.org

♦ South Dakota

Dakota Rural Action, Brookings, S. Dak.

- Frank James/Heidi Kolbeck-Urlacher

Phone: 605-697-5204

Fax: 605-697-6230

E-mail: heidiku@dakotarural.org

E-mail: fejames@dakotarural.org

Web: 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.