Farm Beginnings® Programs in Southeast Nebraska Assist Beginning Diversified Farmers

Gary Lesoing, University of Nebraska, Lincoln Extension
Land Stewardship Project

- Entering its 27th year keeping the land and people together
- Working with farmers, policy makers, ag professionals, consumers of local foods
- Focusing on education, policies, research, marketing fostering stewardship for farmland
- Programming includes
  - Local, State and Federal Policies
  - Community Based Food Systems
  - Farm Beginnings®
What is meant by “Sustainable”? 

- In a farming business to be sustainable you must find sustainability in your:
  - Quality of Life
  - Financial Viability
  - Environmental Practices
    - Grazing
    - Cover Crops
    - Crop Rotations
    - Permaculture
How Farm Beginnings® came to be in Southeast Nebraska

- Land Stewardship Project SARE Grant
- Pilot Program in Nebraska in 2005-2006
- Formed a Steering Committee in Eastern Nebraska
- Formed partnership with the University of Nebraska, Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society, Center for Rural Affairs and Nebraska Department of Agriculture
- Selected facilitators, presenters and mentors
- Financial partners provided assistance to the program through scholarships.
Why Farm Beginnings® ??

- Program trains graduates in innovative low-cost sustainable agriculture.

- Rural populations are declining, in many counties over 5 percent.

- Increasing demand for food grown locally, using sustainable practices.
Why Farm Beginnings® ??

- This program provided an opportunity for people to learn firsthand about low-cost, sustainable methods of farming and see potential opportunities.

- The Farm Beginnings® program utilizes farmers in teaching and as mentors, with Extension faculty also providing facilitation and expertise.
Farm Beginnings®: It Works!

- A hands-on Education/Training Program
  - 34 seminar hours
    - Goal setting/Whole Farm Planning
    - Business Planning/Coaching
  - On-farm education
    - Farm Tours
    - Skills Sessions
    - Mentoring
- Farmer Presenters/Mentors
- Shatters barriers
- Connecting to Resources
Myth: You can’t start farming without having grown up on a farm.

Reality: Beginning Farmers are...

Women and Men

Teachers
Engineers
Part-time Farmers
Secretaries
High School Students
College students
Banker
City Planners
Architect
Computer programmer
Stay at home mom
Myths: No one cares about the future of farmers and the farming community

- **Reality:**
  
  “*My idea of a mentor program isn’t to be an expert but to have an understanding and willingness to share experiences about the operation. We see ourselves as part of the network.*”

  - Bev Struxness
  - Farm Beginnings Mentor
Farm Beginnings® mentor “Paul Rohrbaugh” talks to students at his poultry processing facilities.
Myth: You need to go into debt to start farming.

- Reality:
- Beginning farmers are finding ways to get started that are low input, land intensive and keep their exposure to risk low.
Vegetables growing in a High Tunnel
Finishing hogs on dirt lots and direct marketing them.
Myth:
Get big or get out.
OR
There is only one way to farm.
Myth: Farming is a way of life.
Myth: Farming is a business.

- Reality:
  - Farming is a way of life AND a business.
  - The challenge is to manage the business in a way that helps you achieve the quality of life you desire.
2005-6 Farm Beginnings

- Program was initiated in Nebraska with a SARE grant and cooperation with the LSP.
- Jim Peterson and Martin Kleinschmit provided initial leadership for this project.
- Steering committee was formed of farmers and other agricultural stakeholders.
- Initial class began in November 2005 in Syracuse, NE.
- Paul Rohrbaugh and Gary Lesoing serviced as co-facilitators of this class.
2005-6 Farm Beginnings Class

- The class met for 10 sessions on Saturdays from November – March.

- In the spring and summer the class toured several sustainable farms in SE Nebraska.

- There were 12 families (farmers) that completed the class.

- Class participants came from Nemaha, Johnson, Pawnee, Saline, Lancaster, Holt, Sarpy and Boyd Counties in Nebraska.
Who Participated?

- The came from all walks of life.
- Young single men wanting to learn about the business side of farming.
- College students researching and evaluating potential farming opportunities.
- Young couples and families currently supplementing their income with part-time farming enterprises.
- Older families investigating alternative enterprises.
- Recently or soon to be retired individuals looking to start a second career.
Farm Beginnings Course

- Holistic Management and Goal Setting
- Whole Farm Planning
- Building Your Business Plan
- Financial Planning
- Marketing
- Networking
- Connecting with Resources
Farm Beginnings Presenters & Mentors

- Terry Gompert and Paul Swanson - Holistic management
- Jim Bender – Farm Tour
- Glennis McClure
- Dave Welsch
- Paul Rohrbaugh
- Tom Larson
- Martin Kleinschmit
- Dave Goeller
Farm Beginnings Graduates

- 10 out of the 12 businesses have been involved in production agriculture at some level.
- Selling and managing area Farmers Markets.
- Selling meat, eggs and produce through the Nebraska Food Coop.
- Selling eggs at local grocery store.
- Direct marketing ag products.
Know how. Know now.
Soap is being made from Goat Milk and sold at their store and through the Food Coop.

06/03/2008
Marketing Grassfed Beef
Marketing Vegetables
What did participants say?

- Holistic management portion of class is very useful.
- The network of people and contacts they made through the class was very valuable.
- Like the Mastercard Commercial “Priceless”.
- Become better stewards of the land and provide food to our community and family in a healthy way.
- Resources we learned and used from the class.
- Participants are contributing from $1000 to $25,000 to the economy of their communities.
How did they rate the class?

- On a scale of 1-7 with 1 being poor and 7 being excellent, the average rating for the evaluation of the program was 6.16.
Farm Beginnings Class 2008-9

- Class began in November of 2008
- Meets on Saturdays in Syracuse, NE
- 7 Farms participating
- Participants from Lancaster, Johnson, Gage, Douglas, and Nemaha Counties in Nebraska and Atchison County in Missouri.
- Interests in dairy, livestock, produce, fruits, trees, grains and agritourism.
What about recent graduates?

- Some starting new enterprises on a small scale.
- Others have purchased land to begin new enterprises.
- Some are diversifying into several livestock enterprises, i.e. cattle, sheep and chickens.
- Others are raising vegetables and started raising bees for honey.
- Still others are deciding what the best path is for them to follow.
Organic Alfalfa Production
Converting CRP to Organic Production
Longhorn Beef Production
Pastureland on New Property