New Farmer Training Programs
- A Midwestern Perspective

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New Farmers Grant Project Meeting
December 7, 2006

A Midwest Homecoming:
Sharing a New Tradition of Sustainability
Oconomowoc, Wisconsin
August 15-17, 2006
National SARE Conference

- Attended a session entitled “Farm Beginnings”
  - Amy Bacigalupo, Land Stewardship Project (Minnesota)
  - Deborah Cavanaugh-Grant, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
  - Reagan Hulbert, 2003 Farm Beginnings Graduate
  - Funded through SARE grants

Farm Beginnings™

- A community-based initiative of the Land Stewardship Project that takes a farmer-to-farmer approach toward preparing a new generation of farmers; started in Minnesota in 1998.
- [www.farmbeginnings.org](http://www.farmbeginnings.org) is the website.
- Provides education, support and equity-building opportunities for beginning and transitioning farmers.
Farm Beginnings™

- Provides essential information and first hand knowledge
- Helps participants develop a solid business plan
- Connects to a support network of farmers and other like-minded individuals
- Opens doors to financing

Farm Beginnings™

Provides 30+ hours of training and hands-on learning through classroom sessions, farm tours and mentorships. It’s a 10 month to 1 year long program.

Class participants learn goal setting, financial planning, business plan creation, alternative marketing and low-cost sustainable farming techniques.

Standard curriculum (across states)

Class participants work as a cohort and each are paired with a mentor-farmer. Costs range from $500 - $1000 per family unit.

Tends to support organic/sustainable farms/niche markets or specialty crops.
Farm Beginnings™

At the end of the classroom sessions, in the Spring and Summer, participants take part in a series of on-farm field days on a variety of farms and work days with their mentor’s farm.

Qualified graduates are eligible for a zero interest revolving livestock loan (through Heifer International program). (Minnesota only) This helps farmers build equity while supporting them with a continuing education component that connects them with an advisor. Available for dairy heifers, beef heifers, hogs, goats, sheep and chickens.

7 Classes:
- 2 in Minnesota
- 2 in Illinois
  - [www.farmbeginnings.uiuc.edu](http://www.farmbeginnings.uiuc.edu)
  - [www.csalearningcenter.org/farmbeginnings.html](http://www.csalearningcenter.org/farmbeginnings.html)
- 2 in Nebraska
- 1 in Missouri
Successes

- 90% participate in mentoring program
- 20% apply and receive low interest livestock loans
- Training and certification provides credentials for other agriculture loans
- 60% successfully start farming
Course Shortcomings

• Amount of information presented was overwhelming, especially to those with little experience in farming
  - Large number of topics covered in a short time
• Students tended to be uncertain about how the information and concepts presented could be integrated into their own plans
• Overall cohesiveness of the Program
  - Challenge to adopting and adapting the content and process of another organization's program
  - LSP Outline and form was useful but curriculum needed to be recreated to fit the program in other states.
• Screening of participants for commitment

Contact Information

• Land Stewardship Project
  - www.farmbeginnings.org
  - Kate Twohig at 651-653-0589 (LSP)
  - Amy Bacigalupo at 320-269-2105
• University of Illinois
  - www.farmbeginnings.uiuc.edu
  - Deborah Cavanaugh-Grant at 217-968-5512