

4th BIENNIAL CONFERENCE, NORTH AMERICAN CHAPTER
INTERNATIONAL FARMING SYSTEMS ASSOCIATION

themselves, an independent mind set preventing them from seeking assistance; isolation, apathy and depression; and a need to organize the agricultural sector for political purposes. The study also includes recommendations for overcoming these problems.

Farm Beginnings: Helping to Create a New Generation of Farm Families in SE Minnesota

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Program History The FARM BEGINNINGS program was born out of a group of Wabasha County farmers who six years ago started asking questions about the future of farming. The group realizes that if a new generation is expected to start farming, they will need some dedicated help and asking to get there.

The FARM BEGINNINGS program is cooperatively supported by the University of Minnesota Extension-Wabasha and Goodhue Counties and Land Stewardship Project. A farmer-based steering committee provides continual leadership and guidance to the program.

Rationale: Why Dairy Farms Are Important to Rural Communities A 1995 study conducted in the Sibley County area found not only a decline in the number of overall farmers, but a significant shift occurring over the past 20 years from dairy operations to cash crop farming operations. The decline in the number of dairy farms in the area and the move to primarily cash crops has affected the local economy significantly. An area banker believes that both the direct and indirect scale down of the number of farmers and the number of dairy farmers has had a negative impact on the local economy and schools (Love, 1995).

What Participants Gain?

In addition to receiving first hand farming experience from top-notch SE Minnesota dairy farmers participants:

- Discover keys to successful farm financial and labor management
 - Increase credibility for dealing with lenders
 - Become connected with community members, including vets, bankers, feed dealers, etc.
 - Network with other farmers who are getting started in dairying
- Explore alternative marketing opportunities
 - Develop contacts within the community that will increase chances of hearing about potential farming opportunities
 - Join with organizations that support and care about beginning farmers.
- Learn about available options to aid in starting a farm