

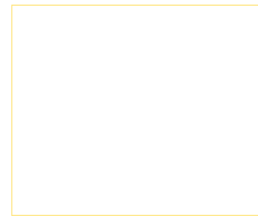
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Community News



DRA offers farm training program

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BY: Staff Reports

It's tough starting a farm from scratch these days. What with skyrocketing land prices and limited availability, and astronomical equipment prices, if you weren't actually born into a farming family or don't have deep pockets, it can be tough to break into the industry.

For those who crave that lifestyle, Dakota Rural Action (DRA) has a way to start.

Dakota Rural Action is now accepting applications for Farm Beginnings, a farmer-led training and support program that will be held in Brookings beginning this October.

Farm Beginnings provides participants an opportunity to learn firsthand about low-cost, sustainable methods of farming and gives them the tools to successfully launch a profitable farm enterprise.

The program isn't just for would-be farmers, but for those already farming who might like a new direction.

Deadline for application is Aug. 31, and class size is limited. To learn more about the program and receive an application, contact DRA at 697-5204 or e-mail heidiku@dakotarural.org.

"Farm Beginnings would benefit anyone interested in building a solid and sustainable business plan," says Sarah Trone, a small-scale organic food producer and farm-to-table restaurateur from Brookings, who serves in a leadership role for the course.

"Whether farmers are just at the dreaming stage of a farm business or well established and looking to grow in fresh ways, Farm Beginnings offers participants the opportunity to establish a solid foundation for their agricultural endeavor."



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meat, eggs and other products, and there's simply not enough farmers to meet that demand. This program can help get new farmers started where there is a strong and growing market for their products." Complete business training

Farm Beginnings participants learn goal-setting , financial planning, business plan creation, alternative marketing and innovative production techniques.

Classes are taught by local farmers and agricultural professionals and held twice a month from October through March 2010 in Brookings. From April to August of next year, participants will have an opportunity to take part in on-farm education components including skill sessions and farm tours, as well as to connect with established farmers for additional mentorship if desired.

Kristianna Gehant, a garlic and egg-producer from Astoria, took the Farm Beginnings course in Minnesota last year.

"Participating in Farm Beginnings helped focus our goals for the farm," she says, "and gave us the tools to plan a profitable enterprise.

"As our operation grows, we continue to reference the whole farm plan we developed , and the Farm Beginnings network of experienced farmers continues to be a great asset when we need advice or feedback on production questions. Farm Beginnings gave us a valuable foundation to build our farm enterprise." Saw need for training

A fourth-generation farmer from Marion, Larry Eisenbeis got involved in bringing the course to South Dakota because he has saw a lack of new people pursuing farming as a career. "Farm Beginnings can help provide answers for folks who are looking for new ways to make a living with the resources we have in this place," Eisenbeis said.

"This course helps farmers conscientiously make plans and formulate goals. Because it's farmer-led , participants build on the real-world experiences of established farmers, and farmers in return have the opportunity to mentor the next generation."

Farm Beginning is an established curriculum developed more than a decade ago by the Minnesota-based Land Stewardship Project that is now replicated in several different states, including Illinois, Nebraska, North Dakota and New York. Dakota Rural Action has adapted the curriculum to meet the needs of South Dakota farmers.

Dakota Rural Action is a grassroots family agriculture and conservation group that organizes South Dakotans to protect family farmers and ranchers, natural resources and a unique way of life.

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