



'Farm Beginnings' Training Program Offered in Brookings

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 first-hand about low-cost, sustainable methods of farming and gives them the tools to successfully launch a profitable farm enterprise.

Deadline for application is August 31, 2009, and class size is limited. To learn more about the program and receive an application, contact Dakota Rural Action at (605) 697-5204 or email 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."

"It's exciting that farmers can help other farmers get started in the business," says Rebecca Terk, who operates a small vegetable farm near Vermillion and will serve as a course presenter for the program. "There's a growing demand for local produce, 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."

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 2009-March 2010 in Brookings. From April-August participants have the opportunity to take part in on-farm education components including skill sessions and farm tours, as well as 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 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."

A fourth generation farmer from Marion, Larry Eisenbeis became involved in bringing the course to South Dakota because he has witnessed 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. 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 Beginnings® is an established curriculum developed over a decade ago by the Minnesota-based Land Stewardship Project that is now replicated in several different states, including IL, NE, ND, and NY. 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 our family farmers and ranchers, natural resources, and unique way of life.

