

Resources for Beginning Farmers:



Building a Sustainable Future



by

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Acknowledgments

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Preface

This listing of resources for beginning farmers started as a list of the resources on the bookshelf in the Farm Beginnings™ classroom. Through project team and reviewer suggestions, the list grew to contain a wealth of information available to anyone willing to entertain the idea of earning a living by sustainably producing food and fiber. Much information is now available electronically, and we have included websites and email addresses wherever possible. Because websites change frequently, we have also included other contact information. These resources will be updated annually, and available on the MISA website, www.misa.umn.edu.

More About Farm Beginnings™

Farm Beginnings™ is an educational training and support program designed to help people evaluate and plan a farm enterprise. It was initiated by the Land Stewardship Project at the request of a group of southeast Minnesota farmers (the Wabasha County “Give a Damns”) who were concerned about where the next generation of farmers would be coming from, and how they would be farming. What resulted was a program that combines classroom time to get information about sustainable farming practices, farm visits to see practices in action, and mentorship opportunities to learn and network one-on-one with successful innovative farmers.

In an era where the first question you’re asked if you want to get into farming is “WHY?” the success rate of Farm Beginnings™ graduates is impressive. During the first seven years, 185 people have completed the Farm Beginnings™ course, and over 60 percent of those graduates are farming. A revolving, long-term, no-interest livestock loan program established by LSP and Heifer Project International has helped 12 Farm Beginnings™ graduates get started. For more information about the Farm Beginnings™ program, see page 42 of this resource guide.



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Introduction

People enter into farming for many reasons. You may have a desire to work independently, to have a closer connection to the land, to work outdoors, to produce a tangible product, or to raise a family as part of a family farm enterprise. Whatever your reasons, careful planning will increase your chances of starting or maintaining the type of farm you want to operate—one that is profitable and reflects your values and priorities.

Beginning and maintaining a successful farming operation can be overwhelming tasks. There are numerous considerations and decisions to make, and each one is unique to an individual's circumstances. For example, you may want to start your own operation after having worked on a farm for many years but lack access to land and other types of start-up capital required for farming. Perhaps you inherited land but don't have any farming experience. Maybe you lack farming experience or the capital required to start up the operation, but have experience owning and managing your own business.

Regardless of your situation, starting a farming business requires thorough planning and long-term commitment. The goal of this publication is to make it easier to get started in farming by providing a planning guide and identifying the many resources available to beginning farmers. This guide is designed for anyone interested in farming sustainably in Minnesota, regardless of your background or situation. A diverse team of beginning and established farmers, as well as other agricultural specialists, collaborated to produce this publication.

Each of the five main issues addressed in this publication follows a set format: questions are posed for you to consider, the issue is discussed, and then relevant resources to help you address the issue for your individual situation are listed. The resources include publications, organizations, and educational opportunities. Many of the publications are available at your

local library, larger bookstores, or on-line through sites like Amazon.com. In addition, the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture, the Land Stewardship Project, the Minnesota Department of Agriculture Energy and Sustainable Agriculture Program, and your local Extension office often have materials and resources available on loan (see “Other Resources”). Website contacts for many of the resources are included for your convenience, but bear in mind that websites change frequently. Many of the on-line information sources mentioned in this guide (pdf files) require the Adobe Reader™ program.*

Consider starting a notebook for the planning process and use it frequently as you read this guide and other resources relevant to starting your farming operation. Thoughts and ideas often become clearer once they are written down. Keeping a notebook will not only help you to make connections between your ideas; it will also allow you to track and evaluate your progress as you plan. Planning is an on-going process that requires continuous modification. We hope that this resource guide will help you in that process, and start you on the path to creating a successful and fulfilling farm operation.

* You can download this program to your personal computer free of charge. Go to the website at <http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep2.html> and follow the directions for downloading. You will need to know your computer operating system (platform) and whether you have a dial-up or broadband connection.

Mentor farmer Bonnie Haugen with Farm Beginnings™ student David Pieper on the Haugen farm in Canton, Minnesota.

