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Newsletter of the National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service: A project of the National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT)

## Starting Out in Sustainable Agriculture

*New farmers and ranchers today have access to a tremendous number of resources to help them with planning, securing land, and making a success of their operation. A few states and counties even provide special aid and enticements to encourage new farmers to settle there. This issue of ATTRAnews looks at some of the ways beginning farmers and ranchers can find a place and learn to run it.*

### Advice to New Farmers *By Tracy Mumma, NCAT Program Specialist*

1. Make friends with your neighbors, and admit you know nothing. They can teach you everything from how to run your irrigation equipment to how to load a reluctant cow in a trailer. If you have friendly Amish neighbors, they may be willing to teach you a lot more.
2. Take all the advice you get from your friendly neighbors, and refine it with the advice offered by books, Extension, and experts.
3. Keep all that advice in the back of your mind as you do the best you can on a daily basis, which often means doing things late, not according to plan, and in totally unorthodox fashion.

*Tracy Mumma, her husband David Sturman, and their two children live and farm in Montana with the help of their Amish neighbors.*



Photo courtesy Tracy Mumma

David Sturman mowing hay this summer with his team of Belgians in St. Ignatius, Montana.

## Linking New Farmers with Retiring Farmers

The National Farm Transition Network fosters the next generation of farmers and ranchers by introducing them to experienced producers who are ready to retire. More than 20 independent organizations belong to the network, representing California, Connecticut, Iowa, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, and Wisconsin. Each of these Farm Link or Land Link groups has its own methods and priorities. To find the organization near you, contact network coordinator John Baker, [rbaker@iastate.edu](mailto:rbaker@iastate.edu), or check the network website, [www.farmtransition.org](http://www.farmtransition.org).



The average age of American farmers is nearing 60. The nation needs more young farmers.

## New Farmers Wanted

Some states and counties are doing their best to attract new farmers or to promote organic agriculture. In northwest Iowa, for example, a majority of farmers are past the normal age of retirement. Woodbury County has embarked on a program to bring in new farmers, especially those interested in organic production and entrepreneurship. The county is basing its economic development on the creation of small family farms, organic processing, and local food systems.

In 2005 the county enacted an Organics Conversion Policy that rebates 100% of real property taxes for five years to farms that transition to organic production. The policy also commits to finding a market for local organic products, along with financing and educational resources, and the counsel of experienced professionals and organic farmers. In 2006 Woodbury County adopted the first mandatory Local Food Purchase Policy in the

nation, requiring locally grown food for its correctional system. [www.woodburyorganics.com](http://www.woodburyorganics.com)

Marathon County in north central Wisconsin sponsors the U Can Farm program, inviting farmers and farm businesses to put down roots. The program's "Agribusiness Incubator" offers technical assistance for beginning and experienced farmers who want to be part of the local grazing and dairy economy. Contact Tom Cadwallader, Lincoln/Marathon County Extension, 715-536-0304, [thomas.cadwallader@ces.uwex.edu](mailto:thomas.cadwallader@ces.uwex.edu). [www.ucanfarm.org](http://www.ucanfarm.org)

Pennsylvania Center for Farm Transitions helps beginning, retiring, and relocating farmers as well as those who want to change or expand their operations. The center works to assure the future of agriculture in the state. Toll-free telephone: 877-475-2686. [www.iplantofarm.com](http://www.iplantofarm.com)

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 [www.attra.ncat.org](http://www.attra.ncat.org)

## Resources for Beginning Farmers

**Alabama Sustainable Agriculture Network** runs a **Farmer to Farmer Program** that links experienced farmer-mentors with beginning growers. The program requires new farmers to pass on what they have learned to others. For more information, call 256-520-2400. [www.asanonline.org/mentorprogram.htm](http://www.asanonline.org/mentorprogram.htm)

**Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project** supports farmers and rural communities in the mountains of western North Carolina and the southern Appalachians with education, mentoring, promotion, and community and policy development. For more information: 828-236-1282. [www.asapconnections.org](http://www.asapconnections.org)

**Carolina Farm Stewardship Association** provides “farm incubators” – educational farms where new growers can lease a parcel of land and gain access to equipment and advanced knowledge without having to buy it. The program also offers business planning assistance. Contact Bryan Green, 919-451-9804, [busha\\_tierra@hotmail.com](mailto:busha_tierra@hotmail.com). [www.carolinafarmstewards.org/projects.shtml](http://www.carolinafarmstewards.org/projects.shtml)

**The Food To Bank On** program connects beginning sustainable farms in northwest Washington with training, mentors & market support while providing fresh high-quality food to Whatcom County’s hungry. Contact Shonie Schlotzhauer, 360-647-7093x106, [Shonie@sustainableconnections.org](mailto:Shonie@sustainableconnections.org). [www.sconnect.org/foodfarming/Food%20To%20Bank%20On](http://www.sconnect.org/foodfarming/Food%20To%20Bank%20On)

**Georgia Organics’ Farmer Mentoring & Marketing** program teams established farmers with new farmers to transfer knowledge and expertise in sustainable growing. The program provides in-depth workshops and training in production, marketing, and financial planning. For more information, call 678-702-0400. [www.georgiaorganics.org/about\\_us/programs\\_projects.php](http://www.georgiaorganics.org/about_us/programs_projects.php)

**Idaho-Rural Roots** supports sustainable and organic agriculture and community-based food systems in the Inland Northwest. Their **Cultivating Success™ Program** provides beginning and existing farmers with the planning and decision-making tools, production skills and support necessary to develop a sustainable small farm. [www.cultivatingsuccess.org](http://www.cultivatingsuccess.org)

**The Intervale Center** of Burlington, Vermont offers two programs for new farmers. The **Intervale Farms Program** leases land and facilities to small organic enterprises and provides technical support with other more experienced farmers. **Success on Farms** works one-on-one with state farmers to strengthen their businesses. For more information, call 802-660-0440. [www.intervale.org](http://www.intervale.org)

**Iowa Beginning Farmer Center** coordinates education programs and services for beginning farmer and retiring farmers. The center helps farm families develop skills in financial management and planning, legal issues, tax laws, technical production, leadership, sustainable agriculture, health, and the environment. Call 877-232-1999 or email [bfc@iastate.edu](mailto:bfc@iastate.edu). [www.extension.iastate.edu/bfc](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/bfc)

**Land Stewardship Project** sponsors **Farm Beginnings** classes each fall in Minnesota, Illinois, Nebraska, North Dakota, and Wisconsin. In the winter participants learn goal setting, financial planning, marketing, and sustainable farming techniques from

established farmers and other professionals. In spring and summer participants work with specific farmers and attend farm field days. For more information, call 651-653-0618. [www.landstewardshipproject.org/farmbeg.html](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/farmbeg.html)

**Maine Organic Farmers & Gardeners Association** operates a **Journeyman Program** with hands-on, mentored training to help farmers find land and a situation where they can develop their business. The association also offers a **Farmer-in-Residence Program** at the 250-acre Common Ground Education Center in Unity, Maine. Contact Andy Marshall, [amarshall@mofga.org](mailto:amarshall@mofga.org), 207-568-4142. [www.mofga.org](http://www.mofga.org)

**Minnesota Food Association’s New Immigrant Farmer Project** provides training for new immigrants and aspiring farmers in gardening, micro-farming, production farming, marketing, and land use planning. For more information, call 651-433-3676. [www.mnfoodassociation.org/newimmigrant.aspx](http://www.mnfoodassociation.org/newimmigrant.aspx)



Antonio Roman-Alcala farms at San Francisco’s Alemany Farm. He is a native of the district, which is bordered by busy freeways.

**New England Small Farm Institute** provides information and training for aspiring, beginning, and transitioning farmers. Their **Growing New Farmers** program in Belchertown, Mass. provides services and resources for new farmers throughout the Northeast. For more information, call 413-323-4531. [www.smallfarm.org](http://www.smallfarm.org), [www.growingnewfarmers.org](http://www.growingnewfarmers.org)

**New Entry Sustainable Farming Project** helps immigrants and others with agricultural backgrounds to begin commercial agricultural enterprises in Massachusetts. Contact Jennifer Hashley, 617-636-3793, [jennifer.hashley@tufts.edu](mailto:jennifer.hashley@tufts.edu). [www.nesfp.org](http://www.nesfp.org)

**National Immigrant Farming Initiative** operates several programs for new farmers. **New Farmer Development Project** educates and supports immigrants in New York City with agricultural experience to become local producers and establish small farms in the region. Contact Michelle Hughes, 212-341-2256, [mhughes@greenmarket.cc](mailto:mhughes@greenmarket.cc). [www.immigrantfarming.org/index.php?page=New\\_Farmer\\_Development\\_Project](http://www.immigrantfarming.org/index.php?page=New_Farmer_Development_Project)

**Southeastern Massachusetts Agricultural Partnership** is a nonprofit organization that helps local agricultural enterprises achieve economic success. They create demand for locally produced agricultural products and provide business education to local agricultural enterprises. Contact Sarah Kelley, 508-295-2212x50, [skelley@semaponline.org](mailto:skelley@semaponline.org). [www.semaponline.org](http://www.semaponline.org)

**USDA Farm Service Agency** offers two financing programs for land purchase by beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers. The new farm bill provides for the **Land Contract Guarantee Program** and the **Direct Farm Ownership Loan Program**. The **Beginning Farmer and Rancher Land Contract Guarantee Program** was created because traditional methods of farm entry and farm succession are no longer adequate to meet current challenges. This pilot program will explore whether or not land contract sales are a viable alternative for beginning farmers and ranchers. The pilot program will be available in Indiana, North Dakota, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, and Iowa. For more information, contact the local Farm Service Agency office. [www.fsa.usda.gov](http://www.fsa.usda.gov)

# Is a Farm Business Right for You?

Tammy Hinman, NCAT Program Specialist

When you consider a rural enterprise, it's vitally important to assess your goals, land, and resources. These considerations may help direct your research and save time and much needed energy for starting a new farm enterprise.

## Identify Your Own Personal Values

Do you want to have an organic farm? Do you want to spend more time with your family? Do you want an enterprise that will equal your current salary? Or is a mellow lifestyle your goal?

## What Are Your Personal Goals and Vision for Your Property?

While this is closely related to the above point, you can create your goals for your property based on your personal values. This is often left out of business planning templates, but can be an important component in your assessment. It is something that you should come back to when there is a question about what direction you want your business to go.

## Assess Your Property

Consider size, location, soils, resources. For example, do you have a wood lot so that you could sell firewood? Is your acreage small? If so, you may need to produce high value crops.

Soil is a very important part of farming enterprises. Good soil will give you more production options. Water access and cost are issues in many parts of the country. Do you plan to irrigate? If

so, do you have sufficient water? What crops do you plan to grow and what are their water and climatic needs? Vegetables and fruit are relatively water-intensive cropping systems.

## Market Assessment

Marketing is an often overlooked aspect of developing a new enterprise. A marketing plan can help you prepare for markets before your product is ready. Location, your personality, and production interests are things to consider when developing a marketing plan.

If you are close to an urban area and enjoy working with people, then farmer's markets or community-supported agriculture (CSA) might be a good way to sell your products. Do you have another occupation? Are you in a very rural area? Then wholesale marketing, which takes less time and energy, might be better suited for you.

Stacy Bliss and John Brenner run a CSA on Broadturn Farm in Scarborough, Maine.



At Good Humus Produce in California, farmer Annie Main, left, teaches students to appreciate the natural world and what it takes to grow food.

## Workbooks and Useful Resources

ATTRA's *Evaluating a Rural Enterprise* provides an overview and resources. [www.attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/evalrural.html](http://www.attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/evalrural.html)

*Farming Alternatives: A Guide to Evaluating the Feasibility of New Farm-Based Enterprises*. \$8.00 + s&h from NRAES in New York state: 607-255-7654, [nraes@cornell.edu](mailto:nraes@cornell.edu). [www.nraes.org](http://www.nraes.org)

Two from the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture—*Building a Sustainable Business: Guide to Developing a Business Plan for Farms and Rural Businesses* [www.misa.umn.edu/od/bizplan.html](http://www.misa.umn.edu/od/bizplan.html)  
*Resources for Beginning Farmers* [www.misa.umn.edu/od/bfarmers.html](http://www.misa.umn.edu/od/bfarmers.html)

*Primer for Selecting New Enterprises for Your Farm*, University of Kentucky. [www.uky.edu/Ag/AgEcon/pubs/ext-aec/ext2000-13.pdf](http://www.uky.edu/Ag/AgEcon/pubs/ext-aec/ext2000-13.pdf)

## A Sampling of ATTRA's Publications to Help New Farmers

In addition to the publications on this list, ATTRA offers hundreds more—for beginning and experienced producers—that provide general information and specific details about all aspects of sustainable and organic agriculture. They're available to download for free from ATTRA's Web site: [www.ncat.attra.org](http://www.ncat.attra.org). Or call 1-800-346-9140 to order a free paper copy.

### Sustainable Farming

- Organic Crop Production Overview
- Sustainable Agriculture
- Sustainable Soil Management

### Livestock Production

- Alternative Poultry Production Systems and Outdoor Access
- Multispecies Grazing
- Pastures: Sustainable Management

### Marketing & Business Management

- Agricultural Business Planning
- Community Supported Agriculture
- Direct Marketing
- Farmers' Markets
- Keys to Success in Value-Added Agriculture

### Pest Management

- Farmscaping to Enhance Biological Control
- Organic Integrated Pest Management Field Guide

### Organic Production

- Organic Chronicles No. 1: Mysteries of Organic Farming Revealed
- Organic Certification Process

### Specialty Crops

- Beekeeping/ Apiculture
- Market Gardening: A Start-up Guide
- Scheduling Vegetable Plantings for Continuous Harvest
- Sustainable Small-Scale Nurseries
- Tree Fruits: Organic Production

### Online Databases

- Local Food Directories: [www.attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/localfood\\_dir.php](http://www.attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/localfood_dir.php)
- Sustainable Agriculture Organizations and Publications: [www.attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/susagorg.php](http://www.attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/susagorg.php)
- Sustainable Farming Internships & Apprenticeships [www.attrainternships.ncat.org](http://www.attrainternships.ncat.org)

### New and Updated Publications

- Organic Materials Compliance—Materials for Organic Production, Handling, and Processing: Planning for Compliance with USDA's National Organic Program
- Peanuts: Organic Production



## Where to Learn About Sustainable Farming

Rodale Institute's **Farming for Credit Directory** lists colleges and organizations that offer classroom programs and hands-on training in sustainable agriculture. [www.rodaleinstitute.org/ffc\\_directory](http://www.rodaleinstitute.org/ffc_directory)

**Educational and Training Opportunities in Sustainable Agriculture** is the 18th edition from the Alternative Farming Systems Information Center of the National Agricultural Library in Beltsville, Maryland. For more information, call 301-504-6927. [www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/pubs/edtr/EDTR2008.shtml](http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/pubs/edtr/EDTR2008.shtml)

## Find Hands-On Experience

Apprenticing with an experienced farmer is probably the best way to learn sound techniques. If that opportunity isn't available, you can learn much by attending workshops and conferences and visiting with other farmers and ranchers. — ATTRA's *Market Gardening*

**NCAT's Sustainable Farming Internships and Apprenticeships Database** lists U.S. farms that are looking for interns and apprentices. Listings include detailed information about the farm and the situation being offered. [www.attrainternships.ncat.org](http://www.attrainternships.ncat.org)

**Collaborative Regional Alliance for Farmer Training (CRAFT)** is a cooperative effort of local organic and biodynamic farms organized to enhance educational opportunities for farm apprentices.

- Eastern Massachusetts: <http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/emasscraft>
- Kentucky: 270-432-0567. [www.theruralcenter.com](http://www.theruralcenter.com)
- New York state: [www.craftfarmapprentice.com](http://www.craftfarmapprentice.com)
- Northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin: Parker Forsell, 815-389-8455, [craft@learn-grow-connect.org](mailto:craft@learn-grow-connect.org). [www.cslearningcenter.org/what/training/craft](http://www.cslearningcenter.org/what/training/craft)
- Western Connecticut: Tracy Hayhurst, 860-824-4362, [thayhurst@sbcglobal.net](mailto:thayhurst@sbcglobal.net)
- Ontario: 519-855-4859x104, [futurefarmer@craftontario.ca](mailto:futurefarmer@craftontario.ca)

**Organic Volunteers.** Find on-the-job learning opportunities in sustainable and organic agriculture by clicking on a map. [www.growfood.org](http://www.growfood.org)

**World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms** offers an extensive international list of organic farms that welcome volunteer help. [www.wwoof.org](http://www.wwoof.org)



Older farmers are often willing to share what they know with interested young people.

## Greenhorns Web Portals for Young Farmers

Film-maker/farmer Severine Fleming is making a documentary film about the growing number of young people eager to supply fresh healthy food to local communities (see [www.thegreenhorns.net](http://www.thegreenhorns.net)). Inspired by those she meets, she has created a series of Web and blog sites for them, so they can see what their counterparts are doing all across the country.

[www.foryoungfarmers.wikispaces.com](http://www.foryoungfarmers.wikispaces.com)  
[www.thegreenhorns.wordpress.com](http://www.thegreenhorns.wordpress.com)

## ATTRAnews

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