

EMBRACING OHIO'S NEW, BEGINNING, AND MINORITY FARMERS

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Abstract

The New and Small Farm College focuses on landowners seeking comprehensive farm ownership and management programming. Started in 2005, the program focuses on new, beginning, and minority farm landowners in Ohio seeking comprehensive farm ownership and management training. Curriculum developed by OSU Extension educators address a variety of educational objectives. Program objectives include improving the economic development of small family-owned farms in Ohio, helping small farm landowners and families diversify their opportunities into successful new enterprises and new markets, and improving agricultural literacy among small farm landowners not actively involved in agricultural production.

The educational components of the Small Farm College consist of the following eight session: 1) participants develop a mission statement and set goals for their farm business; 2) short interactive presentations from government, financial, and farm organizations that can provide further assistance following the college; 3) taxes, liability issues and insurance issues; 4) inventory of land resources including soil fertility, water, woodland, and wildlife; 5) business planning, farm records, loan requirements, and production record keeping; 6) row crop and horticulture production, budgeting, and organic certification (as identified by participants); 7) livestock production, budgeting, labor resources, and forages; and 8) developing markets, niches, pricing, and utilizing technology. The college consists of 20 hours of classroom time and a single-day tour of various small farms to demonstrate successful agricultural enterprises.

Pre/post-program surveys of 254 participants (mean age = 45.2 years) indicated a high level of post secondary education (72%) and computer literacy (85%). Underserved populations were recognized in that 38% of participants were female and 71% were new clientele for OSU Extension. The average farm size, for the participants, was 76 acres with 12.7 years average ownership.

While 53% did not initially have a plan for their farm and 47% either were actively farming or had some idea of the type of production they were planning, post-program surveys indicated 72% of the participants created or changed their farm use plan as a result of attending these colleges. The participants rated the overall program a 9.05 on a 10 point Likert scale with 10 being best. One hundred percent of all participants responding would recommend this program to others and 96% felt the program met or exceeded their expectations. One participant commented that the OSU Extension Farm College is very thorough and enthusiastically sets you to start working on what you want to do in your farm. He goes on to say that he loved the fact that, during every single session, the need for a plan was emphasized a necessary before you start working on your farm business.

Keywords: new farmer, beginning farmer, minority, education