

## Spring 2008 Update

### CRAFT Steering Committee:

Bob Bowers, *Angelic Organics*  
David Cleverdon, *Kinnikinnick Farm*  
Tony & Dela Ends, *Scotch Hill Farm*  
Frank Friar, *DATCP, Farm & Rural Services*  
Janet Gamble,  
*Michael Fields Agriculture Institute*  
Tracey Hall, *Grace Note Farm*  
John Hendrickson,  
*Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems,*  
*UW-Madison*  
Mary Ann Ihm, *Wellspring Farm*  
Kay Jensen, *Jen-Ehr Farm*  
Don Larson, *Pine Row Farm*  
Larry O'Toole, *Growing Home Farm*  
Barb Perkins, *Vermont Valley Farm*  
Mike Sands, *Liberty Prairie Foundation*  
Matt Sheaffer, *Sandhill Organics*  
Tom Spaulding,  
*Angelic Organics Learning Center*  
Steve Tiwald, *Green Earth Institute*



CRAFT and  
Stateline Farm Beginnings®  
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## Collaborative Regional Alliance for Farmer Training

### New Farmers Grow for our Local Food System



Don and Tresea Larson, Pine Row Farm - Roscoe, Illinois

Driving east from Roscoe, Illinois, toward Angelic Organics farm one sees a familiar site: hundreds of new tract homes gobbling up rich agricultural land. It is a worrisome trend when viewed alongside daily stories of tainted imported foods. If we lose the farmland and continue to lose farmers, where will our food come from?

If you pass the tract homes and keep driving east, two bright signs crop up on the right hand side of Elevator Road: one reads "Pine Row Farm – vegetables, eggs" and the other "Margie's Grass Kickin' Chickens – vegetables, chicken, pork." Hungry for fresh, local food, neighbors are downshifting and entering these two driveways in droves.

While the daily papers pose questions for us all about where, when, and how food ends up on the grocery store shelves, more and more people are looking for signs like these along the road and in the farmer's market stands.

CRAFT and Angelic Organics Learning Center launched the Stateline Farm Beginnings® program two years ago to prepare the next generation of sustainable farmers for our local food system. Since then, more than 20 new farms have walked the path from dream to reality, with the support of experienced farmer mentors. We are seeing a great snapshot of the new face of agriculture. It's a younger and more creative agriculture than twenty-five or thirty years ago, it's distinctly more female, and it's peopled by ex-engineers, lawyers, bond traders, college-age idealists, and more than a few artists, writers, and musicians. Only a minority has farm experience or was raised on a farm, but they have passion for it.

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## New Farmers grow for our local food system

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Don Larson, one of our new neighborhood farmers, is a music professor and jazz saxophone player in several area bands. He and his wife Tresea, a potter, learned about Stateline Farm Beginnings® through their neighbors Mark and Margaret Nelson of Margie's Grass Kickin' Chickens – graduates of the 2006 program. In 2007, the Larsons started Pine Row Farm.

Don and Tresea's pasture-fed chicken eggs have become something of a sensation. Enough so that it led one customer to lean in toward Don one day and in a lowered voice exclaim, "You better watch it Don, you run out of eggs around here and you might have a revolution on your hands."

Look for Farm Beginnings® graduates throughout the region and support them with a purchase and encouragement (farming is still one of the most demanding and difficult vocations). Graduates of the program are selling at Logan Square, Wicker Park, Deerfield, North Park, Lake Bluff, and Green City farmer's markets in Chicago, in Geneva, Rockford, and directly from their farms. In Wisconsin, graduates are involved with Madison and Milwaukee CSAs, and farmer's markets in Whitewater and New Berlin.



Don Larson  
Pine Row Farm - Roscoe, Illinois

## Stateline Farm Beginnings® fills fast in third year

2007 marks the third year that we have run Stateline Farm Beginnings®. The class already had a waiting list one month before it was scheduled to begin. Sixteen students eagerly met for class for the first time in October.

It's exciting that we are meeting the needs of so many individuals and it is equally exciting to see so many graduates take their first steps along the road to new careers in farming.

Graduates and new applicants continue to point to the invaluable expertise of the veteran farmers of the CRAFT network. The unique insights of seasoned veterans can't be beat.

This year's class demographics include: professionals from the city looking for a new career, interns from CRAFT and other Midwest farms, and children of farmers looking to create alternative markets on the family farm.

We are focused on implementing much of what we have learned through evaluations of the first two classes. We are also fortunate to have all of our farmer speakers returning, several who will be going into their 3rd year of presenting for the course.

## New Online Resources for CRAFT

Angelic Organics Learning Center has spent part of the last year creating a brand new website for the organization. In late 2007, new farmer training resources were added to the website. Farms and individuals can now join and renew their CRAFT membership and register for events online. In the coming months we'll be asking for your help as we add more resources to the site, including profiles of member farms and a bulletin board for land, equipment, and employment opportunities.

Check it out at [www.learnrowconnect.org/farmer](http://www.learnrowconnect.org/farmer)

## Improving CRAFT outreach

The Learning Center worked with Professor Jason Greenberg's DePaul University graphic design class to produce a new CRAFT brochure. We also asked them for a new CRAFT logo design and they eagerly worked on both of these projects pro bono.

The CRAFT steering committee viewed several different designs and we chose a simple design that will lend itself to placement in a variety of documents. We are also glad to have a professionally produced design to replace the former hand-drawn logo for CRAFT. The original had been lost and we are at a loss to be able to manipulate the old logo in a way that would let us share it in several formats.



## Growing for Market Project connects to CRAFT and Stateline Farm Beginnings®

Angelic Organic Learning Center's urban farmer training program has provided opportunities for socially disadvantaged and limited-resource producers to pursue farming. During the year we added additional sessions to our workshop calendar to accommodate urban growers interested in producing for market. Across the year, more than 100 urban producers participated in skills-based workshops, including two Farm Dreams decision-making sessions, five field days (to visit farmers' markets, urban vegetable and honey production sites, a new farmer incubator, and Angelic Organics farm), and a workshop on extended-season vegetable production at the Chicago Center for Green Technology. On December 13, ten participants completed a 9-session business planning course designed to help them create a viable business plan suited to their individual enterprises. The course was adapted from CRAFT and the Stateline Farm Beginnings® program and introduced potential urban growers to a step-by-step farm enterprise planning process. This work was made possible in part by a major grant from the USDA Risk Management Agency.

### Emerging incubator farms

Incubator farms represent a way for beginning farmers to reduce risk by leasing land and equipment. The farm incubator models represented at Prairie Crossing Farm, Growing Home Farm, and Michael Fields Agricultural Institute all provided opportunities in 2007 for beginning farmers. The fact that new farmers can access capital in the form of infrastructure without taking on the full risk or expenses involved with individual farm start-up is one important avenue for getting more farmers onto the land.

During the 2007 growing season each incubator was visited and the both the beginning farmers and managers of each incubator were interviewed. The point was to gather information concerning both the start-up farms and start-up incubators. These visits were followed by two focus groups – one focused at the management level to understand the challenges and opportunities of running these incubators and the other focused on the operators within the incubators to understand the challenges and opportunities of being a farmer within an incubator.

As many of you know, the challenges with all start-up farming operations are immense. What the interviews and follow up focus groups revealed was that with adjustments on everyone's part, this model does provide a hopeful opportunity for increasing the chances of success for beginning farmers. Experience continues to be a harsh teacher sometimes and many of the situations and learning opportunities seemed to have involved growing pains. The network is fortunate to have both farmers and organizations taking these initial steps in a pioneering development for CRAFT and sustainable agriculture.

## MFAI strengthens partnership with CRAFT and Stateline Farm Beginnings® programs

Janet Gamble of Michael Fields Agricultural Institute became better connected to our farmer training initiative in 2007. Janet interviewed and mentored Stateline Farm Beginnings® students through out the summer and met with Parker several times to process interviews and work to integrate the programming at MFAI with programming through Angelic Organics Learning Center and the CRAFT network.

MFAI also participated in our study of incubator farms and is interested in bringing CRAFT and Stateline Farm Beginnings® participants into their growing incubator project. Including Prairie Crossing and Growing Home, CRAFT now can offer ample incubating opportunities for beginning farmers through the network.

MFAI has also decided to join forces with the CRAFT network and offer a 20% discount to CRAFT members for their winter workshop series that focuses on production techniques. Several of the winter workshops will be mirrored through corresponding CRAFT field days during the 2008 growing season.

### Thanks to our 2007 financial partners!

In 2007, Angelic Organics Learning Center enjoyed continued success in raising the funding needed to support CRAFT's efforts to train the next generation of farmers. We are happy to report that the following businesses joined our efforts:

- Goodness Greeness – Chicago, IL
- Patagonia – Chicago, IL
- Willy Street Coop – Madison, WI

We're also grateful to the organizations who awarded farmer training grants to support CRAFT and Stateline Farm Beginnings®:

- Blooming Prairie Foundation
- Farm Aid
- Illinois Department of Agriculture Sustainable Agriculture Grant Program
- Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity
- Liberty Prairie Foundation
- The Lumpkin Family Foundation
- North Central Risk Management Education Center



## Creating learning opportunities for future farmers through the diverse talents of our regional community of organic and biodynamic farms



Gavin Dandy - Everdale Learning Center  
CRAFT farm - Ontario, Canada

### Advanced Mentoring through CRAFT

Over the past three seasons the CRAFT program has grown to include a whole new crop of beginning farmers. While some of these people have taken the traditional internship path into farming a great percentage of new members tend to be older and come with experience from other careers. In the past, mentoring has been a hands-on activity involving work on a farm and questions in association with given tasks. Mentoring in a hands-on situation provides a great opportunity for learning what it takes to become a farmer.

Our recent experiences with the new beginning farmers have pushed us to consider new ways to mentor in light of the fact that many new farmers often have families, land and jobs from which they intend to slowly withdraw. In fact, we are seeing fewer of the traditional intern-type looking for an eco-adventure and more interest from individuals approaching farming with long-term aspirations, but little real life experience.

Conversations with other farmer training organizations identify the same need for mentoring programs for new farmers. In the year ahead CRAFT will work with MFAI, MACSAC, and DATCP to better define our approach to advanced mentoring. The success will depend on better networking between Midwest farming organizations and long-term support from and for our farmers.

### Visiting CRAFT programs in Ontario and New York

In June, with funding from Heifer International, staff from the Learning Center traveled to Ontario, Canada and upstate New York to visit CRAFT and farm-to-school programs. It was an excellent opportunity to meet farmers and share challenges and opportunities with like-minded organizations that coordinate programs. We all have a lot to learn from one another and it really helped broaden the idea of networking. Both CRAFT programs visited the Learning Center in the fall and are currently working to adopt the Farm Beginnings® model for their area.

### Beginning Farmers Host Field Days in 2008

Based upon feedback from beginning farmers and discussion during the CRAFT steering committee meeting, we will pilot a series of field days hosted on Stateline Farm Beginnings® student farms. The basic lay-out of the field day will include a field walk that will focus on four specific areas of the farm. An experienced CRAFT farmer will give advice and critique to help troubleshoot bottlenecks on the beginning farm. Three field days to be announced.

### 2008 Field Day Workshops

#### April 11-12

Orientation Workshop (interns only)  
Michael Fields Agricultural Institute  
East Troy, WI

#### June 28

Grazing  
Krusen Grass Farms - Elkhorn, WI

#### June 30

Post-Harvest Handling  
Wellspring Farm - West Bend, WI

#### July 12

Managing Weeds for Vegetable Production  
Primrose Community Farm - Verona, WI

#### July - date to be determined

Urban Ag Field Day - Chicago, IL

#### August 16

Farm Fertility Profile  
Angelic Organics - Caledonia, IL

#### September 27

Making Biodynamic Preparations  
Zinniker Farm - Elkhorn, WI

#### November 8

One-on-One Advisory Meeting - MFAI  
East Troy, WI