



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 30, 2008

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Looking to Jump-Start a Farm Business? **Registration Now Open for Stateline Farm Beginnings®**

Stateline Farm Beginnings® is a successful, farmer-led training and support program designed to help people plan and launch farm businesses that are economically and environmentally sustainable. Whether you are interested in growing fresh fruits and vegetables for local markets, or turkeys and geese for the holidays, Farm Beginnings® can help jump-start your business.

Farm Beginnings®, now in its third year in Illinois, links farmer-trainees with successful entrepreneurial farmers, currently operating sustainable farm businesses, via a comprehensive one-year program. The program, originally developed by the Land Stewardship Project in Minnesota, starts in the fall with nine sessions/seminars taught by Illinois and Wisconsin farmers. The farmer-led seminars run through the winter with topics that range from marketing to financial planning. In the spring and summer, participants receive one-on-one mentoring and participate in field days at local farms where they can learn a variety of skills – from animal care to vegetable/fruit production.

The Stateline Farm Beginnings® course was developed with the help of a steering committee consisting of experienced farmers and is facilitated by Parker Forsell, Director of the Farmer Training Initiative at Angelic Organics Learning Center, an educational nonprofit organization in Caledonia, Illinois.

To date, Stateline Farm Beginnings® has helped beginning and transitioning farmers launch 30 sustainable farms.

2006 Stateline Farm Beginnings® graduate Tracey Hall is now farming goats and using their milk to make soap. "I enjoyed the farmers' presentations and have come away with a firmer understanding that my farm will be unique and that there are many paths that lead to success. Each of the speakers seemed to leave me with an important thought. I now realize that it is important to work out your plan on paper and there is a steep learning curve in farming and no getting around it. But, if there is a strong will to create a farm, Stateline Farm Beginnings® can help you write a plan and begin to take the first steps toward creating it."

"Farm Beginnings® isn't theoretical, it is farmers providing examples from their own farms," says Stateline Farm Beginnings® coordinator Parker Forsell. "The foundation of the program is a mentoring component that links established farmers with course participants. This farmer-to-farmer networking benefits from the partnership of Angelic Organics Learning Center with the Collaborative Regional Alliance for Farmer Training (CRAFT). CRAFT was started by a group of farmers from northern Illinois and southern

Wisconsin in 1997 and now includes more than 65 farms and more than 45 Friends of CRAFT.

Tuition for the full-year program is \$1,500, which includes one-year membership in the CRAFT program, course books and materials, eight classroom sessions, working field days, mentoring, an educational stipend and refreshments. Scholarships are available for those in need of financial assistance.

The tuition for the program covers less than one-half of the cost for putting one student through the program. The other portion is provided by major grants from the Blooming Prairie Foundation, Farm Aid, the Illinois Department of Agriculture Sustainable Agriculture Program, the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, Liberty Prairie Foundation, the Lumpkin Family Foundation, Patagonia Chicago, and the Williamson Street Cooperative.

Applications for the fourth year of Stateline Farm Beginnings® are being accepted through September 1.

For more information or to apply, visit www.learn-grow-connect.org/what/training/stateline or contact Joanne Wiedemann-Wolf at 815-389-8455 or craft@learn-grow-connect.org.

For information on Central Illinois Farm Beginnings®, visit central.illinoisfarmbeginnings.org or contact Deborah Cavanaugh-Grant (217-968-5512; cvnghgrn@uiuc.edu).