

A JOINT PROJECT OF
UNIVERSITY OF
MISSOURI EXTENSION
AND THE JEFFERSON
INSTITUTE

Missouri Beginning Farmers Program

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 1

JANUARY 2011

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New Farmers Learn to Plan, Grow, Sell & Drive

In September 2009, the University of Missouri and Jefferson Institute were awarded a \$730,000 grant to provide educational opportunities to Missouri's new and beginning farmers to grow their farms in economically viable and ecologically sustainable ways. The grant is part of the USDA Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program.

Our project teaches production and management strategies that enhance land stewardship, business planning and financial viability, and marketing strategies. We offer programs in 4 regions of the state.

Educational opportunities are offered in four different ways. One is the **Grow**

Your Farm program, a three to four month training program designed for prospective farmers and begin-



New farmers learn about tractors and equipment.

ners with some experience who want to make a "new beginning" with alternative farming methods. MU Extension specialists and experienced, innovative farmers teach eight seminars with

three farm tours. **Educational Workshops** are held 4-6 times during the summer and fall. These workshops cover various topics from vegetable and fruit production to marketing, operating equipment and small livestock production and others.

Returning to the Farm is a course designed to help young people return to the farm as a viable career. The focus is on planning and financial management which is useful for all new farmers. Finally, we are developing **Mentoring Opportunities** that help new and beginning farmers connect with experienced farmers through real-time and online discussion of problems, opportunities and solutions.

Information at Your Fingertips

For great resources on getting started in farming, check out our website at missouribeginningfarmers.org. We have searched out the best resources on helping new farmers select enterprises, find financial resources, learn about marketing alternatives, and delve into financial management.

Updated information about regulations regarding labor and direct marketing in Missouri is also available.

The website also contains an updated calendar of events which lists our workshops and Grow Your Farm sessions as well as conferences and workshops of interest to new farmers.

New farmers who use social media can read our daily blog at missouribeginning-farming.blogspot.com and also join us on Facebook under Missouri Beginning Farmers Program.

Grow Your Farm Leads Son Home



Members of the Grow Your Farm class check out a high tunnel opera-

Justin Knoll strolled underneath the sun-screen netting that sheltered the potted flowers, grasses and other plants that are staples of Seven Cedars Farm.

While other 20-somethings have left the farm, Justin recently returned to manage the family farm in Jonesburg.

His parents, John and Melissa Knoll, decided to diversify with the help of the Grow Your Farm program.

“We want to give Justin an op-

portunity as a young farmer to succeed,” John Knoll said. “We had ideas coming in, but the program reinforced our plans, gave us direction and actually excited my son and made him eager.”

At the Warrenton MU Extension center last winter, the Knolls attended Grow Your Farm classes with six other families, including those with established farms, some with “town jobs,” and those without land who are just

now deciding to get into farming.

“It’s about helping them think more holistically about their land, what’s available to them and how they might use those resources to better allow them to do the thing they love most,” said Shelley Bush Rowe, MU Extension community development specialist in Warrenton. “It could be as simple as looking at a different way to package their product, at a different group of consumers or clients to

(continued on page 3)

Workshops Ready Farmers for Produce

In June, 20 new and beginning farmers got a good dose of information for raising berries in Missouri at a two-day workshop held at the Jefferson Institute.

During a morning session, MU Extension horticulturalist Patrick Byers gave workshop an overview of brambles (blackberries and raspberries), blueberries, strawberries, gooseberries and other fruit crops. Most farms growing berries in MO are small (less than

10 acres) but berries are often paired with other enterprises.

Usually berries are direct-marketed although other markets exist. Blueberries are the most tolerant of Missouri’s climate – but they also require significant initial in-

vestment and very good man-

agement of soil fertility.

An afternoon field trip to Jefferson Farms showed real berries in production and Byers and Catherine Bohnert answered questions about the best varieties, pests, stresses, and yield. Day 2 was devoted to marketing, income expectations, and a field trip to a u-pick berry operation.

Later in the month, 18 eager new farmers learned the ins and outs of producing for direct markets during a two-day workshop in Springfield. Factors to consider when selecting a site for fruit and berry production – from thinking about the soil, hours of sunlight, elevation and slope of the land to what kind of water, utilities, and roadway access the site has — were explored.

MU Extension Specialists Pat Byers, Jay Chism, Bob Schultheis and Gordon Carriker covered an exten-

sive array of production topics. Byers told his own personal experience in setting up a peach orchard with his family while Chism focused on the importance of good soil and managing it well. Schultheis explained the importance of managing water and showed a number of different irrigation tools for beginning farmers. Carriker drove home how important financial planning and figuring out profitability is to a beginning farmer. The day finished with marketing options and strategies by Eileen Nichols, manager of the Webb City Farmers’ Market.

The second day was devoted to hearing from those already farming and marketing. At the Springfield Farmers’ Market, discussion centered on the factors to consider in choosing a farmers’ market, as well as the advantages and disadvantages of selling

(Continued on page 3.)

Most farms growing berries in MO are pretty small (less than 10 acres) but berries are often paired with other enterprises.

MU Extension Specialist Patrick Byers explains what to look for in berry production.



Direct Market or Sell to Grocers?



Fall apples on display at Sappington Farmers' Market in St. Louis

While farmers' markets are a great outlet for your products, some farmers may decide the high transaction costs (time spent to pick products, pack them and then maintain a booth for the entire market) and price

instability (weather affects sales dramatically at open air markets) aren't for them. These farmers seek out other options. One outlet may be local grocery stores. A summer visit to Sappington Farmers Market, a grocery specializing in local foods in St. Louis, revealed beautiful displays of local products.

Grocery stores expose your product to a larger number of

customers than farmers' markets. They can carry products like meat and dairy year-round which provides a steady outlet for product outside of the farmers' market season. But your product sells for a wholesale, not retail price. The grocer is looking for competitively priced products of consistent quality and quantity. They may require liability insurance, and certain food safety standards. However, the added volume of sales may compensate you for the lower price and extra attention to insurance and food safety.

"Developing the photography

business as part of our farm's plans is another thing to add value and income."

Grow Your Farm *continued...*

buy their product, or diversifying their income opportunities."

With help from the class, the Knolls now have a plan to bolster their hay sales and expand their greenhouse operation from 650 square feet to 4,000 square feet by next year. They also outlined ideas to expand their grass-fed Simmental cattle sales and incorporate Justin's budding photography business in the next five years.

"We learned from the class,

but also learned from each other," said Melissa Knoll. "We met so many new people, from people wanting to be farmers to ones who had 500 acres."

The program inspired her family to apply and receive a grant to construct a high tunnel. "We would have never even pursued that if not for the Grow Your Farm program," she said.

Justin Knoll is optimistic about the farm's future and

how he can incorporate his interests into the big picture. "Scenery is important to the type of photography I'd like to be doing," he said. "Developing the photography business as part of our farm's plans is another thing to add value and income."

Check our website (missouribeginningfarmers.org) for more information on upcoming Grow Your Farm classes. Many start in January and February.

Workshops *continued...*

through them. Participants were encouraged to take note of the merchandizing arrangements, and other marketing tools experienced farmers were employing.

Next on the agenda was a field trip to the Milsap Farm, a Community Supported Agriculture operation, where Curtis Milsap led us through the fields, explaining pest and weed man-

agement, answering questions about soil amendments and soil fertility, and discussing post-harvest handling practices. We then explored the Prairie Picking Patch operated by Larry Smith. Beginning farmers asked questions about how to manage risks on a u-pick operation, which varieties work best for blackberries, and sampled some very good blackberries!



Curtis Milsap describes his farming operation, including crop rotations, organic management and soil fertility.



Missouri Beginning Farmers Program

Find us on the web at <http://missouribeginningfarmers.org>

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This Missouri Beginning Farmers Program is funded by a grant from USDA's National Institute for Food and Agriculture. Our three year program provides farm planning and mentorship opportunities, and educational workshops on specific topics of interest to Missouri's new and beginning farmers.



United States Department of Agriculture
National Institute of Food and Agriculture

Upcoming Events

The **Entrepreneurship Project for Agriculture**, another grant-funded effort for Missouri's Beginning Farmers, offers a cohort training program covering the basics of starting an entrepreneurial business in agriculture. Three more cohorts will start four week-long training sessions in 2011 and 2012. These training sessions include travel around Missouri and the United States to visit successful alternative farming businesses. For more information on the project, call Jill Lucht at 573-884-3185 or check out their blog at muagentrepreneur.wordpress.com.

Goat and Sheep Workshops will be held on February 5 (Jefferson City), April 2 (St. Joseph) and April 30 (Kirksville). Please call 417-466-2148 for more information. The workshops will cover basic aspects of sheep and goat production, including animal health, breeding and care.

Grow Your Farm courses are forming in St. Louis, Dexter, Kansas City, Warrenton and Mt. Vernon in January and February. Grow Your Farm at Schafly's Bottleworks in St. Louis begins on

January 18 and runs through March 8. In Dexter, the course runs Jan. 25 through March 29. A GYF course will start January 26 at the Platte County Extension Center near Kansas City. The Warren County Extension Center in Warrenton will host a GYF course starting February 1 and running through March 22. For those in the Southwest, a course will start in Mt. Vernon on February 8. More information about all the courses can be found on the web at extension.missouri.edu/growyourfarm.