

Agricultural Officials Announce Winter Business Development Training Schedule

BOSTON - November 24, 2010 - As the fall harvest season comes to an end, Department of Agricultural Resources (DAR) Commissioner Scott Soares today announced the winter schedule of agricultural business development courses offered by the department.

With the number of farms up 27 percent from 2002 to 2008, there are more than 7,600 farmers in the Bay State producing \$490 million in agricultural goods. DAR's Agricultural Business Training Program offers courses for all members of the agricultural community, ranging from large farms raising a single wholesale crop to smaller farms raising multiple retail crops. More than 350 farms have completed DAR-sponsored business planning programs tailored to their own particular niche in Massachusetts agriculture.

[Information about DAR's Agricultural Business Training Program.](#)

The three courses listed below are offered in Amherst and Marlborough from January through April 2011, and are now open for [enrollment](#).

Explorers -- This course is designed for agricultural enthusiasts who are thinking about profitable farming or expanding a hobby on an income-generating scale. The course, known as *Exploring the Small Farm Dream*, is based on materials from the New England Small Farm Institute (NESFI) and is augmented by DAR individual guidance and group collaboration.

Schedule: four sessions over five weeks on weekday evenings.

Location/Dates: Amherst - January 27 - February 24; or Marlborough - March 8 - April 5

Planners - This course is designed for those a step or two beyond Explorers who have access to land and a stronger sense of what they want to do and are capable of doing. The course entitled *Planning for Start-up* provides a reality check for those preparing to make more significant investments of time and money in an agricultural venture. This course, developed jointly with NESFI, includes a month of individually-guided research and support.

Course requirements: Completion of Explorer, another similar course, or self guided study using the Explorer workbook. Applicants must have reached the decision to farm on a revenue-generating scale.

Schedule: four sessions over eight weeks on weekend mornings.

Location/Dates: Amherst - January 29 - March 26

Established Farmers - This course is designed for agricultural business owners, workers or enthusiasts who operate an existing agricultural enterprise with at least two years of production and sales. The course, known as *Tilling the Soil of Opportunity*, offers a chance to assess or reorganize operations, assemble documentation for business decision-making, consider redirection, plan for expansion, or propose an ownership transfer. The curriculum was developed by NxLevel. This course draws on extensive peer experience, instructor knowledge and guest speakers - with the addition of substantial individual technical assistance at the course's conclusion.

Schedule: 10 sessions over 10 weeks on weekday evenings.

Location/Dates: Amherst - January 10 - March 12; or Marlborough - January 12 - March 14

DAR's mission is to ensure the long-term viability of local agriculture in Massachusetts. Through its four divisions - Agricultural Development, Animal Health, Crop and Pest Services, and Technical Assistance - DAR strives to support, regulate and enhance the Commonwealth's agricultural community, working to promote economically and environmentally sound food safety and animal health measures, and fulfill agriculture's role in energy conservation and production. For more information, visit DAR's website at www.mass.gov/agr, and/or follow us at <http://twitter.com/MDARCommish>. For your gateway to locally grown products, specialty foods, and fun ag-tivities go to www.mass.gov/massgrown.