



On-line learning: Using webinars to teach about succession and enterprise development issues

Abstract: Iowa State University's Beginning Farmer Center and Practical Farmers of Iowa teamed up to broadcast eight webinars to assist current and beginning farmers in devising strategies for successful farm enterprises.

Will farmers utilize webinar technology to reduce long drives for face-to-face meetings, breaking their isolation to learn how to make their farms more profitable, and their businesses transfer to the next generation? Yes, farmers are enthusiastic about learning from people who are farming successfully, love the freedom to access the information from their home whenever they are free, and can log-in live to ask questions that directly impact their businesses and lives.



CROSS-CUTTING

What was done and why?

Farmers are busy people, and unlike the state's urban residents, they tend to be geographically isolated. Despite this, they still need easy access to resources on the legal implications of farming, and planning the transfer of the family business. The aim of this project managed by Practical Farmers of Iowa (PFI) and the Beginning Farmer Center (BFC) was to provide opportunities for communal learning without requiring the participants to make lengthy drives to be part of face-to-face programs. The result was the production of a series of web-based educational presentations dubbed Farminars.

The project objectives were to present Farminars that generated these impacts for participants:

1. Sixty beginning farmers would improve profitability,
2. Half of the participants would take further steps to improve their operation (enroll in a business planning class or add an enterprise), and
3. Twenty families would receive help to create succession plans for the next generation on their farms.

What did we learn?

Many farmers would like to use the off-season to learn how to improve their farm business profits, to be networked together and to hear the encouragement and wisdom of experienced farmers. Distance between farmers and the time constraints of a busy farm life (often including at least one off-farm job) demands careful program scheduling and flexibility of access to information. This grant from the Leopold Center helped test Farminar technology, and this test validated that it can be used successfully to deliver knowledge on topics valuable to farmers.

Farm succession continues to be a major concern and it shows in the well-attended and frequently viewed recordings of the Farminars. Thirty farm families attended a conference held in conjunction with the Farminar effort to get help from Dave Baker of the Beginning Farmer Center for their family business succession issues.

Investigators:

Teresa Opheim
Practical Farmers of
Iowa
Ames

David Baker
ISU Beginning Farmer
Center
Urbandale