Farm Succession Programs in Nebraska: a Network

Nebraska has modeled a successful collaboration with the goal of helping beginning farmers and ranchers to get started. Major partners include the University of Nebraska, the Nebraska Department of Agriculture, Center for Rural Affairs, Legal Aid of Nebraska and USDA Farm Service Agency. These entities often work together to disseminate information about their programs and in shared projects for beginning and retiring farmers/ranchers. This willingness to work together results in frequent communications and efforts to work together to bring new resources to the state. The range of programs in the state attempts to reach beginners, senior landowners, and families at several stages.

- Nebraska is a leader in developing programs for the older generation of farmers and ranchers. UNL and Legal Aid have partnered to deliver several estate and succession planning programs. Their introductory materials have been downloaded several thousand times from the CRA website. Actual retirement materials are lacking from this series and are now under development.
- UNL has run its Returning to the Farm workshops for farm families for over 20 years. These help families with in-depth discussions of the financial, management and interpersonal issues of adding a prospective nonfamily or returning family member to the farm operation.
- UNL has sponsored farm entrepreneurship courses using the Farm Beginnings curriculum from Land Stewardship Project (MN). This course targets beginners for business plan development, primarily for nontraditional and sustainable/organic enterprise analysis, and uses experienced farmers to host sessions on marketing, recordkeeping, finances, etc.
- Center for Rural Affairs launched its Land Link program in 1991 to match beginning and retiring farmers, which many states and organizations have since redesigned. The generates inquiries from around the country and signs up 4 and 10 times as many beginners as seniors for the database. In addition, CFRA hosts a number of web pages for startup strategies and resource contacts. These receive 6000 visits each month.
- The University of Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture, a two-year college, instituted an entrepreneurship curriculum throughout the college in 2006. This catalyst created an innovative partnership with USDA Farm Service Agency, Nebraska Department of Agriculture and major farm organizations to train students to run their own businesses, access loans for a starter herd of cattle or other assets, and create a business partnership with an established farmer or rancher.
- The Nebraska Department of Agriculture Beginning Farmer Tax Credit program gives landowners a tax credit incentive to rent to beginners and gives beginners a tax credit, too. The program now requires a succession plan for participating family members.
- The NDA Farm Mediation program sponsors Legal and Financial Clinics, contracted to Legal Aid of Nebraska. Legal Aid runs several clinics each month with individual consultation for crisis, ag credit issues, and increasingly, farm/ranch transition issues.
- A short article in an Armed Services magazine generated dozens of inquiries from active service members and veterans in starting to farm. Nebraska organizations are learning how to respond to the needs and interest of these prospective farmers and ranchers.