On the farm we always have call to cut things. Not knowing how to use a chainsaw makes that even scarier.

Today on across the fence at University of Vermont extension program of that's a cut above the rest and it is aimed at new farmers. Good afternoon and thanks for joining us I am Judy Simpson. For generations Vermont farmers have turned to UVM extension for educational programs technical support and practical information. Extension also assists new farmers in creating a successful agriculture business in its new farmer project. The new farmer project is headed by Mary Peabody. Mary is a community of resources and economic development specialist with UVM Extension and the director of the women's agricultural network. Welcome it's nice to have you back on the program. What is the new farmers project?

Mary.: It's an umbrella program that takes everything extension had in existence and the center for sustainable AG and along with some new programs and basically consolidates them to what we hope is a one stop shop for new farmers. Both thinking about getting into farming and those who have been in for a few years and are finding they need a little bit more help or a few more resources to get over the hump to profitability.

Judy.: So there were resources out there but they were a bit scattered?

Mary.: Exactly. Extension has always had for example business planning programs farm management programs but they are here there and everywhere so for somebody coming and who's not really familiar with extension it could be hard to find what you want.

Judy.: As I noted you are the head of the women's agricultural network so is the new farmers project for women only?
Mary.: No it's not it's for anybody who is interested any age for stage in their business but a lot of the things that we've learned in the Women's Ag Network over the last 10 years have helped us prepare for this because many of the women we've worked with are beginning farmers.

Judy.: We're talking about farmers but you don't necessarily have to have acres and acres of land.

Mary.: Absolutely not you can have no land you can borrow property you can use family property you can farm at the Intervale for example. You can have a small as 1/2 acre of land and do something with that if you really want to.

Judy.: That's amazing but again this is a good resource for finding out what worked and what wouldn't.

Mary.: It is and land access as you can imagine in a state like Vermont is a challenge and it is one of the sections on our site website is accessing land in trying to be creative in how you are actually able to do access land without going the traditional route of having to come up with a lot of land and buy it.

Judy.: So chain site is one of the many skills that a beginning farmer might need and in the opening of a program which showed a clip for more recent chainsaw workshop which is one of the things this organization helps with indifferent workshops and so forth. Across the fence is Keith Silva was at the workshop and spoke with a participant who was learning a new skill.

Becca Pincus: I'm terrified of chainsaws, terrified ... On the farm we always have call to cut things and not knowing how to use a chainsaw makes that even scarier. So I wanted to come here and be less afraid and do a better job and not hurt myself.

This workshop on how to safely use and maintain a chainsaw is a part of the University of Vermont Extension's New Farmer Project. The instruction and hands-on opportunities fills a need that many of these participants wouldn't be able to get anywhere else.

Jessie Schmidt / UVM Extension: Extension wanted to offer a workshop to get people off on the right foot, give them the fundamentals so that they could be operating their equipment safely and get them out in the field ... there aren't a lot of opportunities out there right now to actually get hands-on training. You might be able to watch a video on line you might be able to go to your chainsaw dealer and ask questions, but to actually get out in the field and be getting some hands-on training with experienced sawyers is pretty limited so we wanted to get out there and try and offer that to the public.
Jessica Ricketson from the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation and Andrew Krenz a safety educator from Stihl chainsaws are leading this workshop. For Ricketson, the safe use of a chainsaw comes down to two factors: respect and awareness.

Jessica Ricketson / VT Dept. of Forest Parks & recreation: it cuts so fast, I mean that’s what’s cool about it that’s what people like them, but things happen fast and you just have to know when they’re going to happen. People think chainsaws are just something that they’ve always known how to use and their easy to use or on the other extreme someone is scared of using a chainsaw and I tend to think of it as right down the middle. Respect this really effective tool and it’s one of the best things you can have if you’re a homeowner I think.

Helping out around the house is what Terry Marron had in mind when she signed up for this class.

Terry Marron / Williston, VT: We are cutting more of our own firewood from our land and so we’re using our chainsaw a little bit more than we have in the past so I wanted to make sure we’re properly using the saw and maintaining it, so, really I know a little bit about cutting, but I did learn quite a few new things, but the maintenance is really an issue that I would like to know about.

For Whit Bissel this class was an opportunity to gain more experience using a chainsaw ... knowledge that he hopes will lead to a job.

Whit Bissel: I found this course on-line and I know some loggers in the area and have the opportunity to do some firewood cutting and wanted to learn a little more about the chainsaw. I learned a lot just the basic safety things that go on with cutting wood and using chainsaws, they’re dangerous and you have to know how to use them right.

By the end of class ... Becca Pincus’s fear of the chainsaw was ‘safely’ put to rest.

Becca Pincus: I’ve used regular hand saws before and chop saws and circular saws and they don’t scare me at all so I don’t know what the chainsaw scary factor is, but I feel a lot better now. You know the safety equip works. I always thought chaps were like that’s not going to stop a chainsaw, but they do and we talked about that and that makes me feel a lot safer. And there’s that emergency off switch and I didn’t know about that before and that makes me feel safer, so overall my fear is, I mean, their dangerous tools obviously, but a lot of things are dangerous, but now I feel a lot safer about how to control that and use it for what I want.
Experience, confidence, and knowledge ... three factors that need to be sharp when it comes to learning and safely using a chainsaw. In Montpelier, I'm Keith Silva with Across the Fence.

Thanks Keith here in the studio Mary Peabody and I are now joined by Beth Holzman. Beth is the outreach education coordinator for the new farmer project welcome. Tell me a little bit about we just saw the chainsaw workshop but what other workshops does the farmer project offer?

Beth.: The new farmer project offers a really wide variety of educational opportunities. Some of them are in person classes and workshops and some of them are online with online classes and webinars. And also just online learning modules that people can use to get the information they need. Some examples yesterday we hosted a webinar on basic soil health up and soil management. Next month we will be talking about insurance for beginning farmers.

Judy.: When you say webinar up what does that mean? People just watch on their computer?

Beth.: If the web based seminar and you can participate online on your computer. You can either participate while it is live or the great thing about the webinar up is that they are taped and we put them on our web site so you can watch them when they're convenient for you.

Judy.: That's great. So you're tailoring the content of the workshops from what you're hearing from farmers? Is that correct?

Beth.: One of the great things about this audience is that they are extremely eager for information and opportunities and they're very forthright about what they're interested in learning so we get a lot of feedback on what they are interested in. Those things vary from sustainable farming techniques. For the most part beginning farmers are very conscious about farming and ecological responsible ways. They want to learn about how to access local markets and how to feed their neighbors and local communities and of course finding affordable and accessing credit are all things that are very interested in.

Judy.: And there all things too that can be found in this one stop?

Beth.: Yes we are calling them different tools sheds and they organize around the four basic areas of production skills knowledge marketing skills knowledge access to capital and credit and access to land.
Judy.: It’s called the new farmers project that the information and skills that are provided might be useful to lots of people regular people in Vermont who are not farming.

Mary.: Absolutely no matter how long you’ve been in farming you can always use a refresher in something. The other thing that happens is that as farmers develop frequently they diversify or decide to get into something new so that maybe slice you back down the learning curve a little bit so you have to come back and figure out if you been milking goats and now you are raise flowers there some new things are going to have to learn about.

Judy.: Or do both.

Mary.: Or do both.

Judy.: We’ve been talking a lot about the skills in information that beginning farmer might need but what about capital or land that is needed to start a business?

Mary.: You need both for sure but as we discussed earlier there’s a couple of different ways to get land and I think that still it’s the conventional wisdom that if I want to farm I need to first go by the end and do the farming but we’re trying to turn that model around a little bit. There’s lots of organizations around the state that are working really hard to figure out how to create incubator spaces for farmers start so you can get your experience and practice without having to invest in the land. Again that cuts down on the amount of capital that you need so actually there are businesses you can start with very little cash in hand.

Judy.: And be pretty creative.

Mary.: And be very creative.

Judy.: We saw the chain saw a workshop and that was sort of a combination of information from an educator but also from a manufacturer. How important are those partnerships?

Beth.: They are absolutely crucial. We partner with government agencies nonprofit industry and in lots of existing farmers. Almost everything we offer a farmer or farmers have been involved in helping us put together what the content and is and often deliver it and we really rely on what dissipates to say what worked in what didn't work for moving on to the next program or set of information that would put up on our web site.

Judy.: I guess is really important to have that information base as far as being able to share experiences. Because that’s also was included in this website too is different farmers blogs and experiences.
Mary.: Absolutely farmers love to learn from farmers that's the one thing that we know. They like stories they like to see how it plays out in the life so to the extent that we can put farmers together with other farmers that's a great learning tool.

Judy.: It's a pretty easy sites and advocate too. I was looking at it earlier this morning.

Mary.: Good that is our goal. Beth has done an amazing job of trying to put it together in a way that makes sense. There is some redundancy built into the system which is important because that means some people look across the top some people look down the side so shouldn't have to struggle for minutes to try to fire which you want and we're hoping that people will give us feedback on how to improve it and make it even easier to navigate.

Judy.: How often do you update the site?

Beth.: Almost daily.

Judy.: Really?

Beth.: At least weekly.

Judy.: What kinds of information have you been adding lately?

Beth.: We're just about to open on the website a new part that has information about all the different agencies and organizations that provide services that are relevant to beginning farmers. It links right from our site and from a very brief description of each of those organizations to the organizational website and specifically to the programs and services that are relevant to beginning farmers because many of these organizations like the USDA natural resources conservation services offer a lot of programs so we're trying to help beginning farmers hone in on resources that they already offer that are already relevant to them because when you go to that big agency web site it can be a little overwhelming. So we're really trying to help them to get as directly in as they can.

Judy.: I would imagine each farmer has a different need for their situations are unique?

Beth.: Absolutely and they change over time. What is your priority today after you live through that challenge may be different and you can come back to our website or come back to us via phone or workshop and work on the next area that will help you advance your business.
Judy.: What's some of the feedback that you have gotten?

Mary.: Good feedback people like it and they like that we have a mix of online things in you can go there 24\7 any time. If you can sleep some night you can go online and there'll be something that you can learn. We still do the face to face things were still sensitive to the fact that not everybody has a computer in their home not everybody wants to have a computer in their home. Internet access is still spotty in parts of the state so people appreciate that we're trying to do something for everybody.

Judy.: It's called the new farmer project but really as we heard in that video clip even homeowners can take advantage of a lot of what is going on on that web site because it is relevant.

Mary.: Right. You never know where the next farmers are coming from so most of the farmers that we work with now or many of them are homeowners as well and maybe starting very small in their backyard and someday they're going to grow and someday they'll be the next big farm.

Judy.: Or as some woman in the clip said just being able to cut your own firewood.

Mary.: Yeah.

Judy.: Thanks to both of you. If you're interested you can contact the new farmer project a couple of ways. There's the website and also a phone number too if you do not have a computer. Thanks to both of you. That's our program for today I am Judy Simpson we will see you again next time on across the fence.

Across the fence is brought to you as a public service by the University of Vermont extension Vermont's agricultural experiment station and WCAX TV.