



## PSS 208: Diversified Farm Planning

Spring 2020, Wednesdays 12:00-3:00 pm. Jeffords 112. Three Credit Hours.

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Office hours: Tues 10:00 am – 12:00 pm / Weds 10:30 am / 12:00 pm. Jeffords 210

*Appointments preferred. I am also available other times, please email to schedule.*

### Pre-requisites

PSS 010 or 021 and one 100-level PSS course; equivalent experience; or instructor permission.

### Course Description

*“The farmer is the only [person] in our economy who buys everything at retail, sells everything at wholesale, and pays the freight both ways.” – John F. Kennedy*

Farmers are increasingly required to be managers of complex biological, environmental, and social systems in order to best compete in their efforts to make a living from the production of food and fiber. The challenge for new farmers starting a new farming business is to identify what they don't know and be able to critically plan a complex farming system that will be financially viable. This course will include material covering a range of topics including and introduction to diverse farming systems practiced in Vermont, farm policy, production functions, marketing, and quality of life planning.

Students will complete a final semester project in the form of (A) a farm plan or (B) an in-depth review of an existing farm business. This course is appropriate for students who will own or manage a farm in the future, who intend to work with farmers through research or outreach, or who are interested in farm production systems and the needs of them to be successful. This standalone course is the first in the PSS Diversified Farm series which also includes PSS 209: Diversified Farm Operation (taught in summer semester).

### Course Learning Objectives

*“When tillage begins, other arts follow. The farmers, therefore, are the founders of human civilization.” – Daniel Webster*

1. Students will develop an understanding of the regulatory, ecological, economic and social drivers of farm success in Vermont.
2. Students will engage critically with class material and make connections with how these drivers shape farm systems and inform on-farm decision making.
3. Students will apply their knowledge and develop a farm plan which can be used for many potential purposes including monitoring and evaluation, applications for financing, etc. Alternatively, students will apply their knowledge to a review of an existing farm business, coupled with reflection about how this review does or does not inform their career choice.

### Contacting course instructors or TAs:

The default method for contacting the course instructor or TA is via email.

All emails should begin with the subject line “[PSS 208]...”

This will allow for incoming messages to get flagged and not missed in overstuffed inboxes. Please use professional language in emails. Text messaging is not an appropriate method for communication with instructors and teaching

assistants. My personal cell phone number is listed at the top of this syllabus, use it only in an emergency and not during or immediately prior to class meeting time.

### Course Structure and Pedagogy

We will use *engaged learning techniques* in this course that are designed to empower students to participate in instruction and develop feedback mechanisms to improve learning and continual course development. Students will be encouraged to speak up in class, and may be called on blindly and asked for opinions on course topics. *Please be prepared for class by completing readings beforehand.* This is not a lecture-and-respond course- there will be collaborative activities each class period. Material delivery will employ a combination of readings, lectures (instructor and student-led), homework, in-class exercises, planning assignments, and peer review. Students are expected to be resourceful in acquiring the relevant evidence to support their homework assignments and final class project.

### Required Course Materials:

All course materials and readings will be posted on Blackboard.

### Course topics

Course topics and schedule will likely change according to student interests and time availability. All schedules and materials will be updated on Blackboard and announced in class.

2020 PSS 208 <i>Tentative</i> course schedule		Initial Readings	Activities
Day	Topic		
1/15/2020	Class introduction	Sheils, C. 2004. "What Does the Term 'New Farmer' Mean?" New England Small farm Institute.	Group discussion: Where we are, why farm?
	Values assessment	Pritchard, F. & E. Polishuk. (2018). Start Your Farm. Ch 1, Why Be a Farmer?	NESFI Farmer Profile
1/22/2020	Comparative crop systems: annual vs perennial; crops vs livestock; agronomic vs horticultural Excel tutorial	Sullivan, P. and Greer, L. 2011. Evaluating a Farming Enterprise. VT Sustainable Jobs Fund. 2009. Farm to Plate Strategic Plan Executive Summary. Resources on Blackboard	
1/29/2020	Skills assessment		New England Small Farm Institute. 2000. Northeast small scale, "sustainable" farmer skill self-assessment tool.
	Planning documents: sales and cash flow projections	Morgan, K. et al. n.d. Farm Financial Risk Management: Introduction to Farm Planning Budgets for New and Beginning Farmers. Virginia Cooperative Extension.	
2/5/2020	Soil fertility planning	Grubinger, V. 2008 Nutrient management for organic vegetable farms.	Sample nutrient planning
	Site mapping		Google Earth mapping exercise
2/12/2020	Crop planning: tools of the trade	Mohler, Charles L. Crop rotation on organic farms: a planning manual. Natural Resource, Agriculture, and Engineering Service (NRAES), 2009.	

2/19/2020	Farm Planning for Pest Management Farm diversification	Select the IPM guide for your specific crop type (on Blackboard) Fritz, M. & R. Meyers. 2004. Diversifying Cropping Systems. NESARE Publications	Farm diversification exercise
2/26/2020	Market considerations: Retail, wholesale and alternatives	Dunn, J. et al. 2014. Fruit and Vegetable Marketing for Small-scale and Part-time Growers. Penn State Extension.	Guest Speaker: Spencer Welton, formerly Half Pint Farm
3/4/2020	Accessing land, land tenure arrangements	UVN New Farmer Project. Land Access and Tenure Toolshed.	Guest Speaker: Maggie Donin, Vermont Land Trust
3/11/2020	UVM Spring Break		
3/18/2020	Business ownership and management - tools to distribute risk	Higby, A. et al. 2006. A Legal Guide to the Business of Farming in Vermont. Chapter 1: Legal Structure of the Farm Business.	Guest Speaker: Hilary Martin, Digger's Mirth Farm
3/25/2020	Labor: regulations, ethics, options	Higby, A. et al. 2006. A Legal Guide to the Business of Farming in Vermont. Chapter 5: Farm Labor Regulation + Chapter 7: Farm Insurance	Proposal peer-review session.
4/1/2020	Farming in the community	Kelsey, T. & C. Abdalla. 2017. Finding the Common Ground: Good Neighbor Relations: Advice and Tips from Farmers, Penn State Extension. link	Final month check-in
4/8/2020	Lending and finances  Land assessment	UVM Center for Sustainable Agriculture. 2012. Guide to Financing the Community Supported Farm. Puglia, A. Penn State Extension Farmland Assessment Checklist.	Farm project peer review session
4/15/2020	Infrastructure assessment	Nix, S. et al. 2017. On-Farm Infrastructure Toolkit.	Guest speaker
4/22/2020	Equipment purchases and maintenance	See resources on Blackboard	
4/29/2020	Student presentations		

#### Blackboard and electronics:

*"You know, farming looks mighty easy when your plow is a pencil, and you're a thousand miles from the corn field."  
– Dwight D. Eisenhower*

UVM Blackboard is the primary tool for course management and all assignments must be submitted and will be grade via that system. In the event of a Blackboard outage, alternative electronic means for submitting assignments will be presented. If assignments are accepted via email, and announcement will be made prior to submission which will include specific instructions for tagging subject lines in order to track assignments. Assignments should not be turned in as paper copies unless otherwise stated. Assignments will not be accepted via cloud services such as Google Docs.

Students are expected and will be taught to be resourceful in searching for information and developing farm plans in this course. As such, you are encouraged to bring laptops to class and to use them as necessary. In-class use of electronics is expected to be limited to activities pertinent to the course.

There will be assignments in this course that require use of spreadsheets software. I strongly, strongly recommend using an up-to-date version of Microsoft Excel for those assignments. Alternative software may be used but if I can't read a file it won't get graded, period, so make sure your program can convert and be read in my version. I will not accept a Google Sheet for any homework or project assignments.

#### Attendance Policy and Classroom Environment Expectations:

This course meets only one day per week, so any absence will result in a full week of missing class. *Students are expected to attend and participate in class discussion.* Students are specifically expected to attend, arrive on time, and show respect for guest speakers who are often volunteering their time. Tardiness and absences will affect the professionalism component of your grade.

1. If you are ill and missing only one day of classes, you can contact class professors by phone or e-mail directly and leave a clear message including your name, and that you are ill and will be missing the class.
2. If you are ill for 2 or more classes or experiencing a personal problem that will cause you to miss more than a day of classes, you must contact Whitney Northrop in the CALS Student Services Office or Student Services in your college. She will notify the instructors for you, but you will also need to work with your instructors to discuss his/her expectations in reference to your absence.
3. It is important that you as the student (not your advisor and not your parent) contact Student Services directly if at all possible. By doing so, we will have a very clear understanding of the nature of the illness or problem and how we can best help you.

#### Grading Criteria/Policies:

*"A good farmer is nothing more nor less than a handy [wo]man with a sense of humus." – E.B. White*

Your course grade will be composed of:

- o Attendance and professionalism 20 %
  - o Homework assignments 20 %
  - o Farm profile 15 %
  - o Peer review essay 15 %
  - o Final Project Presentation 10 %
  - o Final Project 20 %
- All grading will be completed on Blackboard. Grading rubrics for assignments will be available and viewable.
  - Late assignments: As an iterative and project-driven course, it is important to keep up with the assignments. Assignments will automatically be deducted 10% of the total grade for each day late. No assignments will be accepted after five days unless the absence has been approved by CALS Student Services. Please read that again. Also, see the accommodations policy below.
  - This course uses the standard Blackboard grading schema to convert numeric to letter grades. Numeric grades are not rounded to the next highest integer: an 89.9 is not a 90.

	minus (-)		plus(+)
A	90-93.9	94-96.9	97-100
B	80-83.9	84-86.9	87-89.9
C	70-73.9	74-76.9	77-79.9
D	60-63.9	64-66.9	67-69.9
F		<60	

- As a rule, I do not negotiate with students over minor grade corrections on assignments. For every student who feels they received a subjectively low grade on an assignment, there are multiple students who likely

received a subjectively high grade. If you feel like there was an egregious grading error on any given assignment, by all means discuss it with me, but it is highly unlikely that the grade will change unless a strong and compelling case is made. In my experience after assigning hundreds of course grades, any student can achieve a high grade in my courses by simply staying up on readings, attending and participating in class, and completing assignments on-time and according to the instructions. If you would like to contest a grade, please follow the procedures outlined in this policy:

<https://www.uvm.edu/policies/student/gradeappeals.pdf>. For information on grading and GPA calculation, go to <https://www.uvm.edu/registrar/grades>.

#### Assessments (Graded Work):

- Attendance and professionalism: Students are expected to attend all classes, be engaged in class discussion, participate in activities, and act in a professional manner. Attendance, attention, inquiry, and participation affect this grade. Grading for this category will be shared among the student and the instructor based on a shared rubric.
- Homework: Descriptions of assignments will be posted on blackboard and/or described in lecture. These will be designed to complement material from class and readings. Some will be completed in-class, some in groups, and some on your own outside of class. Assignments will be designed to be built into or to inform your final project.
- Farm profile: Each student will study successful (or non-successful) farms or businesses to glean information or tips for your own success. The profile will consist of a short oral presentation delivered in-class and a writeup of the farm business studied.
- Peer Review Essay: Peer review can be an effective strategy to develop a more holistic perspective and improve the quality of student projects. Students can learn how to communicate professionally and see that feedback and revision is a key component in designing high quality writing and planning projects. You will be asked to give thoughtful, critical feedback to your classmates in order to help their peers solidify farm plan concepts and content. A detailed description of the essay assignment and rubric will be provided in-class.
- Final Project Presentation: A short final presentation will be required of all students. A detailed description of the presentation format and rubric will be given to students in the beginning of the course. Presentations will be held on 4/29/18 and 5/1/18.
- Final Project: A detailed description of the assignment and rubric will be given to students in the beginning of the course. Students cannot receive credit for this assignment without turning in both the draft and final versions. Draft Due on 4/3/18. Final due 5/6/18.

#### Course Evaluation:

Students are expected to complete an evaluation of the course at its conclusion. Evaluations will be anonymous and confidential, and that the information gained, including constructive criticisms, will be used to improve the course.

#### Student Learning Accommodations:

The primary goal for this course is for students to achieve learning objectives, not to meet deadlines and complete assignments. That said, the framework provided by the coursework and due dates is important to help us achieve that goal. It is important for students to complete readings and assignments on-time and to be prepared for class discussions. However, I understand that not every student learns the same way, and we all come into this course with other responsibilities that don't go away when we walk through the classroom door. If a short-term accommodation or adjustment to an assignment or deadline will improve your success in this course, by all means please speak to me about it. *This does not mean that I will reward laziness. Flexibility is not a replacement for you completing the coursework and maintaining the trajectory of the course.*

If you have a more substantial need than a minor adjustment to course requirements, and in keeping with University policy, any student with a documented disability interested in utilizing accommodations should contact SAS, the office of Disability Services on campus. SAS works with students and faculty in an interactive process to explore reasonable and appropriate accommodations, which are communicated to faculty in an accommodation letter. All students are strongly encouraged to meet with their faculty to discuss the accommodations they plan to use in each course. A student's accommodation letter lists those accommodations that will not be implemented until the student meets with their faculty to create a plan.

Contact SAS:

A170 Living/Learning Center;

802-656-7753;

[access@uvm.edu](mailto:access@uvm.edu)

[www.uvm.edu/access](http://www.uvm.edu/access)

Religious Holidays:

Students have the right to practice the religion of their choice. If you need to miss class to observe a religious holiday, please submit the dates of your absence to me in writing by the end of the second full week of classes. You will be permitted to make up work within a mutually agreed-upon time. <https://www.uvm.edu/registrar/religious-holidays>

Academic Integrity:

The policy addresses plagiarism, fabrication, collusion, and cheating.

<https://www.uvm.edu/policies/student/acadintegrity.pdf>

Code of Student Conduct:

<http://www.uvm.edu/policies/student/studentcode.pdf>

FERPA Rights Disclosure:

The purpose of this policy is to communicate the rights of students regarding access to, and privacy of their student educational records as provided for in the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) of 1974.

<http://catalogue.uvm.edu/undergraduate/academicinfo/ferparightsdisclosure/>

Promoting Health & Safety:

The University of Vermont's number one priority is to support a healthy and safe community. Resources that may be helpful include:

- UVM CALS Student Services  
<https://www.uvm.edu/cals/student-services>
- Center for Health and Wellbeing:  
<https://www.uvm.edu/health>
- Counseling & Psychiatry Services (CAPS)  
<https://www.uvm.edu/health/CAPS>  
Phone: (802) 656-3340

- C.A.R.E.

If you are concerned about a UVM community member or are concerned about a specific event, we encourage you to contact the Dean of Students Office (802-656-3380). If you would like to remain anonymous, you can report your concerns online by visiting the Dean of Students website at <https://www.uvm.edu/studentaffairs>