



"Tilling the Soil of Opportunity"

An In-depth Business Planning Course for Massachusetts Agricultural Enterprises

Working with key local partners, the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR) offers NxLevel®'s widely acclaimed "Tilling the Soil of Opportunity" (TTS) agricultural business planning course. This innovative, farmer friendly course focuses on existing* agricultural businesses that can benefit from an organized look at their current operation to plan for growth and change.

Over 240 Massachusetts farmers have completed TTS. Many have commented that the farm-to-farm networking during the class was one of the biggest ongoing benefits, and some past participants are still getting together on their own.

The course Instructor guides participants through creation of a business plan to guide decision making on the owner/operator's farm. MDAR has enhanced the course's 35 hours of classroom time with individualized technical assistance and confidential financial planning. The Instructor visits every participant's farm/ag enterprise at least once during the course.

About the Course:

- TTS is facilitated by a nationally certified and experienced Instructor, and is overseen by the Director of the MDAR Agricultural Business Training Program
- Guest speakers are drawn from local businesses and service providers to personalize the key concepts of many sessions
- After the course ends, students can receive additional individual technical assistance in topic areas most important to complete a working business plan. Basic costs are included for this service.
- The business plan each student creates can simplify eligibility for federal, state and local assistance programs
- This course qualifies as a "*Borrower Training Program*" for the USDA Farm Service Agency, and can enhance efforts to secure funds from any lender
- Some courses include extra sessions on special topics, depending on class needs and schedule

Participant Quote: "It gave me a better understanding of how to work my finances, and to set down on paper and organize myriad components of my farm business. The Instructor's enthusiasm and heart felt interest were important, and learning with other farmers was important as well" (2007 participant)

***Prerequisites:**

- **Participating businesses must have been operating for one or more years (work on other ag enterprises may be considered).**
- **Participants have current access to land and at least minimal facilities for their enterprise (owned or leased).**

If you consider yourself to be a start-up or an idea-stage business, we offer a shorter, more appropriate course – “Explorer” - using a similar approach.

Session Titles:

1. Take Stock of Your Resources
2. Basic Planning and Research
3. The Legal Terrain
4. Manage from the Ground Up
5. Bring Your Product to Market
6. Reap the Benefits of Market Strategies
7. Get Your Budgets in Line
8. Analyze Cash Flow and Financial Statements
9. Cultivate Your Money Resources
10. Harvest Your Future - Using Your Plan – GRADUATION!

Course Structure:

Classes meet once per week during a 10-12 week window. Each of the sessions addresses a component/chapter of your business plan. The course is cumulative, with each session building on the last until the participant completes the whole business plan. Therefore, you should not sign up if you must miss more than one session.

The time and effort each participant puts into completing lessons and participating in class will be his or her most valuable investment in refining their farm-based business. We are happy to provide referrals to alumni of our programs (probably in your own region) to help you decide if this course is for you.

Participant Quote: "The course is remarkably useful in providing the knowledge of issues that businesses must take into account." "It is organized well and was nicely targeted to farms." (two 2007 participants)

How do I Find Out More/Sign Up for the 2008 Southeastern Massachusetts Course?

When?

Classes will start on Thursday January 10, 2008
Classes will run from 6:00-9:00 pm
Classes will end on or around March 20, 2008.

Where?

University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, Fairhaven Facility (Old AT&T Building)
200 Mill Road, Fairhaven, MA 02719. This modern facility will afford us a number of technological and comfort advantages.

Deadline?

The deadline for completed applications is November 15, 2007.

Class Size?

Enrollment is limited to 12 businesses. You may bring another person from your farm at no extra charge if space permits. The course will be cancelled (and fees refunded) if we do not enroll at least 8 qualified businesses.

When your application is accepted, you will be asked to pay a course fee of \$200, which includes the course text and workbook, additional handouts and individual technical assistance. If this fee is an absolute barrier for an otherwise qualified candidate, we can sometimes arrange a split payment or alternative sources for a portion of the funds.

Out of State Participants?

Contact the Director (below) for consideration as part of a waiting list. If the course does not fill with in-state participants, we may make a few spaces available at a slightly higher registration fee and without eligibility for post-course services.

For additional information and an application form, contact:

Rick Chandler, ABTP Director
Massachusetts Dept. of Agricultural Resources
25 West Experiment Station
University of Massachusetts
Amherst, MA 01003
Phone: 413-577-0459
e-mail: rhandler@umext.umass.edu