

Guiding Individual Users through *Exploring the Small Farm Dream: Is Starting an Agricultural Business Right for You?*

Introduction

The *Exploring the Small Farm Dream* workbook was originally designed for use in a classroom setting. However, people who were unable to attend a course asked to purchase the workbook to use on their own. To respond to this interest, the New England Small Farm Institute redesigned the workbook so that it could be used by individuals - with support from resources on NESFI's website - to go through the decision-making process independent of a class. Of course, a key benefit to the course is the guidance participants receive from the facilitators. Coaching individual users through the workbook is a way that service providers can offer some of that guidance.

How to get workbooks

Individual users can order a copy of the workbook from NESFI, either by calling 413-323-4531, or by ordering online at www.smallfarm.org. If your organization decides to offer “guided self-study” as a service option, you may wish to purchase a small supply of workbooks for resale. Please note that photocopying the workbook is not permitted.

Preparing to work with clients

The purpose of *Exploring the Small Farm Dream* is to help course participants or individual users decide whether starting an agricultural business is right for them. An important task for a facilitator or coach is to direct users to resources that can help them to make that decision.

- ✦ Review the *Explorer* course delivery guide. Note the learning objectives for each session (which correspond with individual sections in the workbook) as well as suggestions for handouts and resources.
- ✦ Become familiar with the on-line resources at www.smallfarm.org that follow the workbook sections and sub-topics.
- ✦ Consider having some or all of the resources in the *Explorer* “Bookshelf” available for clients to look at or borrow.
- ✦ Create a list of your local, state or regional resources that can help beginning farmers. Be sure to include information on finding/acquiring access to land in your area; where to get information on state and local regulations; local programs, grants or other potential sources of financial support; and workshops, meetings or other opportunities for farmers to get together.
- ✦ Consider compiling a list of local farmers who would be willing to talk to new farmers (see Farmer Interviews in Section Two of the workbook).



Guiding Individual Users, cont.

Working with individual clients

The more you know about a client in advance, the more effective a coach you can be. Use the course registration form to develop a questionnaire for potential clients to complete before you meet with them. This will help you learn something about their background and interests, and whether *Explorer* is an appropriate tool for them. If you decide to facilitate their exploration:

- ✦ Review the *Explorer* decision-making process with the client. If you are meeting somewhere with a computer and access to the internet, look together at the [PowerPoint presentation](#) in the For New Farmers section of NESFI's website.
- ✦ Determine a plan of action. Consider having the client complete all of Section One in the workbook before you spend much time with them. When they return they should be able to articulate their personal goals: quality of life, financial and environmental, and have a sense of what knowledge and skills they need to gain before starting a farm business. That in turn will help you decide how best to spend your time.
- ✦ Be clear about what clients can (and should not) expect from their consultations with you, and what you expect from them between your meetings. Will you be referring on to other service providers? If so, establish milestones to be met before you make those referrals.
- ✦ If you plan to use *Explorer* to help screen potential participants for other programs or services you offer (e.g., a business planning course, farm mentorship program) consider requiring completed worksheets from Section Four of the workbook as part of your application process.

Follow-up

To track the effectiveness of individual coaching, ask clients to complete a brief evaluation form after your work with them is done. If clients “drop off the radar” after a few months, follow-up with an email asking about their status. It will be helpful to learn if they have decided they can work along on their own, or if they have decided they are not ready to continue with their idea, or have decided not to start a farm business. Remember that a successful outcome for *Exploring the Small Farm Dream* can be the decision not to farm commercially. If you refer clients to other programs or service providers, consider getting feedback on the result of those referrals.

In the course of your coaching *Explorer* users you may discover information in the workbook or on NESFI's website that should be updated or added. Please send your suggestions to info@smallfarm.org. We welcome any and all feedback!

