

A publication of  
**Growing New Farmers**

**A northeast service providers consortium**  
GNF Professional Development Series #221



**Program:** New Jersey Exploring the Small Farm Dream

**Organization:** Northeast Organic Farming Association-NJ and Mercer County Community College

**Dates:** Beginning fall 2003. Offered again in spring 2004

**Targeted to:** Prospective Farmers -- Explorers and early-stage Planners. (People at all levels of experience interested in beginning an agricultural enterprise are welcome.)

**Need**

People who come from nonfarming backgrounds often lack the information they need to make an informed decision about starting a commercial agricultural enterprise. Few written materials address these issues, and most service providers don't target Explorers or Planners. Consequently, a certain number of start-up farmers fail each year simply because they didn't understand such things as the effect farming might have on a family's lifestyle or the implications of a marketing and distribution choice.

The New Jersey Exploring the Small Farm Dream is an outgrowth of programs by The New England Small Farm Institute

**Response**

During the course, participants discuss current opportunities in small-scale agriculture, explore objectives, assess personal and financial resources, conduct preliminary market research and develop an action plan for pursuing their interests in food and farming.

Two people who have personal experience in the agricultural industry teach the course. Pam Flory has taught gardening and farming to a wide range of audiences. In 2000, she designed and started Spring Hill Farm in Hopewell and was farm manager there for three seasons. Laura Sayre, program manager at Northeast Organic Farming Association-NJ (NOFA-NJ), has more than 10 years of experience working on organic farms.

## **Description**

Participants interests are many and varied. They range from raising goats and making goat cheese to growing and selling cut flowers or raising a rare tomato variety or some other specialty food that will fill a niche market and create a viable business.

Exploring the Small Farm Dream serves as a reality check for most participants. Some decide to pursue their dream and start a farm business, but most choose to move more slowly toward that goal, maybe by saving money for a few more years or by working as a farm employee to gain needed practical experience.

Still others decide that gardening, homesteading or working in an agriculturally related field suits them better than commercial farming would.

**Funding:** Tuition is \$150, including materials. Two people working on the same farm business idea may attend for a combined tuition of \$170 including two copies of all course materials.

## **Partners**

The New England Small Farm Institute, a non-profit organization supporting beginning and small-scale farmers in the Northeast, originally developed Exploring the Small Farm Dream. First Pioneer Farm Credit's AgEnhancement Program provided funding, in part, to bring the course to New Jersey.

## **Outreach**

The Mercer Community College website: <http://www.mccc.edu>.

NOFA-NJ members or its website: [http:// www.nofanj.org](http://www.nofanj.org)

## **Analysis**

**SUCSESSES:** The course helps participants understand the nature of farming, identify their interests and assess the possibility of entering farming as a business. The course material is practical and useful. Course feedback for the fall program was very positive.

**CHALLENGES:** None encountered.

## **Next Steps**

It would be advantageous for this program to be spread to other Community Colleges in the area, as some participants needed to drive long distances to attend. The program would like to obtain some small grants so that one to three scholarships could be offered, especially to farm interns and apprentices.

## **Additional Resources**

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March 2004

