



Tilling The Soil of Opportunity

Business Planning for Existing Agricultural Enterprises

Rolling applications determine course locations and dates.

*Next course tentatively to be scheduled for Fall 2016, based on enough interest,
location TBD*

More than 350 farms have completed this course for existing Massachusetts agricultural businesses that will benefit from an organized look at their current operation in order to plan for growth and change. You must have at least two years of documented farm operation and income as a for-profit or non-profit farming enterprise.

The course instructor guides participants through creation of a full business plan to improve decision making on the farm. MDAR has enhanced the 35 hours of group meetings with individualized technical assistance and confidential one-on-one financial planning. The instructor visits every participant's farm at least once during the course.

About the Massachusetts Course:

- Tilling The Soil (TTS) is facilitated by a nationally certified and experienced instructor with years of experience working with agricultural enterprises, further supported by MDAR staff.
- Guest speakers are drawn from service providers (legal, accounting, marketing) to personalize the key concepts of many sessions.
- Participants are an invaluable sounding board and support network for each other – we have seen course friendships and problem solving groups go on for years after the course ends.
- Selected students receive follow-up technical assistance in topic areas most important to completing a working business plan.
- The TTS business plan 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.

Participant Quotes:

"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".

"This stuff is not that fun for me, but the class really helped me to get it done. I learned a bunch too, and now I know where to go to get more."

"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."

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 – Present your plan at GRADUATION!

Course Structure:

Classes meet once per week during a 10-week window. Each session addresses a component of your business plan and requires your active participation in completing homework between sessions. The course is cumulative, with each session building on the last until the participant completes the whole plan. Class size is limited to 12 farms, with the opportunity to bring another key person from your enterprise at no additional cost if space allows.

The registration cost of \$200 includes instruction, all materials, guest speakers and networking with other farmers in the class. It also includes an allowance for post-course Technical Assistance for those recommended by the instructor who have attended classes, completed required course work, and would clearly benefit from this additional help. (*No money is due until a course is scheduled*).

For a Course Application form to <http://www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/agr/land-use/agricultural-business-training-program-abtp.html> or contact: Melissa Adams at mdarfarmviabilityprograms@gmail.com