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Robert Donley, Executive Director

January 6, 2015

Michael E. Marshall  
Secretary of the Senate  
State Capitol Building  
Des Moines IA 50319

Carmine Boal  
Chief Clerk of the House  
State Capitol Building  
Des Moines IA 50319

Re: Beginning Farmer Center – Annual Report FY 2014

Dear Members of the Iowa General Assembly:

Pursuant to Iowa Code Chapter 266.39E, enclosed is the annual report on the Beginning Farmer Center at Iowa State University.

If there are any questions concerning this report, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

Robert Donley

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Enclosure

cc: Robin Madison, LSA  
Legislative Liaisons  
Legislative Log

# Beginning Farmer Center

*Celebrating our 20<sup>th</sup> year of helping Iowa farm families*

## Resources to help our next generation of farmers

The Beginning Farmer Center was established at Iowa State University by the 1994 Iowa General Assembly. Objectives of the Center include: coordinating educational programs and services for beginning farmers; assessing needs of beginning and retiring farmers to identify opportunities for programs and services; and developing statewide programs to educate beginning and retiring farm families.

## Organization

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The Beginning Farmer Center is a joint effort of the ISU College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and ISU Extension and Outreach, which delivers the Center's programs and activities. Dr. John Lawrence, associate dean and director of ISU Agriculture and Natural Resources Extension, serves as interim director. Staff includes the Center's administrator, John Baker, an attorney for the Iowa Concern Hotline, and David Baker, farm transition specialist. ISU Agricultural and Natural Resources program specialists assist with programming on farm transition and beginning farmers. Center staff work closely with ISU Extension and Outreach Farm Management, Value Added Agriculture, Women in Agriculture and other specialists to develop and deliver programming to target audiences.

## Major Activities

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### AgLink

The AgLink program facilitates the introduction of retiring farmers to young people who want to get started in agriculture. The Center transition specialist works to find interested parties and facilitates initial discussions. The Center keeps a database of individuals who register their interests. The Center has 665 active beginning farmer files and 29 active retiring farmer files. During 2014, the Center fielded 718 calls from beginning farmers and 184 from retiring farmers. In 2014, the Center facilitated four matches. Electronic correspondence with candidates has increased, allowing for greater speed and flexibility. A summer intern contacted people in the database and updated their status. The Center works closely with ISU Extension and Outreach staff and external partners and stakeholders to identify the needs of beginning and retiring farmers and to better coordinate and leverage resources to address the needs. The staff worked closely with researchers to develop and analyze ISU Iowa Farm and Rural Life Poll results that address farmer retirement plans, challenges and educational needs.

### Returning To The Farm

In 2014, 11 families with 40 individuals attended Returning to the Farm, a four-day workshop for families of college juniors and seniors who plan to join their family farm operation after graduation. Topics include communications, retirement, strategic planning, conflict resolution, goal setting, determining values, business analysis, farm planning and management.

### Individual Farm Analysis

The Center provides succession facilitation, farm visits and in some cases individual financial analysis of existing farm situations. During 2014, there were 51 farm visits, which was double the 2013 number. These visits reached approximately 109 individuals. Many consultations involved nonfarming or nonresident heirs, is an increasing trend in farmland ownership.

### Beginning Farmer Network

The transition specialist serves as a faculty adviser in support of the Beginning Farmer Network, an ISU student organization. Student interest in farming is growing, as reflected in growth of the network to 40 students. Students are interested in new, diverse forms of farming. The Beginning Farmer Network is sponsoring its ninth annual conference on Feb. 7, 2015. More than 100 people attended the 2014 conference.

### Advisory Council

Following the recommendation of the 2011 external review committee, the Center established an advisory council that met in February 2014. The council meets annually with Center staff to review progress and make recommendations on programming and direction. Members include representation from USDA Farm Service Agency, Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land

Stewardship, agricultural lenders, Iowa Farm Bureau Federation, estate planners, agricultural nongovernmental organizations, colleagues from similar programs in other states and active farmers.

### **Outreach Activities**

Outreach and education make up a significant portion of Center responsibilities. In 2014, these activities included:

- 37 presentations to commodity groups, attorneys, farmers, government officials and others
- 24 media interviews
- Spoke to numerous national and international audiences
- Participated in ISU student/veterans activities on Iowa State campus
- Center staff serve on the Board of Directors of the Farmer Veteran Coalition of Iowa
- Partnered with USDA Farm Service Agency, Iowa Finance Authority, Iowa Farm Bureau Federation and five community colleges to provide farm business succession seminars for their students
- Partnered with Farm Credit Services to provide farm business succession seminars throughout the state
- Helped cosponsor Beginning Farmer Network conference, Iowa Farmer-Veteran Coalition of Iowa Conference and the Drake Agricultural Law Center Young Farmers Conference
- Participated in the Iowa Organic Conference, Practical Farmers of Iowa Conference, Iowa Farm Bureau annual meeting, Iowa Pork Producers annual conference, Farm Progress Show and Annie's Project
- Testified to the Farm Credit Agency in Washington D.C.

The administrator serves as chairman of the International Farm Transition Network, a network of state, university and private organizations that helps beginning farmers. It shares information and has established standards and provides certification for professionals working in farm transitions and has certified 52 persons as farm succession coordinators. The Center continues to upgrade its website and is exploring opportunities to provide space for collaborating organizations. Please visit the site at:

<http://www.extension.iastate.edu/bfc/>

## **Leveraging the Advantages**

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The Beginning Farmer Center partners and coordinates with agencies and organizations that are serving beginning farmers. While the attention and resources to farm transitions and new farmers has cycled over time, the Center continues to provide research, education and services to retiring and beginning farmers and the policy-makers who address these critical needs.

The Center works closely with the Drake University Agricultural Law Center by providing speakers and materials. The Center also employs law students part-time to work with the administrator. The Center works with ISU Extension and Outreach staff to offer materials, speakers and financial support for programs to help beginning and exiting farmers. The Center provides speakers and materials to the Iowa Bar Association and works closely on program efforts with several ISU academic departments and centers, including the Extension Farm Management team and the Center for Agricultural Law and Taxation.

## **Future Activities**

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The Beginning Farmer Center will pursue opportunities to partner with others to address the needs of beginning farmers, but will continue support for its core programs: AgLink, individual farm financial analysis and work to motivate farmers to pass on an operation as a unit rather than in pieces. Research also is needed to develop and analyze alternative business strategies for both beginning and retiring farmers.

### **Recommendations**

The Center recommends that state and federal legislators consider the impact of legislation on beginning farmers and those contemplating retirement. The Center recommends a tax credit similar to that available to exiting farmers who lease farm business assets to a beginning farmer be extended to beginning farmers.

For more information, contact John Lawrence, interim director, ISU ANR Extension and Outreach, (515) 294-7801; or John Baker, Center administrator and attorney, and Dave Baker, farm transition specialist, at (toll-free) (877) BFC-1999. The Beginning Farmer Center website can be found at: <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/bfc/>.

### **... and justice for all**

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Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and July 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Cathann A. Kress, director, Cooperative Extension Service, Iowa State University of Science and Technology, Ames, Iowa.