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January 13, 2016

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 2015

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,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Robert Donley', is written over a large, stylized blue circular flourish.

Robert Donley

H:\BFL\Legislative\2015 Session\responses\GA_beginningfarmercenter010814.doc
Enclosure
cc: Robin Madison, LSA
Legislative Liaisons
Legislative Log

Beginning Farmer Center

Helping Iowa farm families for more than 20 years

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: assess the educational programs and services needs of beginning and retiring farmers; develop and deliver statewide programs to address needs; and serve as the one-stop resource for beginning farmers and farm succession planning.

Organization

The Beginning Farmer Center is a joint effort of the ISU College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and ISU Extension and Outreach, which deliver 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 Extension's Iowa Concern Hotline, and David Baker, extension farm transition specialist. ISU Agricultural and Natural Resources Extension 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

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 742 active beginning farmer files and 34 active retiring farmer files. During 2015, the Center fielded 1,315 calls from beginning farmers and retiring farmers. Electronic correspondence with candidates has increased, allowing for greater speed and flexibility. 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 Seminars

In 2015, 12 families with 45 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. A summer intern interviewed 85 families that have participated in Returning to the Farm workshops from 2008 to 2015 to assess their farm succession progress and learn how the Center can assist their plan implementation.

Individual Farm Analysis

The Center provides succession facilitation, farm visits and in some cases individual financial analysis of existing farm situations. During 2015, there were 49 farm family consultations, which was approximately double the number from 2013. Many consultations involved nonfarming or nonresident heirs, an increasing trend in farmland ownership.

Beginning Farmer Network

The Center's transition specialist serves as a faculty adviser for the Beginning Farmer Network, an ISU student organization. Student interest in farming is growing, as reflected in growth of the network to 75 students. Students are interested in new, diverse forms of farming. More than 100 people attended the Beginning Farmer Network annual conference in 2015.

USDA Beginning Farmer Grant Awarded

The Center and ISU Extension and Outreach submitted a successful grant application for \$700,000 over three years from the USDA Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program. Partners include Veterans in Agriculture and the International Farm Transition Network. The grant will establish beginning farmer peer groups across the state, work with veterans interested in or engaged in farming, contact farmers about options and education for farm succession planning and certify farm

succession coordinators in the public and private sectors to assist farm families and other parties along the intergenerational farm transition journey.

Advisory Council

The Center advisory council meets annually with staff to review progress and make recommendations on programming and direction. Members include representatives 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 2015, these activities included:

- 89 presentations to commodity groups, attorneys, farmers, government officials and others
- 37 media interviews: 29 print and 8 radio
- Over 250,000 website hits and 17,700 downloads of information; the website continues to be revamped and upgraded, <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/bfc/>
- Center staff serve on the Board of Directors of the Veterans in Agriculture and participated in 49 meetings and events
- 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
- Participated in the Iowa Organic Conference, Practical Farmers of Iowa Conference, Iowa Farm Bureau annual meeting, Iowa Pork Producers annual conference and Annie's Project
- 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 83 persons as farm succession coordinators.

Leveraging the Advantages

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

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 consultations, Returning to the Farm seminars and work to motivate farmers to pass on their operations 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; John Baker, Center administrator and attorney; and Dave Baker, farm transition specialist, at (toll-free) (877) BFC-1999. The Beginning Farmer Center website is: <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.