

Grow Your Farm Classes Offer Opportunities For Land And Livelihood

COLUMBIA, MO.

University of Missouri Extension's Grow Your Farm classes equip participants to start, transition or expand any sort of farming operation. The next offering of the eight-week course begins Feb. 13 in Columbia.

"We help people identify the resources on their land and around them so they can make wise decisions on what they should be producing on their farm and how to market those products," said Debi Kelly, MU Extension's state Grow Your Farm coordinator.

From cattle to row crops and pumpkins to poultry, participants come to the class with diverse dreams and aspirations for their farms, Kelly said. Grow Your Farm gives those dreams a framework to help make their farms a successful business reality.

"Most farmers in alternative agriculture do not have a written business plan, but successful businesses happen across the U.S. because of preparation," Kelly said. "The concept of Grow Your Farm lets participants walk out of the class with a business plan that they can start implementing, take to a bank, the Natural Resources Conservation Service or the Department of Agriculture for loans to help them get started in their farming enterprise."

Grow Your Farm attracts all types of farmers wanting to transition for the future or increase their profit.

"These classes attract people on traditional farms who want to look at their operations differently, older farmers nearing retirement with

the next generation in mind and people just starting out," Kelly said. "For all of them, it's about understanding the opportunities and the different resources available on or near their land."

Some of those resources might be hiding in plain sight.

"It's not only their land," Kelly said. "Their farm may be on the crossroads of a blacktop, and that's a huge resource if they want to start a 'U-pick' farming operation."

While MU Extension specialists teach the beginning of the course, veteran farmers will lead discussions in the second half of the course. They will explain trials, tribulations and successes experienced in their operation. Two farm tours will also allow the class to see a good business plan in action.

For many participants, bouncing ideas off farmers who have been in their shoes is one of the biggest benefits of Grow Your Farm.

"So many of them come out of the class relieved that there are other people who want to think differently about farming," Kelly said. "The networking helps them develop valuable relationships with classmates and lets them know they aren't alone."

Grow Your Farm classes will begin Feb. 13 at the MU Bradford Research and Extension Center in Columbia. The course fee is \$225 per farm. Space is limited to 20 farms.

To sign up, contact Debi Kelly at 573-882-1905 or email kellyd@missouri.edu. Δ

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