

Training New Farmers in Ontario:

Lessons Learned and a Framework for Next Steps

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Prepared by Pat Learmonth, Farms at Work
Edited with Moe Garahan, Just Food

On behalf of and with the assistance of the members of the FarmON Alliance:



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Introduction

Over the three years from 2009-2012, the FarmON Alliance partners have explored ways to meet the training needs of new farmers in Ontario, through a grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation Future Fund. The partners in the Alliance at the close of the grant were Eat Local Sudbury, Everdale, Just Food (Ottawa), Farms at Work (Kawarthas) and FarmStart. This report provides an analysis of the training models experimented with during the FarmON grant and makes recommendations for the future.

Training encompasses a wide range of topics, covering on one hand practical production-related skills and knowledge, and on the other hand new business planning and management skills. Different types of “new” farmers have different needs depending on what skills they already have. For example, a young farmer who is planning to carry on an existing family business may have well-developed production skills and family mentors. A person coming to farming from a non-farm background, or an experienced farmer who is re-strategizing the farm business, needs to learn practical skills for a new type of farm business. The young farmer is usually a first-time businessperson needing basic business skills. However, second-career farmers may come to farming with a well-developed set of business skills gained from previous experience – they may be new farmers, but not new business people. A new Canadian farmer who has farmed elsewhere for a living, and is now looking to farm in Canada, may have strong business and production skills, but need a better understanding of the Ontario agricultural and marketing environment.

As organizational partners, we have seen all of these situations.

The following report, based on our cumulative experience in Ontario, provides a framework for understanding the training needs of new farmers and a number of areas where we have identified gaps in the existing agricultural training infrastructure. It also recommends the types of training delivery that are likely to be most effective in meeting different needs. This document is intended to be a living document, to be revisited and refined over time.

The 41 recommendations are based on:

- a. A survey of new farmers conducted by the FarmON Alliance,
- b. Evaluations of key new farmer training programs and methods,
- c. The outcomes of meetings held by FarmON Alliance partners with their regional collaborators and/or farmers, and
- d. The on-the-ground experience of the FarmON partners and others working with new farmers in other jurisdictions.

Within the FarmON Alliance, only FarmStart self-describes as a “provincial” organization (while also providing some regional services in the GTA and Guelph area). The rest of the partners self-describe as “regional” organizations, operating largely within a region, while partnering with each other, FarmStart and other provincial organizations and networks. In order to be efficient in the future, some

basic guidelines are needed to help define the respective roles of participants in the FarmON Alliance, including how information and training “products” can be shared.

In this report, recommendations are tagged to indicate lead responsibility for follow-through at the “provincial” level, “regional” level or “jointly” at both levels. The intention is that “regional work” would be carried out based on regional decision-making, “joint” work would be done through collaboration across the FarmON Alliance, and along with other organizations as appropriate, and “provincial” work would be executed at the provincial level.

Our observations in Ontario generally support the US Northeast Service Providers Consortium and New England Small Farm Institute’s typology for new farmer progression, which identifies 3 types of prospective farmers (recruits, explorers and planners) and 3 levels of beginner farmers (start-ups, re-strategizers and establishers). *Appendix A* is an excerpt from a 2004 NESFI publication where the typology is laid out, and *Appendix B* is a representation of the typology developed by FarmStart.

The typology for prospective farmers is fairly straightforward. Individuals go through stages of preparing to start a business. During this time they are gathering both business and production skills, based on an initial view of what the business will look like.

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Once the business is launched, it is harder to “type” what will happen next. Increasingly sophisticated production knowledge will be needed in enterprises that formed part of the initial plan, while beginner production skills may be required if new enterprises are under consideration. Business skills developed during the initial set-up will be applied repeatedly to new situations, and more in-depth skills may be required to cope with expansions in scale or changes to the business model. It has been observed that there is a period of time during the first ten years, when the new farmer will reassess, re-adjust and may “re-strategize” his initial business. At this point, the new farm business owner can go back to being a “planner” around a new enterprise initiative, a new business model or set of production practices. He then goes on to settle into a more established business by the end of the ten years.

In fact, of course, re-strategizing can happen at any time over the life of the business, well beyond the ten-year horizon of the “new farmer” typology.

One challenge with the NESFI typology is the inclusion of farm employees as “planners” and “start-ups”. Are employees farmers? One of the basic questions asked at the “explorer” stage is whether the individual is prepared to take on the risks and realities of owning a commercial farm business in Ontario. If not, becoming a farm employee is an alternative that does not require the individual to take on those risks and responsibilities. It is our view that a “start-up” new farmer is in fact a business owner or, at the very least, a farm manager with decision-making

and financial authority. This highlights an important issue for some “next generation” farmers, who grow up on the family farm. These young farmers may spend many years on the farm as employees and also many years in school learning additional production and business skills. Within the existing family farm structure, however, if there is no succession plan in place, they can be left in limbo for decades, with unclear management and ownership positions. If they do not have any ultimate authority for planning or business decision-making, and are not owners, are they employees or farmers? On the other hand, if they introduce a new enterprise to the farm, with management and financial responsibility for those novel aspects of the operation, they could conceptually enter the “new farmer” spectrum at the Planner stage with respect to the new enterprise, and continue through to establishment.

Understanding this progression, and then looking at the priorities of people at each stage, helps us to organize the appropriate training supports needed. Through our on-the-ground experience, the partners in the FarmON Alliance have identified key questions asked by new farmers at each stage on the spectrum above. We know that these same basic building blocks form the backbone of new farmer training not only in Ontario, but also across North America and beyond. For example, we have looked at the experience of the Land Stewardship Project in Minnesota and the New England Small Farm Institute in Massachusetts (see *Appendix C*). Our job has been to figure out how best to provide farmers with the tools and resources they need at the right time in the right way.

Review of related FarmON Alliance Research

1. Learning to Become a Farmer: Findings from a FarmON Alliance Survey of New Farmers in Ontario

The FarmON Alliance developed, with the assistance of specialists at Fleming College in Lindsay, a detailed online survey of farmer training needs. The survey was widely promoted across the province over an extended period of more than a year (during 2009/10), during which time 436 respondents completed it.

The survey goal was to “identify needs for agricultural training and educational resources in Ontario”. A summary of the survey results can be found at <http://www.farmstart.ca/wp-content/uploads/Learning-to-Become-a-Farmer-2012.pdf>.

The primary focus for the survey was on modes of delivery, rather than specific training topics, i.e. the “how” rather than the “what” of learning needs and delivery. However, training topics were also surveyed at a high level.

The survey was widely disseminated across Ontario. The following characteristics of the respondent group (which included those not yet farming and with up to 10 years farming experience) may reflect the networks that picked up on it most widely, but no effort was made to target respondents.

- While 72% had completed a post secondary qualification in a college or university setting, only 4% had taken 6 or more agriculture-related university or college courses for credit in the past three years, and 88% had taken none. This suggests that they came to farming from other disciplines.
- About 27% were raised on a farm, but less than 8% are farming with family
- Approximately one third were pursuing farming as a second career
- Almost 50% were 36 years of age or older
- Seventeen percent were farmers who had been farming for a period of years and self-described as having recently “taken a new farm direction”.

The survey findings are very helpful in highlighting priorities for action by the FarmON partners.

Respondents were asked about training opportunities they had taken advantage of over the past three years and then asked which they would take advantage of if there were no barriers to doing so.

More than 50% had taken advantage of, in order:

- Workshops on practical topics
- Field days/tours
- Conferences
- Volunteering on a farm

If all barriers were removed, more than 50% said they would be very likely or likely to take advantage of, in order of popularity

- Workshops on practical topics
- Field days/tours
- Formal targeted mentoring by an experienced farmer
- Conferences
- Kitchen table meetings
- One on one advising from government agricultural specialists
- Government-sponsored information sessions on agricultural issues (e.g. food traceability, food safety)

At present, workshops and field tours are clearly the training vehicles of choice for respondents. However, formal, targeted mentoring, kitchen table meetings and one-on-one advising emerge as opportunities of interest if barriers were removed.

The barriers encountered, in order of frequency mentioned, were

- I can't afford travel / overnight stays to out of region events
- Educational events too expensive for me
- I cannot take time off from my paying job in order to attend courses or workshops

These barriers point to the serious challenge of cost when events are not locally available across the province. They also speak, possibly, to the lack of financial resources of younger people and also to the lack of time available to second-career Planners who are already in the workforce.

However, these barriers do not fully explain the unfulfilled desire of respondents to access mentors, attend kitchen table meetings and obtain one-on-one advising. Note that the term "advising" was not defined in the survey, and it may be assumed that it was read to include more than just professional advisors such as lawyers or accountants.

Recommendations:

1. **[Joint]** Work to eliminate specific barriers that prevent access to desired training resources, as highlighted in the training survey, by
 - Reducing the need to travel or stay overnight
 - Ensuring that costs of training are reasonable
 - Offering training at times when those with regular day-jobs are available
2. **[Regional]** Work to ensure that the top-ranked training opportunities identified by survey respondents are available across the province, namely (and in order of priority)
 - Workshops on practical topics
 - Field days/tours
 - Formal targeted mentoring by an experienced farmer
 - Conferences (can also be joint)
 - Kitchen table meetings
 - One on one advising from government agricultural specialists
 - Government-sponsored information sessions on agricultural issues (e.g. food traceability, food safety)

When asked how they accessed information (as opposed to training), print-based media – books and publications- were used regularly by about 53% of

respondents. However, more than 40% used informal visits to other farms and informal mentoring (friends, family and neighbours), both social activities. This is significant, in that it highlights the need for ongoing farmer-to-farmer interaction within the community.

Online information (e.g. farm blogs, listservs, or farm websites) were also used by more than 40% of respondents. Free form comments mentioned the need for more online training, such as podcasts and webinars.

Results also suggest that the most effective means of hearing about (and thus promoting), events and workshops across the community comprises a mix of the traditional 'word of mouth' communication, 'push' technologies, (e.g. via free e-mail distribution lists), and web-based searches to farm organization sites. Of the top 4 mediums, (used by between 40.77 to 64.62% of respondents in each category), three are electronic, but the most frequently used means of communication remains word of mouth at 65.38%.

Taken together, these outcomes suggest that this group of farmers is not averse to technology (although some may have issues with access to high speed internet). At the same time, they highlight the importance of local community in sharing information and visits between farms.

Recommendations:

3. **[Regional/Joint]** Develop online farmer-to-farmer communication vehicles within geographical regions, in order to create and enhance a sense of local community. Putting people in touch will facilitate increased sharing of knowledge beyond the online vehicles, through local and informal farm visits, formal tours and kitchen table meetings – all within a reasonable driving distance. Regional partner and CRAFT node listservs are examples.
4. **[Joint]** Increased use of web-based training would likely be welcomed by a significant percentage of respondents, in combination with in-person workshops and tours. Sharing web-based training provincially will help to avoid duplication, while providing knowledgeable trainers and avoiding travel costs.

2. Supporting Success: Coaching, Mentorship and Advising for New Farmers in Ontario

The FarmON Alliance also recently commissioned a document that looked at the role coaching, mentorship and advising play in the support of new farmers. The distinction among these three forms of assistance is described as follows:

- A coach helps define, and supports the process of achieving, client-defined goals
- A mentor provides holistic and longer term support and guidance
- An advisor helps to solve a particular problem or accomplish a particular goal

This was an exploratory study that compiled information from companies and organizations currently involved in one-on-one knowledge transfer. Interviews were conducted with 24 individuals representing organizations or businesses working in the CMA sector, and current providers are profiled in the full report.

Interviewees stressed the importance of a personal connection in the CMA relationship. Based on interview responses, good mentors are farmers who possess key mentorship characteristics: a willingness to help, provide guidance and who have relevant experience applicable to the mentee's farm. Repeated opportunities to meet potential coaches, advisors and mentors informally allow both parties to build a relationship over time.

The study underlines that the most common way for new farmers to meet potential CMA providers is through other training opportunities such as farm tours, informal gatherings, conferences, and courses or workshops. The following recommendations are supported by Harris Ivens, author of the report.

Recommendations:

5. **[Regional]** Given the self-directed way in which mentorship relationships are usually created, work to offer regionally-based opportunities (eg. farm tours, informal gatherings, conferences, courses and workshops) where potential mentees and mentors can connect over a period of time through repeated contact
6. **[Joint]** Work to ensure financial remuneration for mentors is in place. This is critical for establishing the mentorship relationship.

7. **[Regional]** Explore opportunities for seasonal part-time (as opposed to seasonal full-time) internships in order to provide prospective farmers with hands-on opportunities even though they have regular employment obligations. This would also work well for the re-strategizing farmer who has demanding on-farm obligations but wants to explore other farm enterprises
8. **[Joint]** One on one advisors who are experienced with new farmers, alternative and diversified agricultural operations are scarce. Work to raise awareness and support advisors to take on these roles eg.farm financial advisors, bankers, accountants and local business advisory centres.
9. **[Joint]** Additional formal and informal coaching support is needed for new farmers across the province, through one-on-one as well as group settings. Expand opportunities for providing coaching along with training in settings such as the Exploring Your New Farm Dream workshop series, the Digging into Farming pilot program and business planning programs similar to Everdale's Farm Planner 1 and 2.

Training Analysis Along the new Farmer Spectrum

Using the framework and definitions presented above, this section of the report will analyze:

- What training programs are already in place or being developed at each stage
- Where they are targeted
- Whether they are effective, if evaluation has occurred
- Where there are gaps, and
- Who should take responsibility for developing and offering various aspects of new farmer training and support

A. Recruit Stage:

Recruits are potential new farmers. They may be young people or older career changers. They are the top of the “hopper”, and, as emphasized on FarmStart's website, “we need all the people we can get exploring and choosing this road if we want to have established farms 10 years from now”.

Recommendations:

10. **[Joint]** Develop a poster and outreach piece as universal messaging directed at recruits. This should include information on “why you might think of farming” and “what to do if you are thinking of farming”, including first points of contact, but does not replace messaging that refers to specific programs of partners. The messaging should position farming as an entrepreneurial and “green” career option. Provincial level funding should be sought to support this activity.
11. **[Provincial]** Ensure that OMAFRA’s website and FarmStart’s website provide easy-to-access, up to date contact information for organizations who serve new farmers across the province as part of their core mandate.
12. **[Provincial]** Provide a clearing house for province-wide resources, and a feeder for programming within regions.
13. **[Joint]** Promote farming as a career by placing posters at high schools, community colleges and university departments. The FarmOn Alliance Training Survey indicated that more than 60% of new farmer respondents have a post-secondary education, but few have education directly related to agriculture. Faculties such as Environmental Sciences/Studies and International Development should be targeted. Provide guidance departments and school career counselors with “universal messaging” material and educate them about opportunities for new farmers.
14. **[Joint]** Promote farming as a career with Business Advisory Centres/Career Counselling Centres.
15. **[Regional]** Consider taking booth space at significant food-related shows, fairs and ploughing matches that are targeted at the general public. Regional organizations should be armed with universal messaging aimed at recruits at these events. While attending farming events and shows may be important for other reasons, they are not fertile ground for connecting with “recruits” looking for information about getting into farming.
16. **[Joint]** Partner with organizations/networks such as Sustain Ontario partners to promote farming as a career. They should be provided with our simple “universal messaging” material for display wherever possible.
17. **[Joint]** Entry-level programming (aimed at Explorers) should be advertised beyond the usual farming networks, to reach the general public and attract recruits

B. Explorer Stage

The Explorer is usually someone who has not grown up as part of a family that is running a farm business. Explorers include urban and rural young people as well as older individuals who are considering a change in career. Some already own a farm property. Explorers also could include the new Canadian who has farming experience elsewhere, but is unsure if farming in Canada is right for them. The Explorer needs basic information and guidance to answer the fundamental question “Do I want to be a farmer (in Ontario)?” In order to answer this, they need to ask:

- What are the personal traits and skills required for eg different types of production and marketing? Which of those skills and traits do I have?
- Do I have the time, energy and commitment to run a farm business?
- Am I being realistic about the financial rewards of farming?
- Can I afford to wait for profitability?
- Do I understand the capital investment I might need?
- Am I aware of the regulatory environment I would be working in?
- Is running a farm as a business the best decision for me or are there other agricultural options I am better suited for?
- How do I gain some initial on-farm experience in Ontario?

These questions may be explored through a number of different experiences. The key is to make an *informed* decision taking into consideration all of the above factors.

The New England Small Farm Institute developed an excellent workbook in 2004 entitled “**Exploring the Small Farm Dream: Is Starting an Agricultural Business Right For You?**” The workbook is generally used in a workshop setting where participants are “coached” through a series of worksheets and then develop a plan for further action. In Ontario, workshops based on the workbook have been offered 13 times over the last three years to 110 people – in Guelph (2), Brampton (2), Toronto (3), Peterborough, Kingston, Ottawa, Owen Sound, Kitchener, and London. It has been presented by FarmStart alone and in conjunction with regional partners. A post-survey of participants and evaluation was recently conducted.

There were several important findings:

- Overall, participants were enthusiastic and positive about their experiences.
- The demographic being reached was heavily weighted to second career Explorers (as opposed to young people making their first career decision). Seventy-seven percent of participants fell between the ages of 41 and 60 years. Ninety-eight percent had completed post-secondary education

- Following the course, participants were most likely to visit a farm, attend a workshop or conference and join an organization.
- Very few had done a farm internship (7%) or worked on a farm (9%) since the course. Note: this reinforces the FarmON training survey which suggested that second career farmers were unlikely or unable to take advantage of intensive hands-on training
- 29% had started farms since the program
- Free form suggestions for improvement included references to personal readiness and the large volume of material.

From the evaluation: “The two most important things that respondents learned from the course were firstly, the contacts they made during the course including other participants, the instructors and guest speakers. The second most important factor was the self-assessment and personal growth that participants experienced in the course.” The fact that these were the factors that resonated most with these participants suggests that the course should focus on doing this well.

The course workbook is not being followed rigorously, suggesting that experience has modified the approach taken by current facilitators. This needs to be documented and shared.

The NESFI/FarmStart program has been quite successful in Ontario and has a widespread track record. Reinventing the wheel is not an efficient use of resources for regional partners, who have expressed their preference for using the Exploring Your Farm Dream workbook resources as a foundation of the strategy for supporting those at the stage of exploring.

Recommendations:

18. **[Joint]** Build on the Explorer participant evaluation by documenting and sharing the wisdom gained by facilitators during the 13 Explorer courses offered to date ie. how the course is actually being delivered and why, how it dovetails with the planning stage, and ensuring it adequately answers the questions of explorers.
19. **[Regional]** Continue to identify regional facilitators. De-centralization will keep course costs down, provide maximum flexibility in delivery while meeting explorer objectives, allow for emphasis on regionally-specific resources, sources of inputs, financial and environmental information, and assist in developing networks and community in a region which can foster further mentorship.

20. **[Regional]** Shift financial responsibility for the Explorer workshop, now that it is past the developmental stage, to the regions. A standard charge for the course should be considered. The goal should be self-funding and sustainable programming.
21. **[Joint]** Ensure that regional partners are qualified and accountable for ensuring that critical topics are covered in the course as delivered. It is of mutual interest that the quality and content of delivery be maintained across the province so that completion of the Explorer course could, if desired, be used as a prerequisite for other programming. Note: Explorer, as noted earlier, is only one piece of the process of moving through the “exploring” stage, so would be used in combination with other criteria to establish that individuals have made an informed decision to farm commercially in Ontario.
22. **[Joint]** Meet to share best practices every 12-18 months.
23. **[Joint]** Continue joint promotion and target promotion to also reach younger Recruits (eg through schools) who have been under-represented in the Explorer course.
24. **[Regional]** De-emphasize decision-making during the Explorer workshop (except for those deciding *not* to farm commercially based on the course). Those considering farming as a business should be strongly encouraged to instead create action plans to continue exploration beyond the classroom, including on-farm hands-on experiences eg. volunteer, employment or internship options, and beginner level workshops, conferences and farm tours.
25. **[Regional]** Ensure that farm tours, internships (part-time and full-time) and beginning level workshops are available in every region.
26. **[Regional]** Help participants to understand the different stages and the supports available to them so that they are less likely to feel overwhelmed at the explorer stage.

C. Planner Stage

Planners are those who have completed the Explorer stage, either through the Explorer course or through navigating through all of the issues raised above. They have engaged in meaningful on-farm experiences that have given them an understanding of the practical realities of farming, and made a positive decision that a farm business is their career choice.

They are ready to formulate and test ideas about what their new business might look like. The Planner may have grown up on a farm in Canada, but have decided to plan a farm business that is different from the family farm operation.

They may have grown up in another part of the world, had farm experience in Canada and be ready to plan a farm business of their own. Some of the questions that are asked by Planners are also important to Start-Up farmers and also to farmers at any time in their career who are going through a process of “re-strategizing”, and this is indicated below where appropriate.

There are two stages of planning. First stage planning decisions are around selecting enterprises that are feasible and meet the Planner’s own goals.

Once these preliminary decisions are made, Second stage Planners are actively developing specific production skills and developing business plans.

The Planner phase can take years to accomplish, in particular because of the time it takes to acquire production skills.

First Stage Planners

These early Planners are establishing goals and then testing ideas against them. They are exploring possible enterprises for financial and practical feasibility, and gaining hands-on experience in production skills for the new enterprise.

The first stage Planner is answering the following types of questions:

- What are my personal farm business goals and core values?
- Do the goals and core values of my current business partner(s) match mine?
- How do I identify and evaluate the feasibility of possible farm products in order to meet my goals?
- How do I gain the practical farming experience I need to answer these questions?

Since 2008, Everdale has been offering a two-day course for early planners called Farm Planner 1 (FP1). FP1 is described as a two-day course for Explorers who are transitioning to the Planner phase. More than 50 people completed FP1 between 2008 and 2011. The typical participant is fairly certain that they want a career in agriculture but doesn’t yet know what the best enterprise option is for them. During the two in-class sessions participants narrow their enterprise focus and make early stage planning choices with help and advice from established farmers. By the end of the course each participant has put together a proposal of what their farm

business will look like and has an action plan identifying the trainings and steps they will take to become ready to launch their farm business. FP1 also includes tours of successful farms hosted by the farmers. Many FP1 graduates go on to take the Farm Planner 2 course which takes them through all the steps of developing a ready-to-launch farm plan. Others take different planning routes such as small business course workshops.

<http://farmertraining.everdale.org/pathways-to-farming-2/>

This course is offered only at the Everdale site near Guelph. Everdale has shared this material with FarmStart offered to share its materials with partners from other regions.

Building on the successful Growing Your Farm Profits program, FarmStart has recently completed two of six pilots of its new “Digging Into Farming” (DIF) course in spring 2012. During the three-day course, participants answer questions related to goals and core values. The workshop provides an overview of feasibility analysis and the comprehensive business planning process, including sections on enterprise selection, marketing, production planning, human resources, land, financing the business and financial management. Participants leave with an Action Plan that sets out next steps in gaining production skills and business planning, as well as knowledge of a broad range of resources.

Digging Into Farming therefore does *not* provide a venue for completing personal research or business planning. With the support of Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association and OMAFRA, it is hoped that this course might provide access to funding for skills development, mentoring and business planning through the next Growing Forward framework. This would have the advantage of providing farmers who are at the planning stages and early start-ups with more targeted training and coaching, as well as access to funding, in the same way as the Growing Your Farm Profits workshops provide those opportunities for more established farmers. In order to access funding through GYFP, farmers must show they have control of farming assets. It is unwise for new farmers to try to meet this criterion because it may mean investing in a business that has not been properly planned. Re-strategizing established farmers, on the other hand, making similar decisions to first stage Planners, qualify for funding through Growing Your Farm Profits because of their current farm business.

Like the Explorer course, Everdale’s FP1 and the Digging Into Farming course are essentially “coaching” programs that assist participants in defining and achieving their own personal goals.

Practical skills at this stage can be developed through on-farm internships (CRAFT, SOIL etc), farm employment, workshops and webinars, as well as through more formal post-secondary education (Fleming College graduate certificate in Sustainable Agriculture).

Recommendations:

27. **[Joint]** Support a strong policy recommendation that delivery of the DIF program be supported through Growing Forward 2 and provide access to cost-share funding.
28. **[Provincial]** Take the lead in training facilitators and coordination with OMAFRA and Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association to deliver cost-share funding, if approved.
29. **[Joint]** Develop programming across the province to support goal setting and feasibility planning for a new farm enterprise. Resources may be found in The Exploring Your New Farm Dream workbook, FarmStart's web resources for Enterprise Development and Everdale's Farm Planner 1 (FP1). Everdale has offered to share the materials for the FP1, as well as permit auditing as a training vehicle for partners, all at no charge. Essentially, the model proposed for sharing of information and regional delivery of the Exploring Your New Farm Dream program (above) should be applied to first stage Planner training as well.
30. **[Regional]** Once again, new farmers should be advised to undertake farm tours and seek on-farm experience related to all specific enterprises under consideration **before** committing to them.

Second Stage Planners

These individuals have a clear idea of what kind of farm business they would like to build, but often need additional practical skills, comprehensive business plans, access to land and financing. Some of their needs at this stage are also shared by Start-Up farmers, and farmers who are re-strategizing the farm business, whether or not they are new farmers. Second stage planners commonly ask the following six questions.

- How do I prepare a comprehensive business plan? (also relevant for re-strategizing farms)
- How do I decide on business structure and build administrative systems?
- How do I raise the money I need to start my business? (also START-UPS)
- How do I find and secure the right land? (also Start-Up and Establishing farmers)
- How do I find and manage the help I need on my farm? (also START-UPS/restrategizing farms)
- How do I gain the more in-depth production skills I need in my chosen enterprises before starting to farm? (all levels from Planner onward)

How do I prepare a comprehensive business plan? (also relevant for re-strategizing farms)

- The GYFP program, and the more targeted Digging Into Farming program, walk participants through the fundamentals of business planning. The GYFP also provides cost-share access upon completion, and as discussed above, it is hoped that the DIF may do the same. One of these programs should be taken as a first step for second phase planners, if they have not already done so at the first phase planning stage.
- Everdale's Farmers Growing Farmers suite of programs includes the Farm Planner 2 (FP2) course. Participants enter FP2 with a general idea of the type of farm they want to pursue. They exit with a ready-to-launch farm plan developed with support from experienced farmer-mentors. FP2 Consists of eight full-day classes spread out over a four-month period. The course is suitable for all types of farm enterprises and is also appropriate for Re-strategizers. Since FP2 was launched in 2008 more than 40 graduates have started new farm businesses.
<http://farmertraining.everdale.org/the-farm-planner/>. This type of support is a critical element in the success of new farmers, but it is unavailable in regions other than Guelph

Recommendations:

31. **[Joint]** Consider options for developing a workshop series that will support comprehensive business planning support across the province. The more than fifty Small Business Enterprise Centres (SBECs), under the Ministry of Economic Development and Innovation (see http://www.ontariocanada.com/ontcan/1medt/smallbiz/en/sb_sbec_locations_info_en.jsp) could be partners in this, as they are already staffed to provide business planning and start-up support. Everdale has agreed to share its existing Farm Planner 2 program materials. The NESFI "Small Farm Planner" workbook and the US Farm Beginnings program are also valuable resources, and were reviewed by Everdale in creating the FP2 course.

Note: Everdale has agreed to share materials for no cost, and would charge only for time spent in "consulting" one on one with staff. Auditing of courses would be permitted for training of regional facilitation staff.

32. **[Regional]** Identify regional facilitators. De-centralization will keep course costs down and provide maximum flexibility for meeting needs across the province.

How do I decide on business structure and build administrative systems?

- Funding for professional advisors through Growing Forward would help with the costs of advice from experts in legal, tax and accounting fields to eg develop partnership agreements, leases
- Small Business Enterprise Centres across the province offer programming on the basics of starting and running a small business.
- FarmStart's website has been organized to include specific materials on this topic

How do I raise the money I need to start my business? (also START-UPS)

- Addressed in Digging Into Farming through guests from a local bank and discussion of types of financial information required by lenders.
- Resources are listed on FarmStart's website under Financial Management

Recommendations:

33. **[Joint]** Partners should consider developing materials on financing the business as a stand-alone workshop. It is of primary importance to Planners and Restrategizers.
34. **[Provincial]** Maintain a web-based comprehensive listing of funding sources as a province-wide service.

How do I find and secure the right land? (also Start-Up and Establishing farmers)

There are a number of workshops and publications that have addressed aspects of this issue. Generally, however, options such as leasing land and participating in opportunities to incubate a new farm business are invaluable. They help Planner to minimize risk by transitioning over a period of time from less intensive to more intensive capital investment.

- a. FarmLINK (available province-wide)
- b. Assessment of land – is touched on in a number of places: Tarrah Young's Buying a Farm workshop, Accessing Farmland in Ontario, Just Food handout, FarmStart website resources
- c. Negotiating leases – Accessing Farmland in Ontario Guide – available for purchase or download at FarmStart's website.
- d. Incubator opportunities are available in Ontario, operated currently by FarmStart (McVean Farm and Hamilton farm) and Just Food (at their farm location in Ottawa); FarmStart currently runs a consulting program to support incubator start-up
- e. Buying Land – Tarrah Young has developed the Buying a Farm workshop offered in the Guelph area to date. This may be offered soon as a webinar.

Workshops on land-related topics have been offered on an occasional basis, mostly in the Guelph area.

Recommendations:

35. **[Joint]** Develop resources for delivery of land-related information and support.
36. **[Joint]** Share experiences to date and consider how incubator opportunities can be rolled out across the province by the regional organizations.

How do I find and manage the help I need on my farm? (also START-UPS/restrategizing farms)

How do I find and manage the help I need on my farm? (also START-UPS/restrategizing farms)

- a. Nurturing New Farmers handbook
- b. Just Food “How to Host a Farm Intern” workshop
- c. Resources on FarmStart website

Recommendation:

37. **[Joint]** Develop resources for delivery of up-to-date information on the implications of having volunteers, interns, coop students and/or employees on the farm.

How do I gain the more in-depth production skills I need in my chosen enterprises before starting to farm? (all levels from Planner onward)

- a. CRAFT and other internships
- b. Beginner, Intermediate and Advanced level workshops
- c. Mentorships and Advising
- d. University and College programs, such as University of Guelph campuses, Fleming College Sustainable Agriculture Program
- e. Everdale Sustainable Farming certificate
- f. Webinars and online resources – see FarmStart website

g. Incubator experiences – FarmStart, Just Food

Recommendation:

38. **[Provincial]** Document the “buffet” of practical learning opportunities in the province with links to providers and websites as a one-stop shop for beginning farmers. Maintain this listing as a province-wide service.

Start-up Farmers (Years 1-3)

The Start-Up farm does share some priorities with Planners, namely ongoing concerns about raising money and finding on-farm help, referred to above.

However, other issues are particularly associated with the Start-Up farmer. For the first time, he or she has responsibility for decision-making in real time. When information is needed, it is often because an unexpected problem has arisen, requiring immediate support. Outside the farming season, advanced production skills workshops and networking opportunities help the new farmer to build skills and a sense of community in the place they have chosen to live and work.

The Start-Up farmer needs to know

- What are my sources of “just in time” information for problem-solving?
- How can I develop advanced-level production skills?
- Where are my social networks and peers?

What are my sources of “just in time” information for problem-solving?

- Archived webinars and online resources of all kind are excellent tools because they can be accessed anytime
- Accessible local peers and mentors are critical for sharing knowledge and experience when needed

How can I develop advanced-level production skills?

- Commodity organizations, such as Ontario Cattlemens’ Association, are listed in a link on FarmStart’s website (local chapters)
- Resources and factsheets provided by organizations such as OMAFRA, ATTRA and SARE are invaluable

- Advanced level workshops in-person are scarce, but using in-person workshops tied with the production and archiving of webinars is promising
- Experienced mentors can provide in-depth, geographically relevant production knowledge

Where are my social networks and peers?

- Provincial (eg EFO) and regional organizations, (eg FarmON partners), can link farmers into local networks of peers and media sources
- General farm organizations ie in Ontario OFA, CFFO and NFU (local chapters)

Recommendations:

- 39. **[Regional]** Identify local experienced farmers who have the characteristics of a good mentor, and ensure that funding sources, if available, are made known. Facilitate relationships where needed.
- 40. **[Joint]** Ensure that advanced production skills training is available within each region and at conferences, and an effort made to coordinate recording and archiving so that they become accessible to others across the province
- 41. **[Regional]** Document and provide detailed information on local organizations and contacts that will help to connect new farmers to their community

Re-Strategizers (Years 3-5)

Partners have observed that many new farmers go through a period of adjustment after Start-Up as they investigate new partnerships or enterprises, find new sources of financing or move to owning farmland from a rental or incubation environment. At this time they may go back to having some needs and questions similar to those of Planners. This has been noted above in relation to certain issues.

Establishing Farmers (Years 6-10)

The Establishing farmer continues to have the same needs as the Start-Up farmer, but as time goes by, his relationships and knowledge base become more mature and less support is required. However, the Establishing farmer remains an important part of the community network of peers and often becomes a mentor to newer farmers joining the community.

Summary of Recommendations

1. **[Joint]** Work to eliminate specific barriers that prevent access to desired training resources, as highlighted in the training survey, by

- Reducing the need to travel or stay overnight
- Ensuring that costs of training are reasonable
- Offering training at times when those with regular day-jobs are available

2. **[Regional]** Work to ensure that the top-ranked training opportunities identified by survey respondents are available across the province, namely (and in order of priority)

- Workshops on practical topics
- Field days/tours
- Formal targeted mentoring by an experienced farmer
- Conferences (can also be joint)
- Kitchen table meetings
- One on one advising from government agricultural specialists
- Government-sponsored information sessions on agricultural issues (e.g. food traceability, food safety)

3. **[Regional/Joint]** Develop online farmer-to-farmer communication vehicles within geographical regions, in order to create and enhance a sense of local community. Putting people in touch will facilitate increased sharing of knowledge beyond the online vehicles, through local and informal farm visits, formal tours and kitchen table meetings – all within a reasonable driving distance. Regional partner and CRAFT node listservs are examples.

4. **[Joint]** Increased use of web-based training would likely be welcomed by a significant percentage of respondents, in combination with in-person workshops and tours. Sharing web-based training provincially will help to avoid duplication, while providing knowledgeable trainers and avoiding travel costs.

5. **[Regional]** Given the self-directed way in which mentorship relationships are usually created, work to offer regionally-based opportunities (eg. farm tours, informal gatherings, conferences, courses and workshops) where potential mentees and mentors can connect over a period of time through repeated contact

6. **[Joint]** Work to ensure financial remuneration for mentors is in place. This is critical for establishing the mentorship relationship.

7. **[Regional]** Explore opportunities for seasonal part-time (as opposed to seasonal full-time) internships in order to provide prospective farmers with hands-on opportunities even though they have regular employment obligations. This would also work well for the re-strategizing farmer who has demanding on-farm obligations but wants to explore other farm enterprises

8. **[Joint]** One on one advisors who are experienced with new farmers, alternative and diversified agricultural operations are scarce. Work to raise awareness and support advisors to take on these roles eg.farm financial advisors, bankers, accountants and local business advisory centres.
9. **[Joint]** Additional formal and informal coaching support is needed for new farmers across the province, through one-on-one as well as group settings. Expand opportunities for providing coaching along with training in settings such as the Exploring Your New Farm Dream workshop series, the Digging into Farming pilot program and business planning programs similar to Everdale's Farm Planner 1 and 2.
10. **[Joint]** Develop a poster and outreach piece as universal messaging directed at recruits. This should include information on “why you might think of farming” and “what to do if you are thinking of farming”, including first points of contact, but does not replace messaging that refers to specific programs of partners. The messaging should position farming as an entrepreneurial and “green” career option. Provincial level funding should be sought to support this activity.
11. **[Provincial]** Ensure that OMAFRA's website and FarmStart's website provide easy- to-access, up to date contact information for organizations who serve new farmers across the province as part of their core mandate.
12. **[Provincial]** Provide a clearing house for province-wide resources, and a feeder for programming within regions.
13. **[Joint]** Promote farming as a career by placing posters at high schools, community colleges and university departments. The FarmOn Alliance Training Survey indicated that more than 60% of new farmer respondents have a post-secondary education, but few have education directly related to agriculture. Faculties such as Environmental Sciences/Studies and International Development should be targeted. Provide guidance departments and school career counselors with “universal messaging” material and educate them about opportunities for new farmers.
14. **[Joint]** Promote farming as a career with Business Advisory Centres/Career Counselling Centres.
15. **[Regional]** Consider taking booth space at significant food-related shows, fairs and ploughing matches that are targeted at the general public. Regional organizations should be armed with universal messaging aimed at recruits at these events. While attending farming events and shows may be important for other reasons, they are not fertile ground for connecting with “recruits” looking for information about getting into farming.
16. **[Joint]** Partner with organizations/networks such as Sustain Ontario partners to promote farming as a career. They should be provided with our simple “universal messaging” material for display wherever possible.

17. **[Joint]** Entry-level programming (aimed at Explorers) should be advertised beyond the usual farming networks, to reach the general public and attract recruits.

18. **[Joint]** Build on the Explorer participant evaluation by documenting and sharing the wisdom gained by facilitators during the 13 Explorer courses offered to date ie. How the course is actually being delivered and why, how it dovetails with the planning stage, and ensuring it adequately answers the questions of explorers.

19. **[Regional]** Continue to identify regional facilitators. De-centralization will keep course costs down, provide maximum flexibility in delivery while meeting explorer objectives, allow for emphasis on regionally-specific resources, sources of inputs, financial and environmental information, and assist in developing networks and community in a region which can foster further mentorship.

20. **[Regional]** Shift financial responsibility for the Explorer workshop, now that it is past the developmental stage, to the regions. A standard charge for the course should be considered. The goal should be self-funding and sustainable programming.

21. **[Joint]** Ensure that regional partners are qualified and accountable for ensuring that critical topics are covered in the course as delivered. It is of mutual interest that the quality and content of delivery be maintained across the province so that completion of the Explorer course could, if desired, be used as a prerequisite for other programming. Note: Explorer, as noted earlier, is only one piece of the process of moving through the “exploring” stage, so would be used in combination with other criteria to establish that individuals have made an informed decision to farm commercially in Ontario.

22. **[Joint]** Meet to share best practices every 12-18 months.

23. **[Joint]** Continue joint promotion and target promotion to also reach younger Recruits (eg through schools) who have been under-represented in the Explorer course.

24. **[Regional]** De-emphasize decision-making during the Explorer workshop (except for those deciding not to farm commercially based on the course). Those considering farming as a business should be strongly encouraged to instead create action plans to continue exploration beyond the classroom, including on-farm hands-on experiences eg. volunteer, employment or internship options, and beginner level workshops, conferences and farm tours.

25. **[Regional]** Ensure that farm tours, internships (part-time and full-time) and beginning level workshops are available in every region.

26. **[Regional]** Help participants to understand the different stages and the supports available to them so that they are less likely to feel overwhelmed at the explorer stage.

27. **[Joint]** Support a strong policy recommendation that delivery of the DIF program be supported through Growing Forward 2 and provide access to cost-share funding.
28. **[Provincial]** Take the lead in training facilitators and coordination with OMAFRA and Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association to deliver cost-share funding, if approved.
29. **[Joint]** Develop programming across the province to support goal setting and feasibility planning for a new farm enterprise. Resources may be found in The Exploring Your New Farm Dream workbook, FarmStart's web resources for Enterprise Development and Everdale's Farm Planner 1 (FP1). Everdale has offered to share the materials for the FP1, as well as permit auditing as a training vehicle for partners, all at no charge. Essentially, the model proposed for sharing of information and regional delivery of the Exploring Your New Farm Dream program (above) should be applied to first stage Planner training as well.
30. **[Regional]** Once again, new farmers should be advised to undertake farm tours and seek on-farm experience related to all specific enterprises under consideration before committing to them.
31. **[Joint]** Consider options for developing a workshop series that will support comprehensive business planning support across the province. The more than fifty Small Business Enterprise Centres (SBECs), under the Ministry of Economic Development and Innovation (see http://www.ontariocanada.com/ontcan/1medt/smallbiz/en/sb_sbec_locations_info_en.jsp) could be partners in this, as they are already staffed to provide business planning and start-up support. Everdale has agreed to share its existing Farm Planner 2 program materials. The NESFI "Small Farm Planner" workbook and the US Farm Beginnings program are also valuable resources, and were reviewed by Everdale in creating the FP2 course. Additional resources are found on FarmStart's website. Regional partners should be able to use the materials and adapt them for use as appropriate. Note: Everdale has agreed to share materials for no cost, and would charge only for time spent in "consulting" one on one with staff. Auditing of courses would be permitted for training of regional facilitation staff.
32. **[Regional]** Identify regional facilitators. De-centralization will keep course costs down and provide maximum flexibility for meeting needs across the province.
33. **[Joint]** Partners should consider developing materials on financing the business as a stand-alone workshop. It is of primary importance to Planners and Restrategizers.
34. **[Provincial]** Maintain a web-based comprehensive listing of funding sources as a province-wide service.
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36. **[Joint]** Share experiences to date and consider how incubator opportunities can be rolled out across the province by the regional organizations.

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38. **[Provincial]** Document the “buffet” of practical learning opportunities in the province with links to providers and websites as a one-stop shop for beginning farmers. Maintain this listing as a province-wide service.

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41. **[Regional]** Document and provide detailed information on local organizations and contacts that will help to connect new farmers to their community

Appendix A

Two excerpts from: **Working With New Farmers: Topics in Professional Development**, The New England Small Farm Institute, 2004

http://www.smallfarm.org/uploads/uploads/Files/WORKING_WITH_NEW_FARMER_S.pdf

The New Farmer Progression:

New farmers typically pass through several stages during their farming careers. These stages are associated with increasing degrees of commitment, decision-making responsibility and risk.”

New Farmer Descriptions:

Prospective farmers: Prospective farmers fall into three stages. In the first two stages prospective farmers have not yet begun to farm, or even made a commitment to farm. In the third stage they may work or apprentice on a farm, but are not decision-makers in their own farming activities and do not have a high level of commitment or risk associated with active farming. In these first three stages, they may be taking part in educational or introductory farming experiences such as apprenticeships.

1. **Recruits:** might consider a career in production agriculture if provided with information and connections to agriculture. This includes farm family members and those not from a farm. They could be high school students, or people who want to change careers.
2. **Explorers:** are investigating a farming future. They are gathering information and may be participating in introductory educational programs and/or farming related experiences. This includes next generation farm family members as well as those not from a farm.
3. **Planners:** have made a choice to pursue some sort of commercial production agriculture. They may not actually be farming yet, but are actively planning their farm entry. Farm employees, apprentices and farm family members who do not have control of farm assets and limited decision making responsibility also fall into this stage.

Beginning farmers: Beginning farmers are those who are farming, but have been farming for ten years or less. They also fall into three stages.

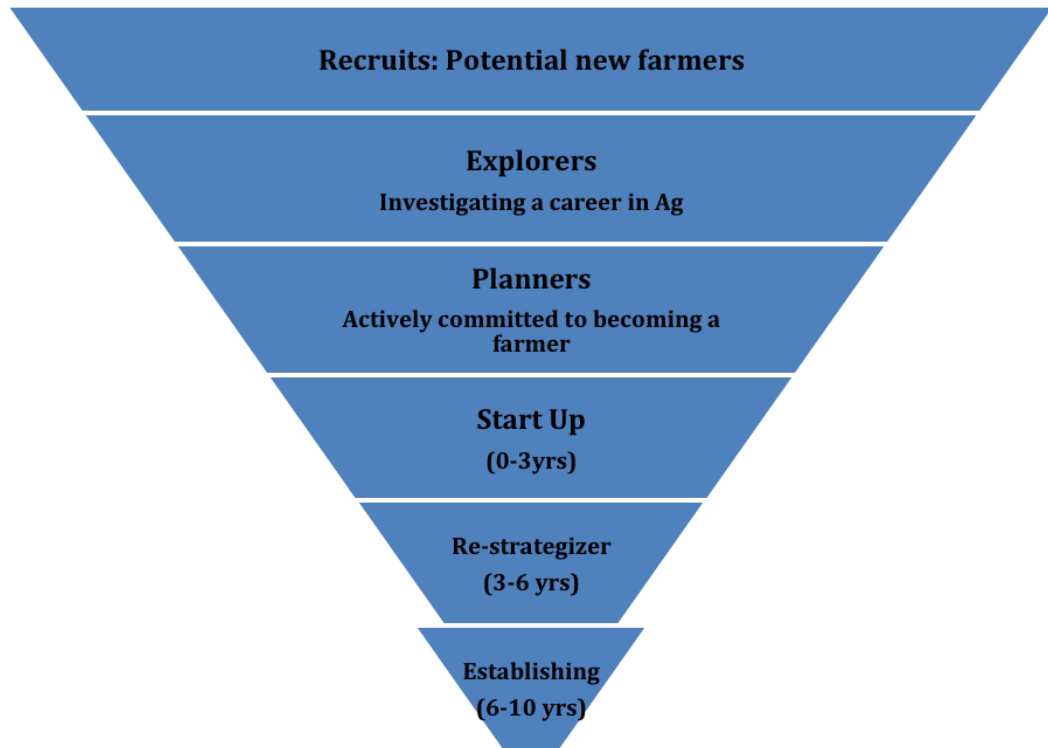
1. **Start-ups:** are in their first three years of farming. They can be an employee, manager, or operator on rented or owned land. They have decision-making responsibility and an increasing commitment to farming either in time, equity and/or resources, either on their own farm, a rented farm or on a family farm.
2. **Re-strategizers:** are farmers who are making adjustments in their fourth to seventh years. They have increased decision-making responsibility and

commitment to farming as a farm renter, manager or owner. Typically, re-strategizers go through a critical phase of modifying or restructuring their operations.

3. **Establishers:** are farmers who are stabilizing in years eight to ten of the beginning farmer phase. They are on their way to becoming established farmers, and who continue to make changes and improvements to their farm operation.

New farmers who grew up on the family farm are not easily classified in this typology. It's hard to say when they actually "began" farming, or when they moved from planning to actual start-up. These young farmers are family farm members who have varying degrees of decision "influencing" roles on the farm without having farm operator status. They may be highly experienced farmers who actively influence farm decisions, but because of the nature and progress of farm transfer within families, they are not easily classified as planners or start-ups. Because of their unique circumstances and programming needs this group may qualify as a particular subset of new farmers. In many aspects, they parallel the central stages of the new farmer typology.

Appendix B



Appendix C

1. The Land Stewardship Project

Farm Dreams

Farm Dreams is an entry level, **four-hour**, exploratory workshop designed to help people who are seeking practical, common sense information on whether sustainable farming is the next step for them. In this workshop, participants:

- Assess their resources, skills and motivations for farming
- Develop an educational plan toward farming.
- Learn about regional training opportunities and support networks.
- Prioritize their next action steps in moving closer toward their goals in farming.

Farm Dreams is recommended as a precursor workshop for those who are considering taking the 10-month Farm Beginnings course. To view a list of frequently asked questions about Farm Beginnings, visit:

<http://landstewardshipproject.org/morefarmers/farmbeginnings#faq>

Farm Dreams is offered four times each year.

<http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/fb/farm-dreams.htm>

Farm Beginnings

Farm Beginnings® is a Land Stewardship Project training course that provides opportunities for beginning and transitioning farmers to learn firsthand about values clarification and goal setting, whole farm planning, business plan development, and low-cost, sustainable farming methods.

Farm Beginnings provides **43 hours** of training and hands-on learning opportunities in the form of classroom sessions, farm tours, field days, workshops and accessing an extensive farmer network. It is a 10-month training and support effort. Farmers and other agricultural professionals are the primary presenters, mentors and steering committee members.

The classes run from the end of October to March, followed by the on-farm education component, including workshops and field days.

<http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/fb/whatisfb.html#regions>

The Farm Beginnings Collaborative

Since 2005, LSP has been partnering with other organizations to offer the Farm Beginnings training model across several states.

The “Farm Beginnings Collaborative” is a national alliance of independent regional groups of farmers and farmer-training support organizations. Besides Minnesota, Farm Beginnings is now in Illinois (3 locations), Nebraska (2), North Dakota, South Dakota and the Hudson Valley of New York, as well as the Lake Superior region in northeast Minnesota and northwest Wisconsin.

2. The New England Small Farm Institute

Exploring the Small Farm Dream: Is Starting and Agricultural Business Right for You? is a decision-making tool to help aspiring farmers learn what it takes to start and manage a commercial agricultural business, and decide whether this is a path they really want to take.

Courses are offered by at least eight “sponsor” organizations in seven states (Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York (2), Ohio, Pennsylvania and Virginia) who determine schedules and format. It is also offered in Manitoba, Nova Scotia and Ontario.

While the course is often offered as a 4 or five day series, Manitoba offers it in a two day format.

It is also available for self-study, or independent group study.