

Excerpts from the Course Delivery Guide:
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**Exploring the Small Farm Dream:
*Is Starting an Agricultural Business Right For You?***

COURSE DELIVERY GUIDE

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Excerpts from the Course Delivery Guide: **2. Selections from Section One**

Purpose of This Guide

This Guide is designed to help *Explorer* course sponsors, managers and instructors plan and deliver a four-session course using the *Exploring the Small Farm Dream* workbook. The recommendations included here build on the experience of the course delivery team that piloted and evaluated several course offerings for NESFI.

The roles of course sponsors, managers, and instructors are all critical to deliver a successful course, and at times overlap. We encourage all members of your team to read this section of the Course Delivery Guide.

We also welcome and actively encourage feedback from everyone who uses this Guide and its supporting website (www.smallfarm.org/explorer). An evaluation form, included in the Appendix, requests comments on the Guide's usefulness as well as suggestions for improving course delivery. We are especially eager to learn about innovative approaches or techniques that you find work well, and we will incorporate best practices from the field in future editions of the Guide and post them on the *Explorer* website.

Course Characteristics

Who Enrolls in the Course?

In our experience, individuals with a variety of backgrounds are attracted to the course. While the mix of course participants will no doubt be different in other parts of the country, here in southern New England most come from non-farm backgrounds. They include graduates of agriculture-related courses of study; career changers of all ages; pre-retirees; and homesteaders and backyard gardeners seeking to expand and/or commercialize their operations. While most did not grow up on a farm, many have worked on one or more commercial farms as an apprentice or field hand. A few experienced farmers, seeking an opportunity to re-strategize their farming goals, have also enrolled in and greatly benefited from the course. Whatever their backgrounds, all participants have been adult learners—people seeking practical information they can “discover” for themselves and apply directly to their own circumstances.

Class Size

Class size is a critical component of course quality. While it is tempting to accept all who apply, there are practical reasons for restricting class size. First, it is important that the course instructor be able to get to know every participant. It is also important for participants to be comfortable in the classroom, to have sufficient space to work together in small groups and to actively network during breaks. Because many who are investigating the idea of farm business start-up do so with a partner, it is important to encourage, accommodate and set appropriate course fees for such partnerships. At NESFI, these considerations translate into a maximum class size of twelve farm businesses—and, when partners are included, sixteen participants.

Role of the Course Sponsor

Course sponsors provide financial, administrative and promotional support for the courses they offer. They recruit and employ qualified instructors and course managers, may offer ongoing support to course participants, and are asked to provide feedback (i.e., share course-related information and evaluation summaries) to NESFI.

Key among your responsibilities as a course sponsor is developing adequate financial resources to hold the course. This means creating a course budget, including determining appropriate compensation for course instruction and management, setting course fees, and raising cash or in-kind support to cover any budget shortfall not met by those fees. While fees could, of course, be set to cover all the costs of delivery, they might then be too high to be attractive to prospective customers. We assume that *Exploring the Small Farm Dream* will be offered by organizations and agencies that have a mission to work with beginning farmers and that normally subsidize their services. (A budget template is provided in the Appendix.)