

eFarmer!



*8-9-10th Grade "Believe in
Oklahoma Agriculture"*

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Throw everything you know about “partnerships” out the window! Finding a trustworthy, well-suited companion is now at your fingertips, thanks to the ultra successful matchmaking website that is leaving many people rushing to log on.

This system narrows the field from hundreds of potential candidates to a highly select group of individuals based on predictors of compatibility. In addition, personal testimonials boast the in-depth questionnaire that led many participants to their perfect match.

No, I am not referring to the popular eHarmony dating phenomenon, but another internet site that will be devoted to Oklahoma farmers. While this won't be a way for our stewards of the soil to meet their potential soul mates, it will “connect” farmers for a different purpose through utilization of computer matching software similar to the system created by eHarmony co-founder, Neil Clark Warren.

This system, currently being developed by the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, is hoping to preserve the family farm business by matching beginning farmers who do not own land, with retiring farmers who do not have successors as part of a new effort to create a lasting future for Oklahoma agriculture. Although this new union may not result in a traditional marriage it could certainly one day lead to a very healthy agricultural relationship.

This system named Farm On–Oklahoma is based off the International Farm Transition Network initiative that has already has been established in 19 other states including California, Iowa and Nebraska. Through the service, specialists will maintain a database of Oklahoma farmers with plans to retire in the next five to 10 years, but who have no one to continue on their farming legacy.

After the soon to retire farmers log their personal characteristics onto the Farm On-Oklahoma website, the data is compiled into the integrated system and compared to a database of young farmers who lack the financial means to start farming, but are willing to swap time, energy and sweat in return for an opportunity to get started.

Finally, after comparisons are made, a list of about 30 compatible new farmers is sent, via email, to the retirees asking them to them to log onto the website to obtain the finalists resumes and personal profile data. This allows the veteran farmers to research the candidates thoroughly, hoping to spark enough interest for a one-on-one encounter and eventually a real-life farm transition.

Farm transitions are simple in nature. Retirees enter a signed agreement with aspiring farmers to lease part of their acreage. If the agreement works out as planned, the farmers develop a personalized gradual management shift of the farm

within a 10- year time period. This eventually leaves the new farmer in control of the entire operation.

The goal of the Farm On—Oklahoma initiative is to foster the next generation of Oklahoma farmers and ranchers because the economic future of not only Oklahoma but our nation depends largely on a new generation to enter farming. However, current volatile trends limiting new farmers are on the verge of developing a major crisis in Oklahoma if tendencies continue. These factors include; insufficient farm entry strategies, limited farm succession and recruitment, the inability to acquire initial capital investment, and finally the lack of appropriate community support.

Over the past several years, farm transition programs in other states have been fighting these production agriculture trends and the Oklahoma program looks to do the same. However, critics say the national program has a major flaw that Oklahoma needs to examine before implementation. This concern being that established Farm Link programs in other states traditionally lack funding to meet demand. Therefore, Oklahoma must somehow tap into an easily replenished revenue stream, which allows the program to comfortably meet its vital goals.

Another big concern is that entry into the farming industry remains a little scary. For new farmers, taking over an entire operation can be a bit overwhelming

especially with limited experience. Therefore, Farm On–Oklahoma developers are looking to obtain funding to provide seminars and consultations that assist farmers in discovering new ways to successfully transition farm businesses from one generation to the next. All participating programs agree that one-on-one technical assistance, research and referral are all essential.

The Farm On –Iowa plan was one of the original pilot programs under the International Farm Transition Network initiative and has been in existence since 2005. It has made over 50 matches total with their success rate being around 90 percent. However, there have been many lessons learned since the program’s inception.

David Baker, farm transition specialists, says that, “Getting into farming has to be a process. Some try to do it too quickly.” For example, one failed relationship involved a farmer with health problems and a new farmer. After being matched through the system, they were shipping dairy cattle within two weeks. When the deal went bad they decided to end their contract after only a few months. Therefore, individuals must remember to take the transition process slowly while building trusting relationships before entering into a serious business deal.

Although this new program may employ untraditional means to get Oklahoma farmers linked, the opportunity to develop lasting business relationships

increases substantially through use of this new compatibility matching software.

Furthermore, with the world population increasing at a rate of 210,000 people per day, the best way to insure that we are prepared for this crisis is by obtaining a new generation of farmers. So log on, create your personal profile, and wait for your results to get “connected” in an effort to sustain the future of Oklahoma agriculture!

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