Sustainable and Entrepreneurial Agriculture Program at Marshalltown Community College

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Sustainable and Entrepreneurial Agriculture Program at Marshalltown Community College

Abstract
Marshalltown (Iowa) Community College used a challenge grant from the Leopold Center to establish a sustainable agriculture curriculum/training program.

Keywords
Business management distribution and marketing, Human systems demographics and beginning farmer programs, Market research and feasibility studies

Disciplines
Agribusiness | Business Administration, Management, and Operations | Marketing

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Abstract: Marshalltown (Iowa) Community College used a challenge grant from the Leopold Center to establish a sustainable agriculture curriculum/training program.

Question & Answer
Q: Can a degree program in sustainable agriculture be approved, developed, and offered in Iowa through a community college?

A: Yes, given appropriate assistance and commitment.

Background
Iowa community colleges are uniquely positioned to increase awareness, knowledge and skills related to sustainable agriculture. To improve rural vitality and increase the availability of local goods, community colleges can offer practical, hands-on focus and local examples to teach sustainable farming and small business practices to beginning and transitional farmers.

The goal of the $25,000 Leopold Center challenge grant was to provide Marshalltown Community College (MCC) with the financial assistance and leverage in development of the Sustainable and Entrepreneurial Agriculture (SEA) program and to begin offering courses leading to A.A. degrees.

Approach and methods
MCC used several strategies to energize the SEA program: fund raising, Iowa Department of Education approval, curriculum development, and community outreach.

Fund raising began with the Leopold Center challenge grant. These dollars were leveraged to obtain additional support from private foundations, Iowa Department of Education Perkins III grants, USDA-CREES, and SARE.

Approval from the State of Iowa Department of Education Bureau of Community Colleges is required to develop a new vocational program. The application to the Department of Education included descriptions of the SEA program content, articulation agreements with Iowa State University, and surveys of need and job potential. As part of the approval process, a board of advisors was established to help develop curriculum, aid in keeping the program relevant, and maintain the focus on addressing educational needs.

Initially, a primary need was the faculty time to plan, develop, and implement the program in 2004 and 2005. The Leopold Center grant was used primarily to fund that released time from regular duties. An additional staff person was hired in 2005 to help manage the program.

Results and discussion
The MCC two-year degree program in sustainable agriculture was the first such educational opportunity offered in the Midwest. The SEA program options include an associate of arts degree, associate of applied science degree, and a certificate (12 credit hours) in sustainable and entrepreneurial agriculture. Both for-credit and non-
credit courses are provided. All program-specific courses, with the exception of Accounting and Soil Management, are new courses.

MCC is working with Iowa Valley Continuing Education to offer some modularized one-week units that can be taken individually as continuing education courses or as a group (i.e., in the Livestock Management course) for credit. Pending funding from a North Central SARE (Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education) grant, the modules will be recorded on digital video for future showing.

MCC is establishing a demonstration farm on 146 adjacent acres owned by the college district. The land was previously rented and used to grow corn and beans. Now, working with an experienced organic farmer, the college acreage has been planted in alfalfa and is in the second year of transition to organic production. The land is envisioned as a meeting place to demonstrate long-term practices and results of sustainable agriculture and educate beginning and transitioning farmers.

Conclusions

The community college can provide local leadership and education in sustainable agriculture. It is uniquely positioned to provide education and networking opportunities needed for successful transfer of sustainable agriculture principles and practices to rural Iowa. In the first 18 months, the SEA program has offered both credit and non-credit options for students.

Courses offered Marshalltown Community College, for credit, began in Fall 2004. These courses and enrollment included:

- Introduction to Sustainable Agriculture, 16
- Farmstead Planning and Technology, 7
- Applied Systems Thinking, 10
- Ecological Concepts, 13
- Principles of Entrepreneurship, 41
- Business Strategies and Niche Marketing, 5
- Livestock Management, 2

Non-credit courses offered through Iowa Valley Continuing Education (IVCE) and Fall 2004 enrollment were:

- Farm Resumes and Portfolios, 4
- Meat Goat Production, 42
- Getting Started on Your Small Market Farm, 11
- Landscape History: Discovering the History of Your Land, 6
- Livestock Management, 9

Future possibilities include outreach, distance learning, and the development of the demonstration farm and a kitchen incubator. Recruiting future program participants means reaching high school students interested in agriculture and MCC staff members are making high school visits and contacting FFA advisors. Some beginning and transitioning farmers have requested distance learning opportunities, and the SEA program might accommodate them by developing courses for delivery on-line or through the Iowa Communications Network.

Impact of results

From the farmer/landowner perspective, there are now local opportunities at an established educational institution to take classes and to safely explore production and planning alternatives in agriculture. The SEA program allows for a thorough, practical exploration of sustainable agriculture and can now assist those wishing to start their own businesses or diversify their farming operations. The college also serves as a place where the student can continue his or her education through non-credit courses and conferences offered during the year or a place to start before moving on to a four-year college of university.

Leveraged Funds

Additional funds leveraged are listed below, including project title, funder, and amount:

- Getting Started on your Small Market Farm, NCR-SARE, Jerry DeWitt, NCR Initiative, $1,400
- Establishing the SEA Program Demonstration Farm, Martha-Ellen Tye Foundation, $10,000
- The Mead Sustainable Agriculture Scholarship Endowment Fund, Janet White Mead, $20,000
- Increasing Enrollment and Retention of Underrepresented Racial/Ethnic Minority Students, Iowa Department of Education, Perkins III, $5,000
- SEA Program Startup, Iowa Department of Education, Perkins III, $2,000
• SEA program curriculum development, The Iowa Foundation for Education, the Environment, and the Arts, $10,000
• SEA Program Improvement, Iowa Department of Education, Perkins III, $5,000
• Sustainable Agriculture Entrepreneurial Kitchen Incubator, Iowa Community Vitality Center – USDA CREES Mini-grant, $10,000