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Contact: R. David Smith, NY Farm Viability Institute, 607-255-7286; Kris Park, Ag Innovation Center, 607-255-7215; Cheryl Leach, NYS Food Venture Center, 315-787-2622

Business Planning Workshop at Cornell Encourages Agricultural Innovation

By Kara Dunn

GENEVA, NY: A business planning course offered by Cornell University through the NY Ag Innovation Center and the New York State Food Venture Center will help farmers develop a plan to grow their businesses. "Tilling the Soil of Opportunity" will be offered at the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station (NYSAES) in Geneva on November 3-4 and 17-18, and December 1-2.

Participants will have the opportunity to consult with attorneys, bankers, insurance agents, marketing consultants, and successful entrepreneurs who have experience serving the farming community and small businesses. They will also complete a comprehensive business plan for their particular enterprise.

"The NY Ag Innovation Center's mission is to help New York State's agricultural producers add value to their products," says R. David Smith, professor of animal science, and director of the New York Farm Viability Institute that oversees the work of the NY Ag Innovation Center. "Business planning is the key strategy that farmers can use to determine the best ways to increase the value of their products."

"The Food Venture Center provides technical and business assistance to beginning and established food entrepreneurs with the goal of promoting long-term economic development of rural communities," says Cheryl Leach, extension support specialist at the NYSAES, which is a research station of Cornell University and home to the New York State Food Venture Center. "This course is for those starting, thinking of starting, or expanding an agricultural-based venture."

Workshop attendees will follow a curriculum developed by the NxLevel™ Agricultural Entrepreneurial Training Program, a program developed at the University of Colorado at Denver. Course materials are specifically designed for people who are searching for innovative ideas and enhanced marketing opportunities in the area of value-added agriculture.

Sessions include taking stock of your resources; developing your business concept and how to conduct on-line research with a business librarian; regulations, contracts and leases; insurance; marketing with advice on developing strategies from an advertising media representative; budgeting and record keeping with an agricultural accountant; financing; and a cash flow discussion with successful value-added agricultural entrepreneurs.

Attendance is required at all three two-day sessions: Day 1 runs from noon-9 pm; Day 2 runs from 8 am-noon with consultations to 3 pm. Attendance at three hours of after-class consultations on Day 1 of each session is mandatory. Attendance at the three hours of after-class consultation on Day 2 of each session is optional.

The cost of the "Tilling the Soil of Opportunity" business planning course is \$250 per registrant and \$175 for spouses and partners. Registration includes books, three dinners and three breakfasts per person. The fee is non-refundable after October 29, 2004. Registration is limited to the first 20 people. Deadline to register is October 25. For more information, contact Cheryl Leach at the NYSAES at 315-787-2622.

The NY Ag Innovation Center is funded by grants from the Rural Business-Cooperative Service, the US Department of Agriculture and the New York State Department of Agriculture & Markets.

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New York State Agricultural Experiment Station, 630 West North Street, Geneva, New York 14456
Telephone: 315.787.2011



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