



Interested in Farming?

This Agriculture and Forestry (AF) New Venture Specialist sees a surge in interest in agriculture, from people from all walks of life. Here's how she helps them.

You might think that all Alberta farmers have generations of farming in their background. While it's true many farms have operated for generations, Kathy Bosse is on the front lines of something quite different.

As a Red Deer-based New Venture Specialist with AF, Bosse regularly fields enquiries from people who want to enter the business of farming for the first time.

"Over the last three years, interest in agriculture has definitely picked up," says Bosse. "We get calls from those retiring from one career who want to go into another, young adults who want to return to the farm, those who want to be part of the rural food trend or those who are new immigrants with previous experience in farming. Really, the variety is very encouraging."

In recent years, AF has been working to provide helpful information to these aspiring farmers. A series of factsheets is available on a variety of topics ranging from finance to production and marketing.

Aspiring farmers keen on planning and finance

What do today's would-be farmers most want to know? A one-day workshop hosted by Bosse this past fall in Airdrie provided a glimpse of this. Delivered with support from *Growing Forward 2*, the session covered topics such as:

- Overview of agriculture in Alberta
- Business planning
- Personal suitability assessment
- Financial management
- Land considerations
- Resources and education.



According to Bosse, the most talked-about areas at the workshop were financial management and business planning. In her view, it's encouraging that these practical topics resonated with the workshop's 35 participants.

"We think it's important for those who want to get into farming to look at it like getting into any other business," Bosse says. "They need to have their finances in place and be sure there is a demand for the product or products they produce. It's really about the business of farming and making sure what you set up has a high possibility of being profitable."



Take it From a *Real* Farmer

She notes that talking with aspiring farmers is all about presenting a balance between optimism and reality. That's why events like these can be so valuable.

AF invited two experienced farmers to speak at the workshop. One of these speakers, Phil Norregaard, runs a 200-head cow-calf operation and grows 500 acres of wheat, barley and canola just east of Balzac.

Norregaard told the group he started with six cows and 80 acres and slowly grew the business by using older equipment and avoiding borrowing money. Although he advises that this model isn't perfect for everybody, he believes that slow, steady growth has worked well for his business. To Norregaard, at the end of the day, if the business side can be made to work out, farming is a great place to be. Even so, a strong Plan B is recommended in case things don't turn out as planned.

"I'm usually the optimistic one," says Norregaard. "I love my job, and if you love what you do, it just doesn't feel like work."

Bosse liked how this face-to-face format gave participants a valuable combination of practical information and personal experience. With a waiting list for future workshops, AF is planning to offer more of these kinds of sessions in the future. Keep an eye on the *GF2* calendar at www.growingforward.alberta.ca for upcoming workshops and events.

"We are glad to see such strong interest in agriculture from so many different people," Bosse says. "The face of farming today is changing from the last number of decades. Like all other industries, it will continue to evolve, and that's a positive thing."