

More information about Penn State's Small-scale and Part-time Farming Project

Since its inception in 1992, the Small-scale and Part-time Farming Project has focused on providing educational materials to assist producers through the complexities of enterprise selection. The *Agricultural Alternatives* publication series, which now contains 60 publications, has strived to help producers analyze production alternatives by providing a balanced assessment of crop and livestock enterprises that might be suitable for small-scale and part-time farming operations. Most of the leaflets offer an introduction to a specific enterprise and cover important issues including marketing, production, regulations, risk management, and enterprise budgeting. To support the enterprise oriented publications, a set of publications covering agricultural business management topics including planning, financing, fruit and vegetable marketing, cooperatives, diversification, insurance, enterprise budgeting, and managing a roadside stand have also been developed. There are also two publications on irrigation and another on organic vegetable production.

County extension offices regularly receive inquiries from clientele for information about how to produce specific crops or livestock. The *Agricultural Alternative* series is frequently used by county educators as a first step to assist their clients with this process. With the number of small farms expanding each year, these clients need complete and balanced information about the enterprise they are considering. Existing producers who are considering diversifying their operations or have underutilized land use the publications when researching their options. Although the publications have been developed with Pennsylvania's small-scale and part-time farmers in mind, these publications are widely used with all types of farm audiences and are also of interest to the general public. These publications are also extensively used in the extension programs conducted in neighboring states and are accessed both nationally and internationally through the Internet (we have survey responses from 31 states and 12 foreign counties). Several of these publications have been used as part of the curriculum in Extension 4-H and high school vocational agriculture programs in Pennsylvania.

These publications strive to provide the reader with balanced information concerning a particular enterprise. One possible outcome will be to dissuade the reader from pursuing an enterprise that not suited to their abilities or resource base. Because the publications are not meant to be "production guides", each publication contains a "For More Information" section. This section contains additional sources of information, including web sites that the reader can access for more in-depth information. Publications covering production of a crop or livestock contain detailed budget information. These budgets are developed to assist the reader with identifying the expenses they will incur if they choose to pursue the enterprise. A column for their estimated figures is included so they may adapt the budget to their operation.

The authors of the publications in the *Agricultural Alternatives* series include extension and research faculty from Penn State University and land-grant institutions from neighboring states, county extension educators, and farmers. By sharing their expertise, they make the *Agricultural Alternatives* series possible.