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FOR SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

Workshops assist Iowa veterans who want to farm

December 30, 2013

Iowa veterans who want to trade the battlefield for a farm field can participate in one-day workshops designed to help make their dreams become reality.

The newly formed Farmer Veteran Coalition of Iowa (FVCIA) is hosting workshops February 20 in Ottumwa, February 22 in Waterloo, March 13 in Red Oak and March 15 in Storm Lake. The workshops will provide vets interested in Iowa agriculture with networking opportunities and education.

The workshops will follow a format similar to the group's successful statewide conference that was held December 14 in Des Moines and funded by a special project grant from the Policy Initiative at the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture. More than 60 veterans and agency officials attended the December conference, including more than 30 aspiring or beginning farmers.

FVCIA chair Ed Cox is an attorney with the Drake University Agricultural Law Center. He said that the statewide conference followed by four regional meetings will reach a group whose interest in farming is increasing nationwide.

"This is a distinct group of farmers, who have different challenges as well as opportunities due to their experience in the military and eligibility for different veteran programs," said Cox, who served in the U.S. Coast Guard.

"The veterans in attendance covered the agricultural spectrum and are very diverse. Some are returning to family farm operations, while others are looking for land and capital to start growing specialty crops or value added enterprises. The thing they all have in common is a history of service and a desire to continue that service by providing secure, healthy food to their communities."

About 40 percent of military service members are from rural communities, and interest from Iowa vets in finding jobs in agriculture has been high. Given a higher than average jobless rate for young vets, and the need for economic development in rural communities, Cox said the farmer veteran assistance program offers a win-win situation for Iowa.

Farmer veterans had an opportunity to connect with more than 20 veteran and agricultural service providers who also attended the statewide conference. They also attended sessions on the challenges and opportunities of starting a farm business as well as finding employment in agriculture and rural Iowa.

Cox said conference evaluations showed that veterans want networking time and educational materials. The most requested topics for additional information related to conservation and sustainability issues, including management intensive grazing and on-farm energy production.

The workshops will feature educational presentations about farm business development, sustainability, legal issues, and any other concerns vets may have. The attendees also will have the chance to meet with service providers from USDA, Veterans Affairs, the ISU Beginning Farmer Center, the Drake Agricultural Law Center, and more. Details on these meetings will be available at www.iowafarmerveteran.org.



Members of the Farmer Veteran Coalition of Iowa board and advisors are (left to right): Steven Hyde, Morey Hill, John Whitaker (ex officio advisor), Steve Ferguson, Ed Cox, Abby Cline, Dave Baker, John Baker, Michael O'Gorman and Lyle Stewart.

Click on photo for high-resolution version of above photo.

Download mugshot of Ed Cox [here](#)

In addition to Leopold Center support for the workshops, other partners include the Iowa Finance Authority Agricultural Development Division, the Beginning Farmer Center and Easter Seals Iowa.

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