

Workshops planned to help veterans interested in farming

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Iowa veterans can learn more about transitioning from the battlefield to the farm field with a series of workshops planned in February and March.

The Farmer Veteran Coalition of Iowa, a newly formed group, will offer the workshops on Feb. 20 in Ottumwa, Feb. 22 in Waterloo, March 13 in Red Oak, and March 15 in Storm Lake.

The group said about 40 percent of military service members are from rural communities, and interest from Iowa vets in finding jobs in agriculture has been high.

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 the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Veterans Affairs, the Iowa State University Beginning Farmer Center, the Drake Agricultural Law Center and more. Details on these meetings will be available at www.iowafarmerveteran.org.

The workshops will follow a format similar to the group's statewide conference held earlier this month. More than 60 veterans and agency officials attended the conference, including more than 30 aspiring or beginning farmers.

Coalition chairman Ed Cox, a Drake University attorney, said the farmer veteran assistance program is a win for Iowa, given the state's higher than average jobless rate for young vets, and the need for economic development in rural communities.

Cox said some vets 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," he said.

Workshop sponsors include the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, the Iowa Finance Authority, the Beginning Farmer Center and Easter Seals Iowa.