

Bringing New Farmers to Your Community

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Ag Stewardship Committee of the Salem Mennonite Church
Freeman, South Dakota

The Ag Stewardship Committee of the Salem Mennonite Church of Freeman, SD, was organized when the agricultural crisis of the 1980s and highly inflated real estate prices in the local area during the early 1990s created a situation where beginning farmers faced difficult, if not impossible, odds of establishing a viable farming operation.

The committee consists of experienced, successful, middle-aged farmers who are each assigned to personally mentor two or three beginning farmers. This process allows the beginning farmers to benefit from the experiences of the established farmers and share the frustrations associated with the establishment of a new

operation.

Secondly, the committee has arranged a collateralized loan program with two agriculturally based banks in the community. Beginning farmers have the opportunity to borrow against certificates of deposits volunteered for this purpose by older or retired farmers in the church. Finally, the committee annually hosts a Sunday evening panel discussion for the whole community on subjects such as intergenerational transfer of the family farm, conservation practices, involvement in cooperatives, etc.