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## Deere Slide A Hit On Minnesota Lake

Grown men who would never go down a water slide might be tempted to try out David Seifert's slide. The giant slide rolls on Deere tires and is shaped like a tractor with a big tube slide at one end.

"It's all scrap tubing," says Seifert, who works in a machine shop and farms with his father near Pelican Rapids, Minn. "It

probably has at least a ton of steel in it."

He welded the 22 1/2-ft. "tractor" frame together and bolted the slide to the deck at about 11 ft. off the ground. He bolted the bottom of the frame to salvaged tractor axles. There's even room for a tractor seat swing under the "tractor" deck. A hitch on the front allows Seifert to back the big rig down into

the water using a real Deere tractor. A sump pump in the lake brings water up to the top of the slide to make it slippery and fast.

The tractor slide has been a big hit since he built it in 2010.

"I built it for my grandsons, Preston and Daniel. There are two more on the way," Seifert says.

Seifert admits it took more time (250 hrs.) and money (\$800 for the spiral slide) than he anticipated. "I put a lot of work into it, but it was a lot of fun," he says.

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## College Teaches "How To Be A Farm Entrepreneur"

By Dee Goerge, Contributing Editor

A Minnesota college has launched a first-of-its-kind course designed to "teach farming" to students who have little or no ag experience. M-State College in Fergus Falls also works with existing farmers who want to learn more about direct marketing of farm products.

One day, students are in the classroom learning about soil science, marketing or crop/forage management. The next day they're castrating pigs, installing corner post fences or touring a dairy farm with cows grazing on pasture.

Instead of focusing on conventional crop farming, the emphasis is on pasture-based systems and small farm operations.

Dr. Sue Wika, coordinator and one of the program's five instructors, explains that the 9-month program is unique in the U.S. because it incorporates science and economics with horticulture and livestock. Each instructor has a PhD or master's degree, but they're also hands-on producers with different focuses. Wika, who teaches sociology, has a diversified livestock farm. A couple of the instructors grow vegetables and operate CSA's, selling food to subscribers.

Instructor Kent Solberg runs dairy cows and hogs on pasture, and runs a fencing business. When he met Wika at a grazing workshop, she talked about creating a course for people interested in learning farming basics. Working with Dr. Tom Priev, a veterinarian and instructor at the college, and two other producers, they created a 31-credit curriculum and received approval from the college to start the program in September 2010.

"We're not just a bunch of academics," Solberg says. "We're people who do this stuff. We've stumbled and bumbled (learning this) the last 20 years, and we put together a package for students. Our target is non-traditional students (average age 30) who are serious about being here. They want to learn what they need to know about regenerative agriculture and sustainability."

Some have farming experience and want to learn more about value-added markets. Others have no experience at all.

At 25, Nicole Moore has a degree in political theory but is looking for a career

in agriculture. She was attracted to the compact schedule of Thursday to Saturday classes, the hands-on and tour opportunities blended with academics and an internship all within a year. She moved from Georgia to enroll in 2012.

"It's practical, and it's fun," she says. "It has exceeded my expectations. The biggest thing I learned is that you can make money doing this. Everyone needs healthful food."

Within a couple of months, she'd been on a few tours, learned to can vegetables, make lard and butcher hogs – along with lessons on state and federal regulations about food processing. She and fellow students were preparing to build a winter greenhouse.

"By the end of November students are swimming in information, and we spend the winter sorting through all that," Solberg says. By March, they're ready for 180-hr. internships at a wide variety of farm and food operations.

"Our goal is to create more farm entrepreneurs," he adds. Just as it takes a few years to establish a small business, students are advised to find apprenticeship type jobs to develop skills, whether it's working for a CSA to learn about vegetable production or in a custom butcher shop to learn about the cuts of meat and ways to market them.

Some students apply their new skills immediately after earning their Sustainable Food Production diploma.

"Within six months, one of our students started a growers market and was growing vegetables and raising chickens, turkeys and hogs on pasture," Solberg says.

Another students started a mobile poultry butchering business. One graduate is building a dairy operation, while another implemented what she learned to improve her beef operation.

"One of the most valuable things that's not listed in the description, is that students are going to develop a network of likeminded people and mentors who can help them down the road," Solberg says.

The course fee is about \$6,000 and it qualifies for the GI Bill and financial aid.



A Minnesota college has launched a first-of-its-kind course designed to "teach farming" to students who have little or no ag experience.



Students spend time both in the classroom and outdoors. Instead of focusing on conventional crop farming, the emphasis is on pasture-based systems and small farm operations.



Low rent housing and ag-related work opportunities are available for students. People interested in the course may contact Wika about visiting a class to check out the program.

The course is intense with homework and reading for master's level subjects of theory, philosophy, techniques, science and ecology, Solberg notes. But students also leave with practical knowledge, as well as a business plan, brochure and marketing skills.

"One thing I tell students is we'll help

you build a toolbox, and you'll have a lot of options," Solberg says.

A future goal of the program is to match students with farmer landowners looking to retire.

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