The how-to's and financing for a beginning farmer or rancher to get started in business will be the focus of a March 6 seminar at the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture in Curtis.

The "Own the Farm or Ranch" seminar, from 1-5 p.m. in NCTA's new Nebraska Agriculture Industry Education Center, kicks off a year-long outreach program. The seminar is designed for all producers and farm and ranch employees that want to one day own an agricultural enterprise.

"There has never been a better time for a young family to begin the process of farm or ranch ownership," said Dean Weldon Sleight, developer of NCTA's 100-Acre Farm and 100 Beef Cow ownership programs.

NCTA ownership programs are based on the idea that a beginning farmer or rancher can begin to build equity in a livestock or cropping enterprise through purchasing cattle and/or equipment from current ranchers and farmers who want to slow down, but who still want to live on the ranch or farm and be active in management. Assets that the beginning farmer gains through the first 15 years, coupled with careful planning and hard work, will grow to be an adequate down payment for a farm or ranch, Sleight said.

In addition to Sleight, seminar presenters include: Marian Beethe, Nebraska Department of Agriculture; Mark Wilke, Nebraska USDA Farm Service Agency; Royce Schaneman, Wheat Board; Ronna Morse, Sandhills Cattlemen; Victor Bohuslavsky, Soybean Board; Larry Sitzman, Pork Producers; Dave Smith, NCTA APS division chair; and others.

While the 100-acre and 100-cow programs initially were designed for students who spend two years on campus, Sleight said the seminar kickoff and subsequent yearlong program target off-campus students.

The outreach program has four components of practical experiences and requires participants to commit to one or two days per month for one year to better learn and understand the latest technology associated with farming and ranching. One component is the hands-on Nebraska Ranch Practicum, conducted in partnership with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln West

Central Research and Extension Center at North Platte.

Ten ranch practicum scholarships are being offered by the Nebraska Grazing Lands Coalition through a USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program grant.

“NGLC and the West Central Research and Extension Center recognize that the development of our youth in farming and ranching is critical to the future of Nebraska agriculture,” said Ron Bolze, NGLC coordinator.

The yearlong outreach program also includes learning the business skills necessary to develop a business plan, understanding a partnership agreement and how to obtain an FSA low-interest loan. Sleight said FSA’s February 2012 Beginning Farmer operating loan interest for up to $300,000 is 1.375 percent.

“This low-cost source of financing is a very optimistic outlook on the future of agricultural commodity prices spell opportunity for those truly interested in farm and ranch ownership,” Sleight said.

“The key is the young farmer or rancher can’t wait for the ‘right time’ because it may never come,” Sleight said. “The USDA low-interest funding is an opportunity of a lifetime. In fact, the difference in the cost of the USDA low-interest beginning farmer loans and commercial rates is a living for the young farm family.”

“FSA is excited about partnering with NCTA as we develop mechanisms that encourage our youth to become the next generation of Nebraska farmers and ranchers,” Wilke said.

FSA sees itself as the lender of first opportunity, Wilke said, and together with other agricultural lenders in Nebraska, provides the needed financial assistance that allows beginning farmers to start farming or ranching.

In the last year, he said 57% of all FSA loans were to beginning farmers. Nebraska FSA's commitment to beginning farmers is exhibited through it being the third highest state in beginning farmer loans, he said.

Seminar participants on March 6 also will learn about a new FSA program allowing established farmers and ranchers to privately finance a farm or ranch for beginning farmers. This loan program, called the Land Contract Guarantee Program, provides either a 90% guarantee on the outstanding contract principal balance or a three-year prompt payment guarantee.

The guarantee allows the real estate seller to spread the contract payment over a longer period of time, while earning higher interest rates than some alternative investments.

To register, contact Traci Bradney at 308-367-5200, tbradney2@unl.edu, by March 2.