

News and Information from the University of Tennessee
Institute of Agriculture

Contact: Patricia McDaniels, UTIA Marketing and Communications, 615-835-4570

For Immediate Release
August 18, 2009

Small, Rural Business Training Begins Later this Month
Web sites and e-Commerce are Focus of UT Extension Training

In response to the stresses placed on small, rural businesses during this recession, University of Tennessee Extension is offering a six-session training program to business leaders in seven Middle and West Tennessee counties. The training is focused on helping businesses broaden their market potential through e-commerce.

“Tennessee is no stranger to small business. In fact, 84 percent of all employers in Tennessee have fewer than 20 employees. In addition, more than 500,000 Tennesseans are self-employed,” said Dr. Michael Wilcox, a community resource and economic development specialist with UT Extension. “However, in these difficult economic times, many small businesses have to make tough decisions. Marketing is often one of the first issues to tackle,” he said.

“This training is unique in that it uses a combination of traditional classroom teaching and the opportunity for participants from agriculture, the arts, crafts and other traditionally rural sectors to exchange ideas and learn the basic ‘in’s’ and ‘out’s’ of e-commerce. Participants will actively engage with local business owners and will ultimately strengthen their businesses,” Wilcox added. Wilcox is also an assistant professor in the Department of Agricultural Economics.

The “Extending the Market for Local Talent beyond Local Borders” training will take place once a month between August 2009 and February 2010 in Stewart, Dickson, Robertson, Humphreys, Houston, Cheatham and Montgomery counties.

“Businesses, small or large, are successful when they supply products and services that meet the needs of customers,” explains Martha Pile, a family and consumer science Extension agent in Montgomery County. Pile founded “The Gathering,” a network of entrepreneurs that is building “business to business” and “business to consumer” linkages in the seven counties. “Traditionally, rural small businesses rely on a small, local customer base. Now, with the introduction of the Internet, some rural businesses are finding ways to connect consumers from all over the world to their products and services,” Pile said.

The purpose of this program is to provide educational information to rural entrepreneurs on the benefits and methods of utilizing e-commerce to expand their potential market. The content of the course offers artisans sound, research-based information to make decisions on whether to

develop a Web page, how to do it, utilizing web-based resources, and evaluating website effectiveness.

Each month, the training will begin promptly at 9 a.m., include lunch and end by 3 p.m. The first session, “Artisans, e-Commerce and the Local Economy” will be held on Friday August 28 at the Stewart County Public Library in Dover, Tenn. Businesses to be visited by participants include the farmers market, a bakery and an artist’s studio. The second session, “Using Technology in the Artisan Business”, will be held on Friday September 25 at the Dickson County Extension office in Dickson.

For a complete schedule, please visit: <http://trend.ag.utk.edu/entrepreneurship.html>. For more information or to register for the program, please call, your local Extension office or Martha Pile at the Montgomery County Extension Office, 931-648-5725, or e-mail Dr. Michael Wilcox at mwilcox2@utk.edu . The deadline for pre-registration is August 25.

UT Extension offers off-campus education and outreach for the UT Institute of Agriculture. Through UT Extension, the Institute brings research-based information about agriculture, family and consumer sciences, youth and resource development to the people of Tennessee where they live and work.

###