THE UNDERGRADUATE LEARNING FARM – HANDS-ON EXPERIENCES. Christopher L. Schuster and J. Anita Dille, Graduate Research Assistant and Assistant Professor, Agronomy Department, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506.

Undergraduate education in Agronomy must provide students with specific skills for successful employment. Students need to be technically competent, but must also develop skills in problem-solving, critical thinking, and team work abilities. Agronomy students would greatly benefit from more hands-on experiential learning activities developed to test technical and diagnostic skills. A new facility being made available to undergraduate students at KSU is the Learning Farm, where students can develop these skills through hands-on field site experiences and investigations. The Learning Farm encompasses 80 acres and is located within the Agronomy North Farm, which is three miles northwest of the Agronomy department building. The Learning Farm is divided into a long-range plan of crop and tillage rotations, with a website acting as a resource for all field information www.oznet.ksu.edu/agronomy/academics/undergrad/LearningFarm/welcome.asp. Undergraduate students gain knowledge of the Learning Farm through class field trips, in-class research exercises, and undergraduate research assistantships provided through departmental personnel. One example of a current undergraduate research project at the Learning Farm is understanding site-specific correlations among winter annuals/biennials and soil properties. Initial results indicate a correlation among winter annual emergence and the type of crop residue present during the early fall months. The Learning Farm will provide a venue for integrating skill development throughout the four-year Agronomy curriculum and provide a resource for extension education and developmental training in the future. Continued evaluation of learning and skill development will occur to maximize creativity, innovation, improvement, and coordination involving the Undergraduat
e Learning Farm.