



Ag Apprenticeship Toolkit

A Guide to Developing or Improving an Ag Apprenticeship Training Program on Your Farm or Ranch

Developed by the Ag Apprenticeship Learning Network
Published by the New Entry Sustainable Farming Project



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Developed by the Ag Apprenticeship Learning Network,
including:

Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship
Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association
Rogue Farm Corps
Quivira Coalition
Vilicus Farms

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About This Toolkit



The New Entry Sustainable Farming Project (New Entry), alongside its five core partners—Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship (DGA), Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA), Quivira Coalition, Rogue Farm Corps, and Vilicus Training Institute—have collaborated to create this toolkit. All partners have experience running successful apprenticeship and beginning farmer and rancher development programs.

Additionally, over 20 expert advisors contributed by aiding in work plan development and providing consultation and expertise on specific topics. Project advisors also served to help with project coordination, resource review, and content review. New Entry, alongside a representative from each core partner and at least three key advisors, were responsible for research and resource cataloging, curriculum development, identifying and filling gaps in knowledge, toolkit development, case studies, and other educational materials.

For more information about the leadership team and development process, see **Appendix A**.

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction



Farming and ranching work requires diverse and complex skill-sets, many of them best learned directly from an experienced mentor. While books, lectures, and videos can teach much of the theoretical underpinnings, they cannot serve as a substitute for knowing how soil feels when it is too wet to work, or the smell of hay that is too moldy to feed, or the muscle memory of peeling a gizzard or harvesting lettuce. So much of what sets a successful, sustainable farm or ranch operation apart from one that struggles is the experience and judgment gained from a mentor—one who knows which items on the unending to-do list are truly critical, and can pass on that knowledge so that new farmers or ranchers do not have to repeat the same mistakes.

Agricultural apprenticeships offer the experience of intensive mentorship to the next generation of farmers and ranchers. Passing on this knowledge through farm-based training opportunities is more important than ever, as fewer and fewer people entering farming and ranching today have a recent family history of working in agriculture. The 2015 Quivira Coalition New Agrarian Program

Apprentice Survey of 38 programs (Quivira survey), showed that 70% of apprentices did not grow up on a farm and did not have regular exposure to farms or ranches. This emphasizes the importance of on-farm apprenticeship experiences as a professional training tool for providing hands-on learning that can not be replicated in a classroom setting.

The importance of training and mentoring new farmers is heightened by the fact that the USDA estimates 70% of farmland will change ownership within the next 20 years, and that few farmers have identified successors for their businesses. A 2007 survey of Wisconsin farmers showed that between 65 and 72% of farmers did not have an identified successor. This gap in farmland succession planning presents both a need and an opportunity for the next generation. The success of young and beginning farmers demands hands-on skills as well as business management, and agricultural apprenticeships are a time-honored method to pass down this critical knowledge.

This toolkit will provide you with peer reviewed guidance for starting an on-farm/ranch agricultural apprenticeship program, and is intended to serve as a resource guide that unites existing ag apprenticeship programs, shares best practices, and outlines the development and maintenance of a successful professional agricultural training program. This toolkit also seeks to coherently outline the state and federal Department of Labor (DOL) laws surrounding on-farm apprenticeships and the standards that must be met in order to comply with these laws, in hopes of protecting training programs through encouraging movement towards legally compliant structures for on farm labor and learning.

The goal of this resource is to minimize the unexpected, and to increase preparedness to begin providing formalized mentorship on your farm or within your organization. We will address topics ranging from recruitment and curriculum development to financial operations and managing relationships.

Additionally, this toolkit aims to facilitate a learning network across many regions of the country. Through this network of partners and collaborators, we hope that ongoing sharing of best practices, resources, and outcomes will continue as this community grows. We hope this toolkit provides farms, ranches, and organizations—those looking to start an agricultural apprenticeship program, and those that already have one with insight and knowledge that allows for successful growth and development, and we wish you the best of luck!

To find other farms and organizations with on-farm learning opportunities and to stay informed about this work, visit the [National Ag Apprenticeship Learning Network](#).

1.2 How to Use The Toolkit



This toolkit is designed for existing and aspiring mentor farmers, and is based on the belief that mentoring the next generation of ranchers and farmers can be extremely rewarding. As an expert in your field with many years of experience running a business, you are in an excellent position to introduce a novice to the many and nuanced aspects of running an agricultural business, from building fences or caring for a sick animal to fixing the farm truck, developing a marketing strategy, designing a label for your products, or making important financial decisions. No one is better qualified to grow a new agrarian than an experienced mentor with many years on the land, but not every rancher or farmer is cut out for the job. Being a mentor is not the same as being an employer—although the ‘employer hat’ is one of many you will wear as a mentor.

As a mentor for a new agrarian, you not only teach skills and supervise an ag apprentice’s work and performance; you work with a whole human, every day, and take them into every aspect of your life in agriculture. You are your ag apprentice’s professional trainer, their teacher, employer, and direct supervisor, and at times their personal life coach. Your ag apprentice will train alongside you through long days and short ones, winter storms and sunny days. You will get to experience their full spectrum of expression and varying moods, and they will get to know you just as well. You will likely share meals during the workday, and more than likely you’ll sit down to dinner together every now and then as well.

This is clearly not a nine-to-five, Monday-through-Friday-job kind of relationship. Your ag apprentice will hopefully become a core part of your ranch or farm team, and if all goes well, may even start to feel a little like family.

If you’re ready to consider these implications of becoming a mentor, then also consider that new agrarians will have high expectations of you. They will have tons of questions.

They will challenge you when you least want to be challenged. They will also bring a fresh perspective and new ideas into your business. They may have special skills or knowledge that will enrich your marketing plan or improve your website design. They will bring youthful energy, spunk, and enthusiasm.

There is no specific set of rules for how to be a good mentor. The important thing to remember is that by committing to an agricultural apprentice, you are committing to both the positive and the challenging. This is a brave undertaking.

As a mentor, you not only have to consider the needs of your business and what tasks need to be accomplished on a daily basis in order to meet your bottom line; you also have to consider your learner's educational goals and how these can be incorporated into your operation. Your commitment to their learning is the greatest gift you can provide and an essential part of the apprenticeship experience.

This brings us back to the original question. You may be an excellent land manager and an astute business person. But will you be a good mentor? Taking the time to work through the following questions will help you understand the extent to which you are ready to take on the challenges of mentorship, and which aspects of this toolkit will be of the greatest use to you.

- **Why do you want to personally mentor a beginning rancher or farmer?**
- **Why might you prefer not to create an apprenticeship?**
- **What are the long term goals for your ranch or farm? (Think “mission statement.”)**
- **How might an apprentice program assist you in reaching those goals?**
- **Why is now the appropriate time?**

If your answers to these questions affirmed a decision to incorporate formal mentorship into your existing farm business, or reaffirmed a choice you have already made to host ag apprentices, then this toolkit is for you! Whether you are starting from scratch or just looking for more information, tips, and ideas to successfully grow your program, this toolkit will have value to you. Browse the chapters to glean experience from programs spanning the country, and find answers to questions such as:

- **What is involved with the development of an apprenticeship program?**
- **How do I strengthen my existing apprenticeship program?**
- **What apprentice program resources and support systems are available to me?**
- **How do I improve apprentice application numbers and recruitment?**
- **What laws surrounding agricultural apprenticeships do I need to be aware of?**
- **What resources are available for tracking graduates of my program?**

Our society relies on agriculturalists to produce food and steward the land, and the current demographics reveal the need for more farmers and ranchers. To affect this change at scale will require more mentorship and training opportunities nationwide. A single operation or program cannot do it alone, but with the collected lessons and insights of years of successful agricultural apprenticeships, this toolkit aims to facilitate the growth of more mentorship opportunities to jointly train and support new agrarians.

CHAPTER 2:

Options for Structuring On-Farm Labor and Learning



Once you are confident that mentoring a new agrarian is a good choice for you, the next step is to consider the different options for structuring the balance of labor and on-farm learning. If you've spent any time on an agricultural job posting site, or as a trainee on multiple farms, you know that the words "intern" and "apprentice" are widely used and often loosely or broadly defined. While this is true within the agricultural community, the U.S. Department of Labor [DOL] operates under a different set of standards. Legally compliant options for structuring on-farm labor and learning are narrow in number and definition, and the words "internship" and "apprenticeship" connote specific labor arrangements.

Remember that part of training new farmers is keeping your farm in operation by avoiding unnecessary risk. Selecting a legally compliant structure for your farm labor and learning opportunities will protect you from potential risks, such as paying fines and back wages to the DOL, and the possibility of litigation from ex-interns or apprentices.

Creating an ag apprenticeship requires some careful planning as well as understanding and adherence to the law, but for the right person, the rewards make it worth the extra effort. We hope that farms who are hosting informal learners and laborers outside of a compliant structure will consider how their operation can be brought into compliance. Bear in mind, however, that this toolkit was not written by attorneys and does not constitute legal advice. Agricultural labor law is complex, federal and state laws often differ, and the application of the law to any specific set of circumstances is uncertain. The same set of facts may look different to two different judges or two different attorneys. Because of this, we encourage you to consult with an attorney about your particular situation. If you're uncertain about where to start, Farm Commons is an excellent resource (farmcommons.org).

2.1 Definitions

While there are finite legal categories for on-farm labor and learning, many farms work outside of these definitions in order to meet the needs of their operation and the goals of their on-farm learners. We will begin this chapter by suggesting definitions for commonly used terms. As a community of practice evolves in this work, we hope to continue to modify and refine these definitions.

Legal internship: A legal category of on-farm labor which resembles training given in an educational environment, is for the benefit of the intern, and does not displace regular employees or confer immediate advantages to the employer. Internships are supervised by existing staff and the employer, and interns understand that they are not entitled to wages. If an intern is paid, they then fall under the category of “employee.”

Registered Apprenticeship: A formally registered category of on-farm labor involving a standards-based Federal and State DOL regulated system that ensures quality instruction by combining paid on-the-job training with theoretical and practical classroom instruction. The apprenticeship curriculum is based on an agreed-upon set of skills and standards and fosters a tradition of mentorship and professionalism in the field. Registration is designed to ensure that training is standardized across participating



employers and based on a Developing A Curriculum (DACUM) protocol, and that working apprentices, program sponsors, and the general public gain a clear understanding of the training content and the measures that are in place. Registered apprentice positions are typically paid prevailing minimum wages during their apprenticeship program and receive regular pay increases reflecting increasing skill levels.

Employee: A legal category of on-farm labor that describes anyone who performs services for a farm business at the discretion of the farm employer. An employee expects the employer to provide compensation for their services.

Volunteer: Someone who performs services for a public agency and is motivated by civic, charitable or humanitarian reasons without promise, expectation, or receipt of compensation for their services. For-profit farm businesses cannot legally engage volunteers in their operations. Volunteers who engage in work for a for-profit farm are considered employees so that all applicable federal and state employment laws apply—including minimum wage, workers' compensation, and payroll tax requirements.

Ag apprenticeship: A colloquial term referring to an array of comprehensive on-farm/ranch educational and professional training opportunities where training includes hands-on experience in a real-life work setting alongside a dedicated mentor who is an experienced practitioner in the relevant areas of agricultural production. While often informal, most programs and individual farmers who offer non-registered apprenticeships provide more advanced and/or comprehensive training than is provided through internships. Ag apprenticeships are often longer than internships and attract more experienced learners. Many ag apprentices could be legally classified as unpaid interns, registered apprentices, or employees. Some opportunities may take place on farms where exemptions allow for training and compensation to be managed in the manner that the farmers sees fit.

More resources:



One way to guarantee your internship or apprenticeship is entirely legally compliant is to treat your apprentices as employees.

2.2 Internships

While internships are a popular on-farm learning opportunity, they have come under scrutiny in recent years for failing to adequately compensate participants. One way to guarantee your internship or apprenticeship is entirely legally compliant is to treat your apprentices as employees with respect to pay and all other workplace protections required by your state and the federal government (in essence, employees with the added benefit of your training, guidance, and mentorship).

If you decide that hosting a paid trainee is not feasible for your operation, legal unpaid internships must meet the criteria laid out by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) in Fact Sheet #71 [see below]. This fact sheet defines when an intern who receives work-based training for their own educational benefit does not need to be paid under the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA). In addition, state labor laws may further define criteria for paid versus unpaid internships. Adherence to these laws is critically important in creating an effective (and legal) learning environment for beginning farmers.

Fact Sheet #71: Internship Programs Under The Fair Labor Standards Act

This fact sheet provides general information to help determine whether interns must be paid the minimum wage and overtime under the Fair Labor Standards Act for the services that they provide to “for-profit” private sector employers.

Background

The Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) defines the term “employ” very broadly as including to “suffer or permit to work.” Covered and non-exempt individuals who are “suffered or permitted” to work must be compensated under the law for the services they perform for an employer. Internships in the “for-profit” private sector will most often be viewed as employment, unless the test described below relating to trainees is met. Interns in the “for-profit” private sector who qualify as employees rather than trainees typically must be paid at least the minimum wage and overtime compensation for hours worked over forty in a workweek.*

The Test For Unpaid Interns

There are some circumstances under which individuals who participate in “for-profit” private sector internships or training programs may do so without compensation. The Supreme Court has held that the term “suffer or permit to work” cannot be interpreted so as to make a person whose work serves only his or her own interest an employee of another who provides aid or instruction. This may apply to interns who receive training for their own educational benefit if the training meets certain criteria. The determination of whether an internship or training program meets this exclusion depends upon all of the facts and circumstances of each such program.

The following six criteria must be applied when making this determination:

1. The internship, even though it includes actual operation of the facilities of the employer, is similar to training which would be given in an educational environment;
2. The internship experience is for the benefit of the intern;
3. The intern does not displace regular employees, but works under close supervision of existing staff;
4. The employer that provides the training derives no immediate advantage from the activities of the intern; and on occasion its operations may actually be impeded;
5. The intern is not necessarily entitled to a job at the conclusion of the internship; and
6. The employer and the intern understand that the intern is not entitled to wages for the time spent in the internship.

If all of the factors listed above are met, an employment relationship does not exist under the FLSA, and the Act’s minimum wage and overtime provisions do not apply to the intern. This exclusion from the definition of employment is necessarily quite narrow because the FLSA’s definition of “employ” is very broad. Some of the most commonly discussed factors for “for-profit” private sector internship programs are considered below.

Similar To An Education Environment And The Primary Beneficiary Of The Activity

In general, the more an internship program is structured around a classroom or academic experience as opposed to the employer’s actual operations, the more likely the internship will be viewed as an extension of the individual’s educational experience [this often occurs where a college or university exercises oversight over the internship program and provides educational credit]. The more the internship provides the individual with skills that can be used in multiple employment settings, as opposed to skills particular to one

If the DOL requirements for an unpaid internship program do not align with the opportunity that you hope to offer, an apprenticeship, Registered Apprenticeship, or employee may be what you are looking for.

employer's operation, the more likely the intern would be viewed as receiving training. Under these circumstances the intern does not perform the routine work of the business on a regular and recurring basis, and the business is not dependent upon the work of the intern. On the other hand, if the interns are engaged in the operations of the employer or are performing productive work (for example, filing, performing other clerical work, or assisting customers), then the fact that they may be receiving some benefits in the form of a new skill or improved work habits will not exclude them from the FLSA's minimum wage and overtime requirements because the employer benefits from the interns' work.

Displacement And Supervision Issues

If an employer uses interns as substitutes for regular workers or to augment its existing workforce during specific time periods, these interns should be paid at least the minimum wage and overtime compensation for hours worked over forty in a workweek. If the employer would have hired additional employees or required existing staff to work additional hours had the interns not performed the work, then the interns will be viewed as employees and entitled compensation under the FLSA. Conversely, if the employer is providing job shadowing opportunities that allow an intern to learn certain functions under the close and constant supervision of regular employees, but the intern performs no or minimal work, the activity is more likely to be viewed as a bona fide education experience. On the other hand, if the intern receives the same level of supervision as the employer's regular workforce, this would suggest an employment relationship, rather than training.

Job Entitlement

The internship should be of a fixed duration, established prior to the outset of the internship. Further, unpaid internships generally should not be used by the employer as a trial period for individuals seeking employment at the conclusion of the internship period. If an intern is placed with the employer for a trial period with the expectation that he or she will then be hired on a permanent basis, that individual generally would be considered an employee under the FLSA.

Where to Obtain Additional Information

This publication is for general information and is not to be considered in the same light as official statements of position contained in the regulations.

For additional information, visit our Wage and Hour Division Website: <http://www.wagehour.dol.gov> and/or call our toll-free information and helpline, available 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. in your time zone, 1-866-4USWAGE [1-866-487-9243].

It is important to note that these standards are under review, and a 2018 press release from the DOL signals more opportunity for interns [see additional resources on p. 21]



2.3 Registered Apprenticeship

One way that apprenticeship experiences have begun to be standardized across the United States is through registration with the U.S. Department of Labor. Registration of ag apprenticeships has yet to become a widespread practice, but there are examples of success which can serve as guideposts for those interested in pursuing this option

The United States Congress passed the National Apprenticeship Act in 1937, formally creating the federal Registered Apprenticeship program administered by the U.S. Department of Labor. This is a structured program designed to provide both classroom and hands-on training to aspiring professionals to become fully proficient in a particular vocational field. It is most commonly associated with the building trades such as electrical work or pipe-fitting, but DOL registered apprenticeships can be developed in a wide variety of fields, including agriculturally focused occupations. Depending on the scope of training required for proficiency in a particular occupation, the duration of a Registered Apprenticeship program can vary. Typically they last between one and four years.

The Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship (DGA), established in 2010, is the first federally recognized agrarian Registered Apprenticeship. Currently the DGA Registered Apprenticeship trains aspiring dairy grazers in nine states in a formalized program comprised of 3,712 hours of paid on-the-job training under the guidance of a Master Dairy Grazer and 288 hours of associated classroom instruction. As a federally registered Apprenticeship, DGA has created a structured curriculum that can be adopted in any state where there are farmers interested in training aspiring farmers.



A Registered Apprenticeship program must first be reviewed and approved by either the federal DOL or appropriate state-authorized labor agency and must satisfy many requirements, including:

- A structured curriculum that sets forth the number of hours of on-the-job training and of associated (often classroom-based) instruction required for completion of the program, and the relevant occupational knowledge to be learned and skills to be mastered at each stage. This program structure is often the result of a DACUM (Developing a Curriculum) process involving key stakeholders and experts. [See Chapter 4 for more on the DACUM process.]
- Sponsorship by an individual business or association of employers (for instance, a non-profit apprenticeship program connecting multiple farmers or ranchers that host apprentices). This organization is responsible for maintaining apprentice records, including on the job training hours, related instruction course completion, and pay rates, as well as assessing progress and approving graduation to Journeyworker status.
- Participants must be at least 16 years old, or 18 years old in programs determined to be 'hazardous.' In most agricultural occupations, 18 years of age will be a minimum, except in the case of Youth Apprenticeship, a high school based program that exists in some states.
- Apprentices must be paid a fair wage (often determined by the state and tied to the prevailing professional wage in the field, or a set minimum) with set increases assured as their skill level increases. They must receive all standard worker rights and protections.

Once a program is approved, it is up to the industry sponsor to select apprentices based on minimum standards, qualifications, interviews, etc. The Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship approves the mentor farmers [called Masters] and provides a pool of candidates for the Master to select from. This gives the Master full responsibility to select the right candidate for their farm over the two-year Apprenticeship period.

Some of the benefits of a Registered Apprenticeship program are:

- Recognized certification upon completion conveys the apprentice's skill set and level of training.
- Assure a consistent and complete foundational education to apprentices.
- Assure participating 'masters' of the legal footing of their training programs.
- Associated classroom instruction supplements on-the-job training/mentorship provided by masters.
- Pay received and skills to be acquired are often more clearly articulated and regulated, potentially sacrificing some personalized flexibility, but increasing confidence of particular training outcomes.
- Compensation can be higher than in other apprenticeship situations, increasing accessibility for those with financial obligations

If the Registered Apprenticeship route seems too intensive for your operation, do not despair! There are many innovative models in practice that preserve aspects of this powerful training model with mutual benefit to both mentor and apprentice. An ag apprenticeship operating under the legal requirements of an employee-employer relationship may be an appropriate solution, and there is certainly room for more creative learning-by-working relationships to be imagined.

2.4 Employee

Most often, what is casually referred to as a farm or ranch “apprenticeship” or “internship” is technically a subcategory of the legal classification of “employee.” Unless your program meets the 6-point test for a legal unpaid internship or have gone through the process of registering an apprenticeship, it doesn’t matter what you call a participant–worker, intern, apprentice, mentee, volunteer–ultimately, they should be treated as an employee and you an employer. State and federal regulatory powers do not make any distinctions between ag apprenticeships and other agricultural labor relationships. To them, ag apprentices are farmworkers.

A significant body of laws governs farmworker employment and housing in recognition of the very real need to protect workers from exploitation and mistreatment. What these laws do not recognize is the fact that the farmer-apprentice relationship goes well beyond that of simple employment to include significant mentorship and on-the-job training. As such, there is no formal valuation of the farmers’ mentorship/training in the calculus of exchange—which can make it challenging to balance the legal requirements of employment with the economic realities of running an agricultural business while also setting aside time for training and mentorship.

Generations of farmers, ranchers and ag apprentices have viewed agricultural apprenticeship as an added ‘labor for learning’ layer to the standard wage exchange of employment, and continue to do so. This exchange involves skill training for labor, but also goes far beyond in many cases to include foundational knowledge, wisdom, values, philosophies, and personal experiences that are powerful formative forces in an ag apprentice’s education and life path.

State and federal regulatory powers do not make any distinctions between ag apprenticeships and other agricultural labor relationships. To them, ag apprentices are farmworkers.

Applicable Laws

When deciding how to structure an apprenticeship program it is important to understand how relevant labor regulations apply to your particular situation. That may sound simple and straightforward, but it often isn't.

Where to start/what to consider:

- Consult an attorney!
 - Preferably someone who knows about agriculture, employment law, and local regulations
 - Farm Commons
 - Conservation Law Foundation "Legal Food Hubs"
- Determine relevant federal, state and local labor regulations
 - Department of Labor - particularly the Division of Wage and Hour (DWH), also Employment and Training Administration (ETA), Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)
 - Fair Labor Standards Act
 - Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Protection Act
 - Applicable Laws and Regulations
 - Law
 - The Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Protection Act
 - Regulations
 - MSPA Regulations [29 C.F.R. §500]
 - OSHA Housing Standards [29 C.F.R. §1910.142]
 - ETA Housing Standards [20 C.F.R. § 654]
 - Federal Register
 - Preamble to MSPA Regulations 29 C.F.R. § 500
 - Proposed Rule: Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Protection Act [03/18/1996]
 - Final Rules: Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Protection Act [03/12/1997]
 - Final Rule: Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Protection Act [05/16/1996]
 - State Department of Labor or Workforce Development, Department of Agriculture
 - County, town or other applicable jurisdictions
- Determine if you're exempt from any of these regulations
 - How is your operation classified - agricultural business, retail, service, educational, etc, a combination?
 - Are you engaged in interstate commerce?
 - Does your jurisdiction have a minimum wage? An agricultural minimum wage?
 - Does your training program meet the 6 criteria for an Internship [see above]
 - Income thresholds
 - "Man day" thresholds

Many farms and ranches that host mentor apprentices find that they are small enough to be exempt from many of these regulations. Even so, it is still important to know where you stand regarding health and accident insurance and other basic protections for yourself, your business, and your apprentices.

Additional Resources

Farm Commons Webinar: [Building a Legally Sound Intern and Volunteer Program for Farm Work](#)

Department of Labor [Factsheet](#) on Unpaid Internships

2018 DOL [Press Release](#) on Primary Beneficiary Test

Drummond & Wilson [Brief](#) of DOL Enforcement Trends

2.5 Educational Partnerships

Educational partnerships can enhance an ag apprenticeship or internship program, whether you are a farmer wishing to train individuals or an organization building a training program. Your ideal partner may be an academic institution, a nonprofit organization, or perhaps a combination of the two.



Some ways a farm/ranch internship or ag apprenticeship program could partner with an academic institution:

- As 'internship' or 'co-op' requirement
- As independent study or self-directed coursework
- Integrated into curriculum as a field/lab site
- As gap year work experience or intersession elective
- As a capstone project
- Campus educational farm
- Some example institutions and scope of partnerships
 - Land grant universities [UC Davis, Mizzou, UMass]
 - Work colleges [Warren Wilson, Sterling, Berea]
 - Private/liberal arts colleges [Hampshire, Duke, Evergreen, Deep Springs]
 - Community Colleges [Central Carolina CC, Vermont Technical College, Kennebec Valley CC]
 - Certificate programs [UC Santa Cruz CASFS, Michigan State]
 - Farms with course credit agreements [EarthDance Organic Farm School/UMSL, Book & Plow Farm/Amherst College, Ma'O Organic Farm/Leeward CC degree]

Academic institutions

Individual farmers interested in engaging with an educational partner might start by investigating internship programs at nearby universities. Many degree programs, including some agriculture degrees, require internships. Registering with these programs may be a good option to identify high quality candidates and conduct an internship with the support and partnership of the university. For Registered Apprenticeships that require related classroom instruction, there are many opportunities for educational partnerships. For its 288 hours of related instruction, Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship partners with the University of Wisconsin and two technical colleges. Technical and community colleges nationwide have a mandate to provide classroom training for skilled trades apprenticeship programs. If your local technical college offers agricultural programs, they may be interested in partnering to enhance your program with classroom training.

Articulation agreement with an academic institution:

By a prearranged agreement/MOU between the institution and ag apprenticeship program, a predetermined amount of academic credit is automatically granted to apprentices who successfully complete a specified program. This can be a formal agreement whereby an academic institution reviews and assigns specific academic credits to a particular farm or ranch's apprenticeship program or assigns credit for graduation from a particular farm training program or apprenticeship. It could also take the form of a specific curriculum or skills development list that the academic institution allows students to fulfill by arranging their own apprenticeship on the farm or ranch of their choosing. The mentor agrees to the learning objectives and signs off on their satisfactory completion. The institution may have a support staff person responsible for overseeing the students' placements and assessing any required assignments.

Credit for life experience, work experience: Short of a formalized articulation agreement, many institutions will provide academic credit for ag apprenticeships on a case-by-case basis as 'life experience' or 'work experience.' Because each institution has its own policies and culture related to this practice, it is important to look into their guidelines and talk to someone in the registrar or admissions office before selecting or structuring your ag apprenticeship, especially if it is critical to you that credit be granted. This goes for students seeking credit towards a degree—and for hosts of ag apprenticeships who might want the additional credibility or marketing edge of being able to provide academic credit.

Additional Resource

MOFGA's Apprenticeship for Credit [Partnership Document](#)



Nonprofit organizations

Many ag apprenticeships across the country are the product of a partnership with a nonprofit organization or directly managed by a nonprofit with a farmer training mission. Below are a few forms these programs might take.

Educational nonprofit as coordinating organization for a multi-farm/ranch apprenticeship program: While infinite in its possible variations, the core concept of this model is that a single organization or association serves as a connective hub for a number of individual farms or ranches that host ag apprentices. Often, the sponsoring organization maintains shared program guidelines, conducts collective promotion and advertising, and provides some type of social and professional networking for participating apprentices and mentors. As exemplified by the DGA, this model can be a point of connection for mentor farms interested in hosting a Registered Apprenticeship. Rogue Farm Corps serves this centralized role for interns and apprentices, and MOFGA and Quivira provide this service for ag apprenticeships.

Some other functions and resources provided by these sponsors may include:

- Supplementary educational opportunities for apprentices
- Shared curriculum and/or training materials
- Social connection, networking, career counseling/support for apprentices
- Professional development for mentors—often related to pedagogy and mentorship training but can also include production, business, marketing, communications etc
- Common apprentice application; some review applications and provide matching services potentially going as far as selecting and placing applicants on participating farms or ranches
- On-site support, evaluation, mediation
- Centralized administration, payroll
- Technical assistance, troubleshooting, legal services
- May charge a participation fee (to apprentices, host farms, or both) to offset educational and program costs

For-profit farms with associated nonprofit: Some for-profit farms or ranches have an associated educational nonprofit that operates an ag apprenticeship program on a portion of their land base, or that provides educational programming to complement the on-the-job training apprentices gain by working on the farm or ranch.

For-profit farms/ranches with an associated educational nonprofit

- Vilicus Farms
- Essex Farm Institute
- Individual host farms in Rogue Farm Corps, MOFGA and Quivira programs

Farm-based organizations hosting ag apprenticeships: Agricultural organizations with their own educational farm or ranch may run an ag apprenticeship program on their land with paid staff as mentors and instructors and a training curriculum tailored to their organization's mission and values. Some programs charge tuition, while others pay apprentices as employees. Often lacking the same income imperative of a for-profit agricultural business, these programs may be more focused on maximizing apprentice learning experiences over maximizing production and labor efficiency. Depending on the apprentice's individual learning style and goals, this can be a program strength or a weakness.

Organizations with on-site ag apprenticeships

- Hudson Valley Farm Hub (NY)
- The Farm School (MA)
- Stone Barns Center (NY)
- Glynwood Center (NY)
- EarthDance Organic Farm School (MO)
- Organic Farm School at Greenbank Farm (WA)

Conclusion

Each of the arrangements for on-farm learning and labor explored in the section come with unique benefits and challenges. Weighing your options thoughtfully, and returning to the self-reflection questions in the introduction of this toolkit, will help you navigate your choice. The remainder of this toolkit will emphasize the components of an ag apprenticeship that are based on the mentor/mentee relationship and the structure necessary to build a solid program on your farm.

CHAPTER 3:

Building an Ag Apprenticeship Program



In the following chapter, we provide a step-by-step guide for designing and implementing an ag apprenticeship. Meaningful engagement with this material will require some work. Have a pen and paper handy and prepare to do some digging into what motivates you and what you aspire towards. The writing suggested in this section will serve several purposes. First, clarifying details regarding your operation and approach to agriculture will prepare you to answer questions with confidence and consistency during the application process and after your selected apprentice arrives. You don't need to have all the answers ready, but it's helpful to have reviewed the basics of what you do, how you got started, why you do it, etc.

Second, having this information at the ready will save you time during the application and selection process. This is especially true for items outlined in the "Hosting and Employment" section. The more potential applicants know about what they're signing up for, the higher quality applications you'll receive. You'll head off applications from candidates who don't meet your basic requirements.

Lastly, completing the exercises in this section will help create the building blocks for your future website [discussed below]. If you already have a website, take the time now to review it and make any necessary changes or updates to reflect your apprenticeship.

3.1 The Decision to Mentor

In creating an ag apprenticeship program, there are some critical questions to ask at the outset that will inform how you structure and present your program. These questions include:

- What makes you a good rancher or farmer? What are your unique strengths and passions? What are your areas of weakness or challenge?
- What experiences and expertise will provide a valuable education to an apprentice? Which experiences or training might not be available to apprentices on your operation?
- How flexible are you? How easily will you adapt your daily routine, work schedule, and operation to include an apprentice?
- How comfortable will you be accepting critique, criticism, or suggestions from an apprentice?
- Why do you want to mentor a new farmer or beginning rancher? We recommend taking the time to fill out [this worksheet](#).

As you set out to design your own program, take the time to seek out other programs that resonate with you—no need to start with a blank slate. A few other models based on internships and ag apprenticeships are presented here:

NOFA New York [Handbook](#) for Farmers about Sustainable Ag Internships

Western SARE [Farm Internship Handbook](#)

[Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship Handbook](#)

[Quivira Coalition Agrarian Apprenticeship Toolkit](#)

What kind of a mentor are you? Mentors offering farm and ranch apprenticeships on family farms have to balance the stresses of meeting a bottom line with the time and patience required to teach an apprentice. Think about algebra: you probably took it in high school and can do it, but if you were to teach it, you would need an additional set of skills, including classroom management, organization of material, and clear communication—not just math. Being a mentor on a farm or ranch is similar, with additional caveats. Aspiring farmers are adult learners, and they bring a unique set of expectations to their apprenticeship. The best farmers aren't always the best mentors. Use this [worksheet](#) to take stock of your own experience in teaching or mentoring roles and any relevant lessons.

- **Who were the mentors who helped you throughout your life? How and why were they mentors to you?**
 -
 - **What prior experience do you have as an educator or mentor?**
 -
 - **What skills and personal qualities will best serve you as a mentor? What aspects of your personality will be challenged by the role of mentor?**
 -
- **Mentor/apprentice relationships provide mutual learning opportunities. What are you excited to learn from an apprentice?**
 -



Typical administrative activities: An ag apprenticeship program requires some additional administration. It's important to consider what you already have in place on your ranch or farm and to set aside time to deal with the administrative considerations.

- Has your operation supported employees in the past? Are the appropriate systems in place? For example:
 - Payroll and associated payroll taxes, or some other compensation package
 - Workers' compensation
 - Safety protocols
- An apprenticeship implies a focus on education, which takes time. Are you prepared to develop a structure around your ag apprenticeship? Examples might include:
 - Clearly stated expectations, a skills checklist or other tool to track progress
 - Reading list and written curriculum
 - An accessible seasonal operation calendar and work schedule
 - Regularly scheduled planning meetings
 - Monthly or bimonthly check-ins and evaluations
 - Time set aside for going over enterprise budgets, visiting other nearby farms or ranches, or training on tools or equipment not regularly used by the apprentice
 - Regular field days, workshops or pasture walks

[See **Chapter 4** for more on creating a curriculum and the education inherent in an ag apprenticeship.]

Also, as explained in **Chapter 2**, regulations govern how you can work with apprentices legally.

There are a few more practical considerations to determine if you are ready to take on apprentices:

- **Housing:** Do you have adequate apprentice housing on your property? Is it separate from your own? Does it provide some private space for each apprentice, adequate heating and/or cooling, and easy access to a bathroom, clean running water, and cooking and bathing facilities? If you do not have housing on site, are you prepared to offer a housing stipend as part of your compensation package? If housing is included as a portion of official compensation, it must meet the guidelines set forth in the Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Protection Act. (More on housing in [Chapter 5](#).)
- **Compensation:** While a learner is gaining the education and professional development you will provide in order to help them pursue the next steps in their careers, they will also need to support themselves financially while they are learning. Are you prepared to offer fair compensation in exchange for their labor? As a mentor you are gaining an increasingly skilled employee, and employees who are paid fairly are more likely to treat the learning experience as a job. (See [Chapter 2](#) for wage and hour restrictions.)
- **Other benefits:** What additional compensation are you able to offer beyond education, housing, and a monthly stipend? Examples might include regular meals, food from the ranch/farm, additional educational opportunities, such as workshops and conferences, tools and equipment, etc. Offering relevant benefits will help to attract apprentices truly interested in pursuing an agrarian career.



3.2 Laying the Groundwork

Resist the temptation to jump right into the ag apprentice search and selection process. Taking the time to get organized and make sure you and your ranch or farm are ready for a trainee will help set you up for success from the start.

Describing Your Ranch or Farm

Description and history: Start by writing a page or so about your ranch or farm. Resist the temptation to go into your philosophy or values here; just stick with the basics. They will provide an easy context for you to then go into the less tangible stuff. Use the following questions and tips to help you write your description and history:

- What do you produce on your ranch or farm?
- Where are you located? Describe your region and ecosystem.
- What are your main areas of focus and agricultural expertise? Does your operation maintain any certifications or particular styles of production? (e.g. Certified organic, biodynamic, mob grazing, veganic, etc.)
- How does your operation fit into the local and regional communities? What are the nearest towns, cultural or social centers? What kind of transportation is available or necessary?
- Who is your customer base?
- When did you start your ranch or farm?
- Why did you start your operation?
- How did you get started?
- How has your ranch or farm evolved over time?

Areas of expertise: You will likely have already addressed your areas of expertise in the description and history section. That's okay. Use this section as an opportunity to boil it down to a couple of sentences. What does your ranch or farm specialize in? In particular, what areas of expertise will ag apprentices be exposed to during their time working with you? Applicants will use this information to judge whether an apprenticeship with you is a good fit with their career goals.

Mentor introduction: This is your opportunity to tell future applicants who you are, what you believe, why



you do what you do. Write a little about your background and family, where you came from, what got you into agriculture. Talk about why this work is important to you. The quality of the relationship between mentor and apprentice can make or break the experience. Putting some careful thought into how openly you present yourself can make a huge difference in who ends up applying and how good a match they are for you and your operation.

Philosophy, mission, values: Consider the importance of working with a like-minded ag apprentice who shares or at least appreciates your philosophy and values. Even if you welcome a wide range of differing ideas and opinions, making your priorities clear from the start may help avoid or lessen potential conflicts later, especially if your ag apprentice has a different perspective or set of values. If applicants have this information before applying, then it tells you they are willing to work within the environment, expectations, and priorities you have defined.

Questions to consider include:

- Do you have a land ethic? If so, how do you express it?
- How do you define land health? How do ecological considerations fit into your operational structure and decision making?
- How would you describe your land management style? Your animal management style? Your staff management style?
- What are the most important considerations in your everyday work on your ranch or farm?
- What are your non-negotiable values or boundaries?
- How do you define quality of life for yourself, your staff, the animals in your care, the wildlife on your land?
- What are your top three to five values?
- Why do you care so much about what you do and how you do it?
- What qualities, traits, expertise do people most appreciate when working with you? What are some areas where tensions or struggle may arise?
- How would you describe a successful ag apprenticeship? What would make it an unsuccessful experience?
- What is your motivation for taking on this task of training the next generation?

Setting expectations: Before diving into the seasonal schedule of tasks and responsibilities, it can be helpful to first list and accurately describe the full range and scope of work expected to be performed and the skills to be learned by an ag apprentice over the course of a season on your operation. You should also create a parallel list of any specific requirements of employment that you expect ag apprentices to have BEFORE arriving on your farm or ranch (particular skills, certifications, ability to perform certain tasks, valid driver's license, etc.).

Typical weekly schedule: Your monthly calendar provides a general overview of all the activities you will engage in over the course of the year. In contrast, the weekly schedule is not meant to be a highly detailed document. It cannot easily reflect the change of seasons or evolution of activities, but it does provide a general sense of the rhythm and weekly patterns on your operation relevant to your ag apprenticeship. The following schedule is an example from an ag apprenticeship with a creamery in Colorado:

Sunday	Milk cows and make cheese all day
Monday	General ranch/cheese-room maintenance work, or a day off
Tuesday	Milk cows and make cheese all day
Wednesday	Same as Monday
Thursday	Milk cows and make cheese all day
Friday	Milk cows, bottle herd-share milk, time for projects (June-September: Telluride Farmers Market 7:00 am to 7:30 pm)
Saturday	Durango Farmers Market in the morning, with some rest-time following; livestock care in the afternoon.

This is not meant to be a highly detailed document, and again, is shared with applicants if they inquire and possibly with your future ag apprentice during the interview process or when they arrive at your operation.

On some ranches and farms there may be no set weekly pattern. For example, if you run a cow-calf operation, you may not have the same level of structure and predictability in your schedule as you would if you ran a dairy. If that's the case, holding a weekly team planning meeting becomes even more important.

Detailed monthly calendar: This is where you get into the nitty gritty details of your day-by-day existence. This document is typically shared with applicants if they ask to see it, or with your ag apprentice when they arrive at your operation. Create a month-by-month calendar of activities for the entire year, including important dates, seasonal priorities, and scheduled and anticipated work activities, as well as a timeline for any particular trainings and progress/evaluation check-ins. Use a format that works for you; it can be a simple outline, with the month as each consecutive heading, or it can be a classic grid calendar. If you go with the grid, consider adding a column to the left or right where you can put general activities that may not be easily assigned to a specific date.

For example, if you run a fruit tree orchard, activities included in the early spring months may include grafting, greenhouse work, pruning, planting, getting the vegetable garden going, setting up the irrigation. Activities included in late spring and early summer months might be irrigation maintenance, hand weeding and mulching, and insect and disease monitoring. Summer and fall activities might include more pruning, harvesting, and propagation.

The more details your calendar contains, the more useful it will be for your ag apprenticeship. Consider creating a version that is easily accessible to your ag apprentices throughout the season. [Some mentors use an online Google Calendar for this purpose.] This will help applicants and your ag apprentices understand the big picture flow on your operation. It will also help your ag apprentices feel more grounded by giving them an idea of what comes next, even if they don't know all the details. Finally, many ag apprentices going on to running their own ranch or farm appreciate the ability to look back at the seasonal timing of tasks as they learn to budget their own time and labor.

More than just a source of useful information, your monthly calendar will also help you structure your ag apprenticeship curriculum. It will serve as a visual reminder of what comes next as you plan your weekly team meetings or your next lesson.



Apprenticeship Structure and Curriculum

What's everyone else doing? Here's some good news: You don't need to reinvent the wheel! Many excellent agricultural apprenticeship programs already exist, and the people who run those programs are often eager to share their experience and compare notes. [That's what motivated us to create this toolkit.] We all love swapping stories about our work. So before you pull out a blank piece of paper and begin puzzling through how to design an ag apprenticeship from scratch, check out Appendix A, where we provide names and contact information for existing ag apprenticeship programs. Don't hesitate to send out an email or pick up the phone. Everyone who participated in this research project is eager to connect with others doing similar work—they are your best resources. Our hope is that this toolkit will lead to productive conversations and shared ideas and resources between programs.

Ag apprentice role: While the tasks you assign an ag apprentice may be shaped by their existing skill set and particular career goals, it's a good idea to outline what their work will be in general. If you operate a dairy, the ag apprenticeship may focus on grazing management and herd health, or it may focus on parlor management and cheese making. Take some time to reflect on what the ag apprentice's work is most likely to be. You can adjust the scope of their role according to their skills and goals, but having a general job description will help to set educational and work expectations. Many ag apprenticeships are entry level, and learning all the nuances of a complicated operation from one season of work isn't possible.

Work schedule: Most of the time, your ag apprentice's daily work flow will mirror your own. Agriculture is not a nine-to-five job, and you would be doing your ag apprentice a disservice if you didn't allow the learner to feel the reality of this career path. The ag apprentice needs this experience to be as authentic as possible in order to have the best chances of success with their own future ranch or farm. If you have a late-night calving emergency, take them along. Schedule the ag apprentice into the rotation for early morning milkings or calving checks. If the only time you're able to address an important business planning decision is after dinner, invite them to join you for dinner and work through the issue with you afterward. They will thank you ten years later when grappling with the same late-night challenges.

Keep in mind that your operation is not their operation; don't expect them to be as deeply invested as you are.

Expectations: What do you expect of an ag apprentice? [Hours to be worked in a day, days to be worked in a week, heavy physical labor, time off, non-farm expectations [babysitting, errands, other work], etc.] What level of independence do you require of your ag apprentices? What can they expect of you in terms of mentorship and physical presence? Do you have a written Farm Employee Manual?

Keep in mind that your ag apprentice needs his or her own time to take care of personal business and family needs.

Curriculum or course of study: Education is the core of an apprenticeship. A curriculum is a course of study required for students who wish to qualify for a particular profession or field of endeavor. [See [Chapter 4](#) for more on developing a curriculum.] Share it with your trainees so they know what to expect to learn from the ag apprenticeship.

Feedback and assessment: When delivered in a timely, thoughtful, and skilled manner, feedback can be a highly effective tool for both professional development and trust building. Feedback and assessment are critical to structuring and supporting the learning curriculum and to maintaining clear communication and good attitude for work that can be challenging. Scheduling regular feedback sessions with your ag apprentices at the beginning of the season will help to ensure that this piece, so important but rarely urgent, happens early and often before misunderstandings escalate. [See [Chapter 4, Section 4.3](#) for more on delivering effective feedback.]

Explain how you provide instruction, training and feedback to ag apprentices. Discuss your process for evaluating work and giving feedback, including the process for disciplinary action if necessary. [Hopefully you already have a written Farm Employee Manual that contains this and other guidelines, expectations and procedures!]

Hosting and employment: As mentioned above, the more information you offer up front about the ag apprenticeship, the more likely you are to attract a pool of well-qualified, informed applicants. Many of us have learned this the hard way. If basic information is not readily available to potential candidates before they submit an application, it may cost everyone valuable time and resources. Many applicants may not meet basic requirements or opt out halfway through the selection process when they learn the details and realize the program is not a good fit for them. When all the details are posted up front—including a basic ranch or farm schedule, ag apprentice work schedule, compensation, and housing and other benefits—you may receive fewer applications, but a higher percentage of them will be from qualified candidates. Moreover, when applicants know what they are potentially signing up for, it makes the interview and selection process more targeted and efficient. Spelling out these details also helps reduce conflicts during the season. For example, if an ag apprentice arrives knowing that they won't have internet access, they can plan accordingly to check and send email from the public library on their day off. Or, if you've clearly spelled out your expectations, it will be easier to say when an ag apprentice has crossed a boundary. [See [Chapter 5](#) for a more thorough discussion of hosting and employment.]

Basic requirements: It is not safe to assume that everyone who applies to your ag apprenticeship will understand that most agriculture requires a person to work outside, all day, every day. Make a comprehensive list of the basic physical requirements of the position you're advertising. Does the ag apprentice need to know how to back up a trailer? To be able to lift fifty pounds? To ride a horse? To work in dusty and pollen laden environments? This list doesn't need to be long, but you may be surprised by the aspects of your job that you take for granted and that candidates won't have considered.

Compensation: This will be high on the list of questions from potential applicants. As with every other item in this section, the more clear and more upfront you are, the easier and more efficient your selection process will be. While the education and mentorship they receive from you are invaluable and core parts of the experience, ag apprentices must also be financially compensated for their labor. Take some time to think about what feels like a good compensation package, including wages, housing, food, and possibly other, optional benefits (health insurance, paid time off, profit sharing, and off-ranch educational opportunities are some examples). Take into account the various expenses that your ag apprentice may need to meet (cell phone, car insurance, gas and vehicle maintenance, health insurance, food, student loans). Educate yourself regarding agriculture labor and employment laws specific to your state. (See Chapter 5 for a more in-depth discussion on compensation.)

Education: What educational opportunities are you willing to offer your ag apprentice beyond your own instruction and mentorship? For example, will you send her to specific workshops or conferences that would enrich her hands-on learning? If so, will you cover all associated costs, including event registration, food, and travel expenses? Other ways to enrich her education might include an online course or webinar series relevant to the ag apprenticeship; books or other educational materials; and visits to other operations similar to your own.



3.3 Roles and Responsibilities

For a successful ag apprenticeship, it is best to lay out clear roles and responsibilities for the ag apprentice, the mentor, any other farm or ranch staff such as a foreman or farm manager, and any support organization coordinating education or other aspects of the ag apprenticeship experience. Below are a list of responsibilities typically expected of each role:

Mentors

Experience: Mentors should have several years of experience farming or ranching, and/or demonstrated capability to mentor novices. Ideally, mentors should be farming or ranching full-time or have a full-time on-site farm/ranch manager that serves as primary mentor.

Instruction: Mentors must be prepared to show apprentices how to do each task. Many of the ag apprentices coming to farms in recent years did not grow up in a farming family or community. Good mentorship reflects the balance of clear, patient instruction and demonstration of how to do a task with appropriate space for apprentices to practice on their own as they gain competence.

Mentors should schedule time to train alongside their ag apprentices on a regular and consistent basis, train as a team with apprentices and employees, and have apprentices train independently. Apprentices should be given a diversity of tasks over the seasonal course of the ag apprenticeship to gain exposure to all aspects of running an agricultural operation.

Mentors should be sure to seek out and take advantage of teachable moments on the farm or ranch on a regular basis.

Inspiration: Giving ag apprentices a longer explanation of the purpose of a task can make a mentor feel impatient in the rush of urgent tasks in the height of the season, but it is usually a worthwhile investment of time. When an apprentice understands the ultimate goal of a task, how it fits into the overall season, they can start to get a sense of the consequences of that piece of work done well or poorly.

Feedback: For real learning, apprentices need to know what they are doing well and where they need to improve. Specific feedback that is timely while still being separated from the heat of any immediate emotions provides apprentices with concrete examples of where they should focus their efforts. Affirmation for a job well done will contribute to a positive attitude, self-confidence, and desire to continue giving their efforts to the farm or ranch.

Remuneration: The mentor is responsible for upholding their end of the employment agreement. This includes compensation in a timely manner as agreed upon.

Networking: Ag apprentices are often very new to agriculture. Mentors can support them by introducing them to resources, whether books, professional organizations or people who can further their learning.

Safety: Mentors are ultimately responsible for setting up safe situations for the apprentice's learning. This means ensuring that the dangers inherent in farming and ranching, from equipment to animals to pesticides, are clearly communicated upfront to the apprentice, that

best practices are in place. In addition, sharing the thought process behind judgment calls on business or financial matters help to prepare the apprentice for future management of their own operation.

Ag apprentice

Initiative: Ranch or farm apprentices are coming to learn, and while mentors are responsible for instructing on safety and production techniques, a healthy dose of curiosity and a drive to be a self-starter on their own education will serve an apprentice well to absorb as much from the experiences that the mentor already has under their belt.

Patience: This curiosity must be balanced with patience. Mastery of these skills takes time, and the apprenticeship is on a working farm with a bottom line. Some questions are best held for a longer discussion around the dinner table or during the slower season.

Consistency: In a skilled trade, so much of the learning comes from practice, and doing this work daily cements knowledge in muscle memory. Familiarity with the equipment, livestock, fields and plants will allow the apprentice to notice the sometimes subtle signs of things changing.

Both mentors and apprentices

Relationship management: Both the mentor and the apprentice must work to communicate their needs clearly, offer feedback and build trust. Even an experienced mentor can continue to hone their mentorship skills. Clear communication is a two-way street, and active listening is as critical as thoughtful feedback and instruction.



3.4 Finding the Right Person

Hopefully you have resisted the urge to dive into this step before having worked your way through the finer details of how your ag apprenticeship will work. Taking the time to think through and reassess the whys and how's of your business, your current infrastructure, and all the pesky details associated with bringing an ag apprentice onto your ranch or farm will essentially build the foundation of your application process.

Finding the right person takes time and effort. If the perfect candidate shows up at your doorstep without your having to search for them, consider yourself extremely fortunate. More often, the time put into designing a thorough and selective application process is well worth the effort. Good mentors take several weeks during the winter months to interview candidates—including flying them out for in-person interviews—rather than rushing through the hiring process, only to discover during the busiest part of the season that the ag apprentice is not a good fit. It's no fun to start over when the growing season is in full swing and work days stretch from dawn to dusk.

Creating a good application also takes time and effort. Do not underestimate the difficulty of this task and put it off to the last minute. In this section, we start by walking you through the logistics of the application and selection process and then bring your attention to the written application. The timeline you create by following the steps outlined below, together with the information you generated about your ranch or farm in this chapter, will prepare you for when the time comes to design an application that truly meets your needs. The written application is the culmination of all the work you will have done to that point. With this in mind, as you dive into designing your selection process, leave yourself plenty of time to devote entirely to the application—two to three weeks at least.

The application and selection process

Overview: Start by creating a step-by-step timeline for your application process, from writing the application itself through the actual ag apprenticeship start date, assigning approximate times to complete each task. For example, designate one full day to write your application and four days for interviews (one for scheduling, two for the interviews, and one to evaluate and respond to applicants).

One process developed by the Quivira Coalition involves a written application and two interviews, one by phone or video conference and one in person. Candidates fill out an online application, and then mentors and organizational staff work as a team to select up to six semi-finalists from the original pool of applications, using a general rubric to help ensure that each application is measured in the same way. Six is a good number for the initial interviews, which are conducted by video conference over the course of two days. There are usually a plentiful number of qualified applicants to choose from, which makes this doable. Often at this stage, applicants will learn something about you or your operation that was not clear to them in the materials available with the application. This new information can alter, positively or negatively, an applicant's desire to continue in the process.

For the video conference, either Google Hangouts or Skype allows visual contact between candidate and mentors. This facilitates a more thorough interaction than a simple phone call. Getting a visual of the humans on the other end of the interview often helps applicants relax and find the words to say more about themselves. They see your smile, you see theirs, and you see each other considering the questions and answers. The more comfortable the applicant is,

the more likely you are to see the real person, which helps make it possible to gauge whether or not she is the right person to work with you in the coming months.

Following the first round of interviews, the hiring team selects up to three finalists for in-person interviews coupled with work visits. This is the applicant's chance to assess the environment. Some mentor operations are remote; others are located near towns with attractions that make for a fun day off. Some operations are located in areas with particularly harsh climates. The applicant gets a sense of what the daily rhythm is at your operation, how you like to handle your day, and the kinds of interruption and unpredicted events that arise.

An in-person interview is often less about assessing an applicant's abilities and more about chemistry. You'll get a feel for the actual person and what it would be like to spend months with them. You'll be asking yourself whether you would enjoy their company over the long haul—and if they would enjoy yours. This is a great opportunity to let them know who you are. The more honest you are with each of your applicants—and they with you—the more likely you will be to make the best decision.

Components and calendar: We recommend that you begin with your ideal start date and work backward. Depending on the various steps you've settled on for your selection process, you will likely need to spread the activities over one to two months, not counting the weeks during which your application is posted before the deadline. Consider the details pertinent to your own situation and decide what will work best for you and your applicants. Once you've made a timeline, create an actual calendar with each action item and the specific date assigned to it.



Example calendar:

Oct 1	Complete application materials and apprenticeship overview Begin placing ads
Oct 15	Open application
Dec 1	Close application
Dec 1-6	Read applications
Dec 7	Select up to six semi-finalists and contact them to schedule initial interviews; send rejection notices
Dec 14-16	Conduct video conference interviews
Dec 18	Select three finalists and contact them to schedule second interviews Send rejection notices
Jan 7-15:	Conduct [separate] in-person interviews
Jan 20:	Make your final selection. Send rejection notices
Feb/Mar:	Start your apprenticeship

If you create a process similar to the one we've just described, you'll need six to eight weeks to launch, advertise, and receive applications, and then an additional six to eight weeks for the interview and hiring process. All steps should be completed at least one month before you would like to have your apprentice start. Scrutinize your monthly ranch or farm calendar closely to figure out the ideal timing to launch your application and dive into the selection process. As mentioned above, start with the ideal start date and work backwards.

Nuts and bolts

Once you have a detailed timeline for your application and selection process, you are ready to spend some time putting all the pieces of the puzzle together. Before you post the application and your advertisements, you will want to finalize the application and apprenticeship information on your website. Details like your interview outline, your acceptance and rejection letters, and next steps documents can be taken care of during the six to eight weeks leading up to the application deadline.

The application: Designing a good application takes work and careful consideration. The application should reflect materials you've already created, such as your description of the apprentice's role and your skills list. You will want to get useful information from your applicants without asking for so much that you create unnecessary work for yourself or scare off potentially good applicants. Start by making a list of possible questions, and then group them into logical categories. Begin the application with the basics (name, contact information, etc.) and then work on your list of additional materials, such as resume and references. Think carefully about the kinds of additional material that will tell you what you want to know about your applicants.

Next, write questions to gather information in three categories: experience, motivation, and creativity. It's helpful to understand a person's motivation for applying and what they hope to get out of the experience. It's also helpful to know about past experience and current skill set. Balance multiple choice questions and those that call for short answers with a few that require more in-depth responses. In most cases, you can teach the technical stuff to an ag apprentice

who has the right character and motivation, and the sheer will to learn. It's much harder to teach character, motivation, or work ethic. As you work on your questions, be careful not to ask questions that might create the possibility for discrimination [i.e. age, religious affiliation, ethnic background or race, specific medical conditions, family circumstances, sexual orientation, etc.).

Keep in mind that you must compare applications in order to winnow out the best. For this purpose, we like to use a basic rubric or scorecard that helps us evaluate each candidate fairly, according to a single standard. By breaking the application into sections, you automatically have categories for your scorecard. Create a system and stick to it for all candidates. You don't have to be committed to inviting the highest scoring applicants for an interview, but we've found this sort of tool helps us find clarity when we're trying to choose among many good applicants.

Getting the word out

If you've made it to this point, you now have all the necessary pieces to build a website or brochure about your ranch or farm and your ag apprenticeship. If you've never done it before, creating these materials can be a daunting task. Don't hesitate to ask for help; work within your technological capacity; and try to keep it simple.

Audience: First, think about who you want to reach with information about your ag apprenticeship – applicants, funders, other programs, peers? Once you identify your audience, think about how they access information. For applicants, you'll probably be targeting individuals under the age of thirty who mostly access employment and education information online. These individuals also rely on career fairs, like the New Agrarian Program Career Connection, FFA conventions, and college career counselors. You can also reach them through other ranches or farms and agricultural networks, such as granges, unions, farmers markets, and young farmers coalitions. Think about the best ways to communicate with these groups, and consider what materials you'll need to get them tuned-in to your ag apprenticeship.

Where to advertise: Getting the word out doesn't have to be expensive, but it will take time. Social media is popular and mostly free, which makes it a good place to start with a basic page about your ranch or farm and your ag apprenticeship. Consider a Facebook or Instagram account, for example. Be sure to include all of the essentials: where you're located, your agricultural focus, contact information, a link to your website and application materials, and some clear pictures that exemplify your work—perhaps even a photo or two of you and your team. Potential candidates like to see who they're communicating with.

A number of free or inexpensive and relatively easy-to-use online tools also exist for creating a unique webpage, including Wordpress.com, Squarespace, and Weebly. We recommend investing in a unique domain name [URL] that's short, easy to remember, and clearly references your ranch or farm. As part of their service, your website tool will allow you to register your domain name for a small annual fee. Think of a website as a digital brochure. Keep it simple and draw on the organization and design strategies of other websites you like. Don't reinvent the wheel.

Finally, if you have it in your budget, you might consider some printed materials, but don't overdo it. Often with print media less is more. A simple flyer or brochure that lists the bare essentials—name and location, condensed operation and position descriptions, contact info, web address, and a few pictures—can be effective and useful in many different ways. It is a good way to

make your ag apprenticeship known to career counselors and local networks and to hand out at career fairs. Also consider creating an easy-to-print PDF version of your flier to send in response to email inquiries.

In the end, your best resource for getting the word out may be other ranches and farms with ag apprenticeships. Use the resources in this guidebook to help you get the word out when you launch your application.

There are a number of venues where you can advertise your ag apprenticeship, including websites such as Idealist.org, Good Food Jobs, the Orion Magazine job board, and the ATTRA farm internships list. Print media is often less likely to reach young applicants; however, if you are hoping for local applicants, you may want to advertise in your local paper. In this case you would need to make it absolutely clear that you were offering an educational opportunity for a beginner, rather than a regular job.

We recommend creating two or three ads, different in length and level of detail. Some websites charge by the word to post ads, and you may want to be succinct. Others are entirely free or have no space limits. Either way, it's helpful to have a couple different ads ready to go. Consider including the following information: position title, term of employment, and start date, the name and location of your ranch or farm, basic descriptions of your operation and the position. You might also want to indicate wage and benefits offered or refer to your website for additional details. Don't forget to include instructions about how to apply, your application deadline, and who to contact with questions. We have found it helpful to create a list of places to advertise with details about deadlines, prices, and other requirements specific to the venue.

Posting your application: You don't want a frustrating application process to derail your best applicants, so think through how your materials are presented. If you've opted to create a website with all pertinent details about your apprenticeship, make sure everything is ready, working, and up-to-date before launching the application. Also take a little time to consider what materials applicants need before applying.

As always, work within your technical comfort zone. If you have support to create an online form, or the bandwidth to create one, young applicants will be grateful. If you'd rather post a list of questions on your website that applicants can respond to in an email, do it this way. If you want them to print out an application form, fill it in by hand, attach typed answers to longer questions, and mail it all to you by U.S. post, go that route. You want to prioritize time spent reading and reviewing applications, rather than wrangling the process, so choose the method that works suits your needs best.

Corresponding with applicants

It is helpful to be as consistent as possible in your communications with applicants. For example, you could create a pre-drafted text that can be copied and pasted into individual emails that require the same information. This save time and ensures that all applicants receive the same information. You may need to communicate with applicants a number of times over the course of the application process.

Candidates you don't want to interview: Create a rejection letter thanking candidates you won't interview. Consider including other places they might apply and encouragement in continuing down the path of agriculture.

Semi-finalists to schedule initial interviews: When inviting candidates to interview, include a schedule of interview slots (dates and times), directions on how to call in, and what to expect during the interview. Let them know the deadline for accepting the interview and that you're excited to get to know them. Follow up this email with a quick phone call to confirm the interview and answer any questions. If you prefer to call your candidates, consider making a list of what to cover during the call so you don't miss any details.

Semi-finalists you don't want to interview in person: Because this is typically a small pool, these folks deserve a personalized email or, ideally, a phone call. A thanks-but-no-thanks phone call is never easy, but having a script or a list of what you'd like to say will help. You could also follow up with a personalized email that includes suggestions for improving their application and other places they might consider applying. A candidate eliminated this year may mature and become an excellent candidate next year.



Finalists to schedule in-person interviews: As this is also a small pool, call the finalists to invite them to visit the farm or ranch. In this phone call, go over the details of the interview and then follow up with an email with the same information. Include a list of possible dates, what to expect during the visit, how to get to the site, special considerations for travel, appropriate work gear or clothing for their visit, and what to do if the candidate decides that they don't want to be interviewed. Follow up with a confirmation phone call and additional emails about travel logistics, if necessary. Finally, check in by phone, email, or both a few days prior to the visit to make sure everything is on schedule to proceed.

Interviewing candidates

Similar to corresponding with candidates, creating consistency in your interviews will help make the process and the decision more efficient.

Conference call interview script and questions: If you are working with a team to conduct interviews [staff member from a sponsoring organization, family member(s), your foreman or manager], it may be helpful to create a loose script with specific questions to be asked by designated individuals. This helps ensure that every applicant is asked the same questions and provided with the same information. It also helps ensure a smooth process for your interview team.

In-person interview schedule: Unlike the phone interview, the in-person interview is about getting to know your candidates at a more personal level. While this will feel less formal than the video interview, you may want to create a general agenda for the day and a list for yourself of questions you want to ask during the visit, to ensure consistency from one candidate to the next.

Apples to apples: In a similar way to the written application, a guide for taking notes and evaluating your interview may help you compare candidates' responses to questions. You can use a rubric based on the interview questions, which focuses on the qualities you're looking for in candidates. You can use numbers, if you're a quantitative type, or notes or descriptors, if you're more qualitative. Either way, try to create some way to make your evaluations consistent. This will enable you to feel certain of your decision about who to hire and may help you communicate with candidates about why you did or did not choose them for the position.

Key interview questions: Remember to set clear expectations and agreements with your prospective ag apprentices. Give them an accurate picture of the amount of on-farm time they will be expected to complete in a day/week/month, accommodations, meals, how much time will be spent training with you and/or crew leader vs. independently, and when you would like them to start and finish.

Sample Interview Questions

1. What kind of physical labor have you done?

Farmers and ranchers are looking for reliable people who will stay through the long and sometimes arduous growing season. Many first-time interns have romantic notions about agriculture, which needs to be tempered with some grit. The reality is that most young people today have not done a lot of physical labor and are not prepared for the very physical nature of farming or ranching.

2. What are your long-term agriculture goals? What (3 things) do you most hope to get out of this particular apprenticeship situation?

Chances are, someone who is really passionate about a future in farming or ranching will be more likely to train hard and stay through the entire season than someone who just wants an interesting summer experience. Life vision and long-term career aspirations are important, though it is equally critical to make sure that a candidate is coming in with objectives that can actually be fulfilled in your ag apprenticeship. For example, if a candidate's top three learning goals for the season are learning to put up food, fix equipment, and butcher hogs, they might not be the right fit if you plan for them to spend most of their time at market and on your vegetable pick crew.

3. Tell me about your living preferences. What do you perceive will be your reaction to living and learning with new and unknown people in a rural area?

This question will be more or less important depending on the living situation. For example, if apprentices are expected to live on site and share cooking facilities and meals, eating preferences may be a big issue.

4. Tell me about how you like to complete projects.

Asking prospective apprentices about how they like to complete projects may give mentors important insights into their attitudes about their style. This may be a difficult question for some learners to answer, so use some of these follow-up questions to get more information:

- Do you prefer to be alone or on a team?
- Do you like a lot of instruction and guidance, or do you prefer to observe and try things on your own?
- Do you prefer to start and end early or take frequent breaks? Farming and ranching schedules can be erratic; what other key commitments will you be working around? (Not that they can't be accommodated, but that they need to be a part of the plan in advance.)
- What have been your favorite tasks?

The answers to these questions will help indicate whether your styles are compatible. Compatibility will depend, in part, on your farm or ranch situation. For example, a very social person who likes to be in groups is bound to struggle in a geographically isolated location that has no other interns or apprentices.

5. Tell me about a time when you had to overcome a challenging situation. How did you handle it? What did you learn?

6. Are you comfortable with the stipend we offer?

Asking this question up front will hopefully help eliminate an uncomfortable financial situation during the season.

7. Are you able to commit to an entire season with us? [Specify the expected period.]

8. Describe the type of farm experience and skills in which you are most interested. Please mention at least three specific areas of interest.

9. Do you smoke?

10. Do you have any dietary restrictions? (e.g. Will you eat meat raised at your host's farm?)

11. Do you have transportation?

12. Can you drive a manual transmission?

13. Do you have any limitations that will affect your ability to do farm work?

14. Please share three things you think people should know about working closely or living with you.

15. What is your learning style?

16. How do you prefer to give and receive feedback?

17. What questions do you have for us?

3.5 Budgeting and Fundraising

Taking on ag apprentices can also be costly. Allowing the apprentice to take on new tasks that you could have done in half the time can be a real challenge for a small farm or ranch when labor is frequently the largest expense. In the Quivira Coalition's 2015 survey of ag apprenticeships across the United States, 30% of respondents estimated the cost of training each new ag apprentice at over \$15,000, including stipend and other compensation, room and board, staff time/travel, program administration, marketing and outreach, and application/selection. Respondents reported that funding to support their ag apprenticeship programs often came from product sales, mentor farms, charging tuition, government grants, or donations from foundations and individuals. Some sources that were mentioned less often include fundraising events and corporate sponsorships.

In formal Apprenticeship, the relationship between the sponsor and the mentor is somewhat different. The employer/mentor/Master takes on the responsibility for employee compensation. The time-frame is usually longer, from one to four years, and there is an expectation that the increasingly skilled employee is able to take on management level roles on the farm. Upon completion of their training, Apprentices might move into a management level position on the same farm or another farm, or they may even be in a position to work toward farm ownership in a succession situation. As the sponsor of this type of formal Apprenticeship, organizational expenses for Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship include program administration, staff time for local education coordinators who work with Master-Apprentice pairs, and program marketing and outreach.



3.6 Running the Program

Now that you've thought through and described your ag apprenticeship and the application process, you might want to generate a list of milestones and critical communications to ensure a smooth season with your apprentices. Throughout the application process, which can seem long and complicated, it's useful and important to focus on the end goal: a successful season with your apprentices and the long term success of your ag apprenticeship program. Consider creating a general timeline for your ag apprenticeship—similar to the one you created for the application and selection process—that will also help organize the materials generated in the “Laying the Groundwork” section of this chapter.

When your selected candidate accepts your offer, consider what happens next. Is the housing ready? What do they need to know as soon as they arrive? What will you expect of the learner in the first days of their ag apprenticeship? How will you make sure that they are oriented to your operation and the general schedule for the coming months? When will you sit down with them to sign your employment agreement?

Here is a general list of items that can guide mentors through this process and ensure a smooth season.

Before your ag apprentice arrives

Send a welcome email with details about what to expect, quirks about living where you live, things they may need to know about groceries, laundry, the library, the post office, etc. Consider sending a draft of the employment agreement, so the ag apprentice can come ready to sit down and sign it when they arrive. Also consider sending the skills list, a reading list, and any other materials you think will help them enter their new position fully prepared. If you have past apprentices, ask if they would be willing to talk by phone to your new hire. New hires may be more comfortable asking some questions of their peers than their new mentors.

When your ag apprentice arrives

Consider doing a short orientation with your apprentice including a tour of your ranch or farm, introductions to anyone they might work or socialize with, and a short tour of the surrounding area. Help them feel at home. Fine tuning the employment agreement and signing it in the first week will help alleviate potential issues later in the season. This is also a good opportunity to request that they sign a photo release and to discuss any documentation you'd like them to participate in. For example, you could have your apprentice write a short biographical statement at the beginning and a short reflection at the end of their season to use on your website as information for future apprentices and others interested in the program.

Schedule focused time to go over the skills list to establish a baseline for each skill as they begin the apprenticeship. This will help you target your teaching to where it's most needed, measure improvement, and ensure effective use of the list during check-ins. Take this opportunity to schedule check-ins for the full duration of the apprenticeship and mark these dates on the ranch or farm calendar.

Completing the cycle

Think through how your season will wrap up, how you will evaluate your ag apprenticeship, and what steps you'll take next will make your program feel more sustainable over time. Put some thought into how you want to send your apprentice back into the world. Will you celebrate together? Go over next career steps? [See Appendix B for career and next-step resources.]

Even if it's as simple as writing down the highlights and low points, creating some end-of-season documentation will help you improve your ag apprenticeship next season. Most likely you will have started your next season application process by the time you do this, but nevertheless you'll be in plenty of time to refine your process.

Ideally, what you're doing as you go through all the steps above is creating an annual routine that makes having an ag apprentice an enjoyable learning experience, a benefit to your operation, and a significant contribution to addressing the pressing need for more capable young ranchers and farmers.

Be adaptable

After you've done all your homework and created a detailed calendar and ag apprentice skills list, be prepared to let it all go if you need to. Don't be so attached to any particular schedule or curriculum component that you insist on sticking with a plan that doesn't make sense once your ag apprentice arrives or something unexpected occurs. Be flexible. You may need to adjust the skills list several times or even start from scratch, depending on unexpected circumstances on your operation or who your apprentice turns out to be. The exercise of using this chapter to create all of the components of an apprenticeship has prepared you to provide a well-tailored, highly educational experience to a capable and motivated learner. You've considered many options along the way. Those options all still exist, along with many others you have yet to consider.



Remember that you're working with a whole human made up of a complex mixture of gifts and imperfections, confidence and insecurity, dreams and demons. You probably have your own similar mixture. When in doubt, be yourself. Be honest with your apprentice and expect the same in return. Allow plenty of room for mistakes and broken things. Be forgiving. This fosters honesty when an expensive piece of equipment has been damaged and discourages the urge to hide mistakes, which in turn creates a much safer environment and decreases the likelihood of anyone being injured.

Make your expectations clear. Articulate and respect healthy boundaries. Respect theirs and respect your own. Build a framework for clear and open communication up front, and practice it regularly as a skill. This will lead to resilient relationships and a positive experience for both mentor and apprentice when unanticipated challenges or opportunities arise [because they always do!].

Bring your ag apprentice into your life. Find small excuses to celebrate on a regular basis. Make dinners for them and create opportunities for them to do the same for you. Give them an unexpected day off every now and then, especially if your team has just been through a period of especially long days and hard work. Take them with you if you're attending a community meeting or workshop off the ranch or farm. Mix it up a bit; break up the routine when you can. You may feel like your ag apprentice is a little underfoot at times, but you're going to miss them when they leave, so don't take the serious moments too seriously and remember to have fun while you can.

Finally, if you are ever feeling overwhelmed, remember that you're not alone in this endeavor. To find other farms and organizations running (or hoping to run) ag apprenticeships and other on-farm learning opportunities, visit the National Ag Apprenticeship Learning Network and join the National Ag Apprenticeship Listserv at nesfp.org/agapprenticeship.

Make your expectations clear. Articulate and respect healthy boundaries. Respect theirs and respect your own.

CHAPTER 4:

Developing Your Ag Apprenticeship Curriculum



Every ag apprenticeship has its own set of goals and priorities for its learners. Whether you're a dairy farmer hoping to provide animal handling skills, or a vegetable producer aiming to instill crop planning and business skills, you'll need to establish a well-defined curriculum to achieve your goals. In this section we provide outlines of particular types of ag apprenticeships and define main focuses of study for each of them. Since a curriculum is a key component that distinguishes ag apprenticeships from the on-the-job training that would be required for farmworkers to complete their tasks, we offer some insight from successful ag apprenticeship programs on what to include in a curriculum and how to structure the learning and the mentor-mentee relationship.

4.1 Creating an Educational Program

The word ‘curriculum’ can conjure images of dry teaching objectives we endured through our academic experiences, but the best agrarian apprenticeships feature a balanced blend of mental and hands-on learning. Ideally, your learners’ work schedule will mirror your own, and simply integrating them into the essentials of your daily habits will serve them greatly throughout the course of their apprenticeship.

Establishing clear goals and expectations for your curriculum is the biggest step towards ensuring the success of your ag apprenticeship—even simply writing down a list is a great start! There are as many ways to design and implement a curriculum as there are mentors, but a tool common to many operations is a skills checklist to track and monitor learners’ progress. This section will feature multiple examples of how to design and manage a skills checklist, as well as other tools to monitor the progress of your goals. In addition to the skills checklist, a well-rounded curriculum may include required reading, off-site or online courses, required seminars, visits to other farms or ranches, development of a personal land ethic, and outreach to prove that the learner has acquired sufficient skill to explain their farm/ranch practices and philosophy to others.

Maintaining a balance between flexibility and execution is always a mentor’s toughest job, and the design of your curriculum will require considerable forethought to reflect the realities of everyday operations. Lessons on seeding and transplanting or breeding and slaughtering will need to occur within fairly short windows, so planning and structuring your curriculum with specific dates will prove incredibly important. Ultimately, the goal is to create a curriculum with enough flexibility to circumvent problems outside of your control, like the weather, while still imparting the essentials of your field

Planning and Structuring your curriculum with specific dates will prove incredibly important.

Who is your audience?

Are you and your operation best suited to exposing newcomers to farming and ranching for the first time? Or would you prefer to focus on training people who have some experience and are already committed to pursuing ranching or farming as a livelihood? Identifying your preference and reflecting on who is drawn to your opportunity can help hone what skills your curriculum can and should cover. For example, one large Registered Apprenticeship program based in Wisconsin has Apprentices that range in age from 19 to 53, with about half of their group coming from an agricultural background or schooling, and half that are newer to farming. If you have a specific target audience—college students, veterans, previously incarcerated individuals, refugees, FFA members—think about how to tailor your curriculum to best serve their needs and goals.

Emphasis on adult learning

In an era when agricultural education is absent from most education systems, ag apprenticeships are an excellent way to achieve vocational preparation for the agrarian profession. Because most programs will train adults and/or young adults, ag apprenticeships succeed when they build their curriculum with the specifics of adult education in mind. Below is an adaptation of the primary characteristics of adult learners as originally defined by “andragogy,” or adult learning theory:



Autonomous and self-directed:

- Adult learners prefer to be free to direct themselves. Actively involve them in the learning process and serve as a facilitator for them.
- Get learners' perspectives on how to cover topics and design learning objectives; let them work on projects that match their interests with your curriculum.
- Allow learners to assume responsibility for creating and completing work assignments
- Act as a facilitator and guide learners to their own knowledge rather than supply them with the facts
- Show learners how the lessons will help them reach their goals

Foundation of life experiences and knowledge:

- Learners need to connect learning to their knowledge and experience base [family relationships, professional life, previous academic experience]
- Draw out participants' experience and knowledge relevant to the topic
- Relate theories and concepts to the learners' lives; acknowledge the value of their experiences as they relate to the current learning situation

Goal-oriented

- Learners usually know what they want to attain; good organization and clearly defined elements on your part will help them accomplish their goals and yours
- Show learners how your program will help them attain their goals
- Clear goals and course objectives should be presented early

Relevancy-oriented

- Learners must see the reason for learning something new – it must be readily applicable to their work or other responsibilities and goals in order for them to see its value
- Try to relate theories and concepts to a setting that is familiar to learners
- Allow learners opportunities to choose projects that reflect their interests

Practical

- Learners may not be interested in knowledge for its own sake. Let them know explicitly how the lesson will be useful to them on the job

Respect

- Acknowledge the wealth of experiences that learners bring to the apprenticeship. Learners should be treated as equals as persons with experience and knowledge, even when you are far more experienced in agriculture than they are

Given these realities, curriculum can be viewed as a map pointing out key features of the ag apprenticeship opportunity, identifying both the goal as well as the route to get there.

Learning styles

There are a number of tried-and-true tools that will help you design a curriculum that can 1) teach the agricultural skills your ag apprenticeship offers; and 2) adapt to allow relevance, personalized goals, and self-direction for your mentee. One such tool is the concept of learning styles or learning preferences. There are many well-vetted learning style instruments, some tailored more easily to adult learners and to the apprenticeship setting. Using one of these tools to learn more about your preferred learning methods will help you determine how you teach, and how to adapt your curriculum to be effective for different types of learners. You can also incorporate using one of these into your curriculum, to help both mentees and you create the most effective learning and working situation for all of you.

A successful mentor will need to foster an experience which works for the learning styles unique to their demographic. Special attention will need to be paid on the specific timescales and methods by which adults are able to learn, and teaching objectives should accommodate a broad learning spectrum.

Examples of common learning styles include:

- Visual
- Auditory
- Kinesthetic or Experiential

The types of learning experiences you create will depend on the resources you have available, but should strike an optimal balance between variety and consistency. It is important to acknowledge that each of your mentees may learn differently, and discovering your mentees' different learning styles will help ensure that everyone thrives. For example, a lecture-style lesson on dairy cow milking may familiarize your visual and auditory-learning mentees with the methods involved, while a follow-up a hands-on lesson will help your kinesthetic learners better engage with the material. Additionally, giving your learners articles on the material at hand is a great way to supplement their learning outside of required work hours, and can encourage them to further research the material on their own.

Additional resources on facilitating adult learning can be found here:

Multiple Intelligences:

<http://www.literacynet.org/mi/assessment/findyourstrengths.html>

Keirsey Temperament, a variation of the Myers-Briggs Types:

<http://www.keirsey.com/sorter/instruments2.aspx?partid=0>¹

Auditory, Visual and Kinesthetic Learning:

<http://www.mhhe.com/ps/hrelations/general/learninven.html>

C.I.T.E. Instrument:

<http://www.deldhub.com/pdf/CITE%20Learning%20Styles%20Instrument.pdf>

Facilitating Adult Learning:

http://www.canr.msu.edu/od/uploads/files/pd/facilitating_adult_learning.pdf

https://www.osha.gov/dte/grant_materials/fy11/sh-22240-11/HowAdultsLearn.pdf

The DACUM Process

The DACUM Process, an abbreviation for “Developing A Curriculum,” is a tool created by Ohio State University to outline occupational profiles for the purpose of establishing peer-developed standards in a particular industry. DACUM facilitators work with five to eight “panel experts,” in our case veteran farmers and laborers, to define the key tasks and duties associated with successful outcomes.

Not only do these charts help to elaborate on the expectations required of new learners, they help managers define and map their overall ag apprenticeship curricula and goals. DACUM charts are best used as a template of detailed skills assessment, through which progress and achievement are explicitly defined and formally recognized. The formality and credibility of a DACUM skills assessment may also prove helpful for programs seeking accreditation or grant funding.

Each educational topic may be organized chronologically, or in order of importance for the particular occupation. Each topic’s main goals are delineated horizontally in a clearly numbered system, allowing for succinct referencing.



Additional Resources

[Sample DACUM](#) Occupational Profile for Northeast Small Scale
"Sustainable" Farmer

Establishing expectations

A well-crafted application process and curriculum will clearly define the learning objectives and opportunities of your agricultural training program. If this is done well, your learner will arrive on site with a basic sense of what their work schedule will be and what educational opportunities are built into the program. Age, educational background and work experiences may mean your mentee has different expectations than you do as to how the learning occurs, how it is measured and monitored, and what types of support they will receive from mentors. Therefore, it is essential to clarify both the work and educational expectations at the beginning of the ag apprenticeship.

Employers give employees a work schedule, list of responsibilities, and compensation details. Mentors provide these as well, but need to go a step further. Mentors need to explain the way lessons will be offered (i.e. if there are separate days or sessions for lessons and others for work, or if lessons are rolled into the workday). Mentors also need to discover what expectations the learner has regarding how much time they will have with the mentor and whether self-study or other non-work hour research or classroom training is expected of them. Both parties need to know how feedback will be offered and who initiates a check-in or feedback session.

A thorough compilation of strategies for exploring and clarifying expectations and the mentoring relationship can be found [here](#).

The table below, adapted from The Mentor's Guide, by Lois J. Zachery, is a sample of the questions to discuss in order to clarify expectations.

Outcomes	Questions to Answer
Well-defined goals	What are the specific learning outcomes desired from this mentoring relationship?
Success criteria and measurement	What are the criteria for evaluating successful accomplishment of learning outcomes? What is the process for evaluating success?
Delineation of mutual responsibility	Who will be responsible for what?
Ground rules	What are the guidelines we will follow in conducting the mentoring relationship?
Confidentiality	How do we protect confidentiality in the relationship?
Boundaries	What are the not-to-exceed limits of this relationship?

Protocols for addressing stumbling blocks	What stumbling blocks might we encounter? What process should we have in place to deal with them as they occur?
Consensual mentoring agreement	What do we need to include to make this agreement work for us?
Work plan for achieving goals	What are the steps for achieving the goals?

Another useful tool for clarifying expectations and mutual responsibilities is offered in [Skills for Successful Mentoring: Competencies of Outstanding Mentors and Mentee](#), by Linda Phillips-Jones

Mentee-Specific Skills	Shared Core Skills	Mentor-Specific Skills
Committed learner	Listening actively	Instructing capabilities
Showing initiative	Building trust	Providing corrective and supportive feedback
Following through	Encouraging	Managing risks
Managing the relationship-taking responsibility for getting the training you need	Identifying goals and current reality	Opening doors

One way to be sure that you both fully understand expectations is to create a Mentoring Agreement, as suggested in The Mentor's Guide. Some programs include expectations and protocols in their employment contracts. Alternately, these things can be spelled out in a Memorandum of Understanding, a Learning Contract, or notes from an initial meeting, which you both sign in order to be sure you have similar takeaways from the conversation. The Mentor's Guide offers tools to help craft such agreements.

An abbreviated explanation of a mentoring agreement can be found in the article [Making a Meaningful Mentoring Agreement](#), by Lois J. Zachery.

SAMPLE MENTORING PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

Goals:

We will assess the incoming skill and knowledge level of the learner and use the program's curriculum and experiential opportunities to develop professional agrarian skills in the learner.

We will actively build a mentor/learner relationship that supports this learning and provides labor to the host site that applies this learning.

We will develop a professional network of people and organizations that will help the learner move forward professionally at the end of the apprenticeship.

We have discussed the process by which we will collaborate on the development of a learning plan. In order to ensure that our relationship is a mutually rewarding and satisfying experience for both of us, we agree to the following:

1. Learning plan

- We will review the curriculum and skill sheets and set up specific learning trajectories built into the regular work environment.
- We will identify specific skills that require additional one-on-one instruction or mentoring and opportunities for corresponding mentorship.
- We will regularly communicate about the learning process, identify areas in need of more focus, and jointly create strategies to foster this learning.
- We will consider the long-term professional goals of the learner when assessing focus areas.
- Mentor will assist learner in creating a holistic goal to be used as part of the curriculum and as a prompt for identifying useful professional contacts and post-apprenticeship opportunities.

2. Additional learning opportunities

We have identified, and will commit to, the following specific opportunities and venues for learning beyond the on-site curriculum:

- Learner will attend the host organization's annual conference.
- Learner will attend two land restoration workshops.
- Learner will accompany mentor to meetings with the Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service.
- Mentor will introduce learner to key resource people in the community so learner can set up learning days with them.

3. Confidentiality

Confidentiality for us means that what we discuss remains between us. Mentor and learner will agree ahead of time whether specific information is to be shared with anyone else.

4. Ground rules for the relationship

Our ground rules will be:

- We will meet every Monday morning to discuss the work week, priorities, deadlines, etc..
- We will be on time to meetings and will refrain from answering the phone, email, etc. during these meetings unless an emergency arises.
- We will bring up conflict or problems when they arise, rather than waiting and letting the problems worsen.
- We will listen respectfully and compassionately to one another and offer our ideas and labor to benefit each other and the business and learning environment.

5. Plan for feedback and evaluation

Check ins and skill sheet meetings will be scheduled as needed, but no less frequently than a check in every 3 weeks and a skill sheet meeting every 2 months. We will come to these meetings prepared, on time, and with open minds ready to both give and receive honest, helpful feedback to one another.

Monitoring and maintaining

If your curriculum includes a skill sheet or other document that outlines educational goals, review the incoming skill level of your learner in conversation with the learner. Consider including a skill category that encompasses any expectations that aren't currently in your skill sheet. For example, some programs include a category titled "Workplace Ethics and Etiquette" that lists communication and conflict skills, expectations regarding work schedule, check-ins and group meals.

Together you can create a reasonable yet challenging learning trajectory that names your overall expectations, as well as clear educational objectives and action steps that lead to completion of goals. This personalized learning plan can be used to monitor the learner's regular engagement with both built-in learning opportunities and self-study, which will help you gauge whether or not they are fulfilling their responsibilities as adult learners. These learning plans easily grow out of regular check-in meetings and can be altered, refined, and updated as the learner acquires competency.

Sample learning plan

Objective:learn forage plants for cattle	Task/Process	Resource	Target Date
Intro to range	Field day	Cindy Villa, NRCS range specialist	May 1
Field guide use	Carry with me	Ranch library	April 15 on
Plant journal	Gather from range	Self, Mentor	April 15 on
Nutritional value	List with drawing/ image of plant in journal	Mentor, Cindy	May 15
Know primary plants on sight	Take field guides and journal with me to range	Self study	June 1

The best way to monitor and maintain expectations is to build a work and learning environment characterized by mutual respect, trust, and clear and frequent communication. While some learners will have work and life experience in such a workplace, many will not. Therefore, mentors will need to model the type of respect they want to receive and be proactive in creating honest and effective communication. Both of these will build the level of trust necessary for your learner to embrace challenging feedback and push themselves to learn and work as hard as they can. Elements that build respect, trust and communication include:

- Listening to the learners' ideas without immediately discounting them
- Authenticity in the beliefs and feelings that are the basis of your business and teaching
- Explaining what you understand and acknowledging when you don't know the answer
- Explaining when you change a plan or task
- Be consistent and true to your word
- Be supportive publicly and privately
- Maintain confidentiality
- Request honest feedback on your mentoring

A weekly team meeting to discuss work schedule, assign duties, identify learning opportunities and discuss any personal needs will help you keep on top of how well you and the learner are meeting your expectations of one another. The more regularly you have such meetings, the shorter they will be and the more likely it is that you will identify a problem before it becomes unwieldy or hard to discuss.

No matter how thoroughly you discuss and agree to expectations, there will be times when either your learner or you find it hard to fulfill them. Think through the schedule of work tasks and learning opportunities to predict when you or your learner will experience challenges. Some site-based reasons are:

- Repetitive chores over a long stretch of weeks
- Exhaustion due to busy schedule, long days, tough weather
- Being too busy to focus on teaching/learning new skills
- Being too busy to have informal or more formal check-ins and feedback sessions
- Natural plateaus in learning; a skill that was exciting becomes rote
- The end of the "honeymoon" period of the apprenticeship
- Expecting the learner to learn more quickly than he or she can

Let your learner know that repetition, boredom, tiring schedules and other site-based challenges are normal, and that it's fine to bring these up in your conversations. If you know that your learner is experiencing these things, you may be able to find proactive ways to change the schedule, add in a spontaneous learning event, or just talk about what's hard about an agrarian lifestyle. Your learner will maintain their good humor and commitment to the work and learning if they know their "ups and downs" are recognized, and efforts are made to address them.

Events external to the work site, occurring in the learner's private life or yours, can also impact meeting expectations:

- Personal upheaval, such as the death of a friend or family member
- Illness
- Relationship issues

If you have already invested in building a mentoring relationship of respect, trust and consistent communication, it is more likely that your learner will voluntarily tell you they are struggling with a task, skill, or with the schedule. It is also more likely that you will be able to accept your part of situation that has created difficulty for yourself or your learner.

For more information on how to monitor expectations and mentee responsibilities, see section 4.3 of this chapter.

4.2 Writing the Curriculum

To succeed, aspiring farmers and ranchers need a wide array of skills. Few other professions require such broad competency, ranging from a solid understanding of plant and animal biology and ecology and mechanical ability to physical strength and stamina, financial management and business acumen. Critical to an apprenticeship is a clear agreement between the mentor and learner on the type of educational opportunities afforded through the experience. Setting out a clear list of skills that a learner can expect to gain is a core piece of your curriculum, and sets the framework for evaluation of the learner's progress. This section includes lists of skills commonly required and taught in agricultural training programs. Some skills will apply broadly to almost all operations, while others will apply just to some specialties.

Offering farm curriculum in collaboration with other farms or umbrella programs

In 1994, the first Collaborative Regional Apprentice Farmer Training (CRAFT) was formed. A group of farmers in western Massachusetts and upstate New York recognized that they were all spending time educating their own ag apprentices on some of the same aspects of managing a farm, from soil science and tractor safety to crop planning and post-harvest handling. They started meeting every winter and divvying up responsibility among the mentors for delivering lessons on their topic of expertise and gave their apprentices time to travel to each other's farms. This allowed for apprentices to learn from a broader group of mentors, to connect with other beginning farmers, and to see a broader range of farming operations.

Similarly, a number of new ag apprenticeship umbrella programs have started offering some of the core curriculum to apprentices from multiple farms and ranches. For example, one program supporting learners on ranches and regenerative agriculture operations across the western United States incorporates an orientation for learners, and an online course in Holistic Management and attendance at a conference for both learners and mentors. Another farmer training program in the Pacific Northwest supports ag apprentices on commercial farms with orientations, classes, farm tours, discussion groups, social networking, on-farm skill assessments, and mediation services.

A registered Apprenticeship program in the Midwest conducted a formal DACUM and developed a standardized curriculum that is used by all approved Masters bringing Apprentices through the program. Because it operates in several states, there is flexibility built into the program to adapt to local climate, market and cultural conditions. They found that their Masters have very different financial management approaches and were often reluctant to share this personal information with their Apprentices. To ensure that Apprentices get a consistent, comprehensive grounding in financial and business management, they added a required online course.

Daily tasks and overview: While farm and ranch work may vary from day to day with the weather, season and schedule, sharing with your learner what the expected tasks are can be very insightful to their future planning and to their mental and physical preparation for the work day. Expectations about when work begins and ends should be communicated clearly to the learner in the application process, along with giving them an idea of what your day looks like. On any farm or ranch, there are always more tasks to be completed than hours in the day. A key lesson for any learner on your farm is how to prioritize tasks. A regular meeting every week or every morning is a good tool to share with the learner why some tasks are more timely than others.

For your curriculum: As a mentor, it becomes incredibly important for your time-management skills to provide boundaries and expectations for both yourself and your learners. Successful curricula will often establish time allotment expectations, in terms of hours or weeks, for each task or skill right at the get-go. Below is an example from an organic produce farm:

Workplace ethics and etiquette: On many ranches and farms, ag apprenticeships draw interest from young adults, some of whom have not held a job before. In addition, living situations on farms or ranches can be isolated and learners may live close to mentors with few other close neighbors. This can create more pressure on the mentor-learner relationship and heightens the importance of respectful communication. Below is a list of skills essential for a learner to succeed in the training program and in agriculture afterwards.

- Adaptable to changing schedules
- Reliable; good follow through
- Punctual; good time management
- Open and clear communication; good listener
- Inquisitive, engaged, eager to learn, self-motivated
- Observant / attention to detail
- Proactive, sees what needs attention, anticipates needs
- Friendly, polite, engaged with mentors and other crew
- Physical fitness and stamina
- Good self-care; shows up in morning rested and ready to go
- Able to express needs
- Able to ask for, receive, and act upon feedback
- Good stress management



Using and maintaining farm and ranch equipment

Most modes of farming production require the operation of some form of machinery. The success of any operation depends on knowing the conditions of your equipment. The operation of large, technical equipment will become part and parcel of the farming and ranching experience for many young agriculturists, and the ability to teach the skills necessary to operate and maintain this machinery is pivotal to the success of your learners. The mentor does not need to expect to train their ag apprentice on all equipment. If you prefer to bring on a learner who already has some basic equipment skills, that should be spelled out during the hiring process. Each type of operation will feature equipment unique to its field, and may include:

- Tractors
- Large trucks, e.g. box trucks or dump trucks
- Planters and seeders
- Tillage and harvest attachments
- Cultivation and weed management equipment
- Balers and other hay equipment
- Spray systems
- Fertilizer applicators
- Washing stations
- Milking stands and machines
- Brooding and culling infrastructure
- Livestock handling equipment
- Energy improvement equipment, e.g. digesters, solar panels
- Irrigation systems, e.g. sprinklers, drip tape or flood irrigation

Equipment skills

- Truck / tractor / equipment basic operation
- Truck / tractor / equipment troubleshooting and mechanics
- Changing a tire
- Changing the oil
- Operation of hand tools
- Operation of power tools
- Operating manual transmission
- Chainsaw safety / maintenance / operation
- Backing up a trailer
- Basic welding
- Walk-behind tractor operation and maintenance

Safety: First and foremost, fundamentals of equipment safety need to be instilled in the everyday habits of your learners. Operating heavy machinery can often prove dangerous or even fatal, so even the most basic skills must be replete with safety guidelines. Because they are so widely used across farming sectors, let's explore safety principles regarding tractor operation. When operating a tractor, the essential skills you teach must involve each tractor's nuances, such as appropriate speed, slope, and level and gear positions. Often when learning to operate new equipment, it's helpful to explicitly state what should never be done, and some distinct indicators that may signal danger.

Similar principles apply with the application of herbicides and insecticides because they will expose your learners to toxic chemicals if they are not used safely. The proper use of protective gear and equipment operation must be demonstrated until you are definitively certain that your learners can operate these skills on their own.

Maintenance routines: Not only will the acquisition of equipment need to be considered carefully, deciding when to use it will also require a well-thought out plan. If you are hosting learners year-round, you can use the winter to focus on machinery repair; otherwise, these lessons will have to be peppered throughout the growing and harvesting seasons. Equipment manuals and maintenance schedules can be useful background reading to provide. Whether you perform most of the maintenance yourself or pay to have your equipment serviced, planning and sharing a maintenance routine with your learners will help to build healthy habits.



Production Skills: Crops

Below is a list of some basic crop management skills different types of operations offer learners.

Plant cultivation and management - general

- Plant ID (crops and weeds)
- Weed control strategies
- Plant pathology and pest ID (insects, diseases, etc.)
- Pest management strategies
- Basic soil science
- Basic plant science
- Harvesting
- Post-harvest handling and storage
- Preparing seedbeds and planting
- Irrigation installation and maintenance
- Compost making / processing / using
- Soil fertility management
- Cover cropping
- Crop planning and rotations
- Soil testing and interpretation of results
- Seed saving

You will most likely want to include many more specific skills depending on the type of operation. For example:

Orchard management

- Holistic orcharding
- Bench grafting
- Bud grafting
- Tree pruning
- Fruit production/processing/marketing
- Tree planting and transplanting
- Tree and shrub handling, loading, unloading, tarping
- Basic knots

Or:

Vegetable management

- Greenhouse management and seed starting
- Crop varieties and selection
- Vegetable plant families, shared characteristics and pests
- Weed management options [e.g. black plastic, mechanical cultivation, living mulches]
- Specifics of the growing system [e.g. planting and harvest schedules, bed spacing]
- Vegetable crop management specifics [e.g. trellising and pruning for tomatoes, stale seedbed method for planting carrots]
- Crop-specific storage requirements
- Assessing harvest readiness and on-the-spot quality control

Production Skills – Livestock

Below we list skills that learners on most livestock operations will learn.

Animal health and nutrition

- Low-stress animal handling principles
- Feeding and watering: timing, method
- Nutritional needs - different age classes, breeding, lactating, etc.
- Mineral supplementation
- Diseases/conditions and diagnosis
- Basic veterinary procedures [e.g. vaccination, drenches, docking and castration]
- Proactive health management
- Breeding and genetics
- Birthing [calving, farrowing, lambing, hatching, etc.]
- Animals' impact on land, suiting animals to land base

You will most likely want to include many more specific skills depending on the type of operation. For example:

Dairy management

- Measure and manage pastures for optimal quality and quantity
- Manage cattle appropriately-heifers/dry cows, calves, milking cows
- Manage milking operations
- Assess dairy nutritional needs
- Evaluate grazing and dairy farm information for effective decision making
- Manage soil and water resources for productivity and health
- Manage farm business operations profitably
- Basic cheese-making

And/or:

Pasture and grazing management

- Basic soil health/ecology
- Grass, plant, and forage identification
- Forage availability: cool and warm season grasses
- Forage nutritional quality: lignification
- Forage sampling and analysis
- Making a grazing plan [stocking rate and animal density; herd effect, animal impact; time - overgrazing and undergrazing]
- Critical periods: lambing/kidding/calving; breeding; water availability
- Drought reserve
- Monitoring issues: biodiversity, land health, utilization, bare soil, weeds, erosion, soil porosity, litter cover, bare ground
- Setting up and moving portable electric fence
- Manure composting / management
- Soil fertility and nutrient management
- Pasture management
- Holistic Management essentials
- Managing animals to heal the land [recovery periods, animal days per acre, ecosystem/wildlife needs]
- Water point placement

Business and financial skills

Record keeping: Good record keeping is a cornerstone of every successful farm. Luckily it's never been easier to keep your crop, business, and financial records straight with the development of software tools and templates. Integrating record management into your curriculum, especially in early in the planning stages of the season, will establish firm habits for your learners to monitor your crops and finances all year long. See the resource box on this page for a list of tools for your various record keeping needs; many require subscriptions, but many are also free and open-source.

Regulatory responsibility

As with all sectors of agricultural production, knowing the regulatory framework surrounding your operation is a particularly crucial skill to impart upon your learners. Food safety is of utmost concern as a dairy or meat producer, and is constantly changing at various local, state, and federal levels. In addition, if your farm or ranch is certified organic, certified humane, Demeter certified, etc., these regulations will need to be clear to your learner. You'll need to devote specific time to explaining any other relevant regulations to your learners to prepare them to enter the market as compliant producers – for example, water law bears significantly on agricultural practices in the western United States, and food safety regulations may be especially critical for any operation doing further processing on site. Establishing a connection with your local extension officer and USDA service center can certainly help streamline the process, as can frequenting your municipalities' websites to keep you and your learners up to date with regulatory information. Farmcommons.org has compiled an overview of the food safety regulations and when to talk with regulators, with a focus on produce operations.

Record keeping tools

Crop planning

- Crop Planning Software*
- Cabbige
- COG Pro
- AgSquared
- Every Last Morsel, Todd Jones*
- Farmier

CSA management

- CSAware
- Member Assembler*

Livestock

- CattleMax

Financial

- Quickbooks
- Holistic Management*
- GnuCash
- Xero
- NolaPro
- LessAccounting
- Zoho Books

*denotes free and downloadable material

Business planning and finances

Unlike apprenticeships in other trades where trainees typically go on to working for other operations, farming and ranching mentees must be trained to start and manage their own businesses. In addition to the hard skills, mentors must also educate learners on entrepreneurship, business savvy and financial basics. Here is a short list of some of the skills mentors should cover:

- Annual budget / planning
- Developing a business plan
- Quickbooks / record keeping
- Market research
- Marketing / designing packaging
- Website design / maintenance
- Understanding certification processes
- Customer service
- Supervising others
- Planning and facilitating weekly team meetings
- Time management
- Equipment investment and depreciation

Capital expenses and infrastructure: As with all other expenses, budgeting for the purchase or borrow of farming equipment is an incredibly important skill to develop. The costs of large-scale equipment, especially motorized vehicles and attachments, often account for the largest proportion of farm expenses, so these investments must be considered carefully. When you discuss business planning in your curriculum, be sure to include to costs and benefits of owning equipment vs. leasing equipment, which will depend on the short- and long-term objectives of the operation. It is also important to note that equipment will depreciate over time, which will affect your budgeting framework. Likewise, learners will benefit from exposure to mentors' considerations when investing in new infrastructure or any other capital expenses. Many learners will likely aim to someday start their own operation, and capital investments are likely to be very relevant to their first years of starting up.

Holistic Management International has a free download of their [Financial Planning Manual](#).



Organic and Beyond Organic: special considerations

Organic agriculture apprenticeships have become increasingly popular in recent years, and have expanded into more complex systems of holistic management such as ecological agriculture and biodynamic farming. It's important to realize that each of these styles will feature a unique set of learning objectives from other methods of farming. As any organic farmer knows, there are specific regulations and practices that pertain to the organic label, and learners should be aware of the attention to detail required to maintain an organic operation.

There are online resources available for nearly every type of organic and holistic management style:

- Demeter Association and Biodynamic farming
- Rogue Farm Corps and ecological agriculture
- The Quivira Coalition and holistic management
- Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service: www.mosesorganic.org
- ATTRA: <https://attra.ncat.org/organic.html>
- eOrganic <https://eorganic.info/> (National Extension organic learning community)

These resources provide guidelines for how to comply with the various standards and can inform how you organize your curriculum. The National Organic Program, a division of the USDA, is responsible for developing the standards for organic certification and provides up-to-date information on regulations and guidelines.

4.3 Feedback and Assessment

"A good evaluation is one from which students can learn."

Stephen Brookfield, *The Skillful Teacher*

When delivered in a timely, thoughtful and skillful manner, evaluation can be one of the most effective tools for both professional development and trust building between learner and mentor. Feedback is criticism in its truest sense; not solely negative or punitive, but an analysis of both positive elements and places in need of corrective actions. Well-timed, detailed praise can catapult a learner to a bolder commitment to both their education and your operation or program. And specific corrective feedback can redirect their energy towards better skill development and judgment.

As the mentor, you set the tone for any kind of feedback or assessment process. The best way to be sure you and your learner commit to regular and effective feedback is to affirm the learner's efforts and accomplishments, no matter how small, and provide concrete suggestions for improvement when you bring up problem areas.

Effective evaluations, be they informal or formal, are built from a combination of tools, skill, and commitment on your part. It is easy to focus on tools. Rubrics in particular have become commonplace for good reason: they make concrete and measurable the specific skills the learner must acquire for successful employment after their apprenticeship. But tools alone can be, in the words of educator Stephen Brookfield, a "scoundrel's refuge," a hollow exercise of quickly filling in boxes with little conversation. Rubrics and other tools are best used as springboards for interactive conversation regarding where the learner is progressing well and where they are stuck. Some tools that can be effective catalysts are offered in the Tools section of this chapter.

Types and Frequency

Types of feedback: Many programs find that a mix of feedback types are the best way to make sure that evaluation is useful and results in improved performance and renewed enthusiasm for learning. Evaluation and feedback can be offered informally and formally, and depending on the nature of your program, a blend of these two is likely. Regardless of whether all your feedback sessions are informal and spontaneous, or scheduled, focused meetings, the following list of feedback modes offers something that can work in your framework.

- Overall well-being
- Skills Assessment, both technical skills [e.g. tractor use or bookkeeping] and interpersonal/leadership skills [e.g. communication, conflict resolution, time management]
- Learning process
- Self-assessment by learner
- Self-assessment by mentor on her/his mentoring

Tools for each of these types of feedback are offered in the Tools section of this chapter.

Frequency: While this is often determined by work schedule and personal preference, it is essential that feedback happen in a timely manner. If a problem is starting to manifest, the sooner it is handled the better for all involved. Timeliness also reminds both mentor and learner of the educational nature of the commitment made to one another, which can get buried under the crammed workload on a busy farm or ranch. Some operations schedule a weekly “Team Pulse” check-in, to find out how each person is doing overall and to determine if a longer time slot is needed to discuss a learning challenge, a misunderstanding or conflict. Informal, daily or weekly conversations as part of your work culture will help everyone become more comfortable with giving and receiving feedback, and build the trust necessary for harder conversations that might need to happen.

Many programs find a mix of informal and formal sessions are most likely to 1) actually fit into the schedule, and 2) build trust and commitment to the feedback process, which is often unfamiliar or stressful for both learner and mentor. First, informal conversations can provide useful insights for both of you. As you have time for conversation on the job, or in a daily debrief session, ask them what they found most interesting in the day’s tasks.

Timeliness reminds both mentor and learner of the educational nature of the commitment made to one another, which can get buried under the crammed workload on a busy farm or ranch.

If you have some specific comments on a job well done or on how they can improve the skills they used that day, this is a great time to share them. Likewise, invite them to offer observations in return. Were your instructions clear and easy to understand? Did you spend enough time working next to them to make sure they took them in?

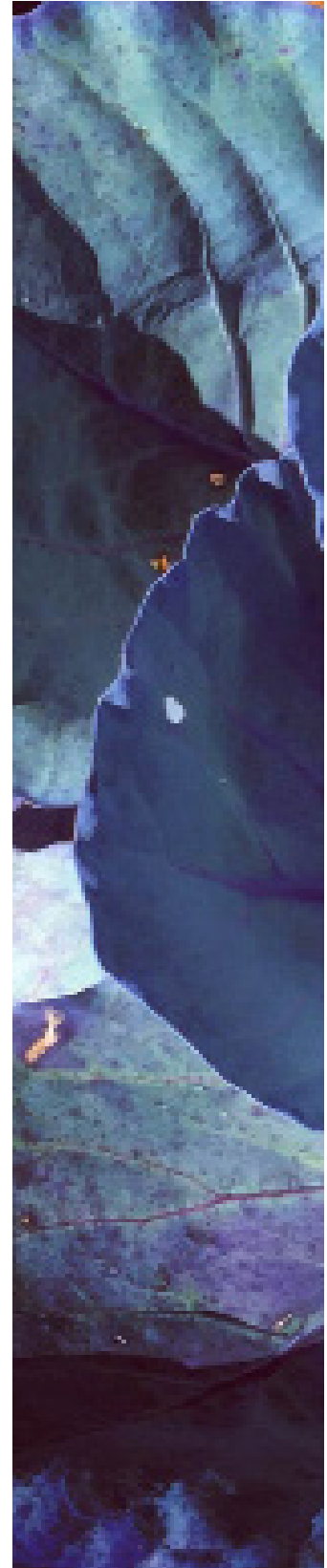
Secondly, more focused conversations offer opportunities for you or the learner to cover specific issues or topics. For example, you might want to highlight major improvement in two skills over the past two weeks, and also bring up a time when the learner lost their temper with a co-worker.

The third type of feedback session is a skills assessment, often scheduled at regular intervals, say every two months during an eight-month apprenticeship. The mentor and learner pull out the skill sheet, and discuss what they have learned, and what next steps they can take to further their learning. If a specific skill, say welding, requires a special time set aside, consider scheduling it when you discuss it. This is also a great time to talk about where the learner has stalled in developing a particular skill, and brainstorm ways for them to kick-start learning or get additional instruction from you. While these sessions offer the perfect opportunity to discuss the learner's skill progression in detail, be sure to leave some time for them to let you know how you're doing as a mentor. Are you adjusting your teaching style to their learning needs? Do you take the time to answer their questions? Do you take their professional goals into account as you schedule daily tasks on the ranch or farm?

Whether it is a spontaneous conversation or a formal meeting approach feedback and assessment with these questions lodged in your mind and heart: "What can this person learn from my comment? What can I learn from theirs?" If you approach feedback with the learner's growth and goals at the forefront, your conversations will be thoughtful, engaged, and productive for you both.

Regardless of the tools you use or the frequency with which you have feedback sessions, specificity is key. Vague, unspecific complaints, especially if blurted out in frustration or impatience, risk shutting down learning. Whether you offer praise or suggestions for improvement, including specific examples is essential if you want the learner to fully grasp your feedback and use it to improve.

- Not Helpful: "You did great this week. I saw some real growth in lots of areas this month. Keep it up."
- Helpful: "I've seen you take on some new tasks this month as well as solidify your ability to troubleshoot electric fence. Last week you found that elusive short in the long fence, and fixed it by replacing the offset and tightening the wire. And



you inventoried fencing supplies and gave me a list of what we needed to order. I've also seen real improvement with your pasture planning and analysis. You checked the grazing patterns last week, saw where we'd grazed pasture too short, and made adjustments in the size and timing of the next paddock. Then you came to me and we revised the pasture plan to account for the resized paddocks. This is excellent work. Keep it up."

- Not Helpful: "I'm really frustrated by the sloppy work you've done lately, not finishing chores, leaving tools laying around. You don't seem interested in what I'm trying to teach you and this needs to change."
- Helpful: "You seem a little off lately and I'm not sure why. You were late three mornings this week with no explanation. Yesterday, you didn't finish the fence job and I don't know why. Also, at Monday's team meeting you were looking at your phone quite a lot. I'm concerned about how this is affecting your work. Could you offer me some insight on what might be causing these things?"

Tools

The evaluation tools you use will likely be the ones you were exposed to in school, or the ones that come most naturally to you. This is all well and good, unless your learner has a very different learning style, personality, or history with evaluations. In these cases, you may find the familiar tools just don't work. Given that feedback is one of the best ways for you to help your learner grow beyond their current level of skill and understanding, nothing can sour a good mentee like feedback sessions that don't take into account what the learner needs in order to receive and act upon your feedback. A range of tools is offered below, along with sample skill sheet rubrics, self-evaluation forms for both mentor and learner, and other examples.



Tips for Providing Feedback

What to Do	How to Do It	Example
Align feedback with the learner's professional goal.	Provide concrete steps towards the goal that are practical given the time schedule and learner's current skills.	"I have a few ideas that might help you move forward and they are..." "When I'm learning something new I try ..."
Provide feedback on behaviors the learner can do something about	Talk about the specific behavior that is causing problems, rather than evaluating the behavior.	"Tell me how you think your late nights might be affecting your learning?"
Remember that your perspective is not the same as your learner's.	When you use an example from your life, set the context so the learner can make a connection between your example and their experience.	"I know this may be different for you, but when I was having trouble learning tractor mechanics, here's what helped me."
Make sure you understand what is being said.	Listen carefully. Ask questions to clarify and summarize what the learner said.	"If I understand what you are saying..." "Help me understand what you mean by explaining ..."
Be respectful in your tone of voice.	Don't undermine the learner's self esteem.	"I liked the way you ..." "I am curious about ..." "Have you ever considered trying ..."
Watch your own communication style and how that affects the learner.	Talk about the challenges everyone feels in a feedback situation and how important it is to be aware of each other's communication habits.	"I find I get defensive when ..." "I react positively when someone ..."
If you aren't sure, get more information rather than give feedback.	Ask for the information you need.	"To be honest, I don't know enough about that right now and need more time."
Keep a future-focus.	Link your feedback in this moment to the overall learning curve and learner's goals.	"When you started here I saw _____, and now I see _____."

[Adapted from Zachery, 2000]

Rubrics

Most apprenticeship programs use a rubric, usually a skill assessment sheet, as a significant, if not the sole, evaluation tool. The reasons for this are clear: they are specific, make clear the goals and step-by-step objectives needed to achieve those goals, and provide a map for both learner and mentor to be sure that all elements of the curriculum are addressed during the apprenticeship. As stated earlier, the risk with a rubric is that it becomes an end in itself: you each fill in the boxes, show them to one another, and that's the end of it. Using the rubric as a prompt for a fuller conversation about specific accomplishments or learning challenges, or as a record of such discussion, will ensure that the clear pluses and minuses the rubric reveals will be actively embraced and implemented. Going over the rubric or skills sheet with your learner at the outset will help to establish clear expectations for their learning, and will create buy-in for using the rubric as a means of evaluating progress toward the agreed upon learning goals. Using the other tools listed in this section to flesh out the rubric's information will help you create an action plan to jump-start learning.

A strong rubric does the following:

- Matches the stated purpose of the apprenticeship
- Identifies the overall goal/skill and breaks it down into small steps
- Makes clear what criteria is used to gauge successful accomplishment
- Easily prompts learner and mentor to create strategies to learn a skill which is being neglected, is proving harder to learn than expected, or doesn't have lessons built into the regular work the learner is asked to do

Many current apprenticeship programs have extremely effective skill sheet rubrics. The following links are a few examples:

Additional Resources

[Apprentice Skills Checklist](#)
[Apprentice Host Evaluation](#)
[Apprentice Skills Assessment](#)
[On-Farm Assessment](#)
[Farming and Business Skills Assessment](#)
[On-Farm Skills Development Guide](#)

Learning audit: Ask your learner to reflect on these four questions prior to a feedback session of any kind:

- “What do I know now that I didn’t know a week ago?”
- “What can I do now that I couldn’t do a week ago?”
- “What difference does this make for me?”
- “What can I now teach someone else do or know that I couldn’t teach them last week?”

These are powerful prompts for a feedback conversation or for skill sheet/rubric review.

3 accomplishments; 3 challenges: Have both you and the learner come up with a list of three things they accomplished since your last feedback session, and three challenges they either didn’t take on or are next steps, given what they did accomplish. This helps you balance positive appreciation of small efforts and learnings, while also giving some ‘hard truth’ feedback on areas that need improvement or more focused attention.

The next four tools all come from *The Skillful Teacher*, by Stephen Brookfield, and are adapted as needed for agrarian training programs.

The Muddiest Point: A great feedback tool to use when you have multiple learners and need to get a sense of how they are each doing with a new set of skills or information. At the end of a training session or discussion/reading of a new concept, ask them to write down or respond in that moment their answer to one or more of the following questions:

- “What was the muddiest point for you in what we covered today?”
- “What was the most confusing idea or element of what we did today?”
- “What was the most poorly explained idea or procedure today?”
- “What is least clear to you about the skill we practiced today?”

This will help you determine where you need to review the lesson with either the entire group or a few individuals, and helps you improve your own teaching.

One minute paper: This is a good one to use when you’ve had a busy day with lots of potential learning packed into it. For example, a big cattle move on open range or planning the planting map for a new greenhouse. At the end of the day, give learners one minute to write down “What was the most important thing I learned or did today?” To this, you can add a second question: “What can I do next to reinforce or further what I learned or did today?” This helps the mentees identify learning that is buried in busy times, as well as how they can self-motivate to hone that skill or knowledge. It also helps you know how effective the learning opportunity was and what you might do next to solidify that skill. It can also help you determine if a learner is ready to be autonomous with a particular task.

Critical Incident Questionnaire: This tool is equally useful with one learner or a large cohort. It is a quick way to gauge how well mentees are learning, as well as what might be getting in their way. It does double duty, since it also gives learners a way to give you

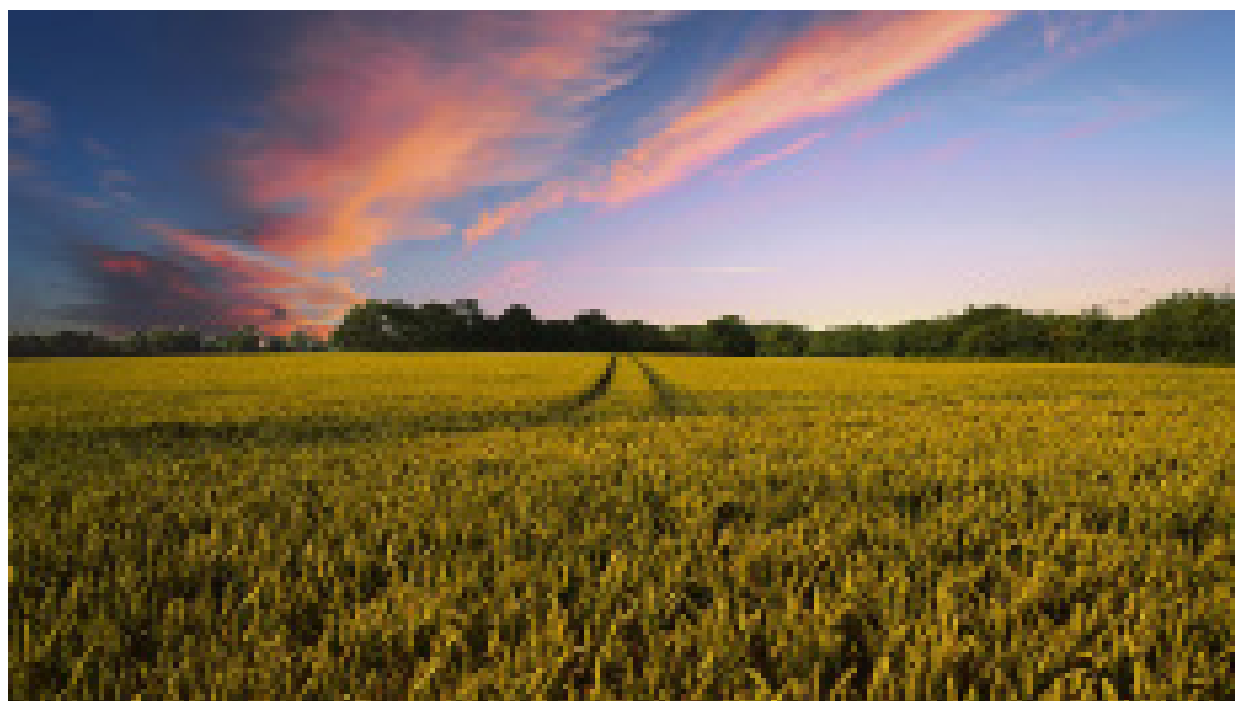
feedback regarding your teaching and mentoring.

- At the end of a week or a particular stretch of days, for example, at the end of the first two weeks of planting or lambing, ask learners to write answers to the following:
- At what moment during this week/stretch of days did you feel most engaged with what was happening?
- At what moment were you least engaged?
- What action did your mentor or someone else take this week that was most helpful or affirming for you?
- What action did they take that was most confusing or challenging for you?

If you have more than one learner, this will help you see how effectively you are mentoring overall, as well as who is in need of some extra tutoring with a specific concept or skill.

This tool can be downloaded for free from www.stephenbrookfield.com.

Significant learnings: A significant learning is anything that deeply impacts the mentee's understanding or appreciation of some aspect of farming, ranching, or their own role in these professions. Ask your mentee to reflect on one or two things they learned since your last assessment session. These can be anything from learning how to drive or maintain the tractor to handling a conflict pro actively and effectively to reading about a new seeding technique. Ask them to tell you about what it was they did, what they learned about themselves or the work/task/ideas, and how that might alter something about their work, study, or future. You might have to tease this out of your learner at first, so be prepared to keep asking questions to get them to think more fully about what they learned and why it matters to them. This tool is especially effective after the learner has been on-site for a month or more.



Other prompts for reflection and discussion

- “What’s going well in our mentor-learner relationship lately?”
- “What has been our biggest challenge in this relationship so far?”
- “What are we each learning that can help us work together better?”
- “Is there a particular skill that we never seem to get to?”

Evaluating the mentor

The best and surest way to improve the feedback you offer to others is to ask for and receive feedback from others. Mentors may hesitate to put themselves in this position; after all, asking for constructive criticism regarding your teaching makes you vulnerable.

This is exactly why it is the best way to learn how to give helpful feedback. It puts you in the position of receiving input regarding what you do well, as well as where you are lacking, in spite of your best efforts to do a good job as a mentor.

Your ability to ask for feedback, and to listen without becoming defensive, models how you want them to listen to and receive the feedback you offer to the learner. One of the most valuable lessons novices learn from mentors is how to be in agriculture, with all the uncertainties, hard work, and risks that come with the life. Consciously or subconsciously, they see what it takes to make a life in agriculture, and they model their own behavior on that of an elder whose opinion and life they respect. By watching how you examine your choices, recognize errors of judgment, and move past mistakes by strategizing different actions, they learn how to do this with their own choices and actions.

Asking for the learner’s feedback lets you model how to receive feedback, and builds the trust that makes it possible for your learner to listen to and accept constructive criticism. Ask your mentee to tell you how you are doing. Have you been clear about expectations, daily schedules, and outcomes you need from them? Do you clarify work priorities or is he left guessing what you think is most important? Do you over-schedule yourself and run short of time or patience when trying to teach a new method of forage assessment or seed propagation?

Consider the questions you want them to ask themselves, in preparation for a feedback session, and ask them in relation to your own performance as mentor. A few such questions are:

- “What have I done recently that was most helpful for you?”
- “Is there something that’s not working for you in how your education is going?”
- “Are you having enough one-on-one learning time with me?”
- “Tell me what’s been useful and not useful in our interactions lately.”

Creating a mentoring rubric can be helpful in tracking your own progress, and also models how to use this tool. A few such rubrics can be found at:

- University of Wisconsin-Madison Mentoring Competency Assessment
<https://ictr.wisc.edu/mentoring/mentor-evaluation-form-examples>
- Nature's Guide for Mentors
<https://www.nature.com/articles/447791a>

Resistance to feedback

Learners may be resistant to criticism. Defensiveness in the face of criticism is human nature, and most of us attempt to deflect criticism, blame someone or something else, or become demoralized in the face of constructive criticism. This is one reason why asking for feedback yourself helps defuse this defensiveness and create a receptive environment for feedback. If you balance praise for effort and small accomplishments with corrective feedback, most learners will realize that your comments are in their best interests and are meant to help them achieve their goals.

Should a learner continue to resist feedback, a few things can help. First, think of a time when you were resistant to something someone else thought you should do or learn. Why were you resistant? What triggered the resistance and was there anything you or the other person did to help you get past it? Second, reflect on something you find hard to do or learn. For many middle aged farmers and ranchers, keeping up with new technology can be mind-boggling no matter how hard they try to learn ever-changing computer programs and online navigation, yet these things likely come easily to your ag apprentice. Now flip the situation and think about how something you find easy to do – manage complicated and aging equipment, a feisty cow, or spider's-web of electric net fencing. Realize that it may be very hard for an ag apprentice to master these things no matter how hard they try.

The realizations that come to you upon this reflection will help you defuse the mentee's resistance with compassion and even humor. Relay a story about a learning challenge of your own. Ask them to tell you about a time in their past when they had to work harder than everyone else in order to learn something seemingly "simple."

Teaching conflict management: One of the most valuable management skills you can teach your mentee is how to approach and resolve conflict. Conflict is human, inevitable, and will pop up during the apprenticeship; it will also occur throughout the learner's professional life years later. Most conflicts emerge out of simple miscommunication or misunderstanding; don't assume ill-will. Your willingness to discuss conflict with patience, curiosity, and compassion will help you and the learner build the honest communication and trust that will serve you both through the duration of the apprenticeship. Model the listening behavior you wish for in your mentee, and give clear examples when you offer constructive criticism so that the learner knows exactly what he is doing (or not doing) that is causing difficulty for you.

Collaborative farmer/rancher education programs:

Some readers may be working on starting up a collaborative farm education program, facilitating and supporting learning opportunities on many farms and ranches. There are several additional services that collaborative farmer training programs often provide:

- **Mentor evaluation:** This can be awkward for mentors to seek out, particularly when the learners are their employees. A benefit that some programs offer is conducting anonymous surveys of both learners and mentors each year.
- **Education Coordinators** who facilitate the mentor-learner relationship and provide a safety valve if and when there are relationship issues between them.
- **Published expectations:** For an apprentice applying to such a program, there are certain expectations that are consistent across all mentor operations. These may include stipulations about housing, stipend, hours worked, curriculum offered, frequency of feedback sessions, and more.
- **Additional structured education:** Some collaborative programs offer additional educational opportunities, ranging from conference attendance, farm visits, classroom based workshops, or online courses.



CHAPTER 5:

Hosting, Employment, and Agreements

After all of your program and curriculum design, after all of your work planning the structure and execution of your ag apprenticeship, there are still a few more crucial items to square away. Before reading this chapter, we would recommend reviewing Chapter 2 and familiarizing yourself with the differences between legal internships, Registered Apprenticeships, and employees. Much of the following chapter will focus on ag apprentices who are treated as employees or are participating in a Registered Apprenticeship. To reiterate a point made in Chapter 2: One way to guarantee your internship or apprenticeship is entirely legally compliant is to treat your apprentices as employees.

5.1 Compensation

If your ag apprentices will be legally considered employees—which is a safe assumption, unless you are participating in a Registered Apprenticeship or are confident that your ag apprenticeship fits the criteria for a legal internship—then you will need to pay them a monetary wage in accordance with your state and local labor laws. Before setting your pay rate, be aware of the minimum wage and the commonly offered wages for your location and type of operation. Be sure you have budgeted to cover the full season's wages with plenty of room to spare—including any employer taxes you may be responsible for paying. You should be able to find information on your state's farm employment rules by contacting your state Department of Agriculture. You can also find more information at Farm Commons [farmcommons.org].

If you are using the legal internship model, ag apprentices participating in your training program are not entitled to wages for their participation. You can, however, offer monthly stipends to offset the costs of living and incidental costs incurred by ag apprentices during their participation in these programs. Generally, it is understood that this stipend is considered taxable income for the intern/apprentice. In this arrangement, host farmers do not withhold tax on stipends or provide interns/apprentices with tax Form 1099 [as you would for an employee]. To facilitate accurate accounting for your interns and apprentices, you may provide them with a document at the end of the season that details the total stipend they received. Interns should maintain a record of the stipend payments they have received during the calendar year (January 1 to December 31) and report this on their personal tax returns.



Payroll

Depending on the size of your current operation, you may already have either in-house payroll, or use an online payroll system. If this is your first foray into employee payroll, be sure to check into options well in advance of your ag apprentice's arrival. Online payroll services can be expensive if you only have one or two employees. If your business uses a bookkeeping program like QuickBooks, the program may include a payroll option or work with the Intuit online payroll system without additional charge.

Be sure to determine the apprentice's gross pay, prior to taxes, as well as your business's payroll tax liabilities based on that gross pay (social security, Medicare, and state unemployment insurance, if applicable), to be sure you adequately budget for your apprentice payroll. Consider the frequency with which you will do payroll (every week, every other week, etc.), and be sure to communicate this in your application materials or upon hiring your ag apprentice.

Notify ag apprentice applicants that you will report their income to the IRS, as they will be considered employees (not independent contractors) by the IRS. Once you have hired your ag apprentices, have each fill out a W-4 form and designate the number of exemptions they wish to claim. Use the federal and state online payroll tax tables to determine federal and state withholding; notify your apprentices of the net pay they will receive; and be sure they understand the difference between gross pay and net pay (take home pay). Consider paying via direct deposit into your apprentice's bank account (we have found most prefer to receive their paycheck this way). This will depend on your payroll system and your bank.

Speak with your business accountant or check online regarding your anticipated annual payroll tax liability to the IRS and the state and determine whether you will need to make monthly or quarterly deposits into those systems. If you are required to make such deposits and neglect to do so, the penalties and interest can be substantial. Familiarize yourself with your year-end reporting of federal and state payroll taxes to both the IRS (often filing Form 943 for agricultural workers) and your state. Filing deadlines are early in the following year.

Workers' compensation

Given that your ag apprentice is considered an employee by the IRS, it is prudent and conscientious to carry a workers' compensation insurance policy. This is especially true given the physical risk inherent in ranching and farming. In some states, carrying workers' compensation is a legal requirement. Talk with your ranch or farm insurance provider, as they often offer such policies and will be able to advise you on requirements specific to your state. If you are a rancher, your state cattlemen's association may also provide you with an affordable policy. Workers' compensation coverage is based on wages, housing, board, and any other compensation you offer, so be sure to calculate the dollar amounts of in-kind compensation prior to meeting with your insurance agent.

If you are using the legal internship model, you may not always be required to provide workers' compensation insurance for them (although, again, it would usually be prudent to do so). For example, in some states, if the intern receives less than \$500 in a 30-day period, the host farmer is not required to provide workers' compensation insurance for them. Check on the rules in your state and speak with your insurance provider for more information. Make sure you refer to them as "interns and/or apprentices," not employees, when speaking with your WC insurance provider.

Your best insurance is always risk management on-site. Closely observe your apprentice in the first few weeks, assessing actual skill and familiarity with safe livestock handling, machinery use, and driving. Due diligence on your part means continually assessing your apprentice's capacity to perform any task safely, starting with extra oversight on your part until you are confident that he can safely perform the tasks you assign to him.

Liability insurance

Many ranch or farm insurance policies include liability insurance to cover accidents that occur when a non-employee visits your operation. Most of these liability clauses will not cover a paid employee. Check with your insurance agent to see what coverage you have already and what they suggest you should have, given that you will have one or more apprentices on site who will be paid as they learn the occupation.

5.2 Housing Allowance

Many ranch or farm insurance policies include liability insurance to cover accidents that occur when a non-employee visits your operation. Most of these liability clauses will not cover a paid employee. Check with your insurance agent to see what coverage you have already and what they suggest you should have, given that you will have one or more apprentices on site who will be paid as they learn the occupation.

On-ranch or on-farm housing is commonly expected as part of an ag apprenticeship. Living on site ensures a greater level of participation in every aspect of ranch or farm life. We highly recommend providing apprentice housing that is separate from your own. Giving everyone a little private space will help keep everyone happy on a daily basis.

If you are providing on-farm housing, the infrastructure available must provide for the basic needs of your ag apprentices: shelter, warmth, toilet facilities, and the ability to feed oneself. Infrastructure varies greatly from farm to farm. Farmers should spend some time in the winter and early spring assessing the condition of apprentice housing and making necessary adjustments and improvements before they arrive for the season. Make sure a prospective apprentice sees the accommodation beforehand. Ideally, they would spend a night in the living quarters to assess comfort level.

Ag apprentices should be provided a safe physical environment (sound structure/fire/electrical) that is weatherproof, has adequate ventilation, and is pest proof. Living structures should have a natural source of light and a safe source of lighting (including instruction in the safe use of non-electrical lighting). Ag apprentices should be provided a reasonably clean, private, and cleanable space (including both personal and common spaces like kitchen and bathroom) with a space for personal cleaning and a sanitary bathroom or latrine, potable water, and a heated living area. Host farmers should clarify expectations beforehand regarding household chores, maintenance, and any other expectations of residents.

Housing requirements can be waived if the farm or ranch lacks adequate housing and there is a reasonable supply of locally available housing within 30 minutes drive. In this case, host farmers may want to increase monthly stipend to cover housing and food costs that meet the standards outlined above.

Be very clear about what the ag apprentice can expect with regards to Internet access and phones. Will they have free and unlimited Internet access in the apprentice housing? Should they supply their own computer? More than likely, they will already have a cell phone, but it doesn't hurt to state that they are expected to provide their own telephone and telephone service. Again, being specific early on can help avoid issues part way through the apprenticeship. For example, if you have poor cell phone reception in your area, and no Internet access, make this clear in your application. It may be a problem for some applicants, but others will embrace being offline—if they know about it beforehand. Also, if your operation requires ag apprentices to use their own cell phones frequently for work purposes, you might consider an additional stipend or reimbursement for their cell phone plan.

Be very clear about what the ag apprentice can expect with regards to Internet access and phones. Will they have free and unlimited Internet access in the apprentice housing? Should they supply their own computer? More than likely, they will already have a cell phone, but it doesn't hurt to state that they are expected to provide their own telephone and telephone service.



5.3 Food Compensation

Reading through postings for ag apprenticeship positions, you will often find something food-related listed in the “compensation” section, just below the salary or stipend. [How many times have you seen “free vegetables” listed as a form of payment?] It is easy enough to advertise, but have you thought about how it might actually work? Will your ag apprentices be relying on you to provide food, or is it an occasional perk? Given that ag apprentices typically will not be making much money, a steady supply of good food may be much appreciated. At the same time, if they accepted the position with the expectation that they would have access to enough free food to significantly reduce their food budget, they will be disappointed if you are unable to live up to those expectations.

Ag apprenticeship programs have wrestled with this question for some time. In the Rogue Farm Corps program, host farmers are required to provide or compensate for an adequate diet to fuel the strenuous activity of farming, provide ample time for regular meals (including prep time), provide adequate cooking facilities (stove, wash basin, refrigeration, food storage), and clarify ahead of time whether they are willing to provide for special dietary needs. Host farmers are required to clarify eating arrangements in their Farm-Apprentice Agreement. [Do interns/apprentices eat separately or as part of farm household? Will cooking and cleanup be shared?]

In Quivira’s New Agrarian Program, in addition to regular wages and housing, ag apprentices are often either given food or an additional monthly food stipend. Food produced on site offers mentors a cost-effective way to provide nutritious sustenance for their apprentices. You may choose to give them a specific weekly allowance of farm products or free access to what they need or a combination of the two, depending on your situation. For example, perhaps they can have as many eggs as they want each day, but only get a set amount of milk or cheese per week. Mentors often provide a shared meal each day during the work week. Sharing meals provides excellent opportunities for mentors and apprentices to talk about things other than work and get to know each other better. If your ag apprenticeship is on a ranch and the only homegrown product is beef (or other meat), shared meals may be your best option for providing a variety of food. You may also require apprentices to participate in meal planning, preparation, set up, or clean up. Whatever the situation may be regarding food, be sure to discuss expectations as early as possible in the apprenticeship, and ideally before, in your ag apprenticeship description or during the interview process.

5.4 On-Farm Agreements and Additional Policies

Some important points to include in your initial agreements are:

Training schedule: Explain how the weekly and seasonal schedule will generally look, range of hours expected, days off, etc.

Days off and vacation:

Most ag apprentices value having the same day(s) off each week, and the benefit is felt by both the apprentice and the mentor. Their days off are one of the few things that apprentices have complete control over, and being able to plan ahead—to meet up with a friend, get an oil change, go out to dinner, visit the dentist—makes all the difference. In addition to weekly time off (highly recommended), consider giving your ag apprentices some vacation time, either paid or unpaid. Clarity around how much time they can take off away from your operation will make inevitable negotiations easier later when an ag apprentice requests to leave for a family reunion, a friend's wedding, etc.

Sick leave: It's not uncommon for someone to feel under the weather and need a day or two off to recover from a cold. But what happens if an ag apprentice contracts a more serious illness (or injury) and is unable to work for a prolonged amount of time? Consider developing a sick leave policy and including it in the work agreement. The policy should clarify details regarding compensation within the context of a prolonged absence from work. How long will they receive full compensation? Partial compensation? At what point will termination need to be discussed?

Other considerations: You might also consider adding some of the following to the agreement:

- In case of emergency – you should absolutely gather emergency contact information.
- Farm rules – especially around alcohol, drugs, pets, weapons, etc. Will you allow ag apprentices to bring a dog, cat, or possibly a horse? If so, think through possible implications (who pays for the horse feed? Can the dog or cat roam freely?). How do you feel about smoking or chewing tobacco? What about alcohol consumption?
- Transportation – does the intern/apprentice need a vehicle? Are any other transportation options available?
- Insurance – whether or not you require interns and apprentices to have health insurance.
- Visitors – what is the farm policy around visitors? An ag apprentice will inevitably want to receive visitors during his stay on your ranch or farm. Are you willing to allow visitors? Do you want to know about visitors before they arrive? Will the apprentice housing accommodate visitors? How many visitors can an apprentice host at a given time? Can visitors be present during work hours? Can visitors participate in the work day, and do you have a liability waiver for them to sign? Will they need to contribute financially to meals, or do you expect them to pitch in

- with chores during their stay? How long is too long?
- Indemnification – standard “hold harmless” clause.
- Exit strategy and ‘at will’ internship/apprenticeship – clearly state the parameters for termination, or simply state that the relationship is “at will” and can be terminated at any time.

Photo release: You may have no plans to use photographs of your ag apprentices in presentations, on your website, or in printed promotional, marketing, or educational materials. Nonetheless, you may find that you do wish to use photos at a later date, in which case having a photo release on file will give you permission to do so. Simple photo release forms can be found online. We recommend that you have your ag apprentices sign one when they sign their employment contract and fill out other employment forms.

Conflict resolution: Consider how you hope to address conflicts during the ag apprenticeship and create a clear process that both you and your ag apprentice understand. This will help you both address conflict early and effectively, rather than have it smolder and grow larger. If both parties have already read over and agreed to a process for resolving conflicts ahead of time, the process has better success.

- When and how will we address conflicts? Is that something appropriate to bring up during weekly planning meetings? During apprentice/mentor check-ins? It is a good idea to have a space to bring them up at some regular interval so they don’t fester.
- Who can initiate a conflict resolution process?
- Do you want to bring in a third party as a mediator? If so, who?
- What topics are non-negotiable for you as a mentor?

Rogue Farm Corps' Conflict Resolution Protocol

Open-Door Policy

It is RFC's policy that communication between host farmers and interns and apprentices is open and honest at all times. Host farmers and interns and apprentices may come forward and discuss their problems directly with RFC staff, in order to resolve issues quickly and efficiently.

Procedure for Handling Complaints

Under normal conditions, interns and apprentices with an internship/apprenticeship related problem, question, or complaint should first discuss it with their host farmer. At this level, interns and apprentices usually reach the simplest, quickest, and most satisfactory solution. Next, if the problem is not resolved, it should then be brought to the attention of RFC, through the Chapter Coordinator.

Conflict Resolution Protocol

If conflicts should arise between host farmers and intern/apprentice, contact your Chapter Coordinator immediately to alert him or her to the nature of the conflict. Interns/apprentices and host farmers shall sit down face to face to discuss the nature of the conflict directly and work towards a mutually agreeable solution. If either party does not feel comfortable discussing the conflict directly, or a resolution is not found in the initial conversation between the intern/apprentice and host farmer, RFC staff shall be brought in to help mediate the conversation. If the nature of the conflict is such that RFC staff is unable to mediate the conversation, professional help will be sought by RFC. All parties must agree to utilize good communication, active listening and empathy.

Disciplinary Review Corrective Action Policy

Host farmers are expected to utilize the following corrective action policy to give feedback to interns and apprentices about their performance where it falls short of expected standards or to address misconduct. Any of the following steps may be used to let interns and apprentices know when to bring behavior into line with expectations:

A verbal warning or counseling

A written reprimand

Suspension

Dismissal

Each of these steps is independent of the others and need not follow in order of the sequence listed above. This policy is a guideline only and does not restrict host farmers right to implement discipline, as it deems appropriate.

1. Verbal Warning

Host Farmers may verbally warn interns and apprentices that training performance or personal behavior is unsatisfactory and if not corrected could lead to additional disciplinary action. The host farmer shall make a note of this verbal warning and share it with the Chapter Coordinator. The intern/apprentice shall have an opportunity to review the verbal warning shared with the Chapter Coordinator.

2. Written Reprimand

Host farmers may prepare a written reprimand detailing unacceptable performance or on-farm behavior. The intern/apprentice will receive a copy of written reprimand and will be given an opportunity to sign the reprimand indicating that she/he has reviewed the document. A copy of the reprimand will be shared with the Chapter Coordinator.

3. Suspension

Host farmers may suspend an intern/apprentice. When possible, the host farmer will provide the intern/apprentice with a written statement of the reasons for suspension and any requirements for reinstatement. A copy of the written notice will be shared with the Chapter Coordinator. The intern/apprentice will have an opportunity to review and sign the document.

4. Dismissal

This is the most serious disciplinary action host farmers can take. Remember: RFC's corrective action policy serves as a guide only. At the host farmer's discretion, any of the steps outlined above may be skipped. This corrective action policy in no way alters the intern/apprentice's at-will status. That is, host farmer retains the right to determine in its discretion the appropriate level of discipline to be administered, up to and including termination.

The following types of behavior, which are ordinarily grounds for disciplinary action, include but are not limited to:

- Performing training duties while under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs
- Poor training performance
- Attendance and/or Tardiness Problems
- Breach of the Confidentiality Policy
- Theft from Host Farm, its employees or clients
- Discrimination or sexual harassment
- Insubordination

This list is provided as a general guideline for illustrative purposes only and does not restrict host farmers' ability to discipline or discharge interns and apprentices for any reason it deems appropriate.

5.5 Employment Contract

We've discovered that employment contracts are not necessarily standard practice when ranches and farms hire an ag apprentice. The reasons for this are diverse: the operation doesn't use contracts for other employees; the ag apprentice's duties are hard to quantify and therefore hard to state clearly in a contract; or sometimes the mentors just dislike legal forms. A contract can be as simple or complex as you make it; either way, we highly recommend that you create contracts or employment agreements for your ag apprentices. This protects you as well as the apprentice from misunderstandings.

A basic employment contract stipulates compensation, start and end date, day(s) off, sick leave policy, early termination, etc. The online legal site Nolo (www.nolo.com) offers useful templates, tailored to your state, as do many office supply stores. If you've clearly thought through the details of your ag apprentice's employment (weekly schedule, compensation, housing, termination), you will be able to determine which details must be included in your contract.

If you regularly use an attorney for business purposes, he or she will be able to help you clarify your expectations and determine your legal obligations to your ag apprentices—and theirs to you—which is, after all, the purpose of a contract.

Termination terms and policy

Should termination become necessary, a clear policy will support you in making that tough decision and will protect you from any appearance or claim of unfair termination. Depending on your state, there may be Right to Work legislation, which determines the amount of time that is required when giving notice of termination (often two weeks is the minimum). Even if your state is not a Right to Work state, it is both courteous and good business to give at least two weeks' notice, unless there has been gross negligence, illegal activity, or other serious misbehavior on the part of the person being dismissed.

Some mentors have implemented a 30-45 day probationary period at the start of the ag apprenticeship, during which time the apprentice and mentor make sure that the pairing is a good fit. This builds in an option to release an ag apprentice early if it is clear that he or she is not well suited for the position or didn't understand the requirements or schedule. In the event of an unforeseen "bad fit," a termination clause is good business practice, and many employment contract templates will include a sample that you can adapt.

Conclusion

We hope these guidelines prove to be a useful resource in helping you create or improve upon your training program. And we hope you will contact programs featured in this toolkit to compare notes and swap stories. Others ranchers and farmers who are doing this work are your best resource. [\[Try the National Ag Apprenticeship Learning Network\]](#)

Thank you for investing your time and hard-earned knowledge into the next generation of ranchers and farmers. Your time and dedicated mentorship is the best gift you can offer to someone aspiring to do what you've done. No one is more qualified for this job than you.

Appendix A: Leadership Team and Partners

Below are the organizations involved in creating this toolkit. To stay up to date with this work and to connect with more organizations and farms involved with on-farm learning opportunities, visit the [National Ag Apprenticeship Learning Network](#).

Core partners

Core partners contributed at least 10-15 hours per month.

New Entry Sustainable Farming Project (New Entry), Boston, MA:

- Served as the project lead for this toolkit.
- Beginning farmer training program annually serves over 300 beginning farmers and ranchers through business planning courses, practical skills trainings, access to incubator farms, land matching services, and direct market support.

Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship (DGA), National, based in WI:

- 1st fully accredited Apprenticeship for farming in the nation.
 - Provides 4,000 hours of on-the-job training and related classroom instruction in dairy grazing.
- Operates in 9 states nationwide, over 100 approved mentor farmers.

Maine Organic Farming and Gardening Association (MOFGA), Unity, ME:

- Runs a nationally recognized apprenticeship and Journeyperson program for those interested in organic farming.

Quivira Coalition, New Agrarian Program (NAP), Sante Fe, NM:

- Provides apprenticeships in sustainable ranching and grass-based dairy and artisan cheese making, through partnerships with ranches and farms in the Southwest.

Rogue Farm Corps, Ashland, OR:

- The sole Oregon organization with a structured, entry-level and advanced-level BFR training program based on a network of commercial farms.
- Provides 7-month internships and up to a 2- year apprenticeship program.

Villicus Training Institute, Havre, MT:

- First generation, organic, dryland crop farm.
- Began a multi-year apprenticeship training and farmer incubation program in dryland organ crop farming culminating in 2015.

Project advisors

Project advisors provided approximately 3-6 hours per month.

AGree/Meridian Institute, Washington, DC
Biodynamic Association (WI)
California FarmLink (CA)
Center for Rural Affairs (NE)
Center for Rural Strategies, Rural Assembly (KY)
Conservation Law Foundations' Legal Services Food Hub (ME, MA)
Farm Commons (MN)
Farm Based Education Network (VT)
Farm Education Resource Network (AZ)
Hawthorne Valley Learning Center (NY)
Kennebunk Community College (ME)
Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings Collaborative (MN)
Land Loss Prevention (NC)
Montana Department of Agriculture (MT)
National Young Farmers' Coalition (CO)
National Center for Appropriate Technology (MT, AK, CA, MS, PA, TX)
Organic Trade Association (DC)
Pie Ranch (CA)
Rural Support Partners (NC)
Sustainable Food Lab (VT)
TomKat Ranch (CA)
University of California, Santa Cruz Center for Agriculture and Sustainable Food Systems (CA)
University of Wisconsin-Madison, O-Grain Organic Extension Program (WI)
University of Wisconsin-Madison, Department of Horticulture (WI)

Appendix B: Career Services and Ongoing Support

What happens when your ag apprentices leave the nest? Below are some ideas for how you can help them move forward with their farming careers.

Programs for Advanced Beginning Farmers

- Fostering social, professional networking [gatherings, listservs, trainings, roundtables, etc.]
 - Example: Collaborative Regional Alliance for Farmer Training (CRAFT). Regional farmer-led coalitions providing workshops and networking opportunities for farmers and future farmers; popular with young farmers, and sometimes specifically targeted toward ag apprentices.
- Educational stipends, scholarships for professional development programming
- Facilitate additional and/or ongoing mentorship
- Group vendor discounts, bulk orders, tool and equipment demonstrations
- Facilitate peer-to-peer education - roundtables, workshop

Land Access Assistance

- Connect with a regional clearinghouse/database of land lease or purchase opportunities [FarmLink Programs]
- Partner with land trust, land access organizations [eg Maine Farmland Trust, Land For Good]
- Assistance with written agreements, leases, contracts, succession plans
- Succession planning with retiring farmers and ranchers
- Outreach to non-farming landowners

Network Navigation

- Provide personal counseling, connection with relevant resources, mentors, opportunities, peers
- Be connected and cross-trained with wide community, topical farm visits and discussions [see CRAFT example above]
- “Next Steps: From Apprentice to Farmer” workshops - newly established farmers host farm tours and discuss their path to establishing a successful farm business; including resources they started with, resources and support services they accessed, some successes, challenges, unexpected twists, and advice for new farmers following in their footsteps. Service providing agencies and organizations are invited to attend to describe their offerings and mingle with attendees over potluck dinner.

Technical Assistance

- Make yourself available for occasional future technical assistance after your ag

apprentice has left the farm

- Options for further learning (during ag apprenticeship or after) on whole farm and business planning, enterprise budgeting, marketing
 - Example: Farm Beginnings Programs. A program offering workshops and support for beginning farmers at various stages, including prospective farmers; includes the Farm Beginnings course focused on farm business planning, offered by several organizations around the country. See the Land Stewardship Project for more information: landstewardshipproject.org/morefarmers/farm
- Mediation and legal services
 - Volunteers of America
 - Conservation Law Foundation Legal Food Hubs
 - Farm Commons

Incubator Programs

- For information about and connections with incubator farms as a next step for ag apprentices, see the National Incubator Farm Training Initiative: nesfp.org/nifti
- Either during the ag apprenticeship or as a second-year opportunity, consider arrangements which allow the ag apprentice to start their own side business somewhere on the farm or nearby, or to run part of the farm like a business