

Manitoba Farm Mentorship (MFM) conducted preliminary screening with mentor farmers when we developed the list of mentors you paid for. We hope that every experience on every farm is fantastic. However, we know that personality differences, work ethic differences or simply a match that isn't helpful to either party can occur from time to time. **This document was developed especially for Interns and Trainees who are planning short or long-term on-farm stays on a mentor farm, but it includes information relevant to mentoring arrangements of any kind.**

Intern/Trainee: it is up to you to do your due diligence! You must take responsibility for your learning experience as much as possible. This means doing all, or the majority, of the following:

- a) Read carefully the mentor listings.
- b) E-mail or call the farm(s) you think would be good fits for you, asking some general questions.
- c) If you chose to e-mail for first contact, you next need to phone to talk to the mentor farmer and ask any questions you haven't already asked. Do not feel like you shouldn't ask a question, you are entitled to the answers you need!
- d) Set up a meeting to get to know your mentor a bit better. If you are going to be spending any length of time with a person, you need to know what they're like! You can learn a lot from an in-person meeting that you might not learn from e-mail or telephone.
 - i. If you did not meet on the farm, now is the time to do so if at all possible.
- e) Decide whether you want to continue with an internship or farm stay and let the farmer know either way.
- f) Call/email MFM if you choose a farm to go to or have any concerns.

Some things you might not realize about farming:

- "Days off" are relative. If your normal day off is Tuesday but it rains the previous Friday & Saturday and everyone is stuck inside, it's probable that Tuesday will be a working day. Inquire about day(s) off if you are planning a farm stay of one week or longer.
- Farming is mentally challenging as well as physically challenging. Don't expect your mentor farmer(s) to be happy all the time or able to stop and teach you something. A good idea is to have a small pad and pencil handy to write down questions to ask later on. There are times when everyone is simply exhausted mentally, physically and emotionally. Learn to be sensitive to these times.
- A lot of farming is out of the farmer's control. If a hail storm wipes out the lettuce crop, there is nothing you can do. If suddenly frost threatens, everyone might need to go out at 8pm to cover things up. Flexibility is a good trait to have.
- Not everyone is cut out for 12 hour days in the field or work in the blazing heat or getting rained on. You will have to figure out whether or not you are, and there is no shame either way.

If you don't feel comfortable after talking to and/or meeting a potential mentor, please, listen to your gut! MFM takes on no responsibility for the quality of your internship. It is up to you to make sure the farm you choose is the best possible fit.

Possible Questions (Interns → Mentors)

Carefully read each mentor's listing as many questions you may have might be answered there. Farmers are busy people, so make sure to put some thought into the questions you will ask. Try to do some research into the farm operation...trying to talk to a cattle farmer in the middle of calving or a grain farmer in the middle of seeding is an unreasonable request, even though it might be the perfect time for you!

— Always ask the farmer when a good time to call would be and how much time they have to talk—

To get beyond the information provided on the mentor listing, here are some questions you may choose to ask or use to help clarify your own.

Accommodations, etc.

- Can you give me more information on where I will be living?
- Will others have access to my room?
- Will I have access to the washing machine at any time? Do I have to bring my own laundry detergent?
- Is there a restriction on water? Can I go into the fridge and eat if I'm hungry?
- Is there a place that I can 'get away from it all' on my day off? On the farm? Near the farm?
- Do you have Internet? High speed? Wireless? Will I have to ask permission to use the Internet?
- Can you tell me more about the other people who live on the farm?
- I don't have a vehicle, what options are available to me for leaving the farm on my days off or for farm tours, etc?

Philosophy

- I've read your mentor profile, and I still have this question about why you choose to be organic/small scale/natural, etc..... What does "organic" (or "natural", "sustainable", etc) mean to you?
- Have you always been a farmer? Have you always wanted to be a farmer? What was/were your former career(s)?
- I'm not religious at all, are you? Would it bother you if I worked on Sunday or the Sabbath? Or didn't participate in grace before meals?
- I'm a religious person and would like to go to church on Sunday morning, is that ok? I'm Muslim. May I have the time off to pray/build a place in which to pray?
- I am a vegan/vegetarian. Will my diet cause problems in any way? Will it be the subject of debate or discussion? *Also talk about allergies, food or otherwise. Food can be a big topic for some!*

Personality

- I am a _____type of person. In a few words, can you describe your personality/nature, and those who will be involved in mentoring me? My best/most challenging personality traits are _____what are your best/most challenging?

Community

- I see from your listing that _____is the community closest to you. What's it like? *If you don't know where it is or the best way to get there, ask.*
- Are you involved in the wider organic/natural/direct marketing, etc. community provincially or nationally?

Work, teaching, income, etc.

- Will I have time to do research for my farm dream? Will this be as part of my work day, or be limited to my day off?
- I have an appointment/wedding/family event on _____, can I get the time off? What happens in the case of an emergency (sudden family death, etc.)?
- I learn best by _____. What is your teaching style? (If they don't match: do you think we could work something out together to incorporate my learning style and your teaching style, or not?)
- Have you had interns/WWOOFers/volunteers before? Do you think I could contact them to talk about their experience? *Ask for contact info.*
- Please describe how you would handle conflict between the two of us, or me and others on the farm?
- I am or I am not comfortable babysitting children, is that ok?
- When is the busiest time on your farm? What does a typical day look like then?
- *(If you require an income during your time on the farm):* If it's not possible to receive a stipend or get paid for my internship, may I look for off-farm work, or can we set something else up where I might be able to make some money? (eg: a small plot of land, a percentage of the income from something that I'm helping with that wouldn't be possible if I wasn't at your farm (for example, an extra farmers' market day))
- For interns/trainees not participating full-time on farm: make sure to tell the farmer exactly what it is you are looking for (eg: every Saturday for 12 hours from June 1 – September 15th, or every CSA harvest day for 4 hours, or every day between certain dates or at a certain time of the year, etc.)



Do you have any questions for me?

When can we meet in person?

I'd like to see your farm before I commit to anything.

MFM hopes that this document helps you. If you have any suggestions for additions to this list, please let us know.

Please consider becoming part of the organic community by joining Manitoba Farm Mentorship on [Facebook](#) and/or purchasing a [Canadian Organic Growers](#) membership for as little as \$1! **Manitoba Farm Mentorship is a program of the Organic Food Council of Manitoba – a chapter of COG.** For a minimum \$35 you can receive the practical and info-packed magazine *The Canadian Organic Grower* and have access to COG's extensive library. http://www.cog.ca/shop/index.php?main_page=document_product_info&cPath=77&products_id=229

Please let us know how your farming experience was! manitobafarmmentorship@gmail.com

Connecting people, land, and local knowledge for a food-secure Manitoba