

Questions/Info for Mentors



Congratulations on being a potential mentor farmer with Manitoba Farm Mentorship (MFM). Thank you for taking the time to read this document. We appreciate it!

MFM's vision is of a just, productive and stable agricultural system that supplies everyone with affordable, exciting and nutritious food. Getting new, energetic, innovative farmers on the land is an important part of our mission. As a mentor farmer, you are an integral part of our program. We want you to have a great experience. With that in mind, we offer you a list of questions to consider as you try to find the best possible mentor-mentee fit.

MFM does preliminary screening of potential interns and trainee farmers prior to offering them the mentor listing. We would hope that every experience on every farm would be fantastic. However, we know that is unrealistic due to personality differences, work ethic differences or simply a match that isn't helpful to either party.

Mentor: it is up to you to do your due diligence! You must take responsibility for the mentorship experience on your farm as much as possible. This means taking the time to screen interns/trainees, understand their learning objectives, and taking on only those interns/trainees you feel comfortable with.

Important things to think about

- Do you have the proper liability insurance for your farm/home to safeguard yourself (and your intern) should they get injured on your property?
- It takes a special kind of person to take in an intern and patiently teach them what you know day in and day out knowing that teaching often takes longer than just doing (at first). MFM believes that you are not only a good farmer, but also a good teacher. At the end of the season, we will, collectively, evaluate the past year's mentor-mentee match ups. Expect this evaluation from MFM if you take on a farmer-in-training. There is no shame in admitting that you are not cut out for mentoring!
- You have been given the document "For interns.pdf" which is the list of questions/info MFM has prepared for interns. Please take the time to read them so that you know what questions interns might be posing. If you wish, you might want to create a document that answers some or all of the questions so that you can easily email that document to potential interns instead of answering the same questions over and over. If there is something on "For interns.pdf" that you think is important, but the intern hasn't asked, please make sure to raise the issue with your potential intern.
- Please make sure you have decided in advance how much time you want to spend on screening potential interns and relay that to them. Many potential interns do not understand the time pressure in farming. This is important because everyone who calls may not end up being an intern with you.
- Do you have any non-negotiable ground rules? What would be grounds for immediate dismissal of the intern from your farm (if anything)?
- Are you going to provide learning experiences outside of working on the farm operations (eg: looking at your planning spreadsheets, teaching interns how to use business accounting software, helping them create a farm plan, etc.)? If so, how much time can you afford to give to this, and when?
- You've agreed to one free day off guilt-free for full-time interns...are you going to take responsibility for amusing them on this day or are they on their own?

- Will interns be part of the family during family special occasions (e.g. birthdays, etc.) or are they expected to do their own thing during those times?
- Drinking, smoking, drugs...what are your thoughts on the intern doing any of them on your farm? Or coming to work under the influence?
- Do you want the intern to get a police check? Child abuse registry clearance? Visit the farm first? Trial period?

Possible Questions and/or Information (mentors→ ask interns)

- Are you looking for a full-time internship? Are you a 'toe-dipper'? trainee?
- Have you worked on a farm before? What is your farm experience? Have you ever had a job that involves physical labour?
- What is your educational background?
- How old are you?
- Are you likely to have multiple visitors during your stay here? (*Mentor: Is this alright with you? How will you deal with this?*)
- What is your farm dream?
- Go over work expectations, "day off" situation...be clear with your work expectations.
- If you have children...is the intern comfortable around children? Same for animals, machinery, extended family on the farm (e.g. elderly parents/grandparents). Do you expect the intern to help with the household chores or with babysitting?

Please remember: the intent of mentorship is to pass on knowledge and experience from one person to another. Both parts of this equation are equally important. Interns are ***not*** cheap labour. They are expecting to learn, learn, learn. Anything you can do to show your appreciation to your intern will not go unnoticed, whether this be in the form of a stipend or chocolate, a simple "thanks" or a flexible work schedule so that they can also work for money somewhere else.

Whenever things don't go well, it is often due to expectations. Make sure you think seriously about your expectations and know what the intern's expectations as well. Get as much information as you can.

What do the following mean to you? What do they mean to someone who has never worked on a farm?

- "a hard day's work" • "just make them look nice" • "muck out the stalls" •
- "weed the carrots" →does this mean take out the carrots, or take out the plants that don't look like carrots? (Yes, we're serious!)

Further resources for mentors can be found at: http://www.organicfoodcouncil.org/resource_guide.php and http://www.smallfarm.org/main/for_on_farm_mentors/

MFM has the following titles available for you to borrow:

- Cultivating a New Crop of Farmers: Is On-Farm Mentoring Right for You and Your Farm?
- The On-Farm Mentor's Guide: Practical Approaches to Teaching on the Farm
- Nurturing New Farmers: A Practical Guide to hosting interns and mentoring the next generation of farmers

Time Commitment

We are often asked what the time commitment is for mentors before the season starts. This is our best guess:

Initial screening with MFM Coordinator: 30 – 45 mins

Reading paperwork, etc.: 30 mins

Talking to potential interns: 20 – 30 mins each

Meeting potential interns: however long it takes to tour your farm or ask remaining questions

If you don't feel comfortable after talking to and/or meeting a potential intern/trainee, please, *listen to your gut!* We are here to help, but **MFM takes no responsibility for the quality of farm mentorship experiences**. It is up to you to make sure the interns/trainees you choose are the best possible fit for your farm and family.

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! 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

We would like to hear how your mentoring experience was! manitobafarmmentorship@gmail.com

Enjoy the process. There are not many things as exciting as seeing your student succeed!

We hope that you have a wonderful season and that your intern is a positive part of your success!

