

Manitoba Farm Mentorship Roles and Responsibilities of MFM Farm Mentors



Manitoba Farm Mentorship aims to get more successful farmers on the land in Manitoba. We are serious about finding successful mentor farmers who can help us fulfill this very important aim. Mentors are farmers and others who feel they have something to teach, and have the desire to work along-side an energetic learner. Farmers who are attracted to this program

- Use or are transitioning to organic or environmentally sustainable farming techniques
- Tend to be managing smaller-than-average prairie farms
- Are more interested in local or regional markets.

The Organic Food Council of Manitoba and the community that is involved in Manitoba Farm Mentorship (MFM) hopes to reverse the depopulation trend of our rural areas by encouraging farmers to diversify, layer and intensify their farms, and seek locally-based networks and value-chains. We believe growers who have fashioned viable farms, market gardens and rural lifestyles have much to teach. **Based on the diversity of inquiries we have received from individuals seeking farm mentors, we are searching for mentors who can meet the needs of the following two broad categories people.**

INTERNS

Interns are aspiring farmers who may have some, a little, or no farming experience and (usually) no land. Despite these significant challenges, Interns are serious about learning all the ins-and-outs of farming and are dedicated to starting up a farm operation within 5 years or so. These future farmers want to learn about food production from the ground up by participating in the daily activities on your farm. Interns are looking for successful farmer-mentors who are making a living (or a percentage of it) off their operation. They deserve the best possible models; farmers who are willing to give them all the information they need to become successful new farmers. This includes (but is not limited to) financial information, farm plan, past mistakes and the wisdom you learned from these experiences.

If you are a farmer wishing to place serious interns on your farm, you will have the following characteristics:

- You are a good teacher
- You have lots of patience
- You are making all or a good percentage of your income on-farm
- Ideally you have a farm plan, or you are willing to share information about your operation and answer questions about farm finances, seasonal planning, your markets, etc.
- You share our goal of producing confident new farmers – you don't see interns as "future competition"
- You understand the political nature of small scale organic or sustainable farming and you are willing to help interns understand it too.
- You have the time (at least 1 hour/week) to sit down with interns to review the past week, intern learning objectives, and upcoming plans, as well as the willingness to allow interns personal space to research, practice new skills, or develop their own farm plan. Having an intern has its rewards but mentors also must realize that interns have special needs...you may be the only person in their life that they can talk to about their dreams and aspirations!
- You are willing to offer at least one day off to your intern each week.

TRAINEES

MFM receives countless inquiries: "Toe-dippers," exploring farming, new farmers building their operations, and established farmers re-strategizing their farms. The backgrounds and needs of these individuals are extremely diverse, but what Trainees have in common are questions... lots and lots of questions. Mentor farmers are an important part of helping these people toward their farming dreams.

New and Re-strategizing farmers generally have specific questions, related to production techniques, organic certification, accessing markets, business planning, and many more. They want to connect with mentor farmers who can answer their questions by phone, email, or in person. They may want to visit other farms to check out what works and what doesn't. Generally, they don't have time to spend more than a few hours on a mentor farm – they prefer to get answers to their questions and take the knowledge back to their own operations.

Toe-dippers are interested in agriculture – they think. They need to do a lot of research before they know whether they are ready to make the whole-hearted transition to a farming lifestyle. Some are looking for short-term working farm stays from a few hours to a few weeks. Others will have specific questions that can be answered by phone or email. Still others are exploring the diversity of farm operations in Manitoba and would like to visit or tour your farm. Generally, "toe-dippers" have obligations in their own lives which make long-term internships impossible at the moment.

Many mentor farmers may not be able to meet the special needs of serious interns (pg. 1), but still have a strong desire to share information and teach farm skills. If this describes you, consider mentoring farmer Trainees.

If you are a farmer who would like to connect with farmer Trainees, you will have the following characteristics:

- You have some teaching ability.
- You have patience.
- You have the time and willingness to answer questions by phone, email, or in person.
- You understand that clear, detailed explanations will often be necessary.
- You have tasks for the Trainee to do on your farm (if that's what is requested)
- You have the time and are willing to make arrangements with the Trainee that suit both of you.
- You share our goal of producing confident new farmers – you don't see trainees as "future competition"
- You understand the political nature of small scale organic or sustainable farming and you are willing to help trainees understand it too.
- If your trainee lives on your farm for a week or more, you are willing to offer at least one day off weekly.

We highly recommend all mentors read/complete the following documents, which are excerpts from the New England Small Farm Institutes [On-Farm Mentor's Guide: Practical Approaches to Teaching on the Farm](#). Links to these files can be found online (www.organicfoodcouncil.org/resource_guide.php), or sent to you via email.

On-Farm Mentor's Guide Excerpt
Mentor Self-Evaluation
Mentor Worksheet 1 & 3

MFM SCREENING PROCEDURE

1. Having read through the above descriptions, we ask potential mentor farmers to self-select their mentor category: Intern-Mentor or Trainee-Mentor. If you have difficulty selecting a category, our screening questions should help to clarify which category you fall into.
2. All potential mentors are required to respond to screening questions, which include questions about your farm operation. Interns and trainees will use responses to select mentor farmers.
3. Based on your self-selection and responses, MFM will assign you a mentor category and create a mentor farm profile which will be distributed to interns and trainees who complete screening themselves. (Your farm profile will only be provided to applicants whose needs match what you have to offer)
4. Interns and trainees contact mentor farmers directly and you and the applicant work out the arrangements of the farm mentorship together. It is up to you to do due diligence whenever anyone calls. We hope that every experience on every mentor farm is fantastic, and we offer resources to help you screen applicants and identify their learning objectives. We are here to help, but **MFM takes no responsibility for the quality of farm mentorship experiences.** If you feel uncomfortable with an applicant, please listen to your gut and/or call us! You have the right not to take on an intern or trainee if you are not comfortable with him/her.

CONTACT US

If you have questions or would like to be listed as an MFM mentor farmer, please contact us:

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