



Extension

Starting a Farm Business

SELF-ASSESSMENT WORKBOOK

AUTHORS

Jeremy Delisle | Elaina Enzien | Jonathan Ebba | Nada Haddad
Kelly McAdam | Olivia Saunders | Seth Wilner



For each section below, indicate in the appropriate column whether you (or those who will be involved with the farm) currently possess that skill/knowledge. If it is not applicable to you or your current business plan, write N/A. Our goal is for you to use these questions to identify where some of the gaps are in your education around agriculture production. This isn't an all-encompassing checklist, but it touches on the major aspects of farming that you should be aware of as a beginner moving forward. We will revisit this checklist at the end of our course, so that you can see where your skills and knowledge have improved and consider how to develop those skills you still need.

Whole Farm Planning

Yes	No	Skill/Knowledge
		Are all family members on board with the farm enterprise(s) idea?
		Do you have a written inventory of your (and all of those involved with the farm) physical, social, knowledge, financial, and capital resources?
		Have you articulated your shared values and goals for the farm?
		Have you developed and written down a mission statement based on your values and goals that you are prepared to share with the public?
		Do you have a sense for what your immediate and long-term financial, environmental, and quality of life ideals are?
		Have you collected maps and information on your property's soil type, topography, and water availability?
		Have you evaluated which enterprises your land is best suited for (or, have you evaluated what type of land you need to acquire based on what you want to produce)?
		Do you have a good understanding of the value of a written farm business plan for keeping farm progress on track?
		Do you know what elements comprise a farm business plan?
		Do you currently have a written business plan for the farm?

Business Start-Up and Management

Yes	No	Skill
		Do you know what a sole proprietorship is, and how, why and whether to develop the farm as a sole proprietorship, partnership, or LLC?
		Have you estimated the basic start-up expenses for the farm?
		Do you have a plan to acquire the capital you will need for start-up?
		Have you researched and calculated your expected profitability of the farm, and have a realistic assessment for how long it will take to reach that level of profitability?
		Do you know how to keep farm business records-what information to track weekly and monthly?
		Do you have a separate bank account for farm income and expenses, not mingled with the family banking and checkbook?
		Do you have an understanding for where the weakest link is currently in your enterprise idea, and how to prioritize expenses so as to have the greatest benefit on your farm's profitability?
		Can you distinguish between the services of Farm Service Agency, Cooperative Extension, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the state departments of agriculture and health and human services?
		Do you have an understanding for how your local municipality and town ordinances will affect your farm business idea?
		Do you know what a Schedule F is, and when and if to file with your federal tax return?
		Do you have an understanding of state taxes that might impact your business, such as the Business Profits Tax and the Business Enterprise Tax?
		Do you have an understanding of what taxes you will need to pay/file if you hire employees?



Acquiring Tools, Equipment and Infrastructure

Yes	No	Skill
		Do you know what new infrastructure/repairs to existing infrastructure will be required immediately and in the next few years?
		Do you have a list of the tools and equipment you will need for your farm enterprise?
		Do you know how to evaluate whether you should rent, buy new, buy used, lease, or custom-hire equipment?
		Do you have the skills to repair and perform regular maintenance on your existing equipment, or know where you can get these services locally?

Managing Production

Yes	No	Skill
		Do you have an understanding of the meaning of the different types of farm-level certifications, such as “organic”, and how to locate certifiers, rules, and who to ask for additional information in pursuing these certifications?
		Do you understand some of the basic conservation practices that would be appropriate for your farm?



Raising Livestock and/or Crops (vegetable, fruit, greenhouse, horticulture etc.)

Yes	No	Skill
		Do you have an understanding of the basic principles for building and maintaining soil fertility?
		Do you know how to develop a crop rotation plan?
		Do you know how to identify, monitor for, and treat key pest/disease problems?
		Do you know who to contact for assistance with identifying and managing potential pests in your crop?
		Do you have a basic plan for seeding, planting, and harvesting?
		Do you have a strategy for post-harvest handling to maximize both the safety and quality of the produce you grow?
		Do you know what records to keep to help make sound decisions about future enterprises?
		Do you know what processing facilities are available and the laws/ restrictions around selling USDA vs custom-exempt meat?
		Do you know what facilities you need and the laws/ restrictions around selling milk products (raw or pasteurized, cheese, yogurt, ice cream etc.)?
		Do you know how to manage pastures to optimize forage production?
		Do you know how to feed livestock to reach your desired production goals?
		Do you have a working relationship with a veterinarian or know what veterinarians are in your area?



Marketing

Yes	No	Skill
		Do you have a good idea for what products you will grow/produce for sale and when these will be available to sell?
		Do you have a well-researched idea about who will buy your product(s) and where the transactions will take place (on the farm, farmers market, CSA, online, wholesale, etc.)?
		Do you know what qualities distinguish your product from the competition?
		Do you know what you will need to charge for your product(s) to be sustainable financially?
		Do you know how to effectively brand your product(s) and have you started to develop labels, a logo, a website, social media presence, and/or other marketing tools?

AUTHORS

Jeremy Delisle

Fruit and Vegetable Production Field Specialist

Elaina Enzien

Dairy, Livestock and Forage Crops Field Specialist

Jonathan Ebba

Landscape and Greenhouse Field Specialist

Nada Haddad

Emeritus Extension Field Specialist

Kelly McAdam

Agricultural Business Management Field Specialist

Olivia Saunders

Fruit and Vegetable Production Field Specialist

Seth Wilner

Agricultural Business Management Field Specialist



Adapted from Cornell University Small Farms Program

[Beginning Farms Skills Checklist - What to Know and What to Do](#)

The University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension is an equal opportunity educator and employer. UNH, U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, and New Hampshire counties cooperating.