



Organic Mentor Guidance Document

Thank you for agreeing to help mentor a new organic farmer. Whether you are working with a farm that is recently certified, currently transitioning or exploring potential organic production, your role is critical to their success. In some cases mentorship has been shown to increase the success of a new business by 45%.

Your role as a mentor is to support the producer as they navigate the issues and challenges that they face both in organic production, organic record keeping, and organic financials. Below is an overview of the process, mentor commitments, program documents, tips on being a successful advisor, and additional resources.

Mentorship Process:

- Farmer submits application seeking assistance with organic certification and requests mentor
- Appropriate mentor is selected based on farmers need and mentor's skill set, personality, location, and availability
- Farmer and mentor prioritize needs and establish mentorship agreement
- Farmer and mentor work together to go through checklist and address identified issues

Mentor Commitments:

- Communicates with farmer before visit to set a rough agenda
- Sends reminder email or phone call one day prior to confirm meeting
- Uses the program checklist at the first visit to make sure the most critical organic certification issues are covered during discussion
- Keeps notes on what is discussed and when appropriate, identifies any needed "homework" or follow-up for farmer to do after the meeting
- Fills out Mentorship Agreement form with farmer at end of meeting
- After the visit, sends summary notes to the farmer recapping the discussion, provide any additional resources and identify next steps
- Sends a copy of the checklist to the program manager, identifies any critical issues or needed follow-up



Written and designed by staff at the Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont. This product was developed with support from U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Marketing Service, National Organic Program

Program Documents:

- Organic Farm Visit check lists with SWOT analysis - Crop, Livestock, etc.
- Mentorship Agreement
- Selected certifiers guidelines for the specific type of production
- Mentor invoice template
- W-9 form for payment
- Mentorship Evaluation

Tips for success:

- Ask open ended questions and learn as much about the farm and family before offering any recommendations
 - Listen objectively
 - Be compassionate
 - Be honest about what you know and what topics you need to find other resources to help them with
- If you feel they need help with a subject you don't know enough about, let them know and contact the program manager to see what other resources are available
- Do a SWOT analysis at the first visit so you and the farmer are sure you are addressing the most critical issues
- Be clear about your availability. Often farmers looking for mentorship are hesitant to burden their mentors with questions. The clearer you are about your availability the better you can protect your time and the more comfortable famers will be to reach out and utilize you.
- Identify other area based resources including:
 - Local organic farming association
 - Organic certifier options
 - Relevant trade or industry associations
 - Regional Extension Agency

Additional national organic resources:

- National Organic Program (NOP)
 - www.ams.usda.gov/
- eOrganic website
 - <http://eorganic.info/>
- The National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service - ATTRA
 - <https://attra.ncat.org/>



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