

Passing Along Farm Knowledge:

A Mentor-Intern Handbook for Dairy and Livestock Farmers



**University of Wisconsin-Madison
Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems (CIAS)**

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SECTION 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 What is a mentor?

Mentors are more than just teachers; they are “partner[s] in an evolving learning relationship focused on meeting [intern] goals and objectives.”¹ Both mentors and interns should set personal goals as they enter into any type of internship in order to make the most of their time together.

The internship is meant to provide experience and can take on a formal or informal tone, depending on farmer preference. This handbook outlines a more structured internship, but its content can also be utilized in informal settings, such as when an experienced farmer advises someone who has already begun to farm.

On-farm mentors are individuals who have struggled—but survived—in their endeavors as farmers and want to help teach an upcoming generation about making a living off of the land while maintaining its integrity. An on-farm mentor should not only be a good farmer but also a good teacher, one who is willing to take the time to explain how and why he or she does certain things. This does not necessarily mean that a mentor needs to start out as the world’s number one teacher, but rather that the mentor is willing to take the time to learn how to pass on skills and knowledge. This handbook will help mentors develop their teaching skills as they progress through their first—or perhaps fortieth—internship.

1.2 What is an on-farm internship?

An internship is a program through which an individual gains skills and experience in a particular field. Internships are useful as a means to determine if a career such as farming is suitable for an individual. Internships differ from formal apprenticeships and employment. Formal apprenticeships provide paid, on-the-job training and may focus more on management and equity building in order to prepare individuals for independent ownership. Employment, especially on farms, focuses on the specific needs of an individual business rather than the whole system. Internships can offer a broader overview of the farming process.

The structure of an on-farm internship is not strictly defined, but rather is modified to fit the needs of each farmer-intern relationship. For a list of some generally accepted internship practices, see Appendix A.1, page 23.

1.3 The importance of on-farm mentoring

Historically, new farmers learned how to farm from their parents and entered the profession by taking over the family farm. But in recent decades, the number of dairy and livestock farms and farmers capable of teaching the next generation has decreased. The farmers who remain are

What makes a good on-farm mentor? Here are some examples derived from various mentoring programs:

- At least 10 years of farming experience
- Organizational skills
- Patience and a supportive attitude
- Desire to learn from interns as well as to teach
- Ability to listen
- Respect for the community and the environment
- Ability to select an appropriate intern for their farm
- Verbal & non-verbal communication skills
- Can balance constructive criticism with compliments
- Demonstrates self-confidence

¹L.J. Zacharay, *The Mentor's Guide: Facilitating Effective Learning Relationships* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 161.

“It’s important to get a younger person to see something different than what they’re used to so that they can see a different perspective. Just to see that there’s many ways of farming and that there’s many ways of doing things. There is no one, right way. Something is going to work for someone else for many different reasons.”

— Andy Jaworski, dairy farmer and former intern, Green Bay, WI

an aging population, with the fastest growing group at 65 years or older.² Maintaining and even increasing the farming population is necessary for rural communities to thrive socially, environmentally and economically,³ yet several obstacles keep beginning farmers of all ages from entering the profession. Appropriate financial investments, scale of inputs, marketing, community relations and other factors contribute to the success and sustainability of each beginning farmer. Experienced farmers have the opportunity to share their knowledge with potential farmers from both rural and urban backgrounds through on-farm mentoring and, by doing so, will help foster the upcoming generation.

1.4 Is an internship a good fit?

Internships are meant for individuals who are interested in learning about a type of farming that is new to them (such as organic, grazing, biodynamic, beef or dairy), expanding their skills (such as bookkeeping, direct marketing or breeding) or starting from scratch with little to no farming background. Interns should be motivated to learn and excited about the prospect of working with an experienced farmer.

Likewise, mentors must want to engage in an on-farm internship to make the relationship beneficial. Mentoring is not for everyone, and some farmers may find that they prefer hired labor over internships. Taking on an on-farm internship is no small task, and both parties must be prepared to deal with the challenges that will occur as the relationship develops. It is important, however, to recognize that there are many benefits to on-farm internships.

Understanding why a mentor would want to work with a beginning farmer is a key step towards a successful internship experience. Mentors should answer the following questions truthfully to better understand why, or perhaps whether, they want to engage in on-farm mentoring:

- Do I understand that interns are not free/cheap labor?
- Do I want to take time to slow down and answer questions?
- Do I want to help teach a new generation of farmers?
- Have I had a beneficial internship or apprenticeship experience?
- Is increasing the number of farmers on the landscape important to me?
- Do I enjoy farming and sharing my experiences and love of the occupation with others?
- Will I like having someone inexperienced help out on my farm?
- What are other reasons why I want to engage in an on-farm mentoring relationship?

²USDA, 2007 Census of Agriculture.

³The increasing age of rural populations is negatively impacting K-12 school districts in rural areas. Enrollment declines were observed in 68 percent of rural school districts in Wisconsin between 1997 and 2002. Additionally, rural areas in Wisconsin suffer from persistent poverty rates. Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters, *The Future of Farming and Rural Life in Wisconsin: Findings, Recommendations, Steps to a Healthy Future* (Madison, Wisconsin: Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters, 2007), 44-48.

These questions⁴ can help to determine how invested a potential mentor would be in assisting next-generation farmers, and whether or not he or she would be willing to devote time and effort to developing a productive relationship with an intern.

1.5 When and how to use this handbook

This handbook targets dairy and livestock farmers in the Midwest and is meant to provide a flexible set of guidelines for individuals interested in mentoring beginning farmers. Beginning farmers can have little to no farming experience or significant farming backgrounds. On-farm internships provide new farmers with practical experience to help them determine whether or not farming is the right occupation for them before investing their time and capital.

This handbook will help cultivate new generations of competent, well-prepared farmers. To benefit the most from this resource, interns and mentors should read and work through the handbook together. Of particular importance are the sections on skills assessment and goal setting (Sections 2 and 3) as well as ending the internship (Section 7). By progressing through the handbook as a team, mentors and interns will have the opportunity to understand each other's perspectives, which will strengthen their working relationships.



⁴Some of these questions were adapted from The New England Small Farm Institute's worksheet: "Motivations for Becoming an On-Farm Mentor." In Miranda Smith, *The On-Farm Mentor's Guide—practical approaches to teaching on the farm* (Belchertown, MA: The New England Small Farm Institute, 2005), 121. www.smallfarm.org/uploads/uploads/Files/mentor%20worksheet%201.pdf. Accessed 10/31/12.

SECTION 2. MAKING A MATCH

2.1 Identifying the right intern or mentor

Identifying the right intern for a farm or the right farmer-mentor for an internship is fundamental to creating a successful learning experience. The first step for the potential mentor is to make connections with potential interns. Some people do this by word of mouth, while others use promotional materials such as fliers, websites and newspapers. Some mentors even develop their own application forms.⁵

For both mentors and interns, a key piece to making the right match is to understand their own—as well as each other’s—goals, expectations and skills they bring to the internship. Potential mentors and interns can use Exercise 2.1 to outline the competencies they hope to attain as a result of the internship.⁶

“I cannot say enough about my time with my host family during my internship. There was an education to be had all hours that I was awake.”

—Robert Harper, dairy farmer and former intern, Columbia, VA



⁵The *On-Farm Mentor's Guide* (Smith, 59-72) has several examples of formal documents farmers may use, including fliers and application forms with reference lists. This resource also includes sample applications for trainees.

⁶Some of these goals were taken from the Wisconsin School for Beginning Dairy and Livestock Farmers' "WSBDF Internship Learning Competencies" worksheet.

Exercise 2.1: Identifying the competencies you wish to attain

Intern competencies: List the competencies you wish to attain during your internship.

Some examples may include (but are not limited to) the following:

___ Pasture

- ___ Overall pasture management
- ___ Managed rotational grazing
 - ___ Developing organized paddocks
 - ___ Timing of rotations
 - ___ Stocking rates
- ___ Fencing and water systems
- ___ Grass/legume establishment and maintenance
- ___ Soil factors influencing grazing systems
- ___ Feed conservation (stockpiling, silage, hay on pasture)

___ Row Crops

- ___ Choosing a crop rotation (corn, soybeans, winter wheat)
- ___ Choosing crop varieties
- ___ Planting: Moldboard plow vs. chisel plow vs. no-till, dates
- ___ Management practices: Pest and disease control, weed control, fertilizers
- ___ Harvesting: Deciding when to harvest, handling, storage
- ___ Selling/marketing crops

___ Livestock

- ___ Handling and managing livestock on pasture
- ___ Feeding/nutrition on pasture versus stored feed
- ___ Understanding milk production and feed rations
- ___ Herd health, disease prevention and treatment
- ___ Manure management
- ___ Breeding
- ___ Calving
- ___ Culling
- ___ Housing
- ___ Milking
- ___ Seasonal milking
- ___ Slaughtering

___ Milking Center

- ___ Overall milking center operation
- ___ Design decision making
- ___ Repair and maintenance
- ___ Timing and seasonal variations in milking
- ___ Milk quality/testing

___ Machinery/Equipment

- ___ Safety
- ___ Overall operation and maintenance

___ Business

- ___ Business planning and decision making
- ___ Financial recordkeeping
- ___ Loans, inputs and outputs
- ___ Balancing business with family and lifestyle values and goals
- ___ Direct marketing skills for meat or dairy
- ___ Value chain analysis (patterns of agricultural markets, and what/ who changes them and how)

___ Organizational and communication skills

___ Exposure to different perspectives

___ Other competencies you wish to attain during your internship (list)

Mentor competencies: List the areas where you wish to become more proficient as a farmer and teacher.
Some examples may include (but are not limited to) the following:

- ___ Learn about managed rotational grazing
- ___ Learn about different fencing systems
- ___ Understand milk production and feed rations
- ___ Develop direct marketing skills for beef production
- ___ Create a sound business plan with financial estimates
- ___ Learn about loans and balancing money (farm inputs and outputs)
- ___ Gain experience in animal breeding
- ___ Learn about seasonal milking
- ___ Establish better teaching and networking skills
- ___ Learn about the team of people you depend on to make your farm successful
- ___ Foster the upcoming generation of new/beginning farmers
- ___ Learn about successful strategies for passing down farms and businesses to another generation of farmers
- ___ Other areas in which you would like to become more proficient

2.2 Self-evaluation worksheet for skills: Identifying what each party brings to the table

Identifying and outlining the skills that interns and mentors bring to the table is an important part of establishing a successful match. Potential mentors and interns can fill out Exercise 2.2 and then compare their lists with the competencies listed earlier. Do the mentor's skills (Exercise 2.2) line up with the intern's learning competencies (Exercise 2.1)?

For example, consider an intern who has experience milking cows and wants to learn more about crop production. If a mentor's farm does not produce its own crops, perhaps this is not the best match. Alternatively, if a mentor's farm specializes in growing alfalfa, corn and various grass-hay mixtures, this could be a rewarding experience. It might also be a good idea for mentors to categorize on-farm activities so that interns can choose where to focus their learning. This is especially helpful for interns in shorter-term arrangements.⁷ Mentors may wish to use the list of intern competencies provided in Exercise 2.1 as a resource for outlining the skills, knowledge and opportunities they can offer.

⁷Valerie Adamski, personal interview, February 14, 2011.

Exercise 2.2: Identifying your skills

Intern skills: What skills and/or knowledge do you bring to the farm? Take some time to consider what you, as an intern, bring to the table.

To get started, think about classes you took and organizations you joined in high school, technical college or a four-year institution. Make a list and consider the skills that you learned.

If you grew up on a farm, what types of activities did you take part in? Did you help with the planting and harvesting of crops? Did you milk cows? Have you ever built a fence? What equipment have you used? What knowledge do you already have? Don't leave anything out.

List the jobs that you have held or currently hold (both agricultural and non-agricultural).

Other skills that you may not immediately think of when you consider farming could include marketing, accounting and balancing finances, business planning, mechanical training (changing oil, repairing an engine) and others. Be sure to include these.

Mentor skills: What opportunities and knowledge do you and your farm offer? Take some time to think about the large base of knowledge that you have to share.

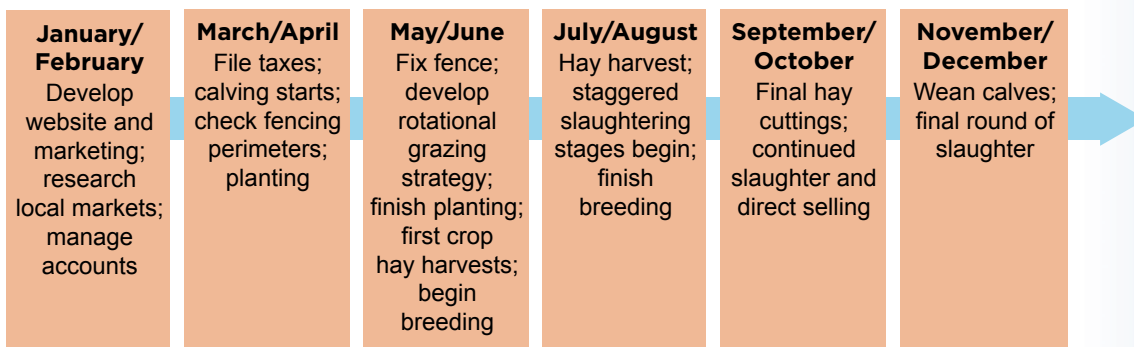
Take a few moments to list your daily, monthly and yearly activities—anything from mixing feed rations to balancing the books and filing taxes. These are all skills that you have to offer as a mentor. Some examples might include: milking, field work, bookkeeping, marketing, networking with local farmers and/or consumers, fencing, breeding, pasture management and mechanical skills. The list of intern competencies in Exercise 2.1 is a good starting place for identifying skills you can offer. Also consider qualities or enterprises that make your farm unique. Do you direct market? Do you have any land in CRP? Do you graze more than one species of animal? Do you milk seasonally? Are you certified organic? Others?

2.3 Determine the length and timing of the internship

The length and timing of an internship will be strongly related to an intern's interests and the timing of seasonal activities on a mentor's farm. Students from the Wisconsin School for Beginning Dairy and Livestock Farmers (WSBDF) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison often found that a two-month internship was an appropriate length. Their desire for a two-month internship stemmed from wanting to get out into the working world to gain capital. Others wanted a shorter internship because they already had previous farm experience, or because they wanted to partake in several different internships rather than one long experience. Interns seeking a more in-depth training experience may want to pursue a longer apprenticeship, such as the two-year-long Wisconsin Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship Program.

Although making money can seem more attractive than engaging in an unpaid or low-paying internship, it is important for interns to look at life in the long-term. Interns should consider taking at least two months for an internship and even more, if possible. Having an extended period of time on a farm can greatly enhance both an intern's and mentor's relationships and learning experiences. This is especially true for farming operations in the Midwest, where day-to-day operations are determined in part by the demands of the season. An intern who is on the farm for a longer period will engage in a broader range of activities and will develop more of the skills and decision-making abilities that are required for success. Alternatively, an intern could do several two-month internships on various farms in order to compare farming techniques.

Consider this sample timeline of a direct market, grass-fed beef farm, which describes activities that occur over the course of a year. Mentors can use a timeline such as this to gauge the appropriate length of an internship to teach particular skills.



In Section 3, we will look at more in-depth schedule examples as well as other farm arrangements.

2.4 Personality evaluation

Most adults can identify, in general, their personality type. Potential mentors and interns should consider their own personalities. Are they quiet and non-confrontational? Are they outspoken? Are they laid back or high-strung? No personality characteristic is better than another, but it is important for participants in a mentor-intern relationship to understand each other's tendencies and accept them. If there is a particular personality characteristic that one party possesses and the other party finds challenging to work with, it might be best to move on to other possibilities.

Conflicts will undoubtedly arise, and mentors must be willing to identify and talk through them. More on this topic will be discussed in a later section on conflict resolution. Understanding their personality types can help mentors and interns address conflict as they engage in an internship.

2.5 Take some time to decide

After identifying goals and assessing skills, mentors should make sure that interns get a chance to look around the farm. They should spend time with each other before agreeing to engage in a mentor-intern relationship, and then take some time to consider the viability of the agreed-upon arrangement. If, after thoughtful consideration, one party feels uncomfortable with the potential arrangement, he or she should respectfully decline the opportunity. It is best for both parties not to engage in a relationship that could be less than fruitful.



SECTION 3. GOAL SETTING, EVALUATION AND SCHEDULING

3.1 Overview

In Exercise 2.1, potential mentors and interns both outlined learning competencies that they wish to attain from an internship. This section will help them organize what they want to learn and how they will evaluate their progress. A large part of this process involves short- and long-term goal setting and establishing a timeline for completion or achievement.

Timelines and schedules should be developed with goals in mind. Mentors and interns should identify how much time will be spent on various aspects of farming, such as milking and breeding. Mentors and interns may find that their objectives evolve over time. After taking a look at the following sample timeline and schedule, mentors and interns can develop their own.

Example 3.1A

A three-month internship designed for an intern interested in rotational grazing and organic milk production on a dairy farm

April	May	June
Establish learning competencies with intern and consider long-term goals	Intern continues responsibilities from April and re-evaluates goals set at beginning of internship	Re-evaluate intern goals and add new items as needed
Safety		Intern should be able to run milking operation by this point without supervision
Teach feed rationing choices and make feeding cows, heifers, steers and calves the intern's responsibility	Herd health <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Go over organic options for udder health Vaccinations Alternatives to antibiotics Culling cows 	Field crops <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teach intern how to run harvesting equipment Explain harvest timing Rotating pasture with fields
Pasture management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explain rotational grazing system and make intern's responsibility Discuss waterways and keeping them clean of manure from the pasture Fix fence Manure management/distribution 	Pasture management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explain choice of grass and legume mixtures and when to plant Explain economic and environmental benefits of grass-based production 	Breeding <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discuss breed choices and breeding dates for fall versus spring freshening Go over recordkeeping for breeding
Manure management Options for barn manure management (methane digester, spread on pasture, spread on fields)	Marketing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teach marketing options (direct, farmers' market, sale barns, buying station) Have intern develop or update a farm website 	Give exit interview and feedback
Milking operation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Milk and wash cycles Time and frequency of milking Discuss average milk production per cow and its relationship between pasture quality and supplementation 	Networking Offer chance for pasture walks and farmer-to-farmer networking	
Heavy equipment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teach intern how to run a tractor and planting equipment Have intern help with prepping equipment for spring and summer use Compare buying to renting or having work custom done 	Discuss various topics such as raw milk, immigrant labor and niche markets	

Example 3.1B

This is an example of an intern's day on a cattle farm in late spring, after the intern has gained some experience working with heifers but little field experience. Daily schedules like these should not be made far in advance, because farm plans change from day-to-day. However, a list of tasks can be helpful for keeping interns on track and for making sure that both parties are meeting long-term goals.

Monday

- 8:00 am Intern bottle feeds calves (on own)
- 10:00 am Intern rotates heifers to respective pastures (on own)
- 10:30 am Clean out planting equipment with intern and return it to neighbor
- 12:30 pm Prepare and eat lunch with intern
- 1:30 pm Clean winter calf pens with intern and explain bedding and housing options
- 4:30 pm Have intern check on heifers and the fence line
- 5:00 pm Fetch haybine from the machine shed and show intern how to grease it for the first hay cutting
- 6:00 pm Prepare and eat dinner and relax for the evening

3.2 Scheduling policies

When mentors and interns sit down to develop goals and basic schedules, they should also develop ground rules for the internship. Specific policies or expectations of both parties should be clearly identified. See the sidebar on page 13 for some ideas of ground rules.

One key decision is whether, and where, an intern will live on a farm. In order for an on-farm living situation to work, there must be mutual trust between intern and mentor (and the mentor's family). Setting reasonable boundaries and respecting them will facilitate this process.

Regardless of whether an intern is living on-farm, the mentor must understand that the intern has a life and responsibilities beyond that farm. It is important for mentors to be flexible and maintain a positive working relationship with the intern. At the same time, interns must be respectful of the boundaries and rules set at the beginning of the internship.

3.3 Unsure about goals?

Interns with little farming experience may be unaware of the many opportunities for growth that exist on a farm. While developing a timeline with an intern, a mentor can suggest learning competencies to see what piques an intern's interest. Exercises 2.1 and 2.2 provide a useful guide through this process. Identifying an intern's long-term goals (e.g., determining if farming is a good occupation for an intern, establishing a business plan for purchasing land, learning the ins and outs of an alternative form of farming) will help clarify short-term goals and timelines for an internship. However, helping an intern decide if farming is a viable career to pursue is also part of the internship process. It is not necessary for interns to have solidified all of their goals in order to have a meaningful internship experience.

3.4 Evaluation

Skills assessment is the key to ensuring that interns get as much out of their internships as possible. Both interns and mentors should revisit and assess progress toward their goals weekly, or even several times a week. These benchmarks are likely to shift as the internship progresses.

For interns who are living on a farm, much of this conversation may occur over meals, where learning is reinforced by talking about on-farm activities. If the intern is not staying on the farm or sharing meals with the mentor and family, then both parties should set aside at least a few hours each week to discuss learning competencies.

3.5 Designing a contract

The development of a contract can provide structure for the internship, helping to clarify mutually agreed upon goals and a reasonable timeline. Appendix A.2, page 25, provides a sample contract that mentors and interns can modify to fit the specific needs of an internship.

Establishing a list of expectations is important to keep the mentor and intern 'on the same page.'

Here are just a few examples.

- Intern living on the farm will have open access to kitchen and house
- Intern living on farm will ask mentor prior to having guests
- Intern will be ready to work by a scheduled time (and no later), X number of days per week
- Mentor will pay intern for milking cows
- Intern should let the mentor know of any appointments a week in advance

SECTION 4. TEACHING AND LEARNING GUIDELINES

“Most teachers of adults in the multitude of adult education programs are experts in the content they teach, but usually have little preparation in the instructional process of helping adults learn.”⁸

4.1 Learning styles

When working with adult learners, it is important to understand how individuals vary in terms of physical abilities and social characteristics such as personality, intelligence and experience.⁹ Likewise, each mentor’s teaching style will vary based on ethical and ideological alignments¹⁰ as well as personality.

For the purposes of on-farm learning, auditory, visual and kinesthetic learning styles can be combined to achieve the most comprehensive education.¹¹ Internships provide an opportunity for experiential learning (or learning by experience) that accommodates all three types of learning.^{12,13} Here are some guidelines on how to teach in a way that emphasizes all three learning styles:

Auditory

- Explain what you are going to do and why it is important
- Note if there are alternative methods to achieve the task at hand
- Clearly state safety concerns

Visual

- Demonstrate by doing
- Explain what you are doing as you are doing it to re-emphasize auditory learning

Kinesthetic

- Have the intern practice the task with the mentor there for assistance, if needed
- After the intern has demonstrated competence in performing a task, allow him/her to practice without immediate supervision

Throughout this learning process, mentors must provide positive feedback as well as constructive criticism. Mentors need to be flexible and allow interns to approach a task creatively, where possible, but also to exercise caution when safety is a concern. Similarly, interns should do their best to adjust to the pace of a farmer’s operation and farming style.

4.2 Asking questions

Questions facilitate the transmission of knowledge, enhance involvement, foster problem solving and encourage feedback, all of which are crucial

⁸M.W. Galbraith, *Adult Learning Methods: A Guide for Effective Instruction*. 2nd ed. (Malabar, Florida: Krieger Publishing Company, 1998), 4.

⁹See Galbraith, 21-34 for more information on Long’s work on understanding adult learners.

¹⁰See Galbraith, 85-89 for the Principles of Adult Learning Scale (PALS) to further evaluate teaching styles. This scale can also be found online: oregonstate.edu/instruct/ed553/pals.html. Accessed 10/31/12.

¹¹Smith, *On-Farm Mentor’s Guide*, 6-7.

¹²For a more in-depth analysis of experiential learning and the continuum of experiential teaching strategies, see Tara J. Fenwick, *Learning Through Experience: Troubling Orthodoxies and Intersecting Questions* (Malabar, Florida: Krieger Publishing Company, 2003).

¹³Many educational specialists find that adult learners do best when they engage in kinesthetic, or experiential, learning because it allows them to observe the consequences of their actions and learn from their successes and mistakes. See Jerry W. Gilley, “Demonstration and Simulation,” in Galbraith, *Adult Learning Methods*, 223-253 for more information on this topic.

in the learning process.¹⁴ Both mentors and interns should ask questions throughout the internship. Here are some reasons why it is helpful for mentors to ask interns questions daily:¹⁵

- To increase the intern's intellectual participation and retention
- To determine what the intern knows about a task
- To review activities or chores
- To test what the intern has learned
- To encourage the intern to ask questions

Interns should learn to ask mentors questions, as well. While questioning why a farmer does things a certain way can come off as contentious, this inquiry is necessary for interns to learn and may even introduce new ideas that mentors might use on their farms. Consider the following reasons why interns should ask mentors questions:

- To increase the intern's intellectual participation and retention
- To help the intern communicate understanding
- To review activities or chores
- To clarify the mentor's instructions
- To demonstrate to the mentor that they are actively engaged in learning and are interested in the farm

4.3 Internship stages

Similar to the stages of learning a task, longer-term internships also have stages.¹⁶ Mentors should pay attention to these stages to avoid overwhelming or boring interns.

Beginning

- Introduce intern to your farm
- Achieve balance between maintaining intern interest and overwhelming them
- Offer instruction for jobs/tasks to be performed

Middle

- Introduce more challenging tasks in addition to everyday tasks
- Move toward granting responsibility for particular jobs/tasks

End

- Intern should be able to run the farm if the mentor is away (NOTE: this applies to interns with previous farm experience or doing an internship of three or more months)
- Help interns think about applying internship experiences to their own farms
- Bring closure to the experience

The beginning, middle and end stages of an internship have no set timeline. For a two-month internship, not all of the tasks in the “end” stage (such as running the farm without supervision) will be feasible. This will be especially true for interns with little or no farming experience.

Interns should not be bored or overwhelmed. Part of the responsibility for ensuring the internship is neither tedious nor taxing falls on mentors, but interns need to let mentors know if they are under too much pressure or, conversely, not challenged enough.

¹⁴Smith, *On-Farm Mentor's Guide*, 10-13.

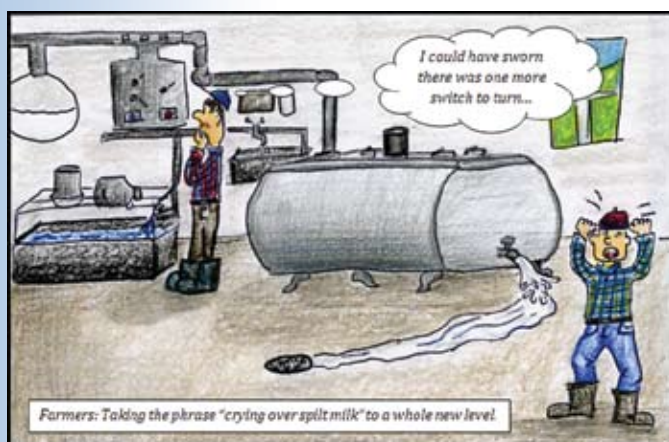
¹⁵Some of these reasons were adapted from Ray E. Sanders, “Questioning Techniques,” in Galbraith, *Adult Learning Methods*, 187-196.

¹⁶Learning stages were taken from a personal interview with Alfrid Krusenbaum, February 13, 2011.

SECTION 5. THINGS TO WATCH OUT FOR

5.1 Questions — finding a balance

Interns who do not ask questions can appear disengaged and may be frustrating for mentors to work with.¹⁷ On the flip side of the coin, interns who ask too many questions or press particular topics may make mentors feel that their judgment is being questioned. Interns should solicit explanations in a respectful manner. Likewise, mentors need to ask questions in order to challenge interns, but must also be attentive to verbal and non-verbal cues that may indicate frustration.¹⁸



5.2 Assuming what an intern should know

Interns offer their mentors various levels of experience. Some have grown up on farms and know that they want to farm, while others have no farming experience and are just testing the waters. Whatever an intern's experience, a mentor should never assume that an intern knows how to do something. Even an intern with previous farming experience may have done things differently and could stand to benefit from learning how a *mentor's* farm operates.

Additionally, it may take several repetitions for an intern to learn an unfamiliar skill. Learning new concepts takes time and can be tricky for those without much farming experience. For example, a mentor may explain how to set up the pipeline for milking, but that does not ensure that an intern will remember the various switches and knobs that need to be flipped and turned the next day. If a mentor makes assumptions about what an intern should know, an intern may become frustrated or withdrawn. This could have negative repercussions as an internship proceeds.

5.3 Interns are not employees

Sometimes it is easy for mentors in any line of work to treat their interns as employees rather than learners. Often this has to do with the tone a mentor takes when addressing an intern. Mentors should always remember that interns are there to learn and that their role is to explain what they do, how they do it and why. Mentors should diversify the tasks an intern engages in on the farm. The fact that an intern is primarily interested in milking cows, for example, does not mean that a mentor should not teach other farming skills such as feeding, finances and breeding.

¹⁷Altfred Krusenbaum, personal interview, February 13, 2011.

¹⁸Lee Herman and Alan Mandell, *From Teaching to Mentoring: Principles and Practice*, Dialogue and Life in Adult Education (New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2004), 55-59.

Additionally, mentors need to be flexible. The intern is on the farm because he or she wants to be there, but personal issues may come up. As long as these are not recurring or disruptive to the internship, mentors should allow interns personal space when appropriate.

5.4 Keeping the internship “fresh”

Keeping the internship “fresh” or exciting is important in maintaining an intern’s interest and work ethic. Striking the right balance between daily responsibilities and new, exciting experiences can be a challenge, but open communication between mentors and interns and a weekly review of their goals will keep the internship moving forward.

5.5 Overworking interns

Farming is difficult, and the work that a farm demands may overwhelm many interns, regardless of their farming experience.¹⁹ Although a mentor may be able to push through a difficult stretch, an intern may have a harder time and may or may not express how he or she is feeling. Mentors can give interns a break now and then, whether it is a three-day weekend each month or an entire week out of a summer. More than likely, interns will come back refreshed and working harder than before.

5.6 Stress

The New England Small Farm Institute’s *On-Farm Mentor’s Guide* describes stress as a large part of farming. “Weather, weeds, diseases, insects and market conditions can all cause problems, sometimes simultaneously.”²⁰ Disastrous as these misfortunes may be, they are part of the package that farmers learn to cope with. Interns may find that the way a mentor handles a situation is unsatisfactory, or alternatively, that a farmer is spending too much time dealing with one issue over another. It is helpful for mentors to explain their approaches to past and current stressful situations, perhaps even disasters. Undoubtedly mentors will have some good stories, and the fact that they and their farms have survived gives them credibility.

5.7 Lazy interns

If an intern is less than motivated, the mentor should carefully communicate the intern’s need for improvement. First, the mentor can try offering compliments about what the intern does or is doing well, and then suggest things that the intern could do to improve.

There may be several reasons an intern is slacking on the job, such as fatigue or boredom.²¹ Interns may not be used to the physical demands of farming nor the repetitive tasks, such as milking morning and night, day after day. Mentors can try to communicate why they enjoy their farming

“While interns can provide plenty of help on the farm, mentors should expect to spend a significant amount of time explaining things to them. You can spend 15 minutes describing or explaining what you can do by yourself in 30 seconds. When you’re up against time, providing this guidance can be stressful.”

—Vance Haugen, dairy farmer and UW Extension Ag Agent, Canton, MN

¹⁹Smith, *On-Farm Mentor’s Guide*, 17.

²⁰Smith, *On-Farm Mentor’s Guide*, 26.

²¹Smith, *On-Farm Mentor’s Guide*, 27.

routines to help interns gauge whether or not they want to tackle this type of career. Interns may feel bored if they are not given a diverse range of tasks. Mixing up the routine with different jobs, like working in the garden or fencing, may help. If a negative attitude persists, a mentor may need to address an intern in a more serious tone to understand the root causes of their behavior.

5.8 Cell phones

Cell phone use during an internship is at the discretion of the mentor. While occasional cell phone use is not usually a problem, taking many minutes out of every hour to text or have phone conversations will disrupt farm activities and the internship. Mentors and interns can establish cell phone and other electronic device rules early in their relationships to avoid conflict.

5.9 Generally accepted practices

Wondering what kinds of living and meal arrangements, meetings and payment are common in on-farm internships? See Appendix A.1, page 23, for a list of generally accepted practices.



SECTION 6. CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND COMMUNICATION

Conflict between people occurs on a spectrum. This handbook identifies three levels of conflict: differences of opinion, minor arguments and serious conflicts. Differences of opinion are a normal part of the mentoring/interning experience and can be healthy for personal and relational growth. For example, a mentor may feel that continuous grazing is the best option for the farm while an intern may believe that transitioning to rotational grazing is a better alternative. This difference of opinion could lead to a minor argument if, for example, one person feels threatened by the opinion of the other. If neither side justifies their reasoning, nor are they able to reach a common solution or an acceptance of the other's opinion, this could lead to a long-term conflict. Conflicts can negatively affect working relationships if not handled appropriately.

Differences of opinion may result from...

- Not setting and/or reviewing goals
- The mentor being unavailable to the intern

Minor arguments may result from...

- Not establishing expectations
- Not setting and/or reviewing goals
- The mentor being unavailable to the intern
- The mentor or intern pushing opinions or perspectives
- Talking too little or too much

Conflict may result from...

- Breaching confidentiality
- Failing to see the reciprocal nature of the internship
- The mentor or intern pushing opinions or perspectives
- Refusing to admit that the relationship is unsuccessful

6.1 Preventing conflict

Although differences of opinion, minor arguments and conflict may arise, it is best to take steps to avoid a negative experience. In addition to those factors discussed in Section 5, some possible reasons for these three levels of conflict are offered in the box to the right. Note that some reasons overlap across levels.²²

6.2 When conflict arises

Inevitably, there will be instances of disagreement between mentors and interns. These may be minor and easily dealt with, or major impediments to the relationship. When mentors or interns find themselves in uncomfortable situations, they should do their best to reflect on what the problem is, why there is a conflict and how they can work together to resolve the issue. Interns and mentors should address issues by setting aside an hour or two for discussion. Although it may be difficult to admit errors,

²²Some of the outlined reasons for conflict were adapted from the *Pennsylvania Farm Link's Mentoring Program: Goals and Objectives of a Mentoring Relationship* (PowerPoint slides).

Here is an example of a helpful exercise to work through conflicts:

Both the mentor and the intern should sit down and make a list of what it is disagreeable about a particular issue or about the relationship as a whole. Be careful about how you word what you say, but be honest. If able, respond to these issues immediately, but if not, then take a day to digest the information. Set a time the next day to go over and discuss potential solutions. Although initially this exercise can make both parties feel a bit vulnerable or uncomfortable, it will help you to work through your problems and keep the internship on track.

doing so will demonstrate maturity and set a good example. The sidebar provides an example of how to work through conflict.²³

Sometimes, mentors and interns cannot resolve conflict on their own. When this occurs, they can seek the assistance of a neutral third party whom both trust and respect.²⁴ In some cases, the problem will be rooted in personality conflicts, in which case it may be best to end the internship altogether. One of the worst mistakes a mentor and intern can make is to continue a failing relationship. Doing so can make a mentor less likely to engage in future internships and can discourage an intern from a farming career for the wrong reasons.

If a mentor finds that several of his or her internships have failed, he or she may want to consider stepping back to address why this is the case. Is the mentor coming across as negative or demanding? Perhaps the mentor is expecting too much or too little of the interns and they feel overwhelmed or underutilized. He or she can try talking with other mentors about their experiences to pinpoint the issues.

Similarly, if an intern cannot make a good match with a mentor, they should reflect on what has caused the internships to go sour. Is the intern fully devoted to the internship or more concerned with other aspects of life? Is farming the right profession for the intern? This kind of self-reflection is helpful in gaining insights about conflict.

6.3 Communicating effectively

Often conflict is rooted in communication, or lack thereof. Here are some helpful communication skills:²⁵

For Mentors

- ✓ After explaining a task, ask interns if they understand what they are doing and why
- ✓ Speak in a respectful manner
- ✓ Actively listen (eye contact, feedback)
- ✓ Differentiate when you are communicating facts and opinions
- ✓ Speak clearly and concisely

For Interns

- ✓ If you do not understand something, ask questions
- ✓ Speak in a respectful manner
- ✓ Actively listen (note-taking, summarizing, eye contact, feedback)
- ✓ Speak clearly and concisely
- ✓ Your opinion is important, so voice it when appropriate

For more information on conflict, conflict styles and how best to handle emotions, see Appendices A.3 and A.4, pages 26-27.

²³This exercise was adapted from Smith, *On-Farm Mentor's Guide*, 29.

²⁴See Appendix B for a list of contacts. Some mentor-intern programs such as the GrassWorks Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship Program provide assistance with conflict resolution.

²⁵Adapted from the GrassWorks *Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship Program Design Summary*, February 14, 2011.

SECTION 7. ENDING THE INTERNSHIP

When an internship begins, both the mentor and the intern should agree upon a date to end the experience. Naturally, this date does not indicate the complete termination of the relationship. The exact date can be modified if the internship needs to be cut short for some reason or, alternatively, if both parties agree to extend the internship. At some point, however, the internship must come to a close, and setting a date for completion is an important part of achieving both parties' goals.

7.1 Evaluating interns

It is important for interns to understand their strengths and weaknesses in farming. An exit interview is a fundamental learning tool that will help them grow as potential beginning farmers and, more importantly, as people. Exit interviews can vary in formality and depth, but at the very least should consist of a thorough review of the goals set at the beginning of the internship. Mentors should also provide positive feedback on interns' strengths as well as constructive criticism on areas needing improvement.

7.2 Evaluating mentors

Mentors should also receive feedback from interns. Again, a helpful exercise is to go over the initial goals set at the beginning of the internship. Did the intern learn the skills that he or she wished to acquire? Were his or her goals met? Were the goals of the mentor met? The intern should provide the mentor with positive feedback as well as constructive criticism to help the mentor to grow as a farmer and teacher. This can be done in written or oral form, depending on individual preferences.

“I would really encourage all beginning farmers to do an internship along with course work.”

—Greg Osinga, dairy farmer and former intern, Janesville, WI



SECTION 8. CONCLUDING REMARKS

By taking the time to work through this handbook, we hope that both mentors and interns gain a better understanding of approaches to and benefits of on-farm internships. Although challenging at times, internships can be exceptionally rewarding experiences for both parties, allowing them to continue learning about farming and the community. We would like to thank all of the mentors, interns and colleagues who contributed to this document and hope that its use benefits future farmers.

For additional resources, see Appendix B, page 28.

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APPENDIX A

A.1 Generally accepted practices for internships

In this section, you will find a list of practices that are common to on-farm internships. This list may help the mentor and intern get an idea of what to expect. Note that these examples don't necessarily apply to all farms.

Interns living on the farm

It is not uncommon for interns to live on the farm, either in a separate housing area or directly in the farmer's home. Living on the farm provides an opportunity for an intern to experience farm life 24-7; this is especially valuable for an intern with little farming experience. However, a mentor who offers living space must be able to provide adequate housing (kitchen and bathroom facilities) and privacy. Most importantly, the mentor and intern should go over and agree upon house rules, especially if the intern will live with the mentor. Make copies of these rules so that both the intern and mentor have clear expectations. As experienced mentor Valerie Adamski points out, farmers should "have the intern treat the farm family's home as their own, but outline some boundaries."²⁶ Here are some examples of house rules:

Kitchen Rules

- Food in fridge is to be shared
- Help prepare meals and clean up
- No drinking milk from the carton
- Mentor cleans every other week
- Mentor takes out trash, intern takes out recycling

Living Space

- Keep living space clean of personal belongings
- Ask before inviting friends
- If watching television after 10:00 p.m., turn volume down
- Lock doors if last one to bed

Bathroom

- Keep showers under 15 minutes
- Intern cleans every other week

Meals

Regardless of living arrangements, it is common for interns to eat lunch with the farm family. More often than not, the farm family will prepare lunch with, or for, the intern, but the intern could also prepare his or her own lunch and eat it with the farm family (or mentor). Generally, if interns are not living on the farm, they will eat breakfast and supper on their own. But mealtime expectations must ultimately suit the mentor's lifestyle. Perhaps having the intern eat breakfast with the farm family fits the family's routine better than lunch.

²⁶Valerie Adamski, personal interview, February 14, 2011.

Weekly meetings

Weekly meetings can help interns and mentors stay on track to achieve their goals. Meetings can take place at the beginning of the work week (Sunday or Monday). They should cover various duties for which the intern will be responsible and questions the intern or mentor might have. Meetings can also take place over meals. Mentors may choose to provide a general description of weekly activities and follow up with more detailed explanations on a daily basis. This will keep the intern on track while also giving the mentor some flexibility to address unexpected tasks.

Learning from the intern

Although a mentor may have been farming a particular way for several years, interns might have experience with new practices that are more efficient or environmentally friendly. A mentor should be open to an intern's suggestions, as new ideas may prove to be profitable. Part of the mentoring experience involves learning from interns; mentors should be open to their ideas.

Paying the intern

Whether or not an intern is paid depends on the relationship between the mentor and the intern. Some mentors may feel that they should be paid for teaching interns. Some interns may feel that they deserve to be paid for the work that they do on the farm. Payment is not necessary for a beneficial learning experience. Some internships progress without payment.

However, it is possible that an intern may find it difficult to proceed with an internship without some monetary compensation. To assist with this, the mentor, if able, could offer payment for a portion of the farm services an intern provides. For example, if an intern studied accounting, the mentor could pay the intern part-time to balance the bills and submit taxes. Other tasks would remain unpaid, but this would give the intern some incentive to choose the internship over a paid job with less opportunity for on-farm learning. Another option could be paying the intern for farm chores done outside the time required for the internship. Some mentors may offer scholarships for interns. Overall, however, decisions about pay depend on the initial expectations set by both the mentor and intern at the beginning of the internship, and will vary based on their relationship and resources.

A.2 Contract example

Here is a sample contract from the Wisconsin School for Beginning Dairy and Livestock Farmers. This can be altered to fit the needs of individual internships. Use the desired competencies identified in Exercise 2.1 and the skills identified in Exercise 2.2 to define learning objectives and responsibilities.

Internship Agreement Form

Mentor Contact Information

Name: _____ Address: _____
Phone: _____ City: _____
E-mail: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____

Intern Contact Information

Name: _____ Address: _____
Phone: _____ City: _____
E-mail: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____

Intern Emergency Contact Information

Name: _____ Relationship: _____
Phone: _____

Details of Internship

Beginning Date: _____ Ending Date: _____

At the end of the internship, the intern and mentor will provide written feedback on their internship experience to each other. This feedback will include what each party did well as well as what they could improve.

Days and times intern will work on the farm: _____

Vacation time/time off: _____

Arrangements for room and board:

Payment schedule (if applicable):

Intern learning objectives (may attach additional pages as necessary):

Intern work responsibilities will include (may attach additional pages as necessary):

Mentor objectives and responsibilities (may attach additional pages as necessary):

Conflicts

If conflicts should arise _____ is assigned as a mediator to help resolve conflicts or, if necessary, to help end the internship.

Mediator Signature: _____

We have read and discussed the Mentor Handbook and the Internship Agreement Form and have mutually agreed upon the subjects identified in these documents.

Mentor Signature: _____ Date: _____

Intern Signature: _____ Date: _____

A.3 Conflict styles

The following summary outlines five conflict styles—competitive, avoidance, accommodate, compromise and collaborative. These were taken directly from Tom Cadwallader’s presentation, “Concepts and Skills for Negotiating Conflict,” which was developed using the Thomas-Killman Conflict Mode Instrument.²⁷

Competitive

- Aggressive
 - Verbal (shouting, blaming)
 - Hostile joke
 - Physical aggression
 - Gunnysacking (attacking a person with a number of issues all at once)
- Assertive
 - Demand concessions
 - Toughness
 - Threat
 - Irrevocable commitment
- Manipulation
 - Guilt (making the other party feel guilty so they comply)
 - Misrepresentation of position (misleading the other party about your true position)
 - Gamesmanship (trying to throw the other person off balance to get them more likely to give in)
- Coalition
 - Gang up against another person
- Authority
 - Invoke formal authority (use your authority)
 - Invoke higher authority (ask a superior to resolve the conflict)

Avoidance

- Change the topic
- Refuse to recognize conflict
- Postpone dealing with an issue

Accommodate

- Unassertive and cooperative
- Neglect own concerns to meet the concerns of others
- Try to avoid conflict in order to maintain the relationship
- Concede to another’s demands

Compromise

- Quid pro quo (giving “something for something”)
- Log rolling (proposing a solution that involves both parties giving something to get something)

Collaborative

- Propose novel solution
- Find a common goal that you both can work towards
- Two-column method (each person/party lists their needs in one column and the needs of the other in a second column; compare and search for commonalities)
- Acknowledge the legitimacy of the other party’s position (you don’t necessarily have to agree with it)

²⁷Kenneth W. Thomas and Ralph H. Kilmann, “Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument” (Mountain View, California: CPP, Inc.). www.cpp.com/products/tki/index.aspx. Accessed 10/31/12.

Appropriate times to use each conflict style are outlined below:

Competitive

- When a quick and decisive action is necessary (emergencies)
- On important issues where unpopular actions need implementing
- When others will take advantage of your noncompetitive behavior

Avoidance

- If the issue is trivial
- When other issues are more important/pressing
- When you have little to no chance of winning
- When the potential for disruption outweighs the benefits of resolution
- To let others cool down and regain perspective
- When long-term costs of winning may outweigh short-term gains
- When others can resolve the conflict more effectively

Accommodate

- When you find you are wrong
- When the issue is more important to the other party than to you
- To build social credits for later issues
- To minimize losses when you are outmatched and losing
- When your relationship is more important than the issue at hand
- To let others learn by making their own mistakes

Compromise

- When goals are important but not worth the potential disruption of more assertive tactics
- When opponents with equal power are committed to mutually exclusive goals
- To achieve temporary settlements of complex issues
- To arrive at solutions under time constraints
- As a backup when collaboration is unsuccessful

Collaborative

- To find solutions when both parties' concerns are too important to be compromised
- When a long-term relationship between the parties is important
- To gain commitment of all parties by building consensus
- When the other person or party is willing to take a collaborative approach

A.4 Emotions

Understanding your own emotions will help you understand other people's emotions and perceptions. Feelings are rooted in our past experiences and how our families express and handle emotions. It is important to deal directly with the core causes of emotions rather than ignore those emotions. Ask yourself some of the questions to the right concerning appreciation, affiliation, autonomy, status and role.²⁸ Considering these questions may help you understand why you feel a certain way about a situation and help you communicate those feelings with a mentor or intern. Consider expressing your feelings using one of these phrases: "When you do this.....I feel this..." or, "I feel this...because of this...." Identifying feelings and linking them to specific actions or underlying causes will help both parties move forward.

- Am I ignored or appreciated?
- Am I treated like an adversary or a colleague?
- Am I restricted or do I have freedom to decide?
- Is my status demeaned or recognized?
- Is my role trivialized or fulfilling?

²⁸Ibid.

APPENDIX B

Below is a selected set of additional reference materials that may be useful:

Sharemilking

Tranel, Larry F. 1996. Sharemilking in the Midwest.

www.extension.iastate.edu/NR/rdonlyres/B090C051-8602-4456-B3D6-1ED769C2D495/46816/SHRMILKPUBWISC.pdf

Apprenticeship Programs in the Midwest

GrassWorks Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship Program:

grassworks.org/?110120000000

The Wisconsin School for Beginning Dairy and Livestock Farmers (WSBDF)

The WSBDF targets individuals interested in dairy and livestock farming with a particular emphasis on grazing as a means to enter farming as a career. www.cias.wisc.edu/dairysch.html

More Educational Resources

This website lists farm educational programs by state in the Midwest as well as other regions of the United States: www.youngfarmers.org/practical/training-and-helpful-organizations/#Midwest.

More information on conflict resolution is found in the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument by Kenneth W. Thomas and Ralph H. Kilmann. Much of their work can be found here: www.kilmann.com/conflict.html.

