



Introduction

Welcome to *Over the Fence*, the first issue of THINKFARM’s quarterly e-newsletter. In *Over the Fence*, we'll share upcoming news and events, update you on projects THINKFARM is pursuing, and share ideas. In each issue, we'll profile a Nova Scotia farm and include a feature article on a topic of interest to beginning farmers. We also have a Frequently Asked Questions page.

We welcome your contributions to the newsletter. Feel free to submit article topics, suggest farms to profile, submit book and website reviews, or send questions you want answered. You can reach us at thinkfarm@gov.ns.ca

Farmer Mentorship What it Can Do for You and Where You Can Find it

Mentorship for new farmers is frequently cited as one of the factors key to their success; however, looking around Nova Scotia, mentorship opportunities seem thin on the ground. What does mentorship look like, what can it do for you, and how can you find a mentor?

The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) defines *mentor* as an experienced and trusted adviser. A mentor is someone with experience that you trust who offers you advice. Presumably, a consultant is also someone you trust who offers you advice, but we don't think of hired consultants as mentors. What OED's definition is missing is that mentorship is something more than just a professional relationship. In fact, the original Mentor in Greek mythology was asked by Odysseus to guide

and instruct his son while Odysseus fought in the Trojan War, which implied a father-like relationship. While some formal mentorship programs offer mentors financial compensation for their time and expenses, a true mentor isn't in it for the money.

Mentorship can take many forms

For the very inexperienced, a situation in which the mentor provides free room and board along with learning opportunities in exchange for labour is often an attractive option.

Jordan Marr signed up for a six-month apprenticeship in Nova Scotia after some agriculture courses at the University of British Columbia piqued his interest in farming. “By the end of the apprenticeship I was hooked

on the lifestyle,” says Marr. Four years later, he’s back in BC expecting to earn most of his income from a market garden on leased land.

For those with a higher level of agricultural education or experience, a paying job on a well-run farm is often the preferred way to learn how to run a farm business. People who have already started to farm on their own can still benefit from formal and informal mentorships in the areas of production and business where they feel their own skills are weak.

“Agriculture is like a trade – you can only get so much out of a book and the rest is practical,” says Justin Beck, Chair of the Canadian Young Farmers Forum. As a beginning farmer, a little mentoring can go a long way. If you find a mentor who has a successful operation, you can learn from their experience and avoid their mistakes. Beck is currently working for and learning from Peter Peill, owner of Lyndhurst Farms in Canning. “To get the practical, you need to learn from someone who has experience or do it the hard way, on your own,” says Beck.

Jen Scott works for the Food Action Committee of the Ecology Action Centre in Halifax and is studying farm mentorship. She recently traveled to New England, US, where there are many mature farm internship programs, particularly for market gardeners. She says it’s been the experience of mentor farmers in the US that market garden skills are easy to teach, while cultural and interpersonal skills are much more difficult. However, the mentors have found these soft skills to be equally essential in creating successful new farmers.

For instance, Lauchie MacEachern has been working on Folly River Farms, a dairy farm in Glenholme, for the past several years. He’s learning the operation from the inside out under a five-year agreement to purchase the farm when the current owner retires. “The most important thing is to keep the cows in calf,” says Henry Eisses, MacEachern’s employer/mentor. “If you don’t stay on top of things, the breeding falls apart.” But MacEachern says the most important thing he’s learned from his mentor is how to let things go, that when problems come up, you don’t make a big fuss; just deal with them and move on.

Why be a mentor?

Most mentors feel a certain obligation to “pay it forward.” They received help from others early on and want to support the next generation of farmers as well. Other mentors feel energized by younger people with new ideas. The fresh perspective can create learning opportunities for the mentors as well as the mentees. A good mentor will be transparent about their farming techniques and operating expenses. If they choose to be overly proprietary about their knowledge they probably shouldn’t be in the mentoring business.

Even if there’s not a formal program you can access, don’t be shy to approach experienced members of the farm community. Most of them are willing to provide advice and assistance. Get to know the farmers in your community by joining your local commodity association or county federation of agriculture. Offer some help in exchange for learning. For example, if you’re not sure how to shear sheep, ask an experienced sheep farmer if you can help out in exchange for some pointers. Furthermore, many farmers nearing retirement are interested in training a successor. As Justin Beck remarks, “A lot of farmers are at that age where they’re looking for someone to transfer their farm and their knowledge to.”

Farmer networks, both formal and informal, are a great way to hone your farm skills. Mentorship is simply a way of participating in a community learning process. So don’t be shy in seeking out opportunities!

Finding a mentor in Nova Scotia

If you’re thinking about becoming a farmer and you’ve never worked on a farm before, THINKFARM strongly recommends that you get some practical farm experience on someone else’s farm before striking out on your own. If you’re just interested in working on a farm for a week or two, consider trying World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF) – www.wwoof.ca A small registration fee will gain you access to listings of participating farms across Canada. You can also WWOOF internationally, but need to register separately for each country/region. You’ll receive room and board in exchange for your labour (usually 4-6 hours/day).

If you’re ready for a longer-term commitment, there are two programs that operate in Atlantic Canada – the

Stewards of Irreplaceable Land (SOIL) Apprenticeship Program and the STEP UP Mentorship Program. SOIL is an independently run program that operates much like WWOOF but apprentices are expected to commit for an entire growing season and expect to receive a richer learning experience than WWOOFers. For more information, visit <http://www.soilapprenticeships.org/>

The STEP UP Program is administered by the Canadian Farm Business Management Council and is going into its fourth year. Participants commit to working for at least eight weeks on a farm in another province. STEP UP helps mentees with travel costs. Mentors pay mentees a fair wage for their labour and receive \$2,000 from STEP UP for their participation in the program. Both mentors and mentees are required to submit reports to STEP UP.

For more information, visit <http://www.farmcentre.com/Features/TheNewFarmer/Resources/StepUp/>

If you've completed one of these programs or feel you already have some experience but aren't ready to start out on your own, working on a well-run farm can teach you a great deal. There is a shortage of skilled farm workers in Nova Scotia so there are plenty of opportunities for this kind of work. The Career Services office of the Nova Scotia Agricultural College is another great resource. Visit http://nsac.ca/csa/job_listings.asp

If you've already started farming on your own, you may be able to access a business mentor through the Canadian Youth Business Foundation's Ment2B Program. Visit www.cybf.ca to see if you qualify.

Farm Profile

Heart and Soil CSA (<http://heartandsoil.ca/>)

"I've tried to not farm, but I can't not do it," says Laura van Hattem-Contant, owner of Heart and Soil CSA in Woodville, Kings County. "I guess it's in my blood."

Laura is the daughter of Dutch immigrants who grew up on a dairy farm in Woodville. She studied Animal Science at the Nova Scotia Agricultural College for two years before transferring to Iowa's Dordt College where she finished her degree with a strong emphasis on sustainable agriculture.

Laura always planned to farm with her dad but as milk quota prices escalated, he was reluctant to see his daughter enter such a high debt to capital ratio commodity. In 1998, he sold his cows, quota, and equipment, but kept the land, house, and buildings. In the meantime, Laura married Michael Contant, a house builder from British Columbia. Together, they lived and traveled in a variety of places before returning to Laura's roots in Nova Scotia to start a family.

Laura was drawn back to farming. She had access to her parents' farmland but student loans to pay and a baby, so she started a market garden – something she could do with limited time and money. Five years ago, Laura was a latecomer to the Valley farmers' market scene.



She found herself competing with more established market gardeners and recognized the need to do something different. She decided to try a CSA.

CSA stands for Community Shared Agriculture, a production and marketing model in which producers provide a set amount of food once a week for a fixed number of weeks. Price is determined and paid in advance before the season starts. This offers the consumer a share in the farm, a stronger connection to the person producing their food, and a delivery box full of seasonally available items each week. It offers the producer a guaranteed market, a fair price for their products, and some upfront capital.

Laura learned about CSAs during her time in the US, first in her coursework at Dordt College, then when she interned on a goat farm in Wisconsin. Originally, this farm sold goat's milk and goat's milk soap but in order to utilize one of the by-products - manure - the farm branched out into market gardening. What began as small vegetable planting expanded to a 50-member CSA. Laura saw the potential of the CSA model in Nova Scotia if she ever returned home, but when she asked people back home about it, their reaction was mixed.

Nevertheless, she decided to give it a try. "I was very surprised at how interested people were," Laura says about her initial CSA sign-up sheet. "I filled up to 25 members very quickly and spent the rest of the summer educating many people at my market stand what a CSA was." Members loved the look of the fresh food in their baskets – some were so excited they took pictures! She ended up selling most of her produce through her CSA rather than the farmers' market.

Despite her previous experience in Wisconsin, running the CSA herself has been a big learning experience. Initially, Laura offered free home delivery and accommodated every request which taught her two key things: set limits on what you can and can't do, and plan crops to consistently keep a fresh and steady supply for 16-20 weeks.

Despite the learning curve, Laura considered the first year a success and decided to build on the momentum. With two children and increased competition with other CSAs, Laura briefly considered taking a break until her children were older. Determined to succeed, Laura continued running her CSA. In the past four years, she's welcomed a third child, maintained her member numbers, and learned how to run a business while balancing a (growing) family life!

Initially, Laura had worries about competition from the new CSAs. While she did lose a few members who wanted a 52-week share, the overall market for CSAs

has grown. The work of Taproot Farms, in particular, to mainstream the CSA concept has made it easier for Laura. She no longer has to educate as many consumers about the CSA concept. While she currently can't offer a year-round share, she does offer two kinds of boxes, "Basic" and "Beyond Basic". The Basic box is for people who prefer more traditional types of vegetables. The Beyond Basic box caters to more adventurous eaters and satisfies Laura's own need to grow a greater variety of interesting crops.

For this year, Laura has switched to a Fall CSA, allowing her to spread out the production and marketing work. She finds the CSA is a good fit for her young family. She has traded vegetables for child care at a local day care and has used the day care as a drop off site for CSA shares, as several other families at that day care have become her customers. She also likes the flexibility of working for herself, especially setting her own hours and working while the kids are sleeping. "I wouldn't want any other job while my kids are young," Laura says.

And once the kids are older? Laura has a passion for working with animals and would like to add some livestock. She's currently using only one acre of her parents' land and would like to be able to get more of it in production. She still struggles with gauging what the market wants and has doubts about her farmer identity, having come from a big dairy farm and now farming only an acre of vegetables. Between her work on the farm and her family, time is limited for attending meetings and workshops. In turn, she feels a bit isolated from the broader farm community.

One thing is certain, Laura is committed to making her farm a success. Laura loves the connection it gives her to the land and the people in her community. She enjoys being outside and knowing people are eating well because of something she grew for them. As her children grow and she hones her business and marketing skills, the farm will evolve and expand, strengthening Laura's role in her local community.

THINKFARM Question Corner

Q. I'm getting ready to farm and want to register my business. I see there's farm registration, business registration, Registry of Joint Stocks, and Nova Scotia Business Registry. Which ones do I need to register with? Is there a particular order I need to follow?

A. It depends somewhat on how your business is structured; i.e. are you known to the Canada Revenue Agency as a sole proprietorship, a partnership, a corporation or a cooperative? (For more information on business structures, see Resource Kit for NS Farmers #15.)

If you choose to incorporate your farm business, the registrations described below are not sufficient to do so. After reserving your business name (Step 1 below), you must obtain a Certificate of Incorporation, which is usually done by a lawyer. For more information, visit <http://www.gov.ns.ca/snsmr/paal/rjs/paal265.asp>

If you are a partnership, you do not need to have a lawyer draw up a partnership agreement. However, if you have a business partner who is not also your spouse, it is highly recommended that you have a partnership agreement drawn up to ensure clear communication and fairness in the sharing of profits, equity and debt and to plan for the future dissolution of the partnership.

Once you've determined your business structure, take the following steps (in this order):

1. Register with the Nova Scotia Registry of Joint Stocks. This registration is **mandatory** for all businesses operating in Nova Scotia with the following exceptions:
 - New Brunswick corporations and NB partnerships/business names registered in New Brunswick
 - Individuals or partners using only their personal names without a descriptive element or attachment such as 'and Associates'
 - Partnerships whose sole purpose is farming or fishing

Therefore, this registration is **not mandatory** for farm

businesses that are sole proprietorships or partnerships. However, this process reserves your business name so you may still want to register. There is a fee, which varies based on your business structure.

2. Obtain a Business Number by registering with the Canada Revenue Agency. There is no fee to obtain this. When you go through the business registration process, you will be asked to register for applicable program accounts. The main program accounts are: HST; payroll; import/export; and corporate income tax.

If you are a corporation or cooperative, this step is **mandatory**.

If you are a sole proprietorship or partnership, this step is **not mandatory** if your business grosses less than \$30,000 per annum, you do not have any employees, and you are not importing or exporting any goods.

Farmers can claim the HST back on all farm-related purchases, including infrastructure and property. Therefore, it is a good idea to obtain a business number and an HST program account before purchasing a farm property so that you can claim the HST on the purchase. Most farms in Nova Scotia have HST program accounts. (See the Resource Kit for NS Farmers for more information on HST and Payroll.)

3. The next step is Farm Registration. Farm registration is a **voluntary** program, but recommended. You should register your farm if:
 - You want to become a member of the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture;
 - You want to access certain programs offered by Nova Scotia Department of Agriculture and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, such as the New Entrants to Agriculture Program, Homegrown Success funding programs, and the Herd Health Program;
 - You want to apply for farm license plates and/or the fuel tax refund; and/or

- You would like a discount on soil, water, manure, compost, or pathology tests conducted by NSDA's Quality Evaluation Division.

There is a fee associated with farm registration, which varies based on your gross farm income. (For more information on farm registration, see [Resource Kit for NS Farmers #11.](#))

The table below summarizes the registration requirements for sole proprietorships, partnerships, corporations, and cooperatives. Note this information applies to **farm businesses** only.

4. The [Nova Scotia Business Registry \(NSBR\)](#) is an online express service that streamlines access to information on doing business in Nova Scotia and applying for permits and licenses that apply to your business. You do not need to use the NSBR if you prefer to apply for permits and services in person or by mail.

FARM BUSINESS STRUCTURE	SOLE PROPRIETORSHIP	PARTNERSHIP	CORPORATION	COOPERATIVE
Registry of Joint Stocks	Voluntary (applies if you want to reserve a business name)		Mandatory	
CRA Business Registration	Mandatory (hired employees or gross income >\$30,000)		Mandatory	
Farm Registration	Recommended (access certain programs)			
Nova Scotia Business Registry	Voluntary (convenient online tool)			

Get Connected

THINKFARM is now on Facebook! Find us at www.facebook.com/thinkfarmns. Click on our page to get regular updates and join the discussion.

The Federation of Agriculture sends out a weekly e-bulletin with news and announcements relevant to Nova Scotia farmers. To subscribe, visit <http://visitor.r20.constantcontact.com/email.jsp?m=1103817697589>

Agrapoint now has several blogs on production-related issues. To find out more, visit www.agrapoint.ca

ACORN (the Atlantic Canada Organic Regional Network) has a Wiki on farm funding opportunities <http://farmgrants.wikispaces.com/>

Events

Late July-September – Exhibitions! These are a great way to network with experienced farmers. For a full schedule, visit:

www.gov.ns.ca/agri/elibrary/exhibition.shtml

August 27 - Nova Scotia Young Farmers Forum Farm Tours

September – County federation of agriculture annual meetings start. Watch the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture website www.nsfa-fane.ca

September 7, 17, 21, October 22 - Agrapoint and Sheep Producers Association of Nova Scotia Pasture Tours, various locations throughout the province. For more information, visit: www.agrapoint.ca/grassshepherdworkshop.php

September 14-16 – Fibre, Fabric and Natural Dyes Forum at Taproot Farms in Port Williams, NS www.atlanticfands.com/

September 18 – Open Farm Day www.meetyourfarmer.ca

November 24 & 25 - Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture Annual Meeting at the Best Western Glengarry, Truro