Passing Along Farm Knowledge:

A Mentor-Intern Handbook for Dairy and Livestock Farmers

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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.” Both mentors and interns should set personal goals as they enter into any type of internship in order to achieve the most out 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.2.

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
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 an aging population, with the fastest growing group at, or over, 65 years old. Maintaining and even increasing the farming population is necessary for rural communities to thrive socially, environmentally and economically, 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?

“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, beginning farmer and intern

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?
These questions 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 to cultivate new generations of competent, well-prepared farmers. To benefit the most from this resource, the intern and the mentor 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, the mentor and intern will have the opportunity to understand each other’s perspectives, which will strengthen their working relationship.

Section 2

Making a Match

2.1 Identifying the right intern or mentor

Identifying the right intern for a farm or 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.

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 or expectations and what skills each party can 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.
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 record-keeping
  - 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
  - Others...
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 I depend on to make my 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
- Others....
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 competency lists created earlier. Do the mentor’s skills line up with the intern’s learning competencies? For example, consider an intern who has experience milking cows and wants to learn more about crop production. If the mentor’s farm does not produce its own crops, perhaps this is not the best match. Alternatively, if the mentor’s farm specializes in growing alfalfa, corn and various grass-hay mixtures, perhaps this could be a very rewarding experience. It might also be a good idea for the mentor to categorize on-farm activities so that the intern can choose areas to focus on. This is especially helpful for an intern in a shorter-term arrangement. 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.

Exercise 2.2: Identifying your skills

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

To get you started, think about classes you may have taken and organizations you were a part of 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 and mechanical training (changing oil, repairing an engine) and others. Be sure to include these as well.
Mentor Skills: What opportunities and knowledge do my farm and I offer? Take some time to think about the large base of knowledge that you have to share.

Take a few moments to list out 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 the intern’s interests and the seasonal variation (timeline) of the farming operation. 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 longer experience.

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 lays out processes 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 is difficult for a person to interact with and a potential intern or mentor demonstrates this characteristic, it might be best to move on to other possibilities.

Conflicts will undoubtedly arise, and mentors must be willing to identify those conflicts 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 going through goals and assessing skills, the mentor should make sure that the intern gets 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 3.1 A

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

**April**

- Establish learning competencies with intern and consider long-term goals
- Safety
- Feed rationing choices and make feeding cows, heifers, steers, and calves the intern’s responsibility
- Pasture management
  - 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
- Manure Management
  - Options for barn manure management (methane digester, spread on pasture, spread on fields)
- Milking Operation
  - Milk and wash cycles
  - Time and frequency of milking
  - Discuss average milk production per cow and its relationship between pasture quality and supplementation
- Heavy Equipment
  - 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

**May**

- Intern continues responsibilities from April and re-evaluates goals set at beginning of internship
- Herd Health
  - Go over organic options for udder health
  - Vaccinations
  - Alternatives to antibiotics
  - Culling cows
- Pasture management
  - Explain choice of grass and legume mixtures and when to plant
  - Explain economic and environmental benefits of grass-based production
- Marketing
  - Teach marketing options (direct, farmers market, wholesale, buying station)
  - Have intern develop or update a farm website
- Networking
  - Offer chance for pasture walks and farmer to farmer networking
  - Discuss various topics, such as raw milk, immigrant labor, and niche markets

**June**

- Re-evaluate intern goals and add new items as needed
- Intern should be able to run milking operation by this point without supervision
- Field Crops
  - Teach intern how to run harvesting equipment
  - Explain harvest timing
  - Rotating pasture with fields
- Breeding
  - Discuss breed choices and breeding dates for fall versus spring freshening
  - Go over record keeping for breeding
- Give exiting interview and feedback
Example 3.1 B

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 the intern on track and for making sure that both parties are meeting long-term goals.

Monday
- 8:00 a.m.
  - Intern bottle feeds calves (on own)
- 10:00 a.m.
  - Intern rotates heifers to respective pastures (on own)
- 10:30 a.m.
  - Clean out planting equipment with intern and return to neighbor
- 12:30 p.m.
  - Prepare and eat lunch with intern
- 1:30 p.m.
  - Clean winter calf pens with intern and explain bedding and housing options
- 4:30 p.m.
  - Have intern check on heifers and the fence line
- 5:00 p.m.
  - Fetch haybine from the machine shed and show intern how to grease for first hay cutting
- 6:00 p.m.
  - 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 for some ideas of ground rules.

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

Regardless of whether the intern is living on the farm, the mentor must understand that the intern has a life and responsibilities beyond that farm. It is important for the mentor to be flexible to 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. The mentor is investing a great deal of time and effort in an on-farm mentorship.

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 in creating 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 an intern 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 on-farm internship 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.1 provides a sample contract that mentors and interns can modify to fit the specific needs of an internship.

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.”

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. Likewise, each mentor’s teaching style will vary based on ethical and ideological alignments as well as personality.

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

- **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, the mentor must provide positive feedback as well as constructive criticism. Mentors need to be flexible and allow the intern to approach a task creatively, where possible, but also exercise caution when safety is a concern. Similarly, the intern should do his or her best to adjust to the pace of the 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 in the learning process. 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:

- 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 the intern to learn and may even introduce a new idea that the mentor could use on his or her farm. Consider the following reasons why interns should ask mentors questions:

- To increase the intern’s intellectual participation and retention
- To help the intern communicate that they do or do not understand
- 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. The mentor should pay attention to these stages to avoid overwhelming or boring the intern.

- **Beginning**
  - Introduce intern to your farm
  - Achieve balance between maintaining interns’ 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
  - Closure with the mentor
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.

The intern should not be under- or overwhelmed. Part of the responsibility for ensuring the internship is neither tedious nor taxing will fall onto the mentor, but an intern needs to let the mentor know if he or she is under too much pressure or, conversely, not challenged enough.

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 a mentor to work with. On the flip side of the coin, an intern who asks too many questions or presses particular topics may make a mentor feel that his or her 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.

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, despite a mentor’s best efforts to teach, it may take several repetitions for an intern to learn a 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, the intern may become frustrated or withdrawn. This could have negative repercussions as the 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 as 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 the mentor’s 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.

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 reoccurring 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. 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

Pennsylvania’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.” 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 The lazy intern

If a mentor has an intern who is less than motivated, he or she 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 can 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. 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 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, mentors may need to address interns 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 on in their relationship 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.2 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 true 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.

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.25

- **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 a relationship is unsuccessful
Open communication between mentors and interns can help manage conflict while keeping both parties on track to meet the goals and expectations set at the beginning of the internship. Additionally, both interns and mentors should maintain respect and integrity throughout their relationships to help prevent misunderstandings.

6.2 When conflict arises

Inevitably, there will be instances of disagreement between mentors and interns. These may be minor, and thus 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, doing so will demonstrate maturity and set a good example. The sidebar provides an example of how to work through conflicts.26

Sometimes, mentors and interns cannot resolve controversy on their own. When this occurs, they can seek the assistance of a neutral third party whom both trust and respect.27 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 farming as a 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 find the cause.

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

Many times, conflict is rooted in communication, or the lack thereof. Here are some helpful communication skills:

- **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

6.4 More on conflict

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

Section 7

Ending the Internship

When internships begin, both mentors and interns 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 goal completion is an important part of achieving intern and mentor aspirations.

7.1 Evaluating interns

It is important for interns to understand their strengths and weaknesses in a farming context. Providing 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 on what worked well, and constructive criticism addressing what could be done differently, to help the mentor to grow as a farmer and teacher. This can be done in written or oral format, depending on individual preferences.

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 on on-farm mentorships and other related programs, please see Appendix B.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank Valerie Adamski, Altfrid Krusenbaum and Joe Tomandl III for their testimonials to on-farm mentoring and Andy Hatch, Andy Jaworski and Jennifer Sig for their insights as interns. We further acknowledge Valerie Adamski, Nadia Alber, Rhonda Gildersleeve, David Hemstead, Louise Hemstead, Altfrid Krusenbaum, Laura Paine, Jennifer Taylor and Joe Tomandl III, for their review of this work, as well as Bridget O’Meara, Ruth McNair and Cris Carusi for their editing expertise. Finally, we would like to thank the following organizations for their financial support of this handbook: the USDA Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative, the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture, the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program and Grassworks, Inc.

This handbook is a work in progress. If you have ideas about how we can make it even more useful for farmers and interns, please contact Dick Cates with your feedback: rlcates@wisc.edu.
Appendix A

A.1 Contract example

Here is a sample contract from the UW-Madison 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internship Agreement Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mentor Contact Information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name: ___________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone: _________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-mail: ___________________________</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intern Contact Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name: ___________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone: _________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-mail: ___________________________</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intern Emergency Contact Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name: ___________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone: _________________________</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Details of Internship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beginning Date: _________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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 on.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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, help to end the internship.

Mediator Signature: ___________________________

We, the mentor and intern, and read and discussed the Mentor Handbook and the Internship Agreement form and have mutually agreed upon the subjects so identified in these documents.

Mentor Signature: ___________________________ Date: ___________

Intern Signature: ___________________________ Date: ___________
A.2 Generally accepted practices for internships

In this section, you will find a list of practices that are common in on-farm internships. This list may help the mentor and intern get an idea of what to expect coming into the relationship. 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.”29 Here are some examples of house rules:

- **Kitchen Rules**
  - Food in fridge is to be shared
  - Help prepare meals and clean up after
  - 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 routine better than lunch.

Weekly meetings

Weekly meetings can help keep interns and mentors on track with their goals. Meetings can take place at the beginning of the work week (Sunday or Monday) and 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 by giving the intern more detailed responsibilities 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, there may be alternatives or 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 the relationship and resources of these individuals.
### A.3 Conflict styles

The following summary outlines five conflict styles—competitive, avoidance, accommodate, compromise and collaborative—and the appropriate situational use for each style. These were taken directly from Tom Cadwallader’s presentation, “Concepts and Skills for Negotiating Conflict.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Style</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Competitive</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggressive</td>
<td>Verbal (shouting, blaming) Hostile joke Physical aggression Gunnsacking (attack a person with a number of issues all at once)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assertive</td>
<td>Demand concessions Toughness Threat Irrevocable commitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manipulation</td>
<td>Guilt (make the other party feel guilty so that they comply) Misrepresentation of position (mislead another about your true position) Gamesmanship (try to throw the other person off balance to get them more likely to give in to an issue)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coalition</td>
<td>Gang up against another person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>Invoke formal authority (use your authority) Invoke higher authority (ask a superior to resolve the conflict)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Avoidance</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change the topic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refuse to recognize conflict</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postpone dealing with an issue</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unassertive and cooperative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neglect own concerns to meet the concerns of others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Try to avoid conflict in order to maintain the relationship</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concede to another’s demands</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Compromise</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quid pro quo (give “something for something”)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log-rolling (propose a solution to conflict that involves both parties giving something to get something)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collaborative</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Propose novel solution</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Find a common goal that you both can work towards</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-column method (each person/party lists their needs in one column and the needs of the other in a second column and compare; search for commonalities)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appropriate times to use each conflict style are outlined below:

- **Compete**
  - 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

- **Avoid**
  - 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 subject 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

- **Collaborate**
  - 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 not ignore emotions, but rather deal directly with the core *causes* of those emotions. Ask yourself some of the questions to the right concerning appreciation, affiliation, autonomy, status and role. Identifying 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…..”
Appendix B

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

Sharemilking


Apprenticeship Programs in the Midwest

GrassWorks Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship Program: http://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. http://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: http://www.youngfarmers.org/practical/training-and-helpful-organizations/#Midwest.

For a resource with additional web links and information for beginning farmers and farm businesses, visit: http://ucanfarm.org/.

For more information on conflict resolution see the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument by Kenneth W. Thomas and Ralph H. Kilmann. Much of their work can be found here as well: http://www.kilmann.com/conflict.html.

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1 Kristina Hemstead wrote this document for her Master’s degree Agroecology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She has a background in organic dairy farming and Bachelor’s degrees in both History and Agronomy from the University of Wisconsin (UW)-Madison. Her future focus is in farmer education and outreach to help create and sustain viable farming communities.

2 Richard L. Cates, Jr. is a grass-based beef farmer in Wisconsin, the founder and Director of the Wisconsin School for Beginning Dairy and Livestock Farmers (WSBDF) at the UW-Madison Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems, and a lecturer at the UW-Madison. Dick also served an appointment to the USDA Advisory Council for Beginning Farmers and Ranchers and consults with farmers locally and internationally. He is vice-chair of the Board of Directors, Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection.

3 Thomas Cadwallader is a sheep farmer and retired University of Wisconsin extension agent. His extension appointment focused on farmer conflict management and establishing healthy relationships in farming communities.


5 USDA 2007 Census of Agriculture.

6 The 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. See The Future of Farming and Rural Life in
Wisconsin: Findings, Recommendations, Steps to a Healthy Future (Year) for more information on farming trends in Wisconsin Pp. 44-48.

7 Note that some of these questions were adapted from The New England Small Farm Institute’s worksheet “Motivations for Becoming an On-Farm Mentor” by Miranda Smith, Pp. 121.

8 The New England Small Farm Institute The On-Farm Mentor’s Guide (Year) has several examples of formal documents farmers may use including fliers and application forms with reference lists. Likewise, they have sample applications for trainees. Pp. 59-72.

9 Some of these goals were taken from the Wisconsin School for Beginning Dairy and Livestock Farmer’s “WSBDF Internship Learning Competencies” worksheet.


12 See Galbraith, 21-34 for more information on Long’s paper of Understanding Adult Learners.

13 See Galbraith, 85-89 for the Principles of Adult Learning Scale (PALS) to further evaluate teaching styles. This guide can also be found by searching online.


15 For a more in-depth analysis of experiential learning and the continuum of experiential teaching strategies, see Tara J. Fenwick’s book Learning Through Experience: Troubling Orthodoxies and Intersecting Questions. (Year)

16 Many educational specialists find that adult learners do best when they engage in kinetic, or experiential learning because it allows them to observe the consequences of their actions by learning from their successes and mistakes. See Jerry W. Gilley’s chapter “Demonstration and Simulation” in Galbraith’s book, 223-253 for more information on this topic.


18 Some of these reasons were adapted from Ray E. Sanders’ chapter on Questioning Techniques from Galbraith, 187-196.

19 Learning stages were taken from an interview done with Alfrid Krusenbaum, an experienced farmer and on-farm mentor.


21 Some of the outlined reasons for conflict were adapted from the PA Farm Link’s Mentoring Program “Possible Pitfalls” section of their powerpoint, “Goals and Objectives of a Mentoring Relationship.”

22 This exercise was adapted from Smith, Miranda. Pp. 29.

23 See Appendix B for a list of contacts.

24 Adapted from the GrassWorks Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship Program Design Summary. 14 February. 2011.

