

Beginning Farmer Skills Checklist – What to Know and What to Do

Initial in ink each item you have already learned or done. Mark as N/A those items that don't apply to your farm, and circle items that are highest priority for learning or doing next.

I / We:	Whole Farm Planning
1.	Have all decision-makers (usually immediate family members) on board with this farm enterprise idea
2.	Have a written inventory of our family's and farm's physical, social, knowledge, financial and capital resources
3.	Have articulated our shared values and goals for this farm
4.	Have written a mission statement based on these goals that we are ready to share with the public
5.	Know how to make decisions that move our farm and family toward our immediate and long-term financial, environmental, and quality of life ideals
6.	Have collected maps and information on our property's soil type, topography, and water availability
7.	Have evaluated which enterprises our land is best suited for (or, have evaluated what type of land we need to acquire based on what we want to produce)
8.	Understand sources of greatest risk to my/our farm operation
9.	Will take steps to mitigate exposure to these risks (including appropriate safety practices and purchasing liability and other insurance policies)
10.	Understand the value of a written farm start-up plan for keeping farm progress on track
11.	Know what elements comprise a farm start-up plan
	Have written a business plan or farm start-up plan
	Business Start-Up and Management
12.	Know what a sole proprietorship is, and how, why and whether to develop the farm as a DBA, or possibly as an LLC
13.	Have estimated the basic start-up expenses for the farm
14.	Have a plan to acquire the capital we will need for start-up
15.	Have researched and calculated the profitability of our new farm enterprise (including a realistic assessment of # of years to reach profitability)
16.	Know how to keep farm business records - what information to track weekly and monthly
17.	Have a separate bank account for farm income and expenses, not mingled with the family banking and checkbook.
18.	Understand where the weakest link is currently in our enterprise and how to prioritize our expenditures to have the greatest benefit on our farm profitability
19.	Understand the farmer sales tax exemption, how to qualify for an agriculture assessment on property, and the farm building property tax program
20.	Can distinguish easily between services from the FSA, CCE, NRCS, SWCD, and DEC
21.	Understand which licenses or permits may be necessary for our farm
22.	Plan to file a Schedule F with our income tax return showing farm income /

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	loss for the first tax year of operation
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I / We:	Acquiring Tools, Equipment, and Infrastructure
23.	Know what new infrastructure – or repairs to existing – will be required immediately and in the next few years
24.	Have a list of the tools and equipment I will need for my farm enterprise
25.	Know that purchasing equipment is not always necessary or desirable, and know how to evaluate whether I should rent, buy new, buy used, or pay for custom work
26.	Recognize that equipment breaks down even with regular maintenance, and so either have the skills to repair it myself or know who will do so
	Managing Production
27.	Have a good idea of the meaning of different types of farm-level certifications (including “organic”), how to locate certifiers, and how to evaluate if I/we should pursue some type of certification
28.	Understand some of the basic conservation practices that would be appropriate for my/our farm
	Raising Livestock
29.	Know the animals’ requirements for feed, shelter, and water
30.	Understand basic animal biology (reproduction, digestion, life cycle)
31.	Know some simple management strategies for preventing and treating health problems (including identifying and contacting my local vet)
32.	Understand basic principles of managing pastures
33.	Know when and how to harvest animals for sale
34.	Understand which regulations apply to my/our chosen strategy for selling meat and/or milk
35.	Know where to go to locate a meat processor near me
36.	Know what records to keep to help make sound decisions about future livestock enterprises
	Raising Crops (Veggies/Herbs/Flowers/Fruit/Berries)
37.	Understand basic principles for building and maintaining soil fertility through compost and cover cropping
38.	Know how to develop a crop rotation plan
39.	Know how to identify, monitor for, and treat potential pest/disease problems that may arise
40.	Have a basic plan for seeding, planting and harvesting
41.	Have a strategy for post-harvest handling to maximize both the safety and quality of the produce I/we grow
42.	Know what records to keep to help make sound decisions about future crop

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	enterprises
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I / We:	Marketing
43.	Know more or less which products I/we will grow for sale and when these will be available
44.	Have a well-researched idea about who will buy my/our product(s) and where the transactions will take place.
45.	Know how to distinguish my/our products from the competition's
46.	Have an idea of what I will need to charge to be sustainable
47.	Know how to effectively brand my product and have started to develop labels, logo, website, brochure and/or other marketing tools