



NOT OUR FARM



presents:

A guide to working on farms!
made for workers by workers



Tips and information from a worker point-of-view
to set you up to find a farm job where you can
grow and thrive.



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a very special thanks to Danni Elias
who inspired flipping the script ⌘
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Self assessment

Finding the "right" farm job can be hard, especially when there are so many options to choose from. It can help to ask yourself some questions to help guide where you want to go in the field.

What kind of farm job are you looking for?

Educational vs. "a job" - Are you looking for an environment that will build on your farming skills intentionally, take time to teach you new techniques and the *why* behind what you're doing, or are you more interested in a steady job that is reliable and is outdoors, working with your body and learning along the way?

Internships and apprenticeships vs. employment -

If the farm is offering an internship or apprenticeship, ask about a syllabus or the program's structure. If they are paying you based on information that they say they will teach you, you should be able to see what that information is and assess if it is the right program for you, geared towards areas that match where your learning excitement sits.



If a farm doesn't have a clear idea of what they are teaching or the description is something like "intern will learn from experience," **take caution** and ask follow up questions.



Keep in mind that a far too common worker experience is signing on to a program where the farm is really just looking for a cheap labor source, without having invested in what their internship teaches.



Make sure that you're getting what has been committed to you out of the program, and that you feel that you're being compensated fairly for your work.



Management positions/ specialized farm jobs (greenhouse manager, pack/wash lead, etc.) -

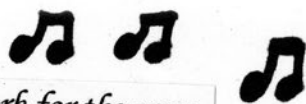
If you have been farming on a crew for a few seasons, you might want to consider a management position.

Some things to keep in mind are that management positions are a lot more responsibility. There is often behind the scene planning and administration included, and you will be accountable at the end of the day/week/month/season for specific tasks), and management positions often mean:

less farming, and more people management!

If you are the type of person who likes to focus on a task at the farm, get lost in it and maybe listen to your favorite podcast while doing it, this might not be the best option for you. Management roles tend to require a level of communication and supervision that ensures that the crew is working cohesively, effectively and efficiently, and knows what the tasks for the day are.

Think of yourself as an orchestra conductor,



you are facilitating work for the crew.

Some questions you could ask yourself are:

- What level of people management do you have the capacity, emotional ability, and excitement for?
 - Can you envision yourself creating the space for your farm crew to work cohesively, effectively and efficiently?
- What level of accountability and responsibility for farm tasks and urgent jobs do you feel comfortable with?
 - Is there a specific area of farm operation that you want to deepen into, and dedicate specific time and brain space to?
- Are there aspects of systems creation and execution that would feel exciting to explore in a specialized interest area?
 - Do you find excitement in organization, structure creation, or facilitating a high degree of interpersonal communication around farm tasks?



management - continued -

- What type of autonomy and decision making power is given to folks in manager or lead roles at the farm you're interested in?

*Farming journeys are rarely linear, and making a decision **not** to take on a specialized farm role or management position doesn't make you any less of an amazing farm worker!*



Knowing yourself, prioritizing what you need out of a farm space at the level of accountability that feels fun, and focusing your energy on the skills and tasks that will bring you the most joy, is a benefit to everyone.



Scale & Mechanization - Farming techniques can vary widely by scale, and by the farmer's interest level in mechanization.

Think about what type of relationships you want to focus on cultivating with land and what priorities you have in building that bond.

The size of the farm you work at will impact the number of workers on the team, the amount of food produced, and the level of machine operation necessary.



MORE ON Scale + mechanization...

Make sure that the scale of the farm that you're interested in matches your excitement about the type of tasks you'll be spending your time on and the farm relationships with coworkers, and community, that you are interested in.

Some questions you could ask yourself are:

- Are you interested in spending your time building relationships with and operating small engines, tractors, and other mechanical farm tools?
- Does working with hand tools and cultivation techniques that rely on people's body power feel more exciting to you?
- What are your values around producing food for the masses, versus a smaller and more intimate community that you know?
- What size crew is exciting and fun for you to work with: Do you prefer to relate one on one with a few folks on a **small team** or to be a part of a dynamic that has "BIG crew energy"?

Urban vs. Rural landscapes - Not all urban or rural communities are the same; spend some time thinking about your local region and the different assets and challenges at play.

How does the local community's engagement with the farm, in either a rural or urban setting, compel you?



For queer + trans + BIPOC folks especially: consider what feelings of safety and community proximity you experience in the urban versus rural spaces near you, and how that may impact your farm life.



Outlets: CSA (community supported agriculture), farmers' markets, wholesale & more -

Growing food can be a beautiful, tiring, and joyful process.

It's only made richer by feeling compelled by who you're growing for.

Farming doesn't have to be necessarily linear, but as you start to learn more, it's important to start asking yourself what kind of farming niche you are more drawn to based on your philosophy, goals, interests, & reality of life.



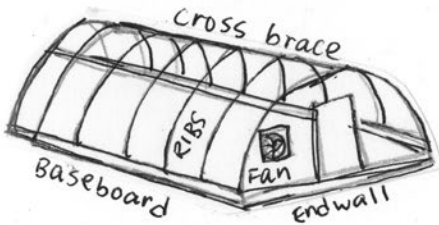
Some questions you could ask yourself are:

- What types of community, and what types of relationships are you interested in creating through food distribution?
- Is there a creative, social, or community building outlet that you see yourself gleaming from CSA drop offs versus farmers market staffing?
- What level of consumer engagement feels energizing to you versus draining? What are your values around growing a food system that you're proud of, and how do they show up in the ways food is distributed by farms you're interested in?
- Are you interested in direct relationships with folks consuming your food, or in supporting local food ventures (like restaurants or food hubs)?



Year round vs. seasonal - Farming is work that shifts and changes depending on the time of year and your growing zone.

If you're working on a farm as a part of a non-profit organization, with animals, hoop houses or hydroponics or in certain climates, year-round work may be an option for you.

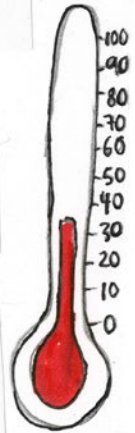


Ask early about what winter work looks like and what the expectations are.

Many vegetable farms hire for seasonal work and have little or no work available during the wintertime when production slows. If winter work is available it may include tasks more focused on farm administration or planning, physical work in cold weather, or be less consistent and reliable than during the main season.

Some questions you could ask yourself are:

- Think about your tolerance for cold and possibly harsh weather conditions: what level of outdoor farming is feasible and interesting to you during the wintertime?
- What are your financial needs and what level of support from the farm to meet your wintertime needs is necessary for you? *Note: support expected from a farm job during the wintertime might change depending on your interest in returning the next spring, or not.*
- Would a wintertime job not in farming, or in addition to farming, feel like an opportunity to explore other interest areas or like an added stressor?



- Are you able to work 3 seasons and take the winter off to rest and recover, or do you need a steady flow of income all months of the year?

For Profit Farms vs. Non-Profit farms - There are many different types of farms, but we've found that there can be largely different experiences in what farming feels like based on the farm's for or non-profit status.

Assess what farm projects may be the most compelling to put your energy into and how the flow of money may impact your relationship to land and space.

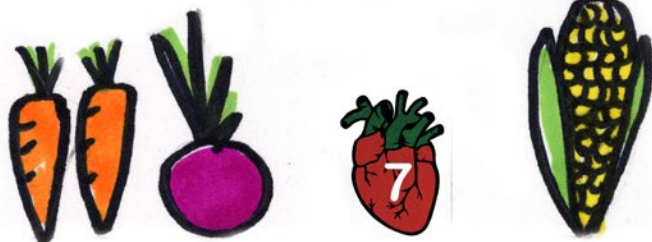
Some questions you could ask yourself are:

- What level of pressure around crop production creates the environment that makes farming feel interesting and fun to you? How do you feel about donor and grant money's influence on your farm space, projects, and culture?
- What time and attention do you want to give to elements of farming beyond crop production (community events, food access, seed saving, creating educational opportunities) and what space is made at farms you're interested in for those projects?
- How important are consistent hours, year-round, or salaried work to your sense of security around a farm job?

Enterprise diversity: vegetables or animals or both-

Having a diversity of experiences to learn from is often key to what draws folks to being on a small scale farm. Knowing what kind of enterprises you are invested in can help you decide what type of farm experience will be most valuable to you.

You'll see a number of small scale farms that either focus exclusively on vegetables or animals, with some that do both.



Farming is time consuming and labor intensive in both vegetable or animal enterprises, but work schedules tend to be different with either production model.

With animals you may work days that are more broken up to orbit around animal needs and chores (ex. milking schedules, birthing schedules).



With vegetables you may have set schedules where you could be working continuous hours (ex. from 7 AM to 4 PM) and might have a little more flexibility with stepping away from work.

You'll also learn the more diverse an operation is, the more there is to keep track of. This is especially relevant in diverse vegetable operations where you're growing more than forty different crops and trying to keep track of all the details....

soil health..... fertility needs.... seasonality....
pest problemsetc.,

but also in

farm work where both vegetable and animal management are a part of the job. As you learn more about mixed farming practices it helps to ask yourself,



Flip the script!

Interview questions YOU ask the farm owner or farm manager.

Remember you are interviewing the farm, too.

You're a catch and they would be lucky to have you!

* Think through what you'd like to know about the farm ebbs + flows, the farm owner's management style, expectations, work schedule, benefits, and so on. If provided, read the mission statements or goals of the farm to make sure they are aligned with yours.

Here are some **interview Q's** that we as workers have asked potential employers, and encourage you to ask, too:

(BIPOC and Queer specific questions in following section)

- Describe two important things I should know about your management style? For yourself, think about how these pieces and your individual style might intersect.
- How would you describe how your management styles work together and your concept of your individual roles? (if it's a cooperative farm or couple or family farm)
- How would you describe the forms of communication you most like to receive? What forms of communication do you find the most challenging?
Ask for examples from last season!!
- What is your biggest pet peeve as an employer and what was it when you were a farm employee?



?

- What are your main goals as farmers?

- Who do you respect in your farming community - locally and more broadly?

- How do you express frustration?

- How do you express affirmation or praise?

- What coping skills have you developed with dealing with less than ideal/challenging situations?

?

- How highly do you value patience as an employer?

- How would you describe the farm's relationship with boundaries?

- What kind of boundaries work for you as a farm owner, and how do you support your staff in navigating boundary creation?

?

- What does success look like to you on the farm? How do you measure it?

- What is a typical day to day schedule on the farm?

- Do you work alongside the crew or do they typically work solo? *(if the farm owner/manager doesn't work with the crew, be wary and ask directly about channels of communication, separation of worker/owner duties/knowledge sharing. This is an opportunity for you to ask more clarifying questions.)*

- Can I speak to previous or current crew members and hear their experiences?

?

- Can I work a trial day as a part of the crew to feel out dynamics and possibility for connection?





- Do you have any returning staff this next season and if so, how do you conceptualize them and their role on this farm?

- What structures do you have in place for navigating conflict?

- Can you talk about a time you're proud of that you navigated an interpersonal challenge with a worker on your team?



- Can you talk about a time that you're NOT proud of where you navigated an interpersonal challenge with a worker, and what have been some of your takeaways for future people management?

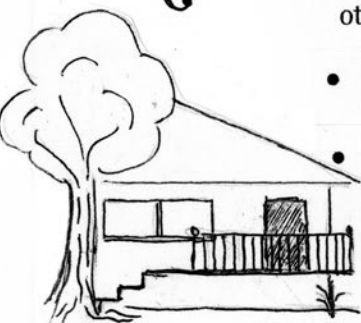
- What are learning edges in people management for you as a farm owner?

- What is one important lesson you've learned as a manager of a farm crew?



- Does the farm crew eat lunch, hold events, or do other activities all together?

- Do you have workers' compensation?



- Is housing available? If so, what do the living accommodations look like? *It's also helpful to ask yourself if shared living is something you enjoy. And ask to see the accommodations in person.*

- Have you ever let go of a worker midseason?



- Do you have bathrooms and handwashing stations for farm crew to use? *If there are multiple sites, you may want to inquire about port-a-potties at each site, or if you are expected to use the farm owners' home, ask for guidelines around that (i.e. is it available at any time?)*






CUE THE SIREN:

**Make sure you get your wages and any benefits
IN WRITING.**

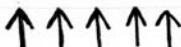
This will be helpful if there is any discrepancy with your pay.

It can even be written over email:

"Dear farm owner, I just want to confirm that
I will be working 40 hours/ week at
\$15/hour." 

*****Calculate your pay so you know exactly how much you will
be receiving each pay period/week/month.**

Address any pay discrepancy RIGHT AWAY!





BIPOC + Queer farmer considerations

* * * * *
While having similar identities and political views doesn't
* mean that a space will be safe, finding out who the people
* who move through the farm are (workers, volunteers, *
* consumers) can be helpful. * * * * *
* * * *

Your **safety is priority** and you can ask during the interview about **cultural competency**:

- Have you had trans or gender nonconforming workers in the past? Are there specific ways I can share about the support that I need from you as an owner if not?
- Are you willing to invest time and energy into respecting, honoring, understanding queer identity and gender identity, including correcting each other, explaining pronoun use to CSA members, etc.?
- Does the farm have a statement on zero tolerance as it relates to racism, homophobia, hate, etc for both employees and customers? How do you define these moments and have you had to address harm caused to workers by these systems in the past?
- Are you in active and continuous conversation about the ways white supremacy impacts your team and farm culture? How is white privilege recognized and broken down in your space?



- Are you in active and continuous conversation around the ways social norms, binaries, and gender roles show up as a part of your farm culture and on your farm team? How is cis het privilege recognized and broken down in your space?
- Are you able to listen and respond with care if I bring identity based challenges around existing and working at this farm to you during the season?

*Often just the farm owners/managers' reactions to you asking these types of questions can be an indication of whether it's a safe space for you or not. Do they embrace the opportunity to have a conversation with you, acknowledge challenges, validate your concerns or do they shy away from questions, avoid answering, and seem shocked by what you're asking?



Be aware of the surroundings around the farm and the community:

- If there is housing, ask to see it beforehand and observe the neighborhood/area, who lives there, yard signs, flags, etc.
- Check out a neighborhood gas station to gain a sense of who lives there and how you will be treated,
- If there is a person that visibly shares similar identities, ask if they are open to talking about their experience in the space, farm, community.
- Social media is a great way to sus farms out.



**IF YOU FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE,
LISTEN TO YOUR GUT.**



New to farming (or not)?

Here are some helpful tips from other workers for what to expect & how to care for yourself!



- If you are new to farming, make a list of what you would like to gain from the experience.

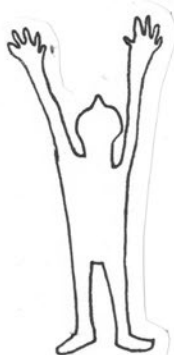


- Get a good pair of **sturdy boots**, perhaps insoles, and rain gear (consider rain pants or overalls in addition to a jacket).
- During the winter, try keeping a camping stove in your car so you can have warm meals and coffee.



- **WATER!** Always have extra water on hand (especially if you're not provided drinking water).
 - Using empty 1/2 gallon glass kombucha jars are great and avoid plastic tasting water.
 - Put some mint leaves in a jar of water and refrigerate overnight. Adds a really refreshing taste during those hot summer days.

- If you're working in the heat, freeze bottles of water each evening and bring them to work.
 - Eating pickles help with dehydration and muscle cramps.
 - If you're feeling overheated, put cold water on your wrists and back of the neck.



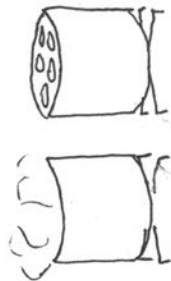
- **STRETCH!!!** Before work and after. If all you can do is a downward dog, your body will thank you as you're doing hard work.



- Wear long sleeves! Old dress shirts are great because they are thin and breathable. This will help with the itchy crops (like summer squash and okra) and protect your skin from the sun.

- If you feel your skin getting sunburned and you don't have any sunblock or long sleeves, wet some **DIRT** and put it on your skin.

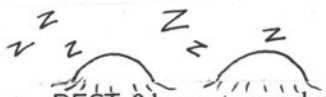
- If you have access to any methods of **food preservation** (jars, dehydrator, etc.), try to preserve food as much as you can during the year. During the summer it's easy to have an abundance of food only for it to disappear when the fall and winter comes. **Canning, pickling, fermenting and drying** vegetables/herbs is a good way to ensure you can enjoy your hard work for the rest of the year and are great skills to learn.



- Get ready to do a lot of **l a u n d r y**. It's easier to spread this out rather than waiting until the last minute and accumulating a lot of dirty laundry.

EAT

- **EAT!** Put some almonds in your pocket, pack a nourishing lunch, and take advantage of the produce you have access to.



R E S T

- **REST.** 8 hours + naps during lunch if you can.

- Bring wet wipes if you don't have access to a bathroom, or make a poop kit (toilet paper, shovel, sanitizer) and keep it in the work truck.
- Stick pieces of **duct tape** and **rubber bands** onto your water bottle - they come in handy when you're desperate!

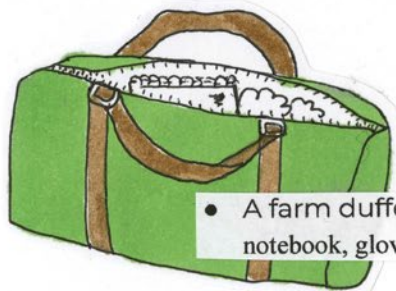
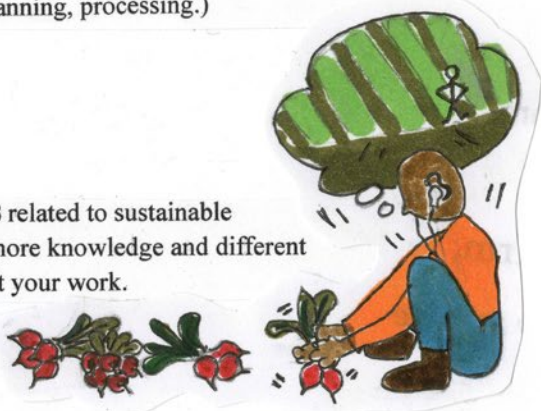


- Keep a *daily journal* of what you did that day - jot down what you seeded, what you planted, what you harvested, what soil amendments you used, what could have been done better, the weather! Trust me - you'll look back on it the next season and it'll be a great resource!



- Do your own personal research on different farm practices. Just because you are following one farm's way of management doesn't mean that's the only way to farm (for example, bed prep, crop planning, processing.)

- Read and listen to **podcasts** related to sustainable agriculture to provide you more knowledge and different perspectives that can benefit your work.



- A farm duffel bag! It helps keep all of your farm tools, notebook, gloves & other accessories together.

- If you wear contacts, keep a pair of old glasses in your farm bag, and saline in case dirt or dust gets in your eyes.



NOTES:

Space for your thoughts,
take aways, tips of your own!:

* Phew! Need a break?

Need a snack?

Drink some water?



RED FLAGS

run far far away

The farm has a history of high turnover rates.
You are not able to contact people who have previously worked on the farm, or there is a completely new crew every season.

The farm owner expresses a lot of critique about their farm workers while speaking in community settings, or criticizes worker efficiency, speed, and crop production casually. This may be a sign that the owner or farm business has an extractive relationship to workers or that their resilience to worker errors and learning curves is especially low. Be wary if the owner “just can’t find good workers.” This is especially worrisome if the owner themselves spends few hours farming in the field.

The owner has clear expectations for overtime work or work beyond the bounds of your job commitment.



You don't have a set schedule and are expected to work "until the job is done". This lack of clear communication and boundaries can often lead to **overwork** and **burnout**, and is an indication that the farm owner or manager is not thinking about workers' needs.

Lack of a website or social media about the farm. If there is no discernible way to research the farm it tends to be a red flag. While that's not always the case, if there is no way to find out their farming practices, mission, how they treat employees or business model then it can be a problem.

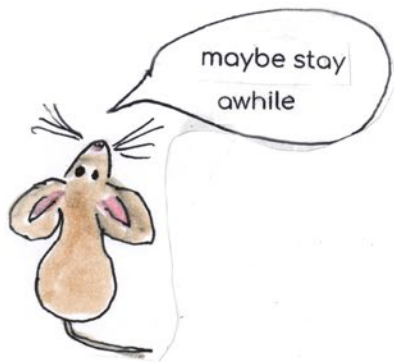
- Make sure to ask more questions up front via email or phone if information isn't otherwise available.


You notice that tasks on the farm follow the lines of expected gender roles without much flexibility. For example, observe who is driving the tractor - *only men*? And ask questions if it seems unfair- it might be that only second or third year crew members work equipment.

Previous workers mention challenges: with organization, communication, conflict, or pay that are worrisome to you based on your needs.





Good signs





 **The farm owners/managers celebrate the staff for their hard work.**

For example: You hear stories from the owner, or see online on the farm's website or social media, affirmation and acknowledgment of staff for their projects.

 **Staff that has been there for multiple seasons.**

 **A crew that has had a history of being comprised of folks who hold identities as Trans, Queer, Black, and/or Indigenous.**

 **The field manager or farm owner talk about aspects of farming that they enjoy, projects that are fun for them, and field experiences that have shaped them.** Their interests may include running a successful business, but they aren't narrowly focused on a farm solely as a money venture.

 **The farm has an employment manual or clear instructions for onboarding new workers.** This is usually a sign that the farm managers or owners are taking time to think about systems, expectations (for both crew and themselves), and worker questions and concerns that come up on the farm.





The farm prioritizes worker education and skill building.

For example: Managers set aside time to cover all aspects of farm production. This can include crop rotation, soil fertility, markets, etc. Obviously there is so much to cover in farming and

it can't be done in one session. It's also easy for managers to not provide a lot of context for the work as the season gets busy and work gets rushed. It's important to set standards at the beginning of the year about what you want farmers to learn while also checking with farmers to see what they want to get out of this experience. Farming requires a lot of whole systems planning so having newer farmers gradually learn about each aspect on the farm helps build a general understanding of all the necessary components of production without overwhelming them.



On top of educating farmers, the farm provides opportunities or projects for workers to be part of the planning process.

For example: The farm provides opportunities for workers to hone the skills they have learned by giving them hands-on projects where they can contribute to the farm with their own autonomy. This can range from coming up with a theoretical crop plan for the next season or writing up a plan for a new enterprise for the farm (mushroom cultivation, layer chickens, etc.).

If farms can go beyond just putting farmers to work and focus on ways to stimulate critical thinking, this dynamic can ensure we see more beginning farmers becoming equipped with the experience, confidence, and resources to go into farming on their own. When farms take an extra step in integrating farm management lessons into the learning aspect, it provides workers with more of a foundation to work on when starting up their own farm.

NO KNOWLEDGE
HOARDING!



and more
GOOD SIGNS



There are sincere attempts to improve worker well-being.

For example: Health insurance stipends, paid sick days, profit sharing, end of year bonuses, opportunity to attend conferences, farm lunches or other perks.. These attempts do not feel forced, overly mechanical, or resentfully given.

Clear roles and expectations around different positions at the farm are built out, and communicated to all.

For example: Taking into account the levels of hierarchy that exist at the farm, the structure for obtaining raises, additional benefits, and more responsibility, is laid out. The limit of the farm's ability and capacity to share responsibility, power, and benefits for long term workers are honestly communicated.



Worker-centered farming community:



You
are
HERE

Queer Farmer Network (instagram: @queerdirt)

Queer Farmer Convergence

(<https://humblehandsharvest.com/queer-farmer-convergence/>)

Jewish Farmer Network (<https://www.jewishfarmernetwork.org/>)

CRAFT - <http://www.craftfarmer.org/>

Maine Organic Farmers & Gardeners - worker centered apprenticeship models - <https://www.mofga.org/apprenticeship/>

TIP → Introduce yourself to other farmers at the market or to community members at CSA pickups!



CONFERENCES - there are many farming conferences nation-wide (for example, PASA, CASA, Ecofarm, TOFGA) and there are often options for *work-share* (volunteering time during the conference for a free or reduced ticket) or scholarships to attend.

While these conferences offer community building and skill sharing, these gatherings are **NOT** necessarily worker-centered. There is often an emphasis on ownership/proprietorship, and workers have shared and experienced feelings of hierarchy and exclusiveness.

**The Not Our Farm worker community contributed to these responses! Many also recommend connecting virtually through instagram and facebook platforms.*



JOB SEARCH

*Late fall to early spring are the best time to look for farm jobs before the season starts, but it really depends on the farm that is hiring.

Some will start looking for the next season's crew in late summer/early fall, so if you are really interested in working somewhere specific, it can help to reach out to them early!

DON'T BE SHY ABOUT SENDING OUT A FEELER EMAIL!

*Harvest help - some farms will open up positions in the middle of the season once the harvest picks up and they need more help. These jobs are usually very specific and short-term, but also dependent on the farm and can be a good introduction to both the field of farming or a particular farm.

TIP → Ask if it's possible to work a trial day (ideally this day would be compensated). You can get a firsthand glimpse of how the farm runs and how things flow. This will give you some sense of what that farm's work day is like and if you are comfortable with some of the more important tasks you will be asked to do.

TIP! → If a farm you are applying for doesn't follow through or is finished hiring for the year, ask if they know any other farms seeking employees.

Farms are often well connected and may know other neighboring farms that are looking for help. You'll be surprised how much a little networking can help you find the right farm.

TIP! → Going to farmer's markets and meeting farmers face to face is a good way to ask direct questions, observe them in action and show your interest as well.

(Keep in mind that farmers' market staff don't necessarily work on the farm, too; farm crew may be different than who is behind the stall.)



Some farm - specific job search websites/list-servs:

- www.goodfoodjobs.com
- <https://elist.tufts.edu/sympa/info/comfood> - sign up to join the Comfood Jobs listserv
- <https://attra.ncat.org/internships/>
- <https://eco-farm.org/jobs>
- Farm social media platforms (farm's website, facebook, instagram account)

Other Worker-Centered Resources



Legal assistance → Farm Commons

<https://farmcommons.org/>

State by State MAP of farm worker laws:

<https://www.farmworkerjustice.org/general-map/>

Ramblin Farmers

<https://www.ramblinfarmers.com/>

various worker guides, employment vs. wwoof-ing

Value of Agricultural Mentorships

<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/c06f3d-c41a74453a85c680eaa6d33943>

Not Our Farm

Read about experiences, dreams and advice from farmers working on other people's farms

www.notourfarm.org

Instagram: @notourfarm



NOTES:





NOT UR FARM

We are not farm owners,
but we are the hearts of the operation.

