Farm Skills Assessment

“The shocking thing about farming in the U.S., is having to be good at everything.” - Jean Paul Courtens

This worksheet will help you identify the skills that will be important for your farm business. You will see that a small farm business that does its own marketing requires a lot of skills beyond production. This means that to be successful, you may need to work with someone else, or you may need to develop certain skills that you lack. It also means that you may already have some very helpful skills from previous jobs and life experiences that you may not have considered important. The following exercise will help you figure it all out.

Take a look at the questions listed on the following pages. These questions will help you identify your skills in the areas of:

- Production
- Business
- Marketing

The skills are further broken down into Practical, Management and Planning skill levels. All of these skills are equally valuable and potentially important for your farm business. Planning is not more important than practical experience.

**Step 1. Identify your skills.** Look at the first skill question, “Have you ever repaired and maintained tools?” and ask yourself:

- Have I ever used this skill? AND
- Do I feel confident in using this skill for my farm business?

If the answer is “YES”, check the box.

If the answer is “NO”, leave it empty.

Go through the rest of the skill questions on all three pages in the same way.

→ for now, ignore the colored dots.

**Step 2. Find your areas of strength.** Each colored dot represents a skill area. First count the dots of each color next to the boxes that you checked. Then write that number under “Your Skills” next to the matching dot and skill area on the final sheet with the key.

**Step 3. Identify your range of skill levels.** Count the number of checked boxes under the Practical, Management & Planning levels on each sheet. Write this number in the corresponding box at the top of the page.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practical Skills</th>
<th>Management Skills</th>
<th>Planning Skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>repaired and maintained tools?</td>
<td>repaired &amp; maintained machinery or engines?</td>
<td>set up an irrigation system?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>operated a tractor?</td>
<td>weeded crops by tractor?</td>
<td>managed the health of farm animals?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>irrigated crops?</td>
<td>built barns, fences or greenhouses?</td>
<td>managed plant pests and diseases?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>harvested crops?</td>
<td>repaired barns, fences or greenhouses?</td>
<td>managed pasture for farm animals?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>planted seeds and transplants?</td>
<td>fed and watered animals?</td>
<td>kept harvested crops fresh for market?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>managed pests or applied pesticides?</td>
<td>slaughtered animals?</td>
<td>chosen animals for purchase?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>weeded by hand?</td>
<td>collected animal products?</td>
<td>implemented a conservation plan?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fertilized the soils?</td>
<td>managed manure?</td>
<td>managed soil fertility?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>researched production information?</td>
<td>kept equipment maintenance records?</td>
<td>kept production records?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>plowed and prepared the soil?</td>
<td>managed a compost system?</td>
<td>monitored weather?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>managed a greenhouse plan?</td>
<td>kept livestock records?</td>
<td>created a rotational grazing system?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>created a crop plan?</td>
<td>created a soil fertility plan?</td>
<td>created a post harvest handling plan?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>created a soil fertility plan?</td>
<td>created a breeding plan?</td>
<td>created a pest management plan?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kept production records?</td>
<td>created a rotational grazing system?</td>
<td>created a post harvest handling plan?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>monitored product quality?</td>
<td>performed a water or soil test?</td>
<td>created a crop plan?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>monitored product safety?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
BUSINESS
HAVE YOU EVER...

**Practical Skills** /8
- balanced a checkbook or account?
- opened a business bank account?
- prepared taxes for a business?
- paid bills?
- applied for a loan?
- collected payments?
- applied for a grant?
- searched for property?

**Management Skills** /13
- assigned tasks and supervised workers?
- obtained licenses & permits?
- purchased insurance?
- established credit?
- purchased supplies or equipment?
- managed debt or repaid a loan?
- used computer software for business management?
- negotiated an agreement?
- prepared financial statements and reports?

**Planning Skills** /9
- recruited and hired workers?
- trained workers?
- established tasks and timelines?
- set up a payroll?
- tracked expenses and cash flow?
- evaluated profitability?
- researched ag business regulations and laws?
- set up a filing system?
- reviewed and analyzed records?
MARKETING
HAVE YOU EVER.../24

PRACTICAL SKILLS/13
- written an invoice?
- negotiated a price?
- delivered products to customers?
- driven a truck?
- created promotional materials?
- set up a product display?
- used social media for promotion?
- sold at farmers market?
- attracted customers to store or stand?
- sold at a retail store or market?
- interacted with customers?
- created a mailing or email list?
- written a recipe?

MANAGEMENT SKILLS/7
- contacted buyers?
- obtained sales supplies?
- kept sales records?
- set product prices?
- designed a product display?
- designed labels or packaging?

PLANNING SKILLS/4
- conducted market research?
- created a marketing strategy?
- created value-added products?
- developed new products?
- monitored market conditions?
Step 4. Identify the skills areas that are most important for your farm business. You should now be able to see which skill areas and levels you can bring to a farm business. Look at the number of “Your skills” compared to the total skills in that area and put a star (*) next to your top 3-5 skills. Write these in the space below:

**SKILL AREAS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>/30</th>
<th>BUSINESS</th>
<th>/39</th>
<th>PRACTICAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>/43</td>
<td>PRODUCTION</td>
<td>/39</td>
<td>MANAGEMENT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/24</td>
<td>MARKETING</td>
<td>/20</td>
<td>PLANNING</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>/11</th>
<th>ANIMAL HUSBANDRY</th>
<th>/4</th>
<th>LABOR MANAGEMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>/8</td>
<td>FOOD HANDLING</td>
<td>/9</td>
<td>SALES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/3</td>
<td>EQUIPMENT MAINTENANCE</td>
<td>/9</td>
<td>RESEARCH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/4</td>
<td>EQUIPMENT USE</td>
<td>/21</td>
<td>COMMUNICATION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/8</td>
<td>SOIL CARE</td>
<td>/6</td>
<td>LEGAL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/14</td>
<td>VEGETABLE PRODUCTION</td>
<td>/9</td>
<td>DESIGN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/2</td>
<td>CONSTRUCTION</td>
<td>/22</td>
<td>FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/21</td>
<td>ORGANIZATION</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Skill areas I can bring to the farm:** (list 3-5)

1. ____________________________  
2. ____________________________  
3. ____________________________  
4. ____________________________  
5. ____________________________

**Skill areas I would like to develop:** (list 3-5)

Now look at the skills without stars (*) and think about which are most important for the farm business that you would like to create. Are any of these exciting to you? Are you interested in developing any of these skills? Write these in the space to the right:

1. ____________________________  
2. ____________________________  
3. ____________________________  
4. ____________________________  
5. ____________________________

**Skill areas I may need to rely on other people for:** (list 3-5)

Are there any skills that seem important for your farm business, but also uninteresting to you? These are skills that you should get other people to help you with. Remember, what you dislike doing may be someone else’s favorite task.

1. ____________________________  
2. ____________________________  
3. ____________________________  
4. ____________________________  
5. ____________________________