

From Pedagogy to Praxis:

Designing effective new farmer support programs

Andrew Marshall

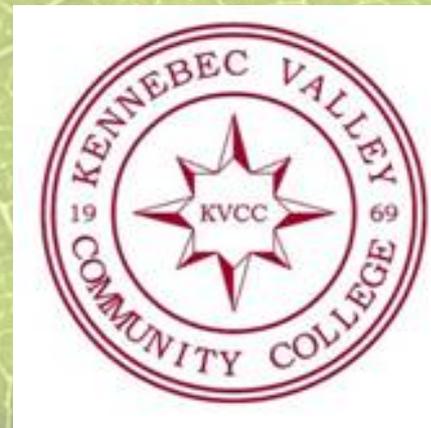
Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association

Unity College

Colby College

Kennebec Valley Community College

Dorolenna Farm



Truths & Trends in New Farmer education

New Farmer demographics are evolving

New farmers want to farm in different ways, for different reasons, and with different goals and outcomes than their predecessors

Ecology * Diversity * Community * Locality * Right
livelihood * Public service * Health & Nutrition *
Social justice

New Farmers need to be innovative, entrepreneurial, and ecologically literate



We need to take New Farmer training seriously, and we need to consider new models for New Farmer recruitment, education, and training.

Models that:

...Recognize the evolving demographics of New farmers and Prospective new farmers

...Recognize the necessary breadth and depth of New Farmers' skill sets

...Deeply incorporate practical skills and immersive training in a real and fundamental way

MOFGA's Guiding Principles for New Farmer Training

People learn to farm most effectively by farming

Practitioners (Farmers) - with guidance and support
- can be extremely effective teachers



Farmers Teaching (future) Farmers



The Farmer-to-Farmer Model

- Among the few mechanisms for education and training in small-scale agriculture
- Reproduce the next generation of small-scale farmers
- Communicate important values and beliefs about the food system
- Impart localized, contextualized knowledge which can only be learned by doing
- Relationships go beyond economics and are built on trust and mutual aid, form basis of community

Characteristics of a Quality Immersion Working & Learning Experience

- **Built-in Mechanisms for Communication and Discussion**
- **Diversity of Workload & Exposure to Farm Enterprises & Activities**
 - **Planned & Structured Time for Learning**
 - **Fair treatment and compensation**



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Helping Prospective Apprentices to find Farms; Helping Farmers to find Apprentices

- web-based clearinghouse
- rigorous application process
- resources and advice about choosing the right situation

Supporting and Advising both parties

- model contracts
- apprentice handbook
- Mentor Guide

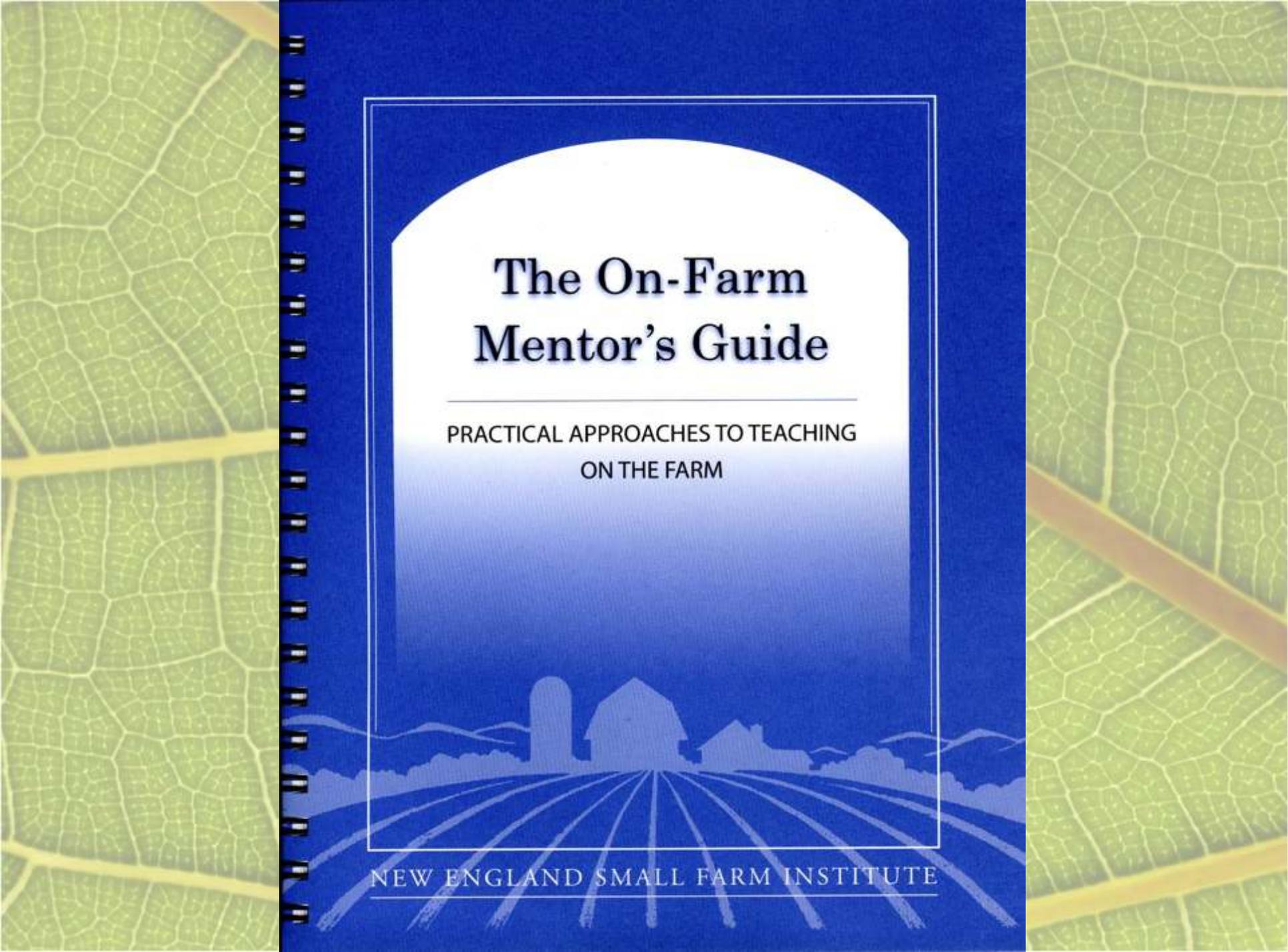
Providing opportunities for supplemental, structured learning

- Farm Training Project
- Apprentice discounts and scholarships

Choosing a Farm and a Mentor: Tips for Prospective Apprentices

Farm apprenticeships are literally unique experiences – no two are identical. So many different variables figure in to the quality and richness of your apprenticeship experience – from the farm, to the location, to the dynamic between you, your mentors, and your fellow apprentices. Each of these factors is influenced by things that are highly personal and variable. What might be a wonderful and fulfilling experience for one person may be a disaster for another. This is why finding the right match between you and the farm you ultimately decide to apprentice at is so crucial, and why you need to take the initial selection process so seriously. Here are a few tips that we've learned over the years to help you with that process. Good luck and please don't hesitate to get in touch with us at MOFGA if you need any help.

- ✎ What kind of farm do you want to work on? What type of farming do you want to learn?
Farms differ very widely in scale and enterprise, so think about what you really want to learn and choose a farm that offers it. If you're not sure yet, it's best to choose a farm with a wide diversity of activities and enterprises to engage you.
- ✎ What is the farmer's experience and skill level? How long has he or she been farming?
Experience and skill mean a lot, but aren't necessarily the most important characteristics in a mentor. Communication and teaching skills are equally, if not more, important. Many beginner farmers (less than 5 years experience) have a lot to offer apprentices if you are willing to learn alongside them.
- ✎ Is the location of the farm important to you? Would you like to be close to a population center? The coast? The mountains? Is it important to have other apprentices on farms nearby? Do you have transportation?
- ✎ Is it important to you to have other apprentices on the farm with you, or are you OK with being the sole apprentice?
- ✎ Pay close attention to whether the farmer is full-time on the farm during the growing season. If they have an off-farm job, you may be left alone at least some of the time, and this could interfere with your learning process and potentially be frustrating. Think about whether this is OK with you. Ask part-time farmers how much time they spend off the farm during the growing season.
- ✎ Check references!! They are often the best way to understand just what life might be like on a particular farm. Ask lots of questions of them.
- ✎ Know what kind of learner you are, and make sure that a farmer's teaching and management style is compatible. If you feel the need for structured instruction and supplemental reading, can the farmer (and the work schedule) accommodate that?
- ✎ Does the farmer encourage and/or enable apprentices to attend MOFGA's weekly Farm Training Project workshops? For example, is the farmer willing to adapt your work schedule to allow you to attend? Could you borrow one of the farm vehicles if need be? Have past apprentices at the farm attended workshops? If not, why not?
- ✎ Do the living arrangements match your lifestyle and privacy needs? Living in the farmer's house can be a wonderful relationship-building experience, but it can also be very challenging to both live and work with someone, and family dynamics are also a consideration.



The On-Farm Mentor's Guide

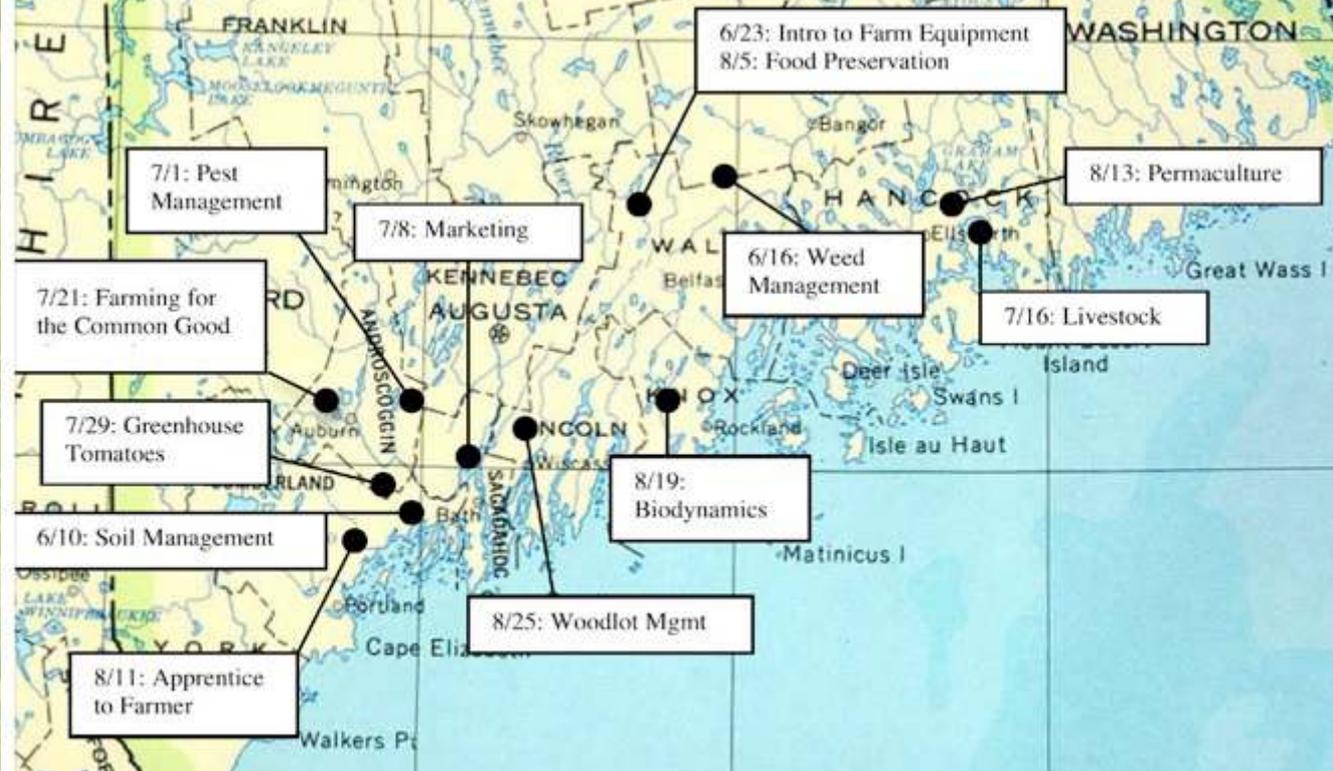
PRACTICAL APPROACHES TO TEACHING
ON THE FARM



NEW ENGLAND SMALL FARM INSTITUTE

2009 MOFGA Farm Training Project

On-farm, topic-oriented workshops for beginning farmers





Journeyperson: the next step

Mentorship

Access to MOFGA events & resources, stipend for non-MOFGA learning opportunities

Farm & Business planning (Farm Beginnings, consultants)

Participation in an informal curriculum of meetings & workshops

Land Access Services (in partnership with Maine Farmland Trust & Land For Good)

Access to capital

MOFGA Farmer-in-Residence program



Mentorship – MOFGA's approach

Help establish the relationship – elicit needs & weaknesses during early communication, use MOFGA's networks & contacts to suggest 3-5 potential mentors

No formal recruitment or application process for mentors

Encourage & empower JPs to shop around, visit & meet with many potential mentors

Keep it informal & flexible, but put parameters around the relationship

JPs & mentors share responsibility for success of relationship

Check-ins every 3-4 mos, annual written evaluation

Invite mentors to participate in JP meetings & farm visits

Proximity? Depends on the type of relationship



Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association

Common Ground Country Fair • The MOFGA Newspaper
Crop Certification • Education and Technical Services

MOFGA Journeyperson/Mentor Agreement

_____ has agreed to serve as a Journeyperson Mentor for _____, who is currently enrolled in the Journeyperson Program of the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA), and is farming in _____.

Mentorship is a key element of the MOFGA Journeyperson experience, and Mentor participation in the Journeyperson Program contributes greatly to the overall effectiveness of JP training and community-building.

The Mentor and Journeyperson (JP) agree to:

1. Meet regularly (at least monthly) to track JP's progress, answer questions, and generally consult and offer advice,*
2. Maintain communication with MOFGA staff, including the Education Director and Executive Director, about JP progress, the mentor-JP relationship, and the effectiveness of the program, including at least one meeting a year between all parties involved, and
3. Keep records of these meetings.

In addition to the above commitments, the Mentor agrees to:

1. Share advice, technical assistance, wisdom, philosophies and sympathy with diligence and honesty, to the best of his or her ability, via phone, email, and face-to-face meetings,*
2. Visit the JP's farm at least once during the growing season,
3. Generally try to support the JP in his or her efforts to learn and develop their farming enterprise,
4. Provide feedback to MOFGA staff regarding the JP's progress and the effectiveness of the program, and
5. Provide a final report and evaluation of the JP and his or her experience with the program at the end of his or her time as Mentor.

In addition to the above commitments, the JP agrees to:

1. Keep records of JP related activities and communications with his or her Mentor,
2. Provide a brief annual report to his or her mentor and to MOFGA on his or her experiences farming and as a JP, and
3. Provide a final report and evaluation of their JP experience at the end of his or her time as a JP.

In recognition of the important service that the Journeyperson Mentor provides, MOFGA agrees to provide a mentor stipend of \$100,000. The stipend will be paid in installments of \$333.34 on the following dates: July 15, October 15, and December 15, 2010.

This agreement is effective upon signing by the individuals listed below, and it extends for one year from the date of signing.

Signed

Mentor

Date

Journeyperson

Date

Andrew Marshall, MOFGA Education Director

Date

*Time commitment expected of mentors in fulfilling their role is generally 4050 hours per year for full mentors, pro-rated for partial mentors. More contact is encouraged if appropriate.

Mentor's SSN (for tax reporting purposes)

Mentor's mailing address

Inherent challenges with mentorship

Farmers are busy & isolated

Predicated on personal relationships – variable; difficult to predict and evaluate

Being a good farmer does not automatically mean one is a good communicator

Please join MOFGA in welcoming the 2009 Journeyperson Cohort



The
Journeyperson
Program
supports new
and beginning
farmers in
Maine



More info
and farmer bios at www.mofga.org



MOFGA Farmer-in-Residence Program



Live and farm at MOFGA's Common Ground



Evaluation



Open Questions

What is the best (institutional) context in which to train farmers?

Which institution types and collaborations are best equipped to undertake this training model?

What combination of practical, immersive learning and traditional academic pedagogy is the right balance?

What is the ideal curriculum, given the expansive breadth and inherent interdisciplinarity of agriculture?



Andrew Marshall

amarshall@mofga.org

207-568-4142

www.mofga.org