

# How to Become a Farmer Without Experience

Two Parts: [Learning About Farming](#) [Gaining Experience](#)

"Farmers farm for the love of farming. They love to watch and nurture the growth of plants. They love to live in the presence of animals. They love to work outdoors. They love the weather, maybe even when it is making them miserable." - Wendell Berry.

So, you want to become a farmer, but you've never grown a crop or raised livestock before? Not to worry—this article will set you on the path to realizing your dream of being a farmer.

Part  
1

## Learning About Farming

**1 Decide why you're interested in farming.** What is motivating you to get into the practice of raising crops and/or animals and leaving the urban area where, usually, more money is to be made without having to work so hard for it? Any kind of farming involves a lot of hard work, it takes huge amount of responsibility, and is not the kind of venture that you will get rich quick on, if at all. Farming is a way of life, and also a business that gives you less of a financial "reward" for all the hard work you have to do throughout the year. But, the emotional and spiritual reward you get can be accounted for more than the paycheck you get at the end of the year.

- The industry is, for the most part, steeped in tradition. If you've never farmed in your life nor have any agricultural experience to bring to the table, and yet you still want to become a farmer, you may run into some individuals who are more skeptical of your future endeavor than you wish. But, do not let this bring you down, as there are many people who will embrace your goals and want to help out as much as possible. You will be surprised at how helpful a lot of farm people can be with the new farmers that want to learn as much as possible!
- Remember there is no such thing as a stupid question. However, don't be discouraged or lead yourself to feel slightly offended if someone is more blunt and forward with some of their advice and/or criticisms of what you intend to do and how to do it than you expected. Those farmers that have been in the business for decades have been-there and done-that, and will give you as much advice as you ask for, and even a few stories here and there. Be open to possibilities, listen well, and don't try to argue on something that they have known to work for them for the last umpteen years. Especially, talk to various farmers to get a better understanding of what to expect with what you are doing and the locale you intend to [start a farm](#) in.

**2 Choose what farm enterprise[s] you would like to get into.** In most cases there are two main categories of agricultural production to choose from: *Crops*, seed or grain production (oilseeds, cereals, and pulse crops), citrus and apple orchards, berry farms, vineyards, vegetable production, hay and silage production; and *Livestock* include raising beef and/or dairy cattle, hogs (pigs), poultry (ducks, geese, turkeys, chickens), horses, sheep, goats, beekeeping or exotic animals (ostrich, elk, bison, buffalo, yak, muskox, deer, emu, etc.). Organic, [sustainable](#) and even regenerative farming is another sector of agriculture which covers all crop and livestock production, but pertains to non-conventional means of producing such products.

- Most, if not all farms regardless of economical classification (i.e., commercial/industrial versus small, organic, sustainable or family farm), rely on and utilize more than one enterprise to maintain an operable farm. For instance, a dairy farm cannot be profitable without also having silage, hay and grain enterprises to feed its cow herd. A crop-only farm will often have a rotational cropping system that may pertain to growing and harvesting at least two crops per season, rotating cereal, oilseed and/or pulse crops every year in order to balance out soil fertility and quality, and to meet future market projections.
- It is generally considered that the larger the farm, the more specified the enterprise. However, this is not always the case, as shown above. You should not have to worry about this, though it's best to dabble in only a couple enterprises at first before you start weighing the options of diversification. This is so that you don't spread yourself out too thin when you first start up, because it's so easy to spend a lot of money on a lot of things and

then realize that you may have wasted a lot of money on something[s] that turned out to be wrong for you.

**3 Visit with some experienced farmers.** It is highly recommended that you find those who are farming in a similar manner to what you intend to do. It's also recommended to ask them to give you a tour of their operation. Run a web search to find out about some upcoming local agricultural events happening, and attend as many of them as you can. You will find many active producers you may want to visit with at such events. There you can ask questions and get a better understanding of their own farming experiences.<sup>[1]</sup>

- Start off with talks of the weather (because farm folk always like to talk about the weather) and how it's impacting their operation. Introduce yourself as well and tell them, albeit briefly, about what you want to do. Usually that will open them up more than someone suddenly inundating them with questions without giving them a sense of who you are and why you are so interested in what they do. Then you can follow up by asking if they wouldn't mind you asking about their own operation: What they do, how they do it, what's changed and what hasn't, and if they have any advice for you. You could also bring up the idea of coming out to their farm to see what they do for yourself.
- Farmers markets are also a great place to meet producers. Not only do you have an opportunity to purchase their product to try out at home, but to also talk with them about their own farming operations. They may appear to specialize in one particular thing (i.e., goat-cheese making, or jam-making), but you don't know without asking them first. They may even allow you to come out to their farm to talk with them more and get a personal tour.

**4 Research as much as you can.** Utilize as many resources as possible: Books, the Internet, agricultural newspapers and magazines, podcasts, videos, etc.

- Read books that discuss the kind of farming you want to get involved in. The library is a great place to start, and ideally a library of a post-secondary institution will give you more resources than one at a local elementary, secondary school. A bookstore is also ideal if you want to start your own collection of farming-related books that you can reference any time you like through purchasing and/or ordering any book you need. On-line book sites are also good to look through.
- Search the Internet for various articles that cover the many topics of the particular enterprise you want to get started in. In the United States, the Center of Rural Affairs also offers online PDF documents that contains lots of information for beginning farmers and ranchers. A PDF link [here](#) gives some advice for those wanting to get into agriculture. There is also a beginner farmers website called Beginning Farmers that contains a lot of information for beginner farmers. Quite frankly, if you search Google with the search term "beginner farmer" you will find a large number of links to look at that caters to those wanting to get started in farming.
- Look for and read some online discussion forums that contain various topics on agriculture, from cattle to goats to crops and machinery. Online forums are great places to discuss a number of topics in farming and ranching with other producers and agricultural experts.
- In your research, find out every aspect of farming that you need to know about, from skills needed to accomplish various jobs (basic mechanical aptitude, how to operate machinery, knowing animal behavior, growth stages of crops, etc.), market potential for your product (where, how, what, when, to whom, and even why), environmental conditions and changes of your area (soil type and quality, vegetation [type, above-ground biomass, natural biome], topography [flat or hilly, high elevation or low] and climatic conditions [precipitation amount, storm frequency and type, drought/flood frequency]), and things you need to know about how to perform the many duties on your farm (from how to [harvest a grain crop](#), [feeding cattle](#), or [bottle-raising a goat kid](#), to knowing [how to make a rope halter](#) or to [drive a tractor](#)).

**5 Attend informational or continuing-education sessions or classes on the sector of your interest.** You can either choose to attend college or university, or just attend various information sessions held by various agricultural organizations, agricultural schools, or government extension services.

- Attending university or college to study agriculture is not required, but recommended if you want to learn more than what you need for running a farm. Depending on the institution, you may want to get into animal sciences, agri-business, agricultural management and production, crop sciences, animal health or pre-veterinary medicine, horticulture, agricultural mechanical engineering, and many others. You have the choice of getting a diploma, a certificate, or a degree if you decide to go into college or university. However, choose wisely and if you can, incorporate classes on business, economics and financial management to your education so that you are not going to be caught unprepared for the amount of financial and economic decisions that you will

ultimately need to make for the betterment of your operation.

- Typically a college diploma or certificate would be recommended, if not a university degree, however learning to farm does not really require formal education because there are many aspects to it that cannot be covered in the classroom. As mentioned, you do not need to attend college or university in order to qualify to start farming, even though the studies will help immensely in the long-run.
- Attend some informational sessions held in your area or within your state or province (or, if necessary, in a different province or state in your country, or even in a neighboring country). They will give you the information you need to run your farm. Such sessions may be on farm economics and finances or how to grow and harvest a certain crop. They may be even on the advancing technologies of your sector of interest, or even on improving management on your farm to be more sustainable and environmentally-conscious.. Some sessions are free, others may require an entrance fee or admission to attend

**6 Consider having to move.** Without a doubt you will not be able to achieve your dream of becoming a farmer if you do not move out of your urban residence, if that is where you are currently situated. However, with regards to starting a farming operation you will need to consider the right location where you can start farming. Some regions of the country are more conducive to farming than others. Some areas are more conducive to different sectors of agriculture than others.

- In your research that you would have been doing above, you will need to find out which location[s] is/are more suited to the kind of operation you are interested in starting up. Note that environmental conditions were mentioned above based on soil, climate, topography and vegetation. The reasons these were included was because all of these determine what kind of farm you can have and what kind of operation you should not even bother considering. For example, an area that has rocky soil is ideal for raising livestock and some hay, but not growing crops.

## Part 2

### Gaining Experience

**1 Offer your services as a farm worker or laborer.** This is probably the most important step on your way to becoming a farmer because you are working and gaining necessary experience in the form of a learning opportunity in exchange for giving some extra help needed by the farmer. Like with all careers, you will be entering at the very bottom. The only way you will work your way up is to work hard and do what is asked of you, and to also not be afraid to get out of your comfort zone and try new things.

- There are several ways to start working for a farm:
  - Look for government-run programs that cover agriculture and farming<sup>[2]</sup>.
    - For beginning American farmers especially, the Center of Rural Affairs offers many different programs that new farmers can enroll in. These classes are fantastic because they link new farmers up with more experienced farmers or retiring landowners. Programs can range from getting advice from farmers, to linking up with landowners to take over their farm once they retire<sup>[3]</sup>.
    - For new Canadian farmers, a program called Farm Start was started in 2005 for the purpose of educating those new farmers with non-farming backgrounds.
    - Beginning Farmer is also a website that has job and internship postings for anyone interested in getting involved in farming and needing the experience. Job and internship opportunities are available not only in the US, but also internationally.
  - Join a beginning farmer training program. There are quite a few of these that can be found through a basic internet search (just type "farming programs [your location]" into your search engine).
    - A program such as WWOOF (World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms) allows you opportunity to get involved in organic agriculture and allows you to explore many different options because you can travel from farm to farm during your time as a WWOOFer<sup>[4]</sup> Select your country and then explore all of the options available in your area.
- Find a summer job as a research assistant for a college or university that holds research trials on one or more research farms. You will get the opportunity to not only participate in research activities, but also learn some duties that are pretty much parallel to what you would have to do on a farm.

- Put your resume out to various farms that both need the extra seasonal help and will be open to taking in someone with no or very little prior farming experience in to provide a learning opportunity over the busy season.
  - Some of these opportunities may not be seen in the local newspaper or listings on Kijiji, but rather by word of mouth. Many opportunities can be based on who you know, because they may know someone (or ask any of their connections if they know of anyone) who can take in and mentor an aspiring future farmer like yourself by giving them some work over the season.
- Be aware that salary payment may not be higher than minimum wage. The pay for farm laborers or hired hands is nothing to be excited about, primarily because most farmers are strapped for cash themselves and will not be able to pay an expected hourly wage that is well above the minimum. Many positions include housing, but usually only on a seasonal basis (i.e., during growing and harvest seasons but not during the winter).

**2 Expect to work for longer than a typical 8-hour work day.** This is especially true during harvest time when the crop needs to come in as soon as possible before any potential bad weather ruins any chance of getting it in. Other times include birthing season, hay harvesting, or checking livestock and finding one needs medical attention immediately.

**3 Express your desire to learn.** Watch how people do their tasks and ask them to teach you if you feel you won't be able to learn it by yourself. You may also find that you will have to ask *why* quite often, so don't be afraid to do so! You will go through a steep learning curve the first month or two that you are a part of the farm's operations. You will also learn to do many tasks including how to change oil in the tractor, fix the combine, get the cows prepared for milking, how to manage pastures and the livestock that graze them, make feed for livestock, and even simpler things like how to tell the difference between wheat and barley.

- Do not expect that you know everything and how to do it simply because you have read about it somewhere in book or even on wikiHow. You will find that the things you can read about are an entirely different thing when put into practice. Experience is everything, and the more experiences you gain, the better equipped you will be to start up a farm on your own. You cannot expect to be a farmer without knowing the seemingly-trivial technicalities and understanding the art and science that goes into how various enterprises are managed on the farm you are working at, and the farm you will eventually own and operate.

**4 Be flexible and open to new activities.** You must be willing to perform any and every task that needs to get done on a working farm as equally as you are willing to learn more about it. Many of these activities will take practice to sufficiently master, as well as a good deal of manual labor. If there is something you're not willing nor comfortable doing, let your employer know (and state why), while also understanding the possibility that you may not have much of a choice in the matter. However if, for instance, you're uncomfortable with having to euthanize a sick and dying animal, you may be missing the point in understanding that you will actually be doing the kindest thing for that animal in ending its suffering.

- Other tasks you may not like to do at first because of certain fears or aversions include:
  - Mucking out barns and stalls of animal manure.
  - Climbing ladders or climbing up on top of grain bins.
  - Operating machinery like a skid steer, tractor or combine to do various tasks like hitching up, backing up a machine (which is as hard as backing up a trailer), maneuvering in tight quarters, etc.
  - Operating a tractor and the machine hooked up to it to cut, till or harvest a crop.
  - Killing pests like rats, mice, gophers, and rabbits.
  - Handling and catching unruly animals that may harm you in some way if they decide they don't like being chased anymore.
  - Keeping on top of feeding and milking schedules.
  - Weeding or harvesting for 12 straight hours or more often with few to no breaks.
  - Applying pesticides to fields.
  - Slaughtering and butchering an animal or participating in the activity.
  - Dehorning/disbudding/polling, branding, tagging or castrating livestock (also includes detusking and/or tail docking in pigs, clipping wings in poultry, etc.)
  - Fixing and/or maintaining machinery, treating sick livestock etc.

**5 Be physically fit.** A whole lot of farming is made up of a lot of physical exercises including crouching, kneeling, bending, lifting, pushing, pulling, etc.. Only farm managers who've paid their dues can skip some physical labor, but even they often must push their bodies close to the limit for the job. Or, ask for help from others to do something they find they cannot do themselves. You must realize the same limitations for your body, and ask for help when you feel you need it.

- Don't shy away from mechanical tasks. Become as familiar as you can with farm machinery, [how to use them safely](#), and how to maintain and fix them. Even the smallest farms usually depend on a rototiller and a small acreage tractor, among other equipment.

**6 Dress the part.** This may sound superficial, but if you walked into a law firm interview dressed in a pair of scrubby blue jeans and work boots, it's as inappropriate attire as walking onto a farm to start work wearing a suit and some classy shoes. It's highly recommended that you wear a T-shirt, jeans, and work boots, particularly those that are safety-standard approved and have steel toes.

- Invest in a good pair of work gloves because you will have to handle materials and tools that could give you some nasty slivers, cuts, abrasions, or blisters in a short period time. They're also ideal if you don't wish to get your hands very dirty.
- If you have long hair, tie it back in a braid or ponytail so it doesn't get caught in anything and stays out of your eyes. A hat or cap is ideal as well, to keep your eyes and head shaded from the bright sun.

**7 Have a good sense of humor.** Laughter makes the day go by faster, especially when your muscles are aching, your fingers feel like they are going to fall off, and the weather has ruined your plans once again. A positive attitude is an asset to any farm!

**8 Know when you are ready to begin your own farm.** For most it will take at least a year or two of being a part of a farming operation before they can be considered "good enough" to graduate from being a mere farm hand to an actual farm-owner and operator.

- For more information, please see the article [How to Start a Farm](#).

## Community Q&A

Is there any way that I can use solar or wind power for electricity at my farm?

wikiHow  
Contributor

Yes, you can also use micro hydroelectric power. One reader uses a mix of micro hydro and solar to power their entire house, chicken coop, cow milking machine, barn, and pumps for the fish pond. solar panels are on the barn, all connected to an inverter and battery bank, which provides more than enough power during the day, and uses hydro electric at night to run all the main things like the entire house and some lights outside. It is expensive upfront but if you

do your own, for all the parts, bits and pieces, it will be around \$25,000, but you will also not have an electric bill in over five years. Aim to take your property completely off the grid but have all the luxuries of living in the city thanks to solar/hydro power.

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### How do I get the capital to become a farmer?

wikiHow  
Contributor

If your credit is great, go for standard financing through a bank. If not, you can buy land on the internet. For example, you can purchase 30 or 40 acres for around \$6000; it's owner-financed with no credit check, and there's a down payment of around \$250 and monthly payments of around \$100. The best part is that you can pay for the land while you use it.

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### How can a child start farming?

wikiHow  
Contributor

A child can get started by planting herbs and vegetables in the corner of the garden or in a container. The child could also get some chickens to take care of as well.

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### How would a farmer use literacy?


Karin

A farmer uses literacy in many, many ways, from reading labels on pesticides to reading current crop or livestock market reports. Also, farmers read classifieds, newspapers, ag magazines, books, etc. to learn more about better farming practices and what interesting things other farmers are doing. Literacy is also necessary for mathematics, which are needed for planning out grazing management plans, figuring out how to build or fix things on the farm, the list goes on. In the 21st century, there is no reason why farmers cannot be literate to improve farming operations.

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## Can you answer these readers' questions?

 Refresh

On **How to Take Care of Granite Countertops**, a reader asks:

How to fit and install an inset kitchen sink?

Your answer...

Reply

On **How to Save Scanned Documents Wirelessly on iPad with HP All in One Printer Remote**, a reader asks:

Is there a way to save all pages as a single document when adding pages?

Your answer...

Reply

On **How to Install a Roku 3**, a reader asks:

How do I get back to my TV home screen from the Roku screen?

Your answer...

Reply

## Tips

- Be on time and be nice to your boss!
- Keep an open mind and learn as much as you can. You will make mistakes, so don't take it personally if you get into trouble for such mistakes. Instead, move on from it and take it as a lesson learned.
- Make sure you know how to use your common sense and your gut-feeling
- If you're not sure about something, ask for help.
- Every day before you go to work, check the forecast for the day. This gets you into a good habit of thinking about how

farms prepare for upcoming weather events and how the operation's schedule may change. You will also be able to better prepare for the weather in the way you dress.

## Warnings

- Farming can be extremely dangerous, especially since you will be constantly working with animals and machinery. Most employers do not offer health insurance to farm laborers, so make sure you know what your risks are, and be careful!
- Farming is not for everyone. You may find out after the first few months of being a farm laborer or farm hand that you don't like it. That is why it is best to start off working for someone rather than starting your own farm and then regretting it later.
- Know Murphy's Law: "Anything bad that can happen, will."

## Sources and Citations

1. <http://www.academicinvest.com/science-careers/botany-careers/how-to-become-a-farmer>
2. <http://www.academicinvest.com/science-careers/botany-careers/how-to-become-a-farmer>
3. [http://www.cfra.org/resources/beginning\\_farmer](http://www.cfra.org/resources/beginning_farmer)

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