

Preface

by Diane Green

Why consider becoming a farmer mentor? Personally, there is a great deal of satisfaction knowing that I can offer perspective and support to up and coming future small acreage farmers. When I look at the rate family farms are disappearing across the country, I am saddened.



As family farms are being subdivided into housing developments, we are losing thousands of acres of farmland every day across the U.S. I believe that much of our future food systems will be reliant on neighboring small acreage farms. With recent events across our country, more than ever, we need more farmers and more effort going towards creating a local community food system!

We have had sixteen interns come and stay with us on our farm since 1997. Having student interns on the farm during the season has brought a new awareness of how we do what we do here. They offer insight and a different perspective to the day-to-day procedures on the farm.

With the repetition of doing our annual small acreage-farming endeavor, it is easy to get lost in the routine of the everyday process. We make choices to do things the way we do them for lots of reasons; having someone there asking questions makes us think more about the process of making things happen. Is there only one way to harvest basil or beans? How did we determine the best process for post-harvest handling of basil and beans? What is the yield of a 150-foot row of beans? How many pounds of basil will you get out of 500 plants?

With all of the questions that come with having someone new to the agricultural endeavor working with you on your farm, I would like to point out that it is very important that a person considering becoming a farmer mentor have patience and like to teach and share information. It can be a challenge to explain everything – and it takes more time to explain things. The relationship that is developed between farmer and intern is not ‘free labor’. While an intern does offer plenty of assistance with daily chores and projects, understand that this is not the reason to take on the responsibility of becoming a farmer mentor.

Hands-on learning has been the most effective way that I have learned to do what I do as a farmer. It seems to me that the best that I can do to help my community and my country is offer the encouragement and learning opportunity to the flourishing new market gardeners and small acreage farmers to produce food and create a local community food system. Teaching is a great way to learn how to be better at what you do!

Acknowledgements

The Cultivating Success Farmer-Mentor Handbook represents the work of many individuals who shared the vision for “a curriculum based on-farm educational experience” for student farmers in the Inland Northwest. Several years of discussion, planning, and in-field educational experiences have resulted in this handbook of useful information for producers who are looking to train a new generation of sustainable small acreage farmers.

The information in the handbook was written and compiled primarily through the diligent efforts of Diane Green. Diane and her husband, Thom Sadoski, operate Greentree Naturals, a small certified organic farm nestled between the Cabinet and Selkirk mountain ranges in rural northern Idaho. Diane and Thom have hosted sixteen interns over the past ten years and have shared their production and marketing knowledge with them and many other students. It took Diane’s first hand experience as a farmer and a mentor to understand what other farmers need to know in order to have a successful farmer-intern experience.

Diane would personally like to thank all of their interns who helped shape this manuscript by offering their assessment of workshops and training sessions over the past several years.

A special thanks goes to Theresa Beaver, former Cultivating Success Coordinator, for overseeing numerous aspects involved in the production of the manual. Theresa worked with Diane and other members of the Cultivating Success team on the initial concept; she reviewed content, and provided essential input and feedback on all aspects of the process.

We would especially like to acknowledge Diane Green, Stan Urmann, Jennifer Parent and Stacia and David Moffett for being the first class of certified farmer mentors of the Cultivating Success program. These farmers attended the first year’s training course, developed a schedule of on-farm activities and prepared a curriculum based on their specific farm situation. Their work helped Diane to refine and improve the approach and methods for future farmers participating in this program.

Through interactions with the farmers involved in our first trainings, we confirmed the value of introducing learning styles as an important aspect of educational methodology. As an added benefit, our project team gained new insights on our own individual learning styles and it has helped us to embrace multiple approaches to the educational process. Thank you to Cinda Williams for contributing the section on learning style indicators and to Cathy Perillo for her help gathering information on learning styles and the educational process.

Colette DePhelps, Cinda Williams, Cathy Perillo and Theresa Beaver secured the grant funding for the development of this training manual. We want to thank and acknowledge our major project funders: USDA Higher Education Challenge Grant program, Risk Management Agency and Western Region Sustainable Research and Education (SARE). Another critical source of support was provided through the Partnership 2020 project funded through the Kellogg Foundation. We would like to thank Vickie McCracken and John Hammel, co-directors of the Partnership 2020 project, who provided their administrative support and the initial funding for this program.

A special thank you to Colette DePhelps for her incredible vision and leadership through all phases of this project and her commitment to developing a quality program that meets the needs of beginning and current small acreage farmers in the Inland Northwest.

We would also like to acknowledge and thank Ariel Agenbroad for revising this manual for on-line print in 2006. Many thanks also to Diane Green, Amanda Snyder, and Kristy Ott for the most recent updates of the 2008 version, as the Cultivating Success program evolves and changes to better address the needs of our farmer mentors and future farm interns.

The training and certification process for farmer mentors participating in the Cultivating Success program was developed as a way to provide farmers with background on the program and provide them with useful information about what is involved in hiring or hosting an on-farm intern. Another critical part of the training is to provide guidance and training applicable to the education process itself. We hope you find the Cultivating Success Farmer Mentor Handbook to be helpful in providing on-farm learning experiences that are rewarding to both you and your farm interns.

