



## **Guidebook for Apprenticeship Mentor 2023**

Farming takes an enormous amount of dedication, patience, and skills in so many categories. To equip beginning farmers with the physical and mental skills necessary to thrive, training, education, and hands-on practice is crucial. Your commitments to land stewardship are noble; we see and feel your efforts that benefit so many. With great excitement and honor, we thank you for accepting to take on the important role of mentorship by having an apprentice(s) at your farm. Visceral, hands-on opportunities for aspiring farmers to connect with land, and learn practical skills are incredibly beneficial—we are confident that an apprentice(s) will learn a lot with your guidance.

Through this offering from Agroecology Commons' Farmer Mobilization programming, we aim to catalyze inspiration and remove barriers for diverse beginning farmers. A farmer's work is highly valuable to society; we honor you, and see this paid mentorship as an opportunity to make that known. Thank you for sharing your experiential wisdom, and serving as a mentor to beginning farmers! The following guidebook is meant to support you as you begin this journey with your apprentice(s). We are here to support you, please reach out anytime.

### **What to Expect**

#### **Relationship-building and cooperation**

- The Farmer Mobilization Apprenticeship Program creates space for land stewards, farmers, and aspiring farmers to connect, share ideas, and cooperate on behalf of agroecology and food sovereignty.

#### **Hands-on Practice**

- One of the core intentions of the Farmer Mobilization Apprenticeship Program is for aspiring farmers to viscerally connect with the earth, soil, seeds, plants, and animals. Your time, guided by an experienced farmer will include a variety of land stewardship, and cultivation practices.

#### **Learning, Un-learning, and Re-membering**

- We acknowledge that wisdom, as well as trauma we carry from our ancestors and personal lived experience affects us. The Farmer Mobilization Apprenticeship Program holds space to

cultivate awareness of our embodied knowledge, as well as practice reciprocal relationships with earth and one another.

### **Experiential Learning**

- This is an opportunity for you to deepen your visceral farming experience and receive mentorship from an experienced farmer. While this apprenticeship is paid you should note that it is not full-time employment.

### **Values:**

Agroecology Commons' Farmer Mobilization offerings are guided by values of earth reverence, intergenerational learning, and healing in relationship with the land. We are dedicated to embodying our values in mentorship offerings by uplifting movements for food sovereignty, land justice, and well-being in our communities.

### **Vision:**

Agroecology Commons is committed to a vision of mentorship that cultivates tangible skills in ancestral ecological stewardship. We honor and celebrate land stewards that share this wisdom with communities across generations. We envision learning rooted in long-term relationships of support & reciprocity with land and each other. Through our programming, we plant seeds for stronger networks of mutual aid, food sovereignty, and community healing.

### **Mission:**

Agroecology Commons supports Bay Area Farmer-to-Farmer Training (BAFFT) graduates with opportunities to dive deeper into the visceral experience of farming. Linking graduates with experienced agroecological practitioners in our network, we assist beginning farmers to deepen their work as land stewards through real-life relationships with place, people, soil, and plants.

### **Roles and Responsibilities**

We believe that creating clear expectations and roles is crucial in having a successful apprenticeship program. Please review the following roles and responsibilities that we have outlined for both the host farmer and apprentice.

## Farm Host

**Instruction:** We ask that you, the farm mentor, be prepared to show apprentices how to do different on-farm tasks. Many apprentices from urban spaces did not grow up in a farming community for the last one or more generations, and therefore may have little experience and understanding of on-farm life. We believe that good mentorship reflects the balance of clear, patient instruction, as well as demonstration of how to approach and accomplish tasks, while providing appropriate space for apprentice(s) to practice as they gain competence. We expect mentors to schedule time to train alongside their apprentice(s) on a regular and consistent basis, and have apprentices work independently. Giving an apprentice a diversity of tasks over the seasonal course of the apprenticeship will encourage authentic exposure to managing an agricultural operation. We ask that farm mentors seek and take advantage of teachable moments on the farm or ranch on a regular basis, as well as recognize there is always something to learn from the apprentice too.

**Inspiration:** We understand that offering an apprentice a longer explanation of the purpose of a task could be challenging in the midst of urgent tasks, and we suggest that doing so can be a worthwhile investment of time. When an apprentice understands the ultimate goal of a task, how it fits into the overall season, they can start to get a sense of the consequences of that piece of work done well or poorly.

**Feedback:** Providing feedback for apprentices supports them in their growth and learning while also giving them concrete examples of where they could focus their efforts. Affirmation for a job well done can contribute to a positive attitude, self-confidence, and desire to continue giving their efforts to the farm.

**Safety:** Farm mentors are ultimately responsible for setting up safe situations for the apprentice's learning. This means ensuring that the dangers inherent on your farm are clearly communicated upfront to the apprentice, including best practices that are in place. Please show your apprentice where safety equipment such as where the first aid kit is located on the first day. If your farm does not have a first aid kit please let us know and we will provide one for you.

## Apprentice

**Initiative:** Apprentices are coming to learn, and while mentors will instruct on safety and production techniques, we encourage you to remain curious and ask questions to absorb as much from the experiences that the mentor has to offer.

**Patience:** You are learning with farmers who honed their skills over many years, be patient with yourself as you engage with new skills.

**Consistency:** In a skilled trade, so much of the learning comes from practice daily and/or consistently. This encourages knowledge to live in muscle memory. Familiarity with equipment, livestock, fields, and plants will continue to grow as time goes on. It is also important for you to be consistent with your apprenticeship in order to respect your mentor's time and farming schedule.

**Feedback:** Providing feedback for farm hosts allows them to understand and be in open dialogue about what is working for you and your learning style.

## **For Both Mentors and Apprentices**

**Relationship management:** Both the mentor and apprentice are responsible to communicate their needs clearly, offer feedback, as well as build trust through care, and repetition. Even an experienced mentor can continue to hone their mentorship skills. We believe clear communication is key to growth, and is supported through active listening and checks for understanding from all people involved—we encourage this! All coordination communications necessary to execute the day to day tasks of the apprenticeship will take place between the mentor and apprentice.

**Scheduling:** It is both the mentor and apprentices responsibility to create a working schedule together. *For example: each Tuesday and Wednesday from 7 - noon, and Friday from 10 - 2 it is expected to be on the farm.* We suggest this is something you discuss upon your first meeting, in addition to clarifying what to do if the apprentice or host is not able to be there that day.

**Evaluation:** Both mentors and apprentices are requested to fill out an end of apprenticeship evaluation form to support AC in enhancing our programmatic offerings.

## **Agroecology Commons**

**Farm Visits and Support:** Agroecology Commons will schedule farm visits to support both mentors and apprentices throughout the apprenticeship. AC staff will also be available for continued communication with mentors and apprentices via phone, and email. Reach out as you see fit!

**Initial Call:** AC will schedule an initial call to review apprentices individualized learning plans with the mentor, AC staff, and apprentice. This will take place before the apprenticeship begins.

**Payments:** AC will issue payments to both farm mentors and apprentices.

We are actively developing this program alongside you all, we ask for your patience! We aspire to host a gathering with other apprentices and mentors—stay tuned, and if you want to support in organizing that, let us know!

## **Adding Value to Your Farm Apprenticeship**

Please note that these are optional offerings but are nice ways to help increase the value of an apprentice's experience on your farm.

- Meet weekly with apprentices to review the past week, plan for the coming week, and discuss any relevant issues (if you are meeting on a weekly basis). This meeting can be 20 minutes or whatever serves the shared need.
- If you feel comfortable, include apprentices in farm-planning discussions so they can learn more about business planning, crop planning, and marketing.
- Offer to share reading materials or recommended reading lists, podcasts, films, etc that might support an apprentice's learning. These items can be added to the apprentice's individualized learning plan.
- Discuss your philosophy of farming with apprentices. Ask them about theirs.
- Let apprentices know about any swimming holes or favorite hikes in your area.
- Give apprentices opportunities to sell with you at farmer's markets.
- Surprise apprentices with ice cream on a hot afternoon.
- If you have it available and are willing, you could offer a small area of land for apprentices to grow their own crop or let them choose a project to manage on their own.

## **Payments:**

Agroecology Commons is responsible for issuing payments. Apprentices are responsible for tracking their hours on a timesheet provided by AC. Farm mentors will also have access to the timesheet and are welcome to review it as they see fit. If your apprentice stops showing up, please inform AC.

AC will process payments in two installations to you, one at the commencement of the apprenticeship, and the other at completion. We will provide an invoice.

If for any reason your apprentice does not continue their apprenticeship, please contact us, at [collective@agroecologycommons.org](mailto:collective@agroecologycommons.org), so that we can find another person to fill that role, or brainstorm an alternative.

Please note that AC will provide you with a 1099 at the end of the year for the funds you have been paid throughout the program. Apprentices are responsible for claiming this as taxable income.

## **Learning Stipend:**

We want mentors to have access to continued learning if desired. If you are interested in receiving a \$200 stipend for your own independent learning, please send us an email at [collective@agroecologycommons.org](mailto:collective@agroecologycommons.org) with what you wish to put the funding toward. For example, you may be interested in taking a class on business and marketing or soil science; or you may be interested in purchasing a book on fermentation; or you may need to purchase another tool for your apprentice to use when at your farm.

## **Conflict Resolution:**

We practice restorative justice and anti-oppression in our collaborations and encourage farm partners and apprentices to do so as well. If there are challenges between you and your farm host that can not be resolved between you both, please reach out to AC so that we can support in facilitating a restorative approach to repair and accountability.

## **On-Farm Safety and Orientation:**

Agroecology Commons asks farm mentors to share transparently about safety risks or hazards on the farm from equipment and tools, to animal handling; please inform apprentices about best practices that are already in place in regard to safety and protocol.

Please show your apprentice where the first aid kit is located on your first day, and other logistical safety needs, like multiple entrances or exits, where to find potable water, where to find the bathroom, poison oak, wildlife, and anything else that is applicable. If you need an emergency kit, let us know.

## **Liability Waiver(s):**

Agroecology Commons will have each apprentice sign a liability waiver which includes an assumption of risk both for AC and the said farm, a covenant not to sue, as well as accountability for any medical expenses. If your farm has an existing farm liability waiver we encourage you to have your apprentice sign it as well.

## **Individualized Learning Plans:**

We aim to make this farm apprenticeship valuable and fruitful for both you and the apprentice. Each apprentice will complete an individualized learning plan that will identify apprentices learning objectives, and their current skill sets. On our initial call with you, and your apprentice, we will look over their learning goals, and have you identify whether or not this is a skill they can learn on your farm. We recognize that not all these skills might be applicable to learning on your farm, and that is okay! For example, tractor skills might not be relevant to a no-till operation and livestock management might not be relevant to a farm that does not have animals. AC will support in setting clear goals and expectations that are applicable for each mentor and apprentice, and will coordinate farm visits to check in on you and your apprentice!

## Community Agreements:

\*adapted with permission from the Biodynamic Association Conference Community Agreements and Racial Justice in the Food Movement Conversation Series

*These community agreements serve as a foundation for how we can show up in shared learning space. **At the beginning and throughout our programming, we invite you to visit and revisit these community agreements to collectively add, redefine, and reflect.** We recognize that community agreements are a living body of values that we can return to in supporting a deeply enriching learning experience for everyone involved.*

**1. Be as present as possible, but come as you are and accept others as they are.** In these unprecedented times, we understand that one another's presence might necessarily coincide with child or eldercare, dinnertime, the necessity of brewing tea to soothe our lungs, stretching, etc. We invite you to be here now, and be understanding of each other's varying circumstances. Folks sometimes use phones to document farm activities as a learning aide, we trust in your discernment to best stay present in learning.

**2. Respect others' identities, backgrounds, and boundaries.** Listen to how people introduce themselves, and use the names and pronouns that people share. Do not assume anyone's gender identity, cultural background, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status.

**3. Listen deeply.** Listen not just to words, but to the feelings, ideas, and inspirations behind them.

**4. Stay curious and open.** Ask mindful questions. Practice inner inquiry. Expect and accept a lack of closure or agreement. Stretch your willingness to be uncomfortable.

**5. Be aware of both intent and impact.** Even though we may intend no harm, sometimes our words and actions can be unskillful and hurt others. Listen to what you actually say, not just what you meant to say. Recognize that impact is often different from intent. If someone tells you that something you said or did caused harm, listen, acknowledge their experience, reflect, and re-engage.

**6. Call each other in, not out.** When someone acts in a way that challenges your values, use it as an opportunity to invite or call that person into greater awareness of their impact. Be accepting that you might also be called into acting more skillfully. Let's all help each other to learn and grow.

**7. Be open to other life experiences and perspectives.** Use "I" statements when speaking about your experience. As you listen to others, understand that their experiences are unique to them, and your experiences are unique to you. Be aware of your biases and privileges, and allow space for voices that are different from your own.

**8. Embrace difference and diversity.** Practice "yes/and" thinking, exploring how apparently contradictory ideas, observations, or experiences might be true at the same time.

**9. Share your knowledge, skills, and questions.** Don't expect that we all come with the same language. If you use words or concepts that may be unfamiliar to others, check in to see if an explanation is needed. If you don't understand something, ask to slow down and clarify. No one knows everything, but together we know a lot.

**10. Center wellness.** Farm labor can be taxing on our bodies, please remember to tend to your needs, to drink water, and center your wellness. Please be present and aware when working with machinery and tools for your safety and for the safety of others.

**11. Ask for consent when taking pictures or other documentation.** We ask that you ask for consent before taking pictures or videos, and to ask special permission if you wish to publicize your documents.

**12. Please share with your apprentice** about how much anticipated notice you would like to have if there is a day that they may not be able to make it to their apprenticeship.