

Michigan Mentorship Programs

Katie Brandt

MSU Organic Farmer Training Program

brandtk7@msu.edu

Who's YOUR mentor?

Mentors matter for new farmers

Katie Brandt, [Michigan State University Extension](#) - February 28, 2023

[Share](#) [Tweet](#) [Save](#) [Share](#) [Print](#) [Email](#)

Michigan Sustainable Farm Mentors program connects 42 beginning and aspiring farmers with experienced farmers.

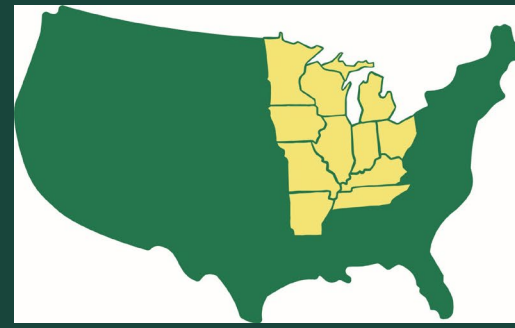


Michigan Mentorship Programs

- TOPP
- Michigan Sustainable Farm Mentors
- Other options!
 - 1:1
 - Networks
 - On-Farm Training & Learning Communities
 - Maps
 - Curriculum



TOPP Transition to Organic Partnership Program



MIDWEST
TRANSITION TO ORGANIC
PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY

Extension

Lead Organizations

- Washtenaw County Conservation District
- Grand Traverse Conservation District
- MSU Organic Farmer Training Program
 - Katie Brandt
- MSU Extension
 - Mariel Borgman
 - Florencia Collella
 - James DeDecker
 - Steve Whittington
- 6 Partner Organizations



TOPP

Transition to Organic Partnership Program

Unique Aspects

- 2 Conservation Districts each will hire a full-time person
- 6 organizations will lead networking events
- Online Evaluation Charrette
- Jobs & Opportunities emails & website



MIDWEST
TRANSITION TO ORGANIC
PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

**GET PAID TO SHARE
PRACTICAL
FARMING TIPS WITH
A NEW ORGANIC
FARMER!**



Michigan Sustainable Farm Mentors



Farmer mentors:

- Jill Johnson
- Cloud Sparks
- Lindsay Daschner
- Andy Chae
- Joannée DeBruhl
- Rachel Cross
- Alex Cacciari

Experience with grazed livestock, vegetables, organic orchards, cut flowers, urban farming, tractor-scale production, marketing, business & much more!

COVID-safe
networking
phone or online

Calling all beginning and aspiring farmers!

Experienced insights to improve your farm:

- Sustainability
- Financial viability
- Social responsibility

Real help to start your farm:

- Training opportunities
- Land & credit access

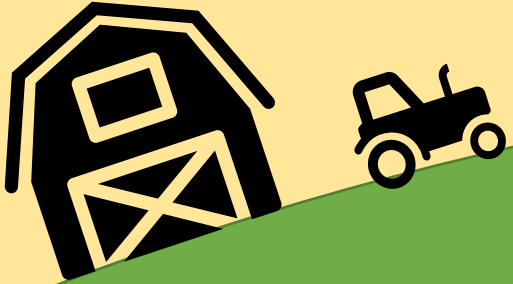
Sign up at <https://tinyurl.com/s9825tz3>

Michigan Sustainable Farm Mentors

2021 North Central Partnership Grant



Katie Brandt
Grant Project Coordinator
Educational Programs Manager
at MSU Student Organic Farm,
Michigan State University



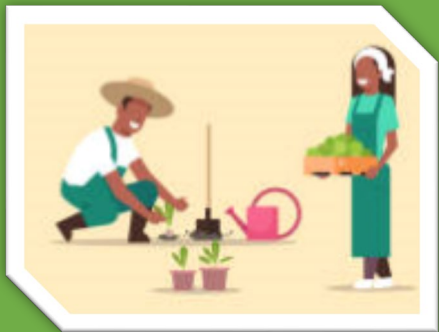
Throughout 2021:

6 Farmer Mentors

met with

13 Mentees

who self-selected
into 2 categories



7 Beginning
Farmers



“Anyone in their first 10
years of actively
farming”

6 Aspiring
Farmers



“Anyone who may have
hands-on farming
experience but doesn’t yet
have land or sell farm
products”

In 2021,

Mentees included:



7 Beginning Farmers



6 Aspiring Farmers



3 Limited resource producers*



3 BIPOC



1 Veteran



1 BIPOC



* "Limited resource producers" is the USDA's term for low-income farmers.

MENTORSHIP NEEDS VARY FOR NEW FARMERS.

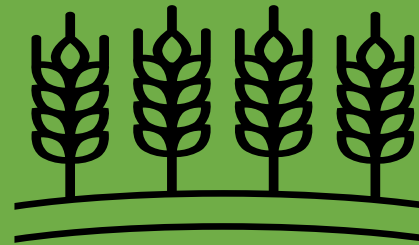
Farmer Mentors focused on different topics for their Mentees.



Beginning
Farmers



Help Increase
Financial, Environmental &
Social Sustainability



Aspiring
Farmers



Help Gain Access to Land +
Credit
& Build Skills in
Business + Farming



Michigan Sustainable Farm Mentors

GRANT OBJECTIVES FOR YEAR 1 WERE MET. Through mentorship, Beginning Farmers reported improvements to their KASA (*knowledge, attitudes, skills, or awareness*) in all categories.

7 Beginning Farmers



7 out of 7

INCREASED Understanding of their Farm Financials



6 out of 7

INCREASED Understanding of their Soil Health + Soil Knowledge



3 out of 5

INCREASED their WORK-LIFE BALANCE from "Below Average"



Beginning Farmers reported IMPROVEMENTS to their Triple Bottom Line (Profitability, Stewardship & Quality of Life)



BEGINNING FARMER MENTEE & MENTOR TESTIMONIALS:

“It was great to have access to someone with so much experience and expertise in the same farming enterprise as I am in.”

- Todd H., **Beginning Farmer Mentee**



“I had some really helpful conversations with my mentor Rachel about getting into the wholesale game.”

- Dani F., **Beginning Farmer Mentee**



“Cool to meet other fellow beginning farmers across the state and my mentor who was so helpful and encouraging!”

- Jane L., **Beginning Farmer Mentee**



“The last 5 or 10 years, I have been a little discouraged with how much farm information sharing is becoming consulting that you pay for.

New farmers don't really have the resources to pay for consulting or workshops. When I was first getting into farming, there was so much peer-to-peer sharing for free at conferences, workshops, and just meeting up.

It is really encouraging that this program is happening, this sharing - helping new farmers where no one is making a ton of money. They're doing it because they want to further sustainable farming.”

- Rachel C., **Farmer Mentor**



6 Aspiring Farmers



2 Accessed Training on land, credit, business or farm



1 Accessed Land to Farm thanks to a mentor's shared resources!



6 Accessed Mentor/Peer Input



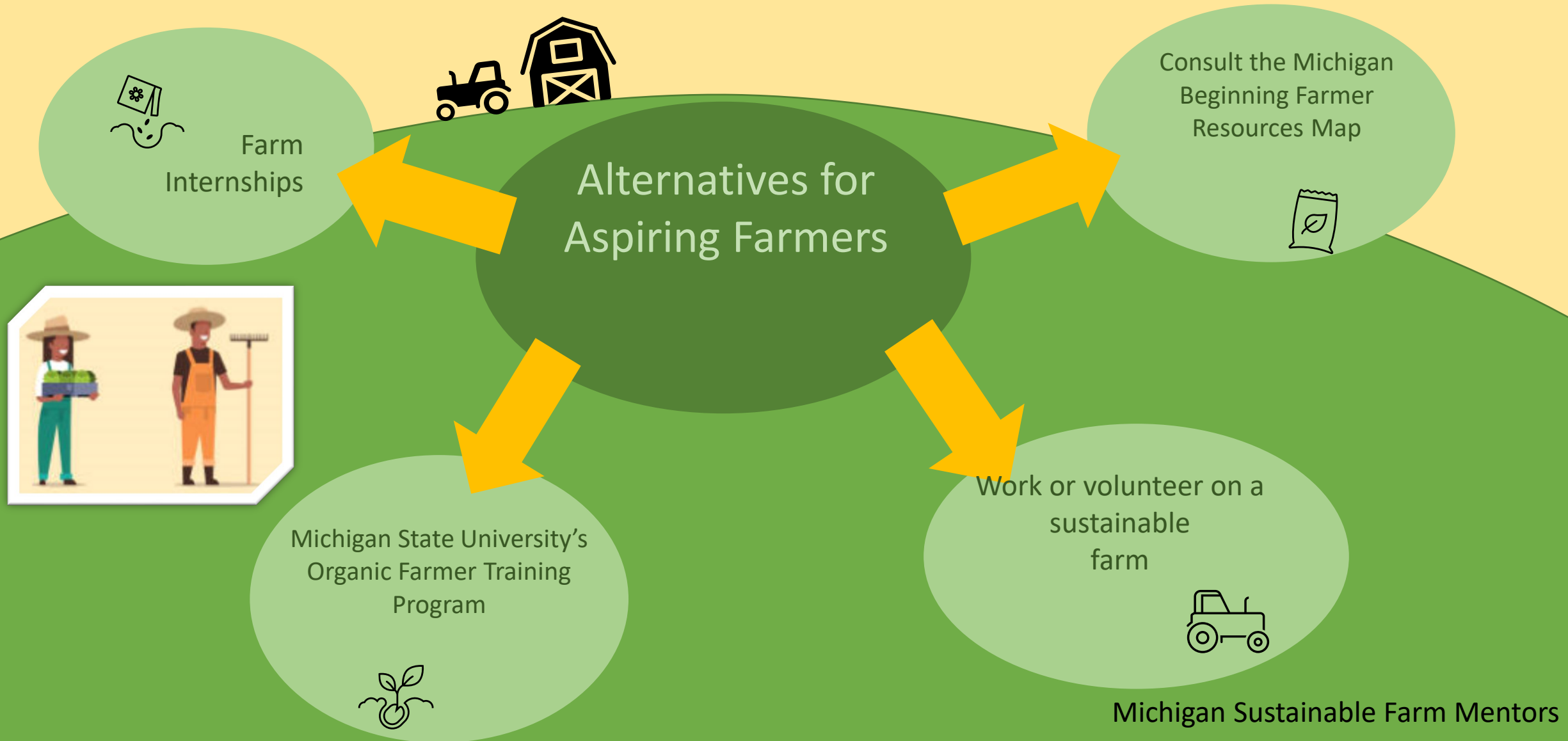
3 Out of 3

report INCREASED KASA about land, credit, or farm/business training



FOR ASPIRING FARMERS – MENTORSHIP MAY NOT BE A GOOD FIT FOR ALL.

Mentors stated that communication was difficult to establish, not sure how to help.



ASPIRING FARMER MENTEE & MENTOR TESTIMONIALS:

“Connecting with established farmers and aspiring farmers has helped a lot. I think networking and having people to bounce ideas off of is extremely helpful because farming can feel overwhelming at times. By networking, you can potentially find someone who has experience with an issue that you are facing on your farm and they can help you find a solution.”

- Andy N., **Aspiring Farmer Mentee**



“Getting matched up with Joanée was really perfect, and getting to have a continued relationship with her is invaluable. The resources Katie provided especially regarding land and credit access are also amazing. The most valuable thing I’ve come out with is confidence!”

– Rowan, **Aspiring Farmer Mentee**



“I was surprised to find that my meetings with mentees always left me newly inspired about my own farm business”

- Alex C., **Farmer Mentor**



“I got inspired by my new farmers and all the new and exciting ways they want to use the land.”

– Joanée D., **Farmer Mentor**



Tour the Toolkit!



Toolkit!



Website!

Katie Brandt

Organic Farmer Training Program
Michigan Sustainable Farm Mentors
Map of Michigan Beginning Farmer Resources
SARE

CREATE A GREAT FARM MENTORSHIP

PLAN FOR REAL CONNECTIONS

Questions to answer?

- How often will mentors meet with mentees?
- Are meetings one-one-one, small group or both?
- Are meetings in-person, on-farm, online, by phone?
- How will the program find & pair mentors & mentees?
- What are local beginning farmer needs? Land access? Business planning? Marketing collaborations?



GREAT FARM MENTORS...

- Have started or managed their own farms
- Are excited to work with mentees
- Are good at returning calls, texts or emails
- >>> Reach out to local farm organizations to find mentors or use an online signup form to find mentors.
- >>> Be sure to find funding to support farmer time.

FIND & PAIR FARM MENTEES

- >>> Reach out to farm organizations or an online form
- >>> Consider prioritizing or grouping mentees by:
 - Years of farm experience
 - Scale in sales or acres
 - Farm enterprises (crops, livestock, etc) & markets
 - Similar background (gender, race, 1st generation farms)
 - Location



SETTING GOALS

How will mentees set & meet their goals?

- Goal-setting document - SMART & HARD goals
- Resource Assessment
- Discussion Themes
 - Aspiring farmers - land, credit, business planning
 - Beginning farmers - soil, weeds, pests, crops, livestock, financials, marketing, infrastructure, labor, work/life balance, community connections

Item	Goal
1. Aspiring farmer (3-5 years of farm experience) with access to land	Find a mentor to help with business plan for access to land
2. Beginning farmer (1-2 years of farm experience) with access to land	Find a mentor to help with business plan for access to land
3. Aspiring farmer with 5+ years of experience as a farmer	Find an existing farmer with 1+ years of experience as a farmer
4. Aspiring farmer without farm experience	Find an existing farmer without farm experience
5. Aspiring farmer (1-2 years of farm experience) with access to land	Find an experienced farmer (10+ years of farm experience)

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

How can mentors & mentees meet up for social time or learning opportunities?

- Farm tours
- Potlucks
- Conferences
- Online



LISTEN & LEARN

Try several ways to get feedback from mentors & mentees:

- **Charrette** - Online or in-person: small groups discuss and share suggestions about improving aspects of the mentorship
- **Survey** - Paper or online forms
 - Be sure to ask open-ended questions!
 - "What 3 things did you learn from your mentor?"
- **Video or audio** - ask mentees or mentors to share comments about the mentorship

Visit the Website



RESOURCES TO CREATE A GREAT FARM MENTORSHIP...

https://www.canr.msu.edu/organic_farmer_training_program/resources/mentors.html

Visit the Toolkit!



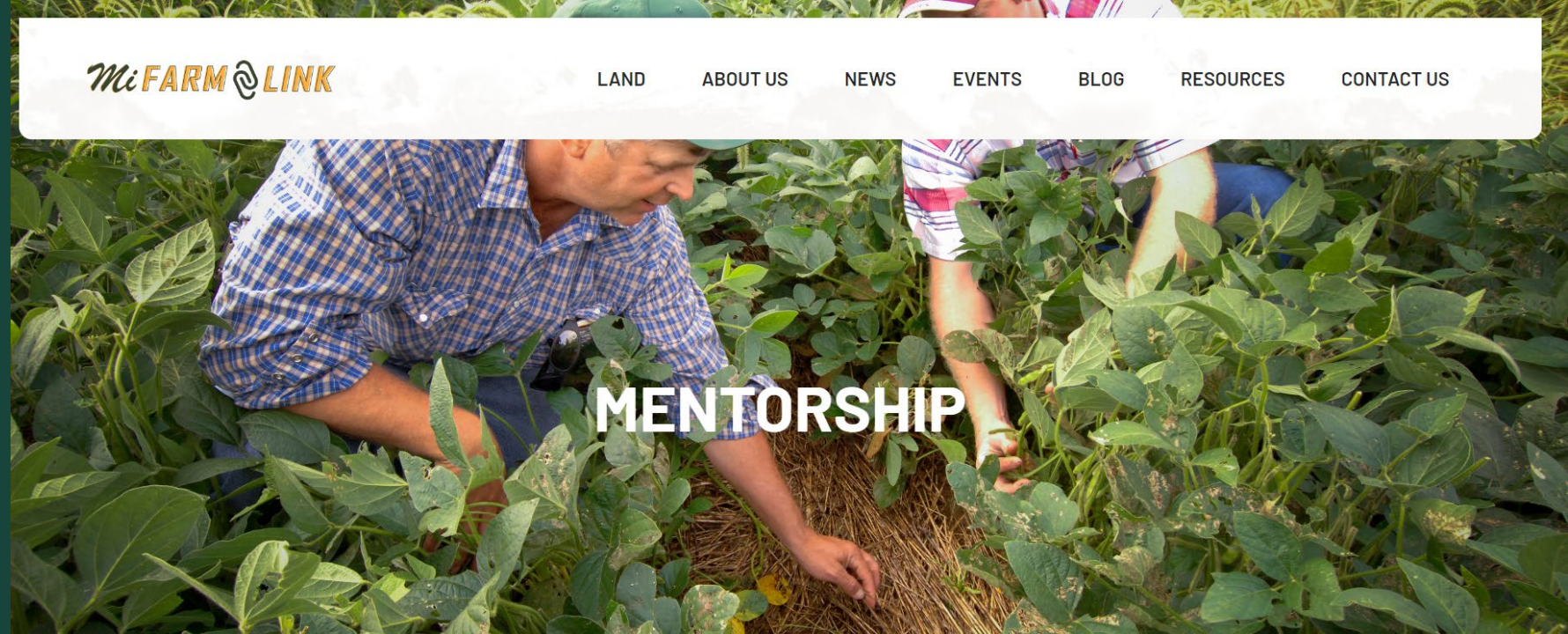
THE MENTOR TOOLKIT INCLUDES:

- Video Tour of the Toolkit
- Full SARE Partnership Grant Example
- Signup Forms
- Marketing Examples
- Agenda for Training Mentors
- Resources for Mentees
- Evaluation Surveys
- Evaluation Surveys & Charrette

RESOURCE Assessment

FARM RESOURCE	DOES YOUR FARM HAVE IT?	NEED		DOES YOUR FARM HAVE IT?	
		Example 1	Example 2	Example 3	Example 4
Land Access	A				
Water	A				
Electricity	A				
Cellular Service	A				
Highway	A				
Proximity to Markets	A				
Proximity to Other Farms	A				
Proximity to Community	A				
Proximity to Schools	A				
Proximity to Healthcare	A				
Proximity to Public Transportation	A				
Proximity to Public Services	A				
Proximity to Public Safety	A				
Proximity to Public Utilities	A				
Proximity to Public Land	A				
Proximity to Public Water	A				
Proximity to Public Air	A				
Proximity to Public Fire	A				
Proximity to Public Health	A				
Proximity to Public Education	A				
Proximity to Public Safety	A				
Proximity to Public Utilities	A				
Proximity to Public Land	A				
Proximity to Public Water	A				
Proximity to Public Air	A				
Proximity to Public Fire	A				
Proximity to Public Health	A				
Proximity to Public Education	A				
Proximity to Public Safety	A				
Proximity to Public Utilities	A				
Proximity to Public Land	A				
Proximity to Public Water	A				
Proximity to Public Air	A				
Proximity to Public Fire	A				
Proximity to Public Health	A				
Proximity to Public Education	A				
Proximity to Public Safety	A				
Proximity to Public Utilities	A				
Proximity to Public Land	A				
Proximity to Public Water	A				
Proximity to Public Air	A				
Proximity to Public Fire	A				
Proximity to Public Health	A				
Proximity to Public Education	A				
Proximity to Public Safety	A				
Proximity to Public Utilities	A				
Proximity to Public Land	A				
Proximity to Public Water	A				
Proximity to Public Air	A				
Proximity to Public Fire	A				
Proximity to Public Health	A				
Proximity to Public Education	A				
Proximity to Public Safety	A				
Proximity to Public Utilities	A				
Proximity to Public Land	A				
Proximity to Public Water	A				
Proximity to Public Air	A				
Proximity to Public Fire	A				
Proximity to Public Health	A				
Proximity to Public Education	A				
Proximity to Public Safety	A				
Proximity to Public Utilities	A				
Proximity to Public Land	A				
Proximity to Public Water	A				
Proximity to Public Air	A				
Proximity to Public Fire	A				
Proximity to Public Health	A				
Proximity to Public Education	A				
Proximity to Public Safety	A				
Proximity to Public Utilities	A				
Proximity to Public Land	A				
Proximity to Public Water	A				
Proximity to Public Air	A				
Proximity to Public Fire	A				
Proximity to Public Health	A				
Proximity to Public Education	A				
Proximity to Public Safety	A				
Proximity to Public Utilities	A				
Proximity to Public Land	A				
Proximity to Public Water	A				
Proximity to Public Air	A				
Proximity to Public Fire	A				
Proximity to Public Health	A				
Proximity to Public Education	A				
Proximity to Public Safety	A				
Proximity to Public Utilities	A				
Proximity to Public Land	A				
Proximity to Public Water	A				
Proximity to Public Air	A				
Proximity to Public Fire	A				
Proximity to Public Health	A				
Proximity to Public Education	A				
Proximity to Public Safety	A				
Proximity to Public Utilities	A				
Proximity to Public Land	A				
Proximity to Public Water	A				
Proximity to Public Air	A				
Proximity to Public Fire	A				
Proximity to Public Health	A				
Proximity to Public Education	A				
Proximity to Public Safety	A				
Proximity to Public Utilities	A				
Proximity to Public Land	A				
Proximity to Public Water	A				
Proximity to Public Air	A				
Proximity to Public Fire	A				
Proximity to Public Health	A				
Proximity to Public Education	A				
Proximity to Public Safety	A				
Proximity to Public Utilities	A				
Proximity to Public Land	A				
Proximity to Public Water	A				
Proximity to Public Air	A				
Proximity to Public Fire	A				
Proximity to Public Health	A				
Proximity to Public Education	A				
Proximity to Public Safety	A				
Proximity to Public Utilities	A				
Proximity to Public Land	A				
Proximity to Public Water	A				
Proximity to Public Air	A				
Proximity to Public Fire	A				
Proximity to Public Health	A				
Proximity to Public Education	A				
Proximity to Public Safety	A				
Proximity to Public Utilities	A				
Proximity to Public Land	A				
Proximity to Public Water	A				
Proximity to Public Air	A				
Proximity to Public Fire	A				
Proximity to Public Health	A				
Proximity to Public Education	A				
Proximity to Public Safety	A				
Proximity to Public Utilities	A				
Proximity to Public Land	A				
Proximity to Public Water	A				
Proximity to Public Air	A				
Proximity to Public Fire	A				
Proximity to Public Health	A				
Proximity to Public Education	A				
Proximity to Public Safety	A				
Proximity to Public Utilities	A				
Proximity to Public Land	A				
Proximity to Public Water	A				
Proximity to Public Air	A				
Proximity to Public Fire	A				
Proximity to Public Health	A				
Proximity to Public Education	A				
Proximity to Public Safety	A				
Proximity to Public Utilities	A				
Proximity to Public Land	A				
Proximity to Public Water	A				
Proximity to Public Air	A				
Proximity to Public Fire	A				
Proximity to Public Health	A				
Proximity to Public Education	A				
Proximity to Public Safety	A				
Proximity to Public Utilities	A				
Proximity to Public Land	A				
Proximity to Public Water	A				
Proximity to Public Air	A				
Proximity to Public Fire	A				
Proximity to Public Health	A				
Proximity to Public Education	A				
Proximity to Public Safety	A				
Proximity to Public Utilities	A				
Proximity to Public Land	A				
Proximity to Public Water	A				
Proximity to Public Air	A				
Proximity to Public Fire	A				
Proximity to Public Health	A				
Proximity to Public Education	A				
Proximity to Public Safety	A				
Proximity to Public Utilities	A				
Proximity to Public Land	A				
Proximity to Public Water	A				
Proximity to Public Air	A				
Proximity to Public Fire	A				
Proximity to Public Health	A				
Proximity to Public Education	A				
Proximity to Public Safety	A				
Proximity to Public Utilities	A				
Proximity to Public Land	A				
Proximity to Public Water	A				
Proximity to Public Air	A				
Proximity to Public Fire	A				
Proximity to Public Health	A				
Proximity to Public Education	A				
Proximity to Public Safety	A				
Proximity to Public Utilities	A				
Proximity to Public Land	A				
Proximity to Public Water	A				
Proximity to Public Air	A				
Proximity to Public Fire	A				
Proximity to Public Health	A				
Proximity to Public Education	A				
Proximity to Public Safety	A				
Proximity to Public Utilities	A				
Proximity to Public Land	A				
Proximity to Public Water	A				
Proximity to Public Air	A				
Proximity to Public Fire	A				
Proximity to Public Health	A				
Proximity to Public Education	A				
Proximity to Public Safety	A				
Proximity to Public Utilities	A				
Proximity to Public Land	A				
Proximity to Public Water	A				
Proximity to Public Air	A				
Proximity to Public Fire	A				
Proximity to Public Health	A				
Proximity to Public Education	A				
Proximity to Public Safety	A				
Proximity to Public Utilities	A				
Proximity to Public Land	A				
Proximity to Public Water	A				
Proximity to Public Air	A				
Proximity to Public Fire	A				
Proximity to Public Health	A				
Proximity to Public Education	A				

Michigan Mentorship Programs



- Cultivate Growth Mentorship Program - Greenstone
- Michigan Sustainable Farm Mentors – SARE/MSU
- TOPP
- SCORE business mentor matching – SBA & USDA
- Begin Farming Mentorship Program - OEFFA
- Farmer-to-Farmer Mentoring Program – Marbleseed (formerly MOSES)
- Michigan Sheep Breeders Association Mentor

Farmer Networks

- West Mich. Growers Group
- Grown in Detroit
- Detroit Black Community Food Security Network
- MIFFS
 - Red de Productores Hispanos
 - Veterans-In-Agriculture
 - Women-In-Agriculture
- Crosshatch Farmer Guilds
 - Small Farm, Beekeepers, Herb, Fiber, Fruit And Nut, Grain, Mushroom Guilds



Farms & Hands-on Learning

- Allen Neighborhood Center & Hunter Park GardenHouse
- Ann Arbor Township Farm (Tilian Farm)
- D-Town Farms & Detroit Black Community Food Security Network
- Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship Program
- Drew Farm & Detroit School Gardening Collective
- Earthworks Farm
- Edible Flint Educational Garden
- FFA - Future Farmers of America
- FoodCorps Michigan
- Greater Lansing Food Bank - Garden Project
- Grow Benzie
- Growing Hope
- GVSU Sustainable Agriculture Project
- Heroes to Hives
- Keep Growing Detroit
- KVCC Food Innovation Center
- MADE Institute
- MSU Bailey GREENHouse & Urban Farm
- MSU Beginning Grazing School
- MSU Institute for Agricultural Technology
- MSU North Farm (UPREC)
- MSU Organic Farmer Training Program
- MSU Student Organic Farm
- MSU Tollgate Farm & Education Center
- Peckham Farms
- Tiller's International
- UM Campus Farm
- Urbandale Farm and Lansing Urban Farm Project
- Waishkey Bay Farm
- Women in Agriculture Farm Development Center
- Ziibimijwang Farm

MSU Organic Farmer Training Program

- **Field trips** to 20+ farms
- **Online peer-to-peer learning** where all can learn and contribute
- **Hands-on learning** at one of two awesome farms:
 - **Keep Growing Detroit**
 - **MSU Student Organic Farm**
- **Write a Farm Business Plan** to fit YOUR values, goals & site
- **Learning Themes** include soils, ecology, marketing, business planning & much more!



Map of Michigan Beginning Farmer Resources

Katie Brandt

[MSU Student Organic Farm](#)

[Map of Michigan Beginning Farmer Programs](#)

[MSU Organic Farmer Training Program & HRT251](#)

[Michigan Sustainable Farm Mentors](#)



**North Central
Sustainable Agriculture
Research and Education**



Curriculum for Beginning Farmer Educators

Funded by a Beginning Farmer Rancher Development Program grant

- Land Access
- Marketing
- Integrated Pest Management
- Soils
- Food Safety
- Farm Financials
- Urban Farmers
- Black Farmers
- Peer to Peer Learning



Peer to Peer Learning and Mentorship
CONNECTING NEW FARMERS WITH MENTORS

Primary Activities

Overview of the main activities in this module

Planning a Mentorship Project

Brainstorming how to design mentorship for local communities

How do you start a mentorship program that is right for the beginning farmers you are working with? How do you stay in touch with mentors and mentees to make sure they are actively communicating?

Supporting Mentors

Getting experienced farmers ready to connect with a mentee

Preparing experienced farmers to connect positively with a mentee. This includes brainstorming discussion prompts, practicing reflective listening and more.

Supporting Mentees

Connecting Mentors with Mentees

Check-ins! Peer

Meet & Greet

Connecting Mentors with Mentees

Welcome to the Mentorship! Explaining the mentorship expectations and timeline, then facilitating breakout rooms where each mentor-mentee pair can set goals for learning and communication.

Evaluation Charrette

Gather success stories & recommend improvements

Charrettes work well online or in-person. For an online charrette, breakout rooms and shared note-taking will allow all participants to contribute on 4 aspects of the mentorship. An introduction prompt will offer time to share successes with the full group.

Curriculum for Beginning Farmer Educators

Steps:

- Teams create curriculum
- Farmers Advise and Review
- Try out the curriculum with farmer groups
- Revise
- Share!



1. Educator Planning Meetings (cont.)

PROCEDURE

Planning to start a mentorship!

- **Introduction Prompt:** Describe one of your mentors and how they've impacted you.
- **Brainstorming:** Create a shared online document, posters or whiteboards to brainstorm for a mentorship program.
 - **Full Group:**
 - **Who?** What types of beginning farmers or group(s) do we want to connect with mentors? What are their needs? Who might make great mentors?
 - **Breakout Groups:**
 - **What?** What topics (eg soil, financials, up to 4 focus areas) should be the focus for the mentorship? Should mentors and mentees sign a contract with best contact info, when they will meet, the mentee's learning goals for the mentorship, etc.?
 - **Where?** Should meetings be online, in-person, on-farms, at existing conferences or in several of those locations? Should mentors and mentees be from a particular region? How often should mentors & mentees meet?
 - **How?** Should we seek funding for the mentorship? Should mentors or mentees be paid? What organizations could partner to lead the project?
 - **Full Group:**
 - **When?** Make a timeline for marketing, matching mentor/mentee pairs, hosting the meet & greet, check-ins and evaluation charrette
- **Signup & Delegate!**
 - Using the timeline, educators in the meeting are each encouraged to lead one aspect of the mentorship by signing up for an item above by highlighting and/or adding their initials to items they can lead. Examples include making a signup form, reaching out to mentors or agreeing to facilitate a training or meeting.