



## **2008 Program Description**

The NB Organic Farm Apprenticeship Program (NBOFAP) is an exciting hands-on organic farming training program. There are a number of components that make it unique – and a valuable experience for anyone who participates. One of the best parts of the program is the diversity it captures, as each farm is different with its own opportunities and challenges, each farm mentor is experienced and skilled in different farming aspects, and each apprentice comes with their own levels of experience and interest. It is up to you to make the most of your experience!

For more information about participating, please contact the NBOFAP Program Coordinator with your questions. Tel: 506-375-4310 E-mail: [agriculture@fallsbrookcentre.ca](mailto:agriculture@fallsbrookcentre.ca)

### **A. Daily Farm Mentorship**

#### **In the Field**

**The length of the program really helps because you see results of the different practices and operations on the farm.**

*- Holly Thomson,  
2006 Apprentice*

The apprenticeship season is a 6-month on-farm field placement. Apprentices live and work on an NB organic farm, participating in a variety of farm tasks. Their labour is given in exchange for room, board and mentorship from the farmer(s) they work with. This is not a summer job that ends when the rain starts sprinkling – it requires a willingness to learn, ask questions and apply concepts and depth to the tasks you take on. The goal is to get apprentices working “hands-on” – not watching from the sidelines.

At the same time, apprentices are not “free labour” for farms. Instead, farm mentors create an in-depth learning environment, explaining tasks fully, getting into the reasoning behind the methods, and remaining open to ideas and input from apprentice observations. Farmers must be committed to working on their farm full-time for the 6-month apprentice season.

The work week is generally about 40 hours, although each farm will have different requirements according to seasonal tasks. Jobs are not limited to soil preparations, greenhouse work, planting to harvest, machinery operation and maintenance, livestock care and handling, marketing, etc. Time in the work week is set aside for apprentices to attend workshops and work on research projects.

The learning curve for apprentices is steep at the beginning – everything is new and may take a few tries to get it right. As the season progresses, the rhythm of the farm becomes familiar and tasks take less effort and mental energy. Apprentices can start to take on more responsibility on the farm, and integrate more skilled tasks into their mentorship program.

**Being able to leave the farm for a few days together as a family knowing things were well taken care of was a highlight of our experience.**

*- Speerville Farm,  
2006 Farm Mentor*

**Meals together, especially early on, provided good opportunities for sharing, updating work schedules, etc.**

*- Serge LaRoche,  
2006 Apprentice*

#### **Living Arrangements**

Farms provide room and board for apprentices. Each farm will have different facilities, and apprentices should be aware of their own preferences and needs when considering farm placements. Living arrangements range between providing a separate apprentice cabin with their own cooking and washing facilities, to having a room in the family farmhouse and sharing all meals.

It is important to remember that apprentices are coming into a new community, sometimes from urban areas with very little exposure to rural living. At first it may seem a romantic notion to move to the country farm, but the reality of living where you work, feelings of disconnect from neighbours, family and friends, and the closest mall or movie theatre being an hour's drive away soon set in. Both farmers and apprentices need to be aware of this "culture shock".

Having time free of farm tasks is important to keeping a good balance between work and rest. Some farms may consider giving apprentices a chunk of time during the season for a holiday, or to allow friends/relatives of the apprentice to come and visit. Apprentices should make sure they explore the local area – having a bicycle to get around is a great idea. Getting involved in local youth groups, sports, etc. is sometimes an option.

### Stipends and Compensation

**The stipend was not the first attraction to the farm – primary attraction is living and working on the farm.**

*- Allan Brewer,  
2006 Apprentice*

The NBOFAP does not require farms to provide stipends or allowances to apprentices. It is a choice of each farm to offer payment if they wish, and at what amount. In our first year, some farms didn't offer any stipend, others offered a weekly stipend of \$50, and still others considered a weekly allowance of \$10-20 to cover personal items. A few innovative farms gave apprentices some garden space to grow their own crop to sell at the market (including support to get a stall set up), and even encouraged one apprentice to busk at the market with her fiddle – at times bringing home more than the farm stall! One apprentice qualified for E.I. benefits, and took advantage of the financial support while working on the farm.

### Farm Exchanges

A recommendation from 2006 NBOFAP participants was to include optional mid-season (ie. July/August) farm exchanges. As the farm moved into the summer season, the apprentices and farmers found they welcomed a change to keep their learning environment fresh. Arrangements are up to the apprentices and farm mentors to arrange, and should be created to suit their needs and abilities. A couple of potential scenarios:

1. *Apprentice from Farm A visits Farm B for one week, while the apprentice at Farm A remains at their host farm. This would give Farm A two apprentices at the same time, while Farm B has none. In week two, both apprentices visit Farm B, leaving Farm A with no apprentices.* This scenario requires both farms to provide room and board to two apprentices at a time, and be able to cope with farm tasks with no help for a week-long period. At the same time, apprentices are then put into mentor roles themselves, teaching tasks and answering questions of the new apprentice. It also provides a chance for apprentices to talk with each other, compare farm notes, and build their friendship.

2. *Apprentice from Farm A visits Farm B for one week, at the same time that the apprentice from Farm B visits Farm A.* This scenario does not demand additional accommodation from farm hosts, nor does it leave either farm without an apprentice for a week.

## B. On-Farm Research

In 2006, the on-farm research projects were a surprisingly successful part of the NBOFAP. Farm mentors found they were very helpful to investigate questions about their farm that have been lingering for years. Apprentices found the projects augmented their own learning process.

**Seeing pigs on pasture was great. It's been a dream of mine for years and with extra help we did it this summer.**

*- Murray Bunnnett,  
2006 Farm Mentor*

Farmers often have great ideas about different aspects of their farm and operation, but find they don't have the time or resources to follow them through. Mentoring an on-farm apprentice creates the opportunity for a question or project to be investigated as apprentices offer the extra labour required, and the NBOFAP can

help with financial costs. Including the training and support from the CESAB, the Organic Agriculture Centre of Canada (OACC), and the NB Department of Agriculture and Aquaculture (NBDAA) creates a network of advisors to help guide the research and answer questions.

During the application process, farmers are requested to list 3 potential questions/problems they would like to investigate. When apprentices apply, they identify which research questions they are most interested in to each farm they apply. The range of projects is far and wide – but the best ones are those that are meaningful to the farm. Here is the list of projects from 2006:

- Carrot seeding and germination rate trials
- Effects of pasture on pork growth
- Vegetable box delivery feasibility study
- Planted poultry pasture mixes
- Flea beetle control methods on brassicas

Through the farming season, apprentices will design, implement, monitor and analyze the project. A final report and presentation will be given at our season-end graduation.

While the term “research” can be intimidating, the level of research in these projects is very basic. Most of the apprentices in our first year had no previous training in on-farm research, and many of the farmers were new to the approach as well. In our Pre-Season Orientation, the OACC delivers an introductory workshop on designing and completing on-farm research projects. The presentation is tailored to our group, with specific advice for apprentices on their topic. Continued support throughout the season from advisors helps to keep the project focused and at an introductory level.

Apprentices in 2006 found that the most successful was to approach the project was to incorporate it into their field work. Taking time to make sure notes and observations were collected at regular intervals (ie. daily, weekly) was important. At the same time, projects should not be taking the place of essential farm tasks. To encourage a balance between chores and research that works for the farm, farm mentors should aim to be involved in the project as well – offering information and observations.

**Projects incorporated into daily field work [as opposed to “after hours”] worked well.**

*- Holly Thomson,  
2006 Apprentice*

The NBOFAP provides assistance for research projects, helping to pay for materials (ie. seeds, small equipment, photo development), analysis (ie. lab tests) and reporting (ie. printing of reports, materials for final presentations).

### C. Farming Organically Workshops

**The workshops were a nice chance to not only learn new things, but see all the apprentices and everyone again. Assignments helped to keep things stuck in my mind.**

*- Holly Thomson,  
2006 Apprentice*

Starting with our Soil Workshop in June, the Farming Organically Workshop Series brings program participants together for a field day. The monthly events are free for apprentices and farm mentors, whereas public participants pay a registration fee. Each workshop is located at a different farm, providing the opportunity for participants to see different organic practices, and give some exposure to the host farm.

Each day is loosely structured with seminars and group discussion in the morning, a buffet-style lunch, and a farm tour in the afternoon. Some workshops also incorporate hands-on demonstration activities. In 2007 these included creating your own soil mix and making soil blocks, identifying pests and weeds,

shingling a barn for livestock, harvesting/cleaning cucumber seed. Seminar style ranges from

lecture to large group discussion to panel presentations to small group activities. Farm tours are most often on foot, although the tractor-pull hay ride last year was a popular favourite!

**Farmer Participation**

Farmer attendance at workshops was one of the highlights for many participants. The sharing of knowledge from their experience, and augmenting the lectures with farmer-to-farmer discussion was beneficial to apprentices. Farmers who attended the workshops found that they liked seeing the other farms, and appreciated the chance to connect with other farmers and resource people. Attending all of the workshops can be difficult – taking a day away from the farm is at times near impossible. The NBOFAP makes it a bit easier by providing travel allowance to farmers (or apprentices if they are transporting themselves) to attend workshops.

**Highlights of the workshops were some of the discussions between farmers, and the hands-on experiences.**  
*- Serge LaRochelle, 2006 Apprentice*

In 2007, workshops were based on the following topics:

Month	Topic	Location	Speakers
May	Organic Soil Management	Harvest Haven - Bocabec	Mark and Carol Stewart (farm mentors/workshop host) Claude Berthélemé – NBDAA
June	Organic Pest Management	Falls Brook Centre and Artful Acres - Knowlesville	Michael Carr (FBC Host) Tegan and Leland Wong-Daugherty (farm mentors/workshop host) Chris Maund – NBDAA; Gavin Graham – NBDAA; Claude Berthélemé – NBDAA; David Coburn – Coburn’s Compost Facility
July	Marketing	Speerville Farm – Debec	Stu Fleishhaker and Nancy Cantafio – Speerville Farm (farm mentor/workshop hosts); Tony Grant – Speerville Mill
August	Organic Livestock	Shepard’s Garden - Harvey	Ted and Louise Wiggans (farm mentor/workshop hosts); Av Sing – AgraPoint, Nova Scotia
September	Seed Saving	Hope Seeds and Perennials – Knowlesville	Andrea Berry – Hope Seeds and Perennials (workshop host); Claude Berthélemé - NBDAA

**Hosting a Workshop**

Farms that host workshops coordinate with Falls Brook Centre to arrange the seminar location, the lunch, farm tour and hands-on activity. On occasion, farms in 2007 didn’t have adequate facilities for the morning seminar so local town halls or community centres were rented. At other times, the machine shed or living room were used. Morning coffee and tea, and a buffet-style lunch are provided by the farm – a great chance to give participants a taste of the harvest! The farm tour is generally informal, and includes a bit of the farm history, plus a look at both the challenges and successes of the farm operation. Incorporating a hands-on activity

**I always want opportunities to learn more even after all these years of “doing it”.**  
*- Karen Davidge, 2006 Farm Mentor*

is one of the hardest parts (especially for a larger group); however it is one of the most meaningful for apprentices.

Workshop hosts are financially supported by the NBOFAP for their coordination/farm tour and the lunch they provide to participants.

## **D. Selection Process**

Apprentices and farm mentors both need to apply to the NBOFAP to participate. Application documents are available on the web, or by mail (contact the NBOFAP Coordinator). A \$35 application fee is required.

### **Farm Mentors**

The complete application package (self evaluation, farm description) is used to help determine the suitability of the farmer for the mentorship role. Once the application is reviewed by the program coordinator, the farmer is contacted for a phone interview to discuss questions and concerns from both FBC and the farmer. Post-interview, the farm description is posted to the FBC website for apprentice applicants to browse. Consider the farm description the place to describe the farm, jobs, learning opportunities, etc. – it's the place the farm "sells" their placement.

### **Apprentices**

Once farm descriptions are posted to the FBC website, applications from apprentices are accepted. As the documents and fee are received, applications are forwarded to the farms indicated by the potential apprentice for farmer review. It is essentially the choice of the farmer to decide if they will pursue an applicant for further questions or contact. Upon the closing date of apprentice applications, farmers and apprentices will be required to make their first and second choices for placements.

Once placements are confirmed by the apprentice and farmer, a conference phone call with FBC, farmer and apprentice will take place, to clarify any remaining questions and prepare the participants for the next stage in activities. The apprenticeship season starts at the end of April.