



Small Farm Orientation: Checklist for a Beginning Small Farmer

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Introduction

This checklist for beginning farmers was developed over a span of a decade working with individuals who came to Virginia Cooperative Extension educational programs seeking to learn the steps needed to start a successful farm business in Virginia.

It was created as a tool for small farm educators to provide essential information for clientele who wanted to start a small farm. The checklist is a step-by-step guide to assist clientele in decision-making related to starting a beginning farm in Virginia. This resource can be modified by small farm educators using site specific information based on the educator’s expertise and knowledge of his/her location.

If you are an individual who wishes to start a small farm, then to effectively utilize this checklist, you will review each numbered step and make a check after completion. Try not to rush each step to check off the items. Just take your time and make sure you understand each step before moving forward.

At any time during this educational journey you have questions, refer to the contact information for your designated area Small Farm agent. Feel free to contact the agent to set up an appointment to provide additional technical assistance.

It is our hope that if you take the necessary time to go through the checklist thoughtfully, you will surely be prepared to begin a successful farm business.

Beginning Farmer Checklist

To begin your successful journey to becoming a farmer, check each item on the list below after you complete it.

✓	Item
	1. Have your local small farm agent visit the proposed farm site with future visits as needed to complete the development plan for your farming operation.
	2. Visit area USDA, state and local agencies to learn each agency’s mission and the services provided to agriculture producers; If applicable, be sure to sign up for available agencies’ mailing lists.
	a. USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA)
	b. USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS)

	c. USDA Rural Development (RD)
	d. US Forest Service (FS)
	e. USDA Risk Management Agency (RMA)
	f. Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD)
	g. Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS)
	h. Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR)
	i. Virginia Department of Forestry (DOF)
	j. Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE)
	3. Learn what services your state land-grant institutions (Virginia State University and Virginia Tech) can provide directly to your farming operation.
	4. Contact other local farmers to obtain names of local farm tax preparers; Select one and visit to discuss farm tax laws and policies.
	5. Visit an existing local farm.
	6. Obtain farm identification numbers.
	a. Sales Tax number
	b. Employers Tax number
	c. USDA Farm Service Agency & other Farm Program numbers
	7. Complete a farm site plan; Identify where each farm enterprise and buildings will be located.
	8. Have your small farm agent assist you in developing a resource list of the federal, state and local agency personnel contacts that can help you with your on-farm enterprises.
	9. Complete the farm planning process for each enterprise (production, marketing and financial plans).
	10. Establish your farm legal structure (sole proprietorship, partnership, corporation or cooperative).
	11. Register your farm business; Obtain local, state and federal business certificates, permits and licenses.
	12. Obtain farm insurance; Review your existing insurance policy needs with a local agency.
	13. Establish your labor needs; Identify all labor responsibilities; Decide if you will hire labor; Be certain to follow all federal, state and local labor laws and policies.

	14. Set up a farm record and accounting system.
	15. Stay abreast of current farming technology by attending local, state and national educational farming programs.
	16. Keep your local, state and federal legislators and area political officials aware of your farming needs and how new laws and policies may impact your farming operation.
	17. Become active in local, state and national farming organizations.

Helpful resources

Business

Planning

Virginia's Business One Stop <http://www.bos.virginia.gov/>

Farm Business Plan Examples: <https://smallfarms.cornell.edu/guide/12-business-plans>

USDA Beginning Farmer Steps <https://newfarmers.usda.gov/first-steps>

USDA New Farmers Discovery Tool <https://newfarmers.usda.gov/discovery>

USDA Getting Started for New Farmers <https://newfarmers.usda.gov/new-farmers>

Starting a Small Farm in Virginia <https://www.vdacs.virginia.gov/agriculture-start-a-farm.shtml>

Taxes

Virginia Retail Sales and Use Tax Regulations <https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/AAEC/AAEC-159/AAEC-159.html>

Sales Tax <https://www.tax.virginia.gov/retail-sales-and-use-tax>

Employers Tax <https://www.tax.virginia.gov/withholding-tax>

Farm Tax Preparation <https://nesfp.org/resources/farm-tax-preparation>

Labor

Introduction to Labor Issues for Beginning Farmers

https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/dam/pubs_ext_vt_edu/AEE/AEE-106/AEE-106-PDF.pdf

Insurance and Regulations

Questions to Ask when comparing insurance coverage <https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/CV/CV-19/CV-19.html>

How Much Liability Insurance Coverage Should I Have? <https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/CV/CV-17/CV-17.html>

Workers' Compensation & Vendor Liability for Farmers' Market Owners and Operators:

<https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/CV/CV-24/CV-24.html>

Record-Keeping

Record Keeping Tools for Small Fruit and Vegetable Farms

<https://ag.tennessee.edu/cpa/Documents/Workshops,%20Seminars%20and%20Webinars/FM%20Boot%20Recordkeeping%20Velandia.pdf>

Veggie Compass <http://www.veggiecompass.com/>

Livestock Compass <http://www.veggiecompass.com/tools/#livestock>

Pricing

Market Reports <https://www.ams.usda.gov/market-news/search-tips> and <http://www.vdacs.virginia.gov/markets-and-finance-market-news-fruits-and-vegetables.shtml>

Services

Federal

USDA Office Locations <https://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app>

USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) <https://www.ams.usda.gov/market-news>

USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) <https://www.fsa.usda.gov/>

USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov>

USDA Rural Development (RD) <https://www.rd.usda.gov>

US Forest Service (FS) <https://www.fs.fed.us>

USDA Risk Management Agency (RMA) <https://www.rma.usda.gov>

State and Local

VSU Small Farm Outreach Program <https://www.ext.vsu.edu/sfop-contact> and <https://www.ext.vsu.edu/calendar>

Visit Virginia Cooperative Extension: ext.vt.edu

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