

CCE Sullivan Beginner Farmer Mentorship Program Overview

About

The Beginner Farmer Program Mentorship Cohort is a farmer-to-farmer mentorship opportunity supported by Cornell Cooperative Extension Sullivan County (CCESC). The program focuses on individual learning opportunities through mentor-mentee interactions on the phone, via zoom, and in person on the farm. The mentee's farm business goals are the foundation for the mentorship, and the mentee and mentor will work together to determine where the mentor's knowledge and skills will be most helpful for the mentee's learning process. Outside of the mentor-mentee interactions, mentees will be expected to participate in a certain number of workshops and farmer networking events hosted by Cornell Cooperative Extension Sullivan County. Mentees will work alongside other participants in the Mentorship Cohort and learn as a community with the other mentees. Mentees and mentors will be matched with the help of CCESC staff. If you are a couple/pair, you can apply as 1 mentee together and you will share the \$10,000 stipend.

Mentors and mentees will work with CCESC staff throughout the 12-month commitment to ensure both mentors and mentees are benefiting from the mentorship program.

Cohort Size

20 mentees. Check back in January for an additional Veteran Farmer Cohort.

Fee

This is a free opportunity for accepted applicants.

Compensation

Mentees will receive a \$10,000 stipend for the 12-month commitment, the stipend will be spread out over 12 months. Mentees must meet the requirements of the mentee program as outlined in their agreement and below in order to receive the stipends.

- **Payment #1:** \$500 upon signing the Mentorship Program Agreement
- **Payment #2:** \$2,000 on February 1 following attendance at December and January program events
- **Payment #3:** \$2,500 on June 1 following participation in all required meetings and cohorts, and attendance at a minimum of one Farmer Mixer
- **Payment #4:** \$2,500 on September 1 following attendance at all required meetings and cohorts held to date, participation in at least three Farmer Mixers, and completion of a minimum of 25 hours of one-on-one mentoring.
- **Payment #5:** \$2,000 on November 1 following attendance at all required meetings and cohorts held to date, participation in at least four Farmer Mixers, and completion of a minimum of 35 hours of one-on-one mentoring
- **Final Payment:** \$500 Issued upon successful completion of all program requirements and participation in the End-of-Mentorship Celebration

Who this program is for

The Mentorship Cohort Program is for individuals who are ready to take the next step toward starting and/or establishing their farm business in the Catskills Mid-Hudson Region. Applicants must have access to land (own, lease or rent) and a minimum of 2 years of farming experience. Our program prioritizes individuals located in the Catskills Mid-Hudson Region with a preference for Sullivan County applicants.

Learning Objectives

Develop a foundational understanding of the components involved in building a farm business.

- Understand journey from farm worker to farm ownership.
- Holistic visioning and goal setting
- Strategic business planning
- Marketing and branding
- Legal regulations and consideration
- Sales operations and logistic
- Financial planning
- Land access
- Capital and resource access.
- Agricultural Production
- Farm Food Safety

Eligibility

- You have a clear idea of the type of farm business you want to start.
- You have a sense of short-term and long-term goals for your farm business.
- You want to start a farm business in the Catskills Mid-Hudson Region
- You have access to land (own, rent or lease)
- You have a minimum of 2 years farming experience.
- Priority will be given to applicants located in Sullivan County, the application is open to individuals in the Catskills Mid-Hudson Region (Delaware, Orange, Ulster, Sullivan).

Enterprises we **are** able to support through this program:

- Food, herbs, and flowers
- Land-based by-products (honey, maple syrup, cheese, etc.)
- Non-food by-products (fibers)
- Hydroponics/aquaponics
- Livestock operations

Enterprises we **are not** able to support through this program:

- Cannabis farms.
- Equine farms.
- Farms focused primarily on education as opposed to production.

Application Selection Criteria:

The follow variables will be the main determining factors in application evaluation:

- Regional relevancy (location in Sullivan County or the Catskills Mid-Hudson Region)
- Participation commitment and availability
- Clarity about business direction and goals.
- Eligibility of enterprise

- Openness to learning.

Application Review:

Applications will be reviewed by the Beginner Farmer Program Advisory Committee; applications will be made anonymous for the review. Following the review from the Advisory Committee members, three CCESC staff members will make the final decision based on the reviews.

Application Timeline

- October 6, 2026: Applications open.
- November 3, 2026: Application closes.
- November 17, 2026: Notification of acceptance, offers.
- December 1, 2026: Offer acceptance due with required paperwork.
- December 14, 2026: Mentorship begins.

Program Expectations

Mentees will have a set of goals for the mentorship and will be open to the learning opportunities provided through the mentorship.

Mentorship Time Frame: December 2026 – December 2027

Mentor-Mentee Pairing Networking Event @ CCE Sullivan:

Monday 12/14/26. Snow Date: Wednesday 12/16/26

Mentorship Cohort Meet Ups:

Cohorts are an opportunity for the Mentees to meet as a group with CCE Sullivan and sometimes mentors to discuss current needs around specific topic areas. **Mentees are required to attend all 5.**

- Cohort Meet Up #1: Kick Off Meeting: (Tentatively In-Person) – Wed. 1/13 at 6pm
- Cohort Meet Up #2: Climate Farm Planning (Via Zoom) – Tues. 1/9/27 (6:30 – 8pm)
- Cohort Meet Up #3: Marketing (Direct & Wholesale) (Via Zoom) – Wed. 3/10 (6:30 – 8pm)
- Cohort Meet Up #4: Marketing (Direct & Wholesale) (Via Zoom) – Monday 4/12 (6:30 – 8pm)
- Cohort Meet Up #5: End of Season Discussion (In-Person) – Wed. 11/30 @ 6:30pm

Farmer Mixers:

Farmer Mixers are networking events that bring together mentees, mentors, beginning and aspiring farmers, and the broader farming community. Held throughout Sullivan County, many mixers include a tour of the host farm or agricultural business. Mixers are offered nearly every month, and mentees are **required to attend 5 mixers** of their choice plus the End-of-Mentorship Celebration in December. The End-of-Mentorship Celebration date is chosen based off all mentees availability.

One-on-One Mentoring:

Mentees are required to meet with their mentor for a minimum of 50 hours over the course of 1 year, or we recommend at least 4-5 hours each month to stay on track. The mentoring schedule and topics are determined between the mentee and mentor.

Educational Workshops & Food Safety Training

- **Educational Workshops:** Mentees are required to complete a minimum of 15 hours of educational workshops and trainings based on their Learning Plan, developed with their mentor and CCE Sullivan. Workshops may be offered through CCE Sullivan or other approved providers.
- **Farm Food Safety:** Mentees are also expected to implement appropriate farm food safety practices for their operation. The mentorship program will cover the costs of approved food safety training and related educational resources.
- **Farm Business Training Webinars:** Mentees are required to attend the 3-part farm business training webinar series. Participation opens up one on one consulting on business and marketing plan development with consultants through the Hudson Valley Ag Development Corporation. (Webinar Dates: Wed. 10/27, Wed 11/3, Wed 11/10 starting at 6pm)

Meetings, Farm Visits & Technical Assistance

Mentees will work closely with CCE Sullivan staff throughout the program and will receive individualized technical assistance and on-farm support. Meeting dates will be scheduled collaboratively between the mentee, mentor, and CCE Sullivan staff.

4 Required Meetings:

- Kick-Off Meeting with CCE Sullivan, mentee, and mentor (January) [In-Person]
- Mentee Check-In with CCE Sullivan (March) [Via Zoom]
- On-Farm Check-In with CCE Sullivan, mentee, and mentor at the mentee's farm (April)
- Program Check-In with CCE Sullivan, mentee, and mentor (October) [Via Zoom]

In addition to the required meetings, mentees may request additional farm visits and technical assistance from CCE Sullivan staff as needed throughout the program.

We understand life happens and that applicants may have existing personal, family, work, or farm commitments that conflict with some program dates or requirements. Such conflicts will not automatically disqualify you from participation in the program. If you anticipate any scheduling conflicts, please communicate them with CCE Sullivan staff as early as possible so that we can discuss potential accommodations and support your successful participation in the program.

Stipend payments are contingent upon meeting program participation requirements and maintaining good standing within the mentorship program.