

— YOUNG AGRARIANS —

# Farm Club Guide



# Farm Club Guide

In order to grow and support the next generation of ecological farmers, and the network between them, Young Agrarians wants to help set up farm clubs. This Farm Club Guide is a resource for new farm clubs, describing how to set up first meetings, invite potential members, and create principles and agendas. Farm clubs, over time, will become self-organizing and self-directed, but Young Agrarians will be available for occasional support, and would love to keep in touch to see how the club is doing.

Farm clubs help farmers solve problems and gain an edge by sharing expertise among members in the club. Farm Clubs, in various forms, have been part of the farming community for hundreds of years and have played an important role in the improvement of the farm and the farmer.



# What is a farm club?

A farm club is a self-directed group, either formally registered or not, that gets together in the spirit of collaboration, sharing and problem solving. Farm clubs can be focused around a specific goal shared by the group (ex: Lentil Underground) or for the general ongoing improvement of each other's farms (ex: Holistic Management Groups).



## The benefits of farm clubs:

- Access to local experience and knowledge
- Regional expertise
- Access to different talents, skills, and resources in the group
- Solutions to real-time or ongoing challenges on your farm
- Improved farming and land management practices
- Discussions on business challenges and opportunities
- Networking and community building
- Collaborative initiatives with neighbours (ex: bulk purchasing, equipment sharing)
- Building collective intelligence about the local and global context



# How to Create a Farm Club

## Summary

### Start with a Champion

### Set up the First Meeting

- Venue location
- Date and time
- Invitations

### The First Meeting

- Creating an agenda
- Introduction circle
- Goals and expectations
- Structure
- Principles & practices
- Roles

### Next Meetings

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Is a farm club something you are interested in? Young Agrarians is here to help you get started. We'll walk you through some of the key principles to getting a farm club started and keeping it going.





## Start with a Champion (aka Meeting Host)

Maybe the farm club champion is you! Maybe it is someone else in your community. Maybe it is both of you. In any case, all groups need a generative core in order to get the process rolling and to establish a farm club. The champion(s) initiates the start-up of a club, invites other farmers and prospective members, and leads the early gatherings. Don't worry, we have an example agenda to get you started.

## Setting up the First Meeting

### Location:

Brainstorm a place where at least the first gatherings can be held. Choose a place that is comfortable, inviting and has minimal distractions for participants.

### Time:

Choose a day and a time to host the first farm club meeting.

### Invitations to the First Meeting:

Create an engaging invitation. It is important to include:

- why you are convening
- the context for the meeting
- the purpose of getting together
- some principles of farm clubs
- who else is being invited

Plan the event for a minimum of three hours. There are many factors that will determine how much time is needed for the first meeting. However, it is better to give yourselves lots of time, especially in the first meeting for discussing the structure and principles of your club. This will build a strong foundation for all future meetings.



# The First Meeting

Create the agenda for your first meeting. Here is an example:

## Agenda:

Welcome & house keeping - As the champion and host, start the meeting off by welcoming everyone and setting the tone for the farm club. The energy and enthusiasm brought by the champion(s) and host(s) will lay the foundation for the rest of the meeting and the rest of the farm club.

## Things to touch on:

Welcome the group

- Thank you to anyone who helped make the meeting happen.
- House keeping - bathrooms, any other issues with the space.
- Choose one or more 'harvesters' (i.e. note takers). This person will use their creativity to capture the conversations of the meeting. This can be as simple as taking notes or as elaborate as drawing a story map. Have fun with this!



**Introduction Circle** - We recommend using a circle set up to do introductions. Introduction circles are a great way to hear from everyone in the room and get to know your new club members.

**Set Up:**

- 1.** Arrange chairs in a circle where everyone can hear and see each other. Preferably, avoid tables as they block body language and can make things feel too formal.
- 2.** Ask the participants to introduce themselves by saying their name, where they live, and what they are farming. Feel free to add a fun question here to loosen everyone up such as "What is your farming superpower?"
- 3.** As the host, start with your own introduction to model it for the rest of the group.

*Tip:* If the group is large and this activity will take a lot of time, ask the participants to make their intros short and sweet. There will be lots more time to get to know one another. Let them know the intro should be a sentence, not a paragraph or a novel. As the host, you might have to remind people throughout the activity to stay on time.

## Goals and Expectations

This discussion can be done in another go-around or popcorn-style. Before this discussion begins, the host introduces what farm clubs are, and why he or she organized the meeting. Next, the host poses the following questions to the potential members. Displaying these questions visibly on a flipchart or on a powerpoint might be helpful. Make sure the answers are harvested!

Questions to start this conversation:

- Why did you come?
- What do you expect from the meeting and from a farm club?
- What is your need or opportunity for a farm club? Why is this meeting important?
- What do you hope to get out of this farm club?



**Farm Club Structure:** Answering these questions will provide the nuts-and-bolts for the structure of the farm club.

- **How?** How are decisions made? Vote? Majority? Consensus? Individually?
- **When?** Year round? Seasonal? Winter only? Weekends, weeknights, evenings, mornings?
- **Where?** Meeting place? Public spaces - libraries, halls? Homes? Rotating hosts?
- **How often?** Every 3 weeks? Once a month? Every two months? Depends on the time of year (more often in winter, less often in summer) Other?
- **Who?** Membership - who can join and when? How do you become a member? Are kids welcome?
- **Finances?** Is there a membership fee? What will money be used for?
- **Food?** Will your club host potlucks? Will alcohol be present?

### Principles & Practices

This discussion can be done in another go-around or popcorn-style.

The next thing to discuss are the principles of the farm club. These define how the group interacts and makes decisions. This can be different for every farm club but there are some common ideas that we have listed. Discuss these with the group and ask if there are any thoughts, additions or exceptions.





Some principles & practices (feel free to add or remove):

- Responsibility is shared among the participants for the quality of the experience.
- Speak with intention, focus on relevant content for the conversation. Listen with attention. Listen to each other with compassion and curiosity.
- Remain aware of the impact of everyone's contributions for the well-being of the circle. Make sure everyone's voice is heard.
- Leadership rotates amongst all circle members.
- Ensure that everyone has the opportunity to ask for what they need and offer what they can.
- Employ a group guardian to watch the timing and needs of the circle, agreeing to a signal that indicates a pause.
- Hold all stories or personal material in confidentiality. This is VERY IMPORTANT TO DISCUSS.

### Defining a core team

At the end of the meeting, make sure to identify who is going to take on different roles to keep the farm club going. This should be a group effort and not land on the shoulders of one person. A small team out of the larger group can work great, or roles can be rotated.

Roles:

- Meeting Host (ie. Champion): hosts the conversation, takes the group through the agenda, maintains the principles and practices
- Space Host: creates hospitable conditions for working together by looking after physical and aesthetic aspects of the space
- Harvesters: captures and documents the key insights as well as presents them to the group
- Logistics person: looks after administrative components like practical material, RSVPs, communications, finances

Make sure you end the meeting by setting your next meeting date!



## Next Meetings

The first meeting will lay the foundation for future meetings to come. The first agenda may seem like a lot of set-up but these discussions will prepare everyone to have productive conversations as you dive deeper into your next meetings.

For every meeting, you should start with a:

- Welcome & housekeeping
- Review of any harvests or highlights from the previous meeting
- Reminder of the purpose, principles and practices of the farm club

We have put together some topics and activities to discuss or participate in with your farm club for future meetings. Customize your own list to suit the needs of your club by picking and choosing and making up your own! This is just the tip of the iceberg of what could happen at a farm club; be creative!



- Seed exchange
- Bulk orders
- Book/documentary discussions
- Farm tours
- Direct marketing
- Butchering
- Soil & forage testing
- Honey extraction
- Livestock breeding
- Child care
- Machinery/equipment sharing
- Cover cropping mixtures/trials
- Attending conferences
- Mechanical & repair
- Biodynamic principles/making preparations
- Compost
- Farming and reconciliation on Treaty/unceded territory
- Farm succession
- Farm finances
- Crop planning
- Crop variety trials
- Grazing
- Preserving food
- Cut flowers
- Agriculture teaching & community education
- Dairy/cheesemaking
- Transitioning to organic
- Value added products
- Buying/building communal or cooperative facilities
- Hosting/attending farm tours
- Draft horses
- Permaculture
- Herbs & teas
- Stress management
- Relationships on the farm

Want to brainstorm? Young Agrarians is just a call away and we would love to help you work through your ideas.



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This guide was created in partnership with  
Organic Alberta and FarmFolk CityFolk  
Society. Thank you to the #noregrets  
initiative for funding this project.

