Farmer program e-course - Mentor FAQs
By Doug Ward and Blythe McKay, revised Jan 24, 2020

How many learners will I mentor?

Typically, you will mentor three learners or station teams. Let us know if you would prefer more or less.

If more than one person from a station registers for the course, they will participate as a station team. They will work on assignments collaboratively, so even if there are five people on a station team only one person submits on behalf of the team. As a result, this will not increase your workload.

How much time will mentoring take?

At the beginning, reading the main course documents, getting comfortable with the e-learning system (Moodle), and writing up a brief bio might take around three hours.

It will usually take about one hour to review and write an evaluation of each learner's assignment. There are 4 assignments you need to provide feedback on. So the time required for each learner or station team is 4-5 hours.

Thus overall, with 3 stations, mentoring will take 15-18 hours.

How many assignments will there be, and when?

There will be four assignments for which you will provide feedback. Learners will submit four of these assignments between the middle of April and the middle of May. The fourth assignment is the final assignment. You will have until the beginning of June to provide feedback on it.

Is my work time-sensitive?

Yes! This course runs from March 9 until mid-May and in many cases the current assignment builds on earlier assignments. Please evaluate each learner's assignment within seven days (except for the final assignment where you have three weeks).

How will I communicate with people I am mentoring?

You will communicate with people in a few ways. Once we have paired mentors up with learners, learners are supposed to send an email introducing themselves. Please respond to them introducing yourself.
For each assignment you will upload written feedback to a specific place on the course itself. The feedback you give will only be visible to the person/team you are providing feedback to.

We also hope that you and the person you are mentoring can communicate via email or WhatsApp from time to time, particularly if the learners have any questions about an assignment or want to share with you assignments they have reworked based on your feedback.

**Who should I follow up with if I have any questions?**

Farm Radio International has hired Busisiwe (Busi) Ngcebetsha (bngcebetsha@farmradio.org) from South Africa to coordinate the 2020 Farmer program e-course. If you have any questions about the e-course please get in touch with her. She can also help follow up with learners that you are having a hard time communicating with.

**What status do small-scale farmers have in African society?**

Even though they produce a large part of their country’s produce, small-scale farmers have low status in Africa’s increasingly urbanizing society. Many young people want to leave rural areas for big towns and cities. But many of them also keep strong ties to parents back on land, and go home for some major farm chores.

**What education and radio experience do learners have?**

Most farm broadcasters have part of a high school education and their radio skills will have been learned on the job. That said, some will have some college education and might have had some radio production and/or journalistic training. Some will be newcomers to broadcasting while others will have years of experience.

**What pay do learners get as farm broadcasters?**

Most of them are volunteers, especially if they work for a community station. They might get some expenses covered, e.g. for training, or day-care. Farm broadcasters at state radio stations are paid public service wages, which are not high. Farm broadcasters at private stations might draw a small wage.

**What production equipment will learners have at their stations?**

They will have at least an on-air suite, with a control room and a studio with multiple microphones. The on-air suite is also used as the production studio. Beyond that, they might have:
- a separate recording/packaging studio
- some field recorders
- phone-in and phone-out capability (often by mobile phone held to the studio mic)
- some access to the internet
- a production computer for editing and packaging and archiving
- digital editing software (usually Cool Edit or an unlicensed version of Adobe Audition)

One of the most important resources that is often in short supply however, is transportation to get out to the villages where their farmer/listeners live and work.

**Who is involved in producing a farmers’ program?**

In many cases, there is one host/producer who does just about everything. S/he might have a helper part of the time. And the local government extension service (agricultural information service) might provide the part-time services of one of its field workers. Beyond that, the station’s news department might cooperate on farming stories.

**What is the learner’s motivation to take this course?**

The fact that they have signed up for this course and have completed the preliminary work signifies that they have a keen desire to improve their broadcasting work and their future work prospects. They are also motivated by the prospect of getting constructive feedback from a radio professional. It might be the first time in their life that a professional-level person will take them seriously.

Past course graduates have greatly improved the quality of the farmer programs they produce, many have trained others broadcasters on what they learned during the e-course. Other participants have been able to submit carefully constructed farmer radio program outlines to organizations and successfully secured funding for these programs.

**How will the learners I am mentoring perceive me?**

They will be highly respectful of you. Some learners might assume you will give them exact solutions that they can copy. Hopefully, you will rather engage them in a voyage of discovery during which both of you learn by sharing options.

**How should I balance criticism with praise?**

One of the golden rules of teaching/learning is to find something to praise, and praise it, and then tackle the things that need fixing. This sequence is all
the more important in a long-distance relationship. It shows that you, the mentor, are respectful of the effort that the learner is making. That said, don’t hold back! If something needs to be fixed so that it will be better radio, say so! There is no reason to give less than the best of your constructively critical comments to the learner.

**Should I correct spelling and grammar?**

English is probably the second language for the person you are mentoring. And s/he will be broadcasting in another language – the language that local farmers use. In light of that, it doesn’t make much sense to correct spelling and grammar. However, if you don’t understand something the person you are mentoring has written, by all means ask them for clarification.

**How can I evaluate detailed work about agriculture in different African countries when I have no background in it?**

You are not expected to be an agriculture expert. You are expected to be an expert at conveying information and emotion via radio. You can always add some conditionality like this: "If it is true that triple-bagging will kill all the weevils in a sack of maize, then you might want to find a farmer who has done this successfully, and capture their story about the difference it has made to their harvest."

**Might I tread unwittingly on some highly respected cultural or religious tradition?**

You might, but it is highly unlikely, given your sensibilities. Again, you can preface your comments with a reference to your culture. For example: “In my country, we would treat a Christian minister or a Muslim imam with respect, but we would also ask him or her the tough questions that we would ask of anyone in a position of authority. Do you see this differently?” Don’t let the person you are mentoring get away with things that do not ring true to you. Ask questions about why a proposed course of action is appropriate in their setting.

**Why did one of the learners I am mentoring drop out?**

This happens in every e-course. Sometimes learners don’t realize how much work is involved until they get into it. Some find they cannot balance course requirements with the demands of work and family, and even of health. Some simply cannot find a reliable Internet connection for regular participation. Rest assured that they have not dropped out because of their mentor!

**Should I share examples from my broadcasting experience?**
Absolutely! Learners will be grateful that you are prepared to swap stories from the trenches. However, don’t intimidate or de-motivate them with stories of your grand, well-resourced super-series. Rather, share both your failures and your successes, to underline the fact that both you and the person you are mentoring are still learning your craft.

**Do I have any obligation to learners once the course is over?**

You have absolutely no obligation to learners once the course is over. If you have struck up the beginnings of mutually beneficial professional relationship with one of the people you are mentoring, you are free to continue it. Please make it clear that this ongoing contact is outside of the Farm Radio International framework.