



7 TIPS FOR INTERVIEWING FARMERS TO RENT YOUR LAND

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Here are seven tips to help you interview prospective farmers to help you find the right person to rent your farmland.

If were you renting your house for the year, you wouldn't just pick any old stranger out of the classifieds, and you shouldn't treat your farmland that way either. After all, it's one of your most valuable assets—it's the place where your family's future is secured.

It matters who works your land: it's crucial that you share the same values and understand each other's goals. Whether you're changing tenants or entering the farmland rental market for the first time, be sure to go through an interview process to figure out who is the right farm partner for your land.

1: Interview multiple farmers

Don't just sign a farmland rental agreement with the first person you talk to. Even if your intuition tells you that you want to engage someone in a lease right away, take the time to interview a few other candidates to confirm your gut instinct.

2: Review the farmland for rent

In the interview process, you should do more than ask questions. If you're meeting in person, be sure to bring along aerial and/or soil maps to illustrate the specs of the agricultural land for rent, any infrastructure available for use and review any issues around access.

You should also be prepared to talk about the land's past use and yields so that your farmer has a clear sense of your expectations. If your lease includes provisions around tillage or conservation practices, be sure to raise these topics in this initial conversation in addition to including them in any public listing of the land.

3: Outline your expectations for farmland management

Farmland management today requires a balance of technology, processes and relationships. Have a thorough conversation about how they run their farming operation and listen to hear how they implement technology, what processes they rely on and how much value they place on the relationships they have locally.

4: Ask about collecting and sharing farmland and yield data

A data-forward farmer will not hesitate to share the information they have about annual yields and soil health. While you should include data delivery requirements in your cash rent lease, it's also a good idea to talk this through before you sign any kind of agreement.

Someone who understands the power of this data will be a strong partner to work with in ensuring the long-term stewardship of the farmland, and laying this groundwork in the interview process will ensure that negotiations go smoothly when it's time to agree upon a fair farmland rental agreement.

5: Find out how each farmer prefers to communicate

Not everyone loves email, and some people still hate the impersonal feel of text messages. In your interview, ask candidates how they prefer to touch base with their landlords and how often.

While no one wants (or needs) to check in with their landlord on a weekly basis, this interview is a good chance to find out how farmers feel about letting landlords know when the crops have been planted or if the land has been flooded. This conversation will also give you a sense of what the farmer considers a major event on the land and will help you hear how they deal with challenges.

6: Ask how they got into farming to get a sense of their values

Someone who grew up on or near their family's farm is likely to have a closer relationship to the land their farm than someone who entered the industry because they were interested in the business model. Find out how each candidate relates to and identifies with their current lifestyle to get a sense of what matters most to them.

Make sure to address how they see their relationship with the community, as this is one of the most important pieces to share when you invite someone onto your land. Especially if you live nearby, the person who works on your land will interact with your neighbors, friends and the suppliers in your network.

The bottom line: Your farmer is so much more than the source of farmland rental income—they're your partner in farmland stewardship and in business.

7: Don't skip checking references

Asking farmers about their relationships with the people they've listed as their references is a good way to get a sense of the farmer's values and to ground the conversations you may have with these contacts.

And as an extension of your interview process, it's important to check all of your farmer's references once you've landed on a top candidate. We typically ask for three references from farmers on the Tillable platform: a financial reference, an industry reference and a past landlord.

You don't have to be an expert interviewer to have a great conversation. When you enter into a conversation with anyone about your farmland, you're starting a conversation about your future. Steer clear of interrogation-style conversations that put prospective farmland tenants in an uncomfortable position.

Aim to put them at ease and demonstrate that you're approaching your land ownership with the humility and honesty of any landowner who knows they can't predict the weather.

For non-operator landlords, farmers are part of the formula for success. A strong relationship with your farmland tenant can yield more than a great crop—it can help foster a positive relationship that nurtures your land for decades and ensures your soil's health.

Think of your interview as the first part of what may grow into a years-long conversation about your land's health.

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