

Build Your Team Information Sheet

Who do you need on your transfer team? Successful farm and ranch transfers rely on crucial professional advisors to inform personal, business, financial, legal, and tax decisions. This resource can help you choose who to work with as you navigate the transfer process. It describes what each advisor does, how they might be involved in a farm transfer, notes qualifications to look for, and identifies places to start your search. It also lists considerations and offers tips for vetting advisors. The table shows when it could be most helpful to engage each type of advisor and highlights the essential services they can provide at different stages.

Core Professional Advisors

ACCOUNTANT

Accountants prepare and examine financial records. In a farm or ranch transfer, a qualified accountant can help you compile financial statements and tax records, review an incoming producer's financial information to assess their ability to complete the transfer, and advise on the tax implications of different types of transfer arrangements. Keep in mind that accountants, especially those who do tax preparation, will likely be busy during tax season, in February, March, and April. The best time to reach out to an accountant is in the summer and fall.

According to the National Association of State Boards of Accountancy, about half of all accountants are Certified Public Accountants (CPAs). CPAs are required to meet minimum education and experience standards, though specific requirements may vary by state. Licensed CPAs are able to perform more tasks than accountants, though transferring a farm between private parties, including family members, may not require a CPA.

HOW TO FIND AN ACCOUNTANT

- To find a qualified accountant in your area or confirm the credentials of an accountant you are considering working with, you can consult your state's Board of Accountancy. The National Association of State Boards of Accountancy maintains a [list of all state boards](#) and runs the [Public Search feature](#), which allows users to look up licensed CPAs using data from the Accountancy Licensee Database.
- Additionally, you can use the [AICPA & CIMA Membership Directories](#) to find an accountant with relevant experience or confirm the credentials of a member.

APPRAISER

Appraisers help estimate the value of your real estate and other tangible assets, assign value to any non-physical assets that are part of your business, and may offer advice on local policies that affect agricultural sales. You can use appraisals in a farm transfer to support price negotiations and to document values for tax purposes and estate settlements.

Qualified real property appraisers are licensed by state oversight boards in the jurisdiction in which they practice ensuring compliance with federal standards. Be sure that your appraiser is familiar with local zoning code and other policies and programs that affect agricultural land values. If you are transferring your farm business along with the property, you'll likely want to get an estimate of the value of the business—that is, the intangible assets associated with the farm or ranch, such as customer lists. Business valuation methods range widely, so you will want to ensure you are working with someone who is knowledgeable about the local agricultural economy. Farm Credit or another qualified business valuation specialist can help.

HOW TO FIND AN APPRAISER

- To find a licensed/certified real property appraiser and learn more about the licensure and certification requirements for your state, you can contact your [State Appraisal Regulatory Board](#).
- The [American Society of Farm Managers and Rural Appraisers](#) is a national association for rural property professionals that provides education and accreditation. The Society maintains a nationwide membership directory that can be filtered by location and accreditation.
- [The Appraisal Institute](#) maintains a directory of valuation professionals credentialed by the Institute, including real property appraisers and business valuers.
- [National Association of Certified Valuers and Analysts](#)' online directory lists members, including certified business valuers, and if they have an active credential and are in good standing.
- The Appraiser Hub's [National Internet Directory](#) allows users to search for real estate appraisers by zip code or state.
- Some [Farm Credit institutions](#) have the capacity to offer appraisals on a fee for service basis. Your local lender might also be able to share the names of appraisers they work with.
- The [National Registry of Real Property Appraisers in Good Standing](#) maintains a listing of appraisers in compliance with state licensure requirements. Users can search by location or by name.

ATTORNEY

Attorneys provide legal support and representation for their clients. Your attorney can identify transfer tools meet your specific needs, help draft a proposal to use during negotiations, and prepare documents to execute your plan. Documents could include a purchase and sale agreement, leases, closing documents, or a will or other estate planning documents. Attorneys usually specialize in specific areas of law—look for one who specializes in agricultural law, business entities, real estate law, trusts and estates, and/or tax law. You may need to hire more than one attorney depending on the specialization needed.

An attorney has a law degree, passed the bar exam, and is licensed to practice law. A lawyer, in contrast, only has a law degree. You will need an attorney to complete any legal transactions. Designated state agencies—a board of bar overseers, the state bar, or the state’s judicial branch—license attorneys. Most maintain an online database that shows which attorneys meet the state’s standards and whether any ethical complaints have been filed.

HOW TO FIND AN ATTORNEY

Start by finding out if your state’s bar association has a directory of attorneys licensed in the state or contact a local law school clinic related to agriculture.

- The American Bar Association (ABA) maintains a [directory of lawyer referral services](#) by location and language, as well as a list of links to [local bar association directories](#).
- Some law associations are industry-specific, such as the American Agricultural Law Association which maintains a [member directory](#) or the [Real Estate Bar Association](#).
- Once you have identified a prospective attorney, check to make sure they are in good standing by checking with the state’s licensing agency. This website directory lists which agency in each state is responsible for maintaining status: [Lawyer Legion Attorney Licensing Organizations in the U.S.](#)

FINANCIAL PLANNER

A financial planner is a type of financial advisor who can help you create a comprehensive financial plan to address future needs. They provide personalized guidance on investment and retirement strategies, as well as helping to manage savings and debt. In the context of your farm or ranch transfer, a financial planner can help you determine what you need to get out of the transfer to meet your future financial goals. They can also help you assess what funds you may need to cover transaction costs when transferring your farm or ranch.

Certified Financial Planners (CFP) are a subset of planners who have passed an exam and met certain education and experience requirements. They are also fiduciaries, meaning they are legally required to work with your best interests in mind.

HOW TO FIND A FINANCIAL PLANNER

To find a financial planner, you can contact your state or local [Farm Bureau](#) or [Farm Credit](#) institution. Commercial banks often offer financial advising services, but depending on where you are located, they may not know much about agriculture. If you already have an accountant, they may also be able to recommend a financial planner.

- Use the [Certified Financial Planner Board of Standards directory](#) to find a board-certified financial planner or check a professional's certification. The directory lists the types of services offered by each planner.
- The Financial Planning Association's [PlannerSearch](#) tool lists board-certified Association members.

MEDIATOR

Mediators are neutral third parties who help facilitate discussions and resolve disagreements. Mediators foster communication and collaboration to help parties find mutually satisfactory solutions. Unlike a judge or arbitrator, they do not have the authority to impose any decision on the parties. In a farm transfer process, a mediator helps parties identify shared interests, preserve relationships, and agree on a joint, voluntary decision based on informed choices. Mediator services are paid for in equal parts by the group (unless otherwise decided) and chosen by the group.

There are no formal certifications or licenses for mediators in most states, though some private organizations offer certification after completing a training course. If a mediator claims to have a certification, ask which organization provided it and what the requirements for that certification are. In general, look for a mediator who has demonstrated experience, especially in the areas of farm business and/or family mediation. In addition, any mediator you hire should have strong interpersonal skills and be able to serve without bias.

HOW TO FIND A MEDIATOR

Start your search for a mediator by asking your network for leads. If you or another party are working with an attorney, you can ask if they have worked with any well-qualified mediators in the past. Other agricultural organizations, especially university extension services and state departments of agriculture, may also work with mediators they can recommend.

- USDA Farm Service Agency maintains a [list of state mediation programs](#)
- The Coalition of Agricultural Mediation Programs has a [directory of state and other programs focused on agricultural mediation](#).
- There are also private companies who have mediator members available for hire. These include, but are not limited to, the [American Arbitration Association \(AAA\)](#) and [JAMS](#).

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

How can I find a professional who is the right fit for me?

First and foremost, hire someone whom you feel comfortable with and trust. You will be sharing personal information about you and your family. Be sure to meet with them in person for an initial consultation. Look for an advisor who communicates clearly and listens to your needs. Ask for references and talk to their other clients about their experience. In addition, be sure that whomever you hire is working for you and not representing other parties. When you are transferring a farm within the family, using the same advisors may offer some efficiencies, but consider hiring separate representatives to avoid conflicts of interest. The one exception among your professional advisors is mediators, who are neutral and engaged jointly by the group.

How can I make the most of investing in a professional advisor?

Accessing free resources ahead of time can help you get familiarized with the subject and ask well-informed questions. You will want to make sure you understand their fee structure and plan for this expense in your transfer budget when assessing your finances. For example, if working with a financial planner, ask whether they are a fee-only advisor—meaning they are paid exclusively by clients—or whether they receive commissions for selling investment or insurance products. Other professional advisors may charge flat fees, or an hourly or per-service rate. It is also a good idea to determine whether they have enough time and availability to support you when you need them. Before hiring an advisor, see if their availability fits with your timeline or whether there are adjustments you can make based on their schedule. You may also want to make sure they will be available to answer questions as they arise and are able to explain complex concepts to you clearly so you can make the most of your meetings with them.

Do they have relevant experience?

Find someone who has experience working with farmers and farm businesses, especially with similar types of operations to yours. It is also helpful if they have relationships with local agricultural organizations, such as university extension services or agricultural commissions. To get a sense of their experience, you can ask if they have worked with other farm businesses and may be able to request references from prior clients. You may want to ask if they have taken any recent continuing education courses that would be relevant to your case. For example, if you use a conservation easement to facilitate the farm or ranch transfer, look for an appraiser with experience or education related to valuing easements. Tapping into your existing network, such as by talking to your neighbors and other farmers in your community, is one way of finding a professional who is familiar with agriculture in your area. If you belong to a farm organization, you can also ask which experts frequently serve their members.

Are they qualified to practice in my state?

Many professions require, or have the option to pursue, licensure or certification to serve in their capacity, which are often state-specific. Many states have registries listing professionals who have met state certification requirements. Once you have identified a prospective advisor, be sure to check the status of their license with the appropriate state agency. As you vet professionals to work with, you can also ask specific questions about their qualifications. For example, you may want to ask an appraiser if any of their prior appraisals or estimates have been disputed or ask an attorney if former clients have filed an ethics complaint against them (and if so, for what). For financial planners and accountants, you will want to make sure they are a fiduciary and ask them to put that in writing. For any professional, you can ask how long they have been practicing to get a sense of their experience.

Other Experts

The following are additional experts who may help inform your farm or ranch transfer.

Conservation professionals can help you set conservation goals for your land and create a plan to address natural resource concerns. NRCS offers a certification for conservation professionals, including conservation district staff, who can provide technical service activities according to NRCS standards and specifications. Cost-share assistance for the development of conservation plans is available through NRCS. Addressing conservation on your land can help make it more viable for the next generation and may be a selling point.

- The NRCS [Technical Service Provider Directory](#) lists certified conservation professionals.
- The [National Association of Conservation Districts Directory](#) provides contact information for conservation district staff across the U.S.

Cooperative Extension agents help bring the latest research and resources to farmers, ranchers, small business owners, and their communities, and provide tailored support and advice to agricultural producers. The Cooperative Extension System is a nationwide, non-credit educational network. Each U.S. state and territory has a state office at its land-grant university and a network of local or regional offices with experts. In many states, extension agents have resources and provide direct technical assistance, which may include offering trainings on farm transfer.

- The [USDA Land-grant University Directory](#) allows you to filter for the land grant universities located in your state.

Farmland protection professionals include staff at private land trusts or public agencies, such as state and local governments, who work to permanently protect your agricultural land from development. They are versed in how landowners can use conservation easements to protect their land. Farmland protection professionals are also often experienced in farm transfers and may be able to provide more general support beyond easements. Many states have land trust coalitions that maintain their own directories of professionals who are experienced with land transactions, making them a helpful referral resource.

- American Farmland Trust's [Farmland Protection Directory](#) lists land trusts and public entities working to protect agricultural land.

Lenders are financial entities that offer loans to individuals or businesses including farms and ranches. Lenders can include Farm Credit institutions, credit unions, community development financial institutions (CDFIs), and commercial banks, especially community banks. Congress created the Farm Credit System—a nationwide network of member-owned institutions—to establish a reliable source of credit and financial services for farmers and related industries. Credit unions are not-for-profit cooperative financial institutions that offer reduced bank fees, higher savings rates, and lower loan rates to a defined membership group. CDFIs are specialized lenders working to inject capital into under-resourced communities. Community banks are a type of commercial bank that make smaller loans and focus on the needs of the communities in which they are located. In the context of a farm transfer, financing is of greater importance to the entering farmer looking to purchase assets. However, exiting farmers may use bridge loans, lines of credit, or personal loans to help pay for transaction costs, living expenses, or the acquisition of new housing away from the farm.

- You can search by zip code or state to find your [Farm Credit Lender](#).
- Find a local credit union using the National Credit Union Association's [Credit Union Locator](#).
- Identify a CDFI to work with by using the [CDFI Locator](#).
- Use the Independent Community Bankers of America's [Community Bank Locator](#) to find a community bank near you.

| | ASSESS YOUR FINANCES | CHOOSE YOUR TOOLS | NAVIGATE THE PROCESS | NEGOTIATE AND FINALIZE DECISIONS |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ACCOUNTANT | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Compile the financial statements to assess your financial position Assist with preparing balance sheet, income statement, and cash flow statement Review incoming producer's financial statements | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explain the tax implications of different types of transfer arrangements | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advise what financial information should be shared with other parties | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prepare documentation for estate tax or gift purposes, including IRS filings |
| APPRAISER | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Estimate the value of your tangible and business assets | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appraise the value of land, including its agricultural value, to support use of certain tools, including a conservation easement Determine a list price, if selling the property | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Update appraisals as needed |
| ATTORNEY | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify present ownership interests of assets | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describe legal options and available tools based on goals, assets, and liabilities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advise what legal information should be shared with other parties | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Help develop a compelling proposal Directly advocate for proposals or offer support for self-advocacy Ensure transfer documents are legally valid Help with executing transfer documents |
| FINANCIAL PLANNER | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Catalog tangible and financial assets Assist with goal setting and planning for future financial needs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explain which tools will work with financial goals and business structure Help decide whether to transfer the business in addition to tangible assets Advise how to structure the transfer to ensure financial stability | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct regular reviews of financial plan to ensure individuals have the resources to address their financial needs |
| MEDIATOR | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Help the parties communicate their needs Serve as an objective and empathetic listener Help build trust and navigate conflict if it arises | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review areas of mutual interest and highlight what remains to be reconciled Guide discussions, foster understanding, and encourage creative problem-solving Upon request, provide written record of points of agreement and final decisions |



This resource is part of American Farmland Trust's [Farm Transfer Toolkit](#) which is available on AFT's [Farmland Information Center website](#). The toolkit walks agricultural landowners through key steps in a farm transfer process. It contains information, worksheets and other tools to help users set goals, assess their finances, communicate with stakeholders, and work with professionals to finalize decisions and implement a transfer plan.