



## Become an Expert

**Agricultural experts and agricultural consultants are needed many areas of interest. What is your expertise? Pick your area and learn how to market yourself as an expert or agricultural consultant.**

By Rick Gush

### About the Author

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The joke about the farmer who is outstanding in his field is one of our oldest agricultural giggles.

The more serious reality of the situation is that many farmers could actually benefit by pushing themselves to become "experts."

This can range from being a private agricultural consultant to participating in public speaking engagements.

Practical experience can be a great teacher to the student who keeps his eyes open; many a small farmer, after a few years of working their farm, finds that they know about as much concerning their craft as any of the ag counselors at the cooperative extension or grange hall.

Many small farmers are indeed candidates for being in the next wave of experts for their particular area of activity.

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The awesome collected knowledge of the current crop of experts is impressive and can easily be intimidating to newcomers to the arena.

But ours is an ever-changing world; old experts are constantly retiring and new experts are continually appearing. Becoming an expert is not as rare as it once was; it's actually a better time than ever before to become an expert because there are more areas of activity: There's more information available both online and offline, and our general communication capacity is at an historic high.

Being an expert can bring numerous benefits, from increased, respect-driven sales and consultant fees to greater market utilization and general publicity.

In short, small farmers should think about becoming an "expert" as it could improve their business and add considerably to their enjoyment.

### Why Become an Expert?

Any consideration as to why one would want to deliberately set out to become an expert must initially be based on personal intellectual curiosity and self pride. Being an expert is essentially the result of being really interested in a subject and the pride of bringing a higher level of craftsmanship to one's activities is a primary motivation for most agricultural experts.

A close second inspiration is certainly the potential financial benefits available to an active expert. Being an expert can be leveraged to produce a variety of income-producing opportunities, including: Consulting for insurance companies and legal firms, Personal consultations with other farmers, Publishing writings on the subject, Participation as a judge in group



events, Serving on committees, Public speaking engagements and Product endorsements.

#### Kit Knotts: A Great Example of an Expert

Amateur gardeners that have risen to the level of expert are an inspiration to us all. Kit Knotts is a good example, as she is the ranking world authority on the water lilies with enormous pads, *Victoria amazonica*.

A great example of a modern expert, Kit, in tandem with her husband Ben, raises and studies tropical water lilies in her Florida garden. She writes and communicates internationally on the subject. While the university experts tend to focus on the more-economically important subjects, it's experts like Kit who carry the burden in many specialty areas. Kit found a niche that appealed to her, searched out all the existing documents and proceeded to start communicating with other experts around the world. Kit and Ben's activities are now producing new important information, as they're harvesting and germinating seeds collected from domesticated plants. Scientists will need expertise like hers in the future, when native waterlily populations are threatened with extinction. Kit has a lily site at [www.victoria-adventure.org](http://www.victoria-adventure.org)

Top Experts also often find that their own products are in greater demand, and that their marketing improves with their public visibility and respect. Of course, there are also a great many experts who do not leverage their expertise for financial gain. For some this is due to not marketing themselves and, for others, it can be that the intellectual pursuit is its own reward.

Being considered an expert also opens the doors for greater participation in one's industry. Known experts receive more invitations of all kinds, and can give and receive more visits to other production facilities, join more industry committees and attend more conventions.

In general, experts can leverage their status to exert more control in their industry and help influence future industry activities. A great many industries regularly experience high levels of uncertainty and assault, and it's the wise experts in each specialty that help guide their industries through the storms. Becoming an expert may also allow one to sidestep oncoming difficulties more easily in their own activities.

Obviously, experts in the more well-known specialties will find more opportunities and demand for their services than experts in obscure subjects.

An expert in small-farm taxes will certainly find more work than an expert in left-handed gloves.

That having been said, there's no limit on what subjects are appropriate for future experts to consider; absolutely any subject is potentially possible.

Experts on edible snails, organic, dried apricots; farm-grown, cut flowers; and efficient manure usage will all find plenty of opportunities for giving expert counsel.

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#### Steps to Becoming an Expert

To be considered an expert, one doesn't need to invent something fancy or start a new school of agricultural practice. As an expert, one serves merely as a conduit for the accumulated knowledge in their specialty.

They may also have opinions that others would like to hear, but an expert is first and foremost a person who knows what the other experts know. As a future conduit for the accumulated knowledge in your specialty, a beginning expert's responsibility is to increase their access to and understanding of all that information.

The first step is to become a junior expert. This step can be taken in an instant and is simply a mental decision, a personal determination to acquire the required knowledge.

The single most important key to becoming an expert is communication. As a junior expert, one must learn how to communicate abundantly and efficiently. Most of us are poor communicators and we need to push ourselves quite a bit to communicate better.

#### Five Study Habits for New Experts



Good study habits should include discipline as well as enjoyable activities. Most experts continue their learning throughout their careers and often continue study habits acquired during their early training. Some suggestions for new students: Keep a diary. Daily, monthly, whatever. Regular recording of observations and information helps create an invaluable document for future research. Read anything, not just texts. Textbooks have a limited focus; newspapers and magazines will offer a wider focus on any topic. Prepare tests for yourself. Surprise yourself with quizzes or have a friend ask questions from a textbook. Testing helps form mental imprints of complicated information. Collect experts. Meet or communicate with experts related to your area of study and take the time to maintain those relationships. Study often for short periods. Frequent and regular study habits will yield the best results. A student will learn more with 10 minutes of reading every morning than with 10 hours of intense study once a month.

TopReading a handful of books and becoming a proponent of a particular viewpoint or practice cannot make one an expert, and ivory-tower experts with little practical experience generally make poor field decisions. A good expert makes the extra effort to understand the viewpoints of a wide range of others in their field; that knowledge is available only through communication with others.

Junior experts need to communicate with other already-established experts, with practitioners in their area of speciality, with any friends, relatives, neighbors or acquaintances who will give them the time of day, and finally, with their potential customers and those whom they themselves will educate. Communication occurs in many forms; in person, in telephone conversations, in e-mails, in chat rooms, on online forums and even in handwritten letters.

There's a great need to study books, as well. A junior expert must study hard, and prepare his own curriculum and study plans. In addition to texts that deal directly with one's specialty, a junior expert must also cast a wide look at literature in related areas. A junior expert must establish study goals and study without external prompting.

Actually, it's not so uncommon for a pair of people to become experts together. Two people can encourage each other, share the adventure and bring multiple viewpoints to the study table. Alone or in association with others, a junior expert must establish study and activity goals, and, above all, learn how to communicate effectively with others.

Of course, university schooling is part of the background of many experts and this path of study is highly recommended, but some small farmers may already have graduated with a degree in an unrelated subject or may have no degree at all. These people are also capable of becoming experts in their field, but the road will likely be a bit steeper.

Even within the university system, becoming an expert requires the personal determination and sacrifice that characterizes any intense study. Universities are also often connected with certification processes and to obtain the relevant documents that testify to a person's expertise, one may need to attend classes at a local university. Even for completely self-taught junior experts, universities can be a rich source of research materials concerning most fields of study. Regardless of any school or other study programs in which a junior expert is enrolled, they should also assume the responsibility of extracurricular studies.

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#### Some Experts Require Certification

For a great many areas, there are established procedures whereby the expertise and competence of individuals may be documented. Becoming certified is one of the best ways to establish oneself as an expert. Universities, trade associations, local and federal governments, and market organizations all conduct various certification programs.

Just learning what certifications are available for one's specialty is an important step for a beginning expert. Finally passing through the various levels and possibilities of certification will give a new expert a boost in confidence to jettison their "Junior Expert" appellation and assert their full expertness. But it's true that the more one learns, the more one realizes the enormity of their own ignorance. A good certified expert usually understands how little is really known about their subject and is humble concerning their own accomplishments.

One must also beware of useless certifications. Mail-order diplomas that have been bought instead of earned are not of much use. Beware also of certification programs that are not respected by true experts in the field.

Extensive documentation may not always be needed to be considered an expert in a particular field. In many cases, one can merely begin functioning as an expert, perhaps by publishing or writing for a specialty journal. Some areas of interest are obviously more well-documented than others. Becoming an expert in cardiovascular surgery is obviously going to involve a great deal more documentation and certification than becoming an expert in left-handed gloves.



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#### What to Expect: Working as an Expert

One of the most exciting events in the life of a junior expert is when they finally muster the confidence to begin working and giving advice in their field. Online forums make this step easier than ever, but working in person is both more terrifying and correspondingly more rewarding. Once a certain expertise has been obtained, a junior expert should consider volunteering themselves for speaking, consulting, judging and writing assignments. Serving on committees is also a good way to get one's feet wet.

Being an expert doesn't mean that one knows everything, but an expert should know how to find the answers for any subject questions. Wise experts are aware of their own shortcomings and are eager to consult other experts.

They know what their weaknesses are and gear their continuing study to fill those gaps as well as to establish an information network that can yield answers beyond their own competence.

They also know what their strengths are and they manage to market themselves in the appropriate directions.

Having the confidence to market themselves is difficult for many experts, which may result in fewer networking opportunities and thus less access to current information in their topic area. Tooting one's own horn just slightly is good for research purposes, if nothing else.

The trick most experts use is to learn from their acquaintances and customers. The raw, live data that customers and other users and practitioners provide needs to be an important part of an expert's own learning experience.

One constant in all fields is change; experts may have a remarkable grasp of past events and discoveries, but only through constant first-hand observation of case studies can an expert keep abreast of the changes occurring in their field. A savvy expert knows how to listen more than speak.

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#### Challenges in the World of "Experts"

Experts inevitably become aware of the effects of human incompetence and greed on their chosen field of study.

Nearly every expert carries with them a series of stories about being aware of a problem early, warning others, being ignored and then watching the problem explode out of control. Experts can expect to be criticized and to make a few embarrassing mistakes: It's all part of the process. Experts will be ignored, abused and ridiculed, but in the long run they'll enjoy the personal satisfaction of having mastered a subject, which is the reason one decides to become an expert in the first place.

To become an expert, one must be unusually focused. One must forgo many other activities and pleasurable events in order to concentrate on activities and events related to their junior expertsmanship. Experts are not created overnight. Junior experts might take inspiration from the English poet John Milton, who had such respect for the craft that although he knew at a young age that he wanted to write poetry, he waited and prepared himself for an unusually long time, until he was middle aged, before beginning to actually write poems.

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