

RESOURCES

# Time Management Workbook

## FOR FOOD & FARM ENTREPRENEURS



Samantha Stokes & Alex Jackman-Wheitner

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**MICHIGAN STATE**  
UNIVERSITY

Center for  
Regional Food Systems

# Acknowledgments

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## **AUTHORS AND CONTRIBUTORS:**

- Sam Stokes, MSU Center for Regional Food Systems, Author
- Alex Jackman-Wheiter, Alex J-W Coaching, Consultant
- Melissa Hill, MSU Center for Regional Food Systems, Designer
- Emma Beachamp, MSU Center for Regional Systems, Contributor
- Jamie Rahrig, MSU Center for Regional Food Systems, Contributor

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## **RACIAL EQUITY STATEMENT OF THE MSU CENTER FOR REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEMS**

The MSU Center for Regional Food Systems (CRFS) recognizes that racism in the food system is historic, ongoing, and systemic. As we collaborate with partners to advance food systems rooted in local regions and centered on food that is healthy, green, fair, and affordable, we emphasize racial equity as a foundation of our work. Read the full statement: <https://foodsystems.msu.edu/racial-equity-statement>

## **SUGGESTED CITATION**

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# Introduction

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## WHAT IS THIS RESOURCE?

This workbook was designed by the Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems (CRFS) Business Assistance team to help food and farm entrepreneurs make business planning an achievable, approachable, and beneficial endeavor. We know from experience that there is always a to-do list that seems impossible to prioritize and a fire that needs putting out. This workbook contains materials to help you best utilize your precious time to make progress on scaling, growth, financing, and any other goal you set for your business.

## THE FULL PDF INCLUDES:

- Task Prioritization Roadmap
- Task Prioritization Guide
- Daily Task Planner
- Weekly Task Planner
- Additional Resources

These materials are available in a publicly accessible [Google Drive folder](#) that contains printable versions of the instructions and worksheets listed above, along with video instructions from Alex Jackman-Wheiter of Alex JW Coaching on how to best employ the task-prioritization techniques outlined in the roadmap. The folder also includes a [spreadsheet that can be used to perform a 'time audit.'](#) allowing you to evaluate how much time your tasks actually take versus how long you budgeted for each.

## WHO IS IT FOR?

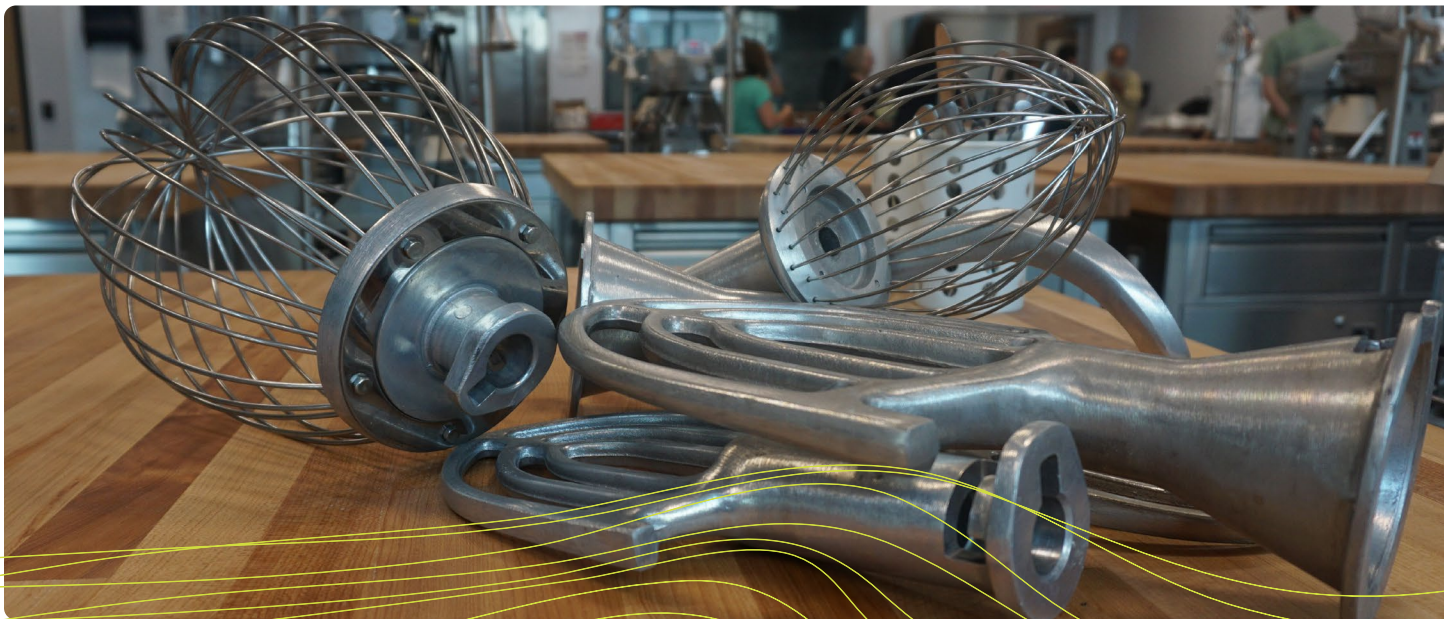
This workbook would be useful to ANY small business owner, but was specifically designed to cater to food and farm entrepreneurs who might struggle managing their time, focusing on a task, prioritizing work or just generally sticking to a plan. The CRFS Business Assistance team is thrilled to work with Jackman-Wheiter in the creation of this workbook, as her expertise in advising entrepreneurs with ADHD and other neurodivergences was invaluable in our efforts to make this publication accessible to one audience that might find it the most helpful.

## HOW CAN IT BE USED?

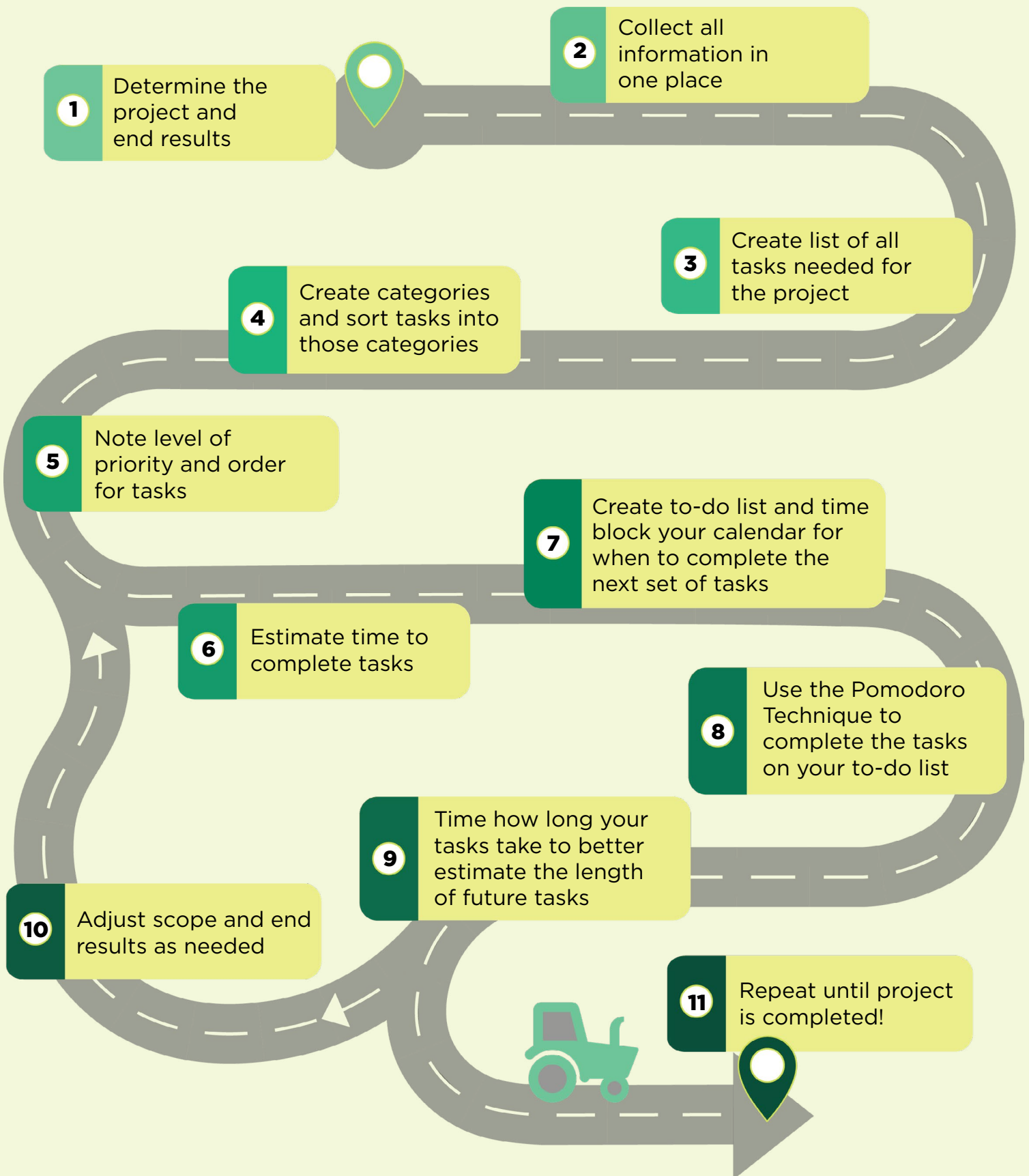
This publication is meant to be a guide, not doctrine – use what works, modify what you like and don't use what isn't helpful to you! A useful time management strategy is one that you can be consistent in applying successfully to your own life and business. This workbook was created to complement the [Loan Readiness Toolkit for Food & Farm Businesses](#) which provides instruction on how to create a portfolio of business documents that lenders commonly require to access capital. Using the techniques described in this workbook to complete some or all of the work described in the *Loan Readiness Toolbox* would be the perfect way to figure out which time management techniques work for you, while also creating/updating useful business documents.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [MSU Center for Regional Food Systems Programs](#)
- [Loan Readiness Toolkit for Food & Farm Businesses](#)
- [Funding Sources for Food & Farm Businesses](#)
- [MSUE Beginning Farmer Website](#)
- [MSUE DEMaND Series](#)
- [MSU Organic Farmer Training Program](#)
- [MSU Farm Management Group](#)
- [Michigan Good Food Fund](#)
- [Alex – JW Coaching Website](#)



## TASK PLANNING ROADMAP



# Task Planning Guide

*Numbered steps in this section correspond to numbered points on the roadmap.*



For an audio-visual explanation of how to use this task planning roadmap, [click here](#).

1

## DETERMINE THE PROJECT AND END RESULTS

*This helps to set the scope, timeline, and benchmarks for the project.*

- In a large project, or long to-do list, the first step can be hard to determine unless you know the end results you're working towards.
- **Step one** is figuring out what end results you will need.
  - Each project in your business will have a different end result.
  - It might be a deliverable that you will provide to a client or a funder, or a benchmark that only the business owner or employees see and use.
- **Developing benchmarks for results and outputs will help you know when you are at the end of a project.**

## COLLECT ALL INFORMATION IN ONE PLACE

2

*Organized files are as important as an organized kitchen or barn.*

- A cloud-based storage system is ideal, since it allows you to easily access your files anywhere. Some options include Google Drive, OneDrive, or iCloud.
- Develop a filing system and folder organization structure that works for your business needs.
- Move any previously created items or files used for this project into the filing system you created.
  - This is a cumbersome process that may take a few days, but is valuable to complete early on in the project.
  - The longer you wait to create or recreate a usable file organization system, the harder it gets to start.
- Make sure folders or items that you use frequently are the easiest to access.
- Schedule time to catch up on “file hygiene.” Even the most organized people let things slide. Build in time on a weekly basis to get everything filed where it belongs.

### STICK TO YOUR SYSTEM!

**Moving between systems can cause organizational chaos. Even if it takes an extra minute, you will save yourself time by consistently following your file system.**

### 3

## CREATE LIST OF ALL TASKS NEEDED FOR THE PROJECT

Create a master list of tasks directly tied to the project and any work associated with those steps.

- Start with the list of everything you know about the project.
- Add tasks that must happen for the project to be successfully completed, even if they are not work related.
  - When self-employed, it can be difficult to compartmentalize work and life tasks. So, if a “life” matter needs to be addressed during the project timeline, do not be afraid to add that into your task list.
    - For example, if you know you need a block of time to work on a project, but you don’t have a convenient place to work, add in steps to find a convenient place to work.
- Any time you get stuck and don’t know what additional steps might be, add in space to research, phone a friend, ask for help, etc.
- Look through previous outlines, lists, and planners for reminders of what other steps might need done.

### 4

## CREATE CATEGORIES AND SORT TASKS ACCORDINGLY

Develop a system to organize and sort tasks into categories for task batching. Three examples for organizational strategies are shown below. Develop a system to organize tasks that works for you.

- The goal is to create a process that batches tasks into categories which allow you to easily switch between mindsets.

### OPTION 1

- Tasks you need to think really, really hard about while you are alone
- Tasks you have to be detail-oriented for, but are uncomplicated
- Tasks you have to talk to people about
- Tasks you have to physically go somewhere else to complete - bank, grocery store, etc

### OPTION 2

- Easy tasks
- Medium tasks
- Hard tasks
- Tasks that require you waiting for outside input from others

### OPTION 3

- Writing tasks
- Reading & note-taking tasks
- Thinking & creative tasks
- “Mindless” tasks or tasks that don’t require creativity
- Computer versus non-computer tasks
- Tasks that do or do-not involve other people
- Tasks outside the house or office

## 5 NOTE LEVEL OF PRIORITY AND ORDER FOR TASKS

Create and stick to a system that helps you prioritize tasks based on importance, timelines, and interdependencies with other work. Complete tasks by starting at the beginning of the list below and working down the funnel. Prioritize by:

1. Due dates and deadlines.
2. Personal and/or business needs and values, such as:
  - paying vs non-paying tasks, projects, and events
  - client-relations tasks
  - mission-driven tasks
3. What is most helpful to you and your business.
4. Commitments versus opportunities.



**To note the level of priority you can use colors, stars, numbers, whatever is easiest for you recognize and that keeps you oriented.**

## 6 ESTIMATE TIME TO COMPLETE TASKS

This builds your ability to create effective timelines.

- This takes practice.
- While difficult, it is worth trying. You can try using a time-tracker through task management tools, such as Asana, Clickup, or Monday to help you improve.
- When you are starting out with this process, multiply your estimated time per task by 1.5 to ensure you have enough time.
- Enter tasks and estimated times into the provided [time audit sheet](#).

## 7 CREATE TO-DO LIST

Use your to-do list to time block your calendar for when to complete the next set of tasks.

- Once you have prioritized your tasks, create a weekly to-do using the most important tasks.
- All tasks on your list should be one step in the larger project or goal.
- Write enough task detail to be able to identify it quickly — using verbs is helpful.
- Tasks should not frequently take more than approximately 30 minutes. If a single task takes longer, break it down into smaller sub-tasks.
- Use a calendar to time-block tasks. Reference any calendars you already use for personal or family scheduling including time for appointments, classes, trainings, meetings, or any time bound event that already exists.
  - If you have any unprioritized, or non-time-bound commitments, add them to the calendar.
  - Be sure to include travel time and down time in your time-blocking.
  - Start adding the tasks you identified as a priority for the week to your to-do list, based on priority, within the time available.
  - Populate weekly and daily planner pages with your to-do list. See pages 10 and 11.



## 8

### USE THE POMODORO TECHNIQUE TO COMPLETE THE TASKS ON YOUR TO-DO LIST

*The Pomodoro Technique can help with focus and task completion. Adjust the timing for your tasks and needs.*

- Set a timer for 25 minutes and spend that time doing focused work.
- When the timer goes off, spend 5 minutes resting and/or moving.
- Set the timer for another 25 minutes.
- Every 4 cycles of 25 minutes (approx. 2 hours) take a longer 25-30 minute break.

## 9

### TRACK TASK TIMES

*Time how long your tasks take to better estimate the length of future tasks.*

- As you complete tasks, time how long they took to complete.
- Update your time audit sheet with completed task times.
- Adjust your estimated time for future tasks.

## 10

### RECALIBRATE TASK TIMES

*Adjust scope and end results as needed.*

- Using your to-do list, time audit sheet, and other feedback, adjust project scope, end results, and deliverables such as business plan, scope of work or contracts. See the [Loan Readiness Toolkit](#) for examples of deliverables.
- Use the [time audit sheet](#) to keep track of this data for all projects to see trends and patterns.
- If tasks have changed or task times have gone past original time estimates, return to step 6 to reevaluate and move forward.

## 11

### REPEAT UNTIL PROJECT IS COMPLETE!

*Using what you learned from the process, continue to build on past successes to reach your business goals for your food or farm business.*

- If new tasks for this project have emerged, continue to use steps 1-10 to develop a task plan to complete them.
- Otherwise, evaluate your business needs and decide on your next project to complete!

# DAILY PLANNER

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

Time	Task
6:00am	
7:00	
8:00	
9:00	
10:00	
11:00	
12:00pm	
1:00	
2:00	
3:00	
4:00	
5:00	
6:00	
7:00	
8:00	
9:00	
10:00	
11:00	

Which task will have the biggest impact on your business if completed today?

Which task(s) are due to someone else today or tomorrow?

Which task will most improve your quality of life today?

OTHER TASKS

TASKS FOR TOMORROW

## WEEKLY PLANNER FOR FOOD AND FARM BUSINESSES

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Tasks Due & To Whom							
Tasks by Priority	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
<b>TASKS FOR LATER</b>			<b>TASKS THAT NEED HELP/ COLLABORATION</b>		<b>NOTES</b>		

## VISION

CRFS envisions a thriving economy, equity, and sustainability for Michigan, the country, and the planet through food systems rooted in local regions and centered on Good Food: food that is healthy, green, fair, and affordable.

## MISSION

The mission of CRFS is to engage the people of Michigan, the United States, and the world in applied research, education, and outreach to develop regionally integrated, sustainable food systems.

## ABOUT

CRFS joins in Michigan State University's legacy of applied research, education, and outreach by catalyzing collaboration and fostering innovation among the diverse range of people, processes, and places involved in regional food systems. Working in local, state, national, and global spheres, CRFS' projects span from farm to fork, including production, processing, distribution, policy, and access.

### **Center for Regional Food Systems**

Michigan State University  
480 Wilson Road  
Natural Resources Building  
East Lansing, MI, 48824

[foodsystems.msu.edu](https://foodsystems.msu.edu)

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