



**Notice:** This guide is for informational purposes only and does not provide legal advice or create an attorney-client relationship. You should contact an attorney to obtain advice with respect to any particular issue or problem.

## Working with a Legal Food Hub Lawyer

You've been matched with a Legal Food Hub lawyer. Now what? This guide answers your questions about working with your lawyer as effectively as possible. If you have a question that isn't answered here, please contact your Legal Food Hub coordinator or [legalfoodhub@clf.org](mailto:legalfoodhub@clf.org).

### Is the service completely free?

Not necessarily. Our Legal Food Hub lawyers are donating their time for free ("pro bono"). Your lawyer will not charge you for his or her time working on your case. However, you may be responsible for other costs incurred over the course of representation for things such as filing fees, photocopying, postage, or travel expenses. For example, a farmer or food entrepreneur seeking to form an LLC will need to file with the state and pay a fee. The Legal Food Hub lawyer does not cover this type of expense, and you will need to pay it yourself.

Plan to discuss any possible expenses with your lawyer in your first meeting. We strongly recommend that the lawyer prepares an engagement letter that lays out the scope of the lawyer's representation of your case and any possible fees. This will avoid confusion later.

### What should I do to prepare for the first meeting with my lawyer?

Your lawyer may know the law, but he or she does not know the details of your case. Before you meet, pull together documents related to your legal issue and information that the lawyer will need to know. You may want to make photocopies or electronic scans of documents that you'd like to share with your lawyer. Spend some time thinking about what information is most important so you can be sure to provide all the key details. Without some forethought, details can be left out. So, preparing a written description of facts or a timeline of relevant events is helpful to make sure no facts are left out.

Coming to your first meeting well prepared will help the case move forward smoothly.

### What should I do in the first meeting?

The first meeting can happen by phone or in person. At that time, you will discuss your legal question and how the lawyer will be able to assist you. Your lawyer will want to know about events leading up to your decision that you needed legal assistance. Be prepared to provide the information you have gathered, as discussed above.

Also, be prepared to state briefly what you would like the lawyer to do for you. In other words, focus on what is your desired outcome. For example, "I would like your help to negotiate a land lease that gives me at least a 5-year term," or "I need a recommendation on the preferred business structure for my organic yogurt business."



There are also some housekeeping items that you should raise at your first meeting. First, you should be sure to confirm that the lawyer's services are free ("pro bono") and you should discuss any possible fees that might arise during the representation. Second, you should ask the lawyer to prepare an engagement letter that lays out the scope of his or her work on your case once you have had a chance to discuss your case. The engagement letter should specify any anticipated fees.

Lastly, be honest. The better your lawyer understands the situation, the better he or she can serve you. It's helpful for your lawyer to be aware of any complications or difficulties at the outset, rather than be surprised by them later.

### **What if my lawyer doesn't seem like a good fit for me?**

Please let the Legal Food Hub know. We can advise you about how to end your engagement with the lawyer, and if possible, we will try to find another lawyer to help you.

### **What if I don't get a response from my lawyer?**

Please let the Legal Food Hub know if you have trouble getting a response from your lawyer. We can reach out to the lawyer, who may have just missed your email, to confirm that she or he is available to work with you. Or, if the lawyer continues to be non-responsive, we will do our best to find you another placement.

### **What if I have additional questions that the lawyer cannot answer?**

Please contact the Legal Food Hub. We will try to find another lawyer with the right expertise for your additional questions. Sometimes, you may need to consult a different professional, such as an accountant or insurance provider. We may be able to offer limited referrals.

### **If I like my lawyer, can I keep working with him or her in the future?**

You can discuss this possibility with your lawyer and your Legal Food Hub contact. When we ask our lawyers to help with Legal Food Hub cases, they expect to work on a specific, time-limited matter, so continuing to work together may not be the right fit for them. The Legal Food Hub will do its best to find you another lawyer to work with on your other legal needs.

### **What happens to the private information I share with my lawyer?**

The information that you share with your lawyer is protected by lawyer/client privilege and will not be made public by your lawyer without your permission.

The information that you share with the Legal Food Hub at Conservation Law Foundation is kept within the organization, except when we share some basic details of your case with lawyers when we are working to place it with a lawyer. We may also share details of your case with our partner organization Vermont Law School who helps the Legal Food Hub provide our services.

Sometimes, we ask permission from our participants to share details of their case for grant reports, our website, or stories in the media. We will not share any information publicly without your permission.

This guide was prepared by Sara Dewey, Director of Farm & Food and Staff Attorney at Conservation Law Foundation.

***Looking for legal help?***

*Contact the Legal Food Hub to see if you qualify for **free** legal assistance!*

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