

# FARMER TRAINING PROGRAM



THE UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT  
AGRICULTURE &  
LIFE SCIENCES



## Information Packet





# FARMER TRAINING PROGRAM

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*“We learn from our gardens to deal with the most urgent question of the time: How much is enough?”*

*-Wendell Berry*



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# Farmer Training *Packet Overview*

The UVM Farmer Training Program is a six-month intensive program (April 29 - October 25, 2024) for aspiring farmers and food systems advocates that provides a hands-on, skills-based education in sustainable agriculture. This full-time program offers participants the unique opportunity to manage their own growing site, take classes from professors and expert farmers, and rotate as learners on successful, diverse farms in the Burlington area. This program will provide an intensive, supportive experience where participants leave with a Certificate in Sustainable Farming, a deeper understanding of agricultural management and small-scale farming, and an entrepreneurial foundation for farm business management. The Farmer Training Program is housed in UVM's Plant and Soil Science Department, providing students the opportunity to interact with and learn from many of the faculty and staff who teach in the program and conduct research at the farm.

The student-run farm maintains an educational focus while still producing enough to meet the demands of its diverse markets. All produce grown on site is harvested and sold every Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday, with students learning to take on managerial responsibilities associated with harvesting, packing, and washing. The produce grown by program students is sold through a CSA, the Old North End Farmers' Market in Burlington, and various wholesale accounts—the largest being UVM Dining Services. The Farmer Training Program has developed a relationship with UVM Dining Services to help supply their dining halls and on-campus restaurants with locally and sustainably grown food.

The UVM Farmer Training program is unique in design because of its rich partnerships with successful farms in the greater Burlington area that allow students to learn

**This weekly experience with innovative farmers exposes students to diverse farm models and enhances the learning gained from managing 5½ acres of vegetable fields from seed to market.**

alongside expert farmers. Students learn from our partner farms about integrated livestock systems, organic berry production, organic cut-flower production, apple orchard/vineyard production managed with IPM (integrated pest management), perennial plants and landscape design to promote pollinator habitat.

Additionally, there is a food and social justice component within the program's curriculum to discuss racial and class inequalities in our food system from ownership of land to who has access to healthy fresh food. Readings and classes are intended to expand the framework for which we understand the complexities of our food system, particularly the impacts of power, privilege and oppression. The ultimate goal of this curriculum is to broaden each student's perspective on racism and classism within the food system and to identify what our role currently is and what it can be in the future.

DATES FOR PROGRAM

## April 29 - October 25, 2024



## Who is this *program* for?

The program is designed for people interested in immersing themselves in sustainable, local food systems in a hands-on educational setting. Candidates include, but are not limited to: new and beginning farmers, urban and community gardeners, farm educators, social justice activists in the food system, and students interested in deepening their understanding of sustainable farming systems in an intensive and focused learning environment.

### *Strong applicants...*

- Are committed to work in the sustainable food movement through farming, education, or advocacy
- Value a comprehensive education in all aspects of farming, including business planning, financial management, and marketing
- Want an immersive, farm-based education with a classroom component
- Want to learn from Vermont's vibrant small-scale, diversified farming community
- Are proactive learners who thrive in a group learning environment

### The UVM Farm and Facilities

The Horticultural Research and Education Facility (the Hort Center) is a beautiful 100-acre parcel of land overlooking Lake Champlain, located 3.5 miles from the center of campus. As well as hosting the Catamount Educational Farm, which is managed by the UVM Farmer Training Program, the Hort Center is also the site of academic field research plots, apple orchards, vineyards, and heirloom varieties of ornamental perennials. Students of the training program will have access to all the facilities at the Hort Center, including tractors, tools and equipment, a walk-in cooler, a wash station, storage sheds, a root cellar, and classroom space with Wi-Fi and restrooms.

The rotation farms, as well as other farms in the area, serve as living “classrooms”, often hosting workshops and learning opportunities throughout the season. As students of UVM through the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, you will have complete use of the Bailey-Howe campus library and wireless internet access from anywhere on the UVM campus.

### Online Community Space

As part of your enrollment in the Farmer Training Program, we will provide you login information to our online learning management system Brightspace. In Brightspace, we will house all of the curriculum materials and guest instructor presentations. Prior to the start of the program, you will also have access to this space to communicate with each other. We will post (with your permission) your bios and contact information to help with the housing search.





## Program Goals

The main goal of the Farmer Training Program is to provide a multi-faceted training for aspiring farmers and food systems advocates. Students will be exposed to all aspects of a small scale, organic vegetable, herb, flower, and fruit operation. Additionally, they will learn about land access, identifying markets and beginning a small farm business. Participants will be prepared to enter the world of sustainable agriculture as small-scale farmers, activists, educators, and advocates and will have the skills to affect our food system in a positive way.

### *The expected outcomes for the Farmer Training Program include:*

- A Certificate in Sustainable Farming from the University of Vermont's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences
- Engagement in meaningful experiential learning with six months of growing experience that fosters immediate application and reinforcement of classroom education
- Development of critical and creative thinking skills used in organic farm management and food systems work
- Exposure to the large network of farmers, organizations, and movements who are active in creating a just food system both locally and nationally

## Design of the Farmer Training Program

**Our hands-on curriculum starts in the field** and continues in the classroom—from learning how to harvest arugula efficiently to listening to a presentation on soil fertility management—every part of the program emphasizes practical skills-based education. Over the course of six months, the UVM Farmer Training Program couples the invaluable approach of hands-on learning with a classroom component and immersive rotations with incredible, successful local farmers. Working closely with experts in the field, the curriculum is designed to cover essential topics, using multiple formats throughout the growing season to build students' experience, confidence, and skills.

**Weekly guest lectures** occur every Wednesday and Friday. Over 40 guest lecturers present in the program including agricultural extension agents, farmers, plant and soil scientists, representatives from agricultural non-profits, and food justice

activists. Curricular themes include soil fertility management, organic pest and disease management, business planning and farm financials, vegetable and livestock agriculture, and food justice issues.

**Personal garden plots** are provided to each student. Students can experiment with heirloom varieties, seed saving, companion planting, or whatever they would like to grow.

**Weekly readings** are assigned that correspond to the weekly guest speakers. Beyond the program's textbook (*Building Soils for Better Crops* by Fred Magdoff and Harold Van Es), other articles, assignments, and resources will be posted to Brightspace.

**Biweekly assessments** ensure students have competency with the learning objectives and have mastered certain necessary skills and concepts before graduating with a Certificate in Sustainable Farming. Assessments are reviewed in small groups and provide an opportunity to compare answers and ideas.

**Program mentors** assist each student in developing specific learning goals and objectives. Guidance and support are provided through regular group and one-on-one meetings with a staff member to help students deepen their understanding and further their progress toward their personal learning objectives. The staff works with students to develop personal learning plans that incorporate their preferred learning styles.

**Student projects** will include assignments on business planning, crop planning, and an independent project. The independent project allows students to focus on a specific component of agriculture that they want to explore more deeply.

**Field trips** give students an opportunity to gain a different perspective of life on the farm and see a diverse set of farming operations and marketing models throughout the state. Vermont is home to a wide array of innovative farmers who are willing and open to host students on their farms for tours, workshops, and work parties during the peak of the growing season. Throughout the program, students will be introduced to and inspired by an extensive network of farmers who are committed to small-scale agriculture as a career path and a way of life.



# Skills and Knowledge *will include*

## ► Organic Crop Production

- Vegetable, flower, and herb production
- Integrated grazing systems
- Organic soil fertility management
- Compost production and use
- Cover cropping and crop rotation systems
- Propagation and greenhouse management
- Direct sowing and transplanting
- Crop families
- Individual crop classes
- Harvest and post-harvest handling techniques
- Strawberry, blueberry, raspberry, and apple production
- Season extension
- Organic pest, disease, and weed management
- Irrigation systems
- Tractor and small equipment operation
- Tillage systems including regular, low, and no till
- Hand tools and field systems
- Product safety
- Winter greens production
- Perennial systems
- Understanding of food production as part of an ecological system
- Basic carpentry skills
- Electric fence systems

## ► Marketing

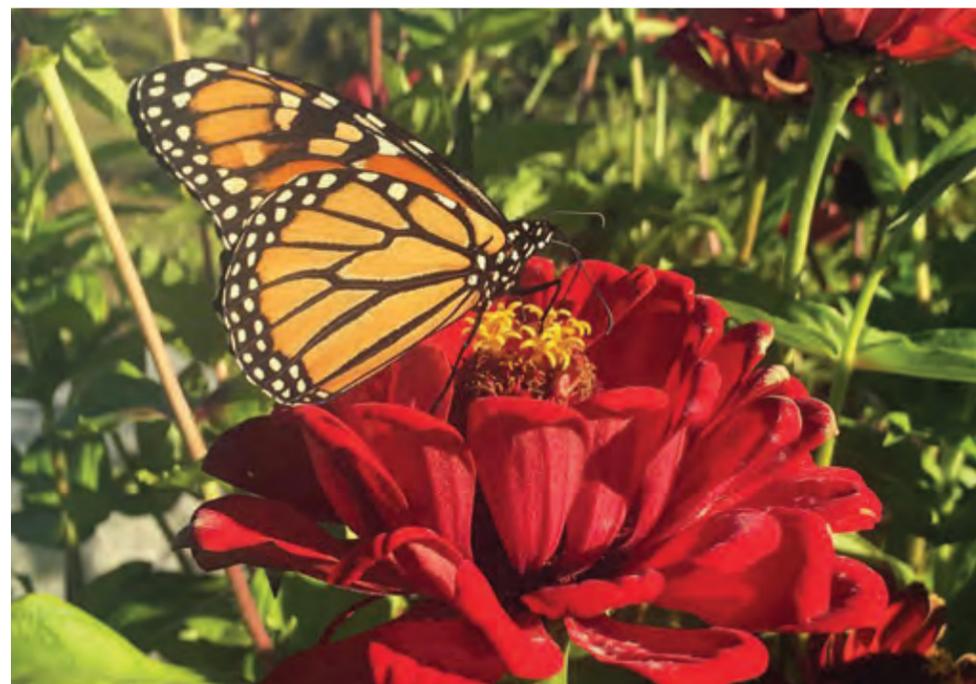
- CSA management
- Farmers market
- Wholesale marketing
- Marketing to a retail co-op

## ► Farm Business Management

- Farm financials
- Agricultural business planning
- Collective farm model
- Crop planning and field mapping
- Organic certification process
- Land access
- Systems and record keeping

## ► Beyond the Farm

- Farm field trips
- Independent projects
- Social justice issues in the food system





# Program *Partnerships & Guest Instructors*

Students will have the incredible opportunity to learn from some of Vermont's most successful small-scale farmers and experts in the local food system. For a taste of the educational community of the program, here are some of our partner farmers and guest instructors.

## Partner Farms



### Intervale Community Farm

The Intervale Community Farm is a 500-member community-supported agriculture (CSA) farm founded in 1990. Owned by the members of the Intervale Community Farm Cooperative, ICF grows certified organic vegetables, herbs, flowers, and berries on 45 acres of Intervale bottomland. They offer summer and winter CSA shares, with membership priority given to ICF Co-op members. ICF is committed to providing a diverse blend of excellent quality organic food at a good consumer value in a sustainable and participatory manner.



### Bread and Butter Farm

Bread and Butter Farm, owned by Corie Pierce, is located just south of Burlington. The farm includes year-round specialty greens production, grass-fed beef production, and a grass-fed sheep, pigs, and turkeys. They grow, raise, and produce food sustainably by focusing on the land, plants, animals and community that supports their whole farm. They also host additional community events like burger night, music concerts, and workshops.

## Guest Instructors

- **Andy Jones** — Manager of Intervale Community Farm in Burlington, VT
- **Ann Hazelrigg** — UVM Extension Plant Pathologist and instructor
- **Annie White** — Plant and Soil Science Lecturer; owner and landscape designer at Nectar Landscape Design Studio
- **Brandon Bless** — Co-owner and farmer of Bread and Butter Farm in Shelburne, VT
- **Corie Pierce** — Co-owner and farmer of Bread and Butter Farm in Shelburne, VT
- **Dave Barrington** — Retired Plant Biology Professor
- **Don Stevens** — Chief of the Nulhegan Band of the Coosuk - Abenaki Nation
- **Ernesto Mendez** — Plant and Soil Science Chair and Professor, Co-Director of UVM's Agroecology and Livelihoods Collaborative
- **Fred Magdoff** — Emeritus Professor of Plant and Soil Science at UVM; co-author of the fourth edition of *Building Crops for Better Soil: Sustainable Soil Management*
- **Hans Estrin** — Produce Safety Accreditation Program Coordinator
- **Hilary Martin** — Co-owner of Diggers' Mirth Collective Farm in Burlington, VT
- **Jacob Mushlin** — Owner of Compose Design Build
- **Jen Miller** — Farm Services Director at NOFA-VT
- **Jessica Sanford** — Owner and farmer of Adam's Berry Farm in Charlotte, VT
- **Joshua Faulkner** — Research Associate Professor; Interim Director, Center for Sustainable Agriculture; Farming and Climate Change Program Coordinator; Director, Agricultural and Environmental Testing Lab
- **Julie Rubaud** — Owner and farmer of Red Wagon Plants in Hinesburg, VT
- **Lindsey Ruhl** — UVM Extension Research Specialist, Northwest Crops and Soils Program
- **Martha Caswell** — Institute for Agroecology, Associate Director of Community and Learning
- **Nicole Dehne** — Vermont Organic Farmers Certification Director
- **Rebecca Maden** — UVM Extension Vegetable Nutrient Management Specialist; co-owner of Singing Cedars Farm in Orwell, VT
- **Sara Armstrong Donegan** — Farm Business Specialist at the Intervale Center; co-owner of Trillium Hill Farm
- **Taylor Mendell** — Owner and farmer of Footprint Farm in Starksboro, VT
- **Teresa Mares** — Associate Professor of Anthropology and the Director for the Graduate Program in Food Systems; author of *Life on the Other Border: Farmworkers and Food Justice in Vermont*
- **Terry Bradshaw** — Director of UVM's Horticultural Research Center, Research Associate for Plant and Soil Science; UVM Plant and Soil Science Department Chair
- **Vic Izzo** — Entomologist, Research Associate and Lecturer in the Plant and Soil Science Department; Head of Undergraduate Education in UVM's Institute for Agroecology
- **Wendy Sue Harper** — WSH Consulting, Soil Scientist and previous Professor at UVM
- **Will Lambek** — Migrant Justice



# A week in the life *at the farm*

Students are engaged with multiple farming operations. They have the most hands-on practice at Catamount Educational Farm. On top of all the experiential learning, students also have lectures that deepen their production, marketing, and business planning knowledge.

*Just like on a working farm, a week in the life of a student can be varied and diverse. This is what a typical week in the Farmer Training Program looks like.*

Monday ..... M T W TH F

To start off the week, you meet your fellow students and program staff to do a field walk where you will assess the needs of the farm for that week. Students observe crop health, weed pressure, harvest needs, etc. to help create a list of tasks and priorities that need to be done. This weekly activity of the farm walk helps you hone your skills at “thinking like a farmer” and helps you develop a critical eye for what the pressing needs are on a farm. After the farm walk, the group has a meeting detailing the logistics and learning goals of the upcoming week. The remainder of the day students will develop their field work skills – operating tractors, harvesting, seeding in the greenhouse, or hoeing in the squash field.

Tuesday ..... M T W TH F

All day Tuesday, you are on-site at Catamount Farm experiencing hands-on learning, while completing tasks designated as priorities in the field that week. It is a harvest day, so half of the students will work on harvesting and washing produce in preparation for the Old North End Farmers Market on Tuesday afternoon, for the Wednesday CSA delivery, and for wholesale deliveries. In the afternoon some students will set up and person the farm stand. The other students will work in the field weeding, doing tractor work, and tending to farm chores.

Wednesday ..... M T W TH F

Wednesdays are another day where everyone is at the farm. In the morning, one of the harvest crews will be packing out CSA shares. Other groups are continuing with priorities in the field - whether that is weeding the carrots, hilling the potatoes, trellising the tomatoes, or harvesting corn. The afternoon is a classroom day. Classes are taught by both FTP staff and guest speakers. Guest speakers include UVM professors, extension agents, area farmers, and other agriculture professionals. Class topics will include soil fertility management, pest and disease management, livestock management, farm financials and business planning and more.

Thursday ..... M T W TH F

On Thursdays, the cohort is on the farm for half of the day. Farm priorities are accomplished as a team throughout the morning. In the afternoon, the group heads out to an area farm for a field trip. An array of farm operations are represented on our field trip days. We explore everything from goat farms to herb operations to farms managed cooperatively to compost making facilities. The intention in our field trips is to showcase for students the myriad facets that a future in farming can be.

Friday ..... M T W TH F

Friday mornings start with a written assessment (every other week) on competency and understanding of highlighted skills and objectives from the previous two weeks. After reviewing the assessment in small groups, students and staff recount accomplishments and remaining priorities for the week. The latter part of the morning is spent in rotation groups to finish any necessary tasks. Friday afternoons include another class to wind up the week. Fridays end earlier than other days of the week. We break at 2:30 pm.

# Program fee *and other costs*



## Housing Information

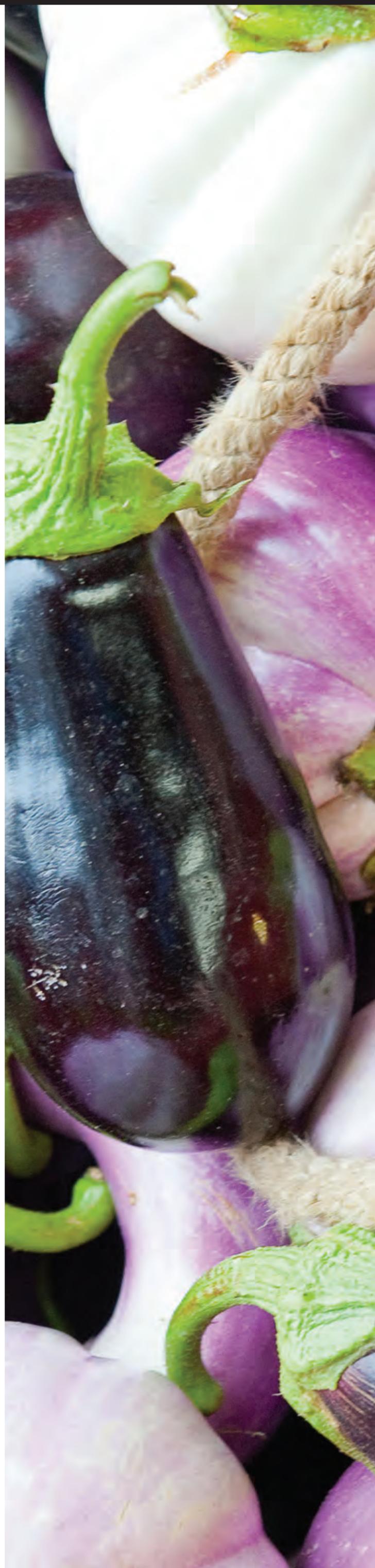
Burlington is a vibrant place to live, work, and learn. Housing options in Burlington vary depending on what students are looking for. Monthly rent can range from \$700-\$1,000 per month depending on location and number of people living in your house or apartment. Students are responsible for finding their own housing. Once the cohort is selected we will connect you with each other and share housing options we know about through the UVM community. UVM is not responsible for finding housing for students in this program nor for any issues that arise as a result of rental situations between students and leasers.

*Below are some resources for finding housing options around Burlington:*

- [Craigslist Vermont](#)
- [Burlington Rent \(Burlington, VT\)](#)
- [roomies.com/rooms/burlington-vt](#)
- [Apartments.com: Apartments for rent in Burlington, VT](#)
- [UVM: Off-Campus Housing Website](#)
- [Facebook Group: Burlington, Vermont & Area Housing and Rentals](#)
- [Homeshare Vermont](#)

*Disclaimer: Rental property owners are responsible for reporting information fairly and accurately, and UVM cannot guarantee the completeness or accuracy of such information. UVM does NOT independently verify the accuracy of information posted on the site. Inclusion of any property or rental unit on this website does not constitute, and shall not be construed or reported as (1) an endorsement or approval by UVM of the landlord, its properties, or its business practices, or (2) a warranty or representation by UVM as to the quality, safety or other features of such property and/or its owners or management agent(s). Additionally, UVM does NOT endorse or conduct reviews of the credibility of individuals who post requests for roommates or rental units. You are strongly encouraged to use good judgment and caution when meeting with individuals you do not know and/or providing those individuals with personal information. UVM expressly disclaims any and all responsibility for any problems that may arise with regard to such property or rental units or with regard to disputes between landlords and tenants or between roommates concerning such property or rental units. All prospective tenants are encouraged to exercise their own good judgment when evaluating a prospective rental unit or landlord.*

*It is the goal of the program to foster an integrated learning environment for all participants. Besides working and learning on the farm, we encourage students to engage together in shared meals, study groups, discussions, educational movies, and social events.*





# Frequently Asked Questions

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **What is the difference between this program and apprenticing on a farm?**

This program offers a more formal, intensive approach to a farming education, with a weekly classroom day taught by a wide range of experts, including farmers, University professors, extension agents, and other professionals working in the local food system. The program is in UVM's Plant and Soil Science Department, providing students the opportunity to interact with and learn from many of the faculty and staff who teach in the program and conduct research at the farm. In addition to the classroom curriculum, participants gain in-depth experience through managing the [10-acre Catamount Educational Farm](#) with staff instruction, working alongside seasoned farmers with diverse business models, and visiting other local farms. Students also design and complete an independent project that allows them to further explore their specific interests. Unlike being an apprentice on one farm, where your main responsibility is to be a worker on the farm, the UVM Farmer Training Program offers time and resources for learning that a traditional farm apprenticeship cannot provide.

### **What is the weekly schedule?**

Students are on the farm Monday–Thursday 8:30–4:00 and Friday 8:30–2:30. This allows students to find employment on Friday afternoons and weekends.

### **Is this program right for someone with little experience in farming?**

This program is geared toward beginning farmers who have shown enthusiasm and commitment to sustainable agriculture. If you have not yet worked a full season on a farm, you can demonstrate that commitment through volunteering on a farm, attending conferences, WWOOFing, having a community garden plot, taking relevant courses, etc.

### **What are the housing options?**

Students are responsible for finding their own housing in the Burlington area. They can choose to live in the thriving downtown area or in one of the nearby communities, opting to rent an apartment or a room, or share a house, depending on their preference. Students should expect to pay between \$500–\$1,000 per month for housing. We also support accepted students by connecting them with others in the program who are looking for group housing.

### **Are there scholarships or grants available?**

There are regional and national opportunities worth researching and applying for. A few great examples: Future Organic Farmer Grant Fund and VSAC Grants for non-degree courses (VT residents only). AmeriCorps educational stipends and the VA GI Bill can also be used to cover tuition. Additionally, the program fundraises for scholarship funds. There is a separate application process for enrolled students who wish to apply. Some students are granted partial scholarships, awarded by need and merit.

### **Is financial aid available for this program?**

The Farmer Training Program is a non-credit program, and therefore it is not eligible for financial aid, work study, or University loan programs. Previous students have taken out personal loans to help finance the program.

### **How many people will be in the program in?**

The program is limited to 25 students.

### **What is the tuition for the Farmer Training Program?**

The program tuition is \$6,650, which does not include housing or meals.

### **Besides tuition, what are other costs involved with attending this program?**

*Here are some estimates of additional costs students should plan for:*

- Housing: \$700 to \$1,000 per month
- Meals: \$200 to \$400 per month
- Tools/Materials: \$200 total (approximate)

### **What do participants do with this certificate?**

Many participants use their experience in the program to start their own farm and food businesses or they go on to manage or work for another farm. Graduates become educators or work for non-profits and other organizations, helping to reform our food system and increase access to local foods. This practical training program helps prepare students to be effective workers in the local, sustainable food movement as it continues to grow and create new job opportunities for qualified people. See our alumni page on our website for profiles of our alumni and how they have incorporated their experience into a career.



# FARMER TRAINING PROGRAM

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