
HUDSON VALLEY FARM HUB

ProFarmer Training Program *Program Summary*

The ProFarmer Training Program is an educational initiative of the Hudson Valley Farm Hub, a 1,255-acre not-for-profit farm in Hurley, New York. Through demonstration and farmer training, we provide education and raise awareness about agricultural practices that are locally rooted, equitable, ecologically regenerative, and economically viable. The ProFarmer Program is a 2-5 year management training program for those who aspire to obtain farm manager positions or to own their own farm enterprises in the Hudson Valley.

Through this practical, hands-on curriculum grounded in the work of the Farm Hub, ProFarmer trainees will attain agricultural and mechanical technical skills, knowledge of the Hudson Valley food system, strong relationships with colleagues on and off the farm, leadership and communication skills, business skills and deep experience with equitable and ecological farming practices. Recognizing that many ProFarmer trainees will need to continue to support themselves and their dependents during the program, and that the program activities will not allow time for outside employment, each ProFarmer trainee selected for admission into the program will be hired as a full-time, year-round employee of the Farm Hub, receiving a full-time salary with full benefits, as well as the option of free, modest housing in the Farm Hub residences.

Our Farm

The Farm Hub is in its third year as a nonprofit education, research and demonstration farm on land used by previous owners as a for-profit sweet corn operation. This land use transition extends beyond soil and cropping methods to every part of the farm's operation. In 2016, our field crops include 70 acres of field corn, 200 acres of soybeans and 450 acres of oats. In addition, 120 acres of land are dedicated to a Small Grains Field Trial led by Cornell University and Cornell Cooperative Extension of Ulster County and managed by the Farm Hub staff. Our diversified vegetable production is 32 acres of various crops bound for our seasonal farm stand and also for wholesalers who market produce in the Hudson Valley.

Over the last three years, the Farm Hub has engaged partners like Conservation Design Forum and Hawthorne Valley's Farmscape Ecology Program to map and monitor the flora and fauna of the land. We've conducted extensive soil health tests and assessed parts of the farm in terms of production capacity and optimal use. Our intent is to create a farmscape that supports and sustains crop production by providing habitat for the many different forms of life on the farm, whereby our wild areas (wetlands, forest, meadow, shrub-land) function in synergy with the cultural areas (croplands). Through their participation in the program, ProFarmer trainees will be part of shaping the farm ecological and social environment, including the creation of systems and procedures, the demonstration of equitable and ecological farming practices, and the way teaching and learning happens on the farm.

Our Approach

The Farm Hub aims to be an exemplary learning, working and living environment, and ProFarmer trainees will have the opportunity to co-create the culture and experiential education approach of an evolving initiative. Our program combines hands-on experience with intellectual, social, and emotional

engagement. Trainees are actively encouraged to pose questions, solve problems, make decisions, and assess their results through open, compassionate dialogue. Open dialogue is supported by the creation of safe spaces to nurture relationships with self, others, and the outside world, and allow for authentic self-expression and individualized learning.

Project-based Learning

ProFarmers will explore their interests and utilize the farm as a place for production, experiential learning and practice through Farm Hub and independent projects. In 2016, our projects focus upon individual crops in the 32-acre vegetable enterprise, from seed to harvest to market. Creating crop and harvest manuals based on research, observation, and record keeping will allow future farmers to learn from our field-based experiences. Also, this spring ProFarmers contributed to improvements at our Farm Stand on Route 209 in Hurley, a real-time project that explored issues of healthy food access (accepting EBT), financial technology (preparing the stand to integrate Square payment and inventory system) and procurement (developing values-based criteria for product selection).

Practice

Farmers with decades of experience in production will share their skills and knowledge through the daily operation of our working farm. Program educators, many of whom are farmers, as well as leaders in sustainable agriculture and related practices, will offer continued training and mentorship. ProFarmers will gain invaluable experience through their work in the field over several growing seasons. They will work alongside our farm crew, many of whom have worked the land here for years, and existing ProFarmer trainees. At present, our curriculum is focused on vegetable crop production. The farm work is based upon a mechanized scale of production, which allows ProFarmers to gain exposure to a wide range of equipment. Tractor and equipment operation, soil health management, crop planning and record-keeping, and mechanic maintenance and mechanic shop skills are all rich areas for practical application.

Pedagogy

Our training program is inspired and informed by “Popular Education.” This learning methodology is based on the principle that all people possess knowledge and dignity, rooted in their life experiences. With this as its core, the goal of popular education is to open a space for trust and participation, to affirm and honor diversity and to commit to creating and recreating knowledge through dialogue, action and contemplation. A key element of popular education is the intention to build knowledge that leads to collective action, with the aim at larger institutional and societal transformation to reshape power structures and move towards equity.¹ The ProFarmer Program will build knowledge using this ongoing, collective process. ProFarmers will also learn through their communities. Field trips to farms, workshops, twilight meetings and the natural world will provide opportunities for interaction, community-building and learning.

Categories of Learning for ProFarmers

Through the lenses of equity and ecological farming practices, the curriculum focuses on developing conceptual knowledge and practical skills across several categories by means of hands-on work experience and training as well as classroom education.

¹ Pancho Argüelles Paz y Puente, Introduction to Popular Education and Discussion Guide for CCHE - *Colectivo Flatlander*.

Farm-based Ecology

We will explore how to create ecological synergy between the diversity of ecosystems on the farm, making informed, compassionate decisions on the impacts to local ecology. Scouting walks, field-based lessons, and interaction with the Esopus Creek watershed will lead to land stewardship opportunities on farm and in the community. ProFarmers will also gain exposure to our planning process for land management and species conservation in the face of a changing climate.

Soil Health

ProFarmers will have a comprehensive understanding of the physical, chemical and biological properties of soil. Here at the Farm Hub, we view the farm as a living organism with the soil at its foundation. Throughout the program, ProFarmers will hone their skills to nourish and manage soil health. Some activities will include comprehensive soil testing, planning rotations, crop planning and record-keeping, and application of soil amendments.

Food Justice

We are committed to create a culture of well-being, inclusion and empowerment of all staff at the Farm Hub. We aim to build a spirit of collaborative work and learning based upon compassion and honest expression. Non-violent communication is one process we will use to guide our work. Another area we have been developing thus far is our work in language justice, offering ESL classes for our monolingual farm crew as well as Spanish language instruction for English-speaking staff.

In 2016, ProFarmers, along with the rest of our team, will participate in sessions to understand the concepts of racial equity and food justice, explore how injustices play out in the food system, and identify strategies to advance equity in our work. As we continue to transition the farm, our workers and ProFarmers are part of shaping our practices related to labor and other farm operations.

Equipment Operation and Maintenance

ProFarmers will have a thorough understanding of how tractors and equipment work and have the ability to independently assess maintenance needs and troubleshoot problems. ProFarmers will work with experienced operators on tractor safety training and practice and will attend regular shop lessons on equipment use, maintenance, and record-keeping. We will also learn to make decisions on efficiency and scale-appropriate choices for equipment.

Insect and Plant Disease Management

Soil health is the foundation of our approach to plant health. ProFarmers will have basic knowledge and identification skills of local invertebrates and plant diseases. An understanding of plant pathology and entomology will help farmers to prevent plant disease and insect damage, eliminating the need for chemical inputs. The role of beneficial insects on the farm and pest management strategies that do the least harm to our environment and health are brought to the fore. We will also learn about biological, beneficials and other effective OMRI-listed materials for remedial application.

Farm, Worker and Food Safety

Our crew and ProFarmers participate in regular trainings, from tractor, equipment and shop safety to worker safety including First Aid/CPR certification. Opportunities for many certifications will be available to ProFarmers, including Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) and Worker Protection Standards (WPS).

Local Stewardship and Community

ProFarmers will engage with the local community through onsite events and regional learning opportunities. Our Farm Stand on Route 209 is the public face of the Farm Hub, and ProFarmers have already engaged in its ongoing development.

Crop Planning and Record-keeping

ProFarmers will utilize crop planning software and develop enterprise budgets to be able to make decisions based upon reliable data. Timely record-keeping will allow them to track resources, evaluate crop performance and meet regulatory standards. The ProFarmers' data collection on the farm will not only build their own skills, but also contribute to the development of knowledge and good practice here at the Farm Hub.

Small Business and Leadership Skills

Each ProFarmer will develop plans for their comprehensive farm enterprise through a whole farm planning approach that balances the quality of life they desire with their resources, the need for production and profitability, and a commitment to long-term stewardship. We will draw on resources like *Holistic Management*, along with the expertise of regional farmers, food entrepreneurs, and business assistance providers. By encouraging the financial literacy of our trainees to lead them on a path toward effective business management, we will use the planning and analysis tools necessary to run a profitable business, create enterprise budgets and conduct cost/benefit analyses to increase efficiencies on the farm. In addition to business skills, we aim to develop leadership and effective communication skills that lead to new social-agricultural enterprises.

Collaborative Market Development

ProFarmers will develop their own marketing strategy to achieve their personal and financial goals. Throughout the program, they will learn about various new and innovative marketing approaches, with a particular focus on collaborative marketing in the regional food system. Through market research and interaction with wholesale distributors and other buyers, ProFarmers will better understand the purpose and methods for calculating the full cost of food and identifying and choosing marketing channels to create a sustainable business. The ProFarmers will build relationships with other farmers and food businesses in the regional food economy and understand what needs exist for food, feed, fiber, flower and seed products in the marketplace.

About the Hudson Valley Farm Hub

Training will take place at the Hudson Valley Farm Hub, a 1,255 acre non-profit farm in Hurley, NY that provides professional farmer training, hosts and supports research, and demonstrates innovative agricultural practices. The Farm Hub is an initiative of the Local Economies Project (LEP). LEP's mission is to build an equitable and ecologically resilient food system in the Hudson Valley – one that meets the economic and social needs of our communities while working in harmony with natural systems. Towards this mission, LEP develops programs, provides grant funding, and acts as a convener in the regional food and farming economy. To find out more, visit the LEP at www.localeconomiesproject.org and the Hudson Valley Farm Hub at www.hvfarmhub.org.