



ORGANIC FARMER TRAINING PROGRAM Information Packet

In this packet you will find information on the following:

- ❖ Information about our program and farm
- ❖ Information on program fees and cost
- ❖ Housing information, resources at the MSU and staff profiles

Please feel free to contact us directly if you have any additional questions.

Contact information:

msufarm@msu.edu

www.msuorganicfarm.org

Farm Phone: 517-230-7987

Please send applications to:

Denae Friedheim
MSU Student Organic Farm
Organic Farmer Training Program
A288 Plant Soil Sciences Building
East Lansing, MI 48824

OFTP 2011 Program Overview

The Organic Farmer Training Program is selective. For the 2011 class we will take 16 full time students. We are looking for candidates who are committed to nine-and-a-half months of intensive training and work in organic farming. Our program provides hands-on experience in managing and working on our 4-season farm, combined with lectures, readings and workshops and is designed to give participants a solid foundation in the principles, practices, management and hard skills needed to operate an organic farm.

Applicants must be ready to devote themselves to an intensive and focused learning experience. We aim to create a healthy and vibrant learning community where students will learn from one another as much as they will learn from the land they will be farming and from the program instructors. To this end, we look to recruit a diverse cohort of students who bring a wide variety of skills, experience, goals and passions and who can engage and contribute positively to our working and learning community. It is important that you understand that this is an intensive program. *The program is not appropriate for those seeking an initial exposure or inquiry into organic farming;* it is intended for participants who know they want to commit to work in local and organic food production or education and are ready for an intensive immersion learning experience, to learn from doing, to learn from professors, farmers, peers, and a whole host of other people interested in local, sustainable foods systems.

If you would like more information on the program or to arrange a visit, please contact msufarm@msu.edu and include Organic Farmer Training Program in the subject line or call the farm @ 517-230-7987

This is a nine month intensive program spanning the entire growing season.

2011 Program Dates: March 1st – November 18th

Program Costs and Payments

The program fee is \$8400. Other costs include those for books, required tools, and optional conferences (estimated at \$600). Half of the program fee or \$4200 is due upon the student's acceptance of our invitation to join the 2011 cohort. The other half of the program fee is due 4 weeks prior to program start date, Feb 1, 2010. Program fees are non-refundable and failure to submit timely payment will result in the loss of your spot in the program and the filling of that spot with a person from our waitlist.



Program Information and Background

Michigan State University Student Organic Farm Organic Farmer Training Program is a nine month intensive training program in year round organic farming focusing on diversified production of vegetables, flowers, fruits and herbs for local markets. Our program emphasizes student learning in hands on farm management and decision making as well as development of necessary farming skills and knowledge. Students engage in the management of the 10 acre certified organic farm including 16,000 sqft of passive solar greenhouse space and 4000 sqft of heated greenhouse space. Marketing experience includes a 48week CSA, six-month on campus farm stand, and sales to campus dining services.

Students also develop competencies in farm skills through skills trainings and by engaging in the day to day work and operation of the farm. Hands-on-training is combined with workshops, lectures, readings, and assignments that build participant's knowledge and understanding of organic farming principles and practices. The program is designed to give participants a strong background in production skills as well as the knowledge, management, and decision making skills necessary to operate a diversified small farm. Program components include rotations in CSA, Farmstand, Propagation, and Edible Forest Gardening as well as management and oversight of a production field or garden and development of a Personal Learning Plan.

Our program prepares graduates for careers in organic farming, urban agriculture / community gardening, and other sustainable agriculture related careers. Program participants who satisfactorily complete the program will earn a certificate of completion from the MSU Student Organic Farm and Department of Horticulture.

This program is one-of-a-kind as students learn by operating a four season, 48 week Community Supported Agriculture program (CSA) that provides fresh and stored vegetables **year-round** to more than 100 families. In the summer season, fresh herbs, flowers and fruit are also included in the shares. In addition to traditional field scale production, the farm uses unheated passive solar greenhouses, heated greenhouses and cold storage facilities to operate the year round CSA. A two-thirds acre permaculture site and management of laying hens, pigs and bees are also important components to the program. Other independent learning projects and management opportunities are key components of the program.

This program was developed because the need for small scale, organic growers is increasing at a rapid rate. All people who wish to promote sustainability through local food systems are great candidates for this program including:

- 1) *New and Beginning Farmers:* Individuals seeking knowledge and experience in organic and year round farming who wish to operate their own farm or work as a highly skilled employee or manager of an organic farming operation. Farmers who are considering building or restructuring their operations around direct marketing of local organic vegetables, fruits and flowers and year round production using passive solar greenhouses (hoophouses) and season extension.
- 2) *Urban and Community Farmers and Gardeners, Educators:* People seeking to contribute to personal, local and national food security by developing a less centralized food system that focuses on small scale diversified and year round production suitable for urban and peri-urban environments. Educators wanting to incorporate organic and sustainable food system topics into their programs.
- 3) *Current Students Interested in Sustainable Agriculture:* Students interested in organic farming, sustainability, environmental science, environmental / experiential education, agroecology, and other related careers. Students at colleges or universities with gardens or farms but no supporting agriculture or farming courses. Students interested in starting their own sustainable businesses or organizations involving local and organic food production.

Program Goals

The Organic Farmer Training Program is committed to successfully preparing graduates to operate their own farm or community food system endeavor. Graduates will be qualified to run small-scale farms, work closely with existing farmers, and be advocates of local food systems based on first hand experience and training in local organic production.

Learning Outcomes of the Program

MSU Organic Farmer Training Program is highly unique. It offers a 9 month full growing season, hands-on, practical training program in organic farming that is designed to teach both production *and* management skills in an environment where personalized learning goals and training are emphasized. In addition, the Student Organic Farm is the first cold climate educational farm that trains students for year round production and distribution of fresh vegetables.

The expected program outcomes for Organic Farming Certificate Students are:

- A certificate of completion from the MSU Student Organic Farm and Department of Horticulture.
- One full growing season of experience operating a certified organic farm supplying a 60 share, 48 week CSA, 40 share summer CSA, six-month on campus Farm Stand, and whole sale accounts to University Dining Services.

- Management of passive solar and heated greenhouses for cold climate year round production and harvest.
- Understanding of agricultural production systems as ecological systems and the ability to apply this knowledge and perspective in farm management.
- Ability to understand and apply both the theory and practice of organic farming to management of an organic farm.
- Knowledge and skills in organic production including:
 - ❖ Organic Soil and Fertility Management
 - ❖ Compost Production and Use
 - ❖ Organic Insect and Disease Management
 - ❖ Organic Weed Management
 - ❖ Organic Vegetable Production
 - ❖ Organic Fruit Production
 - ❖ Organic Flower and Herb Production
 - ❖ Crop Irrigation
 - ❖ Crop Planning and Scheduling
 - ❖ Harvest and Post Harvest Handling of Specialty Crops
 - ❖ Hand Tool and Machinery Use for Garden and Field Scale Production
 - ❖ Organic Transplant Production
 - ❖ Passive Solar Greenhouses Structures and Crop Production
 - ❖ Organic Systems Plans and Certification
 - ❖ Direct and Wholesale Marketing of Organic Crops
- To have the necessary confidence to start a farm, business, or other projects.
- Development of critical thinking skills around food systems / organic agriculture
- To establish connections to a local, regional, national, and global network of people who are active in the sustainable agriculture movement and access and exposure to a wide variety of job opportunities, conferences, and organizations.
- Personal and professional development, teamwork, community building skills.
- Development of a Personalized Learning Plan to guide your learning and activities in the program and beyond.

This program is designed to be a nine month intensive full-time program. The program includes practical hands on management of the Student Organic Farm along with workshops, lectures, skills trainings and learning community activities. All components are important in order for the participants to achieve the outlined learning outcomes. *Part time participation is not possible.*

The developers and instructors at the Organic Farmer Training Program are committed to preparing students who will be ready to enter or re-enter their careers and lives with a well rounded and practical perspective on organic farming and the sustainable agriculture movement. To this end, students are engaged in classroom style learning, reading, discussions and projects, combined with an “apprenticeship” style of learning that involves operation of our farm and participation in the management of our fields and markets. Participants work in the hoop houses, greenhouses and fields along side their instructors and student farmers with the expectation that, as their competency increases,

they will take on more and more responsibility of the farm operations. Students will also have evaluated assignments and opportunities to be presenters and teachers.

The MSU SOF and Facilities / Resources Available to Program Participants

The SOF includes 10 acres of certified organic land, with 16,000 square feet of passive solar greenhouses (hoop houses) and 4000 square feet of heated greenhouses. In addition, we have 5 acres of transitional land and are building a new mobile greenhouse this summer. In addition to vegetable, fruit, and flower production fields and gardens, it includes a unique 2/3 acre Edible Forest Garden along with a flock of 60 laying hens, 12 pastured pigs, 5 beehives, a small grove of sugar maples for maple sugaring, and a small mushroom production area.

The SOF also has an active outreach program focusing on passive solar greenhouse production and working with rural and urban growers across Michigan on organic year round production for local markets. The SOF hosts regular farmer training workshops and field days.

Undergraduate and graduate students participate in the operation of the SOF as both paid farm crew and volunteers and are essential to the learning community. The many groups of people that use the farm include CSA members, MSU and Lansing Community College Classes, the Residential Initiative for Study in the Environment (RISE) and the Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems (SAFS) undergraduate specializations at MSU, student and faculty research projects, school tours, as well as the public who are welcome as volunteers and visitors. Many of the smaller projects including the laying hens, bees, maple sugaring, and mushrooms are student initiated projects that occur at the farm often in partnership with faculty and researchers at Michigan State University.

SOF History

The SOF is a student-initiated project. In 1999, members of the Michigan Sustainable Agriculture Network student organization wanted to have a place to apply some of the things they were learning in classes, to learn things they were not getting in classes, to farm organically, and to get their hands dirty, with some first hand farming experience. At the same time, Horticulture Professor, Dr. John Biernbaum began researching possibilities for four season farming in Michigan, or growing vegetables year round in unheated hoop houses. The marriage of these two projects became inevitable as the year round farming provided opportunities for students to engage in farming during the main part of the academic year (September to May) when most students are taking classes.

With leadership from John, the original core group of students built three additional passive solar greenhouses at the "farm" and in the Spring of 2003 began their first season of production. The SOF was first certified in 2004 by the Organic Growers of Michigan. The students were interested in following the CSA- Community Supported Agriculture- model and grew produce year round to provide to the membership. With cold storage and the hoop houses, the SOF became the first, year round CSA in Michigan, and only one of a few in

the entire country. The CSA currently serves 60 weekly shares (one share feeds a family of four). From the beginning, the aim of the farm was to provide a place where students could come and volunteer, work, visit, and have input on the development of the land and farm.

Due to the vision and hard work of many, the farm has flourished. Over the last 10 years, the farm has developed into a place where many different groups have access to participating in the growing of organic food while creating learning opportunities. As the farm developed, it became clear that many students wanted the farm to offer a more formal approach to learning about organic farming. The Organic Farmer Training Program is a product and evolution of the ideas and vision of the original group of students and faculty who started the farm and all those who have come since then.



MSU Student Organic Farm Faculty and Staff

The MSU Student Organic Farm and programs are managed and coordinated by the SOF Steering Team with input from the farm staff, students and other faculty. Steering Team members and SOF staff bring a variety of backgrounds and experience to the SOF. They all have made a personal commitment to student learning and organic farming.

Steering Team Members

John Biernbaum- Professor Department of Horticulture and Faculty Coordinator

Email: biernbau@msu.edu phone: 517-355-5191 ext 1419

John is a professor in the Horticulture Department and along with the original group of students is one of the founders of the SOF. He has worked with students, staff and faculty since the farm's inception to secure funding, coordinate special topic classes, and help develop the site and facilities, the CSA and SOF teaching programs. John also initiated the SOF Outreach Program now coordinated by Adam Montri. John teaches courses in greenhouse management, organic farming principles and practices, compost production and use, transplant production, organic certification, culinary and medicinal herbs, and has taught vegetable crop and cutflower production. He does research on year-round diversified organic farming with emphasis on the PSGH. John has also coordinated the certification of the 5 acre MSU CHES Organic Apple Research Plot by OCIA and OGM. He has developed and taught courses on organic transplant production, compost production and use, and winter greenhouse vegetable production for the MOSES Organic University and is currently working on developing on-line courses for these topics. In 2004 he was recognized by the Michigan Organic Food and Farming Alliance (MOFFA) with their Public Service Award and he is currently a member of the MOFFA Board of Directors.

Laurie Thorp, Coordinator of the RISE Specialization

Email: thorpl@msu.edu phone: 517-432-4944

Laurie has worked with students, staff and faculty since the start of the SOF to secure initial funding and to help guide programs and initiate new activities. Her RISE seminar class was the first to use the SOF as a classroom and RISE student projects include blue bird boxes, laying hens and the Bee-Team for honey production. Laurie's diverse background in horticulture (MSU undergrad), leadership development and experiential education has provided the guidance for the teaching efforts at the SOF to incorporate the most current academic concepts around effective student learning. Her leadership in the MSU Campus Sustainability programs and the new Sustainability Specialization has connected the SOF to the larger MSU community and food related initiatives.

Jeremy Moghtader- Organic Farmer Training Program Coordinator and Lead Instructor

Email: moghtad1@msu.edu phone: 517-355-5191 ext: 1411

Jeremy has been managing the SOF and its 48 wk CSA since August of 2004 and teaching in the organic farmer training program since its inception in 2007. He along with Corie Pierce (now teaching at Sterling College in VT), John and Laurie designed the curriculum and program for the Organic Farmer Training Program. Jeremy developed and taught the Organic Farming Principles and Practices course as well as co-developed the SOF Practicum with Corie. These courses helped to form the backbone components of the OFTP both in content and in approaches to teaching and learning.

Prior to joining the SOF, Jeremy was a graduate student at the University of Michigan School of Natural Resources and Environment where his research focused on Agroecology. He has studied and worked at the Evergreen State College Organic Farm in Olympia Washington, and worked at several organic farms including the Mountain School educational farm in Vermont. Jeremy is also very involved in food and farm system education and activism. He serves on the founding board of directors for the Agrarian Adventure, a non-profit organization dedicated to connecting k-12 students to the source of their food through experiential food and agriculture education. He also serves on the leadership team of the Food System Economic Partnership of SE Michigan where he chaired the Farm to School Committee for 3 years working to increase consumption of healthy locally produced food in school meals.

Adam Montri – SOF Outreach Coordinator

Email: admontri@msu.edu phone: 517-355-5191 ext 1407

Adam Montri coordinates the SOF outreach efforts around passive solar green houses and does outreach work with both urban and rural growers across the state of MI. Adam was one of the original student organic farmers while an undergraduate at MSU. He then went on to get his Masters degree in Horticulture at Penn State University where he had an emphasis on organic hightunnel tomato production and taught a vegetable production laboratory course. He returned to MSU and the SOF in the summer of 2006 as both the on-farm hightunnel construction and operation coordinator for a research project including hightunnels on 12 farms and as the hoophouse program leader funded by the USDA Risk Management Community Partnership Program. In 2009 Adam continues supporting farmers around the state including urban agriculture related programs in Flint and Detroit as an outreach academic specialist in the Horticulture Department.

Other SOF Staff

Dan Fillius – Production Manager

Originally from San Diego, CA, Dan hails to us most recently from Osceola, Wisconsin. His experience with farming and as an environmental education makes him an excellent member of the SOF team. Dan interacts regularly with the OFTP students, particularly in assisting them with their field and tunnel management. Aside from keeping a finger on the pulse of the farm as a whole, Dan supervises the MSU graduate and undergraduate crew of students who work at the farm.

OFTP Assistant instructors

Graduates from previous cohorts help manage the SOF and work with students in the training program, deepening both their own knowledge as well as that of current program participants. The assistant instructors provide invaluable knowledge, insight, and experience from a beginning farmer perspective to help facilitate the current cohort's learning opportunities while at the farm and while helping to manage propagation, farmstand and CSA.

A Typical Day and Week

The students are engaged with the farm operations Monday through Friday (and occasional weekends). Students are at the farm both in a learning capacity as well as a working capacity. A sample day may look like this:

Students meet first thing in the morning to do the weekly farm walk during which they assess, along with the lead instructor, the needs and priorities at the farm. Collectively, the group will make a plan for the week and discuss who will do what and when. Next, a demonstration for the students on proper transplanting techniques is followed up with actual transplanting. Then the students go to the compost workshop where the instructor presents for the first half of class about the compost piles they built last week and follows that up with a discussion on the way they SOF incorporates compost in to our farming operation. At lunch the students and instructors eat together and share a salad they have made with fresh produce from the farm.

After lunch, students on CSA rotation finish up any harvesting or wash-packing that needs to be done and set up for and run distribution. Other students work on their rotation duties, field management tasks, or other farm tasks identified on the work list. They split into groups and one group weeds carrots that were identified as a priority that morning, the second group prepares beds in the hoopouses for transplanting, while propagation rotation folks along with fall brassica field managers seed broccoli transplants. That evening, there is an optional discussion and lecture on medicinal herbs that a few of the students organized and about half of the students attend before eating a group dinner which they prepare with vegetables from the farm and other items from the local co-op.

Living Options in Lansing/East Lansing

It is the aim of the program staff to help create a holistic learning year for the participants. Besides the training and the work they will do together on the farm there will be other opportunities and expectations of engagement by participants. Students living near one another will more easily engage in shared meals, study groups, discussion groups, optional lectures, educational movies and social events. OFTP staff will help students to locate housing in the Lansing area. Past program participants have shared housing and OFTP staff can help initiate that coordination as well as identification of suitable housing opportunities for those interested. Co-op housing options and house or apartment rentals are available in both East Lansing and Lansing. Monthly rent can range from under \$200 per month to \$800 per month depending on location, number of people in your house or apartment. We will help to guide all accepted applicants to find appropriate housing.

In addition, we are committed to linking the program students to the local business that operate with sustainable practices. More information about the surrounding area, sustainable businesses, and social outlets are available at the following websites (these are just a few):

Visiting and Volunteering at SOF

It is highly recommended that applicants come to visit the SOF and meet some of the farmers and staff and instructors either prior to or concurrent with applying. Coming to the farm for a few hours to participate in farm work is a great way to learn more about SOF and the Organic Farmer Training Program. Visits are not required but they are very helpful for gaining more of a feel for the program. We understand that this may not be possible for out-of-state and far removed students. In this case, we encourage applicants to talk to one of our farmers, instructors or staff over the phone, if possible.

Contact Information: www.msuorganicfarm.org, msufarm@msu.edu, 517-230-7987