



Introduction to On Farm Internships

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Interns at Greentree Naturals 2003

Having an intern can be a mutually beneficial arrangement for the farmer and student alike.

The success of your internship will depend upon how you go about setting it up.

Most of us could use an extra set of hands around the farm. We could always use some help with assorted projects, but hiring an employee is not always a viable option due to financial limitations. You might want to consider offering an internship opportunity for a student interested in pursuing an agricultural endeavor.

The idea of offering an internship is to provide hands-on opportunity for a student to gain experience and possibly receive school credits related to a field of study compatible with your farming enterprise. This arrangement is usually short term. You could offer full-time or part-time work; depending on the terms you negotiate with the intern and the school (if the internship is associated with accreditation).

It is important that you realize that interns are not 'just workers' or 'free labor'. The intern needs to be given a varied assortment of projects in the field as well as specific time spent learning from a farmer\mentor type situation. The success of your internship will depend upon how you go about setting it up.

The intern may be there simply to better understand what a farming enterprise is all about by participating in the daily duties of farm life. Or, they may be considering farming as a life vocation to become the next generations' future sustainable farmer. It is important that we give them the most comprehensive learning experience possible. You need to show them not only what to do, but explain why they do it.

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Seven Tips for Setting up an On farm Internship:

1. Arrange compensation for the intern.
 - You might offer minimum wage (or higher), or work with the educational facility to ensure your interns will receive school credits while working for you. If you are paying wages, you will need to check into workman's compensation regulations.
 - Another option would be to provide room and board in exchange for labor, which would mean providing them with a place to stay and meals while in your service.
 - Consider tallying hours worked in exchange for a dollar value to be traded or exchanged for fresh produce or winter vegetables for storage.
2. Identify how the intern will benefit.
 - The intern will gain practical, 'hands-on' experience in the field he or she is studying. They will also gain a work reference to add to their resume. Some may develop relationships with farmers who provide mentoring and support after the internship is over. If arranged, the school credits are an additional bonus.
3. Identify how the farm will benefit.
 - You get an extra set of hands to help out on a temporary basis, but you do not have the same obligations that you have to a regular employee. You pay lower wages, if any at all, and you are not obligated to hire the intern at any point in the arrangement.
 - If you are looking for permanent employees down the road, interns give you a good understanding of a person's skills and their fit for your workplace before you hire. Additionally, if you set up a good internship program, you will develop relationships with university faculty who will introduce you to recent graduates if you indicate an interest in acquiring future employees.

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4. Understand what is expected with this type of agreement.
 - You will be expected to provide the student-intern with a legitimate work experience. You will be expected to provide orientation and training for the tasks he or she will perform. You will be expected also to supervise and provide pertinent feedback to both the intern and the school that is offering the internship. Naturally, you will be expected to provide the intern with a safe and respectful work environment.
5. Know what to expect from the school.
 - Look for a well-organized internship program. You should be assigned to a contact person who will oversee the internship placement. This person should be available to you (within reason) in event of problems or situations that require discussion. The school should also provide you with an internship contract and clear information regarding its requirements and expectations.
6. Know how to make the internship a good experience for the intern.
 - Be sure that you have work available for the intern, and be sure that the work is pertinent to their program of studies. If an intern is studying agricultural production, for example, and you put him to work answering the phone and dealing with customers, the intern will have no opportunity to hone the skills he is studying and frustration will most certainly be the result.
 - Naturally, a certain amount of "grunt work" is acceptable, as most jobs have their boring elements. Be sure, also, to include your intern in meetings and planning sessions whenever possible.
7. Discover how to go about finding an intern.
 - Identify the nature of the tasks you want the intern to perform, and then contact the College of Agriculture and/or the Plant Science or equivalent department at a school, college or university offering appropriate programs. Find out how their internships or internships work, and how the two of you might work together.

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Cultivating Success Farmer Mentor Responsibilities

- If the intern is an academic student, the Farmer Mentor will develop a Plan of Work with the student and a faculty advisor that clearly states learning objectives, and outlines work tasks, instructional sessions, and a project schedule for evaluation. If the intern is a community member earning CEU credits, expectations for his/her participation will be developed by Farmer Mentor and a university or extension representative at the beginning of the internship.
- Farmer Mentor will instruct the intern, in a classroom setting and on farm, on the practical skills and concepts of intensive, small acreage farming and/or ranching and market gardening, to include any or all of the following:
 - Vegetable production
 - Flowers production
 - Herbs
 - Berries
 - Tree crops
 - Livestock and/or livestock
 - Planting
 - Composting
 - Fertilizing
 - Irrigating
 - Harvesting
 - Pest control
 - Greenhouse/season extension
 - Marketing and record keeping
- Farmer Mentor will direct daily activities of interns in production, marketing and maintenance of the small acreage farm/ranch or market garden.
- Farmer Mentor may be required to maintain a monthly progress report to evaluate student's performance, and evaluate the intern at close of season.

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Skills, Knowledge & Abilities of a Cultivating Success Farmer Mentor

- Experience teaching, or a strong desire to teach in a garden or field setting. Important to have the ability to deliver information and instruction in a clear and thorough manner both verbally, in writing and by demonstration.
- Experience and knowledge in operations involved with maintaining all aspects of sustainable productions of integrated farming systems and instruction.
- Experience with direct marketing. Experience in record keeping for planning, production, and marketing.
- Experience in general equipment maintenance, including irrigation equipment, hand tools, wheelbarrows, seeders, etc.
- Knowledge of organizational and time management skills sufficient to independently set priorities, and to coordinate and complete a number of concurrent tasks for both cropping and trainee instruction is important.
- If livestock is raised, experience in animal husbandry, animal needs, on-farm feed production, animal breeding and productivity, applications of intensive livestock pasturing, rotational schedules, fertilization, pasture and hay production and yields.

Farmer Instructor Training and Certification

- Farmer mentors will go through a short formal training to be certified Cultivating Success Farmer Mentors. The training will include sessions on Cultivating Success curriculum, adult education, experiential education, mentoring, conflict resolution, engaging students, and risk management.

Additional Requirements for Certification

- Minimum three years experience with three listed references from peers, Extension educators, former interns or someone with direct knowledge of your experience and sustainable farming practices.
- Must be the primary owner/operator of production area (not necessarily owner of land, but must be the full time operative).
- Willingness & ability (structurally, legally, etc) to arrange for a student to live or work on his/her farm. Farmer may need to arrange for housing on or near the farm site.
- Must be willing to work with a student to develop a plan of work and other academic on farm projects, which may include a whole farm plan or business plan.
- Must attend a Cultivating Success Farmer Instructor Training and work through the certification process
- Agree to a site visit from a Cultivating Success Leadership Team Member.