



FARMER TRAINING PROGRAM



THE UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT
AGRICULTURE &
LIFE SCIENCES



Information Packet



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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 (May 1 - October 27, 2023) 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.

In 2017, we added food and social justice issues to 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

May 1 - October 27, 2023



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 Blackboard. In Blackboard, 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. Students will have two textbooks. Other articles will be posted to Blackboard

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 deeper.

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*

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 profiles of our host farms and other collaborating partners.

Host Farms

Students will spend several days throughout the program at each of our host farms. Farm visits will include lessons on the farm’s business model, crop plan, insect and disease management, and general management of the operation. Students will have the opportunity to work next to these experienced farmers and glean information from them as they weed, harvest, move animals to a new pasture, or help move irrigation.



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.



Adam’s Berry Farm

Adam’s Berry Farm is a thriving community-oriented farm that grows delicious certified organic strawberries, blueberries, raspberries, and table grapes. Their Pick Your Own is open from June to the middle of October, beginning with strawberries and ending with fall-bearing raspberries. They grow 20 varieties of strawberries, 12 varieties of blueberries, nine varieties of raspberries, three varieties of grapes, three varieties of gooseberries, and five varieties of currants. Berries for the belly!



June Farm

June Farm is a 2.5-acre cut-flower farm on the Intervale in Burlington. They are dedicated to growing as kindly as possible with respect for the land, their employees, and their community. They specialize in cultivating unique and uncommon flower varieties as well as some of the classics (both perennials and annuals). They run a 60 person CSA, sell bouquets to many local grocers and businesses, attend the Burlington Farmers’ Market every Saturday, design for large and small weddings all throughout Vermont, sell wholesale to local florists and designers, host on-farm workshops, and in 2022 opened up a .5-acre pick-your-own field.

Program Partners

The Farmer Training Program has developed close connections with several local organizations working within the Vermont food system. Students will have the chance to meet with representatives from these agricultural organizations and many others.

UVM’s Center for Sustainable Agriculture

The Center for Sustainable Agriculture advances sustainable food and farming systems in Vermont and beyond. They cultivate partnerships, support innovative research and practices, and inform policy to benefit Vermont communities and the UVM campus. Since its inception in 1994, they have engaged in countless outreach and applied research projects, helped launch new programs within UVM and the state at large, and developed a transdisciplinary, systems-based approach to addressing needs in Vermont’s vibrant food system. They are a proud part of UVM Extension.

UVM Extension

UVM Extension integrates higher education, research, and outreach to help individuals and communities put knowledge to work in their families and homes, farms, businesses, towns, and the natural environment. As a land-grant university, UVM is deeply committed to working with Vermonters in a practical approach to education through agriculture and engineering; Extension helps make these connections.



The Intervale Center

The Intervale consists of food-related enterprises and educational programs that have become the backbone of northern Vermont’s food system. Home to 10 diverse farm businesses, Gardener’s Supply Company, a community garden, and a catering company, the Intervale is a hotbed of sustainable agriculture. They help farmers bring their products to market, build and sustain their businesses, and maintain Vermont’s working landscape; they promote land use that protects Vermont’s water quality; they sustain Burlington’s treasured Intervale; and they share our innovative work and knowledge with communities around the world.



City Market

City Market, Onion River Co-op, is a 16,000 sq. ft. community-owned food cooperative located in beautiful downtown Burlington, Vermont. As Burlington’s only downtown grocery store, City Market provides a critical service to the residents of Burlington and the larger community by providing conventional, organic, and local products at a fair price to all. The Co-op is also extremely dedicated to supporting the local economy and enhancing the sustainability of agriculture. They work with over 1,000 Vermont vendors to feature the widest selection of local products in the state.



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. They will also farm alongside experienced farmers at the Intervale Community Farm, Bread and Butter Farm, and Adam's Berry 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.

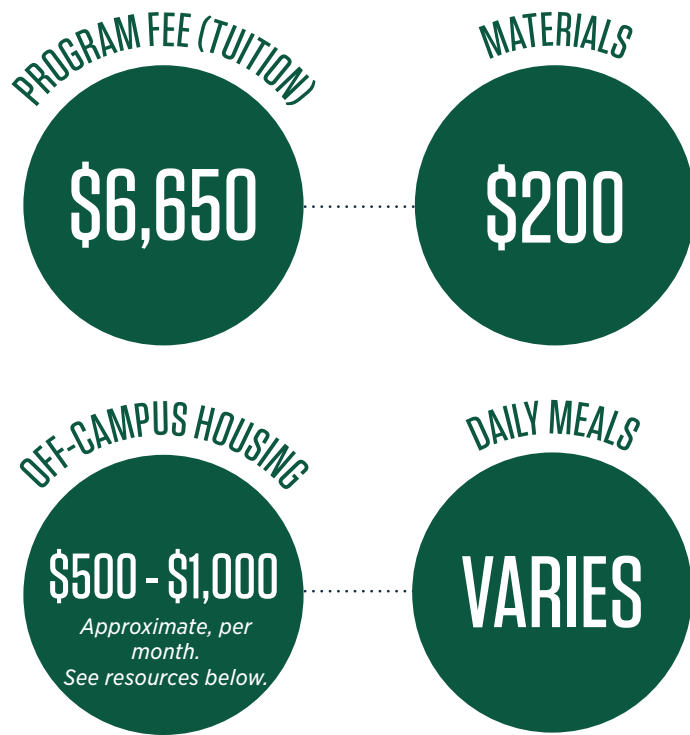
Thursday M T W TH F

On Thursdays, the cohort divides into five rotation groups. Two groups remain at Catamount Farm and three groups go off site to learn alongside one of our partnership farmers. Whatever site you are at, you finish your day there knowing your fellow students have been busy at the other rotation sites harvesting, planting, weeding, and marketing.

Friday M T W TH F

Fridays bring everyone back to Catamount Farm. Students check in about the previous day on rotation. Then students and staff will work off the priority list to finish the necessary tasks of the week. Friday afternoons there is another class to wind up the day. Alternatively, some Fridays involve a field trip to two farms in the area where you will learn about their farming practices. Every other week there is an assessment on competency and understanding of the previous two weeks’ skills and objectives.

Program fee *and other costs*



Housing Information

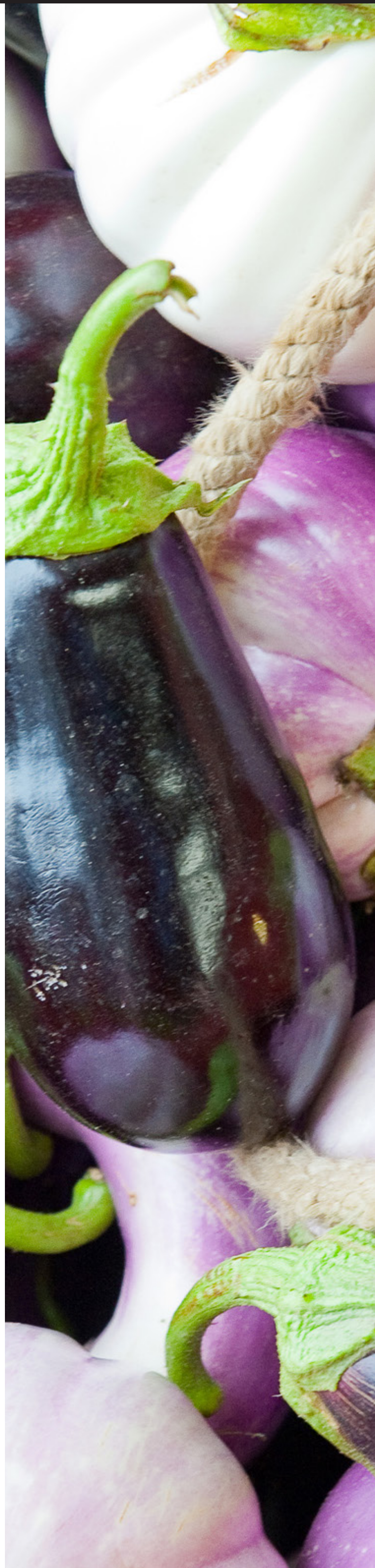
Burlington is a vibrant place to live, work, and learn. Housing options in Burlington vary depending on what students are looking for. Monthly rent can range from \$500-\$1,000 per month depending on location and number of people living in your house or apartment. Students are responsible for finding 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 2023?

For 2023, the program is limited to 25 students.

What is the tuition for the Farmer Training Program?

For 2023, 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: \$500 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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