



# Apprentice Program Description

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**Farmer:** David Hambleton  
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## **Farm description:**

Sisters Hill Farm is a CSA farm located in Dutchess County, New York. CSA stands for community supported agriculture, a mutually beneficial relationship between a farmer and local consumers. Members receive fresh organic produce weekly throughout the growing season in exchange for ensuring the farmer a living wage and providing for production costs up front.

We are now about to embark on our seventeenth season with the following mission statement to guide us: **As an expression of our reverence for creation, the Mission of Sisters Hill Farm is to grow healthy food, which nurtures bodies, spirits, communities, and the earth.** It is a simple statement but one with far reaching consequences.

The 141 acres that includes our 5 acres of vegetables, flowers and cover crops is owned by the Sisters of Charity of Saint Vincent DePaul of New York. The Sisters of Charity have been advocates of people who are poor for nearly 200 years. Their mission expanded and they have made it a priority to care for and nurture the earth. Sisters Hill Farm is their way of “acting locally” with a global resolve.

Even though we are a non-profit organization and we give a lot of our food to charity, we still have economic sustainability as one of our primary goals. We are small but efficient and our market niche is to people who appreciate very high quality organic produce, and feel good about the fact that they are also helping people less fortunate than themselves. On a larger farm an intern might feel like one more cog in the wheel. That is not so at Sister’s Hill Farm, where in the 2016 season we will be growing veggies on less than 5 acres for more than 300 member families.

If you are interested in learning how to make a living growing high quality vegetables on just a few acres, then this is the farm for you. It is amazing how productive a small, well-managed farm can be. Since our beginnings with 40 members in 1999, we have harvested and distributed more than a million pounds of high quality organic vegetables and fruit. We strive to give ten percent to several local charities both in Stanfordville and the Bronx.

**Why a CSA?** There are many reasons for marketing through a CSA. One is that we have a direct connection with our local community and the consumers of our food. Our food stays in the local community and isn't shipped thousand of miles. Two, members often become very involved in the farm and end up learning a great deal about how their food is produced. Finally, we produce an excellent product and we want to be assured that it is going to people who appreciate it. Marketing our produce in this manner creates a win-win situation, we get a relatively good price for what we grow and at the same time our members are saving money. We've analyzed the value of past shares and concluded that members have saved as much as 50% over local grocery store prices. This season our share is an excellent value at \$675 to \$775.

**Do you have other markets?** No. After working on farms that had diverse marketing approaches and going to a farmers market in '99, we made a conscious choice to market exclusively through our CSA. The problem with having many markets is the extensive management they require just when you are most busy in the fields. The nice thing about a CSA is that you do all of your marketing in the winter, when farmers traditionally have the most free time. If you do a good job, you're done with all of your selling for the year before you plant a single seed. Also, we hate wasted effort; our lives are too precious to be spent planting acres of plants that we are just going to till under.

A second reason is that the CSA allows us the luxury of harvesting for only 2 pickups/week. The rest of the time can then be devoted to succession planting, cultivating, or whatever is most pressing. Some farms have such a diversity of markets that they are harvesting and delivering produce every day of the week.

**Three Apprentices needed.** Approximate dates will be April 4th through November 5<sup>th</sup>.

**Living Accommodations.** An apartment, attached to the barn, with a screened in porch will be available for apprentice use. The farmer lives ¼ mile down the road.

Apprentices are responsible for their own meals but are welcome to any excess farm produce.

**Who are we looking for?** We want someone who has a passion for agriculture. You don't necessarily have to have tons of farm experience. Love of physical labor is essential, as is a love of being out of doors in all kinds of weather. You should be the type of person who is always looking for a better way to get a job done. You must be kind, respectful, and empathetic of others. You must have a "beginner's mind," in other words you should be open to learning no matter how much you think you know about a subject. Finally, you should love to laugh and have fun!

**Compensation.** A stipend of approximately \$1,620/month is available for both positions. Housing, farm produce, and workman's compensation is included.

**Work hours and description.** Our usual workweek is around 45 hours, consisting of 8 hour weekdays and four hours on Saturday. Aside from greenhouse and chicken duties, which apprentices usually trade weekends on, Sunday is yours to do with as you wish. We will generally start quite early in order to beat the heat and have more free time in the afternoon. Hours may vary some from day to day and week to week and flexibility is a must. For example, apprentices will have two responsibilities that will exceed the normal hours. These tasks include opening and closing and watering the greenhouse morning and night during April through July and transporting produce (with a farm vehicle) each Tuesday to our off farm delivery site in the Bronx.

The work can be physically demanding, so only those who enjoy hard work need apply. However, many hands make light work and on most difficult tasks we will all be working together. The more initiative you take and interest you show the more responsibility you will be entrusted with.

**A quality learning environment.** We are committed to creating the best learning environment possible. This is a true "hands on" program. We work hard but we also work intelligently. Every morning we will get together and prioritize tasks. Custom computer

spreadsheets and databases are utilized for crop planning and will determine planting schedule. Interns will be exposed to and expected to competently perform all farm operations. Greenhouse management, transplant production, primary tillage, secondary tillage, cultivation, a systems approach to farm management, weed control through many methods, and careful efficient harvesting for maximum crop quality are just some of the many things you will learn. You will learn to drive tractors, operate a front-end loader; you will learn how to enhance soil fertility through the use of composts, manure, and cover crops. Farm rotations and insect and disease control will be discussed and implemented.

Ultimately, however, what you learn is up to you. To make the most of this experience it takes openness, a curious nature, and a desire and initiative to learn and grow. A growing farm library will also be at your disposal, and certain key texts will be recommended reading.

Visits to other farms will be a regular part of our program. We are currently participating in the CRAFT <http://www.craftfarmapprentice.com/> (collaborative regional alliance for farmer training) program. The program is an alliance of more than a dozen farmers who utilize apprentices as their primary source of farm labor. Throughout the season different farmers will host the apprentices from participating farms. The host will give a tour and a presentation on some unique aspect of his/her farm operation.

**Recreational opportunities.** Our farm is located on 141 beautiful acres of rolling fields and mature forests complete with streams and wetlands. There are marked hiking trails throughout the property. Dutchess County's quiet and manicured backcountry roads offer excellent biking or running routes. Finally, we are located in the Hudson Valley, a mere 90 minutes from New York City, where recreational and cultural opportunities abound.

### **How do I apply?**

If you think Sisters Hill farm might be a good fit for you then we invite you to apply. Please supply us with the following information as soon as possible. We just want to get a sense of where you are coming from and why you want to learn to farm. If, after reviewing your information we think you might be a good fit we will contact you to set up a visit.

- 1) Please supply the following information:
  - a) Tell us about yourself; your interests, your long-range plans, why you want to work on a farm.
  - b) What do you hope to learn?
  - c) What sort of physical shape are you in?
  - d) Any special considerations we should know about (diet, health)?
  - e) Do you have any previous related work experiences?
  - f) Tell us what you think of our program, our policies, and how you would fit into our farm.
  - g) When would you be available? Any flexibility?
- 2) Please include a resume.
- 3) Please provide 3 references we can contact regarding your learning and work style.

Thank you for your interest in Sisters Hill Farm. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,  
David Hambleton, Farmer, Sisters Hill Farm

Below are a couple of thank you notes from former apprentices (used with permission) and short description an apprentice wrote about her time here. You might find them informative...

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Dear Dave,

The past week at the farm in PA was amazing. Things are really starting to come together. It is all very exciting and I just wanted to thank you for your part in helping make my aspirations come true. I know I have a long road ahead of me, but I am confident the knowledge and encouragement you have given me will serve me well. I look forward to returning north and visiting you and your family in your amazing new home, but I am sure I will be in touch with a question or two before then. I wish you all the best and thank you again for being a great boss, teacher, and friend.

Best regards, Andrew Buckwalter Apprentice '07 owner, operator, Buckhill Farm, Lititz, PA  
<http://buckhillfarm.net/Site/Welcome.html>

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As a previous Sisters Hill Farm apprentice, I am currently managing Serenbe Farms near Atlanta, GA. I started at Sisters Hill right after I graduated from college and spent some of the spring, the summer, and a good portion of the fall learning the ways of the farm. Having worked on a farm before, I understood the hard labor to come forth, but also had a passion for learning how to make things more efficient and how to better treat the land that I would farm. I came to Sisters Hill with high hopes of learning all I could about farming. Not knowing what exactly was in store, I was very optimistic upon arrival. The farm there was beautiful and extremely neat.

At once, I felt welcomed into the community and began full time work. Of course, I got what I expected in terms of hard work, but gained a much more extensive knowledge of farm systems and how to properly start and run a successful CSA than I had ever expected from one season. Sisters Hill Farm is a wonderful model of a small area that is managed properly to provide tens of thousands of pounds of vegetables a year to grateful recipients. After my first year there, Dave had taught me most farm operations, including farm planning, tractor work, and maintaining the health of the land. I decided to return for a second year to solidify my previous training. This time I was in charge of harvests and planning the CSA shares. The combination of managerial responsibilities, soaking up more knowledge from Dave, reading, and studying definitely boosted my abilities to effectively manage a farm. Thanks to this apprenticeship, I am now successfully running a small CSA farm.

Sisters Hill Farm is different than many farms I've worked on or have visited around the country. Dave has set up so many systems that make things much easier than anticipated and he teaches you lots of effective "shortcuts" that make things simpler and take care of the land. In addition to the learning experience, the surrounding area is great, the people there are genuine, and the natural beauty is plentiful.

Paige Witherington, Apprentice '04-05, owner operator, Pitch Pine Organic Farm  
<http://www.pitchpineorganicfarm.com/csa.html>

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Dave,

I've learned so much from you—you are truly a mentor in the highest sense of the word. Thanks for everything—for trusting me with equipment, giving me responsibility, working along side me digging potatoes, challenging my creative problem solving skills, understanding when I goof, saying "thank you" everyday, greeting us with smiles every morning, showing us how things really work, taking time to explain, and being a superb farmer all around. I will take these lessons with me into my new farm career and continue learning and continue sharing with others. Sisters Hill is a special place. I feel blessed to have been a part of it. Thank you for a great season!

Erin Bullock, Apprentice '08, former owner, operator, Mud Creek Farm, Rochester NY  
[www.mudcreekfarm.com](http://www.mudcreekfarm.com)

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My goal is to have YOU starting your own farm next year too!