



Apprentice Program Description

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 24th 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 over 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. Our goal for the the 2020 season will be to provide vegetables to 400 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 1.25 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.

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've begun to harvest. 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. This gives us some time to focus on other vital work on the farm like succession planting, cultivating, mowing or planning farm events.

Two Apprentices needed. Approximate dates will be April 1st through November 5th.

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. \$13.20*/hr. Housing, farm produce, and workman's compensation is included. (*This is the predicted NY State minimum wage for 2022.)

Work hours and description. Our usual workweek is around 45 hours, consisting of 8 hour weekdays and four hours on Saturday. Aside from greenhouse 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 meaning you will mostly be learning through doing. 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; you will learn how to enhance soil fertility through the use of composts, organic fertilizer, 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 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 Mid-Hudson C.R.A.F.T. (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 70 beautiful acres of rolling fields and mature forests complete with streams and wetlands. There are marked hiking trails all around 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) Are you capable of long days of physical labor often kneeling?
 - 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