

Persephone Farm

Lebanon, OR 97355

Persephone Farm is located in Oregon's Willamette Valley, and has been in operation since 1985. The farm produces over 40 vegetable crops and also raises up to 250 pastured laying hens per season. Their apprenticeship is focused on intensive hands-on training offered with a historical perspective. The long-standing history of Persephone Farm allows apprentices to get an understanding of how practices have changed, and an insight to what has and hasn't worked.

The curriculum follows the seasons and is mostly practical, with some written material for those interested. The experience each apprentice has is individual, as the curriculum is molded to individual interest and ability. The rural location of Persephone Farm poses a challenge to many apprentices, so they not only seek apprentices with strong work skills they look for someone who feels comfortable with themselves. Apprentices get more than just farming skills and techniques, they are able to see how a farm is managed, how to handle challenges with employees, how to budget and spend money, they really get an intimate exposure to Persephone Farm's way of being and daily operation.



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Program Summary

Type of Operation

For-profit farm, LLC

Program Duration

8-12 months

Annual Graduates

About 4 apprentices

Number of Staff

5+, apprentices count!

Training Focus

Whole Farm Planning, Business Planning,
Land and Soil Management. Livestock
Health

Total Annual Cost

Greater than \$15,000

Major Funding Sources

Earned Revenue

Apprentices at Persephone Farm are employees, who receive minimum wage at the start. There is the potential for their wage to increase if they stay on for additional seasons, in recognition of their increased knowledge and responsibility. Apprentices are treated almost identically to other farm employees, with the distinction that a little more attention is given to their educational experience, but all farm employees are invited to attend the seminars. Persephone farm has a personnel policy titled Respect, which states that everyone will respect the contributions of others, and if there is a difference of opinion they will first make an attempt to come to a resolution.

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Top Successes

- Providing a model for honest communication and ethics in the workplace
- Providing valuable hands-on training

Top Challenges

- Finding physical labor skills and desire to work
- Outdated technology and tough to attract interest in rural area

What do you wish you'd known before you started?

We would encourage programs to become familiar with their states legal requirements- we were challenged legally by a formal apprentice and it hurt. Since then we have investigated all legal requirements in great detail, and would encourage other programs to do the same.

What additional resources would be helpful as you look towards the future?

Continued partnership with Rogue Farm Corps—their workshops, classes, and field trips have greatly enhanced our apprentices' experience

Apprentice Demographics

Equal split between men and women, mainly recent college graduates

Qualities Sought

Strong work ethic, comfortable in rural environment, maturity

Most Common Outcome

Work out of agriculture, mainly in advocacy and food systems education

The apprenticeship at Persephone Farm came from the operator's personal experience apprenticing. At first, as a reflection of the founder's own experience, the resources put into the program were minimal and apprentices were not paid well for their time. Persephone Farm eventually realized they wanted to show apprentices that farmers can make a fair wage, and that the farm has the means to compensate them well. While Persephone Farm's ability to fund its apprentices from farm profits is challenging, it has become greatly important to them. Furthermore, despite previous efforts towards labor law compliance, experience with legal claims over wage disputes, strengthened their fair-wage focus.

Apprentices leaving this program have continued production elsewhere, worked on other farms, and some have even started their own farm! While their apprentices don't always leave wanting to produce food, Persephone Farm takes pride in their graduates' abilities to apply knowledge to other skillsets, like advocacy and education.