

Sprouting Farms

Talcott, WV 24981

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Sprouting Farms is a fairly new apprenticeship program, and was established just this year in 2017. Sprouting Farms is a wholesale production farm that was founded with the goal of increasing local food production and supporting the development of new and existing farm businesses. Sprouting Farms seeks to support the local agricultural communities in a variety of ways, and saw the need for entrepreneurs, and developed this program out of the desire to create a program with solid business foundations.

Sprouting Farms seeks apprentices who are looking to dig into their agricultural careers more deeply, and are ready for business and management level work. Their program lasts 8 months, and in the beginning, they will spend 3 months on Sprouting Farms learning from the Production Manager and Education Coordinator. After the initial 3 months, apprentices have the opportunity to learn under other mentor farms in the region. The classroom hours all along this journey compliment skills development and are tailored towards business planning.



Program Summary

Type of Operation

Non-profit farm

Program Duration

One year

Annual Graduates

2 apprentices

Number of Staff

More than 5

Training Focus

Farm operations management, business and financial planning, sustainable production

Total Annual Cost

Over \$15,000

Major Funding Sources

Grant funding from fiscal sponsors

Apprentice Demographics

Equally split between men and women, young professionals with 1-5 years experience in agriculture

Qualities Sought

Experience, commitment to business planning

Most Common Outcome

Too early to tell!

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Top Successes

- Rehabilitation of the property into arable farmland
- Promotion of an apprentice to Education Coordinator
- Passion and motivation seen in apprentices

Top Challenges

- Lack of concrete structure prior to implementation
- Lack of education coordinator who left mid-season
 - Balancing education with production

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

How much time curriculum development and logistics takes– reliance on outside trainers has taken too much time to coordinate

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

Help with internal curriculum development

There was much to be learned in Sprouting Farms first year in operation. There were some initial challenges in marketing their apprenticeship program—recruiting started later than planned, and many of the applicants didn't quite fit, which really limited the candidate pool.

When their first apprentices started, the curriculum was still a work in progress, so integrating them into their farm team was not as smooth as anticipated. Sprouting Farms has learned from these experiences and is streamlining itself and strengthening its curricula and implementation.

Apprentices at Sprouting Farms have a voice; they are part of the farm team. They aren't expected to be as self-directed as full-time staff, but are encouraged to take initiative. They have two major check-ins to ensure skill development, and are consistently encouraged to engage with the local community. Sprouting Farms hosts a monthly Community Education Potluck, which is a great opportunity for this. The potluck not only serves as a social occasion, but also an educational one—Sprouting Farms always invites someone from the local community to share their skill set and experiences.

Looking forward, Sprouting Farms is excited to integrate the valuable insight they gained from their first year into their future plans. The first cohort of apprentices focused a lot of rehabilitating the land, and future cohorts will get to farm more on the land as well as gain insight from the two mentors they have devoted to the apprenticeship. Additionally, Sprouting Farms is leaving on high-tunnel available as an experimental educational component, specifically for apprentices to tryout their own ideas.

Sprouting Farms feels their program is more established and structured, and that they could offer other programs advice on how to operate a production farm in conjunction with an apprentice program.

