

# 2018 Apprenticeship Application Packet

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## Sprouting Farms Appalachian Croft and Training Center

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Laying the Groundwork for Sustainable Farm Business



## Introduction

Sprouting Farms Appalachian Croft and Training Center is a four-season non-profit farm and education and resource center located in Summers County WV. We believe that long-lasting impact is created by training new farmers in quality and sustainable production techniques, and by providing shared resources and educational opportunities to the whole farm community.

Our programs provide farmers with sound business management and production skills, hands-on apprenticeship and mentorship, and the land and resources necessary to launch and refine their farm businesses. Located on a working wholesale production farm, the program offers a practical learning environment and a chance to be part of an active farming community.

The Sprouting Farms Apprenticeship is an advanced farm business training program designed to prepare students for the realities of owning, operating, and / or managing an agricultural business. We offer new and beginning farmers a supportive and intensive learning experience focused on economic, environmental and social sustainability. Apprentices matriculating into their second year can apply to the Sprouting Farms incubator farm where they can access land, resources, and guidance as they launch their agricultural business.

## Sprouting Farms Apprenticeship

The Sprouting Farms Apprenticeship is designed for individuals with a solid foundation of farm knowledge and skills; those who are looking to deepen their experience managing a successful farm business; and those with a goal of running their own farm enterprise. The majority of the apprenticeship will be focused on experiential learning, or learning by doing. Apprentices will be asked to apply diverse agriculture theories and practices, collect and analyze data, and use their findings to adapt and strengthen their final business plan.

The Apprenticeship is best understood when broken down into its three components.

### 1. Paid “on-the-job training.”

On-the-job training consists of learning the skills, knowledge, and competencies needed for apprentices to perform a specific task on a production site. This experiential skill development uses regular and existing workplace tools, equipment, and tasks to teach apprentices how to effectively observe, plan, evaluate and manage a production farm.

We are excited to offer our apprentices a small, subsidized wage for their on-the-job training. Apprentices will work approximately 20 hours per week at the Sprouting Farms production site and/or on mentor farm sites as the season progresses. Wages are \$9/hour for up to 600 hours, or up to \$5,400 over the course of the apprenticeship.

### 2. Related coursework.

In addition to the on-the-job training performed at the Sprouting Farms production farm and on

mentor sites, apprentices will spend another 200 hours on related coursework. Related coursework is best understood as time spent in a more formalized, instructional classroom style learning. As an apprentice, your related training will have two main concentrations with additional space for electives that allow you and your cohort to pursue specialty and niche crops and production styles. Think of it this way:

*Business courses.* Business development courses are at the heart of the apprentice experience. We want to support you as you develop your farming enterprise. A six-module farm business course is taught by Dee Singh-Knights, an Agricultural Economics Specialist with WVU Extension, where you will learn to prepare enterprise budgets, evaluate market demand, and develop a five-page business plan. This course will be supplemented by workshops and presentations covering topics such as risk management, accounting, finance, access to capital for farmers, risk management and insurance, marketing and outreach.

*Production courses.* This classroom time is intended to augment your on-the-job training. You are expected to attend a carefully designed series of classes facilitated by WVU Extension Services, WVSU Extension Services, Natural Resource Conservation Service, Sprouting Farms staff, and other agricultural service agencies from around the region. Topics may include: soil fertility and integrated pest management; farm and production planning; succession planning, food safety and post-harvest handling; tractor and equipment safety and use; farm carpentry and building infrastructure; and the list goes on.

*Elective courses.* Apprentices will submit learning goals and a skills map at the beginning of the apprenticeship to be used as a guide for your experience. The Education Coordinator will review these documents alongside you and your cohort, and identify and connect you to experienced farmers and business owners in the area who can support your learning goals. This is a space to explore niche crops and specialty production techniques that you may not otherwise see listed in the syllabus.

- 3. Agriculture enterprise development.** Please think about this portion of your apprenticeship as personalized farm business support. The Education Coordinator is your advocate and will provide support and connect you to resources as you work through the business planning process. Over the course of the apprenticeship you will have the opportunity to connect with agriculture experts and local business owners in the region as you develop your business concept. A business coach from the West Virginia HIVE, an initiative of the New River Gorge Regional Development Authority, will meet with you (individually and in group settings) on numerous occasions to mentor, guide, and support you as you develop your business plan. You are encouraged to use these resources to plan your business, develop creative branding techniques, and identify potential markets. At the conclusion of the apprenticeship, you will have the opportunity to present your business plan to a diverse community of your peers, mentors, and agriculture experts for constructive feedback

We want you to be prepared for the rigorous nature of the Sprouting Farms Apprenticeship. While you

are learning, you will be working several days each week at the Sprouting Farms production farm and / or mentor farm sites in the area. Farming can be very tedious and repetitive. There is no doubt you will question the educational value of your experience from time to time. You can expect to be challenged physically and mentally. However, with the support and leadership of mentor farmers and Sprouting Farms staff, you can expect to learn valuable farm and business skills to help you develop and launch your own agricultural enterprise.

### Program Details

The Apprenticeship will run for a full farm season, between March 1, 2018 and October 31, 2018. You will complete 600 hours of paid on-the-job training over the course of the eight months, and spend another 200 classroom hours on related coursework and business development.



Participants will have access to a variety of growing spaces. Depending on your experience and your intention, participants will have access to outdoor growing space and / or a shared on-site high-tunnel. These spaces are meant to be used as a space to explore production techniques, potential marketable products, and any other approved business plans apprentices express interest in pursuing.

Sprouting Farms has land use guidelines to improve the overall quality of the farm and land, and maintain organic and food safety certifications. The farm requires that all apprentices, incubator farmers, and lessees do the same. Apprentices and Incubator farmers will work within the standards set by the National Organic Program (NOP) meaning: no synthetic fertilizers, no Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO), and only OMRI-listed pesticides. Other land use guidelines include use of cover-crops, Integrated Pest Management, and appropriate applications of fertilizers and compost to maintain soil fertility. Several production fields at Sprouting Farms are certified organic at this time, and we intend to expand that certification to other fields in years to come. Our team will assist you along the way.

Sprouting Farms organizes farm tours and hosts educational potluck discussions to bring together friends from across the farming community. You will have the opportunity to meet and network with local farmers, community members, and agricultural professionals in the community.

### Program evaluation

Apprentices will participate in pre-and post-evaluations with the Education Coordinator in the first and last month of the apprenticeship. These evaluations are useful tools for identifying gaps in your own skills and knowledge, and for tracking your progress. The Education Coordinator will also facilitate evaluations and feedback sessions for the apprentice and mentor farmers to ensure learning and farm

skill development goals are being met. In the final weeks of the program, you will be asked to present your business plan to a diverse audience of farmers, mentors, and agriculture enthusiasts in the region. Apprentices may present in a format that fits their learning style with approval from the Education Coordinator.

Post-apprenticeship, you are asked to participate in an exit interview and fill out an end of season program questionnaire to help us evaluate and improve the apprenticeship program.

### Tuition

The cost of the apprenticeship is \$2,000 and includes use of a shared on-site high-tunnel, a six-module farm business course, production and special topics coursework, diverse mentorship opportunities, and hands-on, paid on-the-job training. Payment plans, scholarship funds, or other financial aid may be available if needed for participants who are unable to pay for the course up front. Please contact the Education Coordinator for more information.

### Logistics

We cannot offer housing on site at Sprouting Farms at this time, but the farm team has a network of potential housing options and will be happy to assist you in your move, if necessary. The nearest towns to Sprouting Farms are Hinton, a mid-size town along the New River, and Alderson, a small town along the Greenbrier River. Both are rural communities with agriculture economies and are approximately a 20 minute drive from the farm. If you prefer a livelier in-town feel, Lewisburg, a mid-size town, is approximately 35 minutes from the farm and offers a small-town coffee, restaurant, and shopping atmosphere.

West Virginia's hills and hollers are beautiful; and they make extended travel and driving time enjoyable. Farm visits, mentor site trainings, and business development classes will require regular travel and your own means of transportation. You can expect to travel 30 to 60 minutes to most sites.

### Application Criteria and Process

We are now accepting applications for 2018 Apprenticeship, scheduled to begin March 1, 2018 and conclude October 31, 2018. Applications are due no later than February 1, 2018, but encouraged sooner. Applicants will be contacted for an interview on a rolling basis until the program is filled.

Please consider your experience thoughtfully. All applicants are expected to:

- Demonstrate considerable farming experience;
- Share an interest in sustainable production techniques;
- Formulate a farm or agricultural business idea or concept;
- Be a respectful and engaged part of the farm team;
- Work cooperatively and respect other land users on site.

If you think this program is a good fit for you, please submit the attached application to our Education Coordinator, Amanda Harris, (Amanda@sproutingfarms.org ) no later than February 1, 2018. We look forward to hearing from you!



## Application for Apprenticeship Program

### Applicant Information

Full Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Last First M.I.

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
Street Address Apartment/Unit #  
\_\_\_\_\_  
City State ZIP Code

Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Cell: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

### Farm Information

Please answer the following questions. If you choose to fill out this application non-electronically and need more space, feel free to attach an additional sheet of paper.

1) What is your agricultural background?

2) Have you completed any farm or agriculture-related training or education? Please describe:

3) What are your farming goals? Are you interested in farming commercially?

4) Do you have any other commitments (work, school, family, etc.) during the 8-month apprenticeship timeline?

5) Do you have an identified business idea or product? Please describe idea and potential markets:

6) Do you have a business plan for your idea? Is this something you would like to develop?

7) What do you hope to learn at your time as part of the Sprouting Farms Apprenticeship?

8) What resources do you hope to have access to through the Apprenticeship?

9) Do you have experience operating tractors and other farm machinery? If so, what?

10) How do you plan to sustain yourself financially during your time as an apprentice? What contingency plan do you have to supplement your paid on-the-job training?

11) Please list any additional farm skills that you have.

12) How did you hear about the Sprouting Farms Program?

13) Are you interested in the Incubator Farm following the Apprenticeship?

14) Please provide three references:

Name	Title / Relationship to applicant	Phone number and email address
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1)

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2)

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3)

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I certify that the above information is, to the best of my knowledge, accurate and true:

Applicant

Date:

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Please email or mail your application form and resume to:

Amanda Harris  
SF Education Coordinator  
PO Box 325  
Alderson WV  
301-742-0960  
[amanda@sproutingfarms.org](mailto:amanda@sproutingfarms.org)

Application packets are due by February 1, 2018 at 5:00pm.