

STAFFING YOUR FARM: SUCCESSFUL MANAGEMENT OF INTERNS & EMPLOYEES

Summary of the Springtime Workshop at Cedar River Watershed Education Center

Over the course of one day this March, 15 farmers learned about successful management of both farm interns and farm employees. Five knowledgeable presenters shared tips, ideas, and resources for farmers that both currently employ interns and workers, or are exploring new ways to staff their farm. These presenters were Arwen Norman (Sky Root Farm), Tisa Soeteber (Washington State Labor and Industries), Tim Terpstra (farm manager, Ralph's Greenhouse), Doug Collins (WSU Small Farms Team), and Laura Lewis (WSU Jefferson County Extension).

Arwen Norman kicked off the day with a thoughtful presentation regarding on-farm education and internship programs. Currently a farmer at Sky Root Farm, Arwen expressed how her own internship experiences were invaluable to her farm education and had given her a general perspective on structuring internship opportunities. Her tips included adding formality to the process of hiring interns, having a clear balance between labor and providing education, setting goals for the interns, and giving consistent feedback based on those set goals.

The second presentation of the day came from Tisa Soeteber, Agricultural Employment Standards Specialist from the Department of Labor and Industries. Tisa went over the employment standards needed for hiring interns, employees, and contractors such as wage requirements, deductions, recordkeeping, and the Small Farm Internship project. Tisa was interested in making sure all farmers understand the processes involved with agriculture employment and that the department is there to answer any and all questions.

To begin the afternoon, Tim Terpstra presented on hiring practices and employee management at Ralph's Greenhouse. Respect is the basis for all their management practices. Tim explained that the interview process looks for aspects of a person that can't be taught—traits such as trustworthiness, reliability, and work ethic. Tim gave general guidelines that he and owner Ray deVries use when managing employees. First, set employees up for success by plugging people into tasks that fit their strengths. Second, be willing to let people make mistakes (within reason), because that is the best sort of job training. Third, instill self-confidence in people so they feel proud of their work and capable to tackle new tasks. Fourth, consider preventing employees from becoming too territorial about their work, as it can cause problems within large crews.

The final presentations were given by WSU Extension Faculty Laura Lewis and Doug Collins. Laura presented on the FIELD (Farm Innovation, Education & Leadership Development) Program offered in Jefferson County. This multidisciplinary education program combines formal instruction on sustainable agriculture paired with field-based internships on farms within the county.

It allows individuals to receive both hands-on experience and formalized study.

A similar educational opportunity to the FIELD Program is Cultivating Success, a statewide program with curriculum requirements and a network of farm mentors. Doug explained that this program also offers the opportunity for Continuing Education Credits through its various classes held at extension centers and approved on-farm internships with Cultivating Success mentor farms.

In both the FIELD and WSU's Cultivating Success programs, farms are required to apply to be mentors, ensuring that participants in the programs receive a good on-farm experience. In the coming years, Doug shared that Cultivating Success will look to expand its online class offerings and resources for both farm interns and mentor farms.

Summary by Angela Anegon, Tilth Producers Education Coordinator.

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TILTH PRODUCERS REGIONAL SUMMER WORKSHOPS

In addition to the Farm Walk series, Tilth Producers offers three in-depth, all-day workshops each month this 2015 summer season.

From seeds to soil to markets, and everything in between, these workshops provide a deeper look into some of the most highly requested topics. For detailed descriptions visit tilthproducers.org/programs/workshops/upcoming-workshops/. Register today!

BREEDING VARIETY: SEED PRODUCTION
FOR THE SMALL FARMER

Thursday, July 9 (9:30am-4:00pm)

Cloud Mountain Farm Center, Everson, WA

Presentations by Tom Wagner (seed breeding expert), Jessica Babcock (Greenbank Farm), and more. Learn about seed breeding, growing your own seed, and processing/cleaning techniques.

REGISTER HERE: bit.ly/SeedProduction

ONE-DAY UNIVERSITY: SOIL FERTILITY,
COMPOSTING, AND ORGANIC FARMING

Monday, August 3 (8:00am-3:30pm)

WSU Eggert Organic Farm & WSU Composting Facility, Pullman, WA
Presentations address biologically improving soil and assessing soil in the field, crop rotations with quinoa, soil biotic activity measures, soil mycorrhizae, and compost teas. The day includes a tour of the Eggert Farm and the WSU Compost Facility.

REGISTER HERE: bit.ly/SoilsandCompost