

Integrating Undergraduate Interns in Organic Farming Research and Beginner Farmer Programming at the University of California, Santa Cruz

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Abstract

Organic farming research and beginning farmer programming is increasing in higher education institutions across the United States. The University of California at Santa Cruz Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems (CASFS) has been teaching and researching organic farming for well over three decades. Students at the CASFS Farm and Gardens include degree earning undergraduates and certificate earning Apprentices. Meeting the educational needs of these two distinct cohorts, while expanding the Center's agro-ecological field research program has required creative curricular design efforts informed by contemporary experiential learning theory.

What potential roles exist for undergraduates to meet their organic farming related educational goals? What complementary programming activities exist that spreads the benefits and costs of engagement in organic farming research and production training? How can designing interactions among interns, student workers, apprentices and assistant managers add productivity to educational and production goals? This presentation reports on two years of piloting our CASFS internship program, including learning outcome assessments. Discussion will focus on the key features of the CASFS internship program, what has made it successful, and what new opportunities and challenges we face in expanding on our success.

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