

Travis L Tindell
Sewanee Summer Farm Team / In Town Organics
Summer 2012

I worked for ten weeks as part of the Sewanee Summer Farm Team on an organic farm in Monteagle, Tennessee. This farm is called In Town Organics; Jess and Nate Wilson run it. Jess is also the manager of the South Cumberland Farmer's Market, an online farmers market located here in Sewanee, and on the board of the South Cumberland Food Hub, an online farmer's market that serves the local restaurants Sewanee to promote local food. My responsibilities include harvesting, weeding, planting, preparing beds, morning and evening chores, setting up the South Cumberland Farmer's Market, preparing produce for the market, and assisting other farms when necessary. Another large part of the internship was to work one day a week at the Student Organic Garden in Sewanee off Old Farm Road to restart farming on the Domain.

I gained many skills essential for farming (including hoeing, weeding, etc.) and other skills that are able to be used for other opportunities such as operating a tractor. One of the lesser known skills I learned is how to slaughter and process chickens for meat. Along with two other interns, I learned how to humanely kill the chicken and then remove organs so that the chicken can be frozen and later cooked. Also I observed the killing of a pig at another intern's farm. This process may not be the favorite for most people, but I like that these farmers are connected to their meat and consumption, and not blindly choosing food from a source that remains irresponsible as long as people are supporting it. I made a difference by using my labor to support a local organic farm that would be hard pressed to afford labor otherwise and therefore could not accomplish nearly as much without me.

I have learned many abilities that are needed for running a farm organically and more sustainably. I learned the whole process, from unused ground to selling the produce at the

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Sewanee Gardener's market on Saturdays. I used a tractor that runs off of biodiesel (a fuel that is developed from spent grease used by restaurants) with a tilling implement which is usually to turn under a cover crop (a crop such as rye which will suppress weeds and pull nutrients from deep in the soil to a more accessible place to be used by crops or beans which add nitrogen to the soil).

Pathways are needed on either side of the bed so that harvesting and weeding is possible without walking on crops. With fresh soil exposed, fertilizer in the form of composted horse manure is blanketed over the entire bed. Another fertilizer is worm casting, which is the soil that is left after worms have eaten something, and is available at a worm farm in Altamont. These provide nitrogen, an essential element for the production of plants. After this, the bed is leveled with a rake and the planting is ready.

Jess Wilson plants a lot of lettuce, and here spring salad mix is locally famous. So, a lot of times, even when most farmers ceased, she continues to plant lettuce, which can be challenging when the plant does not like hot or dry weather. The rule of thumb for planting is to plant the seed about as deep as twice the diameter. So for lettuce seeds, which can be very small, the depth is almost non-existent. Planting corn can use a planter which rolls across the ground dropping a seed in a specific interval and then covers it with the appropriate depth.

A sometimes challenging but very essential skill is weeding. Although it doesn't sound very difficult, when grass is involved, because of its extensive root system, weeding can take 3-4 hours. However, if weeded properly, one can go a long time before having to weed again.

The most rewarding task, in my experience, is harvesting. When I planted something at the beginning of the summer, for example corn, then harvested it that season, there is a great sense of productivity and accomplishment. Every vegetable is different when harvesting: lettuce requires scissors and patience, zucchini needs a knife due to the prickly stems and a good eye

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to spot them, corn is simple but needs to be processed within the hour to preserve the sweetness, and tomatoes need a lot of time when they start ripening as they come in by the tens of pounds every other day.

The work cannot stop with the reaping however. The soil must be tended to in an organic farm since environmental stewardship is among the most important in the agenda. There is erosion to prevent, vital nutrients to salvage and no time to waste on planting and planning for the next season. I believe the one most important piece of knowledge I gained was not some fancy tomato variety or the nutritional needs for chickens, but the fact that I can learn anything or do anything if I am willing to research it and actually try. This is invaluable to me, a freedom that cannot be surpassed.

The internship has showed me a definite possibility in career choice for the future. It is very relevant to sustainable forestry and other natural resources. I know possess knowledge that and be used to educate and help with programs that are centered around organic agriculture. This is very relevant these days since organic and sustainable agriculture is becoming more preferred and prominent.