

Scott Hardage
Summer 2010 Internship Report
Sequatchie Cove Farm: Organic Farming Practices

Sequatchie Cove Farm is an organic farm nestled at the base of the Cumberland Plateau. Several hundred acres in size, the farm produces beef, pork, eggs, whole milk cheese, and a variety of fruits and vegetables. This summer I spent eight weeks cultivating 3 acres, which was a highly rewarding experience.

My primary focus was the vegetable garden. I worked alongside the farm's head gardener, Raymond, to maintain the garden. Tasks included everything from starting new seedlings in the greenhouse to harvesting for the farmer's market. Sometimes the work was very labor intensive, such as driving metal stakes into the ground, but this was balanced by more laid back tasks such as picking blueberries. While 3 acres may sound small, keeping up a garden of this size takes a lot of work. Raymond and I were the only full-time gardeners, though we usually had one volunteer each day to help as well.

I found every task to be rewarding in some way. After a day of hard work out in the hot summer sun spent tying up tomato plants or spreading straw to keep weeds from taking over, I could look back and see all the progress that Raymond and I had made. Nothing feels better than looking over a well-maintained garden with the knowledge that it produces food in a sustainable manner.

These days America's food production is based around efficiency. So much of our food is mass-produced in monocultures that cover tens or hundreds of acres. Monocultures deplete the soil of certain nutrients, which necessitates the use of chemical fertilizers. Large-scale farming also depends heavily on fossil fuels and machinery. This approach sacrifices any chance of working *with* the land and results in unsustainable farming practices, while mechanized farming provides relatively few job opportunities. Overall America's mainstream food supply is unhealthy for the environment, our farmland, food consumers, and the economy. Working at Sequatchie Cove gave me access to plenty of locally produced organic food and allowed me to see all aspects of food production, from seed to home-cooked meal. This holistic approach to food production instills good land management practices and a greater appreciation for food.

Growing high-quality food would not have been nearly as rewarding if not for the amazing people that I met on the farm. Now I go back weekly to visit my "farm family" and to help out. Even though my internship has ended, they have continued to reach out to me; Bill Keener, who is in charge of the livestock, recently asked me to assist with milking and using the tractor so that I can build a greater variety of farming skills. I am not sure where my career path will lead, but this experience of working with the land has helped to bolster my understanding of how humans fit into the greater biosphere.