

Jonas Hill  
Summer 2012  
Internship Report

## Joseph's Garden and The Sewanee Organic Garden

Joseph's Garden is a small organic farm in Sewanee, TN. They are currently working a half-acre plot for vegetables and also have some livestock including: pigs, sheep, and chicken. The farm is located on the Jumpoff Community Land Trust, which is a part of the larger Cumberland Community Land Trust. The land consists of 1200 acres of plateau and cove forest. All of this land is under a "forever wild" title, meaning that all 1200 acres cannot be touched or managed by humans in any way. The only exception to this title is the existing farm and the other 6 family residences.

Joseph Bordley, the owner of Joseph's Garden and my boss, started farming on the land 21 years ago. He usually runs the majority of the farm by himself, but this summer since I was there to help he was able to do many more things at once. We were able to incorporate a wide variety of projects from fencing, to harvesting, and even some butchering. From day to day most of my work was focused in the garden itself, whether I was picking tomatoes, watering the beans, or planting corn. I would say that 70 percent of my time this summer was spent in the garden.

Another task that I did frequently was to wash and package the vegetables for customers. I learned what 100 pounds of tomatoes looked like before I would even weigh it out. During the middle of July the tomatoes finally started to ripen and be ready for picking; when they started coming they just wouldn't stop. We were picking up to a 110 pounds per week. This was amazing to see because I

arrived there when they were only 3 feet tall, and I watered, caged, and took care of them until they were well over my head and sprawling out over their cages into the rows. The work never stopped with the tomatoes, it was a constant care process throughout the entire summer. During this time I learned all about growing organic tomatoes, caging them, how to look out for and combat different diseases, and proper tomato pruning. Although we grew many other vegetables, the tomatoes were definitely the most memorable because I spent the most time with them.

My living situation on the farm was another project that we worked on for quite some time. It was a 50's style camper that fit in the back of a truck. It was a bit small but we ended up making it work really nicely. The project was to somehow get it out of the truck and set it on the set of jacks, then lower it to the ground, and finally spin it 180 degrees right into place. It sounded fairly easy but actually executing this was a bit of a challenge. We brainstormed for a while on how to do this and we finally decided that we were going to make a large lazy Susan of sorts. It took us a while to finally assemble all the parts but we did it using a large slice of a tree trunk, a metal grate, and a bunch of cinderblocks. It worked. Once it was all in position we then had to give it power so I dug a huge trench for the power line from the box out the camper (back breaking work) then I laid the ground cable into the trench and recovered it. Finally after all that I moved out into the camper and slept for the rest of the summer.

The most interesting task of the entire summer was the killing of the pigs. I feel like this experience helped me to understand not only a lot about local organic

meat and the way its processed but also about how different and frankly quite disgusting the industrial meat business is in the US. Usually farmers slaughter animals during the winter so you don't have to worry about to meat getting to hot and bacteria forming. Unfortunately there was no time to slaughter and they were not big enough in the winter and we couldn't wait until next winter because by then they would have been too big. So we were forced to do it in the middle of June in the hot sun. This presented a few problems including the heat and they were just so heavy it was nearly impossible to move them around after they were dead. So we found a refrigerator truck and used that to cool them off after we have skinned and gutted them. Even with the help of the refrigerator truck we still had to work at a rapid pace in order to cool them down. We worked from 7am till 7pm that day and got two pigs cut into manageable pieces and into the truck by the end of the day. But we couldn't stop there: the next day we worked well into the night butchering the pig into smaller and smaller pieces until they looked like something you might see in the grocery. We made 75 pounds of bacon that day. Then next day we finally finished by packaging all of the meat into nice little packages to be sold to his shareholders. It was one of the longest three days ever.

One of the most difficult periods of this summer was when there was no rain for over a month. All of the water for the garden comes from their neighbor's well that they shared. When the drought came, the water from the well started pumping out a lot slower and we were forced to find other means of getting water. This process was very interesting because we had to brainstorm together to find the best way to get water. We decided that the pond a few miles down the road was the best

place. So we had to load up 50-gallon drums with pond water and take buckets out to water the garden. There were weeks when getting water to garden would take up more than half of the days. The worst part about all of this was that at the very beginning of the summer there was a well dug in their own front yard but we could use the water yet because there was no way to get it out yet. The drought continued so we decided that we finally needed to hook the well up so that we could get water out to the garden.

The best part about this summer was that we did so many different things and I learned about so much more than I thought I was ever going to. Never did I think I was going to be learning about how to hook up well pumps and configure plumbing for a new well, but that's what I did. I learned to map out and put together a well pump rig; it was one of the coolest things I did all summer.

Not only did I work with Joseph in his garden, I also worked with the new Sewanee farm manager in the effort for a new organic garden on campus to supplement the cafeteria and support agricultural learning at Sewanee. I learned a lot there as well, even though I didn't spend nearly as much time at the Sewanee garden. We basically started from scratch. It was much different than Joseph's well-established farm in that we had little nutrients in the soil and had to add a lot of organic matter. We also tilled up everything, dug rows, weeded, and finally, towards the end of my internship, we had the great reward of planting beans in the garden in hopes of adding nutrients, including nitrogen, to the soil.

Working on these farms this summer gave me a lot of time to think about what I would like to do after college. I am majoring in Natural Resources and I would

love to work somewhere on the agricultural side of things. I would love to work in some sort of land management scenario and I feel that this summer helped me to figure that out as well as gave a lot of knowledge on how you can use land on a small scale.