**Growing Growers- Apprenticeship Policy**

**Overview**

The apprenticeship program is the key component in the Growing Growers program. Farm apprentices are matched with a local farm where they work during a full growing season to get first-hand, practical experience. Apprentices attend monthly workshops and get direct one-on-one training from their host farmer.

The apprenticeship program complements the larger organizational mission: to develop growers networks, peer-to-peer learning, and grower collaboration in order to support new and first-generation fruit and vegetable growers in the region.

**Qualifications and Application Process**

Although application does not guarantee acceptance, Growing Growers provides equal opportunity for all qualified persons and prohibits discrimination in employment based on race, color, religion, creed, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, ancestry, age, veteran status, disability unrelated to job requirements, genetic information, military service, or other protected status.

Prospective apprentices must submit a completed application and $25 application processing fee by March 1st deadline. Following application review by apprenticeship coordinator, the applicant is instructed to contact their selected farms and inquire about seasonal employment, typically by phone or email. Prospective apprentices are encouraged to share their program application and involvement with *Growing Growers* when initiating conversation potential host farms.

If the applicant has already identified a potential Host Farm, apprenticeship coordinator will confirm the volunteer/employment agreement with the farmer directly. If the applicant has not identified a farm, or needs help arranging their placement, apprenticeship coordinator will facilitate the applicant’s interview with suitable farms and within reason help secure placement—taking into account the applicant’s preferences and professional interests.

**Applicants are encouraged to contact potential host farmers as soon as possible.** Once an applicant and farm have come to an employment/volunteer agreement, they are instructed to inform program staff. Apprenticeship coordinator takes the proposed pairing of the apprentice and the host farm to the Advisory Board for review and final approval. Final approvals will be made in early March.

**Hiring, Rules and Responsibilities**

During the hiring/selection process, it’s suggested that host farmers and apprentices develop and write down a basic set of expectations for the apprenticeship including start and end dates, schedule, rate of pay or other compensation, core responsibilities, and other important details of work at the farm. These expectations are not set in stone but provide an important reference point for both farmers and apprentices.

The Host Farm is entirely responsible for wages and any employment benefits such as housing to be paid to the Apprentice.

The Apprentice is responsible for working the agreed-upon hours in a responsible and professional manner. The Apprentice is responsible for working the agreed-upon hours in a responsible and professional manner. Apprentice's work start-date, end-date, schedule and activities are to be determined by the host farm supervisor.

**Apprentices agree to pay $500 tuition**. This money is not refundable. The apprenticeship will not begin until these funds are received by Growing Growers staff or until a payment plan is agreed to, e.g. half of tuition dues to be paid at first core workshop and last. Books will be distributed throughout the season at relevant workshops; if the apprenticeship is not completed, the apprentice will not receive any of the books or materials that have not yet been distributed. A few scholarships are available in case of financial need—maximum award is typically half of full tuition.

**Program Components**

Qualified apprentices who are placed onto qualifying local farms who have successfully applied to host participants. Program apprentices can work from 10-40 hours per week on the host farms. Most are paid, but apprentices can be volunteers, too.

**Additionally, apprentices are responsible for participating in 8-12 hours of one-on-one training offered by the farmer.** Training hours are unpaid. Failure to participate in educational activities will result in termination of the apprenticeship. Apprentices are responsible for submitting a completed log of one-on-one training hours with host supervisor’s signature at the end of season. Apprentices should learn by doing and being involved in a wide-ranging range of farm business tasks with the regional producers who do it best. Host farmers serve as mentors to the apprentices and are required to provide one-on-one training for a total of 8-10hr in specific areas such as *soil building, rotations, production planning, seed selection and ordering, equipment operation, organic certification, market planning, budgets,* etc.*,* and typically involve detailed reference to farm records.

In addition to one-on-one mentoring by their host farm, apprentices are trained through an annual series of workshops delivered by the *Growing Growers* program and partnering organizations.

Each apprentice is exposed to a curriculum that includes twelve core competencies, which are listed below. When the organizing committee meet to plan the upcoming season, the goal is to provide information related to all of these competencies during the workshops so that they can be reinforced through the apprentice’s work at each of the host farms.

***Soil management Crop production***

***Pests and diseases Weed management***

***Season extension Harvest and postharvest handling***

***Production planning Food safety***

***Equipment operation/safety Land selection and site analysis***

***Farm design and physical plant Business management and marketing***

Each season, the program offers 6 core workshops required for active apprentices. Core workshop topics include basic information about production, business management and marketing for new growers. These workshops topics are offered every year and are typically rotated between the organizing committee members in order to utilize a diversity of speakers/farms across years.

Although it is encouraged that apprentices should attend all Core Workshops, **apprentices are responsible for attending at least 80% of the Core Workshops offered—usually at least five of six**. Sometime alternative local trainings and educational experiences can be substituted for absences or schedule conflicts (apprentice should first confirm with program staff). The core workshop topics are listed below:

***Propagation and Production Planning Irrigation and Small Farm Equipment***

***Soil Management and Cover Cropping Integrated Pest Management***

***Postharvest Handling and Food Safety Business Planning and Management***

Apprentices are provided with a series of books and are required to attend the six “core” workshops. They are also provided with registration to elective workshops at no additional cost.

Although, it is not a regular program requirement, program staff have asked apprentices to provide tours of their host farms at the end of the season. Similar to a final capstone project, the apprenticeship coordinator arranges a day when another organizing committee member can travel to the farm and the apprentice talks about what goes on at the farm, what they have learned, and answer questions about specific growing practices, crops, etc.

**Post Apprenticeship**

We often see host farmers continue to act as mentors to new growers even after their apprenticeship has been completed. We also have host farmers that were early graduates of the apprenticeship program after its inception in 2004.

The *Growing Growers* program continues to develop resources for emerging and young growers and we are currently undergoing program evaluation to determine what the current needs are.

**Program Finances**

Currently, the *Growing Growers* program operates as a financially-sustainable organization, and does not rely on grant funding to operate. In 2012, we developed an annual budget, which typically ranges from $4000 to $5000, depending on the number of apprentices. Annual expenses include an apprenticeship coordinator, which is paid on a contract basis, books for apprentices, workshop supplies and speaker/tour fees, and payments for host farmers to provide one-on-one training ($200 per farm).

We have been successful at receiving scholarship money from private donors to help support one to four apprentices in the program per year, and applicants for the scholarships must demonstrate evidence of need as well as potential impact. When funds are available

**Conflicts**

Farm work is hard, stressful work and it isn't unusual for issues to arise between the farm supervisor and an employee or volunteer. Conflicts initially need to be addressed by the Host Farm and the Apprentice, but if they are not successful, the Training Program will do its best to help resolve the situation to everyone's satisfaction. If the issues can't be resolved, the Apprentice can leave the farm's employ, but can continue to take workshops for free. We will try to place them on another farm, but cannot make any guarantees. We will also try to find a new Apprentice for the farm but again, cannot make any guarantees.