Across the Fence
University of Vermont Extension
106 High Point Center, Suite 300
Colchester, Vermont 05446-8800
802-656-5059 or 888-283-3430
www.uvm.edu/extension/atfblog/

TRANSCRIPT

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EPISODE NAME: The University of Vermont’s Farmer Training Program

Today on Across the Fence, digging deep to learn about farming. We will join these students as part of the farmer training program. Good afternoon and thanks for joining us I am Judy Simpson. The increasing demand for fresh local foods is providing new opportunities for aspiring farmers and those interested in sustainable local Food Systems. In response, University of Vermont's Continuing Education has developed a six-month farmer training program. The program provides participants with an understanding of agricultural management and small scale farming and the entrepreneurial skills to start their own operation. For more on the first year of the program here is Across the Fence’s Rebecca Gollin.

UVM Farmer Training Program

Though it’s not unusual for students to have a barbecue on a summer afternoon, this is no ordinary picnic. These students are eating their merchandise.

Nats – “as you’re marketing this stuff, you really want to know your products“

The group is part of the University of Vermont’s Farmer Training Program, and they have spent the season growing and selling vegetables, and learning about the business of farming.

Susie Walsh Daloz is the program director.

Walsh Daloz/ - “...it’s like having a lot of farming seasons in one...”

While the focus is on farming in Vermont, the program draws participants from around the country.

Walsh Daloz/ - “we have folks from Missouri and Ohio and Maryland and Florida, Mass, New York, Brooklyn... and we do have 2 locals, one in Burlington, one in So. Burl...”

UVM’s Dept. of Continuing Education worked with local farmers, businesses and academic partners to develop the course.
Cynthia Belliveau/ Dean, Continuing Education – “Actually putting your hand in the soil is critically important for understanding what it means to have a sustainable food system.”

Cynthia Belliveau has seen a growing demand for this type of program in Vermont. Belliveau/ - “I think that all across the country, students are looking for this ... sort of connection, how do I actually learn this? I had one English major tell me that he had been apprenticing on a farm, and it was taking so long, he said I really need to do something that's more compressed, because I’ve been on this farm for 4 years already and I can't afford to continue to do that.”

Although there ARE training courses for new farmers, there are very few that combine academic and hands-on learning at the university level. UVM's curriculum was loosely based on existing programs, but with some changes that make it uniquely Vermont.

Cynthia Belliveau/ – “It was sort of our birthright to be able to do something like this ... we need to be showing people what it means to be scrappy Vermonters who make their way in delivering the most delicious food regionally, we really do have something that's going on here that I think we need to understand, codify and then teach...”

Brittany Hastings: Student, UVM Farmer Training Program/ – “When I came into this program I had no prior farming experience so everything up to this point has really been eye-opening and I’ve really learned tons, and it’s been really awesome. I’ve done a lot of gardening in the past, so I did come to this program knowing a lot of, you know, this is how you save tomato seeds, or you know, random things like that, and doing things on a much smaller scale, but it’s been wonderful working on a full acre, at your disposal, and having all these different crops right in the same place.”

Hastings was working in an office and gardening for fun when she decided it was time for a change.

Hastings/ - “The office lifestyle just wasn't what I was looking for, really. So I was always involved in gardening, and I never even considered farming as an actual career or job, or something that could sustain me... but I was talking to a lot of farmers, going to a lot of farmers markets, I’ve always done that, and I started reading more and more, and talking to people, and being like 'wait, why aren't I doing this?’”

The 6 month program includes classroom and field instruction, farm rotations, and field trips. Teachers come from both the academic and the farming world.

Susie Walsh Daloz: UVM Continuing Education, Farmer Training Program/ – “Part of our real excitement around the way we've designed this is to partner with the existing businesses within the community that has a little more of that reality of a business outside of the university context.”

Nats, (Spencer and Mara talking to class)
Spencer Whelton and his wife run ½ Pint Farm in Burlington’s Intervale. They talk about the business and marketing side of the operation in the classroom, and host the students on their farm for hands-on work rotations throughout the season.

Spencer Whelton: Instructor, Farmer Training Program/ – “They do all the stuff that we do out there, so whether we're harvesting, or weeding, or planting or doing any of the number of other tasks that we do on a daily basis...and in doing so we can sort of have that hands on experience plus we can have all these conversations about stuff that they're learning in the classroom, things that they're seeing on their field trips.”

Lisa Kalan: Student, Farmer Training Program/ - “I’ve gone to 3 different farms, or 3 diff rotations, bread and butter farm, I worked on a marketing rotation, mostly using this site and also, I'm on .5 pint farm right now (0:35:14.0) so I’ve gotten to look at a lot of different places, and also spend a lot of time here at the Hort Farm.”

For some, the program is a bridge between the academic world they’re leaving and the farming world they’re joining.

Kalen / - “I want to have a diversified farm, a few acres of vegetables and then a lot of livestock.”

After the program ends, Kalen plans to pursue more hands-on experience.

Nats- class

Whelton/ - “We're just a small farm, we don't really want to get a lot bigger, and yet there's a huge demand for more and more local produce. we can't do it all, so we want there to be more farmers, we want more people to get into farming and we want them to have as much chance of success as they can have, so any little part we can play by sharing some of the information we've learned, sharing some of the stuff we think about, we're happy to do that. 0:05:12.

Whelton says he looked for a program like this when he got started in farming.

Whelton / - “We're originally from Denver co, grew up in the city, so we didn't really know much about all of - anything having to do with farming, we worked on some farms, but a lot of the stuff, when we got started, we just had to sort of make up, on our own, which we enjoyed, but there was a lot of info that we wished was more available... I think .... this program, if used well, can really be worth 5 years of spending time working on farms, you still have to do the work and you still have to work on the farm, you still have to do all that stuff, but the amount of information that can be shared from all the different people that they're talking to, and from what I'm hearing from the people that are working with us, is really pretty amazing.”

Helping today’s students become tomorrow’s farmers, UVM’s Farmer Training Program is ready to grow. In Burlington, I’m Rebecca Gollin with Across the Fence.
Judy.: Thanks Rebecca to learn more about the farmer training program I'm joined by
the program Director Susie Walsh Daloz. Susie has been farming and teaching for more
than a decade and has also been active in the farm to school program in Vermont
schools. Welcome and thanks for being with us. You just wrapped up the very first
farmer training program this past fall how did it go?

Susie.: We have a fabulous first year. As you can see from the video we had a great
group of students who came in. They came from all over the country is with diverse set
of backgrounds and interests and created a relieved vibrant learning community. We're
so lucky to have amazing partners who helped us make this program possible. We work
with Intervale center city market extension all of these post farmers that you saw a half-
pint of bread and butter all of these guys made the program are really which first year
and really successful. We graduated 12 students with certificates in sustainable farming
and we're well established to keep going.

Judy.: Tell me a little bit about the program vs. the traditional apprenticeship that
someone would do to learn this on a farm?

Susie.: Instead of working out one farm with one farm model this program allows
students to both manage their own site which gives them flexibility to make mistakes in
and try things out and have a real mentor farmer walk long side and teach them and
have the opportunity two work alongside establish successful farm businesses in the
community. With a one season these folks are exposed to a variety of farm models and
then we have a classroom component that allows students to learn additional
information that bolsters their education all in one season. It can pack a lot of learning
into one season and a lot of different farms a lot of different systems and a lot of space
and time to learn and educate on other topics.

Judy.: Tell me a little bit more about the kind of student that the farmer training
program is designed for?

Susie.: Is designed for inspiring farmers and systems leaders who won two immerse
themselves in the production techniques of farming and really take advantage of the
community of sustainable farmers that were part of. It's folks that really want to dive
right into it and have both the classroom and the experiential component and come away
from this program able to start their own operations or be able to support small scale
farmers through nonprofit work and can relate to that.

Judy.: So someone who is a little older perhaps of has and has some life experience has
and decided this is really what they want to do.

Susie.: That's a great point. This will not be the first step of farming for folks and if
you're going to start this program you know this is what you want to do and that you're
ready to take that leap and go for it so yes.

Judy.: The instructors are one of the many strengths in the program.
Susie.: We're so fortunate to be a part of this community wise and amazing sustainable food people. As you know from talking to lots of them we get to work with our partners instructors from the Intervale city market and extension planted soil science the farmers themselves who are great teachers both in the field and in the classroom. So the education students get is so rich because of all these people who are the instructors.

Judy.: Tell me a little bit about the curriculum. What kind of topics do they cover?

Susie.: We really delve into production and management for small scale farms from propagation to pest management plant family's post harvested handling and everything in between. So all of that production piece we delve into while we're in the field and also in the classroom. In addition to that we're doing marketing and business planning because you don't just want to be able to grow it you want to be able to sell it. So we start from the beginning have ate a really deep thread on marketing and business for farm's for our students.

Judy.: Also to be able to relate to people where you're at a farmers market and say this is what you could do with the produce. In the video you talked about recipe cards.

Susie.: Absolutely that marketing piece has so many elements both what your markets are and what kind of customer you're related to and how you do that. We delve and that kind of thinking as well.

Judy.: So what are the 2011 graduates doing now?

Susie.: Great question. That group is a few months out. We of three who have back to the program fell in love with compost and are now starting to compost business themselves. It's a beautiful love story. They're working together. There's another student who started of micro greens business. And other who has started a baking company with local ingredients. A few others who will be working on farms this coming season as an employee to another farm and a few more will be starting their own farm businesses.

Judy.: People who stay in the area or do they go back to where they come from and start up there?

Susie.: Most of them go back to where they came from. We have one who is a transplant and is staying around but most of them are coming here to learn from the community and all we have to offer but want to take it back to where they are form.

Judy.: Other changes to the 2012 program?

Susie.: Yes the big changes are really about expansion. At the Hort farm which is our educational home base we had about an acre this past year that the students cultivated on. This next year we will have 3 1/2 acres which allows is to expand student numbers. We'll have 18 to 20 this year and the amount of education we can do on our home farm
so we will be beefing up what we were able to do on the Hort farm which were really excited about and expanding our markets.

Judy.: Tell me a little bit about the diversity of the students coveted this year has home because have nots a very interesting part of this program.

Susie.: We have diversity both where they come from their age folks from 21 to 47 different places in their lives different educational backgrounds. Some with master's degrees in some as has just finished their bachelor's. Folks from the West Coast New England Midwest with education backgrounds where they want to really have an educational farm others who want to start their own operation. We even have some international folks who grew up in other countries and are now the United States. The diversity is a really rich part of the learn community and we love learning from them and they love learning from each other too.

Judy.: How did the students learn about the program is it unique are there other ones like this?

Susie.: This program we modeled after the Santa Cruz program which has existed for almost 40 years. But ours takes a different twist of it because of this focus on marketing and business planning. This is one that is based on models that exist but has expanded it to be a good regional model for New England for the growing conditions and to train students of the components business not just the growing technique. We have a lot of people reaching out to us who have found out about the program because we talk about it at conferences and are spreading the word through our networks and people are excited about it.

Judy.: The 2012 farmer training program begins May 2 and runs to the end of October. What should somebody do if they want more information?

Susie.: They could check out our web site which is there or give us a call. We could talk to you about it we could send you information and we could tell you what it will be at conferences to tell you more.

Judy.: Terrific thanks so much for joining us today.

Susie.: Thanks for having me.

Judy.: That's our program for today I am Judy Simpson we'll see you again next time on Across the Fence.

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