



# UBC FARM PRACTICUM IN SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

## 2018 OVERVIEW

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# Overview

## WHAT IS IT?

The UBC Farm Practicum in Sustainable Agriculture creates and supports new leaders in sustainable agriculture by providing an experiential learning environment that engages the practicum students with farmers and community educators in an agriculturally-based sustainability dialogue that is both locally, and globally significant.

***Our goal is to inspire and cultivate new farmers and sustainable agriculture educators who will transform their communities and their food systems through initiatives and enterprises that are socially, ecologically, and economically healthy and viable.***

The Practicum is a six-month experiential learning course designed for beginning farmers, urban and community gardeners, aspiring environmental educators with a focus on food production systems, and students with an interest in applying their learning about sustainable agriculture and food systems. Because of the level of commitment required to successfully complete the practicum, we are looking for applicants who:

- Are ready to devote themselves to engaged participation in the coursework and fieldwork;
- Show the capacity to contribute positively to the Practicum team and to the UBC Farm community
- Have, ideally, a vision for how the knowledge and skills developed during the program will fit in with future goals

Students accepted into the practicum bring a diversity of backgrounds and life experience to the program. Our program graduates share a vision of livelihoods and lifestyles grounded in sustainable and community-based food systems.

## WHERE IS IT?

UBC Farm, the living laboratory of the University of British Columbia's Faculty of Land and Food Systems (in Vancouver, British Columbia), hosts the practicum program. Our south campus farm is the site of the majority of farming activities, guest speaker presentations, and classroom sessions. We also travel to a number of local farm operations to provide a regionally-grounded food system context, and to make personal connections with experienced food growers.



## WHEN DOES IT HAPPEN?

The full program meets from April 13, 2018 until October 20, 2018 (and the Summer Option begins on April 13, 2018, and ends on August 25, 2018). During this time period, the program meets Thursday-Saturday (with the exception of occasional holiday and vacation breaks), for approximately 20 hours per week. To successfully complete the Practicum, we require 90% attendance of scheduled program hours.

We have found that students benefit the most when they plan for an average of 5-7 hours/week in additional off-program time to establish, care for, and maintain their individual and shared plot spaces, and to complete assignments.

## HOW MUCH DOES IT COST?

Program fees for 2018 are \$4,240 (Full Program); and \$3000 (Summer Option). Accepted students must pay an initial \$440 deposit and the remaining fee in February 2018.

Experienced instruction with a close student-to-teacher ratio is a foundation of the Practicum learning environment, and our intent is to provide this opportunity to dedicated individuals who are committed to exploring farming and food systems related enterprises and careers. In addition, students can expect to incur some costs (less than \$100) associated with purchasing seed for their plots. There is a small additional expense (optional) for participation in our weekly communal lunches.

# General Information

## THE UBC FARM AND CENTRE FOR SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS

The Centre for Sustainable Food Systems (CSFS) is home to the UBC Farm, a 24-hectare teaching, research, and community farm located on UBC's Vancouver campus. Forming a rich mosaic of cultivated fields, teaching gardens, forest stands, hedgerows and orchard plantings, the farm is a unique urban agrarian gem.

In close proximity to and fully integrated with a world-class community of researchers, the CSFS affords an opportunity to better understand and manage a productive land base that supports a thriving farm-forest ecosystem and adjacent urban population. The interface with the city enhances research opportunities that also address community, ecosystem, and global health.

## THE PRACTICUM

The program was established in 2008 as the "Sowing Seeds for the Future UBC Farm apprenticeship". Since that time, more than half of our program graduates have gone on to develop their farming skills with farming mentors in regional and international settings, in partnerships with other new farmers, or by starting their own agricultural operations.

The main approach to learning within the program is hands-on practice. Participants carry out seasonal farming activities with leadership provided by UBC Farm staff in the greenhouses, gardens, fields, orchards, and at our farmers' markets. Skills and concepts included in the program's learning outcomes range from soil fertility management, greenhouse and horticultural techniques, harvesting and post-harvest handling, irrigation basics, selected weed and pest identification, sustainable cultivation methods, safe operation of small tractors and implements, and operating direct markets and community supported agriculture (C.S.A.) programs.

In addition to the learning that occurs via classroom sessions and hands-on practice, the opportunity to build community with others in the cohort and with farm staff tends to be a very enriching aspect of the Practicum program.

## CONTENT

Applying the concepts and mastering the skills that form the foundations of sustainable agriculture are the key learning objectives of the practicum. We strive to create a strong group learning environment, and make connections between the conceptual knowledge and practical field skills. Although the 2018 schedule and topics will vary from the example given on the following pages, the outline still offers a useful example of a condensed syllabus and schedule from a past year. Opportunities to learn if specific content will be covered in 2018 can be discussed during the interview, or you can inquire via email.

Sessions are taught/facilitated by a combination of UBC Farm staff, allied UBC faculty and staff, and external expert guest speakers. Each year, it is common for us to visit 10-15+ farm operations, and have specialized



sessions taught by 20-25 guest speakers. Several assignments throughout the program require time outside of program hours for research and preparation, and involve 10-20 minute oral presentations.

One of the most distinctive features of the Practicum program is the plot component. Students receive access to an individual plot, as well as larger shared/production plots that they work on collectively. Students have significant autonomy as well as responsibility for managing their plots. Staff provide guidance and supervision, and address student questions and needs, in order to support student learning objectives. Vegetables, herbs, and fruits grown in the individual and shared plot is available for student's personal consumption. With produce grown in the production plots in 2017, practicum students operated their own farm stand at the UBC Farm Market. In addition to the land, water, and irrigation equipment, various tools and materials (including some seeds) are provided, and included within the cost of the program.

## EXAMPLE: CONDENSED PROGRAM SYLLABUS AND SCHEDULE

DATES	PROGRAM CONTENT
<b>April</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Orienting to UBC Farm systems and context</li> <li>• Soil formation and management</li> <li>• Seed and seedling biology</li> <li>• Crop planning: introduction to UBC Farm systems</li> <li>• Transplant seeding</li> <li>• Hand tools: Introduction and overview</li> <li>• Crop rotation: basics and the UBC Farm crop rotation plan</li> <li>• First regional farm visits</li> <li>• Student assignment: : Present rotational and planting plan for personal garden plot</li> </ul>
<b>May – Early</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fostering farm biodiversity: planting and tending a hedgerow</li> <li>• Nutrient cycles: soil sampling, testing, and interpretations</li> <li>• Composting: setting up small and medium---scale systems</li> <li>• Direct seeding: introduction to the equipment and crops</li> <li>• Cover crops: overview and UBC Farm systems</li> <li>• Introduction to UBC Farm Indigenous Programming</li> <li>• Introduction to UBC Farm Children’s Programming</li> </ul>
<b>May – Late</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cultivation comparisons—manual and mechanical techniques</li> <li>• Plant biology basics</li> <li>• Marketing channels overview: farmers’ markets, community supported agriculture (CSA), restaurants, wholesale produce distributors</li> <li>• Tractor safety and initial training</li> <li>• More regional farm field visits</li> <li>• Student assignment: Agro-ecological region of B.C.</li> </ul>
<b>June</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Soil moisture: identification and key concepts</li> <li>• Irrigation design options and field set-up</li> <li>• Poultry management: UBC Farm chickens and eggs</li> <li>• Produce harvesting, processing, and direct marketing</li> <li>• Orchard pruning: the UBC Farm Heritage Apple Orchard</li> <li>• Overnight regional farm trip</li> <li>• Strawberry production</li> </ul>
<b>July</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Orchard management: disease and pest</li> <li>• Mushroom cultivation workshop (special topic)</li> <li>• Bee-keeping workshop</li> <li>• Tillage Practices – To Till or Not to Till</li> <li>• Produce harvesting and processing</li> <li>• Tractor and seeder training (continued)</li> <li>• Blueberry Production</li> </ul>

- August**
- Integrated pest management: workshop and walkabout
  - Produce harvesting, processing, and marketing
  - Farming in the ALR (Agricultural Land Reserve)
  - Practicum Luncheon: Annual Picnic in the Poplars
  - Regional Farm Visits: Organic Grain Operation and Goat Cheese Dairy
  - Preparations for Student Market Stand
  - Student assignments: Farm Case study or Special Topics Presentations

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- September**
- Seed saving workshops
  - Hops Production
  - Squash Production
  - Land Access forum: strategies for accessing land, and understanding leases

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- October**
- Cover cropping: end of season field preparation and sowing
  - Food sovereignty / Food justice
  - Techniques and tips for assessing land quality for farming and gardening
  - Farm Business Planning
  - Field and Sales Summaries from UBC Farm Staff
  - Program wrap-up activities
  - Final student assignment: Present your farm plan

### SAMPLE WEEKLY SCHEDULE

THURSDAY (9-5)	FRIDAY (9-5)	SATURDAY (8-3/3:30)
9-9:30 – Review of Weeding Techniques and Considerations	9-12:30: Harvest Rotations (students rotate between different fields)	8-12:30: Market/Farm Rotations and General Crew
9:30-12: Weeding in Brassica and Flower Fields	12:30-1:30: Communal lunch prepared by one practicum and one staff	(one-on-one rotations with various staff members, including rotations with poultry care and egg harvest, direct marketing with farmer’s market stand and CSA stand, tractor, seeder, volunteer management & tool sharpening, and hoop house)
12-1 – Communal Lunch (made from fresh farm produce, and prepared by two practicum students)	1:30-5: Harvest Processing Rotations	1:30-2: Weekly Reflections (students share what they did and learned in rotations)
1-2 – Plot time (individual plots)	(in addition to the regular vegetable processing rotations, additional weekly one-on-one rotations may include flower harvesting and bouquet making and/or assisting a UBC agricultural researcher)	2-3:30: Beekeeping w/ Guest Speaker
2-4 – Cover Cropping Discussion and Walkabout w/ UBC Professor Emeritus		
4-5 – Plot time (shared/production plots)		

## THE PRACTICUM

We structure the program to ensure that all students experience a variety of field responsibilities and opportunities to develop sustainable farming and gardening skills. Please note that our responsibilities in the field are physically demanding, and take place rain or shine. Students are encouraged to apply for the program only if they are comfortable with the physical requirements of farming. If you have chronic back pain or previous knee injuries, please consider possible impacts of farming and gardening tasks to your personal health and comfort levels before completing your application. Don't hesitate to let us know if you have any questions about the physical requirements.

## VISITING THE UBC FARM

We strongly encourage prospective students to visit the farm and meet UBC Farm staff prior to applying to the practicum. We believe this gives applicants a better understanding of the hands-on nature of the program, along with a better sense of the UBC Farm community.

Interested participants are invited to [join in a volunteer session](#) and participate in the vibrant learning community we foster.

In addition, we are offering an **Open House on Saturday, Sept 16<sup>th</sup>, from 12-2 pm**, as an opportunity to tour the Farm, meet current practicum students, and ask questions. No registration is required. Please see the [UBC Farm website for directions](#). There will also be [a Fall Fair occurring](#) at the UBC Farm on September 16<sup>th</sup> and a Soil Biology workshop ([advanced registration required](#)).

## CRITERIA FOR SELECTION

The goal of our program is to prepare future sustainable farmers, scientists, teachers, and community leaders to take the next step in applying their learning and interests in sustainable food systems and agriculture. In choosing individuals who will carry out difficult tasks, learn, grow food, harvest, and often eat together for 6 months, we are, in effect, creating a community. Out of the pool of applicants, we attempt to achieve a balance of interests, geographical and cultural origins, ages, and gender.

We welcome all applicants, though the program is geared towards relative newcomers to farming and gardening. The selection committee looks highly upon applicants who can articulate the ways in which the program fits their long-term learning and professional objectives, as well as applicants who have demonstrated experience in or a commitment to sustainable agriculture/food systems. Also important to the selection committee, applicants should carefully consider how the demands of the practicum schedule will logistically fit with their other life commitments. Applicants must be at least 19 years old.

## HOW TO APPLY

Applications are available for electronic submission through our website. All applications received by **October 2<sup>nd</sup>** will be considered for Early Admission. The Early Admission pool offers highly competitive applicants an opportunity for a quicker decision to be made on their status. However, even very strong

applicants in the Early Admission pool may not be offered early admission, as we only accept a limited number during the Early Admission process. All early applicants not receiving Early Admission offers will be added to the Regular Deadline pool of applicants. All applications for the Regular Deadline pool are due by **November 5<sup>th</sup>**. All applications received after midnight on November 5<sup>th</sup> (Pacific Standard Time) will be considered “Late” and may or may not be considered.

An application fee of \$25 CAD is required to submit the online application. In unusual circumstances, this fee may be waived for applicants of limited means – please inquire.

Top applicants will be selected for interviews. We notify all applicants of their status in the program by mid-late December of the application year. Since our staff size is small in the winter, we appreciate if you kindly refrain from inquiring about your status, unless you have not heard from us by Dec 18<sup>th</sup>.

### FURTHER QUESTIONS

If you have questions not included in the overview here, please send your questions to Seth Friedman, Practicum Coordinator: [seth.friedman@ubc.ca](mailto:seth.friedman@ubc.ca).





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