



ON GOOD LAND

IF MR. TRUMP WERE AN ORGANIC FARMER

What happens when six apprentices live together for one growing season.

BY EVE KAPLAN-WALBRECHT

If Donald Trump thinks that watching people learn his business is interesting drama, he should see what the apprentices at an organic farm go through. In 2008, our six full-season apprentices (who come on board from April 1 until mid-November) and five “novice” apprentices (here for one month each) participated in every aspect of growing, harvesting and delivering vegetables, cut flowers and eggs to over 1,000 families in the New York metropolitan area, running three farmers markets, as well as our farm stand on our diverse 85-acre organic farm.

“Half of all current farmers in the U.S. are likely to retire in the next decade,” according to the USDA New Farmer program. And so at Garden of Eve we make growing the next crop of new farmers part of our job. (Did I mention that statistics show the fastest growing category of new farmers is women!)

Like a made-for-TV reality show, we also have plenty of drama during the season. Since our apprentices live on the farm, they work together, eat together, spend the evenings and recreational time together and get up the next morning to do it all over again. “This constant togetherness is one of the factors that make on-farm mentoring so much more complex than most types of teaching,” as the Growing New Farmers Project, a program of the Massachusetts-based New England Small Farm Institute, puts it. “Another is the inclusiveness

of the subject matter; farm mentors aren’t simply teaching their students how to farm, they are also teaching them how to be.”

Apprentices participate in monthly visits to other farms, and lunchtime learning meetings on topics ranging from Organic Certification to risk management to balancing farm and family responsibilities. We paid them a salary and provided free housing on the farm, free produce and free eggs. Each apprentice is offered the opportunity to do an entrepreneurial project growing crops to make some extra money, which many take advantage of.

These enterprising individuals come to our farm apprenticeship from every corner of the country and even outside of the United States. Most had academic backgrounds in fields completely unrelated to agriculture, and no farming in their immediate family. What the apprentices share is a belief that enduring the hardships and joys of hands-on farm labor makes them happy, and that producing food is truly important work. They seek to rediscover a lifestyle that once was mandatory in America yet has become rarer and more endangered each year, even if it’s no less essential to the personal and societal future of all of us.

You may never see them on TV, but here we present a portrait of this diverse, fascinating cast of characters who will make up farming’s future.



Dan Machin, farm manager apprentice

Where are you from?

Brooklyn, New York, most recently, but I grew up in Memphis, Tennessee.

Why are you interested in agriculture?

I'd like to be able to make money with a 5 o'clock shadow and dirt in my pants.

What has been your most memorable moment of your Garden of Eve farm apprentice experience?

Walking into the greenhouse in the fall when the onions were curing, thousands of them spread across the entire floor of the whole greenhouse, and the overwhelming smell of hot onions. I couldn't believe how many onions we grew.

Where are you going next?

I'm spending the winter at Garden of Eve and hopefully I'll be launching my own farm business in the spring.

Hassleer Rosales, Multinational Exchange for Sustainable Agriculture (MESA) trainee apprentice

Where are you from?

Huanuco, Peru. My family owns a computer/Internet center there but my grandparents have a livestock farm and I majored in agriculture in college.

Why are you interested in agriculture?

I grew up on our family farm, and I'd like to keep it going and find ways to run it better.

What has been your most memorable moment of your Garden of Eve farm apprentice experience?

When 1,000 14-week-old chickens arrived at the farm in April, and we had to get them out of their cages on the truck and into their new mobile chicken coop in the field.

Where are you going next?

Back to Peru, where I'll be doing a project to visit villages and teach them about the CSA model, which I've learned so much about during my time here in the United States at Garden of Eve.

Hannah Warner, farm stand manager apprentice

Where are you from?

I am originally from Jamesport, but most recently I was living in a women's co-op at Boston University studying occupational therapy.

Why are you interested in agriculture?

I've been surrounded by agriculture my whole life, growing up on the North Fork, and my family's heritage is in agriculture, but I was never involved in it. I'm looking forward to having a Permaculture homestead someday.

What has been your most memorable moment of your Garden of Eve farm apprentice experience?

We had a group of kids visit the farm from a school in Manhattan who were mostly born in the Dominican Republic. It was amazing seeing the kids getting so excited at seeing the animals and vegetables we have here. You could see that for the first time they were realizing that their experiences on their families' farms in their home country had value.

Where are you going next?

I'm getting married to my high-school sweetheart, finishing my graduate studies and looking forward to developing a sustainable farm for my family someday.

Margaret Schlass, farm apprentice

Where are you from?

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Last season I worked on a large organic farm there. Before that I graduated from the University of Delaware with a degree in art history and anthropology.

Why are you interested in agriculture?

I'd like to lead a slower, more meaningful life than the TV-centered sterile environment I see a lot of people living in.

What has been your most memorable moment of your Garden of Eve farm apprentice experience?

Pulling onions in the middle of the worst August rainstorm in bone-chilling cold.

Where are you going next?

Back to Pittsburgh to start preparing for farming on my own next year. It'll be four acres on a friend's property.

Keisha Knight, farm apprentice

Where are you from?

I am originally from Oregon. Before I came here I was working at another organic farm outside of Miami, Florida. I started out there as a Worldwide Workers on Organic Farms (WWOOF) volunteer and they hired me as a farm apprentice.

Why are you interested in agriculture?

To connect to the seasons and the earth. To live within the natural rhythms. I'd like to work to bring the larger community in touch with this type of lifestyle. I'd love to see a kale plant in every home.

What has been your most memorable moment of your Garden of Eve farm apprentice experience?

Driving the 16-foot box truck through New York City to deliver the CSA vegetables during rush hour.

Where are you going next?

A road trip to Virginia, Nashville, Louisiana, Texas, northern Oregon, Seattle and then Hawaii. Hopefully getting a job managing farmers markets in Seattle at the Pike Place Market. My dream is to have a little lunch counter shop where I grow all the produce myself.



Emily Palmer, farm apprentice and flower farm manager

Where are you from?

I just graduated from Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut, where I had been working part-time at an orchard.

Why are you interested in agriculture?

I believe that farming is the most direct way to the best possible life for myself and others.

What has been your most memorable moment of your Garden of Eve farm apprentice experience?

We had an order in August for 18 centerpieces for a local wedding. I cut and arranged all the flowers myself. When Chris and Eve [Garden of Eve farmers] saw them, they were so impressed, the flowers looked so fantastic and professional.

Where are you going next?

To Berlin, California and Israel. Then in the spring I'll be moving into a trailer on a dairy farm on Martha's Vineyard and starting my own vegetable- and flower-growing operation. I feel fantastic about it; my parents, somewhat less so.

Lisa Whitcher, farm apprentice

Where are you from?

Clifton Park, New York, which is outside of Albany. Last season I worked at a conventional farm as an apprentice, and before that I was finishing college at Russell Sage College with a degree in psychology.

Why are you interested in agriculture?

I believe in living my life honestly and positively affecting other people.

What has been your most memorable moment of your Garden of Eve farm apprentice experience?

Working together in fire brigade style to unload melons and pumpkins from the wagon. I had to catch a lot of melons!

Where are you going next?

Out into the world. Peru for three months with Hassleer. Most likely I will do another farm apprenticeship next year.

Alexandra Buck, novice apprentice

Where are you from?

Chicago, Milwaukee, the Twin Cities, most recently New York City, working at the Presbyterian United Nations Office doing educational work about international issues.

Why are you interested in agriculture?

Good food, sustainable living, alternative economies.

What has been your most memorable moment of your Garden of Eve farm apprentice experience?

When we were chasing stray chickens at 10 p.m., trying to catch them and lock them up inside the mobile coop, so that we could move it the next morning. I've never spent the evening chasing chickens before.

Where are you going next?

Lima, Peru, to be a Fair Trade Project facilitator, working with cooperatives of indigenous craft artisans. ☺

Eve Kaplan-Walbrecht runs Garden of Eve organic farm with her husband Chris Kaplan-Walbrecht.

Photograph: Lindsay Morris