

Rodale Institute Veteran Farmer Intern

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BACKGROUND

This summer I had the opportunity to Intern at Rodale Institute as part of the Veteran Farmer Trainee program. Rodale Institute is a 330-acre training, research and working farm located near Kutztown Pennsylvania. Rodale has the longest running comparison of conventional verses organic agricultural practices and is widely considered the birthplace of the organic food movement. Rodale Institute seeks to grow the organic movement through:

1. Research
2. Farmer Training
3. Consumer Education



A prominent display of compost teeming with life

Finding the position

Finding the opportunity at Rodale was almost entirely by chance. Through persistent personal internet research on environmental and agricultural job boards it eventually led me to the Rodale website where I located the position. Being diligent with your search and diversifying your avenues of exploration can vastly improve your chances of finding an opportunity.



Feeder pigs grazing on forage in a pasture paddock

Veteran Farmer Training

The Veteran Farmer program seeks to give United States military veterans the opportunity to practice and learn about farming to determine if it is a passion and career they want to pursue. During my time I had a plethora of learning opportunities that combined hands-on learning with classroom sessions.

My experience Included:

- Vegetable production, harvest, and processing
- Livestock management and slaughter
- Beekeeping training
- Composting
- Familiarization and practice with farming equipment
- Farm marketing and economics



Rodale's beekeeper gives an informational lesson

On The Job

Farming is dictated by the season and your routine can become very consistent with moments of spontaneous excitement and irregular opportunity. Most day-to-day operations revolved around the production of vegetables on the farm consisting of weeding, harvesting, planting, and processing the crop for distribution to customers. Additionally, livestock must be cared for daily with feedings and pasture rotation often requiring fencing prep and movement. Opportunities to visit and learn from local farmers weekly were a highlight during my experience.



A local farmer conducts a tour of his farm operation



A poultry operation seen on a field trip to a local small farm



A Salatin style chicken tractor housing Rodale's broiler chickens

Accomplishments

Broiler Chickens from Egg to Slaughter

Cornish cross chickens have a life cycle of eight weeks from chick to slaughter. During these eight weeks I was able to monitor feed intake, growth progress, grazing movements, and help with processing the birds-all crucial skills for a small poultry operation to get started.

Vegetable Production

As mentioned previously most daily duties consisted of vegetable production related tasks. This continuous practice allowed for me to gain a comprehensive understanding of multiple crops from seed to eventual sell to customer. These skills will be crucial to running a profitable business that includes vegetables at any capacity.

Passion Reassurance

As someone who has struggled with direction, I consider it an accomplishment that this internship has provided me with the knowledge and assurance that farming is a passion I wish to pursue on a professional or personal level. This reassurance through my opportunity drives my academic performance and professional goals on a day-to-day basis.



The images above show the incorporation of advanced technology into the practice of sustainable farming

Reflection

After my experience at Rodale I hope to complete my undergraduate degree and begin farming on my family farm in Richland County near Bellville Ohio. I plan on seeking additional hands-on learning opportunities in agriculture to assist my aspiration of running a small farm. This experience was everything I needed to help me make up my mind if farming is a viable and suitable career choice for me. For students considering this opportunity or others in the field of agriculture there is no replacement for getting hands-on experience and participating with the day-to-day activities of a farm operation.

Acknowledgements

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