

## School of Environment and Natural Resources

# Farmer and Counselor at Camp Walden

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#### Internship Background

This summer, I worked at Camp Walden, a sleepaway summer camp located on Long Lake near Cheboygan Michigan, as both a camp counselor and the head of the camp's farm program. As a child, I was a camper at Camp Walden for several years, and in 2021, I returned to camp to work as a camp counselor. That year, I often found myself gravitating towards working the farm periods, and I was able to return in 2022 as the lead farmer



My cabin group during the first two weeks of camp

As a camp counselor, I

- Lived in a cabin with two co counselors and 5-10 rising sixth graders
- Instructed and/or co-instructed a variety of activities, from sailing and outdoor-cooking to a "Jam Session" period with a camper band
- Tended to the wellbeing of campers, both within my cabin and in my instructional periods
- Provided guidance for campers as they develop their own independence and new skills
- Helped with the running of camp wide "special days", from a massive capture the flag tournament to the "color wars"



Hanna Jenkinson(far right) and I with our 1A campers next to our scarecrows, onions, and potatoes

As the head of the farm, I was

- Present at and tasked with instructing every available farming period
- Was responsible for feeding the animals(goats and chickens) and cleaning the animal enclosures
- Planted new crops with campers, as well as tended to some pre-planted crops by the camp's maintenance staff
- Collaborated with Ben Shipman, my colleague who acted as the camp's Sustainability Ambassador, to spearhead the camp's new sustainable education program("Plant Force")



Mission Statement: "The overnight-camp experience is unique from any other: Away from the demands of school and social media, and distanced from parental expectations and guidance, children are free to explore who they are. At Walden, that exploration is encouraged and supported by caring counselors and veteran administrators whose primary job is to create an environment where children feel accepted and safe"



Fer Ojeda(right) visiting our farm period to lead a goat yoga session!

Being employed at Walden, one gets the unique opportunity to both develop new skills and find a place to utilize existing skills when leading activities. Examples of opportunities for counselors include(but are not limited to):

- Driving a motorboat for waterskiing and/or waterfront supervision(must be lifeguard certified)
- Care for the camp's many animals, including bunnies, kittens, chickens, and goats
- Leading various camping, hiking, and backpacking excursions from camp with varying levels of difficulty
- Coaching for long term tournaments with the camp's various conventional sporting "leagues", including the Walden Soccer League, the Walden Basketball Association, and
- Working with the programming team to lead in planning camp-wide events
- Creating new activities for campers based on your own skills or interests

#### What is Required to Work at Walden?

As a camp counselor, it is important to maintain a balance with your relationship with your campers, as you want to make camp a fun experience for your campers while being able to be seen as an authority figure when needed. During staff week, counselors are trained on techniques for building rapport with campers, approaching confrontation with campers, and possible fun activities they can partake in with their cabin's group

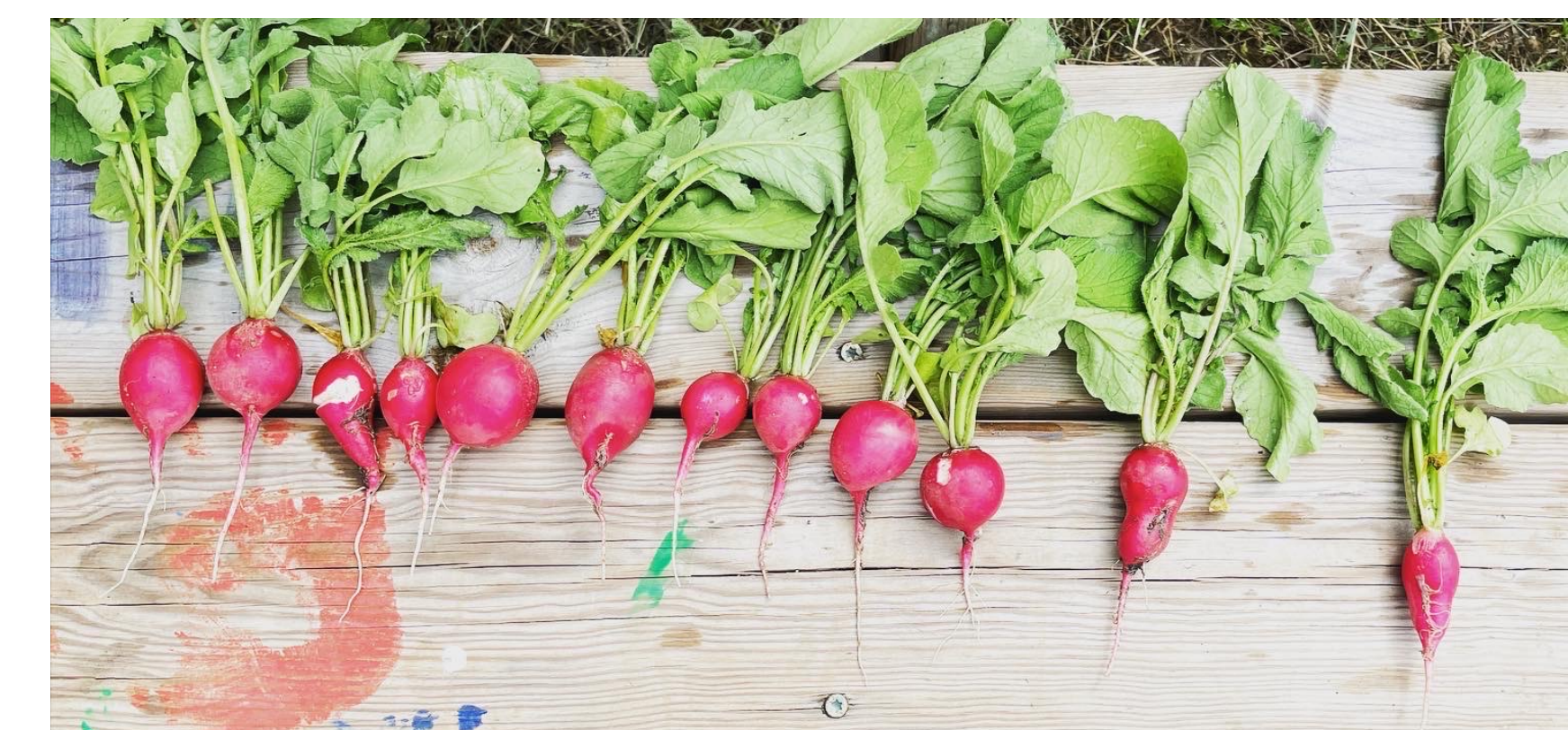


Planting corn seeds with my 1A farm session

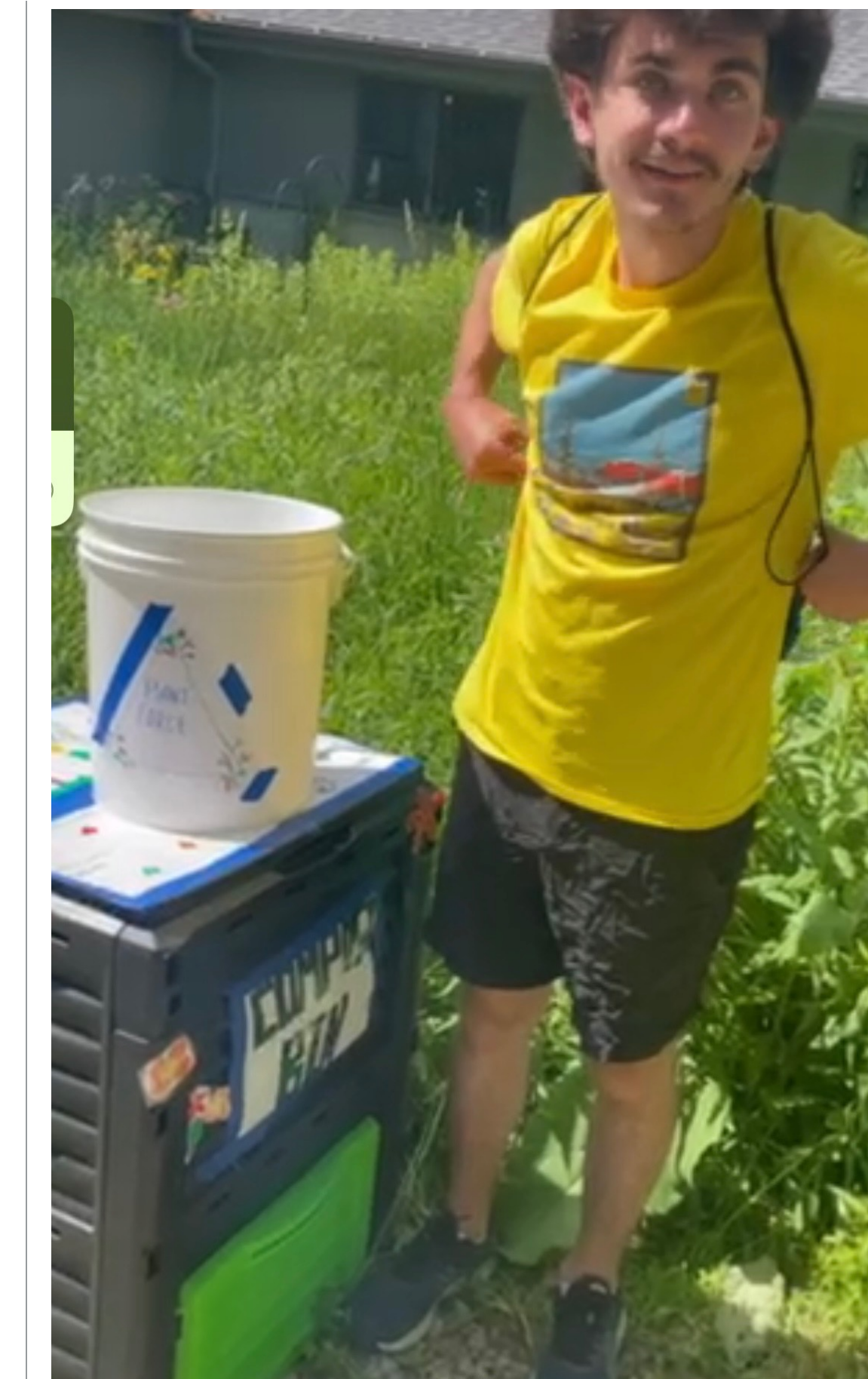
While working at Camp Walden as a normal counselor can be accessible for someone without a ton of job experience, it is important that a counselor

- Goes into the job with the right mindset and intentions
- Approaches any issue they may face with empathy, patience, and compassion
- Is able to effectively separate their personal lives from their roles as a counselor to the campers
- Can work as a team player with other staff members

While specialized skill sets in specific camp areas are not necessarily a requirement to work at Walden, having specific skills, hobbies, or fields of study can allow one to achieve greater levels of responsibility. My experience with gardening and animal care, knowledge of compost, and time studying sustainability at The Ohio State University allowed me to achieve my spot as lead farmer, along with my role in facilitating with the camp's "Plant Force" Program



A batch of baby radishes grown with my first session campers



Ben Shipman, the camp's Sustainability Ambassador, next to one of the long-term compost bins we constructed

#### Conclusion

Working at Camp Walden can be a great way to gain hands on experience with education, land management, animal care, gardening, outdoors experience, and many more. This position was a very rewarding experience for me, as I got to form tight bonds with both campers and other staff members from across the globe, I got to demonstrate some of what I've learned at OSU to my campers in my activities I led, I got to further develop my own outdoorsy skills, and I learned about more internship opportunities relating to environmental education

I would like to extend my thanks to Scott Ruthart and Liz Stevens for granting me this opportunity, Ben Shipman for bringing my voice to the table for the camp's sustainability programs, and my fellow farmers Tom Moffat, Carly Fehr, Hanna Jenkinson. and Shane Havnes



Helping my camper practice for the jam session performance



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