

Sustainable Farm Apprenticeship Program: Environmental Justice Education Initiative

Section I: Narrative

This summer, I proposed to expand the Zumwalt Acres sustainable farm apprenticeship program by centering on environmental and food justice. While Zumwalt Acres had funding to house and feed apprentices, we lacked funds to expand our program to enrich apprentices' political, social, and cultural knowledge of farming. The Projects for Peace award funded books, workshops, guest speakers, field trips, and other educational materials and opportunities.

Zumwalt Acres begins the workday at 7 am to beat the heat. Lunch is from 11:30 am to 12:30 pm. Then the workday resumes, before wrapping up at 3 pm for an end-of-day meeting, in which the next day's agenda is set. There were eleven people living in the house this summer, split between five bunk beds and a tent. The farm owner and manager, J. R. Zumwalt, came weekly, Tuesday–Thursday, to check in and lead outdoor tasks (e.g., operate farm machinery, build infrastructure). Dinner was at 6 pm. The group enjoyed a home-cooked vegetarian meal daily, using fresh-picked produce. Two cats, Shlomi and Tony, regularly joined for dinner. They were strays who wandered onto the property and decided to stay. There's a cat bed in the tool shed they share. The apprentices took great care of them, feeding them and bringing them to the vet.

Educational programming is integrated into day-to-day programming at Zumwalt Acres. Every week, apprentices hold a "Context Conversation," in which they discuss the intersection of food and indigeneity, race, justice, politics, gender/sexuality, ability/disability, spirituality, and more. Over the summer, we invited guest speakers to join the discussion, including Adrienne Williams, co-founder of Growing and Growth Collective and Chef Fresh Roberson, co-founder of Fresher Together.

Adrienne presented "Salt of the Earth: The Rich History of Black Farming in the US." She had offered this presentation before, at a Northwestern alumni event. She graduated from Northwestern in 2008, with a degree in African American studies, and earned a master's degree in business administration and an urban agriculture certification from the Ohio State University. She started Growing and Growth Collective with three other Black women to improve health outcomes and civic engagement for BIPOC through urban agriculture. Chef Fresh spoke about food and identity. They were born and raised in North Carolina and moved to the Chicago area for college. As founder of Fresh Together, Chef Fresh works on healing, economic development, training, and retreat for South Chicago communities.

All apprentices were given their own copy of *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge*, by Robin Wall Kimmerer. We also established a library in the farmhouse, including titles such as *Farming While Black*, by Leah Penniman; *Gathering Moss*, by Robin Wall Kimmerer; *The Overstory*, by Richard Powers; *Freedom Farmers*, by Monica White; and *Sacred Instructions: Indigenous Wisdom for Living Spirit-Based*, by Sherri Mitchell.

Workshops covered such topics as integrated pest management, season extension, food safety, farm efficiencies (e.g., record keeping, worker/farmer efficacies), embodied liberation, apple cider making, concrete craftsmanship, candle making, and food preparation (e.g., canning).

The most memorable educational experiences were field trips to other farms in the region. Apprentices toured and, in many cases, met the owners/founders of Refuge Food Forest, Janie's Farm & Mill, Henry's Farm, Black Oaks Center, Spence Farm, Growing Home, Loyola Student Farm, and West End Garden. Black Oaks Center and Growing Home were highlights.

Black Oaks Center is located forty minutes from Zumwalt Acres in the historic Black farming community of Pembroke Township, Illinois. Since 2006, they have been working to equip youth and families with skills

of sustainability through experiential learning at their forty-acre eco-campus. The Zumwalt Acres apprentices spent the visit in their yurt, discussing sustainable agriculture practices and community building. We have stayed in touch with Black Oaks Center since that visit and plan to collaborate on food distribution and to support their apprenticeship program. Our fall apprentices will be visiting their farm in October and the Black Oaks Center team will be visiting Zumwalt Acres as well.

Growing Home is an organic and nonprofit urban farm in Chicago. Their belief is that everyone deserves a good job, to eat well, and to live in a vibrant community. They serve their communities through paid employment training and providing local, healthy, affordable food.

There were times it was difficult shaping our curriculum. There are many topics that we could have covered. Not only did we need to narrow our focus, but we also needed to find educators who fit our interest areas and coordinate amidst our packed schedules.

We held two community events this summer. One for family and friends of farm apprentices, and the other for local Sheldon community members. It was exciting to show guests around, and to share food and music. Some had grown up and gone to school with our farm's owner. Others were driving from the Chicago area and Wisconsin.

My experience at Zumwalt Acres has influenced my definition of peace. Peace is fostering a community that is welcoming and supportive. It is an individual or group who others feel safe going to, who is accessible and reliable. It is the comfort of a full stomach of nutritious food. It is not worrying where your next meal will come from. It is naming inequalities and injustices and approaching your day-to-day actions with that awareness. I hope my project will contribute to peace long-term. Zumwalt Acres will continue to have important conversations and engage with our local community.

My project has also changed me and the way I think about the world. Meeting farmers, educators, and nonprofit leaders committed to making a difference in their communities inspired me. They demonstrated that one can make a positive impact in whatever role they are in. As I approach graduation and the start of my career, I want to make social and environmental impact a focus. I realize neither "sustainability" nor "impact" needs to be in my job title for me to accomplish this.

My advice to future Projects for Peace grantees is to plan far in advance, but also be ready to adapt your plans. You can never predict what obstacles might arise. It's best to expect that they will, and roll with them, instead of letting yourself get frustrated. Communicate often with stakeholders. Be upfront about issues as soon as they arise, rather than let them build up. Don't be afraid to ask questions. You are not showing weakness or cluelessness. Rather, you are demonstrating curiosity, attention to detail, and courageousness. And be proud of your work. You accomplished a lot in a matter of months. You impacted others and helped cultivate new relationships. Carry that accomplishment and those memories with you!

Zumwalt Acres: A Regenerative Agriculture Initiative is empowering the next generation of environmental leaders, including farmers, scientists, and policymakers. The Projects for Peace grant significantly enhanced program participants' learning experience, funding guest speakers, workshops, and field trips that deepened our understanding of social, political, and historical dynamics of our food system.

Julia Borland, P4P Grantee/Project Coordinator (juliaborland8@gmail.com)

Section II: Photographs



