



# Sustainable Agriculture Internships Guidelines for Internship Hosts

**University of Minnesota**

**College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences**

The Minors in Sustainable Agriculture at the University of Minnesota have been developed on the premise that agriculture that is capable of sustaining humankind for generations to come requires practices and policies that balance profitability with concern for the environment and the well-being of farming families and rural communities. There is an urgent need to develop and promote such practices and policies. Preparing professionals who are able to do so requires that students acquire a good understanding of the interdependencies of food production systems. Providing courses and experiences that build such an understanding is the primary goal of the minor program.

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## A Letter of Invitation

Dear Internship Host!

Greetings from the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture! The Minor in Sustainable Agriculture serves undergraduates and graduate students from a wide variety of departments—geography, ecology, agronomy, environmental studies, etc. In addition to classes, each student must design and participate in an internship related to sustainability in agriculture. Additional more information on the Minor is also available on our website [www.misa.umn.edu](http://www.misa.umn.edu) follow the link to student programs.

Welcoming interns to your site can provide exciting opportunities for lasting innovation at your site. We are always looking for new internship opportunities for students. If you are interested in being included in our site listings please fill out either the Questionnaire for On-Farm Internship or the Questionnaire for Organizations. If you are unsure which form to fill out contact the program coordinator. If you have a job posting that you would like posted on the MISA website please also send it to the Program Coordinator.

Even if your site has not offered internships in the past or money is unavailable for paid internships please consider being listed. Your site may offer a unique experience that is exactly what a student is looking for. Funding is also often available through alternative means such as student fellowships or assistantships; check out the MISA website for more information.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions you may have about the Minors in Sustainable Agriculture, or the internship program. Thanks for your participation!

Sincerely,

Courtney Tchida

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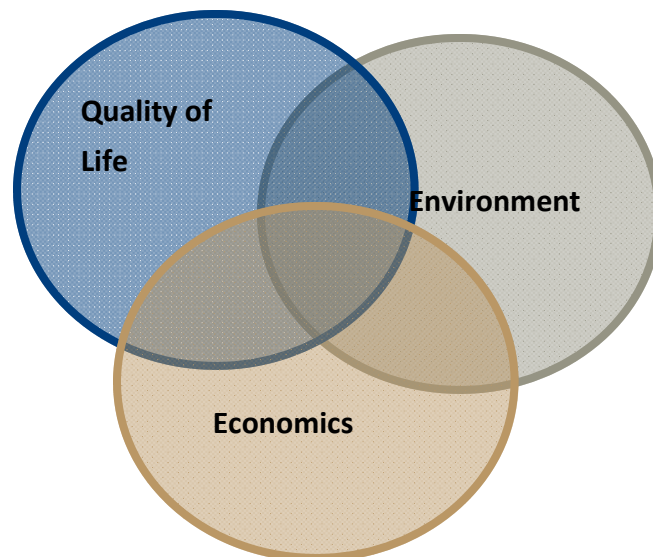
## Program Goals

The internship program was developed to encourage and facilitate experiences in which students work with diverse issues that affect agricultural systems. The program aims to help students develop decision-making skills by observing how solutions to complex problems in agriculture are made. The educational value of the internship experience is enhanced through course requirements and interaction with faculty and students during a period of facilitated debriefing.

### **The internship program provides opportunities for students to:**

- broaden their understanding of agriculture and gain exposure to issues affect the sustainability of food production,
- perform work integral to the operation of the farm, grassroots or public organizations, or agricultural enterprises which contribute directly to the development of sustainable food systems,
- learn about the decision making approaches used by individuals and organizations,
- interact with members of the agricultural community and form working relationships with some of these individuals or groups.

The internship is a supervised, off-campus experience that is required of all graduate and undergraduate students working toward the minor in Sustainable Agriculture Systems. During an internship, students work to complete specific objectives that are agreed upon by the student, intern host and a faculty member from their minor program.



**Sustainable Agriculture seeks to balance three long terms goals:**

**Quality of life, Environment and Economics.**

## What can an intern do for me?

Students conducting internships are enrolled in a variety of graduate and undergraduate programs at the University of Minnesota including agricultural sciences, ecology, natural resource management, economics, sociology and public affairs. They all are highly motivated, capable of working on their own, and serious about contributing to the establishment of sustainable agricultural systems. Interns can assist with many kinds of work, individually or with others, and bring new perspectives and creative input to projects.

The following are examples of internships that have been conducted in the past, and will give you an idea of the kinds of work interns do.

### Organizations:

- assessment of the potential of direct marketing of grass-fed beef,
- development of decision cases of erosion-preventing cropping practices,
- coordination of communication among regional non-profit groups promoting whole farm planning.

### Farms:

- investigation of farmer's diversification opportunities,
- assist with dairy goat milking and cheese production,
- development of educational tools to use with members of community supported farms.

## Do I qualify as an intern host?

Individual producers, nonprofit organizations, public agencies and agricultural businesses that participate in activities through which the program goals (page 3) can be met, qualify as intern hosts. An internship project should involve work directly related to agriculture in which environmental, social, and /or economic impacts of practices or policies are considered. The project may be part of an ongoing activity or a short-term project that the intern will complete.

## When do internships take place?

Internships can be arranged anytime during the year. Students typically are required to complete a specific number of hours based on the number of credits they are registering for. Beyond that the time a student spends on their internship varies depending upon the needs of the host and the time available to the student. Some students can move to a site outside of the metropolitan area and work full-time; others remain in the Twin Cities area and work part-time with the host.



**Internship Opportunity**  
**Sustainable Agriculture Minor**  
**Questionnaire for On-Farm Internships**

Please fill out all sections and return to:  
The Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture  
University of Minnesota  
411 Borlaug Hall  
1991 Buford Circle  
St. Paul, MN 55108  
Or email to [misamail@umn.edu](mailto:misamail@umn.edu)

Farm Name:

Contact Person:

Address:

City, State, Zip:

Phone:

Email address:

Website:

Best way to contact you:

Feel free to use a separate sheet of paper to answer the following questions:

**Current Operation**

Describe your current operation, specifically with regards to sustainable farming practices.

**Internship Description**

Describe the kinds of work interns will perform and any project with which interns would be involved.



### **Intern Skills / Experience**

List specific skills or experiences that interns should have.

### **Internship Timeline**

What is the minimum duration (weeks) and number of hours / day, that you require an intern to be able to work?

### **Internship Stipends / Benefits**

List any stipend or benefits that you are able to offer to interns. If living accommodations are not provided, is housing available nearby?

### **Family Information**

Describe any information you would like an intern to know about you and your family. Please note this information will be posted on MISA's website.

### **Additional Information**

Provide any additional information you think would be helpful.



**Internship Opportunity**  
**Sustainable Agriculture Minor**  
**Questionnaire for Organizations**

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St. Paul, MN 55108  
Or email to [misamail@umn.edu](mailto:misamail@umn.edu)

Organization:

Contact Person:

Job Title:

Address:

City, State, Zip:

Phone:

Fax:

Email address:

Website:

Best way to contact you:

Feel free to use a separate sheet of paper to answer the following questions:

**Organizational Goals**

Describe the goals and activities of your organization that specifically relate to sustainable farming and food systems.

**Internship Description**

Describe proposed projects and / or duties.



**Intern Skills / Experience**

List specific skills or experiences that interns should have.

**Internship Timeline**

What is the minimum duration (weeks) and number of hours / day, that you require an intern to be able to work?

**Internship Stipends / Benefits**

List any stipend or benefits that you are able to offer to interns.

**Additional Information**

Provide any additional information you think would be helpful.



## Do I need to pay interns a stipend or wage?

For this question, which is a rather hot topic these days we inquired with the Farmer's Legal Action Group, Inc. (FLAG). The answer is squarely it depends on a number of circumstances. If your entity is a non-profit organization or farm, unpaid internships are legally allowable. If you are a for-profit farm (as most are), you must abide by federal and state workplace laws and pay farm workers.

Below is an excerpt from FLAG's Farmer's Guide to Farm Internships:

### C. Farm Interns Will Generally Not Qualify as Volunteers, Trainees, or Independent Contractors

The categories of workers who are not covered by the federal and state workplace laws discussed in this guide include volunteers, trainees, and independent contractors. While a host farmer and intern may believe that the intern fits into one of these categories that will not be true for most internship arrangements.

Note that while a farmer and intern may agree between themselves that the intern is a volunteer, trainee, or independent contractor, that agreement is not controlling. In all cases, the agencies that enforce these laws and the courts will look to the reality of the work arrangement rather than the label given to it to determine the appropriate legal classification. Regardless of the title given, if a person appears to be an employee, that person will be considered an employee under the law.

The definitions and criteria described in this chapter are used to determine employee status under the federal Fair Labor Standards Act and the Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Protection Act. These laws very broadly define the term "employee." Thus, it is possible that someone classified as an employee under these two acts might not be classified as an employee under another law. Regardless of the precise definition used, however, the agencies enforcing labor and employment laws typically analyze the same factors to determine employee status and will come to the same determination on this issue. The courts, in turn, generally defer to the enforcing agency's determination.

The bottom line is that farmers should generally expect their intern to be classified as an employee under all of the laws discussed in this guide if the intern cannot be classified as a volunteer, trainee, or independent contractor under the definitions described below. At the same time, farmers should understand that there is a very limited possibility that an intern who is considered an employee under one law, could be classified otherwise under a different law that more narrowly defines the term "employee."

## Excerpt from FLAG's Farmer's Guide to Farm Internships Continued

Trainees are distinguished from employees under federal law by a six-factor test. According to the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), all six of the following factors must be present in order for an individual to be classified as a trainee and exempt from federal minimum wage and overtime laws :

- (a) The training, even though it includes actual operation of the facilities of the employer, is similar to that which would be given in a vocational school;
- (b) The training is for the benefit of the trainee;
- (c) The trainees do not displace regular employees, but work under close observation;
- (d) The employer who provides the training derives no immediate advantage from the activities of the trainees, and, on occasion, the employer's operations may actually be impeded;
- (e) The trainees are not necessarily entitled to a job at the completion of the training period; and
- (f) The employer and the trainee understand that the trainees are not entitled to wages for the time spent in training.

Most farmers do benefit from and depend on the work of interns. Indeed, in most instances, hiring interns allows a farmer to hire fewer regular employees. Because farm interns displace regular employees and their work is to the benefit of the farmer, farmers should generally assume that any interns working on their farm are unlikely to be classified as trainees.

Federal law also provides for a student-learner exemption which permits an employer to pay an employee receiving school credit for work at 85 percent of the minimum wage with prior authorization from the Department of Labor's Wage and Hour Division. See 29 U.S.C. § 214 (2011); 29 C.F.R. §§ 520.200-520.508 (2011). However, the Wage and Hour Division will not authorize the payment of less than minimum wage to student workers unless the employer meets several requirements, including: (1) employment of student workers "will not create a substantial probability of reducing the full-time employment opportunities" of other workers; and (2) "[t]he occupational needs of the community or industry warrant the training of student-learners." See 29 U.S.C. § 214(b) (2011); 29 C.F.R. § 520.503 (2011). Because farm interns do hands-on work that would otherwise be performed by regular employees, the student-learner exception is unlikely to be a good fit for farm interns. In addition, were farmers to advertise their internships as paying the federal minimum wage, the positions would likely fill quickly, given the current popularity of farm internship programs.

In addition to the federal "trainee" and "student-learner" classifications, Minnesota allows for payment of less than the minimum wage to participants in state-certified apprenticeship programs. However,



Excerpt from FLAG's Farmer's Guide to Farm Internships Continued

agricultural occupations have not yet been treated as apprentice-able occupations in Minnesota. Thus, farm interns likely will not qualify as apprentices under the provisions of these state-sanctioned programs at this point. See Johnnie Burns, Director of Apprenticeship at Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry, List of occupations with apprenticeship training programs, available at <http://www.doli.state.mn.us/APPR/PDF/apptrn.pdf>. (last visited Nov. 15, 2012). The Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry (MNDOLI) is the State Apprenticeship Agency in Minnesota.

Additional Resources:

<http://www.flaginc.org/topics/pubs/MILEguide.pdf>

<http://www.beginningfarmers.org/the-legal-status-of-farm-interns-labor-and-law/>

## What are the steps to hosting an intern?

1. If you are interested in hosting an intern, please complete one of the accompanying questionnaires (on-farm or organization) and return it to the program office. Your responses will be listed on the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture's website in the internship opportunities section. If at any time you have a specific job or internship posting please feel free to post it to the sustainable agriculture listserv (SUSTAG), subscription information is available on the MISA website under the subscribe tab.
2. Students will contact potential internship hosts to inquire about intern projects. This is an appropriate time to inquire about the student's background or request a resume or interview.
3. After the student and individual or organization, have agreed to enter into a intern-host relationship, the student will create and present a preliminary proposal of the internship project to their host and minor advisor. The internship proposal should include the work requirements and educational objectives of the internship.
4. Next, the intern will arrive on-site. Intern hosts will spend a variable amount of time training and advising the intern depending on the work and the student's background. An important goal of the program is to expose students to how individuals and organizations make decisions that affect sustainable agricultural systems.
5. At the conclusion of the internship, we ask that the host submit a short evaluation of the experience.

MISA's Purpose is to bring together the agricultural community and the University Community in a cooperative effort to develop and promote sustainable agriculture in Minnesota and Beyond.

MISA's goals are to:

- Increase the University's response to the needs of the sustainable agriculture community and increase practitioner's influence on the university.
- Promote sustainable agriculture thinking within the University so that the concepts permeate teaching, research and extension.
- Work with rural communities in discovering and implementing the values of sustainability.

Check out the MISA website at [www.misa.umn.edu](http://www.misa.umn.edu) for the latest:

- Calendar of Events
- Announcements
- Publications
- Resources
- Sustainable Agriculture Newsletter
- And More

The Sustag Listserv is a great place to get in the sustainable agriculture loop. Subscription information is available on the MISA website under the Subscribe Tab.



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