UBC FARM
PRACTICUM IN SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

2022 OVERVIEW
## Contents

Overview .................................................................................................................................................. 2
  What is it? ............................................................................................................................................... 2
  Where is it? ........................................................................................................................................... 2
  When does it happen? ............................................................................................................................... 3
  How much does it cost? ........................................................................................................................... 3
  Is there financial aid? ............................................................................................................................. 3
  How does Covid-19 impact the Practicum? .............................................................................................. 3

General Information .................................................................................................................................. 4

  The UBC Farm and Centre for Sustainable Food Systems ..................................................................... 4
  The Practicum .......................................................................................................................................... 4
  Content .................................................................................................................................................. 4
  Example: Condensed Program Syllabus and Schedule ......................................................................... 5
  Sample Weekly Schedule (Between June – October, Typical Year) ......................................................... 8
  The Practicum – Physical Requirements ............................................................................................... 9
  Visiting the UBC Farm .......................................................................................................................... 9
  Criteria for Selection ............................................................................................................................. 10
  How to Apply ......................................................................................................................................... 10
  Further Questions .................................................................................................................................. 10
Overview

WHAT IS IT?
The UBC Farm Practicum in Sustainable Agriculture creates and supports new leaders in sustainable agriculture by providing an experiential learning environment that engages the practicum students with farmers and community educators in an agriculturally-based sustainability dialogue that is both locally, and globally significant.

Our goal is to inspire and cultivate new farmers and sustainable agriculture educators who will transform their communities and their food systems through initiatives and enterprises that are socially, ecologically, and economically healthy and viable.

The Practicum is a six-month (or four-month) experiential learning course designed for beginning farmers, urban and community gardeners, aspiring environmental educators with a focus on food production systems, and students with an interest in applying their learning about sustainable agriculture and food systems. Because of the level of commitment required to successfully complete the practicum, we are looking for applicants who:

- Are ready to devote themselves to engaged participation in the coursework and fieldwork;
- Show the capacity to contribute positively to the Practicum team and to the UBC Farm community
- Ideally have a vision for how the knowledge and skills developed during the program will fit in with future goals

Students accepted into the practicum bring a diversity of backgrounds and life experiences to the program. Our program graduates share a vision of livelihoods and lifestyles grounded in sustainable and community-based food systems.

WHERE IS IT?
UBC Farm, the living laboratory of the University of British Columbia's Faculty of Land and Food Systems (in Vancouver, British Columbia), hosts the practicum program. Our south campus farm is the site of the majority of farming activities, guest speaker presentations, and classroom sessions. We also travel to numerous local farm operations to provide a regionally-grounded food system context, and to make personal connections with experienced food growers.
WHEN DOES IT HAPPEN?
The full program meets from April 9, 2022 until October 22, 2022 (and the Summer Option begins on April 9, 2022, and ends on August 20, 2022). During this time period, the program meets Thursday-Saturday (with the exception of occasional holiday and vacation breaks), for approximately 20 hours per week. To successfully complete the Practicum, we require 90% attendance of scheduled program hours.

Students should also plan for an average of 5-7 hours/week in additional off-program time to establish, care for, and maintain their individual and shared plot spaces, and to complete assignments.

HOW MUCH DOES IT COST?
Program fees for 2022 are $4,900 (Full Program); and $3550 (Summer Option). Accepted students must pay an initial $800 deposit and the remaining fee in February 2022.

Experienced instruction with a close student-to-teacher ratio is a foundation of the Practicum learning environment, and our intent is to provide this opportunity to dedicated individuals who are committed to exploring farming and food systems related enterprises and careers. In addition, students may incur some costs (less than $100) associated with purchasing seed for their plots. There is a small additional expense (optional) for participation in our weekly communal lunches. Field trip travel expenses are paid for by the program, though students are responsible for bringing their own food.

IS THERE FINANCIAL AID?
Participating in the UBC Farm Practicum program does not provide eligibility for student financial aid. We are, however, pleased to announce a new Bursary made possible by a generous donation from 2019 Practicum alumnus Gregg Ashby. The Bursary is intended to make the program more accessible to applicants with limited financial means. Bursary awards will consist of either one $2000 award per year or two $1000 awards. The application for the Bursary is separate from the application to the program. To be clear, completing the Bursary application will have no bearing on the admissions process, as admissions decisions will be made prior to viewing the applications for the Bursary. In other words, Bursary applications will only be evaluated among applicants already accepted to the program. To learn more about the Bursary and to apply online, please visit the following link: https://ubc.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_eDNmqL44ILldjDL

HOW DOES COVID-19 IMPACT THE PRACTICUM?
Student, staff, and community health and safety are of paramount importance. It’s hard for us to know in the fall of 2021 what the public health situation will be at the time our practicum is scheduled to begin in April of 2022. While acknowledging that there is uncertainty involved, we are currently anticipating and planning for an in-person program in 2022. That said, we reserve the right to modify the program as required in accordance with provincial and university health and safety protocols.
General Information

THE UBC FARM AND CENTRE FOR SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS

The Centre for Sustainable Food Systems (CSFS) is home to the UBC Farm, a 24-hectare teaching, research, and community farm located on UBC’s Vancouver campus. Forming a rich mosaic of cultivated fields, teaching gardens, forest stands, hedgerows and orchard plantings, the farm is a unique urban agrarian gem.

In close proximity to and fully integrated with a world-class community of researchers, the CSFS affords an opportunity to better understand and manage a productive land base that supports a thriving farm-forest ecosystem and adjacent urban population. The interface with the city enhances research opportunities that also address community, ecosystem, and global health.

THE PRACTICUM

The program was established in 2008 as the “Sowing Seeds for the Future UBC Farm apprenticeship”. Since that time, more than half of our program graduates have gone on to develop their farming skills with farming mentors in regional and international settings, in partnerships with other new farmers, or by starting their own agricultural operations.

The main approach to learning within the program is hands-on practice. Participants carry out seasonal farming activities with leadership provided by UBC Farm staff in the greenhouses, gardens, fields, orchards, and at our farmers’ markets. Skills and concepts included in the program’s learning outcomes range from soil fertility management, greenhouse and horticultural techniques, harvesting and post-harvest handling, irrigation basics, selected weed and pest identification, sustainable cultivation methods, safe operation of small tractors and implements, and operating direct market sales and community supported agriculture (C.S.A.) programs.

In addition to the learning that occurs via classroom sessions and hands-on practice, the opportunity to build community with others in the cohort and with farm staff tends to be a very enriching aspect of the Practicum program.

CONTENT

Applying the concepts and mastering the skills that form the foundations of sustainable agriculture are the key learning objectives of the practicum. Although some perennial crops are included in our curriculum, the emphasis of our program is on the organic management of a diversified annual cropping system. While poultry care (and, to a lesser extent, beekeeping) is expected to be included in our program, other livestock management (cow, goat, sheep, pig, etc.) is only accessible in the curriculum via self-directed studies or potential field trips. We strive to create a strong group learning environment, and make connections between the conceptual knowledge and practical field skills. Although the exact 2022 schedule and topics will vary from the example given on the following pages, the outline still offers a useful example of a condensed syllabus and schedule from a past year. Opportunities to learn if specific content will be covered in 2022 can be discussed during the interview, or you can inquire via email.
Sessions are taught/facilitated by a combination of UBC Farm staff, allied UBC faculty and staff, and external expert guest speakers. Each year, it is common for us to visit 10-12+ farm operations, and have specialized sessions taught by 10+ guest speakers. Several assignments throughout the program require time outside of program hours for research and preparation, and involve 10-20 minute oral presentations.

One of the most distinctive features of the Practicum program is the “Plot component.” Students receive access to an individual plot, as well as larger production plots that are worked on collectively. Students have significant autonomy as well as responsibility for managing their plots. Staff provide guidance and supervision, and address student questions and needs, in order to support student learning objectives. Vegetables, herbs, and fruits grown in the individual plot are available for personal consumption. Produce grown in the production plots are tracked and sold through the operation of a practicum farm stand at the Saturday UBC Farm Farmer’s Market. In addition to the land, water, and irrigation equipment, various tools and materials (including some seeds) are provided, and included within the cost of the program.

For additional details, the following is an example of a condensed program syllabus and schedule. Exact timing and content may vary from year to year:

**EXAMPLE: CONDENSED PROGRAM SYLLABUS AND SCHEDULE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Frame</th>
<th>Program Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>● Orienting to UBC Farm systems and context</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Soil formation and management</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Seed and seedling biology</td>
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<td></td>
<td>● Crop planning</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Seed starting and transplanting</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Hand tools: Introduction and overview</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Crop rotation: basics and the UBC Farm crop rotation plan</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● First regional farm visits</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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April  

*Student assignment: Plot Plan*
| May – Early | • Fostering farm biodiversity: planting and tending a hedgerow  
|            | • Nutrient cycles: soil sampling, testing, and interpretations  
|            | • Composting: setting up small and medium-scale systems  
|            | • Direct seeding: introduction to the equipment and crops  
|            | • Cover crops: overview and UBC Farm systems  
|            | • Introduction to UBC Farm Indigenous Programming  
|            | • Introduction to UBC Farm Children’s Programming  
| May – Late | • Cultivation comparisons—manual and mechanical techniques  
|            | • Plant biology basics  
|            | • Marketing channels overview: farmers’ markets, community supported agriculture (CSA), restaurants, wholesale produce distributors  
|            | • Tractor safety and initial training  
|            | • More regional farm field visits  

| May | **Student assignment: Case Study**  
| June | • Soil moisture: identification and key concepts  
| | • Irrigation design options and field set-up  
| | • Poultry management: UBC Farm chickens and eggs  
| | • Produce harvesting, processing, and direct marketing  
| | • Orchard pruning: the UBC Farm Heritage Apple Orchard  
| | • Strawberry production  

| June | **Student Assignment: Crop Talk**
| July          | • Orchard management: disease and pest  
|              | • Mushroom cultivation workshop (*special topic; these vary year to year*)  
|              | • Bee-keeping workshop  
|              | • Tillage Practices – To Till or Not to Till  
|              | • Produce harvesting and processing  
|              | • Tractor and seeder training (continued)  
|              | • Blueberry Production  
|              | • Student Plot Walk  
| August       | • Integrated pest management  
|              | • Produce harvesting, processing, and marketing  
|              | • Value-Added production workshop (pickling or jam making)  
|              | • Practicum Luncheon: Annual Picnic in the Poplars  
|              | • Regional Farm Visits: Organic Grain Operation and Goat Cheese Dairy  
|              | • Preparations for Student Market Stand  
| August       | **Student assignment: Special Topic**  
| September    | • Seed saving workshops  
|              | • Farm Business Planning and Financial Literacy  
|              | • Squash Production  
|              | • Land Access forum: strategies for accessing land, and understanding leases  
| September    | **Student assignment: Plot Summary & Analysis**
October

- Cover cropping: end of season field preparation and sowing
- Food sovereignty / Food justice
- Techniques and tips for assessing land quality for farming and gardening
- Farming Sustainably: individual health and well-being
- Field and Sales Summaries from UBC Farm Staff
- Program wrap-up activities

Student assignment: Farm Business Plan

SAMPLE WEEKLY SCHEDULE (BETWEEN JUNE – OCTOBER, TYPICAL YEAR)

**THURSDAY (9-5)**
- 9-9:20 – Weekly Announcements
- 9:30-9:45 - Review of Weeding Techniques and Considerations
- 9:45-12: Weeding in Brassica and Flower Fields
- 12-1 – Communal Lunch (made from fresh farm produce, and prepared by two practicum students)
- 1-1:20 – Plot Leader update and time for questions or discussion about plots
- 1:20-2: Plot time
- 2-4 – Cover Cropping Presentation and Walkabout w/ UBC Professor Emeritus
- 4-5 – Plot time

**FRIDAY (9-5)**
- 9-12:30: Harvest Rotations (students rotate between different fields)
- 12:30-1:30: Communal lunch prepared by one practicum and one staff
- 1:30-5: Harvest Processing Rotations (in addition to the regular vegetable harvesting & processing rotations, additional weekly one-on-one rotations may include flower harvesting and bouquet making and/or assisting a UBC agricultural researcher)

**SATURDAY (9-4)**
- 9-1: Market/Farm Rotations and General Crew (one-on-one rotations with various staff members, including rotations with poultry care and egg harvest, direct marketing with farmer’s market stand and CSA stand, tractor, seeder, volunteer management, tool sharpening, and hoop house)
- 2-2:30: Weekly Reflections (students share what they did and learned in rotations)
- 2:30-4: Beekeeping w/ Guest Speaker

(Between April-May, the program ends at 5 pm on Saturdays; June-October, the day ends at 4 pm)
THE PRACTICUM – PHYSICAL REQUIREMENTS

We structure the program to ensure that all students experience a variety of field responsibilities and opportunities to develop sustainable farming and gardening skills. Please note that our responsibilities in the field are physically demanding, and take place rain or shine, and may occur in hot conditions or cold weather. Students are encouraged to apply for the program only if they are comfortable with the physical requirements of farming. If you have chronic back pain or previous knee injuries, please consider possible impacts of farming and gardening tasks to your personal health and comfort levels before completing your application. Don’t hesitate to let us know if you have any questions about the physical requirements.

VISITING THE UBC FARM

In a typical year, we strongly encourage prospective students to visit the farm and meet UBC Farm staff prior to applying to the practicum. We believe this gives applicants a better understanding of the hands-on nature of the program, along with a better sense of the UBC Farm community. In a typical year, interested participants are invited to join in a volunteer session or otherwise participate in the vibrant learning community we foster via a free tour at our Saturday Farmer’s Market at 12 noon (no registration required), or through joining in one of our many public workshops: http://ubcfarm.ubc.ca/workshops/. However, 2021 is quite a different type of year – and health and safety protocols mean that the UBC Farm isn’t as accessible to the public as in a normal year. Given the current public health situation, access to the Farm is more limited than typical, but we are still operating Farmers’ Markets on Tuesdays (4-6:30 pm) and Saturdays (10 am to 2 pm) - and the UBC Farm is currently open to the public on Saturdays between 10 am and 5 pm. Especially if you’re local to Vancouver, coming to visit on a Saturday would be a great opportunity for you to learn more about our Market and walk around our fields. (We are not currently offering tours on Saturdays.) Please see the UBC Farm website for directions (http://ubcfarm.ubc.ca/contact-us/).

Every year a Practicum Open House is hosted at the beginning of the fall season before the application deadline. In 2021, our Open House will be conducted virtually on Wednesday, October 20th, 3:30 pm – 5 pm; and will be a forum to meet staff, ask questions, and receive a virtual farm tour (from the perspective of the program). If you miss our Open House, fear not - we can also attempt to address your questions via email or, preferably, during the interview process. Registration is required to attend our Open House. Please locate the link to register either on our website, or here: http://lfs-ubcfarm-epayment.sites.olt.ubc.ca/2020/08/11/open-house-registration/
CRITERIA FOR SELECTION

The goal of our program is to prepare future sustainable farmers, scientists, teachers, and community leaders to take the next step in applying their learning and interests in sustainable food systems and agriculture. In choosing individuals who will learn, grow food, harvest, and often eat together for 4-6 months, we are, in effect, creating a community. Out of the pool of applicants, we attempt to achieve a balance of interests, geographical and cultural origins, ages, and gender.

We welcome all applicants; however, the program is geared towards relative newcomers to farming and gardening. The selection committee looks highly upon applicants who can articulate the ways in which the program fits their long-term learning and professional objectives, as well as applicants who have demonstrated experience in or a commitment to sustainable agriculture/food systems. Also important to the selection committee, applicants should carefully consider how the demands of the practicum schedule will logistically fit with their other life commitments. Applicants must be at least 19 years old.

HOW TO APPLY

Applications are available for electronic submission through our website. All applications received by November 1st will be considered. All applications received after midnight on November 1st (Pacific Standard Time) will be considered “Late” and may or may not be considered.

An application fee of $35 CAD is required to submit the online application. This fee may be waived for applicants of limited means – please inquire.

Top applicants will be selected for interviews. We notify all applicants of their status in the program by mid-December of the application year. Since our staff size is small in the winter, we appreciate if you kindly refrain from inquiring about your status, unless you have not heard from us by Dec 15th.

FURTHER QUESTIONS

If you have questions not included in the overview here, please review additional details on our website (https://ubcfarm.ubc.ca/learn/practicum-in-sustainable-agriculture/). If you still have questions, send your questions to Seth Friedman, Practicum Coordinator: seth.friedman@ubc.ca.