

TROY COMMUNITY FARM

WORKER HANDBOOK

TO EXPECTATIONS, TOOLS, AND TASKS

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INTRODUCTION

Like most farms, Troy Community Farm has specific systems and a certain language that is completely obvious to those who work here and completely foreign to the uninitiated. This guide is the first step in your initiation. My hope is that by the end you will be ready to converse comfortably with the native speakers!

This guide will also lay out some expectations that I have of you as a worker at the farm. We take the work of feeding people very seriously at Troy, and I want to make sure that you have the knowledge and tools that you need to do the job well. I do my best to be upfront about expectations and what your experience will be like on the farm so that you will not be taken by surprise or left unprepared.

I understand that there will always be more questions no matter how thoroughly you read this guide or how many years you have worked on the farm. So, PLEASE ask them! I prefer that if you are unsure about anything you ask about it rather than do it incorrectly. I try to give very explicit instructions, but I don't always remember everything. Your questions will help me remember details and will help you and others understand the work more clearly. In the end we want to deliver the high-quality products we are known for and take pride in. It takes time and practice and many questions asked and answered in order to achieve that goal.

TWO RULES

Be on Time

We typically have a lot of work to accomplish each day, and we strive to be efficient and effective with the time that we have. So, it is important that the whole farm crew is present and ready to work at the start of each work shift. We usually have a lot of information to convey right at the beginning, everything from who will be doing what, to specifics about how to do it. If we have to explain it again to someone who is late, it frustrates us and it takes away from time that we could be working. So, please, arrive to the farm in time to change your shoes, put on sunscreen, and do anything else you need to do BEFORE the shift starts. Then we can start the day on a positive and productive note. Being on time also lets us know that you respect us and the work that we do. It is very important to us. Thank you!!

No Butt Sitting

Though we often work close to the ground, we never actually sit on the ground (or crates or buckets) while working. Our abbreviated, affectionate way of stating this rule is "no butt sitting." The reason we have this rule is to help maintain our standards of efficiency and effectiveness. Working in the field always involves moving, and it is never efficient or effective to move in or from a seated position. There are several other positions that we will show you that can be both comfortable and effective when used appropriately. We've been doing this for a long time and are happy to share our suggestions for getting through the physical hardships that farming often incurs! When you need help, please ask.

Now and then you will encounter an exception to the "no butt sitting" rule. For some tasks (like shelling dry beans or dusting off dirty potatoes) you don't need to move from one place to another and sitting on the ground or a bucket is the most effective position you can be in. We promise to always tell you when we are doing a task that is an exception to this rule. But be aware that those exceptions are very rare and never involve weeding, harvesting, planting, or any other task that we do in the field.

GENERAL EXPECTATIONS

Come Prepared

On any given day you will need a number of personal items throughout your shift. Please remember to bring sunscreen, clothes that can get dirty and will keep you cool or warm as needed, raingear, a hat or shades, closed-toed and closed-heeled shoes, and plenty of water. Also, please come to the farm ready to work: be rested, don't be hungry, don't be expecting or needing to make cell phone calls, etc.

Note on cell phones: As these tools have become more prevalent, we have needed to be more explicit about their use on the farm. We ask that you turn your phone off before your shift starts and that you leave it at the shed with your other things through your shift. It is impossible to pay attention to instruction or work while on a phone call or checking your messages. Please plan to attend to your phone business before or after your shift or over lunch.

Work Hard

Exactly what each person can accomplish in a day is very dependant on that person's skill level. But whatever the final list of accomplishments, every person should work hard. That means focusing on instructions and task demonstrations, doing every job up to stated quality standards and as quickly as possible, transitioning smoothly and directly from one task to another, and enjoying conversation while working but not when it postpones or elongates the task at hand. You will notice that the farmers feel a constant sense of urgency around the work. Please be sensitive to that and assist us in meeting our goals for the day by working hard.

Clean Up

Please be sure that all the tools or supplies you use on a task or in a shift are appropriately cleaned and put away before you are done. That means that if you are on the carrot bunching team your job is done when all the carrots are bunched and loaded in the truck, all the harvest crates are stacked and cleaned, the rubber bands are put away where they go, and the wash table is cleaned of debris and ready for the next job. When everyone participates in keeping the farm orderly, the task is lighter for everyone, especially the farmers who have to stay late and finish any work that was left undone.

Record

All farms keep records. On a certified organic farm, those records are even more important because they help us demonstrate to the certifier exactly what is happening on the farm. There are two records that all farm workers will use on their shifts.

Harvest Record – There is a clipboard that hangs on the inside right-hand shed door. That clipboard holds our whole harvest record for the year. There is one record sheet per week. Whoever is responsible for the weighing and/or final packing of any harvested crop will record the quantity harvested on the record sheet, either by weight or bunch as noted. An accurate harvest record is essential to decisions about what goes into a CSA share each week, knowing how much we can send to farmers' market, planning for the following years' planting schedule, and our organic certification. We appreciate the care that you will contribute to keeping this record clear and up-to-date.

Veggie Compass Records – In 2011 and 2012 we are participating in a project with the UW called "Veggie Compass." These records helped us track the amount of time and money it takes to grow each crop on the farm. Our Crew Leader will help you to complete these records.

Please plan to wear a watch in the field in order to be able to complete these records. A cell phone is not a substitute for a watch.

AREAS TO NOTE

Wash Shed - This is both the physical shed itself and the surrounding area with the wash tables and hoses. This is where we meet every morning; where all the planting, harvesting, and weeding tools live; and where we wash, weigh and package the vegetables. We try very hard to keep this space neat and tidy!

Hoop House – For now this space serves as an extension of our shed. We use it for curing onions, garlic, and other crops; and as a second weighing station on the CSA harvest day.

Field Sections – Each section of the field has a number and a name. The number stays the same each year, but the name changes based on which crops in the rotation are growing there. For instance section 1 is the first one you encounter when you enter the farm gate. In 20112 section 1 will be fallow, but in 2011 summer squash, melons, cucumbers, carrots, and popcorn grew there. You will want to become familiar with the names of the sections so that you can know where you are going when you are sent out to harvest the radishes in “successions,” for instance.

TOOLS AND SUPPLIES

All the following tools and supplies are housed in the shed. Each tool, crate, and bucket has a specific purpose on the farm. Please note these specifics as you read, and ask for clarification whenever needed. Also please note where these tools are kept so that you can find them easily and return them where they go when you are done.

Knives – Beware: these knives are very sharp! Use them for harvesting lettuce, broccoli, zucchini, salad mix, etc. We want them to stay sharp; so do not use them where they could become dulled by contact with dirt and grit. The knife bucket is kept on the “Harvest Tools” shelf.



Clippers – As an unfortunate rule, because we do use the clippers where they come into contact with dirt and grit (cutting scallion roots), they are always quite dull. In addition to scallions, we also use clippers to harvest eggplant, peppers, winter squash, etc. The clipper bucket is also kept on the “Harvest Tools” shelf.



Note: You may find some rare sharp clippers in the scissor bucket (described below.) Please never use these sharp clippers on scallions and keep them in the scissor bucket until they become dull like all the rest of the clippers.

Scissors – Like the knives we try to keep these sharp. We use them ONLY for harvesting herbs. The scissor bucket is also on the “Harvest Tools” shelf.



Crates – These are used for harvesting, packing, and storing crops. We have both deep crates and shallow crates and they are used for somewhat different purposes. Because space is

limited, it is important that you understand the differences between the two and use them appropriately. It can be difficult to distinguish which is which unless they are side by side, but you will get used to their different size the more you work with them.

Deep Crates: Generally we use these for crops that need lots of space but are not too heavy. We use them for harvesting lettuce, kale, beets, radishes, etc.; for packing anything bunched for the CSA; and for greens like spinach or salad mix. Deep crates are always kept in the first stacks on the left when you enter the shed.



Shallow Crates: We use these for heavier or more easily damaged crops, or for crops that require only a little space, no matter what they are. We always use them for summer squash, and tomatoes, and usually for lettuce. Shallow crates are also on the left as you enter the wash shed, in the stacks beyond the deep crates.

Buckets – We have three types of buckets. Again these are used for different purposes, so it is important to recognize the differences and use them appropriately. Each kind of bucket has its own stack or stacks on the left of the wash shed just past the crates.

Square buckets: Use these for harvesting peas, beans, broccoli, eggplant, cucumbers, and more! We will also use them with lids to transport water for transplanting in the early part of the season. We rinse these buckets out at the end of every harvest so that they stay clean.



Small round buckets: Use these for harvesting all the tomatoes and Brussels sprouts. It is important that these are clean as well, so we wash them regularly.

Large round buckets: Use these (and only these!) for hauling compost or for harvesting dirty crops like potatoes. It's fine that these buckets are left dirty.

Towels – We have four kinds of towels. As usual each type has a very specific purpose and should not be confused with the others. The first three types are kept in separate crates at the very front of the wash shed on the left and are used for packing vegetables. Often these towels will be used wet. On harvest days we fill the two handleless square buckets (which are kept under the table by the corner of the shed) with water and set towels in them to soak. When using a wet towel DO NOT wring it out. It needs to be dripping wet in order to be effective. The fourth type of towel is kept on the ledge above the door of the wash shed and is used for cleaning vegetables.

Thick Towels: These are kitchen-sized towels that fit really well on the top of crates full of vegetables. We soak these in water and then put them on top of the vegetables in order to keep them cool and hydrated on their way to our customers.

Thin Towels: These are the same size as the thick towels, but are more threadbare and less able to absorb and retain water. We soak these and use them on the bottoms of

crates underneath the vegetables. We don't have as many thin towels as thick, so sometimes a thick towel will be used on the bottom of a crate. But a thin towel should NEVER be used to cover a crate. It will dehydrate too quickly and our vegetables will suffer.

Wrap-around Towels: These full-size bath towels are used to wrap around delicate vegetables that bruise easily, or that are loose and need to be contained. We use them either wet for things like sweet peppers and eggplant or dry for green beans and salad mix. See the photo for how to set up a wrap-around towel in a crate before filling it with vegetables.



Wiping Towels: These are towels that are too small or have otherwise lost their original usefulness. Now they are used for wiping dirt from things like summer squash, eggplant, and peppers. If you cannot find them on the ledge on the inside of the shed above the door, check in the square bucket on the top shelf with the bee equipment. When these become too dirty to reuse, put them in a pile by the shed door for washing.

Hoes – We have four types of hoes, each stored in a different spot and used for a different job. They are all quite different, so it will be easy to tell them apart.

Hand Hoes: These are used for fine weeding and require you to be close to the ground. They are kept sharp and clean and we use them often. Because they are such useful and valuable tools, we like to keep track of them. So we number them and assign a numbered hoe to each person. At the end of a task or the day we make sure that we have all the hoes before anyone leaves the field. If a particular number is missing, we can more easily find it when we figure out whose it is and where they were working. The hand hoe bucket is kept on the shelves inside the shed to the right.



Scuffle Hoes: These hoes are used while standing and moving down the row quickly. It is more difficult to be precise with these hoes so they are used more rarely. They are kept on a hook at the back of the shed on the right. They too should be kept clean and sharp.

Wheel Hoe: This tool has three implements and three uses. The wide stirrup blade is used for weeding paths or other wide areas in the field. The narrow stirrup blade is used for weeding between crop rows. And the plow is used for making trenches while transplanting. The wheel hoe is kept on a hook at the very back of the shed. The implements are kept on the ledge above the wheel hoes.



Remy Hoes: The real name for these is probably flat-headed hoe or something like that. We call them remy hoes because all we use them for is putting on remay. They are kept at the back of the shed on the right past the scuffle hoes. They just hang on the ledge. (Remy is the white fabric we use to cover crops that need to be warmer or that need

to be protected from insects. It acts both as a blanket and as a physical barrier to pests.)

Tool Buckets – We often use the small round buckets to hold various tools and supplies that we need to keep together and easily transport to the field. These are some buckets we commonly use:

Transplant Bucket: This bucket has two 100-foot measuring tapes, some yellow stakes, a roll of rope, some spoons, and a laminated spacing guide. This bucket comes to the field when we transplant or direct seed and is kept on the “Transplant Tools” shelf in the wash shed.

Stake Bucket: All it holds is wooden stakes. We use these in the field to mark out beds. The bucket is kept with the transplant bucket on the “Transplant Tools” shelf.

Rubber Band Bucket: This is the last bucket on the “Harvest Tools” shelf and simply holds loose rubber bands. Bring this bucket along when bunching a crop in the field.

Packing Supplies - Rubber bands, plastic bags, berry boxes and such are kept on the “Packing Supplies” shelf with the scale. We will learn what these are for while packing. As always, when you take things off this shelf or put them back, please keep them neatly organized.

There are other items in the shed that you will likely learn about, but that are used less frequently than those above. For instance the rolls of remay are kept on the shelves at the very back right side of the shed. You may be asked to handle the remay, but we will give you explicit instructions when that happens. As usual, ask if you have questions about what something is or where it is kept.

NOTES ON TASKS

On any given day there could be from 7 to 16 people in the field. With so many folks working together, it is especially important that we progress in a logical and predictable manner so that we know what has been done and what still needs doing. For instance when approaching a bed or several beds for weeding or harvesting or anything, it is best to have one person work on one row. Then that person knows she is responsible for that row from beginning to end. If there are more people than rows, then two people can work on one row starting from opposite ends. When they meet, they know the row is done. In either case, when people finish their particular row, they can easily see where to jump in to help the whole group finish.

Transplanting

Some of the very first interns I had on the farm called it the “transplant dance.” There are several different pieces of this job. Each person should learn all the steps and be aware and ready to switch to a new task so that the whole job can progress smoothly. As always, speed and efficiency are key. Be aware of what will come next so that you don’t cross the field with empty hands or waste time looking around for the next step. Also, keep things neat as you go: stack empty trays together, group empty buckets, make a pile of the tray tags, etc.

Weeding

This task is a mainstay of work on any organic farm. At Troy we like to weed not only because it is good for our crops but also because we like the farm to look good for all the many folks who

pass through every week. It's also a great task for carrying on a conversation and for feeling like you really accomplished something by the end.

The keys to effective weeding are to do it at the right time and to do it well the first time. When we are on top of things, we will weed before most folks even notice those tiny invader sprouts. In those cases we can fly down the rows and get a huge amount of ground weeded at a time. When we miss that window and the weeds get taller, weeding is not quite as fast but just as necessary. No matter when we weed, it is imperative that we get ALL the weeds. The cleaner we leave the crop at the end, the better the crop will do and the longer it will be before we have to weed it again.

Harvesting

There are far too many details about harvesting specific crops to list them here. However, with any harvest task it is important to fully understand the quality standards and the quantity to be harvested in order to avoid costly and time-consuming mistakes. The most difficult part is that sometimes standards will change from day to day depending on how the crop is maturing and how much food is needed to fill the CSA boxes or the farmers' market table. Patience and diligence are required to keep up with these changes. Please ask questions and be sure you understand the harvest tasks you are assigned before you begin. Finally, please be understanding as the farmers check your work and make suggestions for changes to better meet the standards.

Bunching

There are several crops that we bunch, and for the most part they are all done in the same general way. Finished bunches should be consistent in size, even, neat, and tightly banded. When bunching carrots, beets, and radishes, group those that are similarly sized together. No one bunch should have both large and small individuals. Make sure the bunch is even so that no individuals are sticking out further or are further recessed than the others. Make sure it is neat and without scraggly or yellowed leaves sticking out. And finally make sure that the band is tight enough to hold it all together nicely. All the bunches of one crop should be the same size (meaning containing the same volume of vegetables) so that each CSA member or customer gets an equal share. When bunching scallions, all the same principles apply except that large and small scallions can be grouped together in the same bunch.

CLOSING

While we take this work very seriously and have many instructions and expectations, we also want this to be a fun, welcoming place for you to work and learn. Farming can be a stressful occupation and while we do our best to keep the atmosphere light, sometimes we are working under a lot of pressure. Please bear with us if we can't answer every theoretical question you might have about organic agriculture because we need to get the work done before the end of the day. We welcome those questions over lunch or while doing something that requires less concentration, such as weeding. Ultimately, we do this work because we love it and can't imagine doing anything else. We hope to convey that joy to you while working together in the fields. We couldn't do it without your help and value the work that you do immensely!

Thank you!