

MAINE ORGANIC FARMERS AND GARDENERS ASSOCIATION

Farm Apprentice Program

P.O. Box 170 Unity, ME 04988

(207) 568-4142

email: mofga@mofga.org web: www.mofga.org

FARMER APPLICATION

Farm Name: Tide Mill Organic Farm

MOFGA Member? Yes

Contact Person: Carly DelSignore

Phone: 207-733-2551

Best time to call: Morning between 7:00 and 9:00

Mailing Address: 91 Tide Mill Road, Edmunds, ME 04628

County: Washington

E-Mail: eatlocal@tidemillorganicfarm.com

Website: www.tidemillorganicfarm.com

Number of apprentices sought: 4-6, preference given to those who are serious about farming.

Farm Type

Yes -- Vegetables/Fruit

Yes -- Dairy

Yes -- Other Livestock

Yes -- Value-added/Processing

Yes -- Diverse, integrated crop/livestock

No -- Nursery Stock

Yes -- Educational

No -- Homesteading

Marketing Strategy:

Community Supported Agriculture

Education

Other

Our marketing relies heavily on many different outlets, most significantly wholesale accounts, farmer's markets, our on-farm market, restaurant accounts, and CSA.

Time Period: Year round (except for veggies, which goes from April through November)

Describe the physical setting of your farm and the nature of the community in which you live (e.g., acreage, woods/fields, buildings, near town/remote area, recreation available, etc.):

We live in an area of amazing, rugged beauty along the shores of Cobscook Bay, and activities include hiking, kayaking, and exploring Maine's bold, rocky coast. There's enough coastline and forest for a lifetime on the farm itself, and if you get tired of that there are a number of state parks a stone's throw away in any direction. Acadia is only a couple hours down the coast and provides more than a weekend's worth of adventure. We have two small mountains (Bell Mountain and Crane Mountain) on our acreage and enjoy taking group hikes when we have the time.

Machias is 30 minutes to the south and has a grocery store, thrift shop, restaurants, cafes, and other quaint shops to visit in your free time. Lubec and Eastport lie around 30 minutes to the east and provide a very authentic small town New England experience. Calais, an hour to the north, and Ellsworth, an hour and a half to the west, are the closest small cities/big towns, and have plenty of big name stores should you need to do some shopping. There are also a few well-loved independently-owned general stores within a few mile's radius where you can get snacks, run into locals, and fill up on gas. The Cobscook Community Learning Center (www.thecccl.org) is a local organization focused on the arts that offers lots of neat classes and opportunities. Mano en Mano, a non-profit focused on migrant worker aid and advocacy, is located an hour away in Milbridge.

We have a large free stall barn that houses our dairy herd, calves, and beef cows, with an attached workshop and indoor farm stand. We have a heated greenhouse for our seedlings and a few unheated hoopouses and storage containers to provide shelter for our pigs and turkeys. We have a large heated, ventilated hoopouse to raise our chickens in through the winter, and an even larger hoop building to store our chick brooder, compost, winter manure, dry hay, and other supplies. We also have our processing facility, where we harvest, eviscerate, and package our poultry. The top floor of this building serves as our apprentice housing. There are 6 Bell families living in different houses on the farm, as well as a renovated century-old farmhouse which we rent out through Airbnb and occasionally use for our own events.

Describe your farm operation (e.g., livestock, crops, bees, herbs, forestry work, greenhouse, orchards, building projects, haying, maple sugaring, meat processing, level of mechanization, products made, marketing, dairy, stockdogs, etc.):

Carly, Aaron, their family, and a hard-working crew raise a couple acres of vegetables, milk 50 dairy cows, raise beef from our dairy herd, tend to 100 pigs, 800 turkeys, 50 laying hens, and 18,000 broilers. We attend a few farmer's markets, have an on-farm market, deliver to local buying clubs, manage a small CSA, and have a coastal delivery route from here to Portland every week, as well as other smaller delivery runs. We have a greenhouse where we start our own vegetables, herbs, and flowers, using compost that we make ourselves, and we are currently experimenting with a largely no-till method of growing. We practice rotational grazing within a pasture-based system, and we process (harvest, cut, and package) our own poultry year-round in our on-farm processing facility.

Through the winter we continue to raise broiler chickens in a heated, ventilated hoop house. We utilize an array of tractors, secondhand pickup trucks, a skid steer, and various other machines to help keep all the pieces moving. We bottle our own raw milk three times a week for local customers and stores. We work with Crown of Maine Organic Cooperative (crownofmainecoop.com) and are involved in developing an agricultural infrastructure in Washington County by working with the other farmers here. Aaron's cousin, Rachel, has a certified organic creamery (tidemillcreamery.com) and a herd of milking goats at her homestead on the farm. She makes yogurt, chevre, camembert, kefir, and various other products, all of which you would have access to.

Are all your crops organically grown? Yes.

Describe the work to be performed and the skills to be learned by an apprentice (e.g., care of livestock, planting, cultivation, harvesting, selling at market, use of equipment, carpentry, food preservation, woods-work, etc.). Please break the season (or months) into 4 major tasks to be performed during each.

- **Veggies**

Spring: Seeding, tending to seedlings, transplanting crops into the field, cultivation, record keeping.

Summer: In addition to the same tasks as in the spring there will also be planting cover crops, pest control, irrigation, harvesting, washing and packaging vegetables, on-farm marketing and delivering.

Fall: In addition to the same tasks as in the spring and summer, there will be drying and preserving of food, planting garlic, and cleaning the fields of debris.

- **Animals (Year Round)**

Settling in pigs and day-old chicks, daily care of cows, pigs, chickens, and turkeys (feeding, watering, clean bedding, fresh pasture, and fence maintenance), poultry harvesting & processing, on-farm marketing and delivering, calf feeding and care, assisting with milking and barn chores.

- **Other**

Fence maintenance, haying, delivery runs, packing orders, loading livestock, etc.

- **Skills to be learned:**

Raising organic livestock within a pasture based system, harvesting poultry safely and efficiently, holistic care of organic livestock for maximum health and vitality, seedling production, mixed vegetable production from seeding to harvest to preservation, scything for weed control, and fence maintenance. Building and maintaining relationships with customers, observation skills to maintain animal and crop health, basic record keeping and analysis for farm profitability, and all the processes (packing, branding, certification, etc.) necessary to bring a product to market.

What do you expect of an apprentice? (e.g., hours to be worked in a day, days to be worked in a week, heavy physical labour, time off, etc.):

You can expect to work six days a week with a guaranteed day off. Very occasionally (especially through winter) one or more of those days will involve only animal chores, but frequently there are plenty of projects that can round out the day. We expect an average of a 9 hour day, but there will be at least one day a week that exceeds 9 hours. We operate with a weekly “to do” list and then try to get those tasks accomplished within the week based on the weather and other deadlines and tasks. Farming, especially when you are depending on it for your sole source of income, is very physically demanding work in frequently adverse conditions. You will be expected to work in the rain, heat, cold, and bugs (black flies and mosquitoes). Many farming tasks are tedious (weeding and thinning) and repetitive (basic animal chores that need to be done every day) -- but satisfying! You should be able to lift and carry 50 lbs of weight and squat or kneel (or those equivalents) for two or three hours at a time. You will be living and working with a diverse range of personalities, and it's expected that you try to approach differences in opinion with respect and patience. You should also be capable of leaving things as you found them and maintaining a clean space for all the others that will be using it after you.

Explain how you intend to provide instruction and training to an apprentice (e.g., work along with the apprentice, demonstration, apprentice working alone, training “classes,” reading to be done, extent of supervision by yourself or others, etc.):

We tend to operate with the “learning by doing” philosophy. We will demonstrate how we want a task to be done and go into the details about why we do it that particular way. Either we or our other trusted apprentices and employees will train you with patience as you become accustomed to the routines and tasks of the farm, although we do expect you to be increasingly efficient and independent as time goes on. It can take a couple of months to truly grasp all the workings of even one of the divisions on our farm, so we're very understanding of the learning process. You are welcome to respectfully use our large selection of farming books and Internet use, as well as other local library resources. We are also open to visiting other farms in our area and promote Washington County's Neighbouring Farm Tours and MOFGA's twilight apprentice opportunities

Are you a full-time farmer? Yes -- very full time! We also have the full-time occupation of being parents to four kids: ages 6, 12, 15, and 17.

Stipend:

We offer \$150 a week per person as a base stipend, but if you have a lot of farming experience there is room for negotiating a higher stipend. We also offer \$100-\$150 per month to the group of apprentices for additional food staples. We offer a bonus for a successful apprenticeship if you are in good standing when you finish the season.

Do you require a prospective apprentice to visit your farm before a final arrangement is made?

No, but it's certainly helpful.

Do you require a trial period?

Yes.

Explain the room and board arrangements (e.g., would the apprentice live with the family, live apart but eat with the family, are there young children, what household duties would the apprentice share, are a vegetarian household, would you provide vegetarian meals, are there rules about smoking/drinking/drugs, are there any other important considerations?):

Our main housing option is The AQ (short of "Apprentice Quarters), a 30 by 60 space above the processing facility that has a shared kitchen, a bathroom with bath and shower, common area, and four large, private bedrooms. Electricity, heat, internet, landline phone, and laundry services are available at no charge. More private, seasonal housing includes a large camper trailer and a converted school bus, both located in the woods. Both have electricity, a hose for running water, a basic kitchen with a gas stove and oven, and a small refrigerator. Bathroom facilities include an outhouse.

We provide certified organic, seasonal vegetables, fruits, and herbs, raw cow milk, eggs, turkey, chicken, pork, and beef that we grow on the farm. We also provide staples such as coffee, flour, etc., and are happy to share some of our snacks and other miscellaneous foods with you. Apprentice meals are to be arranged within the crew. It's up to the individual group how they want to handle extra groceries and meals, though making use of monthly bulk shipments through an Associated Buyers catalogue and Crown of Maine has worked well in the past. We strive to have a weekly dinner (either at our house or at The AQ) which the apprentices and wwoofers are more than welcome to attend if they'd like.

You must bring appropriate footwear (rubber boots and work boots) as well as your own rain gear, snow gear (if staying through winter), sun protection, and bug protection. We will be working through many wet, mucky days, or hot, sunny days, or cold, dark days. Also many incredibly beautiful days, which you'll want a swimming suit for in order to enjoy all the water access on our farm! We also provide worker's comp. insurance that will cover your injury if you should get injured while working for us. There's also the Maine Mobile Health Program (<http://www.mainemobile.org/>) which provides basic health insurance to seasonal farm workers.

Describe yourself, your family, background, farming experience, philosophy, goals & interests:

Aaron Bell and Carly DelSignore are the husband/wife team that own and operate the certified organic meat, cow dairy, and produce business of Tide Mill Farm. They work together to manage their different passions within the business and to balance their different strengths and weaknesses. Carly currently manages the chicken processing, poultry production, greenhouse, and vegetable divisions, as well as the direct marketing of the meats and vegetables. She also manages the financial record keeping of the farm. Aaron focuses his energy on managing and working with the dairy and beef herd, pigs, haying, field management for cattle feed, and maintenance and repair of equipment and buildings, as well as off-site facilities.

Since January of 2000, we have been earning our living farming and attempting to re-vitalize the agricultural infrastructure in Washington County. We believe we can make the world a better place by helping to connect people to the production of healthy food. We know that healthy, local food doesn't just appear on people's plates without a great deal of effort and devotion. There are many, many critical steps necessary for that food to be grown, packaged, delivered, and marketed. Hardworking, dedicated people (that's you!) are a vital piece of the picture.

As mentioned before, we have four kids -- two teenagers and two children. We incorporate them into practically everything we do and value their participation, even though that participation requires more time, care, and negotiation. You will not be expected to do any childcare, though our kids are very likely to go out of their way to interact with you, so comfortability with kids is recommended. We also work with a large farm crew. Our farm is extremely busy as we are deeply involved in the production, processing, packaging, delivering, and selling of nutritious food to grateful customers. Our operation is often bustling and overflowing with people, animals, children, machines, etc. If chaotic situations and activity stress you out, this is probably not the farm for you. However, if tons and tons of diversity and unique personalities and quirky animals excites you, then this is definitely the farm for you!

Are you interested in participating as a mentor and/or host farmer in MOFGA’s Journeyperson program for advanced training in organic farming? Yes

References:

Elisabeth Benjamin	elisabethbenjamin@gmail.com	406-529-1952
Former employee	reference email	phone
Amanda Henderson	amandagail.henderson@gmail.com	248-339-6548
Gregg Stiner	gregg.stiner@gmail.com	207-263-4819
Former apprentice	reference email	phone
Carol Bryan	ellifish@midmaine.com	853-4750
Personal	reference email	phone

MOFGA Apprenticeship Program
Farm Synopsis Form

Please write a synopsis of your farm in 50 words or so. This synopsis will be posted on MOFGA’s website, and is an important way that you will “advertise” your farm to prospective apprentices.

Farm Name: Tide Mill Farm

Synopsis:

We are a nine generation family farm located on the coastal waters of rural Downeast Maine. Carly, Aaron, their family, and a hardworking farm crew operate a highly diversified organic farm with 80 dairy and beef cows, 120 pigs, 50 laying hens, 800 turkeys, 20,000 broilers, 40 acres of pasture, 200 acres of hay, 1000+ acres of woodland, 3 acres of row crops, and on-farm composting. We are deeply involved in the production, processing, delivering, and marketing of certified organic, nutritious food to our community.

Please return your completed application with the \$25 fee (\$35 for non-MOFGA members) to: MOFGA Apprenticeship Program, P.O. Box 170 Unity. ME 04988 or email to education@mofga.org. Thanks!