

What is it like to apprentice at Hope Seeds?

Hello to all of you potential apprentices!

My name is Carolyn, and I apprenticed with Andrea Berry, head farmer at Hope Seeds, from May – October 31st 2009. This experience and place were life-changing for me and I'm happy to share why working at this farm is stellar.

Some of you may be in the same boat I was before starting this apprenticeship. I knew little about agriculture – I had never even seen broccoli growing in the ground and had never even picked a raspberry. Thankfully, fate brought me to Hope Seeds. And now I can whole-heartedly attest to the fact that my life has changed after spending these five months with Andrea and her partner, Ernst, their dog Gus, cats Phil and Pezzo, and of course the cows, Twister and Noel.

On this farm you will gain a solid foundation of knowledge by working with Andrea – an incredible teacher, farmer and seed saver – but also much more.

Andrea involves her apprentices in all decisions and tasks and not only shows you how things are done, but also takes the time to discuss *why* things occur the way they do and *why* certain methods are chosen. Another wonderful aspect of working with Andrea is that she emphasizes how she is also constantly learning as a farmer and seed saver, which makes it a wonderful learning environment for the apprentice – she is curious, constantly seeks to build her own knowledge (which is already strong and well-practiced), and encourages her apprentices to do the same. Hands down, one of the traits that made the biggest impression on me is Andrea's ability to focus on finding the silver lining, no matter the situation. For example, if a crop underperforms due to disease or climatic conditions, Andrea will discuss the possible benefits that came from this situation with her apprentices – an invaluable lesson, and one that is of the utmost importance in becoming a successful and dedicated farmer.

At Hope Seeds you will immerse yourself in the unpredictability of farming and gain flexibility so that plans can be adjusted. You will learn the importance of working proactively, seeing the big picture on the farm, and thinking outside the box.

Andrea takes the time to meet with her apprentices to ensure that their goals are being met, and also takes time to address any concerns that the apprentice may be experiencing. She is committed to fostering knowledge in the apprentice, and even encourages off-farm experiences, including two to three weeks of working on another farm in July to provide a more well-rounded experience. I personally took those three weeks to work on a cheese farm in Nova Scotia – an experience I would never have sought out had Andrea not encouraged her apprentice “farmies” to fly off on another adventure! There are other off-farm experiences as well, which should not be understated: Andrea takes the time to head out with her apprentices to MOFGA events in Maine – learning from other farmers on topics such as weed control and saving seed, and attending the much-acclaimed MOFGA Common Grounds Fair!! (If you have never heard of it, I recommend checking it out!)

Apprenticing at Hope Seeds is more than working in the fields and expanding your agricultural knowledge. The apprentice will enjoy Ernst's homemade blueberry pancakes (with homemade apple sauce and maple syrup from their own sugar maples) every single Sunday, 4 o'clock tea every day (announced to everyone in the fields by the ring of a gong, a sound I fondly miss), Wednesday night yoga sessions with other members of the community, and PLENTY of good conversation and laughter.

The bottom line is, you will not only build a strong base of knowledge here under Andrea's guidance, but you will also experience Andrea and Ernst's way of life – truly living from their land. Both are dedicated to self-reliance and managing their land in as sustainable a manner as possible. You will be awed by their

endless energy and their intimate knowledge of their property – this cannot be underestimated. If you are at all interested in living a self-reliant lifestyle, I highly recommend working for these amazing people. What you give to the farm in hard work, you will get back tenfold in knowledge and experience. Thanks to this experience, I am now preserving food, making my own bread, and working for a local farmer in California who is a curator for Seed Saver's Exchange. Andrea has helped instill necessary skills and knowledge that I needed to start working on a farm, and it is a testament to her that I am qualified for this new job I am so enthused to have!