

Collaborative Regional Alliances for Farmer Training:

Lessons Learned from C.R.A.F.T. in North America

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Part I

Mapping Diversity



C.R.A.F.T. Field Day 'Animal Processing and Pasture Management' at Irish Grove Farms, Nov 4th, 2013

This booklet "Collaborative Regional Alliances for Farmer Training: Lessons Learned from C.R.A.F.T. in North America" is a written compilation of the activities and best practices, as well as a means of self-evaluating the success, of C.R.A.F.T. farmer alliances in North America. It will describe and summarize the activities/best practices/success stories in which C.R.A.F.T. groups are engaged. The booklet will highlight:

- Diverse C.R.A.F.T. groups across the continent, pointing out their unique characteristics
- Benefits that these activities provide to each group
- Benefits of collaborating as a national/international C.R.A.F.T. group
- Photos from C.R.A.F.T. alliances
- Anecdotes and C.R.A.F.T. farmer spotlights

1.1 Background

This study is part of a wider project strengthening the Farm Beginnings Collaborative (FBC) and the Collaborative Regional Alliance for Farmer Training (C.R.A.F.T.). The objective of this study was to gather information about existing C.R.A.F.T. networks, the resources they use, their operational and decision structure, their history, the lessons and success stories, as well as their challenges and struggles. The study was executed by the Grey Bruce Centre for Agroecology Cooperative, a farmer network that wants to promote agroecological farming. Methodologically, internet resources were first reviewed on each C.R.A.F.T. group. Then, an interview was scheduled with the coordinator or contact point stated on their website. In some cases, direct contacts were available through the Angelic Organics Learning Center. Interviews typically lasted 30 minutes. The content of this document is thus the reflection of the online presentation of a group, and the knowledge and opinion of a single individual. It may not represent the opinion of all other C.R.A.F.T. members of these groups, and we apologize for any omissions or mistakes that were made. If these shall be corrected, please let us know and send an email to thorsten.arnold (at) gbcae.com.

The long-term goal of the Farm Beginnings Collaborative (FBC) is to expand the use of farmer-to-farmer training models as a proven method for increasing the number of farmers producing food for local and regional food systems. As a renewal project, the Education Enhancement Team will address gaps in training between the FBC and C.R.A.F.T. beginning farmer mentor programs. In the last year, FBC members have identified several key objectives for the next 3-5 years:

1. Assist FBC members and C.R.A.F.T. organizations to strengthen and expand farmer-to-farmer networks.
2. Increase the program sustainability of FBC members and C.R.A.F.T. farmer alliances through improvement of fundraising skills.
3. Increase the capacity of FBC members and other beginning farmer training organizations to document short, medium and long term changes.
4. Enhance the skills and knowledge of Farm Beginnings trainers.

Farmer Network Goals for this project,

- Increased in farmer participation in farmer networks
- Adoption of new farmer-to-farmer training practices being adopted by FBC and C.R.A.F.T.
- Strengthened relationship between C.R.A.F.T. and FBC
- Identification of new partners interested in FBC
- Recruitment of new organizations into the FBC

1.2 Lessons Learned

There are four main lessons learned as a result of this work.

1. *Farmer alliances face challenges.*

Through our work with over 20 farmer networks, we have identified the six most prevalent challenges they face. First, these networks struggle with fostering leadership. These grassroots organizations strongly rely on volunteers for defining content and organizing workshops. The farmers in these networks are already spending long days working on the farm during growing seasons, so making farmer training and networking a priority - or holding a leadership position in a farmer network - is a role that farmer network coordinators have a hard time filling. Second, farmer networks are challenged in achieving a standard education level for their farmer-apprentices while recognizing the diversity of educators. Each farm and farmer is unique, thus farmer networks are facing difficulties in ensuring that apprentices finish a year of farmer training with a consistent set of skills. Third, improving the depth of education and skill within a farmer network has been experienced as a challenge, beyond the experiences of the first year. This challenge is related to the fourth one, continuing farmer-training opportunities beyond the first years of apprenticeship has been a challenge. Most farmer alliances have not solved the problem of how to support an apprentice after their first years on-farm with advanced training. Fifth, many farmer alliances are challenged in maintaining trust relationships within their network over prolonged period of times, which would be a precondition for deepened collaboration. Last but not least, the role of funding remains contested in farmer networks: reliance on grants to support core role within the network is risky, because donor priorities change rapidly and proposal timelines are often out of sync with the seasonal work flow of farms. While some support by non-profits seems to be a success factor for successful networks, these also need to manage the balance being driven by non-profits against a lead by and around farmers.

2. *Farmer alliances fill very specific needs.*

Working with so many alliances across the country has allowed us to see a pattern in why this range of farmer networks has emerged in the last 15+ years. First, farmers state a lack of practical education in sustainable farming that formal education cannot provide. While traditionally farms had been passed on from one generation to another, there is a growing interest amongst youth without farming background to test this career, often before enrolling in educational courses. Second, these farmers are motivated by opportunities to promote sustainable farming and connect to youth as farmer-trainers. The C.R.A.F.T. networks have an open knowledge sharing culture and gladly pass on their expertise to others. Third, farmers feel a sense of ownership in their farmer networks and enjoy steering the network in the direction that suits their needs. Farmers comment that C.R.A.F.T. alliances are "bottom-up", which gives them strength and a voice. Fourth, the needs that farmer alliances fill may differ regionally, depending on the existence of other formal organizations, socioeconomic context, and individual preferences. The flexible model that C.R.A.F.T. offers is appreciated because it can be adapted to a range of contexts. Last, C.R.A.F.T. farmer alliances fill a need for farmers to model a resilient "short-chain" food system that is very different than the current one. Many members of these alliances have a different approach to farming and food than their immediate neighbors; thus participation in a wider network fills a need to network with like-minded individuals.

3. *Farmer alliances want better standards for farmer training.*

We witnessed a desire for three levels or types of standards by C.R.A.F.T. farmers. First, farmers expressed a need for "C.R.A.F.T. Farm Member Standards". The farmers have already begun fleshing out the standards that are needed and have stated them to be a) farmer-led education, b) apprentices/interns are allowed and enabled to attend C.R.A.F.T. field days, c) member farms attend an annual network meeting, d) member farms choose cooperation within the network over competition, and e) member farms commit to deeply sustainable farming practices and building a local food system (while some members have formal certification as organic or biodynamic, on-the-ground practices are considered far more important though). Second, farmers identify a need for standards for the relationship that exists between a C.R.A.F.T. network and the non-profit that coordinates it - if any. This idea means that the non-profit acknowledges that C.R.A.F.T. is a farmer-led network. Furthermore, C.R.A.F.T. farmers in the coming year want to develop a list of best practices for networks on how they can interface with a non-profit. Farmers (and non-profits) would welcome case studies how farmer networks are successful without facilitation by a non-profit. Third in the list of standards requested is one that would apply to a future, international "network of C.R.A.F.T. farmer networks"; this list will be developed in the third year of our grant.

4. *Farmer networks hold many best practices in common.*

We learned that there are already many excellent and successful practices that are widely adopted among these farmer networks.

Top among those best practices are:

- C.R.A.F.T. farmer members have a shared vision
- C.R.A.F.T. farmer alliances embrace diversity
- C.R.A.F.T. is a bottom-up leadership framework
- Farmers are autonomous in these farmer networks and their voices are heard and validated
- C.R.A.F.T. farmer alliances rely on collaboration and shared learning
- C.R.A.F.T. groups clarify their individual network objectives

1.3 Summary

The fundamental challenge of the C.R.A.F.T. and FBC farmer networks is that they operate in relative isolation and face obstacles to farmer training without access to proven, successful farmer training models. As a result, Angelic Organics Learning Center and Land Stewardship Project opened lines of communication and resource sharing for over 20 farmer networks across the US and Canada. These farmer networks now have access to each other and knowledge of best practices and successful farmer training models that are used across the continent. An outcome of our efforts is that aspiring and beginning farmers in the US and Canada are more connected to national resources and receive improved training through participation in more robust farmer networks.

An example: C.R.A.F.T. Steering Committee for the Upper Midwest region

What does the C.R.A.F.T. Steering Committee do?

- Guide the general direction of the farmer-led C.R.A.F.T. program
- Recommend guidelines for C.R.A.F.T. program components and fund raising strategies
- Outline C.R.A.F.T. membership criteria
- Orient new members to C.R.A.F.T. and our successful strategies for internships and mentorships
- Facilitate conflict management between members on C.R.A.F.T. issues upon request of members
- Attend two required planning meetings annually (the Open Meeting in spring and Steering Committee meeting in fall)

What does the Steering Committee look like? The steering committee should have a composition that is:

- A minimum of three-quarters C.R.A.F.T. farmers
- A minimum of three member farms
- Able to think in circles, deal with uncertainty, bring & enjoy good snacks, and have a good sense of humor

How does the Steering Committee choose Field Day topics?

- Field day workshop hosts are determined through solicited topics from trainees and suggestions made by a steering committee.
- Topics focus on the core themes of soils, plants, animals, and people.
- Field days provide prospective farmers with exposure to the diversity in the region through a workshop series that balances visits to larger and smaller farms, organic, biodynamic and sustainable farms, new and continuing C.R.A.F.T. members, and farms throughout our geographic region
- Field days are divided between time on the training topic, the host farm tour, and social time.

1.4 C.R.A.F.T. groups, overview

Country	Nr	Organization	Website	Founded	Non-profit role	Fees
Canada	a	C.R.A.F.T. Ontario Southwest	http://craftsoutwestontario.ca/	2002	Facilitated, now phased out	SCa 125
	b	C.R.A.F.T. Ontario Kawartha	http://craftfarms.ca	2009	No association Fee	SCa 50
	(c)	C.R.A.F.T. Ontario Kingston	https://www.facebook.com/CRAFTkingston/info			
	(d)	C.R.A.F.T. Ontario Northeast	http://ontariofarminterhips.ca/north-eastern-ontario-farms.html			
	(e)	C.R.A.F.T. Ontario Ottawa	http://justfood.ca/get-involved/#ood-work-ottawa-region/			
	1	Upper Midwest C.R.A.F.T.	www.learningconnect.org/craft			
	2	Northwest Lower Michigan C.R.A.F.T.	www.artmeetsearth.org/			
	3	Ozarks C.R.A.F.T.	http://ozarkscraft.wordpress.com/	1997	Facilitated Fee, Friends Of CRAFT	\$US 45, plus \$10 per-staff
	4	Western North Carolina C.R.A.F.T.	www.organicgroverschool.org/organicfarming/craft	2005	Facilitated Via nonprofit	
	5	Chesapeake C.R.A.F.T.	http://www.chesapeakecraft.wordpress.com/	2008	No association Volunteer	
USA	6	C.R.A.F.T. United Piedmont	http://foodsinttle.org/we-teach/agriculture-training-programs/	2009	Facilitated Via nonprofit	
	7	Kentucky C.R.A.F.T.	http://www.hillandhollofarm.com/craft.htm	2010	No association Fee	\$US 150
	(8)	North Fork Valley C.R.A.F.T. Program	http://www.vogaco.org/education.html	2013	Facilitated Via nonprofit	
	(9)	Snoqualmie Valley C.R.A.F.T.	http://www.dogmeatfarm.com/01aFT.htm	2004	Facilitated Via nonprofit	
	(10)	Tri-State C.R.A.F.T.	www.tristatecraft.org/	2014	Facilitated Via nonprofit	
	A	C.R.A.F.T. in the Hudson Valley	http://www.craftfarmapprentice.com	2012	Facilitated Via nonprofit	
	B	Mid-Hudson C.R.A.F.T.	http://www.glywood.org/programs/glywood-farm/craft/	1995	No association Volunteer	
	C	Lower-Hudson C.R.A.F.T.	http://www.mobiusfields.com/craft.html	2006	Facilitated Via nonprofit	
	D	Catskills C.R.A.F.T.	http://www.catskillscraft.org/	2011	Facilitated Via nonprofit	
	E	C.R.A.F.T. in Western Connecticut	http://www.bloomingfieldsfarm.com/cft_frameindex.html	2004	No association Volunteer	
USA Northeast	F	East End of Long Island C.R.A.F.T.	http://www.amgansettfoodinstitute.org/#iprograms/vstci2-craft	2013	Facilitated Via nonprofit	
	G	Finger Lakes C.R.A.F.T.	http://www.groundswellcenter.org	2010	Facilitated Via nonprofit	
	H	Eastern Massachusetts C.R.A.F.T.	https://el1ist.tufts.edu/wvs/info/emasscraft	1998	Facilitated Via nonprofit	

Table 1.1 — C.R.A.F.T. groups in North America and contact website

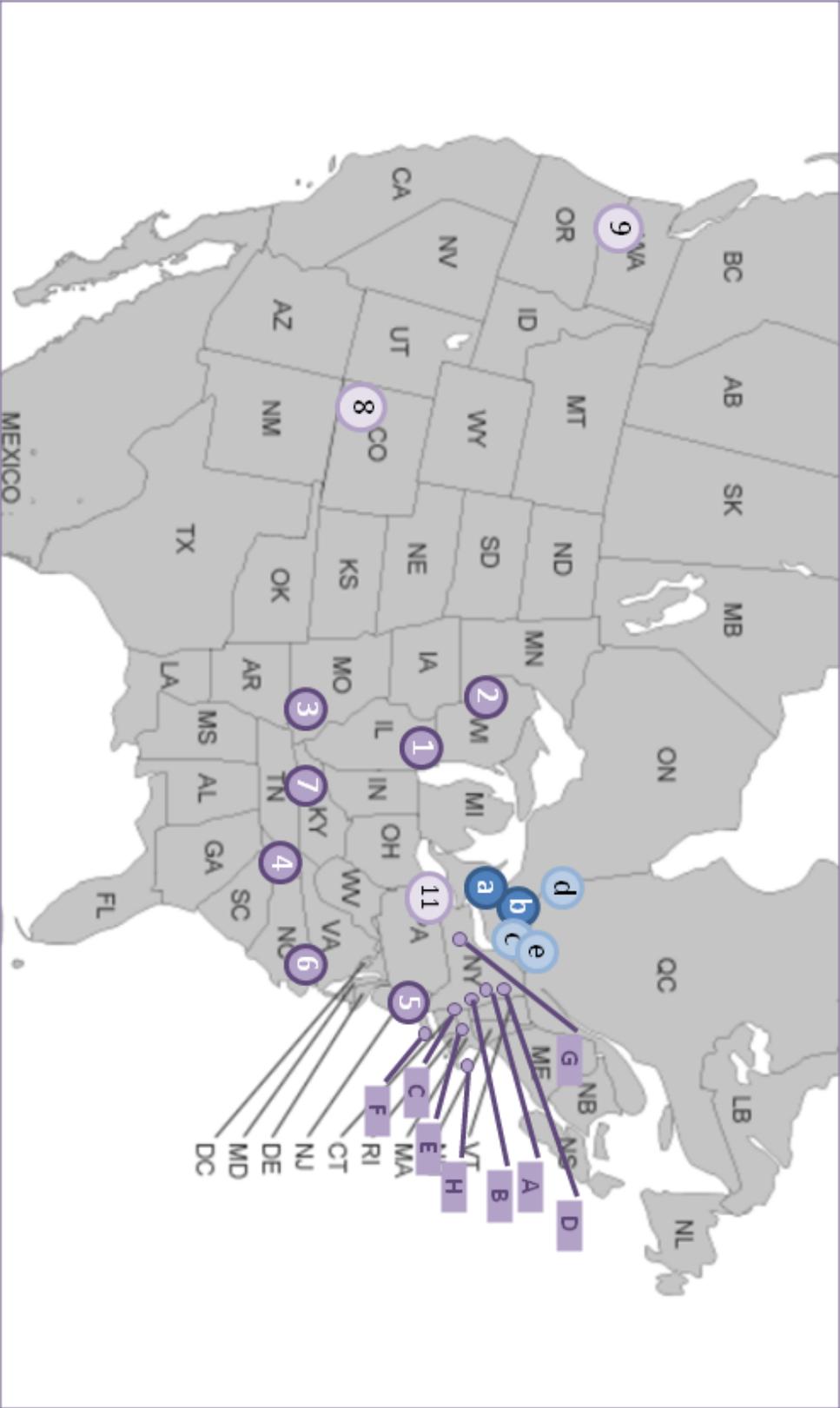


Figure 1.1 — Map of C.R.A.F.T. groups across North America. Numbering corresponds to second column in Table 1.1



2 — C.R.A.F.T. Farmer Alliances in Canada

Cory Eichman demonstrating his seed saving plot during a field day

2.1 C.R.A.F.T. South West Ontario

C.R.A.F.T. South West Ontario is "a gateway to a farming internship experience" in the triangle between Toronto, Lake Eerie (south of London, Ontario), and the Bruce Peninsula that divides Lake Huron and Georgian Bay. Between 15 and 20 ecological farms participate in this group and collectively host 50 to 60 interns each year. Farms are typically highly diversified and include smaller and larger market gardens, grazing operations, and two education centres – the Ignatius Jesuit Centre and Everdale. Generally, interns are expected to stay at one farm for the full summer season. They participate in monthly farm tours during which farmers cover important topics in workshops and see operations that follow ecological, certified organic and biodynamic practices. This C.R.A.F.T. group is strictly farmer-driven, without any type of support beyond its farm members, and entirely focused on providing a good internship experience.

In short

- Farmer-led group
- Founded 2002
- About 20 farms participate
- Maximum travel distance between farms five (5) hours
- Two excellent manuals, *Oh To Grow* for interns, and *Nurturing New Farmers* for farmers, available at www.ignatiusguelph.ca
- <http://craftsouthwestontario.ca/>

Organizational structure

C.R.A.F.T. South West Ontario remains a totally informal network of farmers. All member farms convene twice during winter, at a farm chosen for convenience. During these two meetings, all relevant decisions are made. For a period of two years, an elected coordinator manages minor tasks such as calling meetings, sending out minutes, and providing a gateway for applications by farmers, questions about the group, and as emergency contact. The coordinator also gives support and advice to new network members who struggle with integrating interns into their farm.

The group remains informal and has no bylaws. However, an application procedure for farmers defines eligibility criteria and also requires that one C.R.A.F.T. member farm must sponsor new applicants. Each application is discussed during a meeting and then voted on. The group also advertises jointly, operates a website and email list, evaluates internship experiences, and staffs a booth during the annual Guelph

Organic Conference to recruit potential applicants. Finances are managed by an appointee and reported on during each meeting. The only source of revenue is an annual membership fee paid by farm members.

History

In Ontario, C.R.A.F.T. was originally inspired when two farmers worked as interns and lamented the lack of educational opportunities for young people who wanted to learn how to farm, and also the lack of interaction among interns. After one of them visited the original C.R.A.F.T. group in Hudson Valley, they wanted to start something similar in Ontario. They managed to invite a group of farmers from Southwestern Ontario who coach interns to an initial meeting. Seven farms were interested and launched the first Canadian C.R.A.F.T. program at the Guelph Organic Conference in 2002 – five of them are still members today. Founding members included the long-established farms of Cory Eichman, Tony & Fran McQuail, Plan B Organics, as well as the Ignatius Jesuit Centre and Everdale. For a period of time, an employee from Ignatius facilitated and coordinated the group, until she took maternity leave. At that time, the 20 active farmer members appointed a coordinator and raised \$750 dollars/year as reimbursement for related tasks¹ of calling and chairing the two annual meetings, informing new farmer applicants about the program, and acting as a physical contact person. Also, ad-hoc task forces were created to manage other issues, like advertising, website management, and creating specific policies. That said, the group continues to operate as an informal network by working together to offer monthly intern programming. The application and hiring process remains entirely the responsibility of farmers and interns. The idea continues to be that farmers add value to their internship programs, but the group has grown to be a friendly peer-to-peer network of both farmers and interns. The original format of monthly C.R.A.F.T. field days on Wednesdays continues today.

In 2009, the original C.R.A.F.T. ON group became C.R.A.F.T. ON SW to accommodate interest in other C.R.A.F.T. groups becoming established regionally throughout the province.

Impacts

C.R.A.F.T. member farms have grown into an active community of mutual support for questions related to agricultural practices, emergencies such as shortage of transplants, or even for sharing equipment or trading products after harvest failures. Interns enjoy that visits to other farms expose them to other farming systems, but also connect them with likeminded interns. Indeed, intern networks regularly organize parties and connect in other ways, which is supported by their hosts.

Resource: Educational materials for interns and farmers

Existing textbooks were found to be too specific for an intern that is completely new to the world of farming: interns require a full overview of the basic farming knowledge in layman's terms (equipment, soils, etc). On the initiative of the two instigators, a manual was first drafted as part of a Master's thesis with the support of a small grant, and member farmers edited and expanded the text. With a second grant hosted by the Ignatius Jesuit Centre in 2008, a second edition was developed and updated with timely topics like organic certification. With that grant, Ignatius also developed a manual for farmers, *Nurturing New Farmers*, based on the questions that farmers posed about hosting farm internships and managing employees. The manual also received inputs from a number of experienced C.R.A.F.T. farms. Contributing farmers received a small honorarium and several copies in compensation for their efforts. Both books continue to be published and sold by the Ignatius Jesuit Centre to C.R.A.F.T. ON SW farms at printing costs. A new edition is expected to be finished in Winter 2014/5. The Ignatius Jesuit Centre expects to make the manuals available online in the near future.

All farmers are expected to own a copy of both manuals. The manual *Oh to Grow* is popular especially with interns without farming background, because it contains a selection of the most important information and data in text, graphs and tables.

¹This amount was increased to \$1000 recently.

Farm tours

Monthly tours are typically scheduled on Wednesdays as full-day events. They include a general farm tour, a specific discussion topic, a potluck lunch where participants not only bring food but also their cutlery, and a work bee. The work bee lasts 90-120 minutes during which participants are expected to help out, for example with weeding, moving irrigation equipment, stone picking, or other tasks that farmers are glad to have help with. Discussion topics are chosen during the spring meeting in a way that relevant educational topics are covered in each node.

Tours are mandatory for interns, and only C.R.A.F.T. members are permitted. However, during the planning meeting in winter, it is encouraged that two to three farmers attend each C.R.A.F.T. day to add diversity of knowledge.

Too large groups? On *Sub nodes* and *Mega Days*

With more than 50 interns each year, the SW Ontario group has additionally divided itself into two separate sub nodes (or three, depending on the number of interns or farms in a particular year), divided primarily by travel distance. Out of the six tours each season, half of the farm tours are attended by farm interns within the same sub nodes, and the other half are attended by all farms. These *Mega Days* typically take place on long-established farms or at the educational centres, which offer infrastructure and sufficient capacity to handle such a large group productively.

While all *Mega Days* occur on the first Wednesday of a month, the tours of the sub nodes are staggered: The northern node holds theirs on the second Wednesdays, the southern on the third, to allow cross-visits. Also, thematic foci are distributed evenly, such that each node covers all themes, e.g. biodynamic production, finances, etc.

Motto

The group's motto is "Farmer Training is what we do". A few years after the group started, it became apparent to members of the group that the introductory level of a C.R.A.F.T. internship is not adequate for more advanced education, e.g. for those who want to manage or own their own farms. When some original members asked if C.R.A.F.T. could do more, a full-day meeting assessed the opportunities and resource requirements of such an in-depth program. One of the conclusions was that much is possible, but would bring an organizational burden and dependence on external funding. Farmers decided that this is not consistent with the purpose and mission of the network. In practice, many interns take a second year of internship during which they receive deeper education, more responsibilities, and better pay. Some even work a third year as farm managers. At this point, farmer members are content with how the network operates and work at improving their individual programs through exchange with other farmers.

2.2 C.R.A.F.T. Kawartha

C.R.A.F.T. Kawartha offers farming internships in Kawartha, Northumberland, Peterborough, Durham and surrounding regions. The ecological farming community of the region has joined together and is working cooperatively to provide education and support for prospective future farmers. C.R.A.F.T. interns will live, work and learn on a farm for a full growing season, with "invaluable opportunities to learn necessary skills by working alongside experienced farmers" (website).

All internships must involve an exchange of labour (by the intern) for education and hands-on farming experience (from the farmer). Each farm may organize its internship as it sees fit. Individual farms operate independently so the living arrangements, stipends, work hours and training methods for interns are specific to each farm.

The internship includes monthly educational field trips to the other area C.R.A.F.T. farms to experience various other farming enterprises, as well as providing an occasion to interact and network with the other interns.

In short

- Farmer-run, no association
- Founded in 2009
- 12 farms participate
- <http://craftfarms.ca>

Throughout the growing season more opportunities arise for interns to have further hands-on experience on additional farms in the region.

Participating farms are either certified organic or have adopted organic farming principles (see Text Box).

History

Kawartha C.R.A.F.T. initially received organizational support from the non-profit *Farms at Work*. This organization hosted and organized the first meetings of farmers and also invited a coordinator of a successful neighbouring C.R.A.F.T. node to present their success story. A core group formed, made up of six farmers within a maximum geographic driving distance of 3 hours. Modelled after the Southwestern Ontario node, all interns are required to attend all C.R.A.F.T. farm tours.

The small group has no formal coordinator. Some roles are rotating (website updates, spring meeting organization), while others, like the treasurer, tend to stay with the same person on a voluntary basis. Participants contribute what they can do well.

Organizational structure

Farm members must fulfill these criteria:

- Be a producer and marketer of food
- Offer a full-season sustainable farming internship
- Operate their farm in a sustainable manner that fits with the Principles of Organic Agriculture- however farms are NOT required to be certified organic.
- Participate in planning meetings for C.R.A.F.T. Kawartha
- Contribute a membership fee to assist with advertising and website costs
- Farms are encouraged to host an educational "Field Day" for all C.R.A.F.T. Kawartha interns on their farm and send their intern(s) to all six (with an optional seventh) of the monthly field days on other farms.

An annual spring meeting is organized at which all C.R.A.F.T. farms meet. Applicants who want to become new farm members attend the spring meeting, where new ideas are discussed and the farm tours are scheduled. Farm members pay an annual fee of \$50 for website and other small expenses.

Resource: Statement of organic principles

Member farms must teach according to key principles:

- PROTECT the environment, minimize soil degradation and erosion, decrease pollution, optimize biological productivity and promote a sound state of health.
- REPLENISH and maintain long-term soil fertility by optimizing conditions for biological activity within the soil.
- MAINTAIN diversity within, and surrounding, the enterprise, and protect and enhance the biological diversity of native plants and wildlife.
- RECYCLE materials and resources to the greatest extent possible within the enterprise.
- PROVIDE attentive care that promotes the health and behavioural needs of livestock.
- MAINTAIN the integrity of organic food and processed products from initial handling to point of sale.

C.R.A.F.T. Kawartha specifically rejects the use of genetically engineered/genetically modified organisms in their practices.

Field days

Farm tours last a full day, generally from 10:00 AM - 3:00 PM. Field days include a farm tour and a specific workshop topic, as well as a potluck lunch. One hour of this time is devoted to a work bee, as appreciation for the host's efforts. Most farms choose simple tasks with minimal organizational requirements.

Future aspirations

Farmer members appreciate and value the social bond between likeminded people, and "the feeling that you can call your peers any time for advice". Members move out of isolation and perceive themselves as part of a movement that broadens sustainable farming through education. The members aspire to having more farms join the network, but also would like more frequent meetings with more face-to-face time and knowledge exchange.



3 — C.R.A.F.T. in the Northeast

3.1 C.R.A.F.T. Hudson Valley/Berkshires/Pioneer Valley

Hudson Valley/Berkshires/Pioneer Valley is the original C.R.A.F.T. group initiated in 1994. C.R.A.F.T. is a cooperative effort of local organic and biodynamic farms organized to enhance educational opportunities for farm apprentices. Apprentices on farms that participate in the C.R.A.F.T. program experience a diversity of successful farm models and join a community of fellow apprentices and farmers. Prospective apprentices apply for an apprenticeship directly with one of the participating farms.

After hearing experiences from a formal education in biodynamic agriculture from the Netherlands in 1994, farmers in the Hudson Valley discussed the benefits and prospects of practical education in alternative farming in North America.

History

Some of the original founding farmers experienced training in Europe and learned about the idea of agricultural education in a biodynamic school in Holland. In the absence of formal training opportunities in the US at that time, many interns had voiced a feeling that they were working a lot without adequate teaching, and were exploited as cheap labour. At that time, discussion reignited amongst farmers who host interns, and questioned how to be fairer and prepare interns better for starting their own farms. Farmers questioned themselves and wrote a list of what they thought that an intern should know after having worked on a farm for a full year. Then, they also made lists of what they were actually teaching – and found the latter lists much shorter than the first. However, they also noticed that their collaborative teaching was completely fulfilling the learning objectives, and pondered a collaborative teaching approach.

During the early 1990's, when these discussions occurred, the overall organic market was supply-driven and demand-limited, such that farmers competed amongst each other for few customers. It required a great effort of trust building amongst farmers to move forward collaboratively, very unlike the expansive market during the early 2000s, when the market was demand-driven and supply-limited, which made collaboration easier. Ultimately, the first C.R.A.F.T. program was founded in upstate New York in 1995. In 1997, ten farmers from northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin founded the second C.R.A.F.T. program in the Upper Midwest, and C.R.A.F.T. became an open trade name for a much larger movement.

In short

- Original C.R.A.F.T. group.
- Initiated 1994 and founded in 1995
- 26 farms in New York and Massachusetts
- <http://www.craftfarmapprentice.com>

After their initial success, supporters of the biodynamic idea offered funding to formalize the C.R.A.F.T. node into a non-profit or college, following the Dutch model. Farm members pondered the option and finally agreed not to accept the generous funding offer, because it was felt that the informal nature and collaborative commitment of all farm participants actually was the main success factor for the group. All members had somehow – and at different levels – contributed to meeting organization, teaching content, advertisement, and thus shared a strong sense of ownership for the group. It was believed that a paid position – though helpful in many ways – would undermine the feeling of community.

The Hudson Valley/Berkshires/Pioneer Valley C.R.A.F.T. group continues to exist as an informal network. It remains approximately at the same size as in the beginning, but is transitioning to a new generation of farmers, many of whom are C.R.A.F.T. alumni. Some original members have retired or stopped accepting interns, and prefer working with employees which is believed to be less burden and responsibility. But a new generation of ecological farmers carries the torch of farmer-to-farmer education into the future.

Organizational structure

The original C.R.A.F.T. node remains a totally informal network that is neither incorporated nor has paid staff.

RESOURCE: GUIDANCE AND STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES FOR A VEGETABLE CSA

Jean-Paul Courtens from Roxbury Farm is one of the original founders of the first C.R.A.F.T. group. Roxbury Farm is a community supported farm that grows vegetables, herbs, and grass fed pork, lamb, and beef for over 1000 shareholders representing over 1200 families in four communities—Columbia County, the Capital Region, Westchester County and Manhattan—on 300 acres in Kinderhook, New York (45 acres of vegetable).

Over the years, Jean-Paul has written down many experiences and operating procedures for his approximately 15 year-round and seasonal employees and farm intern(s). In his belief that ecological farms should share knowledge openly and widely, Jean-Paul has shared all of these materials with the internet community at <http://www.roxburyfarm.com> (select "Information for Farmers"), including:

- a 100 Member CSA Plan that breaks down their greenhouse schedule, field planting and seeding schedule, and weekly share plan for a 100 member CSA;
- a description of what Biodynamics means on Roxbury Farm;
- a crop manual describes how they seed, transplant, protect, and cultivate each of their crops;
- a harvest manual describes standard operation procedures for harvest, ready-to-harvest indicators, packing and washing procedures, and storage conditions. This very detailed description includes time expectations for employees;
- an article that describes a thought process before purchasing a piece of equipment.
- detailed schedules for field planting and seeding and greenhouse;
- soil fertility practices on Roxbury farm; and
- the whole farm approach to soil and plant health.

It is understood that all of these resources are highly specific to the scale and circumstances of Roxbury Farm. These resources are highly recommended for consideration by any C.R.A.F.T. farmer – they may provide a template for developing similar resources for one's own farm. Also, by making these resources available, Jean-Paul is setting a gold standard in knowledge sharing and non-competitiveness amongst alternative farmers. Thank you – for the information and for setting this example!

The farm tour

C.R.A.F.T. interns in this node have a five-and-a-half-day work week, which includes Saturday mornings. Once or twice each month, apprentices gather for a half-day farm tour which also includes a two-hour

workshop on a specific theme.

The group has experience with full-day and full-weekend workshops with invited speakers, observation exercises, and exercises that sharpen the prospective farmer's senses. However, interns were too tired during the busy season and not prepared for such an intensive curriculum. They also needed their time to catch up with their lives and were not willing to sacrifice additional free time. But apprentices really liked the social interaction and the opportunity to talk with like-minded people. Ultimately, the group settled on the simpler model with 12 annual half-day farm visits.

Apprentices or employees?

One experience of this first C.R.A.F.T. group is that farmers naturally evolved from meeting their labour needs through apprentices towards hiring permanent and/or seasonal staff. Most farms continue to have (fewer) apprentices, in addition to their core crew. Three main reasons were given: first, hiring interns poses an enormous risk to farmers. While many interns are fantastic people and/or very talented, others have two left hands, such that the farmer cannot rely on them to get the job done. Also, many interns have shown to be judgmental and questioning of each step in the work flow. As an interviewee put it: "They think they are smart from lots of formal reading in textbooks, which is paired with a lack of practical skills" (standard operating procedures with time expectations are one way to manage such critique). The second reason is cost considerations: before the C.R.A.F.T. network was founded, many farmers regarded interns mainly as a cheap source of labour. Experience, however, revealed the hidden costs of hosting interns: they can require a lot of instructor time for teaching work flow procedures as well as speed of work. More mature farms needed very specific labour skills that cannot be met by apprentices, e.g. tractor work or high-quality greenhouse jobs. Third, many internships were an emotional burden for their host farmers and ended with disappointment on the side of the farmer, with a feeling that the strong commitment (and cost) from the farmer's side was met by grumbling amongst interns. Hence, today many farms have transitioned toward permanent and seasonal employees. Two types of seasonal labour were mentioned: Mexican migrant workers, and mothers who seek a second income during the summer season by working on an organic farm.

Larger farms continue to educate apprentices, but have no expectations of them with respect to labour returns. A typical ratio is one apprentice to 5-10 employees. It was pointed out that it is a good educational experience to have apprentices work next to skilled farm labourers.



Figure 3.1 — *The East End of Long Island, New York (Source: Wikimedia Commons)*

3.2 East End of Long Island C.R.A.F.T.

Many summer residents from New York are relatively wealthy and have a preference for sustainable living and wellness. This supports a movement of organic mixed farms and a vital local food economy with multiple direct marketing venues (CSAs, farmers market, farm stands, wholesale to restaurants). As a consequence, growers target summer residents and focus their growing on the mid-season (July, August) while season extension and winter CSAs are not yet common business practices.

Every season, people of all ages and backgrounds who have the desire to gain farming skills come to the East End. Monthly farm tours and workshops train apprentices and other farmers in everything from maintaining optimal soil health to crop planning and marketing.

In short

- Group facilitated by Amagansett Food Institute
- Founded 2013
- 11 farms participate in farm tours
- <http://www.amagansettfoodinstitute.org/#!programs/vstc12=craft>

History

Before 2013, East End farmers visited each other in informal tours to exchange experiences. The idea of C.R.A.F.T., as initiated in Hudson Valley, was known but there were no resources or initiatives to formalize a similar group locally. After the idea of a local C.R.A.F.T. group had sprung up several times in focus group meetings, the Amagansett Food Institute took the initiative and contacted Angelic Organics for guidance on how to start. Amagansett Food Institute hired additional staff as facilitator and coordinator, and now formally structures these tours. The goal stated on the first convention for East End CRAFT is to enrich and support education and community building through farm tours, workshops, and social events.

Organizational structure

The Amagansett Food Institute (AFI) remains the facilitating body of this young C.R.A.F.T. group. AFI members are local businesses in the food production and processing sector who "envision the East End as a place where all farms and food businesses are thriving and supported by an engaged community whose members understand the benefits and uniqueness of local food". Its mission is "to support, promote, and advocate for the farmers, vintners, fishermen, and other food producers and providers on the East End of Long Island"¹.

East End C.R.A.F.T. remains mostly an informal group without a formal membership or fees. A small grant through FarmAid and more general funding for AFI program management also supports the coordination of this C.R.A.F.T. group. The main planning and decision making event is an annual meeting during winter. All farms who are known to have apprentices or hosted farm tours, and even past apprentices, are invited to this annual day of planning, where policies, opportunities for improvements,

¹<http://www.amagansettfoodinstitute.org/#!about>

and successes are discussed and the summer tour schedule is set. Many overlaps with AFI membership exists, but non-members are also welcome.

Farm Tours

Monthly tours take place between April and October, with a break during the busiest time of the season (mid-July until end of August). Tours are non-exclusive and mostly target farmers, seasonal employees and summer students, interns and WOOFers, but they are also open to gardeners and prospective farmers, and occasionally foodies and other food advocates are joining. The tour itself typically lasts one or two hours, plus a social component - a potluck or visit to a local bar/restaurant.

Participants agree that the social components during a busy and isolated summer season are an important part of these tours, in addition to the learning and knowledge exchange.

This year, AFI also organized three workshops that complement more general farm tours with in-depth content on the topics of soil science, tomato pathogens, and beekeeping.

Recommended Mentorship Resources from NOFA New York:

- Core Competencies for Aspiring Farmers ^a
- Resources for hosts and mentors^b
 - Agriculture Teaching Information: The Sustainable Agriculture Education Materials Database at Cornell University (<http://locale.mannlib.cornell.edu/saem>)
 - * classroom activities
 - * handouts to lectures
 - * lab manuals.
 - * ... more ...
 - Presenting an Effective On-Farm Workshop
 - Creating an Apprentice Library on your Farm
 - Resources and publications on teaching sustainable farming and gardening (Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems. University of California Santa Cruz.)
- Labor Considerations and Mentoring Capacity Evaluation
- Sample Contracts and Agreements

^a<http://www.nofany.org/sites/default/files/2012%20NOFANY%20Core%20Competencies%20Tool.pdf>

^b<http://www.nofany.org/organic-farming/beginning-farmers-and-mentors/resources-host-and-mentor-farmers>

Challenges for C.R.A.F.T. in a region of agritourism

The beauty of East End brings many advantages with a strong seasonal population, but also brings challenges. These include that the growing season is defined more by the tourist season than by weather, and winter extension still remains little explored. For this area, agritourism is as much a revenue stream as production itself, so farmers need to give much thought to how to appeal to the affluent seasonal residents. Given the popularity of the region for vacation, farm business operators must be careful to hire apprentices who are serious about farming and realize the work load and time commitment.

Most farm businesses are operated by relatively young people. Farmland is usually rented under long-term leases, in collaboration with a local land trust. In such context where the local zoning bylaw often does not permit temporary housing, finding accommodation for apprentices (and even operators) is often very difficult. The appeal of effective education that the C.R.A.F.T. logo carries is anticipated to draw apprentices to this area who are seriously considering a career in farming, as well as locals who have access to accommodation.

3.3 C.R.A.F.T. in Western Connecticut

Western Connecticut C.R.A.F.T. farms are located between the NY and MA borders, the sound of Long Island, and the Connecticut River as the eastern border. Member farms are very diverse in their products, marketing mechanisms, and in their farm education. Most market directly in the area, or even into New York City.

The purpose of the Western Connecticut C.R.A.F.T. is *training* of farm workers and apprentices in the craft of small scale agriculture and horticulture with emphasis on food production; *exchange* of ideas among farm people; and *community* of farmers, farm workers, and others who are interested in local agriculture².

In short

- Group is farmer led and farmer centered.
- Founded 2004
- Maximum distance 1.5 hours drive between farms
- 10 farms participate
- http://www.bloomingfieldsfarm.com/cft_frameindex.html

History and organizational structure

C.R.A.F.T. in Western Connecticut was organized in 2004. After having had two annual winter meetings of member farmers for several years, members of the C.R.A.F.T. node have moved to a packed February meeting. A quorum of two thirds of current participating farms must be present to make changes in the bylaws. Bylaws can be amended at either the fall or spring meeting. Organizational meetings are followed by a potluck where interns share self-grown seasonal food.

Meeting tasks ³

- Review the season and make any necessary adjustments;
- Choose a leader for a one year term. There are no term limits on the leader;
- Hear sponsorships and vote on any farms in the geographic region that wish to be part of the C.R.A.F.T. program.
- Set the calendar for the member farm field visits;
- Announce any new Provisional Members to the group.

A farm within the geographic boundaries may apply to become a *Provisional Member* by indicating their interest to the current leader by February 15. Apprentices or employees of the Provisional Farms may then attend meetings, but will not be represented at C.R.A.F.T. organizational meetings and will not host C.R.A.F.T. field visits. After a Provisional Member has attended meetings for one season, that farm may apply as a full member. The Provisional Member needs to be 'sponsored' by a current C.R.A.F.T. farm. At the fall farmer meeting, the sponsor will describe the farm and a simple majority vote will be taken to admit or deny admittance to the candidate farm.

At a minimum, a year end survey will be distributed to farm apprentices to gather feedback on the program. Individual farmers may also distribute surveys on or shortly after their visit.

Impacts

The farmer network has created a much wider collaboration amongst farmers. Members help each other during hard times in events of personal illness or crop loss, for example. Farmers really enjoy the informality of the network, but also the reliability of mutual support.

²http://www.bloomingfieldsfarm.com/cft_frameindex.html

³All tasks are performed during a single meeting now, unlike stated in the original 2011 version of the bylaw.

Farm tours

C.R.A.F.T. field meetings are open only to apprentices and employees of member and provisional farms. After the spring meeting, attendance of individuals other than those listed above is only by permission of the individual farmer hosting the meeting, who must be contacted at least one week in advance.

Field meetings begin promptly at 3:00 PM and will end around 5 PM, followed by a potluck supper. Field meetings are comprised of a tour and general description and history of the farm, and then a more in-depth discussion of an area in which the farmer has some expertise. The majority of the farm meeting must be delivered by a principal of the host farm, although experienced farm employees may also contribute. Field meetings are intended solely for farm employees. C.R.A.F.T. farmers are welcome to listen in on the farm tour and topic discussion, but they ARE NOT to ask questions or make comments. Generally speaking, two bantering farmers greatly dampens participation by apprentices. Farmers leading a tour should more than gently remind anyone in a tour group who might need a refresher on this policy.

RESOURCE: A SIMPLE BYLAW

The Western Connecticut C.R.A.F.T. group has adapted a simple bylaw that is accessible at http://www.bloomingfieldsfarm.com/cft_frameindex.html:

Purpose

C.R.A.F.T. (Collaborative Regional Alliance for Farmer Training) in Western Connecticut is an organization of farms dedicated to providing farm education and training to its farm apprentices and employees. We do this by organizing farm field meetings which are attended by the apprentices or employees of member farms.

History

The original C.R.A.F.T. group was organized by farmers in eastern New York and western Massachusetts in 1994. Since that time the concept has become popular nationwide. C.R.A.F.T. in Western Connecticut was organized in 2004.

Organizational Geography

C.R.A.F.T. in Western Connecticut farms are located within the boundaries of the Western Connecticut C.R.A.F.T. program, which are from the NY/MA borders to Long Island Sound, with the eastern border being the Connecticut River.

Member Farms

Member Farms will gather twice a year. The spring meeting will be the last Wednesday in February, and the fall meeting will be the second Wednesday in November. A quorum of two thirds of current participating farms must be present to make changes in the bylaws. Bylaws can be amended at a member meeting. Organizational meetings are followed by a potluck (optional).

Meeting tasks (as outlined in main text).

A farm within the above listed boundaries may apply for membership. Such farms will be known as Provisional Members. New farms must indicate their interest in Provisional Membership in C.R.A.F.T. in Western CT to the current leader by February 15 of the season at hand. Apprentices or employees of the Provisional Farms may then attend meetings, but will not be represented at C.R.A.F.T. organizational meetings and will not host C.R.A.F.T. field visits. After a Provisional Member has attended meetings for one season, that farm may apply as a full member. The Provisional Member needs to be 'sponsored' by a current C.R.A.F.T. farm. At the fall farmer meeting, the sponsor will describe the farm and a simple majority vote will be taken to admit or deny admittance to the candidate farm.

Field Meeting Attendance

C.R.A.F.T. field meetings are open only to apprentices and employees of member and provisional farms. After the spring meeting, attendance of individuals other than those listed above is only by permission of the individual farmer hosting the meeting, who must be contacted at least one week in advance.

Field Meeting Specifications

The C.R.A.F.T. Field Meeting Calendar will be created and distributed at the spring meeting. Field meetings will begin promptly at 3:00 PM and will end around 5 PM, followed by a potluck supper. Field meetings will be comprised of a tour and general description and history of the farm, and then a more in-depth discussion of an area in which the farmer has some expertise. The majority of the farm meeting must be delivered by a principal of the host farm, although experienced farm employees may also contribute.

Field meetings are intended solely for farm employees. C.R.A.F.T. farmers are welcome to listen in on the farm tour and topic discussion, but they ARE NOT to ask questions or make comments. Generally speaking, two bantering farmers greatly dampens participation by apprentices. Farmers leading a tour should more than gently remind anyone in a tour group who might need a refresher on this policy.

At a minimum, a year end survey will be distributed to farm apprentices to gather feedback on the program. Individual farmers may also distribute surveys on or shortly after their visit.

3.4 Mid Hudson C.R.A.F.T.

The Mid-Hudson C.R.A.F.T. program is based on the Western Massachusetts/Eastern New York C.R.A.F.T. program that was formed in 1994. Participants visit a host farm for a tour, a talk or demonstration on a specific topic. These visits to other farms offer farmers-in-training a chance to see how different operations work and to network with other farmers and apprentices.

Members include several farms who are "certified naturally grown", and others are not certified. Most farms are small and produce vegetable on 3-10 acres, rely on direct marketing or the CSA model, and only few raise livestock.

In short

- Managed by a core group who co-facilitate by taking on various responsibilities.
- Founded 2006
- 20 farms participate in farm tours
- <http://www.glynwood.org/programs/glynwood-farm/craft/>

Organizational structure

C.R.A.F.T. Mid-Hudson is steered by a planning group that is made up by farm members, with rotating farm members facilitating the planning meeting each year. The C.R.A.F.T. group has information hosted on the website of Glynwood, a non-profit involved in the planning process⁴.

C.R.A.F.T. Mid-Hudson has a number of partnering farms that attend the planning meeting. A handful of managers from the partnering farms, the core group, rotate the work of calling this meeting. The organizer circulates an agenda before the meeting for additions and approval from the group. At the meeting, a notetaker is requested. Once the group has come up with our prioritized list for scheduling, a volunteer takes on the task of booking dates and updating the schedule. Website updates are handled by Glynwood, including a resource list for apprentices. Glynwood also sends out baseline data forms for to farm managers that care to share details about their operations, which are shared with apprentices before a farm tour.

There are no formal requirements to join this C.R.A.F.T. group, but participating farmers are expected to give interns time to attend C.R.A.F.T. farm tours. During the winter, an annual meeting is called by the planning group where topics for farm tours are prioritized and farms are selected that best fit these topics.

The main information channel of this C.R.A.F.T. group is an internet-based forum. Here, farmers can seek apprentices or advertise full-time jobs, discuss cost-sharing opportunities such as group ordering of fertilizer and other inputs, and seek advice. As such, the C.R.A.F.T. network serves as an informal support network amongst participating farms.

History

When farmers in the Mid-Hudson region wanted to join a C.R.A.F.T. network, the nearby group of Pioneer Valley C.R.A.F.T. was not accepting additional members. However, that C.R.A.F.T. network was supporting the formation of new groups who replicated the C.R.A.F.T. model. The Poughkeepsie Farm Project and Phillies Bridge Farm Project piloted Mid-Hudson C.R.A.F.T.. Staff from these projects was instrumental in launching C.R.A.F.T. Mid-Hudson: They recruited a few participating farms for tours in that first season, and called a planning meeting after the season. It was at this point that it became a more participatory, group planning process. The following year, Glynwood, Four Winds Farm, and Common Ground Farm became involved in the planning process. The next year, Glynwood got involved and offered experience as well as some staff time, for being a contact and hosting the website.

The farm tour

Evening tours, sometimes potluck (depends on host farm). 6:00 PM - 8:00 PM visits, do include apprentices. Farm tour have themes determined by the host farmer. Both depth and the content is up to host farm. While there is little standardization of tours, a self-selection of host farms has guaranteed tours of high quality that cover high-priority topics.

⁴<http://www.glynwood.org/about/>

Maximum travel time about 1.5 hours.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

A list of all kinds of resources can be downloaded at
<http://www.glynwood.org/files/2014/03/CRAFT-resources-2014.pdf>

Success Factors

One of the success factors of this node was the close proximity to one of the founding C.R.A.F.T. networks in Hudson Valley/Pioneer River and personal friendships with their long-standing C.R.A.F.T. member farms. Farm members had a good idea of what to expect from C.R.A.F.T. and of the values that C.R.A.F.T. stands for, such that a loose network structure was adopted that proved sufficient for a continued and successful C.R.A.F.T. node.

3.5 Finger Lakes C.R.A.F.T.

The Finger Lakes C.R.A.F.T. is a community of established and aspiring farmers and homesteaders. This community meets monthly throughout the growing season at each of six C.R.A.F.T. Mentor Farms to learn about that farm operation, ask lots of questions, share knowledge and network with each other. They also have several potlucks through the season where participants can get to know other beginning and established farmers. C.R.A.F.T. potlucks are free and are open to family members and guests who want to learn more about C.R.A.F.T. The maximum driving distance between farms is 1.5 hours.

In short

- Facilitated by non-profit *Groundswell Center for Local Food & Farming*
- Founded 2010
- 6 mentor farms participate in farm tours
- http://www.groundswellcenter.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=63&Itemid=70

Organizational structure

C.R.A.F.T. membership is open to all farm interns, employees, aspiring and experienced farmers, including organic, conventional or other). C.R.A.F.T. membership provides participants with:

- Admission to all monthly C.R.A.F.T. farm tours during the season, and to our potluck gatherings throughout the season
- Participation in a supportive network of experienced and beginning farmers and homesteaders
- Educational benefits for interns and employees that can help attract more qualified workers to participating farms.

This C.R.A.F.T. group is facilitated by the *Groundswell Center for Local Food & Farming*, an agricultural education non-profit based in Ithaca, NY. It operates under the Center for Transformative Action and EcoVillage at Ithaca and serves the broader Finger Lakes area. Its core work is nurturing the next generation of farmers and cultivating knowledgeable "food citizens" through experience based educational programs. "We inspire people and promote positive change in collaboration with, and with support from diverse donors, experienced area farmers, local educational institutions, granting agencies, a broad range of non-profit and for-profit organizations, and the efforts of dedicated volunteers" (group website).

The group holds 1 or 2 winter meetings as part of larger gathering of the Groundswell Center, to which both farmers and trainees are invited. The meeting includes a potluck and an evaluation session for

the season, and farmers can voice feedback for Groundswell. Attendands then plan for following season, taking into account the trainee's voices.

History

The current Finger Lakes CRAFT group was initiated by the Groundswell Center, an "agriculture education non-profit based in Ithaca, NY, operating under the Center for Transformative Action and EcoVillage at Ithaca and serving the broader Finger Lakes area. Our core work is nurturing the next generation of farmers and cultivating knowledgeable 'food citizens' through experience based educational programs" (<http://www.groundswellcenter.org>). Earlier, local farmers had tried to start a C.R.A.F.T.-like program that was successful for some time but was not sustained. The idea was taken up by Groundswell, who offered the role of a facilitator with permanent staff time.

The Finger Lakes group is centered around *Mentor farms* as those who host farm tours. This wording emanated from past Groundswell activities – no specific criteria were ever prescribed for becoming a C.R.A.F.T. farm. The development of this C.R.A.F.T. group has been strongly centered around mentor farms, who evolved from initially three mentors into a larger group of now six mentor farms. The current mentor farms evolved organically through self-selection. Two of these are still beginning farmers who started as C.R.A.F.T. interns and sustain its ideals.

Farm tours

C.R.A.F.T. tour days follow the schedule below and are open only to C.R.A.F.T. members, as is highlighted on their website:

- 10:00-12:00 Farm Tour
- 12:00-1:00 Potluck Lunch
- 1:00-3:00 Workshop

C.R.A.F.T. tours happen on different days of the week, mostly on Monday but occasionally on other days (Sunday, Wednesday, Saturday). While initially a workbee was tested, the concept was not successful because farmers could not find anything reasonable.

C.R.A.F.T. Mentor Farms

Our C.R.A.F.T. Mentor Farms are West Haven Farm, Northland Sheep Dairy, Kingbird Farm, The Good Life Farm, and Main Street Farms. This group of experienced farmer-mentors works with the facilitating non-profit, Groundswell, to host a series of training sessions for C.R.A.F.T. members from May to October. Each session includes an in-depth farm tour; potluck lunch; Q&A with the farmers; and plenty of time for informal mentoring and networking among the farmers and their trainees.

3.6 Chesapeake C.R.A.F.T.

Founded in 2010 by a few local farmers, Chesapeake CRAFT brings together the community of new and aspiring farmers in Northern Virginia and Maryland for farm tours and potlucks throughout the growing season. These simple gatherings are fun, informative, and build networking amongst the farming community.

Organizational structure

Unlike many other C.R.A.F.T. groups, the Chesapeake C.R.A.F.T. has adopted a fee structure that gives financial independence. The fee for a farm's participation in Chesapeake C.R.A.F.T. is \$150.00 which includes attendance of farm staff at any C.R.A.F.T. event during the season. It is understood that most farm crews cannot attend every event, due to schedule conflicts, etc. The \$150.00 goes

In short

- Farmer-led initiative
- Founded in 2010
- 14 farms participate in farm tours
- <http://chesapeakecraft.wordpress.com/>

towards compensating special presenters at C.R.A.F.T. events, and also offsets the costs of the Summer Solstice conference. Individuals can sign up for the C.R.A.F.T. program for \$50 for the season. Single event attendance is \$10.

Accokeek Foundation handles money for the Chesapeake C.R.A.F.T. program, and serves as an organizational sponsor for the program.

The farm tour

Chesapeake C.R.A.F.T. events take place on twelve Mondays throughout the growing season, April- October. C.R.A.F.T. farm tours commence at 3:30pm, followed by a potluck dinner.

Annual Solstice Conference

Chesapeake C.R.A.F.T. hosts the Annual Summer Solstice Conferences at the end of June. This full-day conference gives farmers and apprentices a break from the busy season, and some inputs on a wide range of themes. Most presentations are drawn from within the participating farms and range from practical growing tips (e.g. How We Amend Our Soils and Plants for Productivity), to management (e.g. whole-farm CSA including dairy), to finances (e.g. Thinking about Leasing or Buying Land?), to cooking (e.g. Pizza Making), and to health and safety themes (e.g. Practical yoga for farm workers). Costs are kept low, around \$20 per participant.

Future aspirations

3.7 Catskills C.R.A.F.T.

New York State is experiencing a growth in demand for locally grown farm products. With a decline in the number of traditional farms, a focus on developing and supporting new farmers and diverse agricultural practices is central to meeting such demand, as well as enabling agricultural economic development in the region. The Catskills, with their expansive farmlands and rich agricultural resources, are well suited to continue a long history of raising and growing livestock, produce and various other farm products. The region spans 6 counties, with a maximum driving distance of 2 to 3 hours between farms.

The rich agricultural community that provides both technical skill-sharing and a social network is necessary to support and inspire farmers. With this in mind, the Catskills Collaborative Regional Alliance for Farmer Training (C.R.A.F.T.) was formed in 2011, with the support of Farmhearts, Pure Catskills, and the Watershed Agricultural Council. Catskills C.R.A.F.T. seeks to:

- Deliver a broader experience to beginning farmers than they can receive alone
- Provide a peer base to help beginning and established farmers connect with others who share similar goals
- Increase the skill base in sustainable agriculture

In short

- Facilitated by the Watershed Agricultural Council and supported by Farmhearts, Pure Catskills
- Founded 2011
- 23 farms hosted farm tours so far
- <http://www.catskillscraft.org>

History

Group initiated by farmers market coordinator at the Watershed-Agricultural Council and received seed funding from a number of smaller non-profits. The group was never farmer-led, which continues to be a struggle for its organizers. In its fourth season, it is an informal group of farms that have hosted events.

One organizational challenge was a frequent change of management within the hosting organization, and shifting organizational priorities. One result was much effort going into internal education as well as re-focusing the group's priorities.

Organizational structure

C.R.A.F.T. Catskills is facilitated by a farmer coordinator. This position receives some grant-funding for approximately one half-day per week. It is administered by the Watershed-Agricultural Council, which receives funding from the local department of environmental conservation. The greater objective of these organizations is to keep New York City's agricultural water clean, and C.R.A.F.T. farmers welcome the bridge between conservation, ecological farming and farm land protection.

Farmers are not required to meet in winter, because the coordinator can organize the scheduling of all events.

The farm tour

Farm tours generally last three hours (4:00-7:00 pm) and are followed by a potluck supper, on varying days of the week that are convenient for the host farm. Topics are chosen by the specific farmers, or together with the coordinator. The C.R.A.F.T. coordinator always points out the option of putting the group to work, which is taken up occasionally.

The challenge to build a peer network

After a few successful years with high farmer attendance, in the last year most tour participants were homesteaders or interested city folks. It is not clear whether this shift can be attributed to the organization or also to the weather conditions during the cold 2014 season. As a group, the C.R.A.F.T. node has not managed to establish a community feeling amongst farm members. One structural challenge identified by the coordinator is that farms who work with interns tend to be younger farmers with shorter farming experience, while experienced farmers that qualify as farmer mentors have moved towards paid staff. Under these constraints, "hosting interns" fails as a C.R.A.F.T. membership requirement, as is generally the case amongst other C.R.A.F.T. groups. In Catskills, the coordinator struggles to integrate experienced farmers into the group, because intern education has low priority for farmers in an economically depressed rural setting. At the same time, the coordinator believes that a functioning farmer-to-farmer mentorship network is a factor for the long-term sustainability of this C.R.A.F.T. node and was identified as an important goal for the current winter season.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

On their website, Catskills C.R.A.F.T. provides resources organized in the following sections:

- other C.R.A.F.T. programs
- C.R.A.F.T. Resources
 - www.craftfarmers.org
 - www.craftfarmapprentice.com
- Beginning Farmer Resources
- Catskills Region Agricultural Resources



4 — C.R.A.F.T. groups in other parts of the US

4.1 Western North Carolina C.R.A.F.T.

C.R.A.F.T. is designed as a program to mentor and teach the next generation of farmers the ins and outs of farm operation while also building a stronger network for current farmers in the Southwestern end of the Appalachian Mountains in Western North Carolina. Membership is open to beginning and experienced farmers, apprentices and farm workers, and anyone else who has a strong desire and drive to begin farming.

The core C.R.A.F.T. program includes an apprentice orientation event, a farmer orientation event, monthly workshops at member farms, intern exchanges, and informal visits between member farms. A series of on-farm tours are held monthly from April - October and led by experienced growers, focusing on a specific aspect of sustainable farming. Participating farms enable their interns and employees to participate in these events and must be willing to share their experience with others, which creates a sense of community amongst interns as well as farmers. Membership fees are \$20 - \$30 per year and this gives members access to a wealth of summer tours, winter workshops, and farming resources.

The Western North Carolina C.R.A.F.T. group is focused on farmers, but is non-exclusive and open to other interested people. It is driven by a core group of about 10 farmers, while other members tend to fluctuate. Numbers of interns/employees vary between 30 and 50 each year. Four levels of membership (varying costs) are possible: (1) farm members host tours and have interns; (2) associate farms may not have staff or interns, but would like to join tours; (3) student memberships allow interns or farm workers from other farms to participate in the tours; and (4) associate members are gardeners, other interest people, and supporters of sustainable farming.

History

The Organic Growers School originated in 1993 as an initiative of community members, who convened to organize a spring conference on organic agriculture and growing in the mountainous environment of Western North Carolina. The multi-stakeholder community group included urban gardeners, food

In short

- Group facilitated by Organic Growers School (OGS), organicgrowersschool.org
- Founded 2009
- About 20-30 member farms participate each year
- Maximum travel distance between farms two (2) hours
- Comprehensive 600-page C.R.A.F.T. handbook for farm members
- www.organicgrowersschool.org/organicfarming/craft

advocates and also farmers. The group continues to organize the spring conference annually but has added an annual harvest conference, other workshops, and web resources. The C.R.A.F.T. group was founded after Organic Growers School farm members had informally exchanged interns and supported regular visits and tours, and had heard about the C.R.A.F.T. initiatives in other places. They decided to start a similar program under the Organic Growers School umbrella.

Organizational structure

For the C.R.A.F.T. tours, all major decisions are made during the annual March meeting with all farm members, where the farm tours for the season are laid out. The meeting is called and facilitated by the Organic Growers School. The tours themselves are also administered by Organic Growers School staff, who write invitations, reminders, and do advertising. On average, Organic Growers School staff can dedicate one day per week to the network.

Since last year, an additional steering committee was created that is made up of core farmers and meets twice a year to discuss strategic directions of the network, and ensure a farmer-driven structure. Several member farmers are also part of the Organic Growers School board and educational programming, so discussions during those meetings cross-pollinate with C.R.A.F.T. While there is a recurring concern about funding for Organic Growers School staff to continue to offer administrative support, if funding is available both Organic Growers School and C.R.A.F.T. see the benefits of the partnership.

Impacts

Since the C.R.A.F.T. program started in 2005, over 450 farmers and farm workers/interns have been supported. In 2013, 100% reported that they feel ready to start farming or improve their existing operations. Today, the Organic Growers School is laying out a more in-depth impact assessment survey to evaluate the C.R.A.F.T. program. The most obvious impacts are past-interns who started farming themselves and sell in the region. However, Organic Growers School also seeks more clarity about past interns who have *not* become farmers themselves because of a reality check, and/or because they have become advocates for sustainable food *outside* the immediate farming community.

RESOURCE: PLACE-BASED EDUCATION AND GROWING

The Southern Appalachians are mountainous and often provide a fairly complex landscape with many marginal lands. These areas are adequate for intensive ecological farming, such as organic market gardening, intensive grazing, and diversified mixed farming.

The C.R.A.F.T. node reflects the specific environmental setting. It regularly shares articles on topics specific for the region, with specific sections on vegetable production, diversified small-scale livestock, integrated systems (rotating pig pasturing with field production), specialized products and on-farm processing. Also, the C.R.A.F.T. farmers (with Organic Growers School), each winter, organize two or three round tables on relevant topics where farmers exchange experiences about intern management, improving internship programs, and hiring, but also on less immediate topics like new tools, individualized gizmos, and collective sharing of knowledge.

The C.R.A.F.T. group has developed a handbook with over 600 pages, primarily written by member farmers. It offers resources on basic production topics, but also other resources on marketing, employee management, etc. Author farmers received payments for their articles. The compendium also includes resources from other organizations that were included for free use, without additional charge.

Monthly tours

Monthly tours are typically scheduled on weekend days later in the afternoon, and last a total of 4-5 hours. They include a general farm tour, a specific topic (as set during the March meeting), and a potluck with all participants. Participation in C.R.A.F.T. tours is voluntary for both farm members and interns.

Farm tours are voluntary for member farmers, and targeted to farmers as well as to interns. Optimally, tours have 20-30 participants but in some cases, more than 50 participants challenged organizers to speak up and participants to step forward. This structure implies a range of knowledge levels, which has, on occasion, challenged organizers but also encourages cross-pollination between farmers and interns. The timing of these tours discourages long travel distances and also limits the C.R.A.F.T. network to a one- or two-hour drive.

What farmers say about C.R.A.F.T.

- "These farmers really do their homework. [At one farm] they showed us products and systems that we had not seen or read about elsewhere. Another benefit of any tour, but particularly these, is being able to 'get behind the hype'. To me that means hearing the failures and questions a farmer has, the things he/she is experimenting with. You can't get this any other way than at a C.R.A.F.T. tour. And, meeting the farmers and the interns and having time to talk, allows us all to build a network of help and sharing and spreads good practices farther and faster."
- "Believe it or not, hosting an event this year was incredibly eye opening. Having other farmers and apprentices out to see our farm and our operations created dialogue about opportunities that I could not see with my own eye. When you can see your farm through the eyes of farmers you respect and trust, you can gain perspective on your farm's challenges and assets."
- "Yes, it has opened my eyes to many of the aspects I need to consider when making plans. Seeing and hearing other farmers' successes and struggles has been a great help."
- "This has been such a valuable aspect of my apprenticeship this year. Seeing other vegetable farms and hearing lots of information from new farmers ... getting the overall feel of farming has been awesome."

4.2 Ozarks C.R.A.F.T.

The Ozark region is situated in climate zone 6, and the mild climate allows year-round growing in tunnels, and field plantings in March. With the warm summers of this area, farmers can make use of broad shoulder season and access to water is plentiful, with an excellent aquifer and lots of streams and rivers.

Farm internships typically last from the beginning of March until the end of October. Recreational activities such as canoeing and hiking the scenic hills and rivers, along with very reasonable land costs, are important factors in attracting interns. Farm products are usually marketed to the urban area of Springfield (Missouri), a town of 400,000 inhabitants that is still underserved in terms of locally produced food.

In short

- Group is farmer led and farmer centered.
- Founded 2008
- 12 farms participate in farm tours
- <http://ozarkscraft.wordpress.com/>

History

The network was founded in 2008 by Millsap Farms and Urban Roots Farm, following the model of the Angelic Organics Learning Center. The founders very much enjoyed the freedom of the C.R.A.F.T. idea, as it is non-prescriptive. The network has grown slowly over the past 6 years, hosting about 25 interns over that time, about half of who are still involved in farming. In 2014, interns stayed on four farms and 12 farms contributed to tours. Member farms are diverse, with several market and CSA farms, one goat cheese dairy, one pastured poultry producer, and an urban farm.

Organizational structure

So far, the C.R.A.F.T. network in this region is relatively small and most decisions are made on an informal basis. Only full-time farmers who are "organic in practice" are permitted into the group. In the medium term, it is hoped that there will be a part time position that grows the size of the network. However, the farmer members do not want to create a nonprofit or other entity.

The farm tour

Single day workshops are held on host farms monthly between February and October. Workshops include class time led by farmers and extension specialists, lunch, and a tour of the host farm. As part of each

farm tour, participants contribute an hour or two of work to the farm hosting the workshop, to help offset their loss of a day of work.

All workshops and tours are open to the general public for a modest fee (approximately \$20), which helps defray the cost of the Ozarks C.R.A.F.T. program. Ozarks C.R.A.F.T. interns are exempt from registration fees. The intended audience for these workshops are people interested in learning more about the details of farming for market, and specifically people who already have some on-farm experience, and are ready to expand their knowledge base to become better farmers, managing crops, livestock, land, and labor for the benefit of all.

In 2014, workshop topics included

- Pruning and grafting fruit trees
- Soil health and fertility management
- Marketing for farmers
- Tractor and small engine safety and operation basics
- Weed and pest management
- Farm budgeting and production planning
- Grazing and Pastures

Future aspirations

The Ozark Lake area has very few organic farms and only full-time farmers are allowed to participate in the C.R.A.F.T. program. Many part-time farmers are anticipating a transition to full-time farming in the coming years. At this point, these farmers participate by hosting field days. Many field days include work bees, such as putting up a high tunnel or similar larger efforts that need many hands.

We would hope to have up to 25 farms hosting apprentices within the next decade.

4.3 United Piedmont C.R.A.F.T.

Members of the CRAFT group of United Piedmont are located in an area of central North Carolina, with driving distances of less than an hour between farms. C.R.A.F.T. United Piedmont features new and established farmers dedicated to creating a more just and sustainable food system in Central NC through training, social events, and community resource development throughout the region. C.R.A.F.T. is an international model of regionally-organized farmer training rooted in the belief that farmers learn best from each other. Most farms market directly and are located within the vicinity of an urban centre, where the main customer base is located, but some farms also wholesale.

Through C.R.A.F.T. United Piedmont, inspiring leaders in the local farming community host educational tours on their farms once a month from June to November. Each tour focuses on a special topic and is followed by a community potluck. Farm tours are open to the public and host a wide variety of participants (interested general public, gardeners, beginning to advanced farmers), and are promoted to the sustainable farming community.

In short

- Group facilitated by Inter-Faith Food Shuttle.
- Founded 2013
- 16 farms have hosted tours
- <http://foodshuttle.org/we-teach/agriculture-training-programs/>

History

The idea of a local CRAFT group was originally voiced by an employee of the Inter-faith Food Shuttle, who had participated in C.R.A.F.T. network events elsewhere. The non-profit allocated a small budget within its larger farmer education program for this effort, equivalent to approximate staff time of half a day per week on average.

The Food Shuttle called meetings with the farming community in 2013, and several members of the community signed up to contribute in some form or another, but no-one assumed responsibility for a coordinating role, which is continued by the Food Shuttle.

Organizational structure

This new program does not yet have any formal membership structure. Decision making mainly is based on the guidance provided in three community meetings, attended mostly by farmers from three towns. At those meetings, farmers identified the value they'd like to see from C.R.A.F.T.. Frequent informal communication amongst the most active contributors remains the core decision mechanism.

The farm tour

Farm tours are scheduled on weekends and typically last several hours. In accordance with the host's availability, typical time slots are 10:00 AM - 2:00 PM or 2:00 - 7:00 PM. At the farm, tours generally include an introduction of all participants, background on the farm and its farmers, and a specific topic. Tours also include a potluck meal, either for lunch or dinner. The main target audience is farmers, people involved in agricultural education programs, farms with internship programs, organizations working on agricultural issues, and home gardeners.

So far, participants have represented a wide diversity and tours were engaging with interesting content. Tours provided networking opportunities and potlucks were also fun. One of the shortcomings identified was that one target audience, farm interns, were difficult to reach.

4.4 Northwest Lower Michigan C.R.A.F.T.

The ISLAND guilds started off as a C.R.A.F.T. program intended for farmers and farm interns. Over time, the initiative evolved into a number of local guilds on topics like small farming, fruit trees, beekeeping and growing mushrooms, enhancing growers' practices through tours, potlucks and informal workshops. This program is supplemented by ISLAND's workshops targeted to homeowners, homesteaders and farmers. Workshops teach skills like tool fabrication and maintenance, food preservation, livestock husbandry, soil development, care and use of farm machinery and other equipment, construction and use of passive solar hoop houses, garden design, and more. During the last nine years, "scores" of these workshops have reached thousands of community members in order to increase food literacy at all levels.

Members of the guilds are located within a driving range of three hours. However, many guilds have split into regional nodes which limits driving to little more than an hour.

Guilds

Guilds provide mutual support for skill-building. Functions of a guild include peer-to-peer learning, mentorship, demonstrations, workshops, and conferences. Other guild functions include swapping and bartering, sharing work and celebrating community. Guild members share the strength of many through advocacy, problem solving, collective bargaining, and shared marketing.

In short

- Program by Institute for Sustainable Living, Art & Natural Design (ISLAND)
- Institute founded in 2005
- The C.R.A.F.T. idea evolved into several guilds, including three small farm guilds, the largest of which is attended by more than 65 part-time ecological farmers
- www.artmeetsearth.org/

Currently, ISLAND facilitates seven guilds for small farmers, orchardists, green building design, grain, beekeeping, fiber, and mushroom growing. Each group has defined main activities, which address the specific needs of each topic. For example, small farmers tend to have farm tours and informal workshops, while the orchard guild offers grafting and pruning workshops by professional teachers, or one-on-one mentorship in the beekeepers guild. The guild events are open to other people, but the guild framework gives its members organizational flexibility. Also, the level and type of social activities varies considerably: while potlucks are important to orchardists and fiber processors, small farmers prefer meet-and-greets over drinks, while seed and knowledge sharing events are preferred in the Grain Guild.

Some guilds are currently in the process of forming steering committees. During discussions, they came up with several project ideas, some of which were supported by ISLAND with proposal writing and awarded with grants. That said, guild members have communicated that the administrative role from ISLAND remains necessary because some staff time for setting up and preparing meetings is believed to be essential.

History

ISLAND is a non-profit arts and ecology center dedicated to connecting people with nature, art and community. ISLAND helps people become native to place by:

- supporting artists-visionaries, conceptual explorers and compelling communicators-with dedicated time, space and resources to create new work;
- restoring the old and developing the new skills and traditions of community self-reliance;
- creating and sharing a broad collection of tools for ecological living.

Founded in March of 2005, ISLAND explores the intersections of art and ecology. ISLAND began because of Brad and Amanda Kik's shared belief that the arts and ecology are intertwined and essential to enriching community. In collaboration with local and federal agencies and nonprofits, ISLAND has organized hundreds of workshops and events about how to live more sustainably. The organization has founded school and community gardens, created a network for small farmers, supported artists through the Hill House residency program, and acted as a planning partner for the Northern Michigan Small Farm Conference. ISLAND programs have reached thousands of people in our community over the last nine years.

In 2009, an ISLAND staff member had the idea to start a C.R.A.F.T. group for interns and farmers. However, the farms contacted were part-time and had neither interns nor staff. So farm tours were initially attended by farmers themselves, but then attendance dropped in the following years.

The mushroom and beekeeping guilds preceded the C.R.A.F.T. idea. These guilds lend themselves to sharing equipment, bulk ordering, or joint pick-up of supplies.

LESSONS FOR OTHER GROUPS

ISLAND has limited capacity in terms of knowledge transfer. However, members have established networks with other organizations and collaborate with those on specific topics. For example, for specific business planning courses, ISLAND helps make connections with other local groups. Similarly, nearby university-based extension services can mentor on several technical issues and also provide workshops. This collaborative mindset allows ISLAND to focus its own resources and develop specific capacities. For example, this could include doing workshops or practical community education with their mobile vegetable processing trailer (canning, pickling, etc) or their mobile chicken processing facility.

Future aspirations

- Small farmers are currently scaling up production and growing their businesses from the hobbyist, part-time scale to becoming full-time farmers. This process takes time and requires care, but ISLAND is confident that local food supply will increase over the next years.

-
- Guilds are expanding their scope: several have gotten (or are getting) involved in additional activities like equipment sharing, distribution alliances, and bulk input purchasing, thereby addressing each guild's specific requirements. It is not clear how to institutionalize such additional activities, but ISLAND welcomes the new benefits for its members.
 - ISLAND will continue building community around local food that connects growers and distributors with each other, but also educates consumers and connects consumers and growers.

4.5 Upper-Midwest C.R.A.F.T.

The Collaborative Regional Alliance for Farmer Training (Upper Midwest C.R.A.F.T.) is a farmer-led coalition offering multi-year training for biodynamic, organic, and sustainable farmers and market gardeners. Upper Midwest C.R.A.F.T. is facilitated by Angelic Organics Learning Center.

History

Founded in 1997 by ten farmers from northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin, Upper Midwest C.R.A.F.T. was the second C.R.A.F.T. network in the United States. Drawing from the model established by Jean-Paul Courtens and colleagues in New York state, Upper Midwest C.R.A.F.T. was founded in order to support farm interns and apprentices in building their farming skill sets. Now, over 15 years later, the Upper Midwest C.R.A.F.T. network includes over 80 farms and supports the needs of farm managers, farm business owners, farm employees and those planning to farm.

In short

- Upper Midwest C.R.A.F.T. is facilitated by Angelic Organics Learning Center.
- Founded 1997
- 15 or more farms participate in farm tours
- <http://www.learnngrowconnect.org/craft>

Organizational structure

Since this C.R.A.F.T. network is facilitated by a nonprofit organization (Angelic Organics Learning Center), a best practice has been the creation of a steering committee that guides the farming network. Because of the large size of the network, participants found it important to have a small group of farmers taking the lead to guide the program's general direction. The steering committee is made up of a minimum of three-quarters C.R.A.F.T. farmers with a minimum of three member farms. Currently there are 18 steering committee members, 16 of which are C.R.A.F.T. farmers. The steering committee convenes once a year in November to review the current state of the network, communicate needs to Angelic Organics Learning Center, and brainstorm ideas for field days for the upcoming year. Additionally, in late winter, there is an annual, full-day meeting for all C.R.A.F.T. members to gather, socialize, discuss farmer needs, and talk about upcoming programs.

Membership in Upper Midwest C.R.A.F.T. is divided into three categories: Farm Member, Farm Intern/Employee and *Friend of C.R.A.F.T.* Member farms are people who own or manage a farm business - in 2014 this group had 85 farms in the network. C.R.A.F.T. farms can add interns or employees to their farm membership so that they can be included in email correspondence and attend field days (on-farm tours that include a teaching or hands-on component). Members who join the network as a Friend of C.R.A.F.T. may be looking for work on a farm, interested in starting their own farm, or are supporters of regional sustainable agriculture initiatives. In 2014, this group could win 30 Friends of C.R.A.F.T. contributors. Member farms pay an annual membership fee of \$45, adding \$10 extra for each employee/intern; Friends of C.R.A.F.T. pay \$65 annually.

Funding

The Upper Midwest C.R.A.F.T. program is funded through annual membership revenues, which in 2014 was about \$6,000. Expenses consist of about \$1,500 to pay farmers for hosting field days, about \$3,000 to print and mail the annual C.R.A.F.T. Handbook, about \$300 in food for meetings, about \$400 in program supplies for field day potlucks and promotional materials, and about \$1,100 in mileage reimbursement for facilitators to attend events. Angelic Organics Learning Center's general operating budget covers indirect costs, overhead and the labor (an 85% full-time equivalent) that goes into administration of C.R.A.F.T..

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Benefits and Challenges

The Upper Midwest C.R.A.F.T. network offers both farmer-to-farmer training opportunities and a supportive network for sustainable farmers in northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin. The group offers 10-12 field days annually at members' farms on different topics suggested by the steering committee for C.R.A.F.T. members to attend. C.R.A.F.T. Field Days are free for all C.R.A.F.T. members. Non-members can attend one C.R.A.F.T. Field Day for free before joining C.R.A.F.T.. All other services are available only to members.

Additionally, the facilitator sends out weekly eNewsletters and occasional eBlasts featuring job postings, member announcements, land opportunities, classifieds, workshops, and farming news. C.R.A.F.T. members also receive a 60-page handbook each spring that contains a list of the farmer training programming offered by Angelic Organics Learning Center (which facilitates the Upper Midwest C.R.A.F.T. network), a detailed farm profile of each C.R.A.F.T. farm, and a map of the locations of C.R.A.F.T. farms. C.R.A.F.T. members also receive discounts to workshops at area nonprofits and get access to the Upper Midwest C.R.A.F.T. Listserv, through which they can immediately access the collective expertise of the group. Lastly, C.R.A.F.T. members have access to Angelic Organics Learning Center's farmer-training programs, such as the Technical Assistance Program and the Farm Asset Builder agricultural IDA (individual development account) matched-savings program. Angelic Organics routinely receives feedback that the field days, electronic newsletter and social networking are the most valuable components of C.R.A.F.T..

Attendance at field days can fluctuate widely, depending on the location or the day of the week – ranging between 40 or 5 attendees. There is usually a good mix of C.R.A.F.T. Farmers, Friends of C.R.A.F.T., and farm interns and employees. There are often 1-2 external people who come out to the field days, sometimes extended family or friends of C.R.A.F.T. members, who have the opportunity to attend one field day for free before joining C.R.A.F.T. themselves.

Because the network extends over such a large area, it is frequently difficult for farmers to attend field days or events. The network stretches approximately 200 miles from its northern edge to the southern edge. Participation at field days by farm employees and interns is also limited as busy farm managers find it difficult to take time away from their farms during the growing season. The group is currently tackling the most immediate, short-term obstacle of sporadic farmer attendance at field days, by offering longer field days in 2014. This is anticipated to create a greater incentive to travel the long distances typical in this region: Instead of 3-hour events and a 1-hour potluck, the group pairs two farm visits on the same day or incorporates a more substantial educational module in conjunction with the farm-tour/on-farm demonstrations.

Evaluations received from member farmers also demonstrate their need for support in accessing capital, increasing production skills, and gaining access to land and markets. The programs that is being developed at Angelic Organics Learning Center's Farmer Training Initiative in the next three years focus on 1) developing a mentoring program, 2) planning and implementing an agricultural Individual Development Account matched-savings program, 3) offering microfinancing references and resources, and 4) hosting advanced winter workshops on the subjects of record keeping, financing, marketing and land access. The Farmer Training Initiative works to train the next generation of sustainable farmers. Led by the experienced farmers from the C.R.A.F.T., Angelic Organics offers business planning, on-farm training, and mentoring directly from the region's best farmers.

Part II

Appendix



A.1 Summary report on telephone conferences on Jan 23, Mar 6 and May 13, 2013.

Each C.R.A.F.T. made recommendations about what how they envisioned further communication and interaction with other C.R.A.F.T. and farmer networks. They also identified the most pressing needs for their farmer networks. A summary of the recommendations and comments follows.

Recommended topics:

- Best practices/ what has been successful
- The structure of the networks and how they work
- Best practices in on-farm mentoring
- How to better support both farmers and apprentices
- How to best support farmers after the first year
- How to improve the learning experiences of participants
- Membership fees and financial support
- How to bring more people to events
- Technological support for distance meetings/learning opportunities
- How to do farmer training without organizational support
- Share C.R.A.F.T. Handbooks

Structure of sharing/communication:

- Use technology to increase communication: conference calls, list serve or websites.
- Provide documentation of resources, presentations and other documents via website or other electronic forums
- Have a face-to-face meeting
- Have an annual conference call
- Share best practices throughout the year

Most pressing needs:

- Extend farmer training beyond the first one or two years; multi-year apprentice training programs
- Offer business planning training for more experienced farmers who have not taken Farm Beginnings
- Hire skilled professionals to present workshops
- Formalize the curriculum so the same series of topics is covered each year
- Strengthen the network through both farm-to-farm and public events
- Provide more opportunities for social interaction among farmers in the network
- Improve networking among Farm Beginnings graduates
- More direct market options
- Broaden the network's steering committee
- Track/report activities and participation within the farmer network
- Rebrand the program; serve as a guild rather than a C.R.A.F.T.
- Start satellite chapters of C.R.A.F.T.
- Expand mentoring abilities
- Assist farmers with land access
- Branch out to include non-C.R.A.F.T. farmers in the network (most are former apprentices)