

Community-Supported Farmers

UCSC Farm apprentices seek finances to help them stay on the land where they've built a community

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Tim Becker came to the farm as a first-year and hasn't left since.

The seed was planted in 2005, when he arrived at UC Santa Cruz as a proposed language studies major from Los Angeles who had no prior farming experience.

Then he got his hands dirty. During his first quarter, Becker spent Tuesdays and Thursdays harvesting food at the farm, waking up at 6 a.m. so he could eat breakfast at College Nine before spending his day working at the gardens. He became more rooted in agriculture his second year, when he interned at the farm 10 hours a week, learning the basics of gardening: weeding, planting, maintaining tools, compost and working in the greenhouses.

"I was in awe of this garden that I discovered so recently in my college experience, and I felt so lucky coming from L.A., this big metropolis where I never really experienced agriculture on that level," Becker said. "When I found this place I realized how important it was for me to get involved on a deeper level."

Becker, who graduated this past winter with a degree in environmental studies, is now an apprentice in the UCSC Farm and Gardens Apprenticeship Program, a six-month intensive program where farmers from all over the nation come to live, learn and work on the 32-acre UCSC Farm and 3-acre Alan Chadwick Garden.

Since its founding in 1967 by Alan Chadwick, more than 1,200 farmers have lived and worked on the farm to learn the nuts and bolts of organic farming and horticulture.

Many have since started their own farms and businesses and become chefs and educators all over the nation. One recent graduate, Blair Randall, started the Victory Gardens in front of San Francisco City Hall.

On April 13, Becker moved back to Santa Cruz with a mattress, some blankets, a dresser and his tent, much like all of the apprentices before him. However, Becker and his fellow apprentices will be the last group to live in these tents that line the periphery of the farm. As of June 2009, they will no longer be permitted to do so by the university due to build-



A SECOND-YEAR apprentice at the UCSC Farm stands outside a tent which uses solar energy. *Photos by ALEX ZAMORA City on a Hill Press*



TIM BECKER, a recent UCSC graduate, rides his bike to his apprenticeship class.

ing regulations.

In December 2008, the UCSC Farm and Alan Chadwick Garden launched the Grow-a-Farmer campaign to raise \$250,000 in order to build permanent university-approved housing that would shelter the 38 apprentices that work on the farm each year.

Ann Lindsey, the fundraising coordinator for Grow-a-Farmer, expressed excitement for the eight four-person tent-cabins that will provide private rooms for 32 new

apprentices.

"We want people [to] have a better place to live than a tent," Lindsay said. "They're going to be nice little structures tucked behind the plum orchards. They're going to be a great place to live."

Christof Bernau, the UCSC garden manager and instructor, views living on-site as a "very solid cornerstone" of the program not only because it provides first-hand experience, but also because its low cost allows for people of

varying economic backgrounds to be able to afford to attend the program.

In addition, Bernau said that the community that develops due to on-site living arrangements provides a valuable opportunity for the cross-pollination of ideas and backgrounds.

"[The apprentices] come from a world of experience that they share with each other in part in the day-to-day, but in the off-hours as well," Bernau said. "If

people weren't living there and were all off in these separate places, there would be a whole lot less community engagement."

The month of May marked the last push to get businesses, restaurants and organizations to help fund the tent-cabins that would house the next generation of organic farmers. The support was overwhelming — over 50 restaurants and businesses in Santa Cruz and the Bay Area, such as Gabriella's Café in Santa Cruz and New Leaf grocery stores, pledged to donate a percentage of their profits. The effort isn't just a local one; restaurants in New York and Los Angeles also held events to benefit the campaign and foundations like Newman's Own Foundation donated \$50,000.

The work has started to pay off. As of June 1, Grow-a-Farmer had raised \$213,000. County Supervisor Mark Stone proclaimed June "Grow an Organic Farmer Month" to honor the work the apprentices have done to provide sustainable and organic agriculture.

Aside from businesses, there have been individual donations ranging from \$5 to \$10,000, an effort that Martha Brown, senior editor at the Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems, compares to the grassroots efforts utilized in Barack Obama's presidential campaign.

Brown said that the most gratifying part of the campaign was receiving donations from former apprentices who threw events at their homes and farms, using their connections with family and organizations to get more sponsorship.

"It's so clear that they're so passionate about giving people the same opportunity to have the same chance they had," Brown said. "That's been kind of a fun part of it, a whole community of people [coming] together to work on it."

Tim Becker, who is excited about the community aspects both on the farm and within the greater Santa Cruz area.

"Agriculture is such a social engagement. As much as it is about your involvement in the land, it's about your involvement with people," Becker said. "What we partially strive to achieve is a deeper relationship with our agricultural community. That's what I realized coming here. I kind of fell in love with this place."