

Labor Law and Management Tipsheets

Management Case Study



Stone Soup Farm and Brookfield Farm are CSA farms in Western Massachusetts which are focused on teaching their employees, via an apprenticeship program, the skills they will need to run their own farms. The two farms offer similar pay and benefits, including on-farm housing and shared meals. However, their apprenticeships are structured in very different ways, and they reflect the possible range of successful management techniques.

Stone Soup Farm is run by Jarrett Man, and his apprenticeship is based on individual exploration of farming techniques, with regular instruction woven into the workday. Employees each take on one or more focus areas for periods during the summer, and develop their skills deeply in those particular areas. Each employee also develops a hands-on independent study project, which they carry out on the farm throughout the summer season. This provides the employees with independent learning opportunities and can also serve the farm by testing its systems.

Brookfield Farm is run by Dan Kaplan, and the apprenticeship functions as a highly structured training program, where employees have very little autonomy over their schedules or the content of their farm education. As a non-profit farm, education of beginning farmers is a central piece of the farm mission and there are ample learning oppor-

tunities, but every person that spends a summer on Brookfield Farm receives the same lessons about the operations of that particular farm and its successes.

So which model is better? Neither! Stone Soup Farm is an excellent environment for those who thrive on independent learning and are flexible in their work. It is better suited to those looking for a place to be experimental and self-directed, or for those learning how to embody those qualities. Along with this freedom must come guidance, and learning how to learn is a crucial focus of this style of apprenticeship.

Brookfield Farm is an incredible opportunity for people that want to be trained to carry out a farm system that has proven to be successful, and who appreciate clear boundaries in their work. Brookfield Farm is one of the oldest CSA farms in the country, and the well-honed lessons that come from long term experience provide valuable benefits to their apprentices.

The key is that both farmers communicate clearly to potential workers what will be expected of them and what they can expect from the experience. Communication and careful hiring of workers are central to making any employment situation functional, especially for on-farm apprenticeships.

The information on this sheet is based on a workshop series on Farm Labor, organized by CISA in 2010-2011. Speakers included Dan Kaplan of Brookfield Farm and Jarrett Man of Stone Soup Farm.

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One Sugarloaf Street
South Deerfield, MA
Phone: 413-665-7100
Fax: 413-665-7101



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