

Farmer Training Program - October Newsletter



Fall Newsletter: Endings and Beginnings

The Farmer Training Program finished on October 12, with a joyful breakfast potluck celebrating five months of hard work, abundant harvests, and strong friendships. This season ends.

And yet, a new season begins this month too. We'll plant garlic today - in costume - the first crop of 2024 to go in the ground.

At this time of year, we also look ahead to next year's farmers. Who will come and farm with us? Keep an eye on our website for [opportunities](#) and updates for 2024.

Whatever part you've played in this season's work and learning, thanks for being a part of it! Read on for more on the hopeful projects and personal reflections that bring that have occupied our hands and hearts this season.

~ Elicia Whittlesey, Farmer Training Program Coordinator



Blue Corn Harvest

On October 11, we held our third annual Blue Corn Harvest, an all-day event that featured a blessing by Hanley Frost, Southern Ute Indigenous Traditional Healer; story and harvest instruction by Brandon Francis and Karyn Denny (Diné); Corn processing with Matthew Bahnimptewa and Hannah Duwyenie (Hopi); mural painting with Maddie Sanders (Mvskoke & Mojave); and of course harvesting corn, carried out by all our farmers and the community. We're grateful to everyone who makes this project and annual event possible.



New Mural at the Old Fort by artist Maddie Sanders

“[Painting a mural](#) for The Old Fort was a such a meaningful experience. As I was thinking of a concept for this mural, I was reminded of the deep significance of the history of this place. With the recent release of the [History Colorado report on Federal Indian Boarding Schools](#), and more specifically The Old Fort, I wanted to create a work that embodied the positive things we are doing out here and create a safe space for everyone to be able to heal through art.

The images depict a blue corn woman on one side and a monarch butterfly with southeastern florals on the other. This mural started during our Blue Corn Harvest event so I wanted to incorporate a blue corn woman to symbolize the nourishment and life that farming brings to each of us. On the other side I incorporated some southeastern florals and a monarch to symbolize transformation, renewal, and growth.

During my time finishing everything up, I have been reflecting on what it means not only to myself but to this community as well. Each stroke of paint felt like a tribute to the countless lives of Indigenous children that were here during The Old Fort's time as a boarding school. Moving forward to heal the past requires courage, empathy, and a willingness to confront uncomfortable truths. This mural stands as a reminder of the importance of acknowledging and learning from the past to create a better future for all."

Durango based artist, Maddie Sanders (Mvskoke & Mojave), has been honing her skills in murals and graphic design for the past several years. Sanders grew up in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, and comes from a long line of artists. She studied at Fort Lewis College where she received her Bachelors of Art in Communication Design in 2021. Over the years, she has practiced various art forms but has become known for her large-scale murals featuring bright colors and Indigenous culture. Sanders' brush strokes have adorned walls across Oklahoma, New Mexico, Colorado, and California.

To learn more about Fort Lewis College process of reconciliation, go to www.fortlewis.edu/reconciliation



End of Season Reflections from a FIT Member

Spencer Busick's term as a Farmer In Training and AmeriCorps member wraps up on November 15. Along with two other "FIT AC members," Spencer and his peers have made robust contributions not only to the Farmer In Training Program but also to the Grub Hub and the La Plata Family Centers Coalition's project, Together We Grow. We're grateful to Spencer, Jamie, and Daelyn's service this season, and are sharing Spencer's reflection here.

"As my second farm season comes to an end, I reflect on how I leave this year with more rounded knowledge and experiences about living the rural life. This is my first time farming on this scale, with tractors and a large team that motivates everyone to show up in the rain, sleet, or heat. This is the strongest community I have ever felt in a workplace or classroom, and I can only imagine that it comes from spending so many hours together in meaningful conversations and sharing silly speculation about what is the best way to eat a potato, or the best Disney soundtrack.

I wake up most mornings and think of the history of this space, how it has changed from dark to light, and getting brighter each year as I hear how our experiences are better than those before us. We were told early on that the mountain north of us, now called Mt. Hesperus, is a sacred mountain. We are doing the work to recover the sacredness of this land. We have been taught epistemologies, sacred stories, and received blessings for reintroducing Indigenous farming practices and knowledge in a world with the history of taking them away.

As the season ends, I wonder what my next step in this journey will be. I have farmed enough to know it is hard work mentally and physically, and that has been my motive doing the work all along. In order to help people in these rural lands, I need to have walked the walk. I need to understand that it is hard work, but it is heart work that makes sustainable agriculture sustainable."

~ Spencer Busick (Chickasaw Nation and German-Irish)



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