

Tucker Family Farm Creamery Apprenticeship

Tucker Family Farm offers a one-year farmstead sheep creamery apprenticeship program. The goal of this apprenticeship is to prepare you for a career in the cheese industry, for jobs such as a cheesemaker/cheesemonger or introduce you to some of the necessary skills required to start your own creamery. Our apprenticeship position is a full education and immersion into the operation of a farmstead creamery: from pasture to a wedge of cheese.

POSITION DESCRIPTION

The apprenticeship program is a yearlong commitment. We only accept those that are willing to stay for the entire yearlong process, this ensures that those applying have the desire and commitment to learning. No previous experience is required, but an eager attitude for learning and appreciation for artisan cheese is a must. The training and exposure build in complexity, starting with affinage techniques, cleaning dishes, fresh cheese making techniques, and building towards learning our farm's full range of 10 aged cheeses (which vary among hard cheeses, aged blues, and young semi-soft small wheels). The apprenticeship culminates in the apprentice designing, making, aging and marketing their own cheese recipe. Long term future employment at Tucker Family Farm is also an opportunity. In our last 4 years making cheese, we have grown so much. 2020 will be an exciting year for us! We'll be expanding our sales market outside of Montana and are looking to grow our team as well with positive, critical thinkers who are always looking to improve.

The daily schedule will vary throughout the year depending on what is taking place. An average work week is around 40-45 hours spread over 5 days, but in the busier season (May-August) or when we're working on special projects or events we may work longer to get everything done. Apprentices are never asked to work more than 10 hours a day.

The apprentice is also responsible for managing a booth at one of the Missoula or Hamilton Farmer's Markets where he/she will be well versed in the history, techniques and flavors of our cheese. Farmer's Markets are a critical component of our local marketing and sales, so we encourage our apprentices to excel at managing their booth.

WORKING IN THE CREAMERY

Cheesemaking is an inspiring artform supported by focused hard work and 100% consistency in process. Without a high attention to detail and a meticulous focus on each batch or wheel of cheese, we will not be able to achieve the results we need for our customers. A lot of trust and responsibility is given to the creamery teammates and it is critical that the processes are followed exactly. Applicants should have a very detail oriented and focused working style and be comfortable taking full responsibility for their tasks. The creamery training philosophy is to provide thorough education to empower our teammates to excel in their specialties independently. While we take our cheesemaking and work very seriously, it's also important that everyone maintains a positive attitude and has fun. Listening to music, dancing and joking around are just as much a part of our day to day. Feeling comfortable in this type of working environment is critical.

"Cheesemaking is 70 percent washing," Vivien Straus

Cheesemaking, affinage, and handling cheese requires very strict adherence to sanitation guidelines. The apprentice will have between 10-15 hours of equipment cleaning and dishwashing per week, 10-15 hours of affinage each week and additional cleaning and maintenance projects. Also days in the creamery can be long and we are on our feet the majority of the day. Applicants should feel comfortable doing this type of work.

EXPECTATIONS

We are looking for someone who can get up early, work fulfilling but long arduous days, and is able to sustainably and safely lift 50 lbs. Having a background in this field is not necessary, this is an educational experience and we will teach you the tasks and skills. However, there are apprentice requirements; apprentices must have a good attitude and be willing to learn, accept critique, acknowledge mistakes and work to make themselves better. In addition, apprentices should be comfortable working both in a team setting and alone. Tasks will be taught to you and then you will be expected to accomplish them on your own. Team meetings occur every week and one-on-one coaching every month. Team meetings and coaching are mandatory.

STIPEND

We follow Montana State laws in regards to apprenticeship positions. Apprentices will be given housing, some food and a stipend. Stipends will be paid once a month (state requirement) starting at \$800 per month. Apprentices will be housed either on farm or in off-farm rental properties.

The farm sits in the Bitterroot Valley, surrounded by gorgeous views, hiking, biking, skiing/snowboarding/snowshoeing and camping opportunities right on our door. Victor is a small town with only a few restaurants and stores, but is an hour south of Missoula (a very active and young college town) and 15 minutes north of Hamilton (a bigger town with coffee shops, breweries, shopping and thrift stores). Those staying on farm will live in a camper or bunkhouse and have access to our shared kitchen, bathroom, living and dining area, and Wi-Fi. Off-farm housing will be mostly furnished apartments as near to the farm as possible. Because of the chance you will be living off farm, a vehicle is required of all applicants. Apprentices are responsible for responsibly maintaining their living areas and caring for the provided furniture, appliances, etc.

The start date of the 2020 apprenticeship program will be December 10th, 2019. There is a slight range in start date depending on availability.

LEARNING PLAN

The Phases below outline the learning and development plan for the creamery apprentice. The focus of our Creamery is to produce very high-quality cheese, so the importance is on mastery of tasks before expanding into new areas. After a skill is taught we give time to develop that skill and allow our apprentices to perfect that process and hopefully identify ways to improve it, before moving onto introducing a new skill. The skills are listed chronologically of when they will be taught within each phase, with many times learning skills simultaneously within the same week. Each phase is approximately 3 months, but highly dependent on the individual.

Phase I

Sanitation and Maintenance

- Our creamery strictly follows Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) and our HACCP plan to ensure our cheese is produced safely. All of our apprentices will develop a strong understanding of these practices.
- Appropriate clothing to reduce risk of outside contaminants as well as cross-contamination between cheeses
- How to effectively clean and sanitize all equipment and tools
- How to maintain the creamery facility to produce top quality cheese

Affinage techniques for our selection of 10 aged cheeses

- Mold-ripened semi-soft cheeses – aged 16 days
- Spiced rind hard cheese – aged 6 weeks to 2 months
- Beer and Sulz washed hard cheeses – aged 3 months
- Natural rind hard cheeses – aged 4 months or more
- Cloth-bound cheddared blue cheese – aged 3 months

Making Ricotta – Ricotta is a great introduction to the skills needed to make our aged cheeses on a larger scale. Mastering this cheese will set the apprentice up for success in Phase II & III when they learn our other cheeses.

- Ricotta – made from the whey produced when we make cheese

Assist with making aged cheeses

- Setting up the creamery to make cheese
- Transporting milk from the dairy to the creamery
- Supporting the cheesemaker to mold and press the curd as efficiently as possible – hard and fresh cheeses
- Turning newly made cheeses on schedule to allow correct whey and fat distribution within the cheese
- Brining newly made cheese to the correct salt level
- Transferring newly made cheese to our caves where they begin their affinage journey

Farmer's Market

- Pack the cheese needed to operate 3 farmer's markets on Saturday
- Support the other two teammates who will also be running farmer's market booths on Saturday
- Successfully manage the booth and sell cheese at the Clark Fork Market in Missoula, Montana

Phase II

Continue completing, perfecting techniques and learning in the skills and processes in Phase I.

Understanding our customer base and how to appropriately pack cheese for final sale to match their needs

- Distributors
- Hotels, Restaurants, Grocery Stores & Delivery Services, Breweries & Distilleries, Caterers
- CSA's (Community Supported Agriculture weekly food share programs)
- Farmer's Market

Cheese Making: Vat Pasteurization and adding cultures and molds (once a week)

- Setting up and operating the equipment to heat and hold milk & airspace at the correct temperatures for vat pasteurization
- Cooling milk to the appropriate temperature to add cultures and molds
- Calculating the amount of cultures, molds and rennet needed for the cheese we are making that day
- Adding cultures and molds correctly to produce the proper flavor and texture of our cheese

Phase III

Continue completing, perfecting techniques and learning in the skills and processes in Phases I & II.

Cheese Making: Curd Set, Handling and Molding (once a week)

- Monitoring pH throughout the cheese make
- Adding rennet and finding the appropriate curd set before cutting curd
- Curd handling techniques – cutting, hardening, stirring, washing, scalding, cheddaring
- Efficiently molding curd to ensure the appropriate look and texture of our cheese wheels

Assist in training apprentices or cheesemaking assistants to solidify the skills developed over the apprenticeship.

Phase IV

Continue completing, perfecting techniques and learning in the skills and processes in Phases I, II & III.

Cheese Making: Fully operate all equipment and manage end-to-end process of the day's cheese make (once a week)

Implement Limited Release Cheese

- Develop recipe and affinage plan, with input from Head Cheesemaker for feasibility and approval from the Sanitarian at the Montana Department of Livestock
- Fully operate all equipment and manage end-to-end process of making your cheese
- Implement the needed affinage for your cheese, make changes as needed depending on how the cheese is aging, and training all teammates in how your cheese needs to be cared for in the caves
- Market your cheese to our customers – draft an announcement, pictures to share on Instagram/Facebook, develop talking points for teammates selling your cheese at the farmer's market.
- Most importantly: Name your cheese

Coaching and Development

Each month the apprentice will sit down with the Head Cheesemaker and discuss their progress. We ask the apprentice to identify areas they enjoy, areas they are struggling and areas they wish to learn more. Together we outline one or two areas for the apprentice to improve and areas that the creamery operation can improve. By both sides focusing on a continuous improvement, we hope to challenge and push ourselves past our current state. These meetings are friendly and constructively critical. We highly appreciate engagement in these discussions.

While we will always have these monthly meetings, we encourage this type of discussion as a team during lunches, more formal team meetings and ad-hoc with the Head Cheesemaker, Cheesemaker, other creamery apprentice and farm teammates as needed. Our goal is to have very open and honest communication among all the teammates at Tucker Family Farm.