

## Student farmers rough it to learn how to produce a lot from a little

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Students, foreground, from left, Hilary Barber, Joel Handley and Christof Bernau work in UCSC's organic garden.

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# UCSC farm has worldwide reputation

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Ana Wagner, who is learning to grow vegetables organically at the University of California, Santa Cruz, got her first taste of chemical-free produce from the UCSC farm earlier this year while camped at the base of 17,058-foot Mount Kenya in East Africa.

As Wagner's camping companion tossed some dehydrated tomatoes into the soup pot, she explained that her sister had grown them as an apprentice in UCSC's six-month organic farming program.

Now Wagner is in the same program, and she is

working alongside the camping companion's sister, a third-year participant. Wagner, 17, is the youngest of 44 apprentices this year.

It's no surprise to Orin Martin that word of the 27-year-old program reached Africa. Martin is manager of the four-acre Alan Chadwick Garden, where organic farming started on the campus. Today, the program includes a 25-acre farm, where students cultivate fruit, flowers and herbs as well as vegetables.

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— Orin Martin, garden manager

## UC Santa Cruz student farmers learn to make the most out of the minimum

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increasing. We don't advertise much any more. It's word of mouth," Martin said.

Apprentices, Martin said, tend to be from developing nations or U.S. citizens working in those countries who must get a lot from poor soil with minimal mechanization, people interested in small-scale food production in community gardens, and would-be producers of vegetables, fruit or flowers on a larger scale.

Instruction covering botany, horticulture, soil types, pests, diseases and marketing is largely part of day-to-day work on the farm. Guest speakers, films and field trips supplement the instruction. In all, apprentices spend about 120 hours in class, 1,200 hours in the fields.

Two days a week, apprentices sell their produce at a roadside stand near the entrance to campus. The \$80,000 they raise during the season from the farmers market and wholesale contracts, plus the program's \$2,200 tuition they each pay, covers the cost of the program.

Farm produce also helps sustain the apprentices, who takes turns at shopping, cooking and other chores at a central kitchen.

Almost all apprentices live on the farm in their own tents, which they pitch under cypresses at the edge of an orchard. No spouses, children or "significant others" are allowed to share the quarters.

Roughing it doesn't mean romance doesn't blossom, however, according to Jim Leap, who ticks off several marriages that have occurred among apprentices during the four years he has been farm manager.

When the six-month apprenticeship ends in October, six to eight students winter at the farm to prune trees, prepare soil, sow seeds in the greenhouse and plant cover crops. The following April, they stay on as instructional aides.

Aide Amy Linstrom, a 1986 graduate of Los Gatos High School, earned a degree in literature at the University of California, San Diego.

"I tried teaching, but I didn't like it. Now, I'd like to get into small-scale farming and marketing," Linstrom said.

Wagner, who spent her childhood in Liberia and Kenya before graduating from high school in Ithaca, N.Y., plans to return to Africa.

"I want to learn a skill that's important in life — being able to grow food and take care of my family," Wagner said. "When I used to visit Dad in the Sudan I found beauty in the simple way of life. There they think it's funny that you have to learn to use a shovel — bend at the knees in order not to pull out your back."

When she finishes college, Wagner said, she wants to help her parents farm 10 acres they've bought in Kenya. "It's a dry, dusty place, so I'll have to translate what I learn here to fit a new climate," she said.

Another first-year apprentice is Celia Guilford, who with her husband raises grain and sheep on 960 acres in Canada's Manitoba province and teaches organic farming at a community college there. She wants to set up a UCSC-style organic farm back home.

"I just love the program," Guilford said. "I'm here to learn the logistical as well as the agricultural aspects."