

SANTA CRUZ PERMACULTURE FARM INTERNSHIP

A credit-bearing farm internship for students serious about permaculture and agroecology. Designed for 1-quarter/semester, 2-quarter/semester, and 3-quarter/semester commitments.

Deep hands-on learning in permaculture and agroecology at a working farm.

Santa Cruz Permaculture is a 26-acre certified organic farm on the coast just north of Davenport, near Año Nuevo. We grow vegetables, fruit, herbs, flowers, and value-added products through agroecological and permaculture design principles, integrating perennial polycultures, whole-systems thinking, and ecological land stewardship. Permaculture, as Ferguson and Lovell (2014) describe it, is simultaneously a design system, a best practice framework, a worldview, and a movement, and one of the most promising vehicles for agroecological transition operating outside of institutional science. This farm is a working example of that transition.

Santa Cruz Permaculture operates as both a working commercial farm and an educational site, growing food for market while training the next generation of farmers and hosting agroecological research.

The farm is designed around permaculture principles made tangible: integrated water management, contour farming, perennial polycultures, and a diverse array of alternative crops including willow, goldenberry, and kiwi. We are actively developing a food forest, herb garden, and natural building program as part of the farm's long-term agroecological design. Students who come here encounter permaculture not as a set of ideas but as a set of decisions embedded in the landscape. We also sit with a deeper question, central to our research, about whether permaculture's practices can be separated from the relational ontology that originally gave them meaning, and what it would look like to farm not just sustainably, but relationally.

What you will do:

Every Friday begins with a structured opening circle from 8:00 to 8:15am, led by Owen Williams, program coordinator. The circle introduces an intellectual prompt, a question, concept, or observation drawn from permaculture or agroecology, that interns carry into their required weekly reflective journal. From 8:15 to 8:30am, Dave Shaw co-leads a field task introduction with Owen, connecting the day's hands-on work to the morning's prompt. Then the work begins.

The work is real and physical. You will transplant seedlings, harvest crops, move irrigation pipe, and tend the land through every season. This is not simulated or instructional labor; it is the actual work of the farm, performed under supervision and oriented toward your development as a beginning farmer. The work changes with the season. The learning comes from showing up week after week alongside people who know what they are doing and can explain why.

By Wednesday morning each week, Owen sends the intern group an email previewing Friday's work and offering optional readings or videos connected to the week's theme.

For interns attending Thursday CSA operations, Max Kuempel, who holds a degree in agriculture and is enrolled in the farm's Permaculture Design Certificate course, provides framing for the day's work, connecting harvest, washing, packing, and delivery to permaculture principles and food systems concepts.

What you will gain:

- Hands-on experience across a working commercial farm, including harvest, planting, irrigation, soil care, perennial systems, value-added production, and post-harvest handling
- Direct exposure to farm-to-market systems including CSA operations and farmers markets
- Peer coordination and mentorship from Owen Williams, a UCSC ENVIS student who has worked at this farm for two years and is himself developing his skills as an internship leader, with Dave Shaw as his mentor in turn
- Mentorship from Dave Shaw, PhD student in UCSC Environmental Studies and director of the UCSC Right Livelihood Center, whose work sits at the intersection of agroecology, permaculture, and food systems
- A place in a committed cohort of students serious about food systems work
- Access to unsold farm produce to take home, by permission and when available
- Academic credit through UCSC ENVIS or other participating institutions

Schedule:

5-unit UCSC interns (12 hours/week, approximately 120 hours per quarter):

- Every Friday, 8:00am to 4:30pm (8 hours, excluding 30-minute lunch break 12:00–12:30pm)
- Additional hours arranged individually with the agency sponsor; may include Thursday CSA operations or off-farm project work such as research, writing, farm documentation, or communications

2-unit UCSC interns (6 hours/week, 60 hours total):

All 2-unit interns must be present for the 8:00 to 8:30am opening circle and field introduction. Two schedule options are available; arrange with the agency sponsor:

- Option A: Full days (8:00am to 4:30pm) for approximately 7.5 Fridays, completing 60 hours about 2.5 weeks before the end of the quarter
- Option B: Shorter days (8:00am to 12:00pm, 12:30pm to 2:30pm) for all 10 Fridays of the quarter, completing 60 hours at the end of the quarter

1-credit Cabrillo interns (54 hours total):

- Option A: Full days (8:00am to 4:30pm) for approximately 7.5 Fridays, completing 54 hours about 2.5 weeks before the end of the quarter
- Option B: Shorter days (8:00am to 12:00pm, 12:30pm to 2:30pm) for all 10 Fridays of the quarter, completing 54 hours at the end of the quarter

Learning objectives:

By the end of this internship, students will be able to:

- Explain what permaculture is and how it relates to agroecology
- Describe key permaculture design principles and identify examples on the farm
- Understand how a CSA operation functions from field to customer

- Articulate connections between farm work and ecological and food systems concepts through reflective writing

Supervision and communication:

Owen Williams (program coordinator) is the primary day-to-day contact for interns. Dave Shaw (agency sponsor) is present at the Friday opening circle and field introduction, conducts all midterm and final evaluations, and is available by phone and email throughout the quarter. Max Kuempel supervises Thursday CSA operations. Caylie Soon serves as backup supervisor when Dave Shaw is unavailable.

Credit pathways:

- **UCSC ENVS 84 (2 units):** 6 hours/week minimum
- **UCSC ENVS 83 (5 units, lower division):** 12 hours/week
- **UCSC ENVS 183 (5 units, upper division):** 12 hours/week, includes final project
- **UCSC ENVS 183A/183B (senior internship, 2 quarters):** 12 hours/week
- **Cabrillo College Work Experience Education HORT-99 (1 unit) or WORK-499 (non-credit):** 54 hours/semester per unit
- Other institutions: contact us to discuss

Financial aid note:

Due to recent changes in financial aid policy, we encourage students receiving financial aid to consult with their financial aid advisor before enrolling, to understand how internship credits will be covered.

About this internship:

This program is a credit-bearing educational internship, not employment. Your work here is intended to complement, not replace, the work of paid farm staff. The primary beneficiary of this internship is you, in the form of academic credit, practical skills, peer community, and, for Yearlong Fellows, the Permaculture Design Certificate. More broadly, this program is part of a long-term vision to develop a trained, values-aligned workforce for the regenerative agriculture and permaculture sector.

Location:

640 Cabrillo Highway, Pescadero, CA 94060. On the coast just north of Davenport, near Año Nuevo. About 20 minutes north of Santa Cruz on Highway 1.

To apply: <https://forms.gle/dJ9cpqgunX6HHUEjz>

Dave Shaw: info.santacruzpermaculture@gmail.com +1 (831) 216-8208

Owen Williams: oowilia@ucsc.edu +1 (802) 379-4570

**COMMIT TO THE YEAR: THE YEARLONG FELLOWSHIP AND THE
PDC**

Students who commit to the internship for fall, winter, and spring quarters become **Yearlong Fellows**. The commitment is straightforward: enroll in the Santa Cruz Permaculture Farm Internship each quarter through the credit pathway that fits your academic plan, show up every Friday, and stay engaged through June.

As a Yearlong Fellow, you receive a full tuition waiver for the [Permaculture Design Certificate course](#), a 96-hour immersive program grounded in agroecological design and valued at \$1,395. The fall/winter PDC begins **October 3, 2026**, meeting one weekend per month through March 2027. If you are interested in making a yearlong commitment, reach out now; the PDC train leaves the station on October 3rd and enrollment is open.

Students interested in the yearlong program should contact Dave Shaw directly to discuss credit pathways, faculty sponsorship, and PDC enrollment. Single-quarter internships remain welcome at any time; the PDC waiver is a benefit reserved for Yearlong Fellows.

SENIOR INTERNSHIPS AND COMMUNITY STUDIES FIELD STUDY

Santa Cruz Permaculture welcomes students who are ready for a more substantial and sustained engagement with the farm. If you are approaching your senior year and looking for a capstone experience that combines real farm work with academic inquiry, this may be the right place for it.

Owen Williams, our current program coordinator, is the model for what this can look like. Owen completed a 2-unit internship here in his sophomore year, was hired as a farm employee in his junior year, and is now doing his senior internship here while taking on a leadership role in the intern program itself. His senior project is the internship: recruiting, orienting, and mentoring the next cohort of interns, with Dave Shaw as his supervisor and collaborator. It is hands-on, it is academically rigorous, and it is the kind of experience that shapes a career.

We are particularly interested in students who:

- Have already completed an internship here and want to return in a more senior capacity
- Are enrolled in ENV5 183A/183B (senior internship, 2 quarters) and want a site that offers both field work and intellectual engagement
- Are Community Studies students planning a 6-month full-time field study and looking for a site that can support sustained, project-based learning on a working farm
- Are interested in eventually taking on a program coordination role, helping to lead the intern program for a future cohort

Senior interns and Community Studies students work with Dave Shaw to define a project scope that serves both their academic requirements and the farm's ongoing needs. Past and current themes include farmer training program design, agroecological research, value-added production systems, and farm-to-market operations. Projects are shaped by the student's interests and the farm's real questions, not by a predetermined template.

If you are a senior or a Community Studies student considering this path, reach out early. These placements require planning on both sides and are limited in number.

Contact Dave Shaw: info.santacruzpermaculture@gmail.com +1 (831) 216-8208