Sacred Spaces Food Sovereign Neighborhood Feasibility Intern
Organic Career Network 2026

Internship Type: Paid, Hybrid (Detroit-based preferred)
Start Date: Week of June 8 or June 15, 2026 (at the latest)
Eligibility: Open to current undergraduate or graduate students (any age) and individuals (ages 18–24), regardless of enrollment status, who are interested in organic agriculture, regenerative practices, and community-based food systems.
Preferred Majors: Urban Planning, Public Health, Environmental Studies, Agriculture, Sociology, Geography, Public Policy, or related fields.

Organization Overview

Sacred Spaces (SSp) is a Detroit-based nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing regenerative urban agriculture, food sovereignty, and healing nature-scapes in the Riverbend neighborhood. As the nonprofit partner to Sanctuary Farms (compost cultivator), Sacred Spaces works at the intersection of organic agriculture, community planning, composting, and environmental justice in Detroit to address historic disinvestment and food apartheid through community-led land stewardship.

SSp's work builds upon Sanctuary Farms' mission to close the food loop by transforming organic waste into nutrient-rich compost and cultivating regenerative food systems. Together, the organizations support neighborhood-scale approaches to food sovereignty that center resident leadership, cultural foodways, and equitable access to land and resources.

Organic Career Network (OCN) Cohort Experience

This internship is funded by the Organic Career Network (OCN), a national initiative dedicated to developing the next generation of leaders in organic agriculture. As an OCN-supported intern, participants join a select cohort of peers placed across organizations in the organic sector, gaining access to a broader professional network and shared learning experience. Interns are expected to attend four virtual cohort sessions throughout the internship, featuring facilitated discussions, guest speakers, and career-focused programming. This cohort model enhances the internship by providing structured opportunities for connection, mentorship, and deeper engagement with the organic movement.

Position Overview

The Food Sovereign Neighborhood Feasibility Intern will support Sacred Spaces in advancing a long-term vision for a food-sovereign Riverbend neighborhood. A neighborhood capable of producing culturally appropriate, organic food to meet the needs of its residents and beyond. This role builds upon prior feasibility research conducted in the summer of 2025 by Chen Lyu, University of Michigan Dual Master's Degree student in Urban & Regional Policy and Public Policy, and shifts the focus toward implementation-oriented, community-rooted planning led by Sacred Spaces.

The intern will engage in applied research, community-based data collection, and planning strategy development to help answer a central question: What would it take,logistically, spatially, and socially, to build a food-sovereign neighborhood through regenerative and organic agricultural practices? The position aligns with Organic Career Network (OCN) and TOPP goals by grounding organic agriculture within broader systems of public health, land use planning, and racial equity.

Goal: To develop a community-informed food sovereignty framework and early-stage implementation roadmap that supports resident-led planning and organic food production in Detroit's Riverbend neighborhood.

Activities & Deliverables

>> Deliverable 1 (Approximately 80% of Internship Hours): Food Sovereignty Framework for Riverbend

- Beginning in June 2026, the intern will leverage the "Riverbend Community Food Access Survey developed by Cherish Wanter, University of Michigan graduate in Public Health Dietetics, who interned with Sacred Spaces in the Winter of 2026, to gather data on food access, dietary patterns, cultural food preferences, perspectives on organic food, and nutrition needs in Riverbend.
- Additional activities might include:
    - Ensuring data collection methods align with Sacred Spaces' commitment to non-extractive, relationship-based community engagement.
    - Reviewing existing literature and best practices from agroecology, Black agrarianism, regenerative agriculture, and food sovereignty movements.
    - Collecting primary data on crop yields and production capacity from Sanctuary Farms and peer urban farms through structured interviews.
    - Estimating land requirements necessary to support neighborhood-scale food sovereignty through organic and regenerative production.
    - Synthesizing qualitative and quantitative findings into a Food Sovereignty Framework for Riverbend that can inform future planning and investment.
    - Co-develop interactive curricular materials (e.g. brief video, zine, or other creative materials) on food sovereignty and organic/regenerative agriculture alongside the SSp team and the University of Michigan Dietetics graduate student working with the farm this winter

>> Deliverable 2 (Approximately 20% of Internship Hours): Implementation Strategies for a Resident-Led Neighborhood Plan

- Building on Chen's prior research exploring the feasibility of community-led planning in Riverbend, the intern will help translate vision into action by:
    - Estimating costs, timelines, and staffing needs for a resident-driven neighborhood planning process.
    - Identifying potential funding sources, technical assistance providers, and institutional and community partners.
    - Developing inclusive engagement strategies, such as listening sessions, photovoice, design charrettes, and small-group dialogues, to ensure broad participation across age, race, tenure, and lived experience.
    - Outlining participation thresholds needed to ensure the process is meaningfully representative and equity-centered.

    - Producing an early-stage implementation roadmap to guide Sacred Spaces' future neighborhood planning and land use initiatives.
- This deliverable will serve as a foundation for Riverbend's first resident-led neighborhood plan and future food sovereignty–aligned development efforts.

Measures for Success

- Completion of materials for a Food Sovereignty Framework for Riverbend grounded in community data and organic production capacity
- Clear documentation of land, resource, and participation requirements for neighborhood-scale food sovereignty
- Development of sample implementation pathways for resident-led planning
- Active collaboration with Sacred Spaces staff, partner interns, and community stakeholders
- Demonstrated ability to integrate organic agriculture, public health, and planning principles

Knowledge & Skills Expected to Be Gained

- Applied experience in food systems planning and food sovereignty research
- Skills in community-based data collection and ethical engagement practices
- Understanding of how organic and regenerative agriculture intersects with land use, public health, and racial equity
- Experience translating research into actionable planning strategies
- Professional exposure to nonprofit leadership, community organizing, and interdisciplinary collaboration
- Willingness to learn and work in a self-directed fashion.

Compensation & Qualifications: Compensation is $15 per hour for undergraduate interns and $18 per hour for graduate interns, not to exceed $2,250 (undergraduate) or $2,700 (graduate) per semester. Interns are not eligible for benefits. This internship may be hybrid, with some in-person engagement in Detroit; reliable internet access is required.

Applications are now closed!

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This internship is funded by