Farm & Food Systems Graduate Fellowship 2022-2024

Mountain Roots Food Project and the Master of Environmental Management Program at Western Colorado University welcome applicants for our 2022-2024 Farm & Food Systems Graduate Fellowship.

This is a two-year award that provides an opportunity for an outstanding graduate student to engage in the research, project design and management, operations, and innovation for the Mountain Roots Community Food System initiative with a focus on sustainable/regenerative agriculture. The Fellowship is also a launch point into for-profit, non-profit, and research-based sustainable agriculture and a deeper understanding of its critical role in the development of a resilient food system.

Background

Mountain Roots is a food systems initiative and is a leader in this arena in the southwest / central mountain region of Colorado. Our work includes a district-wide Farm to School program, Community Food Security, localizing and strengthening the local food economy, and expanding regenerative agriculture across the region.

A large-scale concept for the Mountain Roots valley-wide regenerative farming enterprise is being developed across multiple sites and with multiple partners. Currently, a 2-acre portion of the Coldharbour Ranch, a 0.75 acre portion of the former Niccoli Ranch and two community gardens produce food for our community and model and teach cold climate sustainable agriculture. Four climate-controlled hydroponic farms are being integrated currently to provide for year-round food production and expanded learning opportunities. We train aspiring agrarians, support the growth of small family farmers, focus on community engagement, and provide visibly integrated elements of food justice, social equity, education, and resilient food systems.

Our growing spaces enhance agricultural diversity of Gunnison Valley by demonstrating methods in which growers can produce a wide variety of annual and perennial food crops (both plant and animal based) on an ecologically sustainable scale and enhance biological diversity by emphasizing native and agricultural plant species and demonstrating how the two can coexist. As the organization grows, we will continue to develop complimentary elements in satellite locations, including greenhouse facilities, animal husbandry sites, commercial kitchen, and food hub.

The 2022-2024 Farm & Food Systems Fellowship Focus

We are pleased to offer two fellowship positions. Each fellow will responding to community needs assessments and strategic planning currently underway, conduct additional research, and align with direction from the Board of Directors to design a project that fully develops one of the following:

a) beginning farmer training program  b) community food hub  c) community kitchen / small food business incubator.

Ideal candidates will have a combination of skills in sustainable / regenerative agriculture, entrepreneurship, and program development, and would also be seeking to build those skills through experience. We work with students and faculty to layer or integrate the fellowship project work with the graduate course work, but fellows should understand that inevitably there are tasks and activities in each area that fall outside of the other’s purview. It is understood that fellows are working above and beyond the usual graduate work.

The Fellowship Award

The Farm & Foods Systems Fellow will receive $40,000 through two channels: (a) tuition assistance, paid to Western on behalf of the student and (b) in the form of a work-study AmeriCorps position that provides a cash living allowance, paid to the student.

Commitment  June 2022 through May 2024
Year One: $14,000
Agriculture is seasonal work, and summer is high season. Beginning in June, the fellows are actively working in Mountain Roots part time 3 days/week (24 hrs/week). Fellows will join various program teams to gain hands-on experience of food systems “in the field” and in our community. This provides material for the graduate portfolio, and relevant, practical context for the project development that is to come. During the fall and spring semester, first year fellows are expected to work an average of 20hrs/week in addition to academic coursework and requirements.

- Living Allowance, paid bi-weekly: $8,735
- Tuition Assistance: Education Award: $4,192 + Western: $1,000.

The student’s performance will be evaluated at the end of the first year in June/July 2021. If the student is recommended for renewal, the second year award of $26,000 will be structured as a follows:

Year Two: $26,000
Second year students begin the dedicated graduate project. Is the expectation that all graduate project hours will be dedicated to the completion of an exceptional Food Systems project that meets requirements for both Mountain Roots and Western MEM.

In the second summer, the fellow will be spending 40 hours per week at Mountain Roots. During fall and spring semesters of the second year, fellows work an average of 32 hours per week.

- Living Allowance, paid bi-weekly: $13,000
- Tuition Assistance: Education Award: $5,000 + Western: $8,000.

Project Launch Option
Following successful completion of project and graduation, and contingent on funding, students may have the option to continue on in some capacity with Mountain Roots to lead the launch of the project and see their work come to fruition. This is handled on a case-by-case basis.

Successful candidates should demonstrate:
- Working knowledge and experience with sustainable agriculture and its principles such as: whole-farm planning, permaculture principles, crop rotations, cultural management of perennial crops and fruit trees, cover cropping, soil and plant sciences, and regenerative farming concepts, organic and/or biodynamic agricultural operations, animal husbandry, and agroecology.
- Proven ability to collaborate, negotiate and build consensus with multiple external and internal constituencies, including visitors, across varied professional, educational, and socio-economic levels.
- An entrepreneurial approach to acquiring resources and unlikely partners; genuine interest in ‘start-up’ project design.
- Working knowledge and sensitivity toward food justice, social equity, and resilient food systems.
- Versatility: equally comfortable and confident working in the field or in the office, working independently and with people. The role requires a balance of time and energy spent on sustainable agriculture (actively farming and other field work in food distribution) plus program planning, budgeting, concept development, and community outreach.

How to Apply:
Please submit a letter of interest, your résumé, and contact info for two references to Holly Conn, Executive Director of Mountain Roots, director@mountainrootsfoodproject.org. Your letter of interest should be no longer than two pages and answer the following questions:
- Explain your experience and goals in the area of farming and food systems. What skills do you bring to add value to the organization and project? What do you hope to learn? How will the fellowship prepare you to meet your goals?
- What three attributes would co-workers, friends, and family all agree that you possess? Please give examples.

Open till filled. The fellowship award is contingent on acceptance to the MEM program. For questions please email the above address or call 970-417-7848.