

SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE &
FOOD SYSTEMS FUNDERS



Investing in Human Capital

Sponsored by Betsy and Jesse Fink Foundation

The complex and interconnected environmental problems we currently face—from climate change to food system sustainability—will be inherited by today’s young people. If, in the coming decades, we are to find solutions to these problems, it will be the spirit, ingenuity, and resilience of this new generation of leaders that enables us to do so. yet high quality opportunities for college students to gain challenging on-the-ground project experience, mentoring, and skills training are surprisingly hard to find in the sustainability field, and demand for such programs is much higher than availability. The purpose of this workshop is to learn how we can most effectively invest in human capital through high-impact internships, fellowships, and out-of-the-box thinking as funders.

Moderator

Joan Briggs, director, Betsy and Jesse Fink Foundation, CT

Speakers

Kaila Binney, program director, Island Grown Initiative, MA

Tracy Himmel Isham, assistant director, Career Services, Middlebury College, VT

Katie Kritzalis, apprentice, Millstone Farm, CT

Elena Mihaly, 2012 intern, Natural Resources Defense Council, NY

Jesse Fink

- Started doing grants to large environmental groups and small start ups and developed an interest in sustainable agriculture and global climate change
- Shifted to a focus on investing in human capital in January of last year
- Since then have supported 29 organizations and 38 interns
- Started Millstone to understand first hand the challenges of small scale farmer and to inform policy-

Kaila Binney

- Variety of programs on Martha’s Vineyard including a pollinator program, mobile processing, and gleaning program
- They provide opportunities from high school volunteering, through preprofessional internships, through professional
- This scaffolding builds a continuum that builds a more stable and resilient community in a community where there is a lot of transience and fluctuations

Elena Mihaly

- The internship program provided opportunities that wouldn't have happened otherwise and allowed her to combine her interests in a unique role
- As a lawyer, things are evolving so quickly that the law cannot catch up and more and more gray areas are being discovered every day
- Inspiration came from meeting others doing the internships and by meeting those who had invested in her
- Knowing that she personally was being invested in caused her to take the work and her personal development more seriously

Tracy Himmel Isham

- In this changing economy students need support in career development and how to create their own opportunities
- Opportunities exist to develop fellowships that help students translate their skills and passion into a need of organizations
- Students need paid work, but an audit of their database showed that only 45% of their opportunities were paid
- They've developed 22 learning outcomes and typically place at least 2 students together for maximum support

Katie Kritzalis

- Previously was working in New York City and wanted to connect more with the land
- Her apprenticeship has provided relationship-building opportunities that she would not have otherwise had
- They grow vegetables, chicken, pigs, sheep, turkey, and guard llamas and sell to 15 restaurants, all of which are at most ½ hr. away
- Originally was only going to stay one year but decided to stay for two – this apprenticeship has been a great learning opportunity and she is given responsibility that she would not otherwise be given
- The farm is also a gathering place for the other participants in the program

Discussion Themes

- Most jobs that exist today did not exist 20 years ago! The economy is changing rapidly and the job of the future is the job that you create yourself
- A cohort model helps provide the support that young people need to be creative in identifying problems and solutions they want to work on
- Young people today understand the market and are ready and eager to take on more responsibility
- Student loan debt requires young people to take paid positions but too often the work that really needs to get done is unpaid
- To ensure success, it is important to have a structure that supports the interns or apprentices in developing goals and having regular check-ins to ensure that the internships is meeting those goals – supervision is key!
- By investing in human capital you are not only investing in an organization and its growth, but also the career and creativity of a young person that can help shift the entire system