

# SnoValley Tilth Experience Farming Project

## Program Description

The Experience Farming Project provides farmland for lease and infrastructure to farmers looking to start sustainable farm businesses and easy access to resources, education and community through SnoValley Tilth Farm Services.

In this region, land prices, access to land, and startup costs can limit a farmer's ability to start and establish a farm business. The Experience Farming Project provides access to land, infrastructure, and the opportunity to start a farm business without that burdensome debt.

Inherent in the structure of this program is the fundamental idea that the path to success for an individual farmer and a farm business varies. This program welcomes that diversity. Experience Farming Project participants are independent and ready to meet the challenge of starting their own business. During their time in the program, farmers build and refine their production practices, markets for their products, and develop the confidence and experience to manage and prepare for the inevitable unpredictability of commercial farming.

SnoValley Tilth's other programs complement the Experience Farming Project's unique approach. Participants have access to our Farm Services including business resources, technical skills development, workshops and a welcoming community of farmers in the greater Snohomish Watershed. Our Experience Farming Project Manager provides connections to these resources, answers questions and directs participants to community support and knowledge to build upon what they learn in the initial years of operating their own business.

The Experience Farming Project means to engage the independent, tenacious, and inquisitive nature of many farmers, allowing the flexibility to start their business and learn on their own terms.

### **The Experience Farming Project offers access to:**

- Productive farmland
- Access to infrastructure such as wash stations, cooler space, dry storage, potable and irrigation water
- Initial tractor work before the growing season

Experience Farming Project participants receive a complimentary annual membership to SnoValley Tilth, which includes access to the listserv, reduced workshop fees, free monthly farmer gatherings (virtual discussions, potlucks and farm tours), discounts from businesses, and more.

### **Recommended qualifications as a participant:**

- Past farming experience - minimum of two years interning or working on farm
- Demonstrated knowledge and skills that indicate ability to be successful in the program
- A strong understanding of their farm business model, production plan, and markets
- Ability to meet program expectations (see Expectations for Participants section)

## **Application Process**

We accept applications on a rolling basis and application review and parcel allocations are ongoing and on a first come, first served basis.

**To Apply:** Send an email to Sean@snovalleytilth.org with your name and contact information (phone, address) and short answers to the following:

1. Describe your farming experience.
2. Describe your goals for the program.

# Welcome to the Experience Farming Project!

## Handbook Purpose

This handbook is meant to set common guidelines, processes, structure, and expectations for you as a participant and for us, SnoValley Tilth, as the organization that supports this important program. It is also meant to clarify all of our roles and create pathways for constructive communication.

## Land

### Land management philosophy

SnoValley Tilth believes that farmland should be stewarded by farmers themselves and as such does not own the land at its program sites. In most cases, the Experience Farming Project sites are leased (with long-term options) to SnoValley Tilth. This enables us to provide access to productive farmland at a reasonable lease rate.

### Plots

In your first year farming, we recommend leasing a ½ acre plot of land, planning production for ¼ acre and cover crop for the second ¼ acre. Exceptions can be made for those farmers experienced in working larger (or smaller) parcels. Each plot will be cover cropped and tilled prior to your use.

## Infrastructure and Services

Your program fee includes access to a wash station, a walk-in cooler, and dry storage. Also included is irrigation for your plot and incidental use of electricity. Significant use of electricity (for heated greenhouses, grow lights, etc.) will incur additional fees.

### Personal Equipment and Additional Services:

All participants have the option to bring their own equipment and tools and/or to contract with a different provider of their choice. Referrals can be provided for contracted soil services.

## Marketing

As a new farm, you are expected to have marketing incorporated into your business plan and we encourage you to develop additional marketing opportunities for yourself. SnoValley Tilth will add your farm business to our business directory.

## Mentorship and Community

A membership to SnoValley Tilth is included as part of your program fees in the Experience Farming Project. We encourage all participants to attend the monthly potlucks/virtual events as a way to meet other farmers.

## Assessments, Reporting, and Storytelling

A part of every successful farm business is record keeping of one kind or another. As part of your participation in the Experience Farming Project, you will be asked to complete a self-assessment at the beginning and end of the season. These assessments are tools to assist you in setting goals and measuring your progress towards them. The EFP manager will review your self-assessment with you at the beginning and end of the season and help you set learning goals for the year. We encourage all participants to take the Cultivating Success Program offered through WSU.

As a nonprofit organization, SnoValley Tilth asks for your support in raising awareness and support of our organization. We will bring community members to the Experience Farming Project and tell the story of the EFP and the farmers through newsletters, social media, traditional media and at fundraising events. We may take photos and videos that include your plots. These are opportunities for you to tell the story of your farm business and your experience at the EFP.

## Policies

### Lease and Participant Agreements

The lease and participant agreement with SnoValley Tilth is an important part of the Experience Farming Project program. The lease agreement is the contract that stipulates how much land you are leasing and the requirements and expectations that are obligated. All lease agreements are valid through December 31, 2025 . The participant agreement acknowledges that you have read and understand the expectations and details of participation in the Experience Farming Project.

Payment schedule:

- Signed participant agreement is due by February 15.
- Half the annual lease fee is due by March 15, 2025. Those who do not pay by March 15 need to make alternative payment arrangements with the EFP Manager. This payment is non-refundable.
- Remaining lease fee is due by June 15.

The lease rate is based on market rates and includes the services described in this handbook. Late payments will be subject to a late fee of 10%.

### Program Costs

The program fee includes the cost of the land rental, access to the wash station, cooler space and dry storage. For those farms who need more than a day of wash station time or significant cooler or dry-storage space, an additional fee will apply. Limited high tunnel and/or propagation space is also available for an additional lease fee of \$5 per linear foot . For those in the greenhouse, there will be an additional fee of \$30 per month per outlet for electrical use assessed in advance at the beginning of the season.

Quantity	Price Per Growing Season
¼ Acre or less	\$450
Half Acre	\$700
Acre	\$1300

Reduced fees may be available to those who need financial assistance. Please contact the Experience Farming Project Manager for a discussion of fees prior to signing the participant agreement.

For those requiring financial flexibility, options include:

- reduced rates (for initial 2 years of operation) if funding is available.
- payment plans
- other mutually agreed upon arrangements.

## Expectations for Experience Farming Project participants

- Willingness to take initiative and self-direct farming activities and learning experiences
- Experience Farming Project follows the guidelines set forth by the Certified Naturally Grown non-profit organization. ([www.cngfarming.org](http://www.cngfarming.org))
- Complete an annual survey required by SnoValley Tilth for use in reporting on program success to funders, partners, and interested community members as well as the skills self-assessment.
- No smoking or vaping on EFP premises due to Tobacco Mosaic Virus
- Compliance with the Garbage Disposal policies (see below)
- Compliance with the Weed Management policies (see below)
- Planning and planting to maximize access for cover cropping (see below)

## Garbage Disposal and Food Waste

It is the participants responsibility to pick up and dispose of their own garbage and farm supplies from all common areas on a daily basis, including the wash stations, high tunnels, coolers, dry storage areas, etc.

### Participant Farm Waste

You are responsible for removing all trash from your farm site, including but not limited to stakes, trellises, twine, plastic mulch, landscape fabric, row cover and other supplies after the growing season. Everything must be removed by the end of summer production in October, unless engaged in over-wintering production.

#### In addition

- Remove all trash each day. Follow all Food Safety guidelines and remove debris that would attract pests, including rodents. Keep your fields and all common areas clean and neat at all times.
- Remove materials before they begin to decompose. Any small pieces of plastic or twine that damage equipment may result in fees for the grower.
- Stack and secure all farm supplies neatly to prevent them from blowing into other fields.
- Growers—including those with employees—should take extra care to dispose of plastic bottles or other food or drink packaging.

#### Trash Accumulation

- In instances of severe trash accumulation
  - SnoValley Tilth will provide grower with written notice.
  - The grower will have 72 hours to remedy the situation, and if no action is taken, we will remove trash at grower's expense

*There will be fees levied for any egregious instances of trash dumping or accumulation. Fee amount will correspond to the severity of the instance, and will be levied at the discretion of SnoValley Tilth.*

## Abandoned Property

Best attempts will be made to allow for owners to claim property that appears to be abandoned, but ultimately the SnoValley Tilth reserves the right to dispose of any property left on-site.

## Weed Management

Weed management is an extremely important and challenging part of organic vegetable and small fruit production.

- Uncontrolled weeds steal water and fertility from the soil and outcompete the crops you are trying to grow, reducing yields.
- Weeds that go to seed deposit millions of seeds into the “seed bank” that will take many years to deplete. These same seeds are transported to neighboring plots and parcels which will have a direct impact on your neighbors and their production.

*It is of utmost importance that weeds are managed for the benefit of your and your neighbors production during the season, but this management also benefits future farming efforts. As farmers, we are stewards of the land and are obligated to work to leave it in better condition than we found it.*

Farmers growing organically have fewer tools at their disposal to control weeds. The primary means of controlling weeds are either by hand or mechanization. Mechanical cultivation is the responsibility of you, the farmer.

- Weed management can be subcontracted should you not have the capacity to do it yourself. If you choose to do this, make sure you plant to the scale of the cultivation equipment.
- If you plan to use your own cultivation equipment, please plant according to the equipment that they plan on using.

## Weed Management Expectations

In the event that a weed management issue is identified (subject to SnoValley Tilth management), **the farmer will be given written notice and will have 72 hours to address the situation.** If the situation has not been taken care of within 72 hours, SnoValley Tilth will:

- Use whatever mechanical means possible to get the weeds managed
  - **An additional \$30/hour will be charged on top of whatever equipment and operator costs are associated to address the issue.**
- In extreme situations or where mechanical cultivation and weed management are not possible, crops may be disked in.
- SnoValley Tilth will not be held responsible for any damage that occurs to crops in the event that auxiliary weed management is required.

SnoValley Tilth maintains weeds in all common areas, including roads and the edges of parcels. Growers are responsible for maintaining weeds within their parcels, including around irrigation lines.

## Cover Cropping

Cover cropping is an important part of a sustainable farming system. It builds organic matter in the soil, maintains soil health, prevents weeds and stabilizes the soil when flooding occurs.

- Participants are required to have plots prepared for fall/winter cover cropping. The block areas you wish to have cover-cropped must be cleared and planted with cover-crop seeds by Sept 15<sup>th</sup>, as research shows that planting cover-crop by this date provides the greatest benefits. Any area of your plot not cover-cropped must be overwintered responsibly to prevent soil erosion loss during flood season.

## Failure to Comply & Probation

Every farmer involved with the EFP program must agree to follow the rules and guidelines laid out in this Participant Handbook. While EFP staff will make every reasonable effort to communicate with farmers around any questions, comments, or concerns with policies and rules laid out in this manual, **it is ultimately the grower's responsibility to ensure that their farm operation is in compliance with all guidelines detailed here.** Please contact EFP management for any questions or clarification on any policies.

In instances where a farmer or farm operation fails to comply with any of the specified guidelines, there will be a process to address the issue:

1. The Farmer will be given a verbal warning and a chance to remedy the issue as simply and quickly as possible.
2. The Farmer will be issued a written warning and given a second chance to remedy the issue as quickly as possible.
3. The Farmer will be placed on probation. Once on Probation, the farmer will be required to meet with the EFP committee in order to agree upon a plan and timeline for the farmer to be removed from probation. Upon meeting the terms of the agreement, at the discretion of the EFP management, farmers will be removed from probation.
4. Failure to comply with the terms of Probation will result in the forfeiture of any possibility to lease from SVT or participate in EFP in the future. Refusal to participate in the probation process is grounds for immediate removal from the EFP program, cancellation of leases, and plowing in of any crops currently growing.

**There are several other instances that will result in immediate removal from the EFP program and cancellation of leases:** The use of non-organic inputs, intentional abuse or theft of EFP or other farmers' property, fields, or products, use of illegal drugs or weapons on EFP property, or any kind of violence or aggression toward others.

**If a farmer is asked to leave the EFP program for any of the reasons listed above, there will be no refunds of any fees or forgiveness of outstanding dues or bills.**

## Diversity and Acceptance

We are strongly committed to cultivating a sustainable food system that is just and equitable for all people. We expect farmers to be respectful and inclusive of all people and backgrounds. You will be encouraged to engage with a diverse group of peers, mentors, customers, and neighbors through the project. No disrespect or discrimination of people based on culture, ethnicity, gender, orientation, religion, or identity will be tolerated. Such behavior could be grounds for expulsion from the program and termination of your lease agreement.

## Problem Solving and Communication

There is a 100% certainty that during your time as an EFP participant you will run into an issue that needs resolution. As a farmer, one of the skills you will use on a regular basis will be that of creative problem solving. When it comes to common infrastructure and equipment we ask that you make your best attempt at resolving the issue yourself. If you are able and you think that this issue will also affect other participants, please communicate with the EFP manager so that repair or maintenance can occur in a timely manner. If you are still unable to solve the issue, please reach out to the EFP manager for support. As a business owner, you will no doubt be busy, and sometimes you will feel like you don't have the time. Please make the time to communicate about issues on the property. If everyone works together in this regard, the season will progress much more smoothly for the entire EFP community!

*The Experience Farming Project and SnoValley Tilth is committed to working with you on your farm enterprise and hope that you take advantage of the resources, community and educational opportunities available through our other programs. New farm businesses are an essential part of a resilient agricultural economy and we thank you for beginning that journey with the Experience Farming Project at SnoValley Tilth. Should you have any feedback or suggestions about the policies or anything else related to the program, please let us know.*

## SnoValley Tilth Experience Farming Project Participant Agreement

I understand that I have been selected to participate in the Experience Farming Project because I show interest, aptitude, tenacity, and ability to independently operate a small farm.

I have read and understand the project opportunities and expectations as outlined in the Experience Farming Project Handbook.

I agree to participate fully and in accordance with the expectations outlined in the Experience Farming Project Handbook.

I agree to pay \_\_\_\_\_ which will cover program costs for \_\_\_\_\_ acre(s).

Additional fees:

\_\_\_\_\_ \$5.00 per linear foot for greenhouse use

\_\_\_\_\_ Use of greenhouse with electrical (\$30 per month, flat fee for electrical)

I agree to pay for additional services according to pricing outlined in Experience Farming Project Handbook.

I understand that a disregard of these terms may result in a termination of my participation in the Experience Farming Project.

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**Participant Signature**

**Date**

**Address:**

**Phone:**

**Email:**

**Preferred method of communication:**

\_\_\_\_\_ copy of photo ID

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**Project Manager Signature**

**Date**