

Addressing The Skills Gap: The Apprentice's Tale



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Ex-apprentice, now market garden business owner

Gap? What Gap?

- λ 2005-6 study shows average age of farmer in UK was 53.3yrs old (Farm Business Survey)
- λ Horticulture average was 55.7yrs
- λ Average age in 2012 was 58 (RASE report)
- λ Younger workers most likely to be found on larger farms
- λ 60,000 new entrants needed over decade
- λ Falling incomes & lack of respect off-putting

Minding The Gap

- λ Agricultural apprenticeships doubled 2009-2012
- λ Biodynamic, Soil Association, Hill Farmers, EDGE/local, colleges & universities
- λ Other work-based training: Future Growers, WWOOF, Lantra courses



Apprenticeship Details

- λ 2 years working on an organic holding
- λ Horticultural and/or agricultural
- λ Seminars & theory
- λ Extra training days & networking
- λ Project & log book/diary
- λ No age restrictions (16+)
- λ Fees (eg currently £1,600 per year)



Apprentice Commitments

- λ Pays apprenticeship training fees (help may be available from Lantra, Prince's Trust etc)
- λ Uses own time to attend seminars
- λ Project (blog/diary?)

- λ Hands-on experience (growing, marketing, business, machinery, planning rotations)
- λ Theory put into practice; & freedom for trials
- λ Networking: potential jobs, customers, good marketing/growing ideas

Farmer or Grower's Commitments

- λ At least min. wage pay (and/or equivalent)
- λ Mentorship & contact: min 1hr/week
- λ Varied work & responsibilities
- λ Usual holiday & worker benefits

- λ Interested & engaged worker
- λ Brings other skills in
- λ Brings other ideas from farm walks/seminars
- λ Brings potential marketing opportunities
- λ Good PR & sharing skills

A Day In The Life Of An Apprentice

Hours: average 9am-5pm (some earlier or later), 5 days a week

Jobs include: collect, grade & pack eggs; harvest veg; pack veg boxes; sow/drill seeds; plant/pot-on seedlings; side-shooting; weeding; soil preparation (rotovator/tines); help move cows; feed pigs; work on marketing & leaflets; manage other workers; seed orders & derogations; business planning

Post Apprenticeship

Apprentice alumni: some stayed on at farms; new jobs/head growers; taken skills into teaching/other industries; started own horticultural businesses

Further training & skills: research & trials; via contacts & networks; taking on new apprentices/trainees; local growers' groups

What's needed: more placements on farms; share skills & knowledge; raise profile & value of agriculture & horticulture

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