



*Stewards of the Land*

## **Wanted: New Stewards on the Northern Plains**

### **State of Montana Registered Organic Farmworker Apprenticeship Two Positions (One Targeted for a Veteran)**

**Sponsor - Vilicus Farms  
Havre, MT**

Vilicus Farms is a first generation, nationally recognized organic, dryland crop farm located in northern Hill County, Montana. Established in 2009, Vilicus Farms grows a diverse array of heirloom and specialty grains, pulse, oilseed and broadleaf crops within a 5+year rotation on approximately 5,000 acres. Vilicus Farms practices advanced land stewardship at a scale that matters. Integral to Vilicus Farms' mission of land stewardship is an aspiration to also steward new organic farm professionals.

Increasing demand for organic grain and the increasing age of farmers, and landowners, in the state of Montana provide substantial opportunities for organic farming professionals and entrepreneurs. Montana is ranked number in the nation for production of organic grain and organic lentils. Vilicus Farms Apprentices will be leaders that help to further the understanding that land stewardship must be integral to food production.

#### **Registered Apprenticeship Description**

Two positions will be filled in 2017. One position is targeted specifically for a Veteran. This position is part of the National Center for Appropriate Technology's [Armed to Farm](#) program and partially funded through a USDA Beginning Farmer Rancher Development grant.

Positions are a minimum of a two-year career development commitment, requiring 4000 hours of on-the-job training and 288 hours of coursework. Apprenticeships may culminate with full-time employment as a farm worker with Vilicus Farms; with continued training in farm management; or with qualifications for employment with another organic farm or farm business. These positions are very unique and are pilot programs in consultation with the Montana Department of Labor and Industry and Montana State University-Northern. Apprenticeships can be tailored to individual Apprentice's skills, learning needs and previous education and experience.

#### **Duties**

Apprentices will work under the direct supervision of the Farm Managers and will be an integral part of the Vilicus Farms team, expected to participate fully in daily work planning sessions, and weekly/monthly team discussions. Apprentices will participate in the physical labor of the operation as well as some of the mental challenges of managing the farm business. Specific activities will be



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dependent upon the operations needed for any given season. Responsibilities and tasks will generally include:

- Large-scale machinery operations, tillage, seeding, cultivation, cover crop termination, green manure incorporation, swathing, combining, and crop handling, storage and delivery.
- Field and crop scouting to monitor crop conditions, weed, pest, disease incidents, and soil health.
- Record keeping, maintenance, review, development and analysis. Including documentation of field operations, organic certification records, and conservation practices.
- Machinery maintenance, periodic service, cleaning and repairs.
- Planning and implementation of conservation practices such as wildlife and pollinator habitat, windbreaks, field border establishment.
- Facility upkeep and minor construction, weeding and mowing.
- Participation in field days, farm tours, and conferences to further develop knowledge of dryland cropping systems, organic production and grow connections with the network of organic producers in the northern plains.

Year one of the Apprenticeship will be an immersion experience in all facets of the dryland organic crop farm enterprise. Specific duties and responsibilities will be based on the initial skills and experiences of the Apprentice.

Year two of the Apprenticeship will further develop skills and a land stewardship ethic. The Apprentice will have increasing responsibility and leadership opportunities as their skills and abilities grow.

The State approved work progress schedule and related instructional course listing are available upon request.

Numerous opportunities for projects that connect on-the-job training with coursework, the needs of the farm enterprise and the Apprentice's individual interests exist. Possible projects could include, but are not limited to: transition to biobased oils and lubricants, soil health monitoring protocol, specialty crop management, cover crop documentation, technology streamlining of in-field record keeping, wildlife/pollinator habitat and conservation practice implementation, energy in/out analysis, creating an annual sustainability report, equipment upgrade planning, or working with one of our buyers to explore increasing sustainability and risk sharing through the entire food system value chain

Apprentices will have opportunities to attend at least one off-season conference/learning forum. This may include providing a presentation about their apprenticeship experience. This is dependent upon schedule, interest and topic. Apprentices will be compensated for travel expenses associated with conference attendance



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### **Work schedule**

Work at a farm is highly seasonal and does not run on a time clock. Our busiest season is seeding (approximately 9 weeks, early April – early June) and we will work 6 days a week, usually 12-hour days unless it rains. During our off-season (approximately 9 weeks, early December – mid-February) we work only what is necessary, usually 20 hours or less a week. Day to day changes in work hours can and will occur to accommodate Mother Nature, soil and crop conditions, equipment needs and crew capacity.

### **Location**

The farm is located 40 miles from the nearest town in a very rural location with limited population. Candidates should be willing to embrace this lifestyle and understand there is limited access to services. The closest larger population center is Medicine Hat, Alberta Canada approximately 100 miles away.

### **Minimum Requirements**

Applicants must have a keen interest in the work of farming and organic agriculture. They must be self-starters, and highly motivated individuals. Applicants must have the ability to work independently, appreciate the challenges and joys of working outside in all conditions, be a solid problem solver, with an open creative mind, and embrace diversity. The chosen applicants must be mature individuals and excited to engage in their own learning process. Ideal candidates have worked on a farm or have some basic training in agriculture and can provide some proof of success in a classroom setting that shows their desire to learn. Ability to be curious, reflective and engage a sense of humor is a necessity. Candidates must have a high school diploma or equivalent. They need to show hands on agricultural experiences that are sufficient to have led them to know they want to pursue a life in agriculture. Candidates must have a valid US drivers license with a good record, and a passport allowing travel to Canada. Additionally candidates must be able to:

- Lift a minimum of 50 lbs.,
- Drive a standard transmission,
- Work outside in adverse and variable weather conditions,
- Spend long days working independently on repetitive tasks
- Drive large equipment for multiple hours at a time
- Maintain a sense of humor no matter the circumstances
- Handle changing priorities – sometime multiple changes in a day

### **Compensation**

Starting at \$1,500/month salary, plus independent housing (valued at \$600/month) and participation in the Vilicus Farms Employee Education Assistance Plan to cover educational expenses of up to \$2,500 annually. Two wage increments will occur during the 2-year apprenticeship with another wage increase and profit-sharing opportunity upon completion of the Apprenticeship for employees



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willing to commit to longer-term employment with Vilicus farms. Veterans are encouraged to identify GI Bill benefits that may apply to this formal training opportunity.

Applicants must be able to provide their own health insurance.

### **Application Requirements**

For additional information contact:

[Anna@Vilicusfarms.com](mailto:Anna@Vilicusfarms.com) 406-459-9944

The farm landline phone number is 406-394-2469.

Applications will be accepted until December 15<sup>th</sup>, 2016.

Video interviews will be conducted, by Skype or Google Hangout , between the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of December and early January for semi-finalists. For finalists, in-person interviews at the farm will be conducted in January. There will be some travel assistance for the on-site interviews. Start date is March 1<sup>st</sup> allowing the Apprentice to have time for orientation and to participate in pre-season preparations.

Applications should be submitted to [anna@vilicusfarms.com](mailto:anna@vilicusfarms.com) (Apprentice 2017 in the subject line).

Application packages should include:

- A. A cover letter, please note if you are a Veteran.
- B. A current resume.
- C. A list of at least three references.
- D. Narrative responses that answer the following questions:
  1. Why is this Apprenticeship important to you and how will this Apprenticeship help you meet your long-term career goals?
  2. Describe your experiences in agriculture, specifically your role on a farm or ranch. What did you like? What didn't you like?
  3. How are you a good fit for Vilicus farms? What specific sets, knowledge and abilities would you bring to Vilicus Farms? What specific skill sets, knowledge and abilities do you want to grow?
  4. It's spring of 2025. Describe your vision of your typical day. Don't tell us what you think we want to hear. Tell us what you really want to be doing.
  5. What does the term "organic" mean to you?
  6. If you were hiring an Apprentice what would be most important to you?
  7. In your opinion, and with your current understanding of agricultural practices, briefly describe what you see as the ideal direction for agriculture. What would be your top three steps to get there? What is your role in making these changes?