

Dairy Internship at Paradise Gardens and Farm

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Introduction

Internship opportunities provide a useful skill in a particular area in order to enhance performance in one's future career. My internship was a kind of apprenticeship. There are lots of things that need to be done before you choose a certain profession as your career. A good apprenticeship or internship provides an excellent platform, whereby the apprentice performs the day-to-day work through which he or she learns and practices how to perform a particular job in the proper way for the future.

I am Govinda Narayan, a native of Nepal. My future goal is to become a social entrepreneur by being an organic goat farmer in the foot hills of the Himalayas. That is my dream. But having a dream and achieving that dream, in most cases, are two very different things. An academic institute or training center helps to bridge that gap by providing knowledge and skills. The reason I entered Tokyo University of Agriculture and Technology was to equip myself with a basic know-how of farming, and to gain an understanding of how to implement rural development in a sustainable way. One of my objectives was to gain first-hand knowledge of the interrelationship between the environment and agriculture. This is why I chose FOLENS, due to its relevant curriculum and internship opportunities.

My FOLENS internship, which lasted two years, provided me with basic knowledge about environmental degradation and how to protect and preserve the environment. Through discussion opportunities, class work and workshops, the organization helped me to grasp the prerequisite knowledge in this field. It also provided me with the opportunity to work on a dairy farm called Paradise Gardens and Farm LLC, in Pennsylvania, USA.



My mentor and the owner of the farm, Stephen Cleghorn, leading the goats on a rainy day. I can be seen on the far right. (Photo: Pittsburgh Tribune-Review)

Paradise Gardens and Farm LLC is an organic farm, spreading over 53 acres of land, with about 5 acres of organic garden within it. The creamery is the main business of the farm. The farm has 32 milking goats and more than 50 hens and roosters. The farm was established as a training center for youth who want to become farmers, as well as providing a model, in concept and practice, of environmental friendliness through sustainable farming. Paradise Gardens and Farm is also an eco-friendly farm, which runs its dairy by solar energy

As mentioned earlier, I am looking forward to my career in organic goat farming, which will be based on environmentally friendly principles and the sustainable utilization of local resources. The internship consisted of different learning and practical opportunities.

Activities during the internship

During the internship I learnt and practiced how to milk the goats using inflation, which was my first lesson. I woke up at 5 am in the morning and milked the goats, which usually took 2 hours. After milking, pasteurization had to be done; this usually gets inspected every 3 months by an authorized person. I learnt to perform, almost error free, the operation of milk pasteurization procedures and record keeping. One of the other main tasks of my internship was to make artisan cheese which, is farmstead cheese. It was a delicate job, which required fastidious work, hygiene control skills, culinary art (you have to know about the peculiar taste of natural cheese), and patience. Chèvre and feta are two kinds of cheese I learnt to make, which was very useful as well as a fantastic experience. I also made yogurt and bottled goat milk. Along with daily chores, I became familiar with the solar energy system, which provides electricity to the dairy. Surplus solar energy generated by the farm used to be sold by sending it to the main electricity grid.



Lucinda Hart-Gonzalez and I posing for the *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review* in the dairy with our products. (Photo: *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review*)

Besides working in the creamery, I learnt how to feed and take care of goats. The goat is a pretty animal, which is sensitive and smart. However, just like other domestic animals they are prone to disease, which is mainly transferred through their feed – in other words, grass. Therefore, to control the spread of diseases I learnt how to take preventive measures to keep them healthy. Cleaning the barn was one of my jobs. Checking the behavior of the goats to detect possible symptoms of injury or infection was also routine work.

In Nepal, top-soil erosion is a prominent environmental problem due to overgrazing in hilly areas, as well as in the plains areas of the country. Realizing the potential threat from such animal grazing, Paradise Gardens and Farm has implemented a rotational grazing system, which not only minimizes top-soil erosion but also minimizes the risk of spreading parasites. I had an opportunity to learn and observe these practices. Rotational grazing was traditionally used in Nepal, but this is not the case nowadays.



Stephen and I at the Farmer's Market in Pittsburgh, selling our products. (Photo: Yuka Timilsina)

Sales is the most challenging job for most small scale-farmers, because of their relatively low volume of sales and inability to compete with large-scale producers. Paradise Gardens and Farm provided me with an outstanding opportunity to market its products through two areas of marketing activities: direct sales, and supplies to department stores and brokers. I was taught how to display the products at the Farmers' Market at Pittsburgh, and the company also provided me with the opportunity to maintain relationships with its main clients. During my term at the farm, I devised and implemented a new approach involving a price incentive marketing strategy, and cost efficient operation and handling techniques.

Experience and Achievements

Besides all the other skills and lessons, I learnt that understanding human relations in any organization counts for a lot. The success or failure of every organization is mostly based on co-ordination and co-operation among its staff, because their work and talents propel and shape the organization. Based on my internship experience, I learnt that this is a key factor in operating an organization. Other than that, techniques for animal keeping and the proper care of them was the most useful experience. Working at the creamery enabled me to make cheeses and sell them at the market.

If I had to pick my main achievements from doing the internship, however, I would have to say it was public relation building and generating knowledge assets, mainly entrepreneurial skills. Learning how human beings, animals and other organic materials share the earth and how to improve their inter-relationships has been a challenging task in environmental, agricultural and other sectors. After being at the farm for 6 months, I have gained an idea of how to manage it on a small scale.

One of the rewarding experiences of my work at Paradise Gardens and Farm was when the *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review* published a cover story on the farm and my work in its May 31, 2011 issue.

Relationship to future career development as a field-oriented leader in Asia and Africa

As I mentioned earlier, I am going to be an organic farmer. Nepal, where I come from, is a mountainous country, including the Himalayas. Every year monsoon brings havoc in the form of rising rivers and landslides. Every year many people lose their lives, family and property, and most of them are poor farmers: ridiculously, in this world most of the poor are farmers.

In search of knowledge to eradicate poverty among farmers and to take the necessary initiatives for controlling environmental degradation, I entered Tokyo University of Agriculture and Technology with some anticipation of discovering measures to fight against such environmental degradation in the foot hills of the Himalayas. I learnt that overpopulation need much food to sustain, which eventually impact on overpopulation of domestic animals due to rise of food demand. Severe environmental damage often occurs as a consequence of over-exploitation of natural resources. Thus, to ensure the sustainable utilization of those resources, it is important to run a farm – or any other type of human activity – sustainably. In the future, I, with the support of local people, would like to take the initiative by operating a goat farm in an environmental friendly way, which in the long run will have the potential to become a local institute for needy farmers who wish to maximize the benefits of the available resources without any harm to the sustainability of those resources.

To conclude, I would like to convey my sincere thanks to FOLENS as well as its contributors. I am also indebted to Paradise Gardens and Farm for providing me with such a useful opportunity for an internship.