



Dear Farmer,

The *New York State Veterans in Ag Project* at the Cornell Small Farms Program is working to create pathways into agriculture for military veterans. Veterans often enter the workforce with skills and attributes which make them uniquely suited for farm work. As they transition out of their military service, many veterans are looking for rewarding careers, which will allow them to put down roots in New York State. At the same time, farms are facing the challenge of finding qualified, dependable, and loyal staff for their farms. One way to help veterans enter a career in agriculture is through formal on the job training on farms. The Small Farms Program is seeking farmers interested in training and hiring veterans as part of the New York State Division of Veterans' Affairs' (DVA) *On the Job Training* (OJT) program.

Currently, OJT is utilized almost exclusively by the trades and unions (electricians, plumbers, etc.) This project aims to bring a new level of professional training to the agriculture industry. The OJT program, as administered by the DVA, is a 6 month to 2 year-long training program with an approved training outline for veterans utilizing their GI Bill funds. Cornell Small Farms, along with the DVA, will help each farm modify or create a simple training outline covering what the veteran will be expected to learn while he/she is employed at the farm as a trainee. The veteran is paid by the farm at a rate equal to that of any other trainee while also receiving a portion of their military housing allowance (MHA). Using this benefit the veteran can offset their family's cost of living, while working for a training level wage at the farm. Those funds are solely intended to help defray living expenses for the veteran while learning the basics in order to become a farmer.

Farms hiring through the on the job training program should be in a position to offer full-time employment to the veteran at the end of the training term. Of course, this is contingent on the relationship being mutually beneficial, with the farm gaining a valuable, well-trained employee. Small Farms Program staff will assist farms in applying for the program and will work to help match farms with veterans to ensure positive experiences for all involved. If you feel that your farm is interested and capable of providing on the job training to a veteran or if you have any questions about the OJT program, please contact us.

Sincerely,

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Outline of the NYS OJT program for Veterans -For On-Farm Training only-

Getting your Farm Approved as an OJT Program

- Cornell Small Farms Program will develop an enterprise specific training program with each individual farm (see attached sample outline).
- The training period must be between 6 months to 2 years in duration.
- An application is submitted, and a representative of The Division of Veterans Affairs will visit the farm and meet with the farmer briefly.
- Once approved as an OJT site, the job will be posted to find applicants.
- The farmer will select a veteran trainee, and both will sign a training agreement which includes the proposed training program and wage scale. (see OJT Training Agreement)

During the training period

- The farm pays a trainee's normal wages, which must not be less than 50% of a trained positions' rate. The rate must increase to at least 85% of the trained position's rate for the last full month of training.
- During the training period, the veteran will receive a portion of their military housing allowance (MHA). During the training period, the veteran is given 100% of their housing allowance during the first six months, 80% during their second six months, 60% during the third six months, and 40% for the remaining 6 months.
- Once a month, during the training period, the farmer will submit a standardized report to the VA confirming the veteran is still receiving the approved training. This form should take no more than 5 minutes to fill out (see attached VA Form 22-6553).

At the completion of the training period

- If the training has been mutually beneficial, there should be a full-time position available to the veteran at the end of the training period.