

University Lab Coat

THE CENTER FOR
AGROECOLOGY AND
SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS

Not all of UC Santa Cruz's laboratories are tucked inside air-conditioned buildings filled with beakers, test tubes and pale scientists sporting bleached-white lab coats. In fact, at one of the university's oldest labs, trowels, wheelbarrows and tan agriculturalists with dirt-stained jeans are the norm.

That's because those studying at the Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems' Apprenticeship in Ecological Horticulture spend most of the time outdoors on the 25-acre UCSC Farm or in the three-acre Alan Chadwick Garden, getting their hands dirty.

The CASFS was established in 1967, just two years after the university was founded. Since then it has been an invaluable resource to students of agriculture, whether officially enrolled at UCSC or participating in the center's apprenticeship program.

The Apprenticeship in Ecological Horticulture, provides specific and practical skills in agroecology and organic farming. The program is open to the public, not just university students. Enrollees don't need to have an undergraduate degree or even a high school diploma, although Brown says most who apply are at a post-graduate level.

Interest in the program has seen a great spike in recent years. The CASFS had to turn away 75 percent of all applicants to this summer's apprenticeship session.

"That's just an indication that people really want to learn about this stuff," says Martha Brown, senior editor for the CASFS. "People are becoming more aware and they want to learn about food systems."

The CASFS provides specific and practical skills in agroecology and organic farming to those enrolled in the apprenticeship program, which is open to the public with few prerequisites. Enrollees don't need to have an undergraduate degree or even a high school diploma, although Brown says most who apply are at a post-graduate level.

"Most of the people that come in have had some experience on organic farms or gardens," Brown says. "They realize that this is what they want to do for a living but they don't have the training or grounding to do it. They are coming to get a particular set of very practical skills as opposed to theoretical."

Many of the program's applicants are interested in sharing what they learn in the living laboratories of the UCSC Farm and Alan Chadwick Garden with communities throughout the United States and around the world. Brown says many graduates of the apprentice program have gone on to work on urban farming projects in major metropolitan areas such as New York. The goal is to help people use local resources to live healthier, more productive lives.

There is another component to the CASFS quest, however. As a program within the UCSC social science division, the CASFS is also interested in promoting social justice in agricultural communities. The treatment of farm workers, Brown says, is just as important as the treatment of local ecosystems.

"I know we live in a community where we have a lot of options," she says. "Other regions throughout the country and world are not as fortunate. "Ultimately we want everybody to be able to eat and eat well." | [Nick Veronin](#)

Learn more at casfc.ucsc.edu.

CHARLES MIXSON

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Ross Clark

GREEN TO GREENER TO BLUER

Santa Cruz residents' collective carbon footprint would fit inside a 6-year-old's sneaker. The average California home burns enough fossil fuel (not counting transportation) to release 4.5 tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere each year. The average Santa Cruz home produces about 3.5 tons of the greenhouse gas, according to Ross Clark, the city's climate change action coordinator, a position created in 2007 to drive the city's efforts to lower its carbon footprint.

Santa Cruz's mild weather accounts for some of that savings—our heaters and air-conditioning units (if you have one) don't have to work too hard to keep us comfortable. But there's no doubt that Santa Cruzans have put forth a proactive effort to lower their carbon emissions.

Between 1996 and 2005, the city of Santa Cruz as a whole reduced its carbon footprint by 11 percent, according to a 2008 city report.

So, if you already ride your bike to work, recycle your garbage and buy local, organic produce, what more can you do to save the planet? Just a little bit more, Clark says, and the city is teaching people how to do it. Clark leads an initiative called "30 by 20" in which the city vies to reduce its carbon emissions by 30 percent, based on 1990 levels, by 2020.

Reaching the 30 by 20 goal requires an engaged citizenry. To that end, last year the city began organizing Climate Action Teams to involve residents. The five- to 10-member teams, plucked from neighborhood groups, churches and other organizations, meet four

times over six weeks. They calculate their current carbon footprint—including their homes, transportation and purchases—and explore ways to shrink it.

"The idea is that everyone can find a 30 percent reduction in how they use energy and materials in the next 12 years," Clark says. "Everyone should be able to do so easily and without undermining their livelihood or their standard of living."

To date, eight teams have participated in the program and have found ways to reduce carbon emissions by an average of 1.6 tons annually per participant household—and that's without making a major investment, such as buying a hybrid car or installing solar panels.

Team members found that shifts as simple as taking shorter showers and washing fewer loads of laundry began to shrivel their carbon footprints. (Heating water and treating wastewater are energy-intensive ventures.) Switching to efficient lightbulbs, steering clear of products with a lot of unnecessary packaging, composting food waste and committing to keeping the car parked one day a week can cumulatively make a big difference.

"As people start to talk about it, they realize that there are simple ways they can reduce," Clark says. "Everyone that has gone through the program finds new and innovative ways to reduce their energy use." | [Laurel Chesky](#)

Find out more about 30 by 20 and Climate Action Teams at 30x20.org.