

Spannocchia



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## Farm Internship Program: Frequently Asked Questions

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### Program Background and Costs

**Q: Who runs the Farm Internship Program?**

A: The Farm Internship is run by Friends of Spannocchia, a US-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that supports the educational activities and conservation initiatives at the Spannocchia farm property in Italy. Friends of Spannocchia works with the Associazione Castello di Spannocchia, our Italian-based partner, to implement programming onsite, as well as Tenuta di Spannocchia, the organic farm and agritourism property. (We know it sounds a little confusing, but in practice, it just feels like one cohesive organization with staff in both Italy and the United States!)

**Q: How long has the Farm Internship Program been in existence at Spannocchia?**

A: Since 1985, Tenuta di Spannocchia and the Etruscan Foundation have hosted volunteers and interns who have worked on the farm in exchange for room and board. Under the auspices of the Etruscan Foundation in the late 1990s, the Internship Program (formerly called the “Farm Program” and “Garden Internship”) developed a more formal syllabus that included Italian language study, field trips, and educational presentations. Friends of Spannocchia has supported the educational elements of the Internship Program since 2003.

**Q: What is the Spannocchia community like: Who else is part of it, what else does Spannocchia do?**

A: Spannocchia is a truly unique and beautiful property and community dating back to 1225 (with portions of the property even older); we recommend reading [Our Story](#) on our website for historical context about the estate and the Cinelli family’s role over the last century. Francesca Cinelli and Randall Stratton still have a home at Spannocchia, and split their time between Italy and the US. There is a small number of other ongoing residents—some longtime and some newer—all of whom also work for either the Associazione or the farm. Short-term residents include the farm interns, apprentices, and sporadic WWOOFers. Finally, between April and November there is a steady flow of international guests—both as part of educational program groups and as independent agritourism visitors—who stay in bed &

breakfast-style accommodations in the Villa/Fattoria buildings, or in farmhouse rentals that are scattered throughout the property.

Comprised of 1100 acres, Spannocchia lies within the Alto Merse Nature Reserve, a protected area rich in wildlife and biodiversity. A large portion of the property is wooded, and managed according to a sustainable forestry plan. In addition to the elements of the farm that the interns participate in daily, Spannocchia runs an award-winning salumi operation; local sales of farm products including honey, meats, and wine; farm-to-table dining not only for the Spannocchia community but also for area residents and travelers; and a limited number of tours, classes, and events/activities for day visitors.

**Q: Explain more about the costs associated with the program. Why is there a fee to participate?**

A: All participants are required to pay a one-time education fee of \$1500 directly to Friends of Spannocchia. This covers just about a third of the full cost of running the program, with the rest paid by Friends of Spannocchia, thanks to the generous support of our donors and foundation grants. The fee is used to offset educational costs including Italian lessons, field trips, learning materials, and educational presentations, and includes a one-year student-level membership to Friends of Spannocchia. Interns may pay this fee directly or use our crowdfunding platform to support their participation. All interns must also become members of [WWOOF Italia](#) (World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms), which costs €35.

Participants are responsible for their own travel costs to and from Spannocchia, and for any expenses they incur during their free time.

**Q: Do more internship programs like Spannocchia's exist?**

A: Yes and no. There are many agriculture volunteerships, internships, and apprenticeships in the States and Europe, and the WWOOF organization lists organic farms looking for volunteers. The Internship Program at Spannocchia is unique, as it offers an educational curriculum in agriculture, food, and Italian culture, making it much more than a work exchange. Online searches for “farm internships,” “volunteer in Italy,” etc. may be helpful if you'd like to find out about other programs in existence.

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## Eligibility

**Q: Can non-Americans apply to the Farm Internship Program?**

A: Yes! All nationalities are encouraged to apply, and we've hosted interns from around the world. Historically, the majority of interns have been American because Friends of Spannocchia is based in the United States and the application process is

done in English. However, we recognize the unique value in a diverse and international intern group, and welcome applications from all interested and qualified candidates, regardless of nationality/citizenship or current residence.

**Q: Do I need a special Visa to participate in the program?**

A: For citizens of the United States, the European Union, and many other non-EU countries, no visa is required for travel in Italy for up to 90 days, and our Internship and Apprenticeship programs are designed to fit within this timeframe. **If you are not from the EU or the US, you are responsible for determining if you will need a Schengen Visa to stay in Italy for the duration of the internship. Spannocchia is unable to provide assistance with Visa applications.**

If you are an EU citizen and would like to remain in Italy for more than 90 days, it is not necessary to acquire a visa. US and other non-EU citizens have visa requirements for stays longer than 90 days, and interns are responsible for determining and handling these on their own if they plan on a longer stay.

For more information for US citizens, see the [Department of State's travel website](#).

**Q: What are the typical ages of interns?**

A: Applicants must be a minimum of 18 years old by the start of their session, and under 35. Most farm interns are between 20 and 30 years old, but we strive to create internship groups with a diverse range of ages and life/work/school experiences. Regardless of age, the accommodation is a shared, double room in a rustic, communal farmhouse for all eight interns, butcher/culinary apprentices, and (at times) short-term WWOOF volunteers.

**Q: Can couples, friends, and siblings apply to the Internship Program together?**

A: Yes, although the chances of being selected are greatly reduced. Couples, friends, and siblings must submit separate applications. **If you are connected with someone who is applying, you must state clearly on the application what the nature of your relationship is to one another** (e.g., girlfriend, brother, friend, roommate, spouse, etc.), **and whether you'd like to be considered together or separately in the selection process.** Group dynamics are always taken into account when building each group, and we usually prefer to accept individuals with no ties to other accepted candidates.

**Q: Can families apply to the Internship Program? What if I would like to bring my young children with me to the program?**

A: Unfortunately, families or individuals with dependent children are not eligible for the internship program. The housing we offer is limited to a single bed in a double room, so we simply cannot accommodate families or children.

**Q: How competitive is the Spannocchia Internship Program?**

A: We typically receive between 35-45 applications for the 8 available spots for each session. We seek to build each internship group as a diverse but well-balanced whole, giving consideration to geographic diversity, educational background, work experience, future goals, age, gender, etc. The summer session tends to see the highest number of applicants. Due to the high number of applications, we cannot consider any applications that arrive after each session's deadline or that are significantly incomplete (e.g., missing multiple references, etc.) at the session deadline.

**Q: I'd like to apply, but I can't participate in the full length of the session. Am I still eligible?**

A: No. All interns must participate in the full duration of the session.

**Q: If I apply early, can I be accepted early?**

A: No. We review all applications for each session following the application deadlines, and make our decisions by the listed notification dates. It is important to us to evaluate each applicant individually, but also to take group dynamics into consideration when examining the applicant pool in our interest of building a well-rounded group that will work well together.

**Q: The application deadline has passed for the session I am interested in. Can I apply late?**

A: No. Due to the volume of applications received, internship applications received after the listed deadline dates cannot be accepted.

**Q: Can I participate in more than one session?**

A: No. Our spring, summer, and fall internship programs are highly competitive, and it is important for us to offer this unique educational experience to as many people as possible. Internship Program alumni, however, are welcome to apply for our Butcher/Culinary Apprenticeship or Winter Volunteer programs.

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## Qualifications & Expectations

**Q: Do I need to speak Italian in order to participate in the program?**

A: While we welcome applications from individuals who have studied the Italian language, it is not necessary to have Italian language skills to be considered. However, all accepted candidates are expected to study some Italian before arriving, and we will provide some resources to help with this (free apps like Duolingo are a great place to start!). It is important to remember when considering coming to Spannocchia that **this is not a language immersion experience**, and while we hope you are able to learn some Italian language, it is not the main aim of our programs.

**Q: How important is it to be able to drive a "stick-shift" (manual) vehicle?**

A: It is not a requirement that participants have a driver's license or know how to drive a manual transmission. **However, we have a need for at least three "stick-shift" drivers in each intern group** to assist in farm chores (on-farm transportation, trash duty, supply runs, etc.). **This is particularly important for interns working with our animals**, which are spread throughout the property.

Please note that the vehicle the interns have access to for two hours of driving time for weekend travel is also a manual transmission, so the more drivers available in each intern group, the more flexibility when planning travel.

**Q: Do I need to have lots of experience with farming and/or gardening in order to apply to the Farm Internship Program?**

A: Not necessarily, but a curiosity and willingness to learn about these core elements of the program are essential. We look for applicants who have an interest in organic farming, food, and the environment, are committed to the Friends of Spannocchia mission, and are eager to gain knowledge and skills through experience. We do appreciate some background in these areas, and past experience with physical labor of some sort is advantageous, as challenging, physical work is a fundamental element of the program.

**Q: My background is in organic farming, animal husbandry, and/or Italian language and I am looking for an experience to build my resume. Is the Farm Internship Program right for me?**

A: Maybe. This program provides a good introduction to regenerative farming and Italian language. **The internship is most fitting for individuals who are fairly new to one or all of the aforementioned fields, or have had little practical experience and wish to engage in hands-on learning.** If you have a strong career background in these areas and are looking for an intensive, advanced course, then the Farm Internship Program is probably not the right fit for you. In any event, it is important to have realistic expectations of what the program offers.

*Learning targets and duties include:*

**Team Orto (3 interns): Work with the horticultural expert and farm staff in the extensive gardens, to understand the dynamics of small organic farm planning and implementation.**

- Participate in the management of the vegetable gardens and olive groves: seeding, transplanting, weeding, hoeing, applying treatments, watering, harvesting, taking samples, weighing/measuring/recording, bringing harvest to kitchens/storerooms, etc.
- Collect the compost for the pile every morning.
- Help prepare harvest baskets for guests when needed.
- Monitor chickens and ducks (feed and water, eggs, keeping track of the flock and closing them in at night, repairs to chicken coop/tractor, etc.).
- Do rotating orto (vegetable garden) duty on weekends.
- Rotating general chores (trash/recycling, Villa dinner service, intern lunch duty).
- Anything that needs doing!

**Team Animali (2 interns): Work with farm professionals in all aspects of animal husbandry, to acquire a level of expertise in decision-making about animal care.**

- Participate in the management of pigs and cows, including all feeding and animal care during the week and on weekends (rotating care on weekends).
- Collect slop for pigs every morning.
- Occasional cleaning of animal stalls/housing.
- Help with building projects for the animals.
- Maintain and/or build new fence lines on the property.
- Patrol/fix/maintain the electric fences on the property.
- Mill feed for animals.
- Rotating general chores (trash/recycling, Villa dinner service, intern lunch duty).
- Anything that needs doing!

**Team Tuttofare (3 interns): Work on vineyard management and wine production, general farm projects, and maintenance, to gain comprehensive insight on viticulture and the complexities of running a diverse organic farm.**

- Work in vineyards, including hoeing weeds, selecting and tying vines, pruning, applying treatments, etc.
- Harvesting (depending on time of year: grapes, olives, tree fruits, etc.).
- Work in the cantina helping with the wine (winemaking, bottling, labeling, cleaning, depending on season).
- Responsible for making *fascine* (brush bundles) and managing the *caldaia*—the large, wood-burning furnace that provides all heat (in season) and hot water—on a rotating basis.
- Responsible for Pizza Night fire on a rotating basis.
- Assisting in the gardens with seeding, weeding, transplanting, harvesting, etc. when needed.
- Keeping tools in good condition and keeping workshops clean and organized.
- When necessary, assisting in preparation of firewood on property.
- Rotating general chores (trash/recycling, Villa dinner service, intern lunch duty).
- Anything that needs doing (including assisting in other team duties).

**Q: If accepted, what is expected of me prior to my arrival at Spannocchia?**

A: We will provide more information about general expectations, what to bring, etc. to all confirmed interns well in advance of the start of each session. But in general, we ask that you study some Italian; review the educational resources we share about Spannocchia, farming, food, and environmental issues; participate in a virtual orientation/“meet & greet” with fellow interns and the Farm Education Director; and get excited for what promises to be an incredible experience.

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## COVID-19 Policies

As we welcome interns, apprentices, and volunteers to the Spannocchia property, the health and safety of our farm staff and residents—including all of you—is our priority. While many of our COVID-19 policies have been relaxed or eliminated, we do still maintain a few important precautions, as outlined here:

- You must be fully up to date on COVID-19 vaccination (including booster(s), as eligible) before arrival at Spannocchia. We may require proof of vaccination.
- You will be required to take a rapid test upon arrival at Spannocchia.
- Throughout the entire duration of the program, you must notify Spannocchia staff if you have any COVID-19 symptoms, or learn you’ve been in contact with anyone who tests positive for COVID-19.

Because the global COVID-19 situation continues to evolve, please understand that guidelines are subject to change/tightening at any time, as advised by the Italian or American governments, or as determined by Spannocchia staff. We will do our best to communicate any changes as quickly and clearly as possible. As we’ve all seen throughout the pandemic, flexibility and compassion are essential!

*Note:* It is possible—even if highly unlikely—that the government might reinstate limitations or even severe restrictions regarding moving around Tuscany/Italy, which could lead to most of your time being limited to the Spannocchia property. If you accept this opportunity, this is a possibility you should be aware of and comfortable with.

**If you feel unable or unwilling to adhere to any of the COVID-19 safety policies, Spannocchia is unfortunately not the right fit for you at this time.** We appreciate your understanding, flexibility, and adherence to help make our community as safe as it can be.

*While Spannocchia takes these precautions and others to prioritize the community’s health and safety, Spannocchia is not responsible for any cases of COVID-19 that may arise on or related to the property and this program.*

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## Contact Us

If you have any other immediate questions that were not answered here or online, please feel free to reach out to our Farm Education Director, Niccolò Merighi, at [farmprogram@spannocchia.org](mailto:farmprogram@spannocchia.org).