

Community Food Security Graduate Fellowship 2023-2025

Mountain Roots Food Project and the Master of Environmental Management Program at Western Colorado University welcome applicants for a 2023-2025 Food Systems Graduate Fellowship.

This is a two-year award that provides an opportunity for an outstanding graduate student to engage in the research, project design and management, operations, and innovation for the Mountain Roots Resilient Food System initiatives with a focus on regenerative agriculture and community food security. The Fellowship is also a launch point into for-profit, non-profit, and research-based regenerative agriculture, education, and food security and a deeper understanding of the critical role these play in a resilient food system.

Background

Mountain Roots is a food systems initiative and is a leader in this arena in the central mountain region of Colorado. Our work includes a district-wide Farm to School program, valley-wide Community Food Security efforts, localizing and strengthening the local food economy, and expanding regenerative agriculture across the region.

REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE: Mountain Roots produces food for our community and we model and teach regenerative agriculture for cold climates on a 1.5-acre portion of the Coldharbour Ranch, a 0.75 acre portion of the former Niccoli Ranch, two youth gardens, and three community gardens. Four climate-controlled hydroponic farms are integrated to provide for year-round food production and expanded learning opportunities. We train aspiring agrarians, support the growth of small family farmers, focus on community engagement, and provide visibly integrated elements of food justice, social equity, education, and resilient food systems.

FARM TO SCHOOL: Rural mountain youth in grades PreK–12 receive environmental science and nutrition education through hands-on, experiential lessons in school classrooms, in after school classes and clubs, and in 10-week summer camp programs. We manage the two school gardens and we envision a school lunch based on values that support a sustainable community food system and nourish the whole child.

COMMUNITY FOOD SECURITY: Mountain Roots address equity and food justice issues through Community Food Security programs, which start with providing fresh, nutritious foods for people in need, then uplifting community members through a food security continuum that educates and engages our marginalized and vulnerable community members to build self-sufficiency. We are dedicated to improving the physical, social, mental, environmental, and economic health of the Gunnison Valley.

The 2023-2025 Community Food Security Fellowship

We are pleased to offer one full fellowship in Community Food Security.

A sustainable food system (SFS) is a food system that delivers food security and nutrition for all in such a way that the economic, social and environmental bases to generate food security and nutrition for future generations are not compromised. This means that: – It is profitable throughout (economic sustainability); – It has broad-based benefits for society (social sustainability); and – It has a positive or neutral impact on the natural environment (environmental sustainability).

With a focused lens on the Backyard Harvest Food Rescue/Food Relief program, the fellow will be assessing community needs, current efforts and their impact, the influence and limitation of current and forthcoming resources and policies, and strategic planning currently underway. After conducting additional research as needed, the fellow will be reforming / redesigning the existing on-the-ground projects for better alignment and impact, piloting / field testing one or more efforts, and evaluating for impact.

This could include, but is not limited to: procurement and sourcing from Colorado producers, networking with producers and food hubs, distribution to people in need including underserved, marginalized, and otherwise vulnerable audiences, providing outreach and education, developing input and output metrics that determine the stability and success of the Backyard Harvest food relief effort, administration of grant funding for the program, studying models of sustainable food systems, expanding local, regional, and state partners in the Food Security arena, and providing guidance, mentorship, and training to AmeriCorps service members in administrative and field work.

Ideal candidates will have a combination of skills in regenerative agriculture, food & nutrition, education, entrepreneurship, and program development, and would also be seeking to build those skills through this experience. We work with students and faculty to layer or integrate the fellowship project work with the graduate course work, but fellows should understand that inevitably there are tasks and activities in each area that fall outside of the other's purview. It is understood that fellows are working above and beyond the usual graduate work.

JEDI: To promote more diversity in agriculture and outdoor education, and more leadership and inclusivity for students from diverse audiences, we strongly encourage BIPOC and LGBTQ+ individuals to apply.

The Fellowship Award: August 2023 through May 2025

The Mountain Roots Food Systems Fellow will receive \$42,000 through two channels: (a) tuition assistance, paid to Western on behalf of the student and (b) in the form of a work-study AmeriCorps position that provides a cash living allowance, paid to the student. The fellowship award is contingent upon acceptance into the MEM program.

Year One: \$13,000

Beginning in August, the fellows are actively working in Mountain Roots part time 2-3 days/week (16-24 hrs/week). Fellows will join various program teams to gain hands-on experience of food systems "in the field" and in our community. This provides material for the graduate portfolio, and relevant, practical context for the project development that is to come. During the fall and spring semester, first year fellows are expected to work an average of 20hrs/week in addition to academic coursework and requirements.

- a) Living Allowance, paid bi-weekly: \$8,915
- b) Tuition Assistance: Education Award: \$3,200 + Western: \$3,200.

The student's performance will be evaluated at the end of the first year in June/July. If the student is recommended for renewal, the second year award of \$29,000 will be structured as a follows:

Year Two: \$29,000

Second year students begin the dedicated graduate project. Is the expectation that all graduate project hours will be dedicated to the completion of an exceptional Food Systems project that meets requirements for both Mountain Roots and Western MEM. In the second summer, the fellow will be spending 40 hours per week at Mountain Roots. During fall and spring semesters of the second year, fellows work an average of 32 hours per week in tandem with MEM work.

- a) Living Allowance, paid bi-weekly: \$15,217
- b) Tuition Assistance: Education Award: \$7,097 + Western: \$7,000.

Project Launch Option

Following successful completion of project and graduation, and contingent on funding, students may have the option to continue on in some capacity with Mountain Roots to lead the launch of the project and see their work come to fruition. This is handled on a case-by-case basis.

Successful candidates should demonstrate:

- Working knowledge and experience with community food systems, including food security, equity, and social justice
- Familiarity and experience with basic principles and practices of regenerative agriculture
- Experience in environmental and nutrition education of youth
- Proven ability to collaborate, negotiate and build consensus with multiple external and internal constituencies, including visitors, across varied professional, educational, and socio-economic levels.
- An entrepreneurial approach to acquiring resources and unlikely partners; genuine interest in 'start-up' project design.
- Working knowledge and sensitivity toward food justice, social equity, and working with marginalized audiences.
- Versatility: equally comfortable and confident working in the field or in the office, working independently and with people. The role requires a balance of time and energy spent on sustainable agriculture (actively farming and other field work in food distribution) plus program planning, budgeting, concept development, and community outreach.

How to Apply:

Please submit a letter of interest, your résumé, and contact info for two references to Holly Conn, Executive Director of Mountain Roots, director@mountainrootsfoodproject.org. Your letter of interest should be no longer than two pages and answer the following questions:

- a. Explain your experience and goals in the area of food systems and community food security. What skills do you bring to add value to the organization and project? What do you hope to learn? How will the fellowship prepare you to meet your goals?
- b. What three attributes would co-workers, friends, and family all agree that you possess? Please give examples.