



J O B D E S C R I P T I O N

Part-time Field Assistants (ZeroDIG – RAU site)

ZeroDIG @ RAU

This is a market garden project being developed by applying agro-ecological farming principles to demonstrate how these can be applied successfully both in practice and commercially. Growing practices remove carbon from the atmosphere to build up stocks of soil carbon and restore biodiversity to produce a resilient market garden farm.

Formally called the GREAT ZeroDIG project. The land, 7.4 acres is located adjacent to the RAU to the left of the Tetbury Road entrance as one approaches the main RAU buildings and alongside the rugby pitch. There is a pedestrian entrance by the weather station.

The ZeroDIG project is overseen by the Royal Agricultural University (RAU), Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) and ZeroDIG.

Whilst a range of vegetables and fruit for sale locally will be produced on site it is also an experimental site where ZeroDIG market gardening methods are tested in the field, measurements made and recorded and systems refined. The market garden is a commercial operation and aims to be profitable to demonstrate the viability of small scale and local market gardening.

This project will also embed agro-ecological learning in the curriculum of the Royal Agricultural University, engaging its students and the wider academic community in the development of this site.

Working on a ZeroDIG site also includes participating in the ZeroDIG climate action programme which removes carbon from the atmosphere by increasing the stock of carbon in the soil. Growing practices should be adapted to meet this objective.

General description

The ZeroDIG project operates a pool of part-time Field Assistants to work on the site. This is designed to provide a flexible working environment for ZeroDIG and the Field Assistants.

Being a ZeroDIG Field Assistant means joining an active pool of about 12 people who work various hours allowing them to fit in their ZeroDIG obligations around other activities, studeis, jobs or interests.

Hours are determined by the Head Grower, who is the site manager, and set at least a week in advance. The will typically be Monday to Friday with some weekend work also available from time to time and especially during the summer months.

Field Assistants who have committed themselves to work on site must always be punctual and only cancel their attendance under exceptional circumstances – which should be

extremely rare. Should a Field Assistant be unable to make an agreed work slot the Head Grower should be given as much notice as possible and in any event not less than 48 hours.

Certain general principles should be followed. These include:

- Zerodig growing principles must be followed
- Increased soil carbon and a healthy, diverse soil biology must be achieved
- Above ground plant diversity (including trees and shrubs) should be maximised
- Beds should have plant cover at all times (including over-wintering)
- Annual targets for the production of good quality fruit and vegetables for sale must be achieved
- The site appearance must always be welcoming and pleasing
- Community relations should be positive, open and friendly
- Work must be lean and efficient

Duties and responsibilities

These are divided into five main areas: (1) Propagation, (2) Planting out and direct seeding, (3) Weeding and crop maintenance, (4) Harvesting and packing, and (5) General site maintenance, soil improvement and compost.

Observation, attention to detail, accuracy and a standardised approach are all essential elements of every task. Particular crops require specific approaches which must be followed at all times. Instructions provided by the Head Grower must be followed.

If, at any time, a Field Assistant is not entirely sure what has been requested by the Head Grower or feels insufficiently trained to execute a particular task they must request clarification and/or more training. Field Assistants must not undertake tasks where they are unsure how to proceed.

There is very little equipment on site but even hand tools can cause injury if not used correctly or not stored safely. Field Assistants must always request guidance if they are unsure how to use or store a particular tool and always wear appropriate clothing keeping toes and feet covered at all times.

The site is high profile and must always be kept in a clean and tidy condition. Tools must always be washed and stored away at the end of the day and no litter or other disposable clutter left on site.

(1) Propagation

- Preparing and seeding module trays (72 cells) for germination
- Looking after germinated seeds (weeding, watering, etc.)
- Observation of seedlings (pest damage, poor growth, etc.)
- Hardening off

(2) Planting out and direct seeding

- Topping up with compost where required
- Creating a firm weed free seed bed
- Setting up seeder for direct sowing
- Marking out beds for seeding and/or planting out
- Applying bio-stimulants 5-7 days after planting out
- Applying row covers for heat (fleece) and insects (enviro-mesh)

- (3) Weeding and crop maintenance
 - Applying foliar bio-stimulants and compost drenches/teas as required
 - Hoeing
 - Manual weeding
 - Thinning and pruning according to crop requirements
 - Observation of plant growth for pest damage and nutrient deficiencies

- (4) Harvesting and packing
 - Selecting plants that are ready for harvesting
 - Manual harvesting taking care not to damage produce nor and remaining plants
 - Sorting of produce for sale (in field)
 - Washing and packing produce for sale (in depot)
 - Leaving roots in the soil as much as possible

- (5) General site maintenance, soil improvement and compost
 - Keeping beds and paths clean of weeds
 - Establishment and termination of cover crops
 - Establishment and maintenance of biodiversity areas outside bed areas (predator insect and bird habitat). Aromatic perennial plants, wet areas, over-wintering shelter, etc.
 - Establish and maintenance of coppice areas for ramial woodchip production
 - Production of woodchips
 - Top-up of woodchips on paths
 - Mulching with ramial woodchips
 - Producing compost onsite
 - Topping up beds with compost (3-5 cms per year)
 - General site tidiness (mowing, removing clutter, cleaning and storing finished with materials and tools, etc.)

Skills and experience required

- Previous market gardening experience desirable but not essential
- Physically fit and able – this is quite a physically demanding job which requires being outside throughout the year in all weather
- Ability to work in a team and alone
- Open and positive attitude - enjoys working with people and happy to follow the lead and instructions of the Site Manager
- A strong interest in agroecology and promoting these principles
- An interest in soil biology
- Experience with post-harvest activities (timing for freshness, cleaning, presenting, packaging, delivery logistics, etc.) would be a bonus

Opportunities for professional development

There are numerous opportunities for professional development and in building up a CV that includes a wide variety of field experience. These include:

- Training from the Head Grower and in the Zerodig growing process
- Field experience in commercial scale agro-ecological market gardening
- Opportunity to undertake individual research projects and be involved in onsite ongoing RAU agro-ecological science.
- Opportunity to learn about cropping plans, sales and on-site operations

Pay

£15.00 per hour plus holiday pay of £1.81 per hour (£16.81 per hour) up to 20 hours per week – exact timing to be agreed.

Report

Head Grower

Location

Zerodig site at RAU