Vinnie and Mitch led me around the facility, sharing their ongoing survival stories. From time to time, they careened in and out of dark crannies, revealing holes in the design that serve as safe hiding spaces.

They told me that some of their trashiest friends had reached a level of burnout unparalleled in the real world. I looked around at the mounds of waste—pieces of burnt-out baubles and food scraps clinging together hopelessly, in part because of the sticky substances they secrete.

An American Spirit cigarette box, Sharon, piped up from one of the piles. “We could have been great together,” she shouted at a fellow paper product, both of them overlooked for recycling. Sharon had always wanted to become one of those brown recycled coffee collars, but dreams like this are rapidly reduced to ash in here.

We shuffled around the plant some more, uncovering years of nihilist graffiti; “squalordarity” was a recurring sentiment. Mitch motioned toward the large metal trash grabber, Claudia. Everything she touched, he warned, turned to dust.

“I feel dirty all the time,” she whispered remorsefully.

We rounded a cinder-encrusted corner, and Vinnie let out an angry sigh meant for Thad, the orangey brick smokestack, who had been funneling mercury and dioxins into the atmosphere for years. The nearby boilers, Piper and Lilith, looked exhausted from all the hot flashes.

Mitch and Vinnie escorted me to our final destination, a swampy alcove where they liked to stock precious items. Inside of a Genesee bottle cap, they had stored a few drops of cola which Mitch found and soaked up somewhere by the entrance. There was also a wooden splinter and a folded up corner from National Geographic.

Knowing full well that my jeans would be ruined, I knelt down to unfold the wrinkled magazine scrap. It was sky blue on the inside with an image of fluffy white water vapor on the edge.

At that moment, I realized that neither of them had seen a cloud in much too long, and that I had a lot to tell them about the Clean Air Act. Vinnie’s angry sigh might best be served elsewhere then, like at a waste authority meeting or a vacant city lot with untapped community gardening potential.

After exchanging a few heartfelt mumbles, I pulled out two Ziploc bags. “Plastic, really?” snapped Mitch. I shrugged, and they slowly shimmied inside, knowing I’d do my best to find them more comfortable environs, like a cushiony compost pile or a large textile recycling bin. Together, we left that hellhole scathed, but markedly more optimistic.

“I’m so happy I might peel my pants,” smiled Vinnie, perhaps a little too proud of that joke.
Dickinson College: Dickinson College Farm

Dickinson College is sustainability central, serving as a green beacon throughout the liberal arts scene in the U.S. One of their cornerstone programs is the Dickinson College Farm, a 50-acre living laboratory run by two outstanding farmers and a revolving door of student-workers. It’s a place that has grown from a one-acre experiment in 1999 to an academic and physical touchstone, where renewable energy keeps the barn’s electricity humming, where workshops like ‘Foraging for Your Food’ are offered, and chickens, cows, and sheep need attended to daily.

Matt Steiman and Jenn Halpin serve as the full-time farmers here, overseeing the student-workers and the circus of production and programmatic initiatives. Steiman, when asked about the usefulness of students interacting with a farm when spending over $60,000 a year on college tuition, says that this farm serves as a laboratory for students, faculty, and staff. Dickinson “doesn’t have a farming major, per se... but also we’re here to help people get their hands dirty.” He gestures to a student with whom he’s making homemade pizza. “She might be the President of the United States or a movie star one day, but she’s going to have an understanding of food systems. In addition, she’ll be an educated consumer, perhaps a gardener, or perhaps go work at other farms, as a career or otherwise.”

I ask the students a potpourri of questions as they finish making pizza and do some pinto bean counting—hints of the practical, educational, and interesting ways one could spend a few hours per week. All of the students had varying opinions as to what farms will look like in the future, but one thing was almost unanimous: if provided the resources and loan deferment, most said they would be farming straight out of college. This suggests a societal shift among post-basics, even if a niche one, yet a vocation that is currently unachievable in this environment of ever-increasing tuition. One thing is certain though. While Steiman and the staff don’t set out to train the next generation of farmers, the Dickinson College Farm is nevertheless instilling that kind of agricultural passion.

**Elena Capaldi**
- **Year:** Senior
- **Hometown:** Pittsburgh, Pa.
- **Major:** Environmental Studies
- **Favorite Plant:** Spinach
- **Mascot for the Farm:** Bayza the Dog

**Kaitlyn Soriano**
- **Year:** Junior
- **Hometown:** Bethlehem, Pa.
- **Major:** Environmental Science
- **Favorite Plant:** Kale

**Kyle Long**
- **Year:** Senior
- **Hometown:** Baltimore, Md.
- **Major:** Environmental Science
- **Favorite Plant:** Sweet Potatoes

**Favorite Task:** Working with the livestock and feeding them. It’s cool connecting with an animal that way, knowing this is an animal that will be my food.

**Thing that you’d like to see on this farm that isn’t here currently:** Orchards

**Farms of the future will have...**
- Increased biodiversity, increased habitat. Farms will have to go in this direction.
- Pests are adapting to our pesticides. Weeds are adapting to our herbicides.

**Stats:**
- **Acres (in cultivation or for grazing):** 50
- **Student Workers per Semester:** 10 Fall/Spring, 4 Summer
- **Variety of Crops:** 50
- **WOW Factor:** Yums
Messiah College: Grantham Community Garden

Messiah College’s Grantham Community Garden (GCG) is a unique project, taking up a quarter-acre space at a makeshift kiosk in the middle of campus. Sandwiched between an academic building and a residence hall, it gets more use on its soil and plants than just about any other college garden in the country. Now in its eighth growing season, the garden is expanding by a mother's acre due to a generous gift from the Senior Class.

The GCG mission is to be student-run and managed, a lofty goal that will be continuing into its expansion. Because of its smaller comparable scale, this student-driven framework is feasible; the challenge will be to operate and maintain this structure as the project expands. Personally, I personally know how difficult the quarter-acre plot is to tend.

As a sophomore at this college, I co-founded this little engine that could of an operation. We established the project to serve as a visible representation of sustainability on campus.

After many long hours of business plan writing and persuading student groups, administrations, and faculty to see the value of this proposition, we broke ground in mid-April 2012. Dozens and dozens of volunteers came out of the woodwork to dig holes for fence posts, till into the most degraded soil on campus (according to a soil science expert who worked at Messiah at the time), and someone even made a mix CD to encourage those wheelbarrowing mushroom soil into raw area. Two thousand volunteer hours and three weeks later, the garden was operational.

Since then, hundreds have taken part in both small and large ways to keep the garden alive and thriving: a small orchard has been planted, a substantial drip irrigation system has been installed, and sustainability majors use it as a laboratory for dozens of academic projects annually. Happily, our vision was correct. This project has galvanized the community — especially the garden volunteers — to continue pushing limits and think bigger every year (for sure to check out the tale of the ‘chicken coup’).

As I casually inspect my old stomping ground, I inwardly grin to see the garden has been winterized, preparing for another season. The winter work — cover cropping, getting finances together, charting out a crop rotation — is for obvious reasons the least immediately gratifying and exciting, yet it’s arguably one of the most important non-dirty jobs. For me, the fact that the garden is able to attract volunteers in both the growing season and the off-season is a confirmation that the garden is still in good, dirty hands.

Alex Correia

Year: Senior
Hometown: Taunton, MA
Major: Sustainable Community and Urban Development Major
Favorite Plant: Loofah
Your role on the farm: Communications Coordinator (Marketing, Internal and External Communications, Ultimate Organizer)
Best tool in the toolshed: Gloves
Best part of the garden: Its educational opportunities and the conversation that occurs due to its central location.

Darin Horst

Year: Senior
Hometown: Hanover, PA
Major: Environmental Engineering
Favorite Plant: Habanero Peppers
Your role on the farm: Production Manager
Best part of working in the garden: The chickens. (Side note: Darin and Abishek built the chicken coop without the administration green light and are now known among the garden crew and bureaucracy as the ‘chicken coup’)
One thing you wish you could have: A cow. We’re allowed up to two livestock in the new expansion.

Abishek Jacob

Year: Senior
Hometown: The Bahamas
Major: Environmental Engineering
Plant: Beans
Your role on the farm: Design and Engineering Coordinator
Projects you’ve completed: Chickens Coop, Raised Beds, High Tunnel, and Rainwater Collection System
Why do you think sustainable farming is important at a college?
I came in with absolutely no awareness of agriculture. I didn’t see anything wrong with current agriculture practices and its complete lack of sensibility and humanity. The garden is a very simple thing. For us to know it’s even possible to supply our own demand, it improves your standards, it improves your vision, and your health.

One thing you wish was in the garden that isn’t there right now: Financial sustainability
In 10 years, the garden will become: A farm

Stats:
Acres (in cultivation or for grazing): 1.25
Student Workers per Semester: 6 paid full-time workers during the summer, volunteers year-round
Variety of Crops: 40, including peanuts, popcorn, habaneros, chris, poblanos
WOW Factor: Location, Location, Location

P.S. Sorry for planting the one peach tree crooked. I’m afraid it will always lean ever so slightly. (I had a test that day.)
Wilson College: Fulton Farm

The longest standing college farm in the area is Wilson College’s Fulton Farm, located in Chambersburg, Pa. Unlike Dickinson and Messiah, there’s a traditional feel to this place, from the brick, two-story Tocque Farmhouse to the Owen’s Bank Barn, both pre-Civil War era working relics. Brick barns were traditionally built on, well, banks, i.e. hillside. Like a split-level house, this was done for accessibility, so you could access the barn both from the top and bottom levels.

Twenty years in the making, the Fulton Sustainable Living Center has had oversight of the environmental efforts over the college. Sarah Bay, the college’s farm manager, now in her third growing season, tells me that their USDA Certified Organic Farm is a five-acre production, which includes over 100 varieties of vegetables. Boy came to Fulton from New Morning Farm, an hour north of Chambersburg, where her three years of managing crops and doing marketing and sales at a D.C. Farmers’ Market gave her an invaluable foundation from which to manage this type of operation.

Fulton Farm, minus the solar panels and the organic label, is a throw-back to the array of fancy gadgets found at Dickinson (e.g. a biodigester and a solar powered electric golf cart). Preservation and cultivation seem like the crucial priorities here, of course with the added lesson that growing your own food is a bit more labor-intensive, although arguably more rewarding, than driving to the grocery store. This passion for the land is clearly reflected in my conversations with the current work-study students. We huddle over a sorting table in the former stable of the bank barn, combating the cold and inertia of February on the farm.

**Brooke Wenger**
Year: First-Year  
Hometown: Gettysburg, Pa.  
Major: Vet Medical Technician  
Favorite Plant: Strawberry  
Best tool in the toolshed: (Plain old shovel)

**Danniele Fulmer**
Year: First-Year  
Hometown: Indiana, Pa.  
Major: Equine Journalism and Environmental Studies  
Favorite Plant: Anguria

**Cherish Brown**
Year: First-Year  
Hometown: Gettysburg, Pa.  
Major: Vet Tech  
Favorite Plant: Trees

**Negative Stereotype of Farmers:** They’re only big and bratty and work out in the fields.

**Positive Stereotype of Farmers:** Employers know if you were on a farm, you are a hard worker. That’s a big selling point when you go to apply to other jobs.

**Equine Journalism in:** Specific to Wilson. You are getting all the same journalism classes, but you’re also taking the biological side, too.

Farms of the future will have...I’m hoping they will model themselves after organic farms like Fulton with the addition of solar/wind power.

Was the farm a selling point to come here? Yes, but I found it myself, so I sort of sold it to myself.

**Stats:**
- Acres (in cultivation or for grazing): 5
- Student Workers per Semester: 2-4
- Variety of Crops: 100+
- WOW Factor: Sensory