



Teacher-in-Residence Program:

Developing promising teachers through
food, farming and environmental education



A Letter from our Program Director



Slide Ranch lies just 40 minutes from the diverse urban centers of San Francisco and the East Bay, some of whose glittering lights are visible from our coastline. This gorgeous piece of coast has been preserved as national park land and stewarded by Slide Ranch to educate the Bay Area's urban population and connect them to nature outside, and ultimately inside, the city.

Slide Ranch's Teacher-in-Residence internship is in many ways the cream of the crop of our renowned programs. From a highly-qualified applicant pool, each year Slide Ranch selects seven passionate interns to plant themselves on a rugged turn-of-the-century farmstead nestled in the coastal California wilderness. The internship involves hands-on learning through teaching, organic gardening, animal care, land stewardship, and sustainable living, supported by intensive training, professional development and coaching.

The following pages share stories of transformation within our teaching interns, and of their broader ripples of effect as Teachers-in-Residence leave Slide Ranch carrying with them the inspiration, knowledge, skills, and confidence that things of surprising beauty can be achieved in the world. These are just a few of many stories of powerful work being done by alums of our program.

Slide Ranch first touched my life as a 2nd grader on an overnight field trip with my San Francisco public school. That fog-shrouded, magical memory came back into focus when I rediscovered Slide Ranch as a young adult, returning in 2004 to be a Teacher-in-Residence. Returning to Slide Ranch to step into the shoes of my own Slide Ranch teachers, and later become one of the people who supports those wonderful teachers and guides our educational programs, I have been privileged to be part of the transformation that happens within visitors to Slide Ranch from many sides. I hope you, too, are inspired by these stories.



Annie as a Slide Ranch Teacher-in-Residence, 2004

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Annie M. Desmond".

Annie Millar Desmond
Program Director

Carol Gunderson, 2003

Working at Slide Ranch was an experience unlike any other I have had before or since: watching the chickens run and peck while feeding them each morning before breakfast; growing my own vegetables for the first time in my life; hearing the ocean each night before falling asleep; clanking up the hill in the moonlight with bottles and pail on a night-milking shift; participating in the respectful slaughter of animals for food; and most importantly, sharing the wonder of the ranch with the public through education programs.

As Executive Director of the Food Literacy Project in Louisville, Kentucky, whose mission is to inspire a new generation of people to build relationships with healthy food, farming, and the land, I frequently draw on my experience at Slide Ranch. To this day, I pick up the phone and get input from my colleagues at the ranch on everything from staffing plans to garden plans. Moreover, the core teaching values I learned at the ranch have shaped the way I approach experiential education in my own organization.



Working at Slide Ranch taught me that capitalizing on young people's inherent wonder and curiosity about the natural world is the most effective way to help them build a meaningful relationship with the earth; that our job as educators is to get out of the way of direct experience, building on the child's own senses and observations. For me, this means teaching not what to know but how to know. Letting the natural world teach itself is at the core of environmental education best practices, and is one of the things Slide Ranch does best.

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Duffy Ross, 1997

My time at Slide Ranch was the richest time in my life: rich in kitchen flavors and gardeny perfumes, rich in community and intention, rich in wildlife experiences, rich in personal and professional growth.

Slide Ranch encouraged me to commit my life's work to underserved youth and their relationship to the earth. Because of Slide, I experienced (and have since emulated) how one can be a leader while empowering those you lead.

So many urban kids know of the world outside only through television. Almost daily, I hear "I saw this show once...." To give them hands-on experience in a garden, at the continent's edge, or even winding their way up highway 1 is to blow open their concept of reality.



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Following my experience at Slide Ranch, I worked for 15 years in environmental education. I taught at Outward Bound, then at the Sierra Institute, at the Headlands and Yosemite Institutes and soon I was directing programs and outdoor science schools – beginning a lifelong career as an educator committed to educational equity and to the earth.

Four years ago, I left my management position in environmental education to immerse myself in the public school reform movement. I earned my credential and am teaching (literacy) and coaching (science) in two underserved public schools in East Oakland. I aspire to—in time—bring Slide Ranch and all I know of the world to a whole school community – including parents, teachers and students – in a sustained fashion, year in year out.

Joe Marraffino, 2002

I taught at Slide Ranch after graduating from a local master's degree program in Culture, Ecology, and Sustainable Community. I had a strong desire to put my education to practical use and work directly with both the land and people.

As a teacher at Slide Ranch I felt the freedom and responsibility to push the limits of curricula and to be constantly inventive and open to the teachable moments that arose out of the environment.

When I left Slide Ranch I continued working with food as a baker in San Francisco at Arizmendi Bakery, a worker-owned, democratically-run business that is frequently cited as one of the Bay Area's best bakeries. Seven years later, I helped to found a sister bakery in San Rafael that later donated leftovers to the ranch.



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I also helped found an urban garden on a semi-abandoned lot in Oakland with three other Slide Ranch teachers. The garden, which also serves as an education center, has blossomed and is now a stop on Bay Area garden tours.

I often am tempted to look back at living and working at Slide as one of the happiest times of my life. I don't think there was a single day when we failed to reach our goals of connecting kids to the earth. The time spent at Slide fostered trust in myself and in the capacity of groups working toward common ends. It serves as a touchstone for what an alignment of effort and values can feel like when it succeeds, an ideal that I aim for in my continuing work.

Jaclyn Moyer, 2009



I arrived at Slide Ranch in February of 2009, spent nearly a year living with my fellow teachers tucked into a windswept hillside above the pounding Pacific, and left in December with a vibrant patchwork of memories.

I remember an afternoon teaching a class of eighth graders in the fall. I am leading a group of public middle school students into the chicken coop. Their classroom teacher has warned me about one student, a tall boy who had immigrated with his family from El Salvador. The teacher told me that he is hard to manage, disengaged, disruptive.

We enter the chicken coop and I watch this boy bloom into an entirely different student. He is confident and at ease in the familiar environment. He explains that his family had always had chickens in their home in El Salvador. Displaying a capacity for serious attentiveness, focus, and leadership beyond his years, this boy carefully instructs his classmates on how to pick up the birds, he shows them where their delicate ears are hidden, and explains how to prepare a chicken for a meal. The other students are now enthralled. They are amazed by this boy's knowledge and are yearning to hear more from his life in El Salvador. Soon another child, a small girl wearing two messy blond

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braids who first shrieked in fear at the sight of the chickens, now has a chicken in her arms and is poking around to find its ears as the boy has shown her.

I now work as the coordinator and instructor for a garden-based science program at a public elementary school, and am beginning a Masters program focused on education and social justice. In both these endeavors I draw from my experiences at Slide Ranch and am certain I would not have chosen this path without the inspiration I found there.

Corey Block, 2002

For an entire year I was lucky enough to sleep in a cozy trailer, with a west-facing bay window, on cliffs overlooking the Pacific Ocean. My life was filled with fresh goat milk, tide pool adventures, starry nights, wholesome meals, campfires, farm chores and most importantly, education.

Not only were we lucky enough to teach amazing students from all over the Bay Area, but as teachers, we were constantly learning about ourselves and community, about farming and ranch management, about educational theory, Marin coastal ecosystems, and about agriculture and its vital place in the environmental and social-justice movements.

After Slide Ranch, three fellow teachers-in-residence and I went on to start an urban agriculture cooperative and education project in East Oakland where we transformed a vacant lot into a farm and hosted free educational programming to neighbors and local school groups on topics ranging from science to nutrition,



Alicia Moore, Corey Block, Deepa Iyer (2002 Slide TIRs and SOL co-founders)

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urban-greening to job training. This project, Sustaining Ourselves Locally, was a direct result of our truly life-changing experience at Slide Ranch, both socially and thematically.

I'm currently the Urban Farm Coordinator for the Treasure Island Job Corps center, where I am overseeing the construction of a one-acre production and education farm and developing a program to use the farm to provide vocational and academic training to the 600 students at the center.

Amy Lerner, 2001

Slide Ranch made me feel more connected with my food and fiber not only when I was there, but for the rest of my life. After my time at Slide I went on to be the executive director of an urban gardening non-profit in the Los Angeles Area and also serve as the gardening teacher at several urban public schools. Later, I started graduate school, where I have been studying environmental planning, geography, and urban-rural connections. I have consistently worked for local farms in my spare time,

harvesting and selling produce at farmers markets.



My fondest memories of Slide Ranch include midnight milkings while I rested my head on the belly of a goat with her chewing the only sound, the miracle of fog lifting out of the garden, the most incredible compost piles I have ever seen, and many many memories of children connecting to the earth.

I remember the most famous line: “Nature tastes good!” (Richmond youth excited that he rebelled against his mother who told him to never eat plants out of the ground) or “I feel like I just entered the plant universe”

(from a 5-year-old after smelling sage)... they go on and on.

Even as I sit here writing my dissertation I have dirt under my nails after the farmers market today. Slide Ranch is with me everywhere: in my cast iron skillet, my jars of quinoa, my dried chiles and canned tomatoes and sun tea. My life has evolved so much since I was there 9 years ago but I will always remember the fennel butterscotch smell of the Marin Coast alongside the sound of waves crashing. It makes me smile just to think of it.

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Sonya Hammons, 2005

I grew up in southern Marin and remember passing the sign for Slide Ranch during family trips on the coast, and wondering what secret space lurked beyond my field of vision from Highway 1. Years later, I focused my college studies on food justice issues. As I searched for opportunities to continue my involvement in the sustainable food movement, I came across Slide Ranch again and was eager to participate in such an innovative organization whose location and ecology played such a strong role in my childhood. I applied following my fellowship in agroecology in Brazil and was happy to join the TIR team in 2005.



I recall peaceful moonrises over the ocean, analyzing the decomposition rates in the three different compost piles, and becoming familiar with the personalities of the goats. I loved the brightness in students' faces as they bit into peas from the garden, making the tangible connection between the plant world and the food that they eat each day.

After Slide Ranch, my work touched on a range of food-related issues: first as a biological researcher on invasive weed ecology for the USDA, next as an agricultural policy officer at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, and now as an urban greening advocate for the California Urban Forests Council.

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I treasure the opportunity to have shared my passion for the sheep-to-fabric process with so many young people, and to have prompted thoughts about where food comes from in young and more experienced minds from a diverse range of backgrounds.

Jacqueline Ostfeld, 2004

I was doing environmental education in the foothills of the southern Sierras when a friend introduced me to Slide Ranch. The Ranch's Teacher-in-Residence program seemed like the perfect opportunity to combine my environmental education background with my love of gardening.

Some of my most vivid memories at Slide Ranch were sitting around the campfire watching the sunset with the great friends I made there; scrambling up the hill to watch the birth of three goat kids; the smell of coastal sagebrush; and providing kids with positive and awe-inspiring experiences in the natural world.



“Slide Ranch gave me the foundation to **advocate** on behalf of kids and the outdoors.”



After leaving Slide Ranch, I went on to get an MA in Global Environmental Policy and have been working to build the movement and advocate for children and nature ever since. Slide Ranch gave me the foundation to advocate on behalf of kids and the outdoors.

I am currently Sierra Club's National Youth Representative and the co-founder of OAK, the Outdoors Alliance for Kids. I live in Washington, DC and I do Sierra Club's policy work around reconnecting kids with the outdoors.

Roxanne Crittenden, 2006

Slide Ranch provided my first formal opportunity to develop as an educator and exposed me to new educational models that engaged and inspired me.

My time there forced upon me an acute awareness of the natural world that was awe-inspiring and often challenging. I loved the land, the weather, the wildlife, the plants and the forced proximity to nature's cycles. I lived with the Pacific Ocean in my front yard and a national park in my back yard.

For some of the time I lived at Slide Ranch, it was my chore to close the chickens and ducks into their hutches and collect their eggs in the evening. At the time there was a chicken tractor in the pasture, and I would go up into the field about sunset. The pasture is just above a large grove of trees and I spent many evenings as night settled in, sitting in the grass, listening to a great horned owl in the branches above. I had a sense then, and it has proven true, that the feelings of those evenings would remain some of my most powerful memories.



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I went from the Ranch to Project E.A.T. (Educate, Act, Thrive) in Hayward, where I coordinated a nutrition and gardening program for two elementary schools. During my time there, I worked with 5 other Slide Ranch alumni, and when I left the program this last August, I knew I left the schools and gardens in good hands when I found out my successor was one of my co-teachers from my time at Slide Ranch.

I now work with a few different organizations that support small farms and sustainable agriculture, work that I am passionate about and hope to continue. I go back several times a year to volunteer at events, visit with the perennial staff and meet the TIRs. Always I am struck by the commanding power and beauty of the land and by the competence, passion and inspiration of the incredible staff and interns that make up this amazing organization.

The Program

The purpose of our Teacher-in-Residence Program is to develop and inspire promising environmental educators. The program was established in the 1980s and has since grown into a nationally acclaimed internship. Each year we select seven teachers to live and work at Slide Ranch for 11 months. Slide Ranch provides comprehensive training, professional development, hands-on opportunities working with diverse groups of youth and families, and a living environment aligned with the sustainable practices we teach.



The central focus of the internship is planning and leading environmental education programs with children and families. Teachers also learn to cultivate and maintain a thriving one-acre organic garden which produces food for their own consumption as well as for programs; practice a comprehensive soil development program; participate in sustainable building projects; care for our resident farm animals; and work with volunteers and program participants to restore the native ecosystem.

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