If you are interested, APPLY NOW! Students are selected based on their level of interest and potential for future application of what they’ve learned. We also strive to select a diverse group of participants, and welcome all applicants. Aspiring farmers of color, members of the LGBTQ community and veterans are encouraged to apply. Space in the program is limited, and we review applications on a rolling basis until spaces are filled. We look forward to hearing from you!

Dates: May 4th – September 29th, 2019

Program Cost: The total cost for the season is $4,250 + $100 refundable cleaning deposit (returned after the end of season check-out). Program cost includes:

- $750/month (5 months) covers a portion of your room and board, a $50 per month utility fee and a portion of instruction costs. All basic food staples, plus staff-prepared lunches Monday - Friday are included. We are able to keep this monthly cost low (approximately half of the actual cost) thanks to community support and grant funds including a 2016 Beginning Farmer and Rancher grant from the USDA.
- $500 Materials Fee covers personal tools, project materials and educational supplies (including a “Reader” with a large selection of articles and book excerpts), which are yours to take with you when you leave. This fee will also support your access to specialized tools and supplies (carving tools, spinning wheel, art supplies, etc.) throughout the program.

Housing: Program participants are provided with rustic accommodations and a shared kitchen. A $100 cleaning deposit is required and returned at the end of the season after personal and communal spaces are vacated and clean.

Food Provided: Basic whole foods (grains, beans, nuts, dried fruit, oils, vegetables, some dairy and eggs) are provided throughout the program. Note — fresh vegetables from the field come into production by late May and continue in great bounty through the rest of the season.

College Credit Option: Students can choose to take this program as a 6 credit course through the University of Alaska, Fairbanks—Summer Sessions. There is a modest registration fee to UAF, and you’ll register for the class through UAF. All students accepted into the program will receive information about the option of registering for credit.

About Calypso’s Farmer Training Program
Calypso’s Farmer Training Program is an intensive experiential education program focused on providing the skills, inspiration and experience necessary for participants to embark on starting their own small farm with confidence. A small group (3-8 people) of aspiring farmers participate in the program each year — allowing for a high level of personalized attention.

Participants learn how to become self-reliant farmers through immersion in all farm operations: caring for greenhouse transplants, preparing the field for planting, planting, seeding, harvesting, caring for farm animals, operating a CSA, running a farm stand, selling to local restaurants, working in natural alignment to prevent injury and more. Additionally, participants are introduced to a variety of topics related to becoming a self-sufficient farmer, including: mechanics, construction, graphic design, carving, wool processing, hand and machine sewing, and whole-farm planning. We are proud to include creative arts in our Farmer Training Program and believe that exploring creativity can be a key to growing confident and resilient farmers!

Calypso’s unique setting also provides exposure to and experience with farm-based environmental education, organizing
and running community events and a wide range of practical homesteading skills (building, cooking, baking in a wood-fired oven, fiber arts, metalsmithing, woodworking, wild crafting, food preservation and more!) Additionally, participants learn first-hand about the operation of a non-profit, educational farm.

This training program immerses you in farming and self-sufficiency, therefore the majority of the training is experiential and field and farm based. However, the program also includes topical workshops, discussion groups, involvement in farm-based youth education, visits to other farms and an extensive, creative Whole Farm business planning project.

Concentration Options:
The program offers a broad scope of topics, however you also have the option of delving deeper into Farm Production and/or Environmental Education. A concentration will allow the opportunity to take on opportunities for increased responsibility and involvement in these interest areas. Please let us know if you are interested!

1) Farm Production & Marketing—this is highly recommended for the person who is seriously interested in starting their own farm. Throughout the season, the person concentrating on farm production will have the opportunity to go to the farmers’ market, coordinate with local restaurants and assist with decisions regarding weekly field work.

2) Environmental Education— for those interested in working with youth and farm-based education, this is a great opportunity. Throughout this season, the person concentrating on environmental education will work more in-depth with Calypso’s environmental educators by participating in 1-2 field trips per week throughout the season and helping to train other participants in environmental education.

Educational Methods

Farming Immersion
The majority of the farm production training is experiential and field based. Participants are part of the team that is running the farm for the season. Regular hands-on, field-based trainings will support skill and confidence building. Participants will also take on increasing responsibility in specific areas throughout the season and will have the opportunity to mentor others in skills that they’ve learned.

“Intros”
Throughout the program, participants will be exposed to a wide range of topics, including: soil science, wool basics, blacksmithing, wood working, graphic design, animal husbandry, mechanics, environmental education, natural dyeing and more. These “intros” will provide participants with foundational information to gain familiarity with a variety of topics.

Intensive Workshop Series
Throughout the program, participants will delve deeper into the subjects covered in the intros. Examples of intensive workshops include (but are not limited to): “raw wool to finished product” projects, blacksmithing, production of value added products and food preservation.

Whole Farm Planning
In order to cover the broad topic of successful farm business planning, participants will meet twice weekly for farm planning and will work step by step to create a detailed whole farm plan. For some, this plan will be directly relevant to their next step as beginning farmers, for others it will be a creative exercise enabling them to create a solid whole farm plan for a future farm. Farm planning sessions are interactive, fun and often include guest instructors. Over the season, participants build a comprehensive plan starting with personal goal setting, land selection and mapping, marketing, crop planning and rotation, complete budgeting, creating a logo and brand, risk assessment and more!
Group Discussions
Participants will work in pairs to lead group discussions on farm and food topics (topics may include: understanding the Farm Bill, food justice, anti-GMO initiatives, creative farm tools, animal husbandry… the skies the limit!). Some group discussions may center around watching a film together. Calypso has a small library of food and farm related films which participants can show with the group.

Craft Skills
Regular project sessions will be held - covering an array of hand craft topics including carving, birch bark weaving, block printing, nature journaling and more!

Required Reading
Each participant is provided with a “Reader” - a collection of writings from many different authors— to better prepare them for both what’s going on in the field and in workshops. There are regular reading assignment and discussions.

Farm Visits
In order to expose participants to other styles and types of farming operations, we will visit 3-4 other farms in the area throughout the season. Most visits will include a farm tour and several hours of helping out with a project at the host farm. We will choose farm visits based on interests of the group and availability of local farmers.

Program Topics
A detailed list of topics covered through the season is available on our website: http://www.calypsofarm.org/education/calypso-farmer-training-program/. Click the link to “Farmer Training Program Topics” to view the file. The selection of topics changes a bit based on the interests, local instructors and feedback from participants and other beginning farmers.

Farmer Training Program Instructors:

Susan Willsrud, Farm Director and co-founder of Calypso, has led the farm design and planning since Calypso’s beginning in 2000. She has an extensive science background, with a B.A. in Botany and Zoology and a M.S. in Plant Ecology. Creating a healthy farm ecosystem is her on-going goal. Susan also loves working with the wool provided by Calypso’s beautiful flock of Shetland sheep! Susan leads the Farmer Training Program and often works side-by-side with participants throughout the growing season.

Tom Zimmer, Ecology Center Director and co-founder of Calypso, is responsible for the farm infrastructure (buildings, numerous projects, etc) and is responsible for the care of Calypso’s chickens, sheep, goats and other assorted animals. Tom is a skilled environmental educator and is instrumental in all of Calypso’s farm-based education. He is currently building a blacksmith shop and looks forward to integrating blacksmithing and wood-working into the Farmer Training Program. Tom also has a MS in Soil Science and makes sure we are taking good care of our soils! Tom will give regular workshops throughout the season.

Christie Shell, Assistant Director, has been involved with Calypso since 2001. Christie is a skilled farmer and has been involved in all aspects of the organization from educational programming to strategic planning and managing Calypso’s CSA. Christie loves the fast-paced growing season and is excellent at keeping farm production on track and fun! Christie leads farm production and works side-by-side with participants through the growing season.
Kay Hackney, Yoga and Balance Instructor, has taught yoga since 1997 and is also currently a certified balance instructor. As part of the Farmer Training Program, Kay teaches a six-week Balance course at the farm. Kay is a gifted teacher and has had an incredible impact on the health and well-being of many beginning farmers—including all of us here on the farm!

John Manthei, Woodworking Instructor, is a carpenter, furniture maker and founder of the Folk School Fairbanks. We are so lucky to have John come out to the farm to teach basic carving and woodworking skills as part of the Farmer Training Program.

Other Local Instructors: Calypso is working in partnership with the Folk School Fairbanks, a local community based nonprofit, to provide experts from the community will join us as instructors throughout the season, for topics such as small engine repair, sewing, chainsaw use, soap making, herbal vinegar making and more! We also work with numerous other local experts to provide a range of instructors for the program.

Who are Calypso’s Training Program Participants?
Participants are individuals who are seriously focused on advancing their personal education in small-scale, ecological agriculture and are interested in doing so in a dynamic, creative and community-based setting. Beyond that shared interest, participants are of a range of ages and have a variety of life experience. Some are focused on getting their own farm off the ground as soon as possible, others are exploring the farming lifestyle, still others are drawn to farm-based environmental education and would like to build their farming skills while also being involved in environmental education, others come to the program for yet different reasons. We welcome all applicants openly! The dynamic nature of Calypso Farm requires self-motivated, flexible participants able to work and live well with others. A good sense of humor doesn’t hurt, either!

What to expect
Week days begin at 8:30 (8:00 on harvest days) and end at 5:30. You can also expect evening activities at least 1-2 times per week. Each morning starts with a glance at our farm chalk board of the day’s activities. In general, mornings are spent in the fields and afternoons are focused on training topics and farm projects. Group lunches are enjoyed daily at 12:30. Weekends are usually schedule-free, however there are a number of events and activities throughout the season that you will be involved in. Weekends are also a great time to work on personal projects (fiber arts, woodworking, sewing, reading, farm planning etc.). In addition to the standard challenges of communal living, adjusting to the dynamic, seasonal pace of the farm stands alone as the most challenging factor for most participants.

Alaskan summers are full of light, energy, and fun, but can also be overwhelming at times. You will arrive right at the fast-paced beginning of the growing season. As the fields thaw and drain in the spring (early May), we make a big push to get the beds prepped and plants moved out to the field. This is also when you’ll get familiarized with carving tools and simple woodworking. The early season is usually the most physically demanding time of the season. We do the vast majority of the field work by hand. During May and early June, we often return to the fields in the evening for planting. Our terraced, hillside farm setting provides amazing views of the Alaska Range but also requires substantial hill walking.

Once the fields are planted and first harvesting begins, the morning field work settles into more of a regular rhythm of harvest, cultivation, and field maintenance. Throughout this season, you’ll have the opportunity to take on increasing responsibilities and explore all that the farm and the Farmer Training Program has to offer. Although we strive to have several more relaxed days of the week (weekends), there is always some level of activity on the farm and there will be many weekend activities that you want to be a part of, so plan to truly immerse yourself for this 5 month period!
Living on the Farm

Housing - On-farm housing is rustic. Participants will each have an un-insulated, seasonal cabin for sleeping or a very small shared cabin. A communal kitchen space is available for meals and spending time outside of the program hours. The farm does not have running water. Clean drinking water is available at all times and a wood-fired sauna is available for bathing. Outhouse facilities are available on-site.

Food - Calypso provides all of the basic food staples needed for a healthy diet (grains, rice, beans, nuts, dried fruit, oils, spices, etc) in addition to vegetables grown on the farm. We do not provide meat—except occasionally at shared meals and events. Monday through Friday, we eat lunch together – rotating cooking chores with those interested in cooking for the group. Rest assured – you will eat well!

Transportation – Although a vehicle is not required, the farm is located 10 miles from Fairbanks and public transportation is not available in our area. Bringing some mode of transportation, car or bike is highly recommended—particularly if you are someone who wants to shop at the grocery store, visit town for any reason or get away for weekend excursions. There are not any vehicles available for lending on the farm. If you are interested in driving to get here – we are happy to offer advice and direct you towards maps and resources.

Come prepared! - Although summers on the farm are often quite warm and sunny, you can also expect some cold and wet weather and even some snow at the beginning and end of the program. Come prepared with a very warm sleeping bag and other comfortable bedding, layers of warm clothing, rain gear, rain boots and warm and dry outer layers. We will provide you with a detailed “What to Bring” list!

We hope you’ll be interested in immersing yourself in an Alaskan farming season as a stepping stone to launching your own farm! We’re excited to hear from you!

To Apply:
Please email or mail the information listed below to calypsosusan@gmail.com or by US Mail to:
Calypso Farm and Ecology Center, PO Box 106, Ester, AK 99725.
Please put the “Application – Farmer Training Program” in the subject heading or on the envelope. We will fill the spaces available on a rolling basis, so apply early!

Include the following in your application:
• A current resume. This does not need to be formal.
• Three strong references, with current email and phone contact information for each. Note: Your references should be people who know you well, and will have an idea about how the program will work for you. They do not need to be work references.
• Answers to the following 9 questions. These are important!

1) Why are you interested in participating in the Farmer Training Program at Calypso?
2) Describe any relevant experience that will aid you as a program participant.
3) If you were a vegetable, what would you be and why?
4) Describe the role that farming plays in your future plans.
5) Describe any experience that you’ve had with non-traditional forms of education.
6) What do you hope to gain from spending a season at Calypso?
7) Are you interested in the Farm Production or Environmental Education concentration areas, and why? This is just to gauge your current interests; you can alter your focus as the program starts.
8) How did you hear about the Program?
9) What is the best way to reach you?

We welcome and encourage questions about the program! We encourage phone calls and are happy to receive email questions. To learn more please contact Susan at (907) 451-0691 or email calypsosusan@gmail.com.
Frequently Asked Questions about Calypso’s Farmer Training Program

How is this training program different from a “typical farm internship”? Calypso’s Farmer Training Program is completely different from a farm internship (we offered an internship at Calypso farm for 11 years—so we speak from experience!). A key difference is in the type and quality of scheduled, focused training that you receive throughout the season. You will have the benefit of being fully integrated into the farm and farm-life and will spend several hours a day immersed in farm activities however the majority of your time will be focused on hands-on education to support your future in farming. Your educational experience is backed by a carefully designed curriculum complete with skills training in: ecological growing techniques, whole-farm planning, metal, wool and wood-working, food preservation, seed saving and more. The overall experience is a much more in-depth educational experience than spending a season as an intern working on a farm because a majority of the time is carved out specifically for your personal educational experience.

How are you able to offer the program at such a low cost? Calypso raises funds to cover the program from a number of sources including general community donations and small grants. The program has also recently been supported in part by a grant through the USDA.

Do you offer any scholarships or financial aid? Currently, we are not able to offer any standard scholarships or financial aid for the program. However, we are able to offer payment plans and we can work those out with you to meet your needs. Please note, thanks to the support of donors, we are able to offer the program at a very low cost for all participants. If you are a veteran who is unable to afford the cost of room and board, please let us know, one of our partner organizations may be able to help.

What if I want to live off the farm? If you are interested in living off-farm, you are welcome to do that. The program cost is half of the cost for on-farm participants ($350 per month). Full participation is expected for off-farm participants. Off farm participants pay the same materials fee.

Will I have time to travel around Alaska during the program? Plan any travel around the state for before or after the program dates. We have many topics scheduled for the entire season, so there isn’t time for extended trips. However, there are many beautiful places nearby and we encourage weekend excursions! Scheduling a long weekend later in the season is a possibility.

Should I be worried about bears or other wildlife? We rarely see bears on the farm. We are not located in an area of high bear density. However, we do encounter other large wildlife on the farm (mostly moose) and will make sure that you are oriented on what to do when you encounter wildlife of any kind while you are here.

What about the mosquitoes? The farm is located up on a hillside and is “high and dry” which usually means less mosquitoes. However, we do have periods of time (evenings in June…) or some years (2013) with high mosquito density. We have head nets and natural mosquito repellent available for use. Also—the shared kitchen is mosquito-free and all sleeping areas are equipped with mosquito nets. Even on a bad mosquito year, by mid summer they should be gone!

How will I know what to bring? Upon acceptance in the program, we will provide you with a detailed list on what to bring, including suggestions on where to find items.
What type of people participate in the program? All types of people (different ages, life experience and future plans), participate in the program — that’s just one of the elements that makes it so much fun! People choose to do the program for all kinds of reasons and have just as many different ways that they plan on applying what they’ve learned. Check out the profiles of our past Farmer Training Program participants on our website— www.calypsofarm.org or our Farmer Training Program blog: http://calypsoftp.tumblr.com — you can also find our blog by searching for “Farmers of the Last Frontier”. We will also be adding current profiles of past program participants—highlighting what they are up to now!

What if I’m not sure which concentration area to choose? That’s OK! Let us know your top two areas of interest and then soon after you get here, we’ll work with you to tailor your experience to your interests!

Can I bring my dog? Sorry, we can’t house any extra dogs on the farm. We have a few farm dogs and are at our dog limit!

Can I have friends or family come visit and stay on the farm? YES, we welcome visitors! We have several tent platforms that friends or family can use and they are welcome to share the communal kitchen for meals. Our general rule of thumb is that they help on the farm for at least a half day each day while they are here and any visits longer than a week need to be pre-arranged. We try to make sure that we don’t have over-lapping visitors so that there isn’t too much pressure on the kitchen space.

What’s the trip like if I choose to drive? Driving can be a great option. Although not necessary for participating in the program, people who bring a car are usually very glad that they did. There are several driving routes to get here. The easiest is to drive to Bellingham, Washington and then take the Alaska Marine Highway—also knows as “The Ferry” — up to Haines, Alaska. The Ferry takes about three days and journeys through the inside passage. It’s a spectacular trip. The drive from Haines to Fairbanks takes about 10 hours — it can be done in a long day or can be broken into two manageable days. There are several places to stay at about the half way point of Tok, Alaska. Your other option is to drive the whole Alaska-Canada (Alcan) Highway. If you choose this option, give yourself at least a week and you’ll want to pick up the most recent copy of The Milepost which will walk you through the drive, mile by mile. Although it’s good to fill up with gas as it’s available, (here are some long stretches without services), the road is well maintained and well traveled so you won’t be out there all alone!

How can I get a better idea of what it’s like to participate in this program? We have a blog about Calypso’s Farmer Training Program! Take a look to get a better idea of the types of things that go on calypsoftp.tumblr.com/

Another option is to talk directly to someone who has participated in the program. Many of the past program participants are happy to talk with you about their experience here at Calypso—we can get you contact info!