

Tenuta di Spannocchia
Chiusdino, Italy
James Gonzalez
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Overview:

The Tenuta di Spannocchia is an *agriturismo*, or farming estate, that is operated by the Spannocchia Foundation formed in 2002.

Operational goals of the estate include:

- maintaining a sustainable farming operation, based off of organic farming methods, permaculture, renewable resource use, and resource recycling
- provide opportunities for interns, and any other interested parties, to learn about sustainability and conservation, organic agriculture, and the rich cultural heritage of Italy.

Responsibilities:

The responsibilities that I held as an intern varied on a day to day basis, as well as on a weekly basis. Many of these were dependent on other aspects of the farming operation. I was assigned as an *orto* (vegetable garden) worker, and, as such, was typically tasked with ensuring the stable production of high quality produce. This was managed via a multitude of various different tasks associated with farming or gardening, such as: weeding, watering, seeding, transplanting, monitoring, seedbed preparation, irrigation setup, and compost preparation. The estate manages three different garden areas (*orto villa*, *orto della torre*, and *Capannone*), with each requiring a different amount of work and care. One of the garden areas contains a chicken coop and an orchard area, which meant care for the chickens and ducks housed there, plus maintenance and harvest of the fruit trees. As an intern, I was expected to act as an ambassador for the Spannocchia Foundation. In addition to my work in the gardens, I would inform guests about the property, provide them with tours if requested, and help setup and serve at dinner.



The *Orto della Torre* (Tower Garden)
This garden is based on *hügelkultur* (German: mound or hill culture) beds, which replicates the natural decomposition that occurs on forest floors. This style of planting helps provide nutrients to growing plants, increases water retention, and mimics nature. This garden was established by my supervisor to experiment with permaculture methods.



Monitoring tomatoes and beans in *Capannone*.



My supervisor and a coworker transplanting cabbage into a bed in *Capannone* on an unusually rainy day. *Capannone* is the most "traditional" of the three garden areas, with most plants being propagated in long beds.



The *Orto Villa* (Villa Garden)
This would be considered the main garden area at Spannocchia. This is due to the fact that most of the produce consumed by the residents, guests, and interns is produced here. In addition, the chickens, ducks, and fruit orchard is located in this area as well. This garden implements a number of different agricultural techniques, such as intercropping and companion planting. Due to the large amount of biodiversity located here, there is a low frequency of insect and disease pressure.

My supervisor, Yago, and I with one of the chickens situated in the fruit orchard. The chickens and ducks are allowed out during the day to roam free and explore. This helps them retain their natural characteristics and helps reduce feed costs due to their foraging for insects and wild plants.



Summary:
Throughout my time at the Tenuta di Spannocchia, I was awarded numerous opportunities to gain knowledge, broaden my horizons, and grow as a person. Prior to this internship, I had little hands-on experience in farming/gardening, save for occasional volunteering and my work at the WSU Organic Farm. As such, I cherished every task and assignment that was given to me, owing to the fact that each and every one was something new to me. For example, simple tasks - such as weeding and watering - became important learning tools due to the very nature of agriculture and agricultural production. To elaborate on this, the garden areas contained a vast array of different plants and it may become hard to differentiate one plant from another, when something is a weed, or whether or not it is okay to let water get on the leaves. As such, I quickly adapted to identifying plants on-the-go and adjusting my methods accordingly. In addition to providing me with skills pertaining to agriculture, this experience helped foster my professional growth through a number of different situations. As mentioned earlier, I was provided assignments on either a day to day or weekly basis. Due to the large amount required by the garden areas, it was not always possible to work with my supervisor or coworker simultaneously. This meant that I was required to work independently and was entrusted with a professional responsibility to perform my work, as well as an ethical responsibility to maintain my integrity and complete tasks as efficiently as possible. The time I spent with my supervisor also reinforced within me the importance of communication in a professional setting. There were occasionally language barriers due to the nature of an internship program in Italy, but we were always able to work through the difficulties and accomplish our tasks. Overall, I believe that the experience instilled a new sense of confidence within me regarding my abilities in agricultural production, built upon a foundation of knowledge provided to me through school, and invoked feelings of preparedness for the world that awaits me after my college career.