

Obelisk Farm report

ANTONIA AND FRANCISCO

2025



Getting to know the farm and beginning the work



Antónia and Francisco began their traineeship by immersing themselves in the daily rhythm of the farm. During the first days, they had the opportunity to walk around the property, understand its layout, and learn about the different areas. From the hemp fields and processing spaces to the garden, storage areas, and farm house. This initial exploration helped them situate themselves not only physically but also within the broader context of the farm's philosophy and working style.



We took time to explain the history of the place, how the farm evolved over the years, and the importance we give to self-reliance, small-scale production, and natural materials. Both of them showed curiosity and asked questions, particularly about the way hemp is grown and processed here.

Once familiar with the space, Antónia and Francisco gradually joined the ongoing work. Tasks during this phase included basic maintenance. This hands-on approach allowed them to start understanding the rhythm of outdoor work, the attention required in everyday farm tasks, and the importance of observation. Something we value deeply here.



They adapted well to the pace, were open to learning, and showed initiative early on. This first stage was essential to build a foundation of trust, collaboration, and understanding of what the farm represents, not only as a working farm but as a lived space with its own values and routines.



Encounters across generations: learning through stories



One of the most enriching aspects of Antónia and Francisco's time at the farm was the opportunity to connect with older members of our community. These moments offered more than just a glimpse into local life because they provided living lessons in resilience, creativity, and the many ways knowledge can be passed.

A particularly meaningful visit was to the nearby farmhouse of Jānis, an elderly farmer who has worked the land his entire life. Walking through his property, Antónia and Francisco were able to witness a different way of farming, one rooted in tradition, personal rhythm, and intuitive relationship with the land. Jānis shared his stories with warmth and clarity, speaking about changing seasons, past struggles, and small joys. For the trainees, this was a chance to listen and learn from someone whose experience cannot be written down, only shared, face to face.



Another special moment came from meeting our neighbour, a local poet who embodies a different kind of connection to place, one that is lyrical, emotional, and rooted in words rather than tools. In her quiet, thoughtful presence, Antónia and Francisco encountered a form of expression that revealed yet another layer of rural life: not only how people work the land, but how they make sense of it through art and reflection.

These intergenerational encounters offered something that no manual or task list could provide. They created space for meaningful exchanges where knowledge passed through stories. For Antónia and Francisco, listening to people with decades of lived experience brought a richer, more layered understanding of what it means to live and work in a rural context.



These conversations weren't only about the past; they also helped the trainees reflect on their own future. By seeing how older generations adapt, resist, and create meaning within the challenges of rural life, they were encouraged to think critically and compassionately about the kind of choices they might make themselves. In turn, their presence and questions also brought energy and curiosity to those they visited. A reminder that learning flows both ways.

Harvesting and drying hemp: learning by doing



The process began with a short explanation of how to identify the right moment to harvest, based on the plant's maturity and the conditions of the field. We spoke about how harvesting is always a conversation with nature, a balance between readiness and respect. Antónia and Francisco approached the task with focus and eagerness, quickly learning how to handle the plants with care and efficiency.



As the work progressed, they became familiar with different parts of the plant, asking thoughtful questions about how each one might be used. This curiosity opened the door to broader conversations, about traditional uses of hemp, its cultural significance, and the role it plays in our farm's values and daily life.

After harvesting came the equally important step of drying. We introduced them to our simple, low-tech methods that allow the hemp to dry slowly and evenly. They helped with spreading the plants, learning how airflow, humidity, and space affect the outcome. There was precision involved, but also patience: drying hemp is as much about waiting and watching as it is about doing.



Through this hands-on process, Antónia and Francisco gained a deeper understanding of hemp not just as a crop, but as a material that carries history, potential, and responsibility. By engaging with each step, from field to drying rack, they could witness how small-scale practices contribute to preserving the quality of the plant and the knowledge behind it.



Processing hemp: from plant to material



Antónia and Francisco were introduced to some of the ways we transform hemp into usable, natural materials. This phase of the traineeship brought a shift and opened space for creativity, experimentation, and tactile learning. We began with paper-making, using hemp fibers prepared in advance. The process is slow and intentional, requiring patience and attention to detail. They learned how to prepare the pulp, form sheets with the mould and deckle, and press and dry each page. What began as a bucket of fibrous mush gradually turned into textured, beautiful paper, each sheet slightly unique, marked by the natural color and feel of the hemp.



There was something quiet and meditative about this part of the work. Antónia and Francisco quickly understood that paper-making is not just about technique, but about rhythm, balance, and presence. They handled each step with care, asking thoughtful questions and showing a real interest in the connection between process and outcome.



Next came the more physical, hands-on experience of working with hempcrete, a mixture of hemp hurd, lime, and water that we use in small-scale construction. After learning about proportions, mixing methods, and curing time, they helped shape hempcrete.

This offered a different perspective on hemp: not as something fragile, but as a material of strength and durability. These sessions were not only about making, they were about understanding the full cycle of a plant, from seed to structure, from stalk to story. Antónia and Francisco came to see how hemp can take many forms depending on how we engage with it, and how traditional, low-tech practices still hold incredible relevance today.



Food, culture, and the everyday table



Amidst the work, food became one of the most grounding and joyful parts of the traineeship. Mealtimes offered more than nourishment, they created space for conversation and connection.

Francisco naturally found his place in the kitchen, often stepping in to prepare lunch or dinner with creativity and calm. His approach was intuitive, using what was available, keeping things simple, and always cooking with care. Many of the meals he prepared reflected a blend of backgrounds, stories, and influences, adding another layer to the multicultural learning experience of the traineeship.



Often by his side was Fredis, whose enthusiasm and curiosity made the kitchen a space of shared learning and laughter. Helping with chopping vegetables, mixing ingredients, or simply keeping the energy light, Fredis turned each cooking session into a small collaboration. Their time together in the kitchen became a beautiful example of how knowledge can be exchanged across ages, not through formal lessons, but through doing, side by side.



Antónia also took part in the preparation of meals, and together, all of us contributed to setting the table, sharing food, and cleaning up, reinforcing the sense that meals were a collective act.

Through food, we shared more than ingredients. We exchanged memories, rituals, and preferences. We spoke about dishes that reminded us of home, about habits we inherited, and about how food shapes our relationships to time and one another. These everyday conversations added depth to the traineeship, reminding us that cultural exchange often happens in the most ordinary, intimate ways.



Markets and events: sharing the farm beyond its borders



Throughout their time at the farm, Antónia and Francisco had several opportunities to step outside the daily routines and take part in local events and markets. Selling, explaining, and simply being there with the products and the story behind them became an extension of the work done at the farm.



Their first experience was at the Varakļāni Market, a small-town gathering that brought together local producers and residents in a quiet but steady rhythm. The pace was slower, the conversations more personal, and both trainees were able to observe how relationships are built in these spaces. They helped set up the stand, talked with visitors, and began to understand the subtle art of sharing a product that's deeply connected to place and process.

During the Countryside Open Day, a national event, they experienced a different atmosphere altogether. It was a demanding day, but one that showed how much coordination, hospitality, and clear communication matter in sharing our values with the public.



Later, they joined us for the Mākslas Pikniks, an artistic picnic event that brought together craftspeople, creatives, and food producers in a vibrant, open-air setting. It was a space of exchange, inspiration, and lightness.

Finally, at the Viļāni Town Market, a slightly larger and more structured environment, Antónia and Francisco helped us interact with a wider audience. The experience taught them about practicalities, pricing, packaging, timing, but also about the importance of listening and reading the public.



Through these events, both trainees came to understand that farming doesn't end at the edge of the field. It continues in how we speak about what we do, how we relate to others, and how we create bridges between those who produce and those who consume. These small markets and gatherings became moments of connection.

Supporting the production: care, consistency, and craft



In addition to their involvement in farming, learning, and community life, Antónia and Francisco also contributed meaningfully to the production of our hemp-based products, a vital part of what sustains the farm. This work required attention to detail, consistency, and a respect for the material and the process behind each item.



They participated in various stages of production, from preparing raw materials to packaging finished goods. Tasks included cleaning and sorting seeds, labeling and packing hemp tea, measuring and sealing oil bottles, and preparing hemp paper kits. Though often repetitive, these tasks were never rushed, we emphasized doing things with care, and both trainees responded to that approach with patience and commitment.



Through this hands-on work, they were able to see how the value of a product lies not just in what it is, but in how it is made. Each item is the result of a process that blends knowledge, time, and manual work, and their involvement gave them a deeper understanding of that invisible labor. They quickly became reliable and proactive, asking questions, suggesting improvements, and handling responsibilities with maturity.



Their presence during this part of the traineeship reminded us of something simple but essential: when people connect with the process, the product holds more meaning. And in a setting like ours, where every item tells a story of place, plant, and people, that connection matters deeply.

Encounters with rural entrepreneurship



As part of their learning journey, Antónia and Francisco had the chance to visit two very different, yet equally inspiring, local initiatives. Both rooted in the countryside, but shaped by distinct personal stories and visions. These visits were important not only to broaden their perspective on rural life, but to witness how knowledge shared can take root and grow in unexpected directions.



The first visit took them to a hemp house built by someone who had previously attended one of our hempcrete workshops. This stop held special meaning, as it showed the long-term impact of shared knowledge. Seeing the house, still in progress, but clearly the result of dedication, experimentation, and care, was a powerful example of how learning doesn't stop at the end of a course. It continues through trial, error, and the quiet determination to build with natural materials. Here they also had the chance to visit a historical and folklore-based project that merges traditional knowledge with entrepreneurship. For Antónia and Francisco, it was a chance to see how identity, history, and creativity can come together in a sustainable way.



Finally, we spent time at the small farm of a young woman entrepreneur who raises goats and produces a range of handmade products. Her approach was practical, passionate, and deeply personal. She spoke openly about the challenges of starting something from scratch, of navigating markets and seasons, and of holding onto one's values in the process. Her energy was contagious, and Antónia and Francisco left the visit with a renewed sense of what is possible, even on a small scale, even in a rural setting.





Welcoming Antónia and Francisco to the farm marked not only another chapter in our experience of hosting trainees, it marked the final one. Since 2020, we've had the privilege of sharing this place, this rhythm of life, and this ongoing experiment in self-reliance and sustainability with people from different places and backgrounds. Each person who came left something behind: a story, a task completed, a question asked, or simply their presence. And through each exchange, we grew, as hosts and as a family.

This last traineeship felt special from the beginning. There was a sense of calm and openness in the way Antónia and Francisco arrived, ready to adapt, eager to learn, and fully present. They moved through the days with care and humility, slowly weaving themselves into the fabric of our daily life, not as visitors or guests, but as participants in something shared.

It was deeply meaningful for us to witness their interest, not just in the "how" of the tasks, but in the "why" — why we do things the way we do, why this work matters, and how it all fits into a larger picture of living intentionally.

Ending this cycle of traineeships is not something we take lightly. It has been one of the most incredible experiences we've had here at the farm. These past five years brought us connection, challenge, inspiration, and the constant reminder that learning is not a one-way street. Every person who came taught us something and helped shape the atmosphere we've built over time. Hosting has made us more patient, more thoughtful, and more aware of the many ways life can unfold.

As we look ahead to new directions, we carry with us the memory of all these shared seasons. And this last one will remain close to our hearts. To Antónia and Francisco: thank you. And to everyone who ever passed through this place with open hands and an open mind, we are deeply grateful.