

Internship Experience at Obelisk Farm

Introduction



I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to have completed my internship at Obelisk Farm. This experience was not only a period of agricultural practice but also a journey of cultural immersion, personal growth, and reflection on the social dimensions of farming. What struck me most was how Obelisk Farm embodies a holistic approach: one that integrates sustainable farming, community engagement, education, and cultural exchange.

Access to Land

Access to land is often one of the biggest challenges for farmers. Land provides the basis not only for cultivation but also for building community, receiving visitors, and enabling educational initiatives.

At Obelisk Farm, access is guaranteed through a country road that, despite heavy rains, remained in good condition throughout my stay. This detail may sound simple, but it is crucial. For a project that hosts visitors, interns, and tourists, reliable access is essential. Without it, many of the activities I witnessed would be limited or even impossible.

The road itself symbolizes a bridge between rural areas and wider society. It allowed tractors and supplies to arrive, tourists to visit the hemp museum, children and families to enjoy workshops, and interns like myself to participate fully. It reminded me that access to land is not just about ownership but also about connectivity — the physical and social infrastructure that ensures a farm can thrive and remain part of a larger network.



In Portugal, where I have managed a hemp crop, I have seen how access can be a barrier, whether due to poor roads, isolation, or lack of transport. Obelisk Farm demonstrated that maintaining accessibility, even in a remote region of Latvia, enables agricultural projects to become hubs for knowledge exchange, cultural events, and entrepreneurship.



Gender Issues

One of the most striking aspects of Obelisk Farm was the natural integration of gender equality. There was no visible distinction between the roles of men and women. All tasks — from welcoming visitors, preparing food, guiding educational activities, or working in the field — were carried out collaboratively and without hierarchy based on gender.

This was very meaningful for me to observe. In many traditional farming settings, gender divisions still exist, with men typically associated with machinery or fieldwork and women with domestic or supporting roles. At Obelisk Farm, those divisions were absent. Women and men participated equally in farm maintenance, construction projects such as hempcrete wall building, and in decision-making processes.

This equality extended to social spaces as well. During meals, discussions, and cultural activities, everyone's voice carried weight. The atmosphere was open, respectful, and inclusive. This approach not only increases efficiency but also fosters a stronger sense of community.

For me, this confirmed that gender equality is not something that needs to be imposed externally but can become a natural way of working if consciously practiced from the start. Projects like Obelisk Farm show that gender inclusivity strengthens resilience, creativity, and the overall sustainability of agricultural ventures.



Intergenerational Aspects

Another powerful dimension of my internship was the intergenerational exchange of knowledge and practices.

Within the farm itself, I observed how family members of different ages contributed to the project in their own ways. Elders brought stability, experience, and continuity, while younger members and volunteers added new perspectives, ideas, and enthusiasm. This created a dynamic balance between tradition and innovation.

During external visits, intergenerational learning was also clear. At the goat cheese farm, the farmer shared their deep knowledge of animal care and cheesemaking, while younger workers went and picked some fruits for the tourists. At the markets, I saw older generations of farmers discussing crop yields and machinery, while younger generations explored digital tools and marketing strategies.

This theme was also visible in the hemp house construction project. The owner, drawing from both historical building practices and modern sustainable architecture, demonstrated how old and new knowledge can be combined to create innovative and resilient solutions.

For me, the intergenerational aspect was not only about age but also about the transmission of values. Respect for the land, cultural traditions of the Latgale region, and the inclusion of diverse perspectives were all passed down and shared freely. This gave me a strong sense of continuity and belonging.

Activities and Practical Learning

The variety of activities I participated in was central to the internship experience:

- **Hemp Leaf Harvesting:** I learned to collect and dry hemp leaves properly for tea production. This activity required patience and attention to detail, highlighting how small processes influence product quality.
- **Hempcrete Wall Construction:** Contributing to rebuilding a wall with hempcrete gave me firsthand knowledge of hemp as a construction material and its potential for sustainable architecture.



- **Hemp Paper Production:** Following the full process of turning stalks into paper — from raw fiber preparation to producing an A4 sheet — taught me how agricultural byproducts can be repurposed into valuable resources.

- **Farm Maintenance:** Routine but essential tasks such as weeding and grass cutting reminded me of the constant care and responsibility that underpins all agricultural projects.

Beyond the farm:

- At the **goat cheese farm**, I experienced the complete process of cheesemaking, from fresh goat's milk to the final product.
- At **markets**, I observed rural economies in action, with small farmers, craftspeople, and large machinery all coexisting in one space.
- At the **hemp house construction site**, I learned technical details about sustainable building and discussed how hemp can serve as a cornerstone for eco-friendly projects.



Food and Cultural Exchange

Food was another dimension of learning. Hemp was incorporated into nearly every meal, which not only introduced me to new flavors but also demonstrated its versatility. Hemp oil was used to marinate meat, hemp hearts enriched salads, and even traditional Portuguese cuisine was adapted with hemp as an ingredient.

This integration of hemp into daily food culture was more than nutrition — it was symbolic of how agriculture and identity are intertwined. Sharing meals with the Obelisk family, volunteers, and visitors created moments of connection that transcended language and cultural barriers.



Reflections and Personal Impact

Overall, Obelisk Farm was for me like a “hemp university.” I gained knowledge not only about hemp as a plant with countless applications but also about the social dimensions that sustain agricultural projects.



Conclusion and Next Steps



This internship has been transformative. It has shaped my understanding of hemp farming, deepened my appreciation for inclusive and intergenerational approaches, and reinforced my motivation to continue developing my own hemp project in Portugal.

In my next phase, I intend to reorganize my project with a renewed focus. While I will continue producing hemp seed oil, whole seeds, and hemp protein, I also want to build a model that integrates volunteers, interns, and community members — ensuring that the project becomes not only productive but also socially valuable.

In conclusion, Obelisk Farm has shown me that with accessible land, gender equality, and intergenerational collaboration, farming can be much more than agriculture: it can be education, culture, sustainability, and community.

I am deeply grateful for this experience. Thank you very much — Paldies, Muito obrigado, Obelisk Family and Forum Synergies!

