

Pomona College Organic Farm Self-Guided Tour

Tour Route: Entrance Chalkboard – Chickens – Earth Dome – Plot Stewardship – Hammer Throw Field – Compost Piles – East Orchard – Greenhouse – Row Crops.

Entrance Chalkboard

Welcome to the Farm – we're glad you're here and hope that this tour will help you to appreciate the history behind the Farm and the hard work that goes into running the Farm today. This tour will take 30 minutes to an hour, depending on how long you spend at each stop. Feel free to take this guide home with you or return it to the box.

Before starting the tour, make you've checked out the marble statue of the Goddess Pomona, which is just to your left if you are facing the chalkboard. This statue was donated by Pomona College alumnus and Farm supporter Ronald Fleming '63. As you make your way from here to the chicken coop, read over the history of the Farm below.

Farm History

The history below is adapted from Adam Long's 2012 Environmental Analysis thesis project, "A Guide to the Pomona College Organic Farm: An Introduction to the Farm's History and Basic Gardening Skills and Techniques."

The Pomona College Organic Farm (the Farm) is located at the southern end of what is commonly known as "The Wash," a low area which was a natural drainage for water from floods. The Coast Live Oaks that populate The Wash today likely have grown there for hundreds of years, their limbs providing shade and acorns food for the Serrano people who used to populate this region. Spanish settlers in early 1800s forced the Serrano people off their lands, and all had left by the mid-1880s, around the time that Pomona College was founded. Since the early days of the college, The Wash was a favorite spot for "picnics and other activities," and so in 1905 trustee Nathan Blanchard provided the funds to purchase and set aside the 40 acres as a live oak preserve. Only 10 acres of that land remains untouched today – the rest has been developed for other uses such as playing fields, buildings, and other infrastructure.

One part of The Wash, an open area used as a gravel pit and trash dump, caught the eye of a few Pomona College students in the late 1990s. In the fall of 1998, they began using The Wash as a site for spreading composted food scraps from the dining halls as part of the student-initiated Compost Club. The Farm was eventually born in the spring of 1999 when these students shaped the accumulated

soil and compost into a few beds and planted a few crops. Although very little survived the first summer at the Farm, students came back in the fall of 1999 to find one living tomato plant. This inspired them to continue work, and so they planted more vegetables and founded the original Associated Students of Pomona College (ASPC) “Gorilla Farming Club.” Students, faculty, staff, and community members spent countless hours every day during this first year removing trash and rocks, building up the soil with compost and nitrogen-fixing clover, and maintaining vegetable plots. Starting in the spring of 2000, a wide variety of fruit trees were planted across the Farm and enough produce was grown to donate some to local food banks.

During these early years, the Farm was still run almost entirely by students and community members as a largely freeform, grassroots effort. Soon, however, the college took the first steps to officially recognize the existence of the Farm and provide guidelines for its use. In the early 2000s, the Dean of Students Office created a student-faculty committee to set basic rules for temporary use of the Farm. The rules they developed, such as no planting under oak trees, no fires, and no illegal activity, have been adapted and are still in use today. However, disregard for these rules and the continuous presence of and illegal activity fostered a distrusting relationship between the early Farm students and the administration at the time. At the same time, there were also students and others who worked hard to keep the Farm looking neat and attractive and were influential in healing the negative feelings that characterized the early relationship between the Farm and the administration.

Chicken Coop

In 2008, a group of students called “The Order of the Sagehen” began raising chickens to learn about sustainable animal husbandry. The current coop was built during the construction of the South Campus Parking Structure (just on the other side of the fence). Like the rest of the Farm, the chicken program is ultimately under the oversight of the Environmental Analysis department. However, as with all vertebrate animals on campus, the chickens are subject to strict animal welfare standards regulated by a national accreditation agency. Student coordinators and volunteers take care of the chickens on a daily basis. If you see a student in the coop, please ask and they will be happy to let you come in and meet the flock!

Next, turn around and make your way towards to the large structure at the center of the West Farm – this is the Earth Dome!

Earth Dome

The following excerpt is adapted from Adam Long's 2012 thesis:

In the fall of 2001, a student organized 19 others to form an independent study class with Professor Rick Worthington about green architecture, which was later titled "The Politics of Community Design." This course took a field trip to The California Institute of Earth Art and Architecture (Cal-Earth) in Hesperia, California which exposed students to architect Nader Khalili's "superadobe" structures. These structures are permanent, earth-based buildings constructed by filling long fabric tubes with dirt, stacking these coils into walls, arches, and domes, and then covering the surface with concrete and plaster. Farm students were inspired by one of Mr. Khalili's earthen dome designs and made an initial proposal to construct what they called an "Earth Dome" at the Farm. This first dome project started during the spring and summer of 2002 but was soon destroyed by the college due to the concerns that it was against city building code.

The second Earth Dome, which stands to this day, was started in April 2003 with donations from the college and alumni and a proposal to the City of Claremont. After receiving approval, work on concrete and rebar foundation began in the summer of 2004, work on filling and stacking long bags with dirt began in the early spring of 2005, and then the bags were encased with rebar and concrete during the summer of 2005. Later improvements like surface plastering, drainage trenches, a hand-carved door, hand-painted interior art, and a concrete floor were developed and implemented over the course of many years and not finally completed until 2011.

West Farm

The Pomona College Organic Farm has two distinct faces: the West Farm and the East Farm. These two sides embody two distinctly different approaches to organic farming, with the West Farm taking a smaller-scale permaculture/food forest approach and the East farm taking a more traditional row crop approach. They offer unique opportunities to explore two different sides of organic farming and gardening.

The West Farm is the original area where students began composting and planting crops in the later 1990s (see Farm History above for more). The West Farm is currently home to student, faculty, staff, and community plots, available for checkout on a semester basis, and a variety of fruit trees. This side is more favorable for small-scale gardening and installations based on companion planting and food forestry. The West Farm is also much shadier, so it offers opportunities to explore gardening with shade-friendly plants. Events such as music festivals, harvest parties, and workshops are also often held in the open mulched areas on this side of the Farm. This side of the Farm has an area of about .65 acres.

Take your time and wander through the West Farm (perhaps wandering into the Outdoor Classroom or by the Composting Toilet, and then head to the large field to the east.

Hammer Throw Field

The Hammer Throw field has been a source of slight friction the Athletics Department and Farm supporters (who see it as a perfect place to grow more food). Athletics continues to hold sway, and hammer throw athletes use the field a track meet hosted Pomona College each spring. Watch out for flying discs and metal balls!

As you continue across the field, read below to learn more about the history that led to the creation of the East Farm.

East Farm

The following excerpt is adapted from Adam Long's 2012 thesis:

Wishing to expand and formalize the Farm's boundaries, a group of professors met with President David Oxtoby and other college administrators and grounds supervisors at the Farm in late 2005. This group also proposed allocating a new space for Professor Hazlett's first "Farms and Gardens" class which was being offered during the upcoming spring 2006 semester. This proposed location was originally an empty plot of land with a young fruit tree grove surreptitiously planted by students in 2004. Final decisions about the matter were postponed until students returned in the spring. A follow up meeting with students, faculty, and administrators in January 2006 ended with the understanding that the original Farm boundaries would be maintained and space would be allocated for Professor Hazlett's course.

However, in mid-February the College began considering an alternate proposal that would have demolished everything except for what was within a 20 foot radius of the new Earth Dome. Students, upset about this plan, started the "Save the Farm" movement and began working with the administration to preserve the original West Farm site. The efforts of the first "Farms and Gardens," which began developing what is now the East Farm, also played an important role in showing the administration the importance of the Farm. In the end, almost 900 students, faculty, staff, and community members signed a petition to protect the Farm from development.

Finally, President Oxtoby formally agreed to support the preservation of the Farm (both West Farm and East Farm) in early April and the boundaries set remain in place today. The Environmental Analysis Program began to provide

financial and operational support for the Farm at this time as well, especially for the development of the East Farm, originally known as the “Experimental Field” or the “Academic Field.”

Today, the East Farm contains a mature fruit orchard, small greenhouse, extensive compost program, beehives, and row crops, an entirely different approach to farming than what is seen at the West Farm. It is maintained year-round by the Farm Manager, student workers, and Farm volunteers. Produce from this side is also sold at Farm Stand to raise money to buy seeds, supplies, and equipment needed to keep the Farm running. The total area of this side of the Farm is only .45 acres, but we do a lot in the small space!

As you pass the large tool storage containers, look to your left for the large compost piles.

Compost Piles

The compost system in front of you processes all the food waste from Pomona’s dining halls, cafes, and from bins located around campus, which amounts to over 65 tons each year. A student Compost Driver picks up bins of scraps from the Pomona dining halls every day and brings them to the Farm, where student Farm employees mix them with tree mulch and leaves. Microorganisms quickly establish themselves in the piles and turn the organic waste into dark compost. This microorganism activity alone heats up the piles to between 140 and 160 degrees Fahrenheit! Because these aerobic microbes require oxygen to thrive, the piles are turned by hand and with the tractor a few times over the course of the composting process. After 8 to 10 weeks, the compost process is complete: few identifiable food scraps remain, the pile has cooled down, and it smells like rich dirt. The compost can then be sifted to remove sticks and rocks and applied to beds at the Farm or around the college.

Turn around and the next stop on the tour is directly behind you.

East Orchard

The orchard on the East Farm was originally planted in 2004 by a group of students. Over the winter of 2013-2014, the orchard was overhauled to remove an old shed, install drip irrigation, prune back overgrown trees, and sheet mulch to eliminate Bermuda grass and other noxious groundcover weeds. There are many varieties of trees planted here including peach, nectarine, plum, sapote, orange, tangerine, blood orange, and jujube. You will also notice the bee hives, which help to pollinate trees and crops around the Farm and beyond. Don’t get too close to the bee boxes, but please feel free to wander around or have picnic lunch on the tables.

As you finish wandering the orchard, look to the right of the compost piles to find the greenhouse – that's the next stop on the tour.

Greenhouse

The current greenhouse was built in late summer of 2013, replacing its somewhat flimsier predecessor and offering more space for seedlings. Although you may associate greenhouses with cooler climates, the greenhouse here is vital to help start seeds and protect small seedlings to survive the cool nights here until they are large enough to transplant outside. The greenhouse also offers some measure of protection against the many hungry animals and bugs at the Farm. Feel free to look inside, but please don't touch the sensitive plants and close the door behind you when you leave. The crops most commonly started in the greenhouse include broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, kale, Swiss chard, and onions for the winter season and tomato, eggplant, pepper, squash, cucumber, and basil for the summer.

After exiting the greenhouse, turn left and head over the field of row crops.

Row Crops

The rest of the Farm is primarily occupied by the crop rows that you see extending in front of you. This is where most of the annual vegetable crops are grown after being started from seed in the greenhouse. These crop rows are watered with drip irrigation which provides water directly to the soil near the plant roots and helps to prevent water loss from evaporation. You will also notice various vines growing on the fence, a section of banana trees, and some native plants along the borders. All of the produce grown here is used for an on-campus Farm Stand, provided to several campus cafes, or given to volunteers in return for their labor. Please walk around and ask Farm Staff if you have any questions or would like to sample some of the crops that you find. Step on the mulched pathways and please do not allow children or dogs to step in the beds.

This ends the self-guided tour! Stay and wander the Farm as long as you like, but make sure to head out before the sun sets. We hope that you enjoyed your visit. Please invite friends and family and come again soon!

For more information and to stay up to date with Farm activities and public events, follow us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/pomonafarm or visit our website at farm.pomona.edu.