

**CENTER FOR  
SUSTAINABILITY**  
CAL POLY AGRICULTURE, FOOD  
AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES

Eric Boyd, a 2011-12 CAFES Center for Sustainability Sustainable Steward and 2012 Cal Poly graduate with a major in Soil Science, was recently in Washington DC with the [Veterans Sustainable Agriculture Training \(VSAT\) program](#). Eric is a veteran of the United States Army where he served five years as a Calvary scout. He was deployed twice to Iraq, and received a Purple Heart for wounds received during his first tour.



Member of the Veterans Sustainable Agriculture Training program help First Lady Michele Obama in the White House organic garden. (from L to R): Mike Hanes, VSAT alum, Colin Archipley, VSAT Founder, First Lady Michelle Obama, Eric Boyd, VSAT soil instruction, and Karen Archipley, VSAT Co-founder.

While there, the VSAT team were invited to help plant the White House organic garden with Michelle Obama on Thursday April 4, 2012 (see photo below). The next day, the group met with met with USDA Secretary, Tom Vilsack; White House Domestic Policy Council Rural Affairs Senior Policy Advisor Doug McKalip, and other policy maker, and visited four senate offices to promote the VSAT program that helps transition veterans into agriculture and create effective strategies to do so.

The VSAT program was started by Colin Archipley, a decorated Marine sergeant, and his wife Karen however saw the combination as a win-win when they founded the outside San Diego, California.

Many veterans who have served our country have challenges transitioning to civilian life and struggle with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and high unemployment rates. After three tours in Iraq, Colin found his solace working on the Archipley's newly-purchased, neglected avocado farm, which sat on 3 acres outside of Camp Pendleton, a Marine Corps base.

Colin wanted to help other veterans heal their wounds through organic farming—and to use their acquired skills to start agricultural businesses of their own. The VSAT program has partnered with local community and state colleges to offer veterans an intensive six-week course to learn how to grow hydroponic crops from seed to market. Participants then take an exam and present their business plan to potential investors, produce buyers, and human resources personnel. At the end of

the course, participants have a solid business plan and the know-how to start their own operation. While teaching soils for the VSAT program, Eric himself created a business plan that he was able to use to erect a greenhouse on my family's farm in Arroyo Grande.