

Summer Internship Report 2017

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Hometown: McDowell, VA



**Great Day Gardens
Forest, Virginia**

Provide an overview of the organization/research project and a summary of your responsibilities, tasks, and/or projects.

This summer I interned at Great Day Gardens in Forest, Virginia. They are a market-garden and bakery that grow vegetables and bake bread and pastries for both a weekly CSA share and once a week markets. My responsibilities as an intern varied greatly, as I would help my supervisors, Arden and Michael, with whatever tasks needed to be done that day, from weeding to harvesting in the garden to helping out in the bakery. Typically I spent about one day a week in the bakery, helping either to mix or shape loaves with Michael, or left to do other tasks and pastry preparation with the other intern. I also attended a weekly farmer's market on Saturdays, so I and the other intern would have to set up and run our stand from 8 to 12.

During your internship, what did you accomplish or how did you make a difference? In what ways did you grow in your professional and technical skills?

During my internship, I learned a lot about organic farming and the struggles associated with it. I thoroughly enjoyed every moment on the farm, and am definitely now clearer about my post-graduation plans after spending this summer at Great Day Gardens. Coming into this internship, I did not have much experience with farming, so I was confronted with many things that I was uncomfortable and inexperienced with. From the first day there, when I had to be walked through each task and supervised very closely, to the last day when I was able to be given a list of tasks and left to my own, I definitely learned a lot and was able to contribute more and more to easing the huge amount of garden work that increases as the summer progresses. My presence, and that of the other intern, also enabled Great Day Gardens to run three separate stands at weekly farmer's market, which helped to sell the large volume of produce we got from the garden at its peak time, and allowed me to learn a lot about the inner workings of farmer's markets and the struggles and benefits associated with

being in such close collaboration with other vendors at these markets and with the customers who attend.

Describe a problem that you helped to solve at your internship. What skills or knowledge from your education at Sewanee helped you address the problem?

Being a Forestry major, I did benefit from having some knowledge learned in Forestry classes and labs about growing trees and about ecosystems that translated well to growing vegetables organically, with a lot of concern for the state of the soil and ecosystems that are essential to growing food without having to put in outside pesticides and fertilizers which ultimately leave ecosystems and ecological relationships damaged or destroyed. Many of the problems we were faced with on the farm were discussed with the whole team, and we often brainstormed in order to find a solution together. From trying to find ways to improve fencing so that rodents and other pests would not continue to eat the produce to trying to figure out issues in the bakery, each time a problem surfaced we would discuss them together and collaborate to find a solution.

In what way were your teamwork skills strengthened?

During my internship this summer there were rarely tasks that were done alone. Many tasks, such as harvesting tomatoes or green beans, were so daunting that we'd often tackle them together, both to keep morale high and to make the tasks go faster. Because of the small size of the garden, even tasks done alone were usually done within sight of one of the other members of our team this summer. We all ate lunch at the farm together, so throughout my time there the four of us formed a very tight knit working group and worked very well together, constantly collaborating and using our relationships to get all the work that had to be done both quicker and more easily than if it all had to be done alone. Moments where the other intern, Kyra, and I were given tasks to do alone were a very concrete example of our teamwork skills, as often problems would arise that we would have to work together to solve without the benefit of our supervisor's knowledge. Every Wednesday, we would be sent to the bakery together to work on the first steps to mixing that week's bread dough and pastries. During our individual time with Michael, who supervised everything in the bakery, each of us had been exposed to different things and different areas of the bakery, so when we were together we were able to put our individual knowledge together in order to accomplish the day's tasks.

How did your internship affect your career plans?

As a rising senior, I am getting to the point where I have to start thinking about what I will do when I graduate in just one year. Working this summer with Arden and Michael, who both graduated Sewanee in 2013 and were unsure about their futures until they started Great Day Gardens, I was able to both look at them as examples of going with the flow until things worked out, and I was able to experience what it is like to be a young farmer, just starting out and figuring out how everything works on the job. They, and the other young farmers I met through them, all had different ways of doing things but offered me many different paths to farming, which, after this summer, is certainly something I would consider doing with my future. The commercial agricultural system in the US is so broken, and after seeing how farming should look, and could look, I could definitely see myself contributing to a solution to this country's agricultural problems in my future.

In what ways did your internship cause you to encounter people of different backgrounds from your own? What steps did you take to communicate effectively with such persons? What did you learn from such persons' perspectives?

The most striking encounters I had with people of different backgrounds happened at the farmer's markets. For my first three weeks, before the arrival of the other intern, I went with my supervisor to

the Lynchburg Community Market. This market is in downtown Lynchburg, and has historically been a place for those who live in the food desert of downtown Lynchburg and have not have access to any fresh foods. Because of this, it is a mix of vendors, some who have been there for a long time who cheaply re-sell produce to the community, produce not grown by them or in a sustainable way, but that is still so important to this community which would not have any access to fresh foods without it. However, there is another population of vendors at the market who do grow their own food, and do it without spray and with concern for the environment, but cannot grow as much as these other vendors, as they are limited by their growing season in Virginia and by organic practices. The difference between these vendors was very striking as a vendor, however those who attended the market had no idea the difference between the two, and only went to get their weekly produce. Once the other intern arrived, I began going to a different market, which was outside the city and located in a more affluent and privileged area. This market did not allow vendors to resell anything, so all vendors grew or made their own products. The customers at this market came because they wanted to support the local farmers, not because they had no other options for fresh foods, and had a different approach to the market and to their community. Having gone to both of these markets did present an interesting cultural separation, from the inner city people to those who were more privileged and enjoyed the market for its ambiance and the quality of produce there. In interacting with customers at both markets, I tried to simply convey the care with which we at Great Day Gardens grew the vegetables and baked the bread, and to help each person the best I could, without getting frustrated either by other vendors who sometimes were not as excited about collaboration between vendors, or by customers who did not appreciate how lucky we all were to have such amazing food, right at our fingertips.

Words of thanks to your internship funding donors:

I was so fortunate this summer I have had an internship that I enjoyed and from which I learned innumerable lessons. I believe I made some lifelong friends during my stay with Great Day Gardens, and would not have traded this experience for anything. Thank you so much for being so generous so that we at Sewanee can continue to throw ourselves into new experiences without having to worry as much about the financial downsides that an unpaid internship can bring. I am forever grateful to Sewanee and its donor for making this summer possible!