

## Behind the Greens: Our Research and Extension Summer Experiences at UGA

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When we weren't in the lab this summer doing research with our REEU, we were out harvesting organic potatoes, petting turkeys and setting up food stands at the local Farmers Market. From organic farm trips to helping out local farmers at 5:00 am, we got to experience first-hand what the other side of our research looks like.

On our day at the market, we had the pleasure of working with Mark Golden, a former travelling musician that now spends his days as a whimsical full-time farmer at Hearts of Harvest Farms. He decided to farm after realizing that farming would always be an important part of his life. "It kind of just happened. I never

planned on becoming a farmer," he said. His stand was simple, yet colorful and attractive. Mark's products included beautiful "ugly" tomatoes, carrots, Spanish garlic, onions, fresh basil, flowers, and even microgreens (different, but delicious). He chuckled as we inquired of his crop selection. "Call me crazy, but part of it is a calling from the Earth. Sort of a music that you hear from the plants, you know? Otherwise, I grow by the season, and I try to grow as many varieties as possible. That way, our produce is more marketable."

He also told us about how the highlight of organic farming is omitting the use of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides. Likewise, he only uses plant-based compost, and even fish emulsions for his crops. To deter pests, Mark prefers to plant borders that take the brunt of it all, and use organic sprays. Finally, he informed us that being a good person and communicating is a key aspect in what he does. "Treat people like they're people and everything will be just fine," he said as he bagged tomatoes for a customer. "Having good food helps, too!" the customer quipped.

Our experience cemented that our research is about so much more than lab work and genetics. On the other side are people that rely on this knowledge for their livelihoods. Meeting growers and sharing their experiences was extremely rewarding and will leave a lasting impression.