

STEM and Stem: UGA REEU Interns Look Into Farming

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It's undoubtedly July in Georgia: summer squash, heirloom tomatoes, and sweet blueberries are everywhere at the Athens Farmers Market. Regardless of your taste in fruits and vegetables, we can all agree on one thing: unblemished produce is much more desirable than those with spots. That's why over the past few weeks in the UGA REEU Crop Genetics and Genomics Internship, we have been learning about plant pathology and how it impacts the food we grow and eat. Some of the interns here at UGA are looking at pathogens, or disease-causing organisms, on different plants. We study these pathogens to find better ways to naturally protect our crops against disease, keeping them delicious and bountiful without the need for lots of pesticides. This past week, we were offered the opportunity to witness the implements of our laboratory work and see how it can impact local farmers here in Athens. We helped out

Sundance Farm's stand, which is a local, organic farm that is located in Danielsville, GA, about 20 minutes from Athens. Ed Janosik, Sundance Farm's owner, was more than happy to tell us about his farm. Ed has been farming for over 20 years, brought into the lifestyle because of his desire to have fresh, quality crops. And he does just that, growing a hearty crop including zephyr squash, kale, tomatoes, onions, carrots, and garlic. He picks his crops based on what people want, with a few plants, like hot peppers, that he has a personal interest in.

We talked to him about pest management and learned that there are very few pesticides available for organic farming, and most of them are controlled by crop rotation and multiple croppings. Fertilizers, too, have to be natural, so compost and natural minerals are a staple. But what was most fascinating about the market was the community: farmers talking, trading, agreeing on fair prices, and customers that know Ed on a first name basis. It's as simple as having good produce, so people come back, and then you get to know them, he said. Good and organic produce is what brings the community together in Athens, which is our inspiration to continue to do what we love to do!

