

## Title: Beyond the Field and the Lab Bench

In an increasingly global world, it is easy to get lost and disconnected. Both science and agriculture have been commercialized and it seems we have forgotten the importance of meaningful connections. Through our experiences in the Crop Genetics REEU, we have been reminded of the significance of community in daily and professional life.

For centuries, we have been at odds with the environment. We have tried to control it, to make room for our paved roads and cattle fields. But through our trip to a local organic farm, we learned there is still hope for harmony. On a cloudy Monday, we met with Ed, owner of Sundance farms. He walked us through his farm, telling us the story of each crop he grew, and the critters that call Sundance home. By refusing to use inorganic pesticides and herbicides, he allowed the natural ecosystem to coexist amongst his tomatoes and peanuts. Ed showed it is possible for organic farms to be both economically and environmentally sustainable, by staying connected to the native landscape around us.



While local organic farms create bonds with the native ecosystem, they also forage connections in the community. While at Sundance, we learned about organic farming techniques, but we also learned about Ed. He grew up in rural Pennsylvania and originally got a degree in Zoology. Ed chatted about his daughter and four dogs, and about other local farmers that he often exchanges product with. It's Ed's kind and approachable demeanor that makes him a big hit at the Athens Farmers Market. Through Ed, we saw the importance of engaging with your local community.

Many students venture out into the world during their summers to gain career insight and connections. This summer, ourselves and other undergraduate students gained research experience from the Crop Genetics and Genomics REEU at the University of Georgia. The REEU is a great way to explore options and possible career paths.

Being mentored by graduate students in a lab gave us insight into graduate school and the world of research. Our peers also played a great role in our REEU experience. We were able to work and connect with people from many different backgrounds, and this was a great way for us to learn more about other experiences in science. It created a sense of comfort, knowing we share a similar experience and it's also nice to know of the hard work others put in to be in the position they are today. Our REEU experience put us out of our comfort zones, but in doing so it gave us the opportunity to learn about ourselves and make lifelong connections.