

## The Crop Connection

Every living person is dependent on food to lead a healthy lifestyle. Despite this, many of us living in the industrialized west are completely unaware of how our meals are cultivated on the field before reaching the table. The Crop Genetics and Genomics REEU program at UGA allowed many of us students from all over the country to break this unknown barrier and permitted us to take our first steps into the vast and uniquely beautiful world of agriculture.



While this was the first time experiencing plant research or even working with plants in any facet for many of us, the rapid transition and integration into this unique world was eased through the quality of care provided to us by our mentors and those immersed in the agriculture communities. Some of the more technical aspects of the farming process such as knowing which tomatoes to harvest for data collection, understanding how to properly plant crops, or even knowing which plant is a weed or a crop, were a bit daunting at first for many. Our mentors, having once been in our shoes, took care when teaching us, building our confidence in a way that allowed us to grow from mere seedlings in the world of agriculture into fresh buds, ripe with excitement.

The practical use of agriculture is clear; its highly unexplored, yet deep impact on culture and community too is significant. During our time working in our respective fields and greenhouses, we instantly felt the sense of endearing community surrounding this field of study. Agriculture is not merely pumping out high yield crops or using research studies to find the best way to grow squash, it's also tasting your home grown beans and learning about ways to incorporate a community into your own home. From the largest of factory farms all the way down to the most quaint of community gardens, the people really responsible for dinner are constantly building a connection amongst themselves and with the earth.

Unlike many other fields, agriculture has applicability and importance all around the world. What one person does across the world can impact an entire population thousands of miles away. Food is what brings us all together. Whether your food is home grown in your backyard, selected in a farmers market, or bought in a grocery store, you can rest assured that there are those dedicated to improving the quality and consistency of every meal. It was *because* of our vastly different experiences this summer, not despite them, that we all were able to share the inclusiveness surrounding the community of agriculture, thus bringing us closer not only to each other, but to the food we eat every day.