

The Joy is in The Jam: Bridging Science and Community

Kathleen Howell has always had a love for the nature around her. While she pursued a rewarding career tending to animals as a veterinary technician, Kathleen noted she always was finding herself in the garden. “It just became a lifestyle”, she told us, as she elaborated on the ever expanding plot of land she used to grow a wide variety of crops. As yields of blueberries, okra, blackberries and sweet potatoes began to grow, Kathleen realized she had begun to produce more than her canning hobby could handle, thus marking the creation of Moonflower Farm.

Kathleen’s stand at Winterville’s farmers market is easily spotted with its colorful array of flavorful jams and jellies: Moonflower Farm’s specialty. From a simple and sweet strawberry jam to a bold signature Kentucky Bar Fight jelly, variety was plentiful. If jams/jellies aren’t your thing, simply pick up a dozen of hand gathered eggs straight from Kathleen's chickens or, better yet, a hand baked pastry made with those same eggs. All of the goods offered come homegrown and handmade.

This experience to learn about Moonflower Farm was facilitated through the Crops Genomics REEU at University of Georgia, a program designed to not only provide research experience for undergraduates, but an understanding of scientific extension services as well. Our time with Kathleen and her husband Mike offered us the ability to better understand what it means to provide for your community and be a local farmer along with the joys and challenges it brings. Kathleen and Mike are actually readers of the newsletter themselves (Hi guys!) and spoke to us about their experience with extension services. When having trouble with wilting/yellowing crops, they turned to sending in a soil sample for nutrient testing through UGA extension services. Soil samples are tested in the lab and a report is returned that highlights any nutrient

deficiencies or contamination. Luckily, most nutrient problems seem to be easily remediable for Kathleen as she has a small army of chickens to contribute to fertilization. In all, these experiences highlighted that the bridge between science and community is an invaluable one.



