

## Blossoming at Marigold Market

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The moment we stepped foot onto the Marigold Farmers Market in Winterville, GA, we felt an overwhelming sense of connection. As participants in UGA's Research and Extension Experience for Undergraduates (REEU) program for Crop Genetics and Genomics, we were introduced to the Marigold Market with two tasks: to volunteer with locals and to gain insight into the "field to table" approach to agriculture. While volunteering, we spoke with Lydia, a co-op member of the Market, helping her sell organic products. Through her, we gained an appreciation for the Market's accomplishments in local agriculture.

When we asked Lydia about her agricultural journey, she laughed and gestured to her dirty shoes. "It's not just on my clothes and under my nails," she exclaimed, "I've got dirt in my blood!" Lydia Engelsen, organic farmer and owner of Sungate Farm, shared stories of her childhood in Trinidad. She conveyed how it felt to live in a time and place where she knew exactly what she was eating. Now as an experienced farmer in Georgia, she's learned considerably from her upbringing and involvement with the Market. And as she spoke, her passion for organic, sustainable agriculture and sharing her knowledge with the next generation was palpable.

So much happens between growing produce and preparing it for consumption, it's impossible to keep track of what you're ingesting. "There's a disconnect between the people and what they're eating," Lydia explained. The Market is intentional about bringing products straight from the field to patrons' tables, fostering a sense of community and integrity among everyone. While we were helping Lydia run a section of the market, a family that had purchased many items left without paying for one. Once they realized, they quickly came back to pay. As Lydia chatted with them, we realized that patrons of the market are honest about what they buy, because the market is honest about what they sell. It was truly inspiring to witness. Through our experience, we grew a deep passion for local agricultural improvement. And like Lydia, we learned how initiatives like the Marigold Market can help many other communities blossom.

































