



Y'all-- gardening in facemasks during a heatwave is not. a. joke. This summer, we hosted ten incredible young people who were willing to put up with the extra sweat and contribute towards building a better, more nourished community. To say I am proud of this year's Youth Food Justice Intern cohort would be an immense understatement. For six weeks during a summer of unprecedented upheavals, record high temperatures, and drought, our team of ten accomplished so much! Read more about Manny, Ally, DaTayveyus, Lynaisha, Keyshanna, Aina, Sethaun, Hallie, BriAsia, and Rosy and their intensive summer of food triumphs.



The school gardens have long been a focus for intern work, and this summer was no exception. Many of our team are rising ninth graders, and missed an entire spring season of working in their middle school garden, so what an excellent opportunity to return and give the garden at Buford some love. This summer, we put our energy into renovating the center seating circle to make it a welcoming meeting space (hello, fresh new seating stumps!), planting and harvesting food for youth to take home, or add to the UAC market day offerings, and of course, constant weeding and watering.



Throw in a few lessons on how to use a weedeater, and a few more on navigating organic pest management, and you've got our Buford workdays in a nutshell. The high school garden was another hive of activity this season, with a recent expansion and so many productive beds to care for and harvest. Interns had fun learning to use new tools like wheel seeders and digging forks, and together harvested hundreds of pounds of produce for UAC markets.

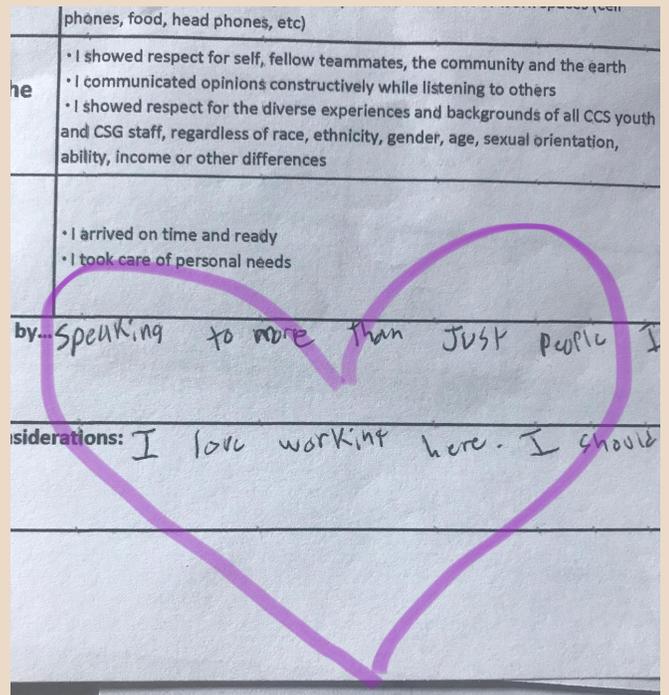




Weekly workdays with the Urban Agriculture Collective were a treat, and an excellent example of gardening at a production-oriented scale. Interns practiced the art of digging potatoes, trellising tomatoes, harvesting greens and squash, and of course, weeding and watering. Farmers Richard, Jenifer, Michael and Nick provided guidance while interns brought the muscle!



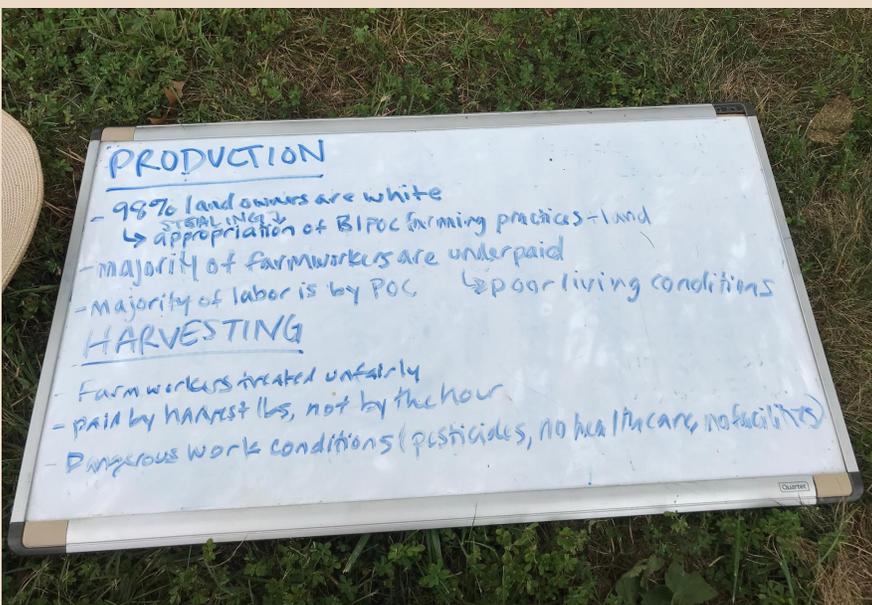
Interns also made a weekly visit to help out at the City of Promise garden. Along with general garden work, they removed old wood chips and prepped the garden for new grassy pathways, to be planted once the weather cools down a bit.







But garden work alone would not be as meaningful without a deeper perspective on the food system in general. Each week, interns met to learn about and discuss the complexities of our food system, and all the places where injustice shows up within it. From a closer look at Charlottesville's food deserts (ever noticed how few grocery stores are walkable distances from low-wealth neighborhoods?) to learning about Black land loss and the systemic racism that fueled it, interns showed up each day ready for open, compassionate conversations on tough subjects and their own lived experiences with food justice.



Applying their knowledge of food justice and their passion for building equity, interns started work on two major projects: the Healthy Schools Initiative and the Black and Brown Farmers Directory.

Every Friday morning interns participated in the Healthy Schools Unit, part of a broader initiative around school nutrition services. Focusing on school meals and mealtimes, students worked to identify major themes that have adverse effects on their school lunch and breakfast experiences, along with recommendations on how to make improvements. Many recommendations came back to increasing fresh produce options and more transparency around where food comes from and how it is prepared.



As for the directory, please stay tuned! Interns will continue to work this fall and winter, collecting narratives of BIPOC agrarianism in Virginia, and learning from small, local farmers as they go.

This summer has seen an unprecedented juxtaposition of momentum and stagnation: the joy and unity of the collective uprisings against systemic racism and police brutality—locally and nationally—of course comes with immense sorrow and rage. The continued spread of COVID often leaves us isolated and stymied, but these past six weeks of intensive intern programming have been a powerful tonic for the soul. One intern said it best, “It feels good that, when everything is so crazy, all over the world and in our neighborhoods, it feels good to grow food with people. Like you can nourish yourself and your community all at the same time.” This is what youth leadership and growing in community looks like. Y’all, if young people are our future, then our future is looking pretty bright.