

As a member of the Farm Team I worked closely with our new Farm Coordinator Gina Raicovich and other Farm Team interns. I would spend three days of the week in Coalmont and two days in Sewanee. I stayed on a small family farm in Coalmont where I worked and ate with a family of three. My days in Coalmont consisted of anything that Amy Rae needed tended to for that day.

As cliché as it is I would often wake up to the sound of roosters crows or Caleb Rae turning the truck engine over before he drove over to the cows. I would get up and make my way from the tent to the front door of the house, on the way trying to wake myself and receiving some help from the dog Whitney, who constantly whined for a scratch behind the ears. Breakfast would be cooking and Liam, who turned two while I stayed at the Rae's, would be talking about something, often indistinguishable strings of letters. When we sat down at the table, which was positioned on a back porch which is in the process of becoming a new dining room, we would look out over the garden which sat below the porch and into the pasture. I sat beside Amy and Caleb sat across the picnic table, with Liam on the end, we held hands in this triangle and Caleb would say a prayer over the meal we were about to eat, the beginning of the prayer never deviated: "Thank you Grandfather for ..." We would eat our meal, which also never deviated from being original and delicious. After cleaning up Caleb would go to work and Amy would start working on something, I would either wait for instruction or had already received it over breakfast: "You know what you could work on ..."

I would often be sent out to the cows in the morning. In the pasture with the Scottish Highland Cows the Rae's also owned goats, alpaca, and a miniature horse (which may have been sold by now). The Rae's used rotational grazing to feed the cattle and reclaim this land which was abused in years past in search of coal. Because the animals are moved across all of the pasture, never staying in one spot more than a few days they keep the vegetation down but leave the stubble to grow back. Also because of the paddies they leave behind the O-horizon of

the soil deepens with each pass of the rotation. My job was to pick up the electric fence in places that the cows had already grazed and set it up for the next grazing areas.

Another task that I could count on being on my to do list was letting the ducks out of the pen. In addition to ducks the Rae's kept geese, chickens, turkeys, and some guineas showed up before I was done working this summer. Letting the ducks out was hardly a chore, keeping the poultry in general seemed from my limited experience involved very little time or effort. Keeping the infrastructure of the fences and tractors was the biggest time expense. However, changing the ducks water was sometimes a little gross. These ducks bathe and drink from these tubs of water and it was my job to take these water and pour it over the potted plants and the sweet potatoes. Also while in the duck pen, which also housed chickens, I would look for eggs to be taken into the house and cleaned by Amy or Caleb later.

Other common jobs were working with power tools to make or fix something. One day Clesi Bennett, who also worked at the Rae's farm, and I built a chicken tractor to house a brood of ducklings and their pseudo-mother chicken. It was a relaxed and supportive environment, if I ever did something wrong, which was often the case, Amy would set me straight, I was happy to be learning and Amy and Caleb were happy to teach. I changed my first tire at Solace Farms under the watchful eye of Caleb. They were grateful of the help I was able to give.

On the days that I worked at Sewanee I would have the same breakfast ritual but instead of walking out to the pasture I would make the trip up to Sewanee. There I would either work in the garden with Gina and the other interns who had the same garden days as me or we would go over to the Cheston Farm where the University cattle have been grazing all summer long. In the garden we would normally be working on prepping beds, which I'm happy to say is almost done at the end of September. A difficult but necessary job, to "prep" a bed means, in our case, to survey and mark with flags the elevation across the garden in order to maintain relative

elevation conformity. This made the water flow evenly off of the beds so that we would not have issues with erosion. The beds were planted with beans, a good summer crop and a nice crop to start our Sewanee Garden which has not been managed with any uniformity. The beans have helped trap Nitrogen from the atmosphere to make the soil more hospitable to future crops. Our beans have been served in McClurg recently which has encouraged support for our blossoming new Farm Program. Also, the cattle that we worked with all summer will also be featured in McClurg, the meat is scheduled to be served on October 1 and all of the interns involved in the Farm Program are invited to take part in the event.

Being a Farm Team Intern was a challenging position and not in the same way that being a student is challenging. I realized over the course of the summer that there is not a right or wrong way to farm as there is a right and wrong way to do a math problem. It is an art; however, there are time tested results for certain actions: Amy always plants her seed under $\frac{1}{2}$ in. of soil, and it works. Alternatively Gina uses differing depths depending on what she's planting, this also works. Sometimes when I was out working and something went wrong, which it was prone to do, and I didn't have access to Amy and Caleb or Gina, I went with my gut. This often happened with little things, something would break, or I thought I could carry more alpaca manure if I used the cart. What I didn't realize in the moment is that in becoming momentarily disoriented and sometimes even panicked at the thought of screwing up, I was maturing. I learned to calm myself and think to solve the problem. This will be a lasting gift of my summer on the farm but probably more than that I learned how to literally slow down my life. We live in a fast paced world but the Raes permitted me to enter into their life which focuses on what life is fundamentally about. They welcomed me in and taught me what their life was about, most of all they taught what a family can still look like today and it is really a beautiful thing.

In conclusion, my days were long and hot and the work was hard but I always had enough to eat good people, who were grateful for the work I was doing were never far away. I

learned a lot this summer and most of it was not specifically how to farm, although I did certainly learn that. The sources of life which often elude my sight in my comfortable life in Sewanee were evident everyday on Solace Farms. Death was also present on the farm, there were three baby calves born during the summer, only one survived. A couple of weeks into my internship I walked onto the porch to find a calf sprawled out. It was having difficulty breathing. It had been born over the weekend and was not drinking its mother's milk. Caleb came home from work during his lunch period at the hospital to try to help Amy nurse it back to life. Sometime between letting the ducks out and lunch time it stopped breathing. These reminders of life and death were constantly present on the farm but I learned they were not something to fear or fret over but to learn from. Farming seems to me to be a constant state of learning, but learning that is so different from the learning that takes place in a classroom, it's more like revelation, slowly and often painfully when I opened up something new was always revealed.