Sewanee’s University Farm is a small, organic farm on Sewanee’s Domain that focuses on creating a learning experience for students through a living laboratory. Traditionally, students are taught about plants, animals and food through textbooks and lectures, but the University farm allows students to participate in a hands-on learning environment to learn about plants, animals and food, in addition to agriculture, sustainability, and natural resource management.

Solace Farms is a ninety acre organic farm in Coalmont, TN, that aims to encompass the values of a small, organic farm. It is owned and operated by Caleb and Amy Rae, two Sewanee alumni. They have a variety of farm animals including cows, goats, alpaca, ducks, turkeys, geese and chickens, as well as a large selection of produce that is sold locally at different farmers markets.

During my internship with Sewanee’s University Farm and Solace Farms, my responsibilities encompassed a wide variety of daily farm tasks, as well as larger projects.

Daily maintenance on the University Farm was a large portion of my responsibilities that included tending to the garden in the form of watering, planting, maintaining, and harvesting crops. Animal daily maintenance was also a responsibility divided between farm manager and interns. This included feeding, watering, cleaning, and monitoring the University Farm’s cows, goats, chickens, and bees. Larger projects consisted of creating ideal living facilities for all the animals and providing produce for the Sewanee dining hall.

Daily maintenance at Solace Farm was also a large portion of my responsibilities, including daily upkeep, cultivation, harvest, and preparation of crops for sale at local farmers markets. The responsibilities at Solace also encompassed the daily animal maintenance of cows, goats, ducks, and chickens. My responsibilities also included working in collaboration with the farm’s owner on larger long term garden and land management projects.
In addition to the daily maintenance of farms during my internship, I also worked on several large projects that varied greatly depending on a need basis. Some of these projects included: transplanting strawberries into 55 gallon drums to increase their productivity, building dehydration boxes for the sun drying of produce, overland flow erosion restoration, honey extraction and preparation, building roost and laying boxes for increased chicken populations, the slaughter and preparation of chickens, and goat castration. I finished my internship with a trip to Greensboro, North Carolina, to pick up three Pineywood heifers for the University Farm.

During my internship, I developed many skills that will prove to be helpful and necessary in an agricultural and farming career. These skills include but are not limited to: basic farm management, the development and improvement of organic farming techniques, animal handling and care, keeping plants and animals healthy, and the harvesting, preparation, and sale of organic crops. I learned about and practiced various sustainability practices to help keep our environmental impact as low as possible, while maintaining a healthy, fully functioning farm. I learned a lot about how to work individually and make important decisions on my own. In addition to becoming more self reliant, I also learned how to work in a partnership with the farm managers at Solace and the University Farm, and as a group with the other interns and volunteers at the University Farm.

During my internship I feel I made many small accomplishments, personally and for the farms. I helped to create healthier, more comfortable living conditions for all of the farm animals. I also contributed to the production of crops to be sold at farmers markets and to the Sewanee dining hall, McClurg. Although McClurg does not rely solely on the University Farms produce, the exposure and participation in the farm moves the campus towards a more sustainable future.
I learned, during my internship, that there is both physical, mental and even emotional labors that are necessary to run an organic farm. There were highs and lows during the day-to-day work of the internship. I endured strain both physically, and mentally, from hot, long days enduring the elements of heat and rain, to the frustration and emotions of a failing crop or a sick farm animal. I experienced a behind the scenes involvement at organic farming, and the satisfaction of seeing a completed task or project. Hatching chicks and seeing the daily joys of farm animals that are happy to be fed and watered was an experience beyond rewarding. Now that my internship is over, I can say that I have learned much more than I ever expected; and that there is great joy and satisfaction in even the most basic elements of life.

This farm internship has helped shape some of my ideas for a career focus. Initially, I was worried that the physical, mental and emotional pains may push me away from the idea of farming. But I found myself more and more intrigued with the idea of organic, sustainable farming, and why I am truly passionate about it. I had started, and now continue, to research about the potential of starting my own small, sustainable, organic farm.