

Calvin Soule

## Exploring Maine Farms: Community, Practices, and Food

This summer I had the privilege of doing exploratory research with support from the Breckinridge Summer Research Fellowship. Under the guidance of Dr. Shana Starobin and with my research partner Lauren Hickey ('20), my research focused on a wide variety of Maine farms. While the approach was originally very specific to food sovereignty, our research team decided quickly that it was more worthwhile to make this a long-term project. First, Lauren and I needed some research experience, so we started off visiting local farms and practicing good research skills, with Dr. Starobin's help. After an intensive week of learning and touring, Lauren and I started to orient ourselves to the Maine Food system. We traveled to local midcoast farms, volunteered at hunger prevention programs, talked to statewide food organizations, went to blueberry field days in down east Maine, spoke with immigrant farmers, and much more.

Along these adventures, I sharpened my research skills and attuned myself to what good research is. This included learning how to ask good, provocative questions, how to take efficient notes as I walked around the farm, how to use pictures to capture data, how to listen, how to transcribe, how to organize meetings, how to gain the trust of the interviewee, how to control the directions of conversations, and how to network new contacts from interviews. The main themes this project focused on were **1)** farmers philosophies **2)** farmers network (and their relationship to geographic, economic, political or social factors) **3)** whether or not farms were organic certified, why or why not, and what effect it had on their network, with the addition of many more topics coming up as well. This project helped solidify connections with a multitude of farmers, and helped Lauren and I orient ourselves to the Maine food system and figure out what questions were worth answering.

I also spent time helping Dr. Starobin with her research, building a website for my, as well as future students, continued research on the Maine Food System, creating a map indicating all the farms we visited, transcribing interviews we had done, and processing a lot of notes. Overall, I feel excited to be a part of a long-term project under Professor Starobin to develop a more robust dataset on the Maine food system and establish stronger partnerships between its stakeholders and Bowdoin College.