Dear SARE Partnership,

With the opportunity of an internship the summer of my freshman year and an independent study my sophomore year, I gained hands-on experience, knowledge, and skills. I was able to learn about and conduct two types of interviews. The first interview was fairly short and inquired about the general characteristics describing the farm and the farmer(s). There were four decision-making questions pertaining to past, present, successful, and unsuccessful challenges. The answers led to a second interview which was longer, semi-structured, and conducted to narrow in on two of the four decision-making questions. The first part asked about a decision made in the past, and the second part asked about a decision that was currently being made. I learned a lot about how to write an interview and conduct it properly in order to try to discover common and uncommon strategies.

            From the data collected, I learned about the different types of farms which can be described from small to large, herb to livestock, and short to long time operating farms. Certain farms have different strategies for different types of goals. It was the objective of this project to assess these strategies and goals and simplify their decision-making process. I also learned about the community among farmers. Many work together to distribute their products. In one instance the farmers being interviewed discussed that they had chosen to produce meat for a variety of reasons, the most important seemed to be the proximity of vegetables already sold nearby.

We used NVivo to analyze the data collected. The data was also categorized and maintained to be used to write a paper and help farmers. The program also allowed for the answers from the first interview to be used for more in-depth questions in the second one. I had never worked with a program like this before. It is definitely something I will use in the future. It was interesting to experience writing a research paper, rather than just a lab report. It is much more of a collaborative effort to understand and interpret the data.

We also are going to use our data to conduct a workshop and try to help farmers even more. By having farmers collaborate, they can learn different strategies and meet people that can help, hopefully creating a sense of community. There more people can compare how they run their farm, the more knowledge can be gained. Through this internship, I’ve been learning how to help create that sense of community. I have never had opportunity to collect and prepare information for a workshop before and it is really interesting and exciting to be able to see how it will all come together to be able to help farmers in a unique and strategic way.

            This project has been interesting and educational. I’ve even learned how to get projects accomplished while coordinating with others’ busy schedules. Also, being able to work with another student, professors, and the farmers, has been surprisingly easy and everyone has been helpful and cooperative.

Thank you,

Amelia Flanery