

Career Ladder Profiles

Ree Ree Wei, Sophomore and Bonner Scholar, Guilford College; Major: Community and Justice Studies

When Ree Ree Wei started attending CEFS' Food Youth Initiative (FYI) meetings as a freshman in high school, it was just her and her sister representing Transplanting Traditions Community Farm. "We talked about what we wanted to do, and we recruited more people." Five years later, the Transplanting Traditions youth group is six-members strong, and a core member of the FYI network of youth groups around the state that are connected in their passion and activism to change the food system.

Ree Ree has stayed active in FYI, attending annual summer gatherings, and this past year was an FYI Summer Intern. "What I really like about FYI is that it's youth-focused. The summer internship allowed me to take charge of what I wanted to do, which was to learn about how we can use our stories to advocate for our communities."

"FYI was really helpful in building my professional development. I've learned how to advocate and how to define justice. Everything I've learned carries through the work I'm doing with Bonner [Scholars] and my Major."



Ree Ree and her family, who are from Burma, arrived in the U.S. from Tham Hin Refugee Camp in Thailand when she was eight years old. "I want to use my voice to share my story, and others' stories, and bring attention to refugees. Ultimately I want to be an immigration attorney and work with refugees," she says. Now a sophomore and Bonner Scholar at Guilford College in Greensboro, she is majoring in Community and Justice Studies.

Caroline Stover, Director, NC Farm to Early Care and Education, Center for Environmental Farming Systems

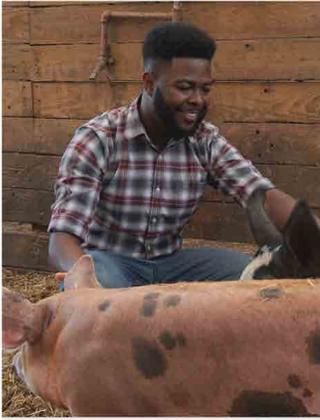
As an AmeriCorps VISTA Service Member in Robeson County, Caroline Stover knew she wanted to work with youth and food in a meaningful way. She served in a soup kitchen and organized connections with community gardens, and then started working in schools. She learned about FoodCorps when she was looking for additional resources to support her work. "The resource I was seeking out became my next step," she says.

Caroline served as a FoodCorps Service Member in Warren County for two years. When she was offered the chance to become a FoodCorps Fellow, supporting program development and mentoring other service members, she didn't hesitate. "The progression was pretty seamless," she says. "First learning about what it looks like in the classroom, then learning about how to develop the program, what goes on behind the scenes."

After another two years, another opportunity arose that she couldn't turn down: the chance to direct CEFS' Farm to Early Care and Education Initiative. Training and professional development opportunities offered through CEFS have been critical for helping her get to where she is. "Getting to be part of a network of people helping me to understand the food system; all the training opportunities offered through CORE to understand systemic inequities and how to weave that throughout the work – all that has been absolutely essential," she says.

"CEFS is my career path. I wouldn't have been prepared for my current job without my previous experience with CEFS. As far as training, experiences, networking, all the mentors I work with – it's pretty ideal!"





Rhyne Cureton, North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, B.S., Agricultural Education, December 2018

Rhyne Cureton’s interest in agriculture developed from a life-long love of animals. “I knew I wanted to work with animals somehow, and always appreciated animals in their natural environment,” he says. He studied Animal Science at N.C. A&T, which, he says “helped me see animal agriculture integrated into the larger whole of agriculture.” He decided to take a gap year in his studies to experience different outdoor animal production systems, working on various pasture-based livestock farms around the country.

“NC Growing Together made me a better student. It really gave me the opportunity to understand agriculture on a big scale.”

At the end of his gap year, he became an NC Growing Together Local Food Supply Chain Apprentice at Foster-Caviness, a produce distributor in Greensboro. “My mission is to see how I can fit into different parts of the local food system. I never thought that I’d work at a huge produce distributor, and it was really cool to get into the supply chain side of local food,” he says.

When he returned to N.C. A&T to complete his studies, his perspective had changed. “In classes, I knew what they were talking about. NC Growing Together made me a better student. It really gave me the opportunity to understand agriculture on a big scale.”

Through NC Growing Together he became involved in NC Choices, which was a perfect fit for his interests. He volunteered at NC Choices’ 2017 Carolina Meat Conference and 2018 Marketing Local Meat Seminar. “I’ve gotten a lot out of volunteering. In the long run, I’d like to have my own farm. In the meantime, I get to soak up all this knowledge, connections, and networks to raise meat on pasture.”

Eliot Lee, MBA Candidate, Supply Chain Management, Poole College of Management, NC State University

Eliot Lee had no idea that becoming a CEFS Sustainable Agriculture Intern in 2015 would change his life’s trajectory. At the time, he was looking for a job or internship in sustainable agriculture to build on experiences in commercial-scale agriculture and alternative fuels he had while an undergraduate. The internship was “eye opening,” he says, giving him a comprehensive understanding of food and farming systems.

After the internship, Eliot was hired as a CEFS Program Assistant, helping behind-the-scenes with CEFS’ programs and initiatives. He also began learning more about CEFS’ work in different parts of the food system. “CEFS is a really close-knit community. If you show interest, there are a lot of people who will support you in what you want to do. There’s always someone you know at CEFS connected to the kind of work you want to do.”

When CEFS had an opening to coordinate NC Growing Together’s Local Food Supply Chain Apprenticeship, he knew he had to apply. After two summers coordinating the Apprenticeship and learning about building local food economies, Eliot’s path became clear. “The Local Food Supply Chain Apprenticeship sent me down the career path of food supply chains. I discovered how business can fit into sustainable agriculture,” he says.

Along the way, Eliot became a CEFS Compass Group USA Graduate Fellow and added to his real-world experience with an internship at Kellogg. “In business school, there is a real need for folks who can contribute to food systems work. I want to take these experiences I’m having through my MBA program and apply them to something I’m passionate about.”



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Dr. David Suchoff, Extension Assistant Professor, Organic Production Systems, Department of Crop and Soil Sciences, NC State University



“CEFS has had a huge impact on my career path. Honestly, one of the reasons I took this position [at NC State] was so that I could continue working with CEFS.”

David Suchoff first came to CEFS as a Sustainable Agriculture Apprentice in 2012. After serving as an Agricultural Extension Agent in the Peace Corps, he wanted to continue in the field of Sustainable Agriculture but he wasn't sure how or where. CEFS' Sustainable Agriculture Apprenticeship Program gave him the hands-on experience and systems-level perspective he needed to figure out his next move.

“The Apprenticeship is ultimately what led me to apply to the Master's Program in Horticultural Science [at NC State University],” he says. After investigating nitrogen use efficiency in grafted watermelon and tomatoes for his Master's degree, David worked on increasing resiliency in grafted tomato through rootstock selection for his Ph.D, which he completed in the spring of 2018.

Along the way, he conducted numerous extension workshops at CEFS' Field Research, Education, and Outreach Facility at Cherry Research Farm in Goldsboro, and became a CEFS NC State Graduate Fellow. “The graduate fellowship allowed me to network well outside of my discipline while at the same time promoting CEFS' programs to a diverse crowd,” he says.

This year, David's journey came full-circle when he was hired as an Extension Assistant Professor in Organic Production Systems in the Department of Crop and Soil Sciences at NC State University. Once a student in these halls, he's now a professor, passing his knowledge and passion on to the next generation.

Chanel Nestor, Adjunct Lecturer of Rural Sociology, North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University



“I really credit Community Food Strategies and NC Growing Together for helping me find my place in agriculture.”

Chanel Nestor's eyes light up when she recalls attending Community Food Strategies' 2017 Statewide Food Gathering. Watching conference keynote speaker Savi Horne, Executive Director of Land Loss Prevention Project, and CEFS' Committee on Racial Equity in the Food System (CORE) Director Shorlette Ammons speak, “I had an epiphany moment. It was one of the first times in my career that I felt I was in my place. I thought, ‘this is what I need to do, community engagement with African Americans around food’.”

Chanel was attending the conference as a volunteer with Community Food Strategies after first coming to CEFS as an NC Growing Together Local Food Supply Chain Apprentice. An N.C. A&T graduate with a B.A. in Sociology and an M.S. in Agricultural Education, Chanel was looking for ways to expand her knowledge of the food system when she applied to the NC Growing Together Apprenticeship. She was placed with Piedmont Triad Regional Council, where she worked on the development of a regional food council. “I never expected my career would take me to local foods and advocacy, but I'm so grateful it has,” she says.

After the Apprenticeship, Chanel deepened her involvement with local foods through the Davidson County Local Food Network and the Cleveland County Food Council. She also founded the Bailey Conference, a strategic meeting of African Americans in the Agricultural and Rural Community Development fields. She is now an adjunct lecturer of Rural Sociology at N.C. A&T, teaching classes she took as an undergraduate in 2013.