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Supporting Access to Healthy and Fresh Foods

By Justin Williams

My internship

This summer I interned for Capital Roots. Capital Roots is a non-profit organization based out of Troy, NY with a vision for the future where everyone has access to fresh, affordable, and healthy foods. They work to reduce the impact of poor nutrition on public health in New York's Capital Region, by providing the public healthy food access, as well as nutritional and agricultural education. My role this summer was to analyze the survey data gathered from various retail outlets within the

City of Renesslaer and then mold it into a comprehensive report. This report would be used to identify opportunities within the current food distribution network, with a goal of both increasing the availability and affordability of fresh healthy foods. The methodologies developed would then be used on a larger scale to analyze data for all of Troy, NY and eventually applied to NYC. This internship was perfect for me, not only because of my passion for food education and equitable distribution but also because it offered me the flexibility to work remotely while simultaneously maintaining my full-time job and attending a summer class. I spent about 10 hours a week on the internship and had a weekly phone call with Marissa, Food Assistant Coordinator for Capital Roots. These weekly touch bases helped focus my direction, allowing Marissa and myself to fine tune my analytical technique. Although given some specific targets, I was able to apply and experiment with my own strategies in compiling the data. Early on I started recognizing that my quantitative methods summer course, would help me with the data analytics portion of my internship. I began to import survey data into the software program R, producing data visualizations that would help support my findings. Actually applying the skills I was learning in

class, simultaneously to a real-life situation, reinforced my ability to retain and comprehend the course material. This resulted in a robust report for all stakeholders highlighting the opportunities within existing infrastructure for food distributors to fill availability gaps. Thus creating opportunities for those in low income, high priority, > 185% Federal Poverty Level (FPL) neighborhoods, to eat healthier food at a more affordable price. The hope is this can eventually support a more equitable distribution of healthy foods, while keeping them affordable, thus creating a new food distribution and consumption paradigm. This was my first experience working for a non-profit organization and has helped me realize my future trajectory. I went into Graduate school with a desire for a mid-life career change. I had been working in retail management for 10 years and wanted to do something where I could make an impact. Equitable fresh healthy food distribution will increase accessibility where these types of foods were previously unavailable. This coincides with my dream to help transition our current economy over to more green conscious, sustainability-focused, socially equitable direction.

Justin Williams is on path to graduate January 2020 with a

Masters of Science in Environmental Policy and Sustainability Management. Next summer he plans on taking a sabbatical from his full-time job, to undertake a fellowship within the sustainability management field. His career aspirations are to become a sustainability manager within the corporate sector, become an advocate for sustainable businesses and educating others about sustainability through a communal and integrative process.



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