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Alum Spotlight: Madeline Squarcia '22 connects consumers to growers



By Grace Sanborn (https://lafayettestudentnews.com/staff_name/grace-sanborn/), Assistant Sports

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Madeline Squarcia '22 wants you to care about buying from local farms. She just didn't expect her career to revolve around food systems.

Squarcia is the project lead for Buy Fresh Buy Local Greater Lehigh Valley (<https://www.buylocalglv.org/>), a non-profit run by the Nurture Nature Center (<https://nurturenaturecenter.org/>) in downtown Easton that aims to connect Lehigh Valley residents with local farmers.

However, Squarcia's career almost went in a very different direction. She started as a civil engineer, but while she enjoyed the problem-solving aspect of the field, she noted that a civil engineering internship after her freshman year "drained" her.

She was exposed to the idea of the global food system for the first time in her first-year seminar "Feeding the World."



Madeline Squarcia '22 works to make 'farm to table' a reality. (Photo courtesy of Madeline Squarcia '22)



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“I think something struck in my brain,” Squarcia said. “I got really excited that that topic, of things like food that we all interact with, had such a wide-reaching impact.”

After taking several liberal arts classes while studying abroad in Spain during the spring of her sophomore year, Squarcia decided to change her major to engineering studies and environmental studies.

“I was really excited again about solving these bigger systems-based questions and thinking about how justice and science and environmental issues connect,” Squarcia said.

In addition, she enjoyed interacting with community members in service-based organizations on campus like Alpha Phi Omega, America Reads and the Lafayette Food and Farm Collective.

Squarcia’s first exposure to the Nurture Nature Center was during her environmental policy class in her junior year. Rachel Hogan Carr, the executive director and co-founder of the Nurture Nature Center and adjunct instructor at Lafayette, taught the class. Afterward, Squarcia interned for the center, so when the position at Buy Fresh Buy Local opened up, Hogan Carr invited Squarcia to apply.

Buy Fresh Buy Local is a national network of chapters overseen by Pasa Sustainable Agriculture, a Pennsylvania-based non-profit. However, the Nurture Nature Center directly oversees the Greater Lehigh Valley chapter.

Squarcia collaborates with nearly 100 community partners in the Greater Lehigh Valley area including farmers, vendors, restaurants and markets. Depending on the season, her role involves on-site visits to interact with partners, running the social media, creating educational materials and working on grant proposals.

“Once you’re getting out and around and driving all over the Lehigh Valley and seeing all the different types of farms and communities, it’s just very eye-opening,” Squarcia said.

Right now, she is focusing on updating a biannual local food guide as well as updating the Lehigh Valley food economy report, which hasn’t been updated since 2013.

Squarcia grew up in Easton and has lived there her whole life, but she noted that working closely with local farmers has given her fresh insight into the area.

“I’ve met a lot of really cool people in the food system sector and a lot of really cool community groups, and it’s just given me a whole other appreciation for this place,” Squarcia said.

Hogan Carr said that Squarcia’s background “speaks for itself.”

To Hogan Carr, one of the most notable attributes of Squarcia’s work ethic is “her genuine passion and love for the local food system which she carries with her everywhere that she goes.”

“She, from her heart, really cares about connecting people to local foods and to the benefits that it has to the local economy and the local community, but also the environment,” Hogan Carr said of Squarcia.

“I have an opportunity every day to make a difference, which is something that I dreamed of having in a job, so I feel extremely fortunate that I can wake up and feel like what I’m doing has an impact,” Squarcia said.



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About the Contributor



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