

## **Report on Advisor Visit by Kim Williams**

**to Cora Manica**

**Dripping Springs Garden, off-the-grid near Huntsville, AR**

**August 6-8, 2023**

I conducted an advisor visit to Cora Manica at Dripping Springs Garden near Huntsville, AR, on August 7, 2023. I drove from Fayetteville, AR, to the organic cut flower and vegetable farm near Huntsville, AR. The site is so remote that it cannot be found via Google maps, and following the directions that co-owner Mark Cain e-mailed required nearly 2 hours on many gravel roads and three restarts to travel the 49 miles. The remoteness of the location is of note: Cora spent the summer with very limited WiFi, no phone service, and not a lot of creature comforts. Yet, she thrived and learned a tremendous amount about local, small-scale cut flower production that she is excited to build upon in her future career.

Cora and I spent about three hours touring the farm. We started in the shipping barn where we had an in-depth conversation with Mark Cain, co-owner. Mark is a member/speaker of ASCFG and explained the market niche: 70% of their revenue is generated from their cut flower business, which consists of Saturday Farmers' Market sales in Fayetteville and two organic grocery store accounts for bouquets, with other orders for weddings and special occasions. As you can see from the photos, the flowers are beautiful. Crops produced include lilies, statice, lisianthus, zinnia, sunflowers, celosia, dahlias, basil, and many more. Cora has been primarily responsible for making the bouquets twice weekly.

We toured the propagation house, several high tunnels with cut flowers, and outdoor/field production. It is notable that the entire production cycle is organic, and as a nutrient management specialist, I was especially fascinated to learn how they fertilize all of their crops: one gallon of "meal"—a combination of bone, blood, feather—per 100-foot row. The transplants start out as nutrient deficient, but as nutrients release from the pre-plant incorporated soil amendments, they grow into high quality plants.

I also met Cora's co-workers, with whom she shares housing and meals of only food grown on the farm, cooks on rotation, and watches movies checked out

from the library on market days—all of whom have become dear friends. All had wonderful things to say about Cora and her work. We ended the visit with a trip down to the creek at the edge of the property where the team swims, reads and relaxes.



Cora next to one of two coolers for Dripping Springs Garden



Cora and co-owner Mark Cain, her supervisor. Mark and his partner started the business 40 years ago.

While this internship was a bit unusual for a Ball intern, it was great for Cora to experience local, organic, cut flower production and learn a small-but-successful business model in this arena. She made K-State look good, and I am proud of her accomplishments this summer.



Cora with five of the other interns/woofers as they cleared a sunflower bed to prepare it for planting celosia transplants.



Cora and I ended the visit down by the creek, with its cool, clear water.