The following project proposal was created by a community partner of the Upstate Institute to describe the way they would like to engage with a Colgate student this summer. The research project proposed will be a full-time research project conducted by a Field School Fellow this summer. Below, the partner describes their organization and the research project, as well as a statement of benefit derived by the community for this project. The proposal also mentions logistical considerations and required skills for a student interested in doing this work.

Agricultural Economic Development Specialist for Madison County Morrisville, NY
Digital Tours of the Farms of Madison County

For 2019, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Madison County would like to partner with Upstate Institute Fellows to develop Digital Tours of the Farms of Madison County. This Upstate Fellow would work with Ag Economic Development team whose missions is to maintain, develop, and promote a viable agricultural economy that benefits Madison County. The primary priority for achieving this mission is to market Madison County’s agricultural products and services.

The digital tours of the farms of Madison County will include a fellow with digital editing interest. The research question is: how do digital pictures and commercials via social media impact the interest of consumers, both for sales and trust? The Fellow will be responsible for developing digital commercial based tours of some of the farms in Madison County. Then, assist the farmers in pushing their video tours through social media, you-tube, etc. The fellow will then follow the interest that the videos develop based on analytically reviewing shares, comments, and sales, if applicable. The research will be focused around buying trends and consumers want to be educated about the products and farms they are supporting. The ideal farm candidates for this project will be those who have very low social media impact currently. It will offer the fellow the opportunity to look at “before and after” for comparison of the buyer trend based on social media use with the farmers “telling their story”.

The research will be used to determine the impact of digital story telling on the consumer. If it is determined that there is a large increase in sales, but also trust in the farmer, then it is valuable for producers to spend more time focusing on that. Most farmers feel “too busy” to tell their story, but the consumers have a decreasing level of trust in their food supply. Those who increase their trust, in theory, will increase their local sales to those who they “trust”. An increase in local sales has a variety of benefits to the Upstate area, including healthier communities, higher camaraderie in neighborhoods, and better infrastructure due to increases in local dollars spent.

This fellow would be supervised by Jenn Farwell, Ag Economic Development Specialist. This student could work approximately half time remotely, half time in the office. We would provide office space and could supply the digital editing software if we are aware before that we need to. This fellow would first work with Jenn and the staff to determine those farms that are strong candidates for the project. The goal would be at least three farms. Then the fellow would survey said farms (this information would be used for the final report, anonymously). The fellow would then work with the farmer to capture both video and still photos. The fellow could work remotely to develop the videos and social media campaigns from there, coming in on scheduled days to work with Jenn on comments. After the videos have been launched for a 2 week period, the fellow would then work to survey the farmer again, with the “instant” results of the campaigns, as well as with a portion of consumers to review their changes in interest into those specific farms, focusing on questions regarding trust, understanding and education.
The skills necessary for this would be digital marketing skills. Ag or farming experience is not required. The fellow should understand, at a minimum, the basics of video editing. The fellow will gain knowledge in survey data analysis, social media tracking and analysis, and consumer trends. The student will definitely be involved in staff meetings, as well as local government level meetings, such as the Board of Supervisors, Madison County Planning Committee, etc.