

Alex, Red Hook Farms, Red Hook, Brooklyn
July 10, 2021

Rachel (00:00):

Alex, tell me who you are, where you grew up, where you live now, how old you are, what you do, and how long have you been here at Red Hook Farm?

Alex (00:14):

Okay, so my name is Alex. I forgot a lot of those questions.

Rachel (00:19):

Where'd you grow up?

Alex (00:21):

I grew up here in Red Hook. I've been living here most of my life. All my 19 years of living, I was living here in Red Hook. What I do on the farm, I'm a farmer's assistant. I started off as a youth farmer in one of their programs and I had several different positions here, in my three years of being here. The first being the youth farmer, second, a seed preserver, the third being an intern this year and then right now, I'm now the farmer's assistant. Yeah.

Rachel (00:57):

You've been slowly moving up in the world here.

Alex (01:00):

Yep.

Rachel (01:00):

And what have you learned from working on the farm for three years?

Alex (01:05):

Well, there's a lot I've learned, like a lot of the names of these vegetables. It took me a while to remember some of them because I'm not really that good with names, but now, with so much that I've learned, I'm able to give tours to people and just guide them around the farm and explain things like the compost, our medicinal herb patch, and the chickens, and the caterpillar tunnel. Stuff like that I'm good at explaining. Yeah.

Rachel (01:05):

What's been the value for you of learning all these things?

Alex (01:05):

Value for me?

Rachel (01:05):

And getting comfortable and knowledgeable about the farm?

Alex (01:43):

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I think it's really valuable to me because I was always interested in healthy living, like eating organic foods and just having a healthy lifestyle. And being on a farm, I got to experience all of that stuff. Sometimes I will take home vegetables from the farm, I would cook with it. I'm doing it a lot now because I'm more on a diet now than I used to be. Yeah. It's all really valuable to be here because all this information that we learn here on the farm, you don't only get to use it here. You get to use it in the outside world.

Rachel (02:25):

That's awesome.

Alex (02:26):

Yeah.

Rachel (02:26):

That's so cool. Did you learn how to cook?

Alex (02:32):

I learned how to cook for my mom and from YouTube.

Rachel (02:33):

Uh-huh (affirmative).

Alex (02:40):

Yeah.

Rachel (02:40):

I'm going to ask you this first question. It's kind of the core question of this project, which is when you think about global warming or the climate crisis, what do you think about and how do you feel?

Alex (02:54):

Well, when I think about the global warming and the climate crisis, I think back to a time where I remember we had this class in high school, in my 12th year of high school, before COVID. We was learning about the climate change issue and our teachers, I remember they told us something that really stuck to me, saying that in the future with all the climate change and the global warming, issues like that with natural disasters, countries are going to want, they're going to want pieces of Africa. Because apparently, from what I learned, it's going to be the most safest place in the future and it's going to be the more reliable place, because they've got a lot of agricultural... Like their soil is good. There's a lot of stuff in Africa that other countries are going to want to take advantage of in the future, regarding the climate crisis and stuff like that. Something like that really stuck to me because it was kind of worrying, knowing that all these countries are going to want to take pieces of Africa and what's going to happen to the people there.

They'll probably just make them work in the farmlands and they'll just pay them a few cents an hour. That's what I imagined what would happen.

Rachel (02:54):

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And how do you feel?

Alex (04:19):

How do I feel?

Rachel (04:20):

Yeah.

Alex (04:23):

Well, me?

Rachel (04:25):

Yeah.

Alex (04:27):

I do feel a little bit worried. I'm worried what's going to happen in the future. Yeah, I kind of grew up with it, but my younger siblings, they're going to be the ones who really grow up through this stuff. They're going to be here to experience most of it. Yeah. Us too, but the children of the future, they're going to be growing up in this. So yeah, that's kind of worrying for me.

Rachel (04:53):

What is the "it" in that sentence? What are they going to grow up with? Do you worry about?

Alex (04:59):

Worse hurricanes, tornadoes, flash floods, especially in New York City. I know this place is now considered neo-tropical, I think. It sounds cool, personally from a farmer's perspective, because you get to grow tropical fruits and stuff like that. But then on the other hand, Red Hook is the worst flood zone to live in. So if we were to get a really bad hurricane, this whole farm will probably be covered in like five feet of water or something, so yeah, it sounds cool, but it's not going to be cool.

Rachel (05:41):

It's scary.

Alex (05:41):

Yeah, it's scary.

Rachel (05:43):

When was the moment for you when you were confronted with climate change? When did it show up in your own backyard, so to speak?

Alex (05:55):

Well, on the farm, I remember this one time they was telling me how the bees, they get confused when the temperature fluctuates a lot. So when it gets from hot to cold really quickly, suddenly. That

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happened, I think that happened a few times in the spring when it was really getting hot and then all of a sudden just dropped to 40 degrees. When that happened, I think the beehive it died.

Rachel (06:19):

Wow.

Alex (06:19):

Yeah, they got confused. They thought it was a nice time to be out and they got caught in the cold weather and they just all died.

Rachel (06:27):

What does that feel like when you experience that?

Alex (06:32):

It's a really bad thing because if our bees die, then we're not going to have any pollinators on the farm. I mean, we'll still have other pollinators, like wasps and butterflies and flies, but bees are the main pollinators. Yeah, if that keeps happening, it's going to affect the farmer in a big way, because those fluctuations are just going to really be bad for the bees. It's not going to be good for the farm in the future.

Rachel (07:00):

And what does that make you feel? What's an emotion that comes to mind when you think about that possibility?

Alex (07:10):

It would have to be like when you know something bad is about to happen. Like impending doom-type feeling. Yeah, one of those feelings.

Rachel (07:21):

Impending doom.

Alex (07:21):

Yes. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Rachel (07:21):

Yeah, I totally...

Alex (07:24):

Not just for New York City, but for around the world, too.

Rachel (07:29):

I feel that. I've been talking a lot about this feeling of dread, but impending doom is very similar.

Alex (07:36):

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Yeah.

Rachel (07:41):

I mean, you've been here your whole life. Have you noticed changes in seasonal patterns and your local weather and landscapes over the course of your 19 years here?

Alex (07:53):

Well, I remember when I was younger, I would always wait for the snow to come on Christmas and it would always come on Christmas, but now it just barely snows. It just gets really, really freezing cold and it just doesn't snow as much as it used to. I remember, we would get, I don't know, like four... I remember this one time when it was a huge blizzard when I was little and the snow must have been like five feet high. Yeah and we don't really experience snow, any type of snow events like that no more. It doesn't really snow like that.

Rachel (08:28):

When did you start noticing that?

Alex (08:30):

It had to be recently, like in the past five years maybe. Past five years.

Rachel (08:38):

Has anything changed for you after that? I mean, what does that feel like to experience that kind of pretty drastic change?

Alex (08:51):

It just feels like there's nothing you can really do about it.

Rachel (08:56):

Like powerlessness?

Alex (08:57):

Yeah. Yeah, there's nothing you could really do. Well, I mean, there is stuff we can do as a whole, but right now... Yeah.

Rachel (09:14):

But there's nothing you can do as an individual?

Alex (09:17):

Well, I mean, yeah. There's definitely some stuff I can do. I was watching this documentary on Netflix called Seaspiracy. Reducing your intake of fish, that'll definitely help because fishing is also another major issue because the fishing nets, they get into the ocean and it makes up a large part of the pollution that's in the ocean. And from what I've heard, you know how we are with toothpicks? Toothpicks can be compared to plastic straws in the ocean. Plastic straws is such a small percentage of what makes the pollution in the ocean, but the fishing nets, the industrial fishing equipment that boats

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use, that makes up a large percentage of the pollution that's in the ocean and also kills a lot of marine life. It kills coral reefs when the fishing nets just drag along the ocean floor, just picking up. It just kills everything in its path basically. Yeah. Sorry, I lost track of time.

Rachel ([10:33](#)):

That's okay. I was asking you about what it feels like when you noticed that we've lost our snow and that seasonal shift. And I guess I'm curious, Alex, has that affected how you experience time or your body in space?

Alex ([10:58](#)):

Well, when I do notice how, when it doesn't snow as much, it just feels empty and cold. Like there's...

Rachel ([11:06](#)):

Emotionally or physically?

Alex ([11:08](#)):

Physically and it can also be sometimes emotionally, too. Because you don't see any snow. It's just blank. It's just cold and that's it. No leaves, no nothing. Everything is just dead.

Rachel ([11:20](#)):

Yeah.

Alex ([11:24](#)):

What was the other question you asked me?

Rachel ([11:26](#)):

Well, does it change, does it shift the way you feel about how you experience time?

Alex ([11:44](#)):

Time? Yeah, I don't think so, but time definitely seems to be moving a lot quicker. I don't know why. It just seems that way, I don't know why though. I don't know how to explain it. Time seems to be moving a lot quicker. These weeks that I work on the farm, they just go by so fast and like my trip to Puerto Rico, I remember we was planning it just a few weeks ago and I'm going to be going in two weeks from now. Yeah.

Rachel ([12:17](#)):

How does climate crisis affect your day-to-day life, if it does?

Alex ([12:26](#)):

Well, the pollution does... I hate the smell of car exhausts. I know that with these Amazon and all these mail carrier package facilities that's being built around Red Hook, well, I hope they have electric vehicles, because all that pollution that if they were to use cars that require fossil fuels, it's just going to pollute this neighborhood a lot. You'll probably be smelling that all the time if you're not wearing a mask and it's

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going to affect your health too. Pollution like that, it can cause asthma, diabetes and obesity rates in no-income neighborhoods like Red Hook.

Rachel (13:12):

Yeah. I mean, do you think that you will be affected differently by climate change because of the various identities that you have, like your racial identity, national identity, gender, sexuality, religion? How do you think those aspects of your identity might affect how climate crisis affects you?

Alex (13:41):

Well, I think when it comes to things like that, I know that some races, they're not viewed as important. I'm going to give Native Americans, for example. When they have a land and they own it, it's their land, people higher up like companies and stuff like oil companies, they're going to want to build oil pipelines through their homes. And when they protest that, it's like they're not heard no matter how many people are speaking up for them.

Rachel (14:18):

Right.

Alex (14:19):

It's like these companies, they just jam all these oil pipes into your homes and no matter how many people there are, they'll do it regardless. They're not going to care. If it was white people maybe, they probably wouldn't have done something like that. They would only do it towards the minority groups, like Native Americans, like Mexicans, Black people. Stuff like that. Because we have protested with the carrier facilities. We wanted them to have electric vehicles to be running, going past and through Red Hook, and I don't think they have responded. They just completely ignored it and there was a large, large group. There was a large group of protestors and there was no response from any of these companies.

Rachel (15:17):

It's very upsetting.

Alex (15:17):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Rachel (15:17):

What does that feel like to have...

Alex (15:23):

It makes you just angry and irritated and it's like your voice is not being heard. Imagine you want something to stop, you want something another way. Multiple people are asking for it and you're just not being heard, you're not being listened to. That's what it feels like. It makes you angry.

Rachel (15:43):

Yeah.

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Alex (15:45):

Yeah.

Rachel (15:45):

How does thinking about climate crisis affect how you plan for your future?

Alex (15:54):

Well, I've thought of maybe owning a farm in my future and I remember when I considered that, I remembered thinking about, "Oh, how is the weather going to change in a few years from now?" For example, would upstate New York be a good place to start a farm there, considering how the climate is going to change in the future? Am I going to see more tornadoes over there, more thunderstorms, huge floods over there? Those are things to consider. If I were to build a farm in my future, I would want a place that's a stable weather environment. Yeah, I wouldn't want to pick a place that's going to be torn up soon.

Rachel (16:46):

Do you feel like you have the ability to find that? I'm thinking about when this rain is going to come.

Alex (17:00):

Yeah. Honestly, I feel like there's not really much you can do, because climate is going to affect everywhere.

Rachel (17:09):

Right.

Alex (17:09):

It's really going to be those big, those large companies that's going to acquire that nice farm land that I'm talking about, like places in Africa and stuff like that. Yeah.

Rachel (17:22):

Alex, I would love to keep talking with you, but I'm feeling worried about this. [crosstalk 00:17:28]. I think it's coming, so I think we should finish up before all of this equipment gets wet.

Alex (17:36):

Okay. Yeah. You're right. We're good.

Rachel (17:37):

Oh, this is such a good conversation. Any final thoughts before we finish?

Alex (17:48):

Final thoughts? I don't know. When I mention the fishing issue?

Rachel (17:56):

Yeah.

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Alex (17:59):

Maybe we can try to do more to get that message out there, because fishing is also a large part of our ecosystem.

Rachel (18:10):

Right.

Alex (18:10):

Oceans, their carbon sinks. They take up a lot of the carbon that we release into the atmosphere and when we kill the wildlife, the life that's in the oceans, it's not going to take up any carbon. Everything is going to wither away.

Rachel (18:31):

Thank you so much. Thank you. Oh, gosh. This is a great conversation. I'm really annoyed at this...