

Michael, Red Hook Farms, Red Hook, Brooklyn  
July 17, 2021

Rachel:

Okay. So, um, Michael, tell me your name, uh, where you live, where you grew up, um, how old are you and how long have you been here at Red Hook Farm?

Michael:

All right, so my name is Michael Martinez Veloz, and I was raised partly in Dominican Republic. And then after my eight years of being there, I moved to New York and Red Hook and I lived here ever since for 10 years. So right now I'm 18 years old. Yeah.

Rachel:

And, uh, how long have you been at Red Hook Farm?

Michael:

Red Hook Farms. I've been here for a good four years. I started, I started right before I graduated middle school.

Rachel:

Oh, you've been here for a long time.

Michael:

Yeah.

Rachel:

That's awesome.

Michael:

And now I'm a senior.

Rachle:

What brought you here?

Michael:

What brought me here is, um, a program, SYP. It's like a summer youth employment program. And that summer that I was doing it, it was like event like. They pay for you to work somewhere. So like one of the positions they had was the Red Hook Farm that I didn't even know existed before I came here. And I actually live like five minutes away from here.

Rachel:

That's crazy.

Michael:

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And I didn't even know there was a farm here until I started working here. Crazy.

Rachel:

And, uh, what have you learned since you've been working here?

Micahel:

Well, there's a lot of small and big things. So like, like how we grow food and how we grow these vegetables. Fruits and like what is needed and like the names, the right names to say like, when should we grow them? And the names of the toolsm composting, the cycle of farming basically. I didn't know any of this prior.

Rachel

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

Michael:

The value of this is like, yeah, I'm a farmer now, but like even after 20 years, like maybe buy a farm. I'm gonna have a backyard cause I'm not thinking of living in New York and like I can apply this in my normal life.

You know, like even if I don't have a backyard, I can start like an indoor farming thing and like experiment with that now that I'm a farmer and I will always be like a farmer in some way cuz the land is where we are. So ...

Rachel:

What does it mean to be a farmer?

Michael:

To be a farmer just means to like always have or like to always know what plants are used for what. We went camping and this kind of like a little bit off topic, but we went camping and we was like -- saw the shape of a plant that people used to use before they had like toilet paper and like, yes, a little bit off topic, but like normal people, they normally don't know that you can like say it like you're in the woods. You can use that, that tree for that. Like if, if you're really in need to do so, you know, and like what things you should eat. Like giving different things, like different priorities. Like I would rather use the blueberries from here than to like say you see like wild blueberries growing somewhere. I would rather skip, skip on those because of the nutrient that the soil that is being grown in, I don't know really much about it and like it's not being taken care of the right way. So I know how to take care of a soil the right way so you can like regrow and like actually eat.

Rachel:

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So it's really given you a whole new understanding of, um, how you can, uh, like, use and work with the planet.

Michael:  
Yes. Yes.

Rachel:  
That's cool.

Michael:  
Mm-hmm. . I agree.

Rachel:  
Um, so Michael, the, the core question of this project, um, is when you think about global warming or the climate crisis, what do you think about and how do you feel?

Michael:  
What I think about is more like things that we're not, we're gonna be able to see again. So like global warming. It like kills a lot of animals and trees I guess. Because like you can, you can assume that like 20 years prior to this, there used to be a lot more animals that have gone and extinct now because of global warming and things of that sort Also, our farming season is like cut off some way. Like you can't plant certain things that you used to plant that you could plant prior to global warming or prior to getting this bad.

Rachel:  
Has that been happening over the course of time that you've been working here?

Michael:  
Oh, I wouldn't say it happened to me in particular because I'm not the one that chooses like a hundred percent what we're planting, but I know it, it has impacted a lot of farmers. So like they can't grow, let's say they can't grow pepper past or tomatoes past a certain temperature, past a certain date because it gets colder, let's say by October.

Rachel:  
So it sounds like what you think about is a lot of loss.

Michael:  
A lot of loss. Yeah. Like animal loss, um, trees, fruit loss, time loss.

Rachel:

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And how do you feel?

Michael:

Well, it feels kind of sad, but like, it's mostly about like, oh, how can we do, or what can we do as a, as everybody to like change what's going on and not necessarily like, like being reasonable. Like you can't just say like, let's ban all cars from existence cuz you know, that's not gonna happen. Like so many people use cars. But like, something that I always bring up is Teslas because, because they're like, not stopping, they're like trying for the long run. They're trying to like help the environment and like, like some argument that people can hit you with is like, oh, they take like a lot of carbon emissions to like make, because they're a new brand, but like in the long run they're not gonna be using like negative energy to, to be run. So like, it's not mostly about banning things, but like upgrading them to the point where like it's not harming the environment.

Rachel:

And how do you feel?

Michael:

Feel right now, I feel like there's nothing I can do to stop it cuz I'm just one person like, like I can be pro this, but one person is just not gonna change the whole world, you know?

Rachel:

What does that make you feel? Like? Like an emotion word.

Michael:

Emotion. Word. Like powerless. That's an emotion, right?

Rachel:

Yeah.

Michael:

Yeah. Powerless.

Rachel:

When did you first learn about global warming?

Michael:

Global warming. I felt like it was a really big thing at like two years ago maybe. Well, like all the ice, what's it called? The ice, like the glaciers. The glaciers breaking and that like, you know how like the, the glaciers, they hold a lot of carbon emissions that are like kept in the

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ice, and we don't stop them from the melting. That's just more greenhouse gas is being released to our Earth, which is even more harmful.

Rachel:  
So you kind of learned about this pretty recently.

Michael:  
Yeah. I'm actually in a group that we're making like, Air sensors to like test the carbon emissions and the pm, which I'm not really sure what it means, but I'm in the group like trying to learn more about this and like bring social awareness to people.

Rachel:  
Oh. Why did you choose to join that?

Michael:  
Um, it was kind of like from the farm. This part of, it's kind of part of the farm. We, uh, work in the farm and then we also work in a concentration group. And the concentration group that I chose was environmental justice. And global warming has a lot to do with environmental justice.

Rachel:  
Absolutely.

Michael:  
And everything is connected. Like everything in the world is connected to each other. You can find a way to connect it.

Rachel:  
What made you interested in environmental justice?

Michael:  
Because like, like, not to be mean or anything, but like, like like my parents or like the younger, the older generation. I don't know the name of generation, you know the name of that. Like we're generation Z. And then your generation, or like your, your parents' generation.

Rachel:  
Yeah. Or like, like they, they're probably like Gen X.

Michael:

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Alright. So they did stuff that like, wasn't really beneficial for the environment. You know, it's like, like, like maybe for them it's like, who cares? It's not gonna impact us. But for me it's like we care because it's gonna impact us and our future families.

Rachel:

Yeah. How does thinking about this topic impact how you, um, view your future or plan for your future.

Michael:

Like, like the only example I can have is like, what's happen, what happens in California where all the wildfires that's because of global warming and just imagine like that getting like 10 times worse. And it can get 10 times worse, really fast.

Rachel:

Yeah.

Michael

If nothing is being done to stop it or to improve it.

Rachel:

So how does that affect you and your own future?

Michael:

Because like, where am I, where am I going to live? Or like, am I gonna live like New York? You can tell New York is kind of like messed up because like in the spring, like one day, one day it's cold, like super cold. One day it's like super hot. That's not, it's not normal for us to be living like that. And. We kind of adapted to it, but it's not, it's not right.

Rachel:

When did you start noticing those kinds of changes?

Michael:

I would say mostly, like this year I actually like took it into consideration like every time it happened. But I did realize that last year too, like, you know, like we kind of have a meme going on that like New York has just has like bipolar temperature. And that's not, it's not like it always been like that, like that's because of global warming.

Rachel:

What does it feel like to experience unseasonable weather like that?

Michael:

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It's just like, you can never be ready. You know, like you always have to have that coat in front of your door, which I hate having coats. Like I'm not thinking of living in New York in the future, but I wouldn't like to live, leave a spot and like know that it's doing bad or that it could be doing better. You know?

Rachel  
Where do you wanna live in the future?

Michael:  
In the future, I wanna live like in a tropical place like Florida. Because my parents recently moved to Florida because they can't stand the cold.

Rachel:  
Well, yeah, especially coming from DR. It's like a really big difference.

Michael:  
Yeah.

Rachel:  
Um, how does climate change affect your day-to-day life?

Michael:  
Day to day? I feel like more in the spring, like sometimes. Like, I would walk to school and then I'm like, oh, I have a nice clothes on. You know, like I'm ready for the temperature. And then I go outside and I find out it's a whole different temperature and like, it wasn't like that yesterday. So, you know, like that would be like a personal way. Like, oh, having to go home and change again. In the farm, there's some things that you can't eat that you should be able to eat at that in that month that you can't eat no more because of the temperature.

Rachel  
Like what?

Michael  
I actually can't think of any right now, but maybe tomatoes. I don't know, but I'm pretty sure it ends our farm season much sooner. Not for me personally, but like farmers, like they should know. I think so. I feel like I should be confirming this with Souhair or Brendan.

Rachel:  
No, no. Cause it's not like this isn't a fact-based interview. It's an experiential based interview, you know? I'm curious about your experiences Yeah. And your perspective on what you've noticed.

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Michael

Yeah. That's what I feel like, you know, because living in New York, like I just feel like it's gonna be a getting colder every time and every time, you know, like, Like usually my birthday is right in October 15th, where you should be able to pull off nice clothes, I feel like. But I feel like it's getting to the point where like you have to pull off winter clothes, kind of some in some, some days, right?

Rachel:

Like you can never wear your nice transitional seasonal. Yeah, like transition seasonal outfits.

Michael:

Yeah. Cause now it's just like summer and winter.

Rachel:

How does that, does that affect how you, um, experience time or like your body and space?

Michael:

Well, I feel like personally as you get older, time starts to speed up. I'm just saying this because like when I used to live in Dominican, yeah, it was summer, like the whole year, but I was a kid and I feel like my summer vacation was like a year long, and then I found out it was just two months. So as you get older, you time to, you start to view time are different. And then here, like when it gets cold, you daylight savings starts and then like a day is like goes by so fast you can't really do anything. That's also one of the reasons why I wanna move.

Rachel:

Why?

Michael:

Because it starts to be like you start to adapt to like being dark at at four o'clock. Yeah. And I don't want to live life like that kind of.

Rachel:

Have you ever taken, oh, it sounds like you do, but um, have you taken political action around this topic?

Michael:

Well, I've done marshes around what's going on in my neighborhood, like Amazon coming and building three Amazon Warehouse like. Like what is this? And we march out about that and yeah, like bringing social awareness to people. That's kind of why I wanted to do this interview.



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Rachel:  
To bring social awareness.

Michael:  
Yes. Even though I don't know all the facts, I still feel like me talking about it and sharing my opinion can persuade people.

Rachel:  
It does. It's so important. And, and also like this, we get mired in these ideas of facts, but really we can see the effects of climate change and we can see the effects of, um, just environmental degradation all around us.

Michael:  
Yeah. Like what's happening in, and I hope you know the place, but. France or Italy or Germany. Germany where like the water rising, like it's really scary. That's scary. And they're, they're used to it already, or not used to it, but like it is, it is their life. Like at a certain time, water just goes inside their house and their business and there's nothing they can do about it.

Rachel:  
Yeah. I mean, sort of, I'm asking this question, how you adjust to change or how you experience change? What it feels, what it feels like to be experiencing change? Um, in, in, in the realm of something that seems so fundamentally stable.

Michael:  
Yeah. How does it feel? How does it feel? It feels like there's nothing you can do about it. You just having that part of your life taken away from it because you know it's changing and you know, like you can't really get it back. You know, like what was the place again? Germany, like those people know that if they don't do something like a really big thing to change it, they just gonna be getting floods and they don't like it. But what can, there isn't really nothing they can do about it to change it. So it's like just again, with the powerless, like this happened, there's nothing you can do about it now. I guess we just have to adapt to what's going on. It's gonna be a new normal. It's kind of like what happened with Covid. Covid didn't come to stay. It kind of feels like that, but like now you see somebody with a mask and you just think like, oh yeah, that's normal. You know? I know there's like probably some two years old, they probably think it's normal to just be walking outside with a mask and like, you know, not just be living nature like to the fullest. Cause you have to be careful whether you catch covid or not.

Rachel:

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Right. We're just constantly adapting. Um, here's a question. Uh, how do you contextualize this moment? Like, how did we get here?

Michael:

From my previous actions? Is that -- does that answer the questions like,

Rachel:

How did we, yeah, like focus, how do you, and when you think about history and you think about where we are now, like how did we get here?

Michael:

Because we started focusing on things that like, like improving technology and improving transportation so much that we forgot about how to improve our environment. So like that's a really big thing that happened in China too, with the --Ah, I, I haven't been to school in a minute, um, what's that word? Um, industry advancement. No, Industrial Revolution. Uhhuh. . Yeah. So like China wanted to get ahead and like now, like the air, air there is like much worse than here. From all that investment that they try to do. They totally forgot about the environment and now they're trying to fix it. So that's kind of what's happening now. But with the whole world, the whole world started like focusing on things that didn't really matter, like making fast close and fast phones and fast cars. And we started to forget about our environment.

Rachel:

And so what is here, where, what is, how would you define this moment?

Michael:

This moment is, I feel like it's the moment to start improving our environment. Does that answer the question? So like, so like now we have to like lay back on all these fast technology and start to think about our environment. Like Apple is kind of doing this, I'm not gonna like praise them or anything, but they make themselves look good by like having like a whole -- their thing in California, like all solar panels and like all the trees that they planted. So like, I guess they're doing good, but I'm not gonna like make them sound good because if you think about it, they all should like, they're like making a lot of money off of, off of what they're doing and everything is not good. You know, like everything that they do is not like, positive. Not that I know much about what they're doing, but I just know like they're plotting something behind the scenes so they're not telling everybody, you know?

Rachel:

Yeah . Um, and then where do you stay us in 20 years?

Michael:

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In 20 years I would, I actually know California, how's this law now by 2020, 2035, they can't sell gasoline cars in California, so hopefully. That's a new trend that other people are gonna start adapting. And in 20 years that, how much? Um, 15 years. So in 15 years I hope to see a lot of more electric cars, which I feel like it was a, a trend that Tesla started only because Tesla made it look cool to be driving the electric cars. Because electric cars existed before Tesla. But now they're like making it better, like more mileage and hopefully I, I hope to see like more solar panels being used. Like my auntie in DR, she put solar panels in her house and like now she has to pay less for electricity, which is better, and helping the environment at the same time. Yeah, I hope to see a lot more like solar panels, electric reusable energy being used and less harmful, negative energy.

Rachel

What do you feel fearful for, for the future?

Michael:

Oh, something I'm fearful about is like us not getting the message and just keep on keeping on doing whatever we're doing. Keeping using all this bad energy and because at the end of the day, it's not under our control. As much. It's mostly the government has to get the bigger picture and they have to, um, they have to, they have to put the laws in place for everybody else to follow.

Rachel:

What do you feel hopeful for?

Michael:

Um, I feel hopeful that we are getting the bigger picture, and the government like to start putting like laws and like do stuff to help the environment and not just like, just to make money, you know? Yeah. Like, yeah.

Rachel:

Do you feel like you will or have been affected by climate change differently because, um, The identities that you have, like racial identity, national identity, gender, sexuality, ability?

Michael:

Well, um, I kind of feel really good about myself mostly because of where I was raised, which was a tropical place, and I feel like that was really good for me. But my little brother, which was eight now, um, I know he has like, or he had asthma. And that does have to do with the environment that you're being raised in. And I just wanted to share that because I was talking about it with my group yesterday, like where you're being raised has to do a lot with how you're doing in life and yeah. But I feel like he's been getting better cuz. I feel like he's with the asthma. Like I feel like it was really big when he was born.

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And like four years old, but like now I feel like he's better.

Rachel:

Did I not ask you any questions that you thought I'd be asking you? Or do you, are there any questions that you wish I had asked you?

Michael:

I wouldn't say, you didn't ask me any questions that I wanted you to ask. I feel like you asked me everything that I wanted to cover in the interview. Uhhuh . Um, I wanted to share though, um, like what I wanna do for the future. Yeah. Which is kind of like the opposite of being the farmer. I wanna be a pilot because I want to be successful in life.

Rachel:

Kind of like an airplane pilot.

Michael:

Yeah, airplane pilot, and airplanes is a big problem. With like carbon emissions that they put in the air, but they also have been -- same way with Teslas like carbon and electric cars -- like they are also improving. So I feel like every transportation are, they're improving in their own ways. Yeah, like having, uh, I'm having branch brain farts now, so I can't mention the names though.

Rachel:

I know I can smell them.

Michael:

Planes they're having, they're like being built to take less, to produce less carbon and like less greenhouse gases. So I just want to share that so you don't feel like I'm being a hypocrite, but...

Rachel:

I don't feel like you're being a hypocrite. I know it is like the, we are living in such a complex time. Yeah. Where, you know, we sort of, we have these desires that don't necessarily align with –

Michael:

Our values?

Rachel:

Yeah.

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Michael:

Yeah. Especially cuz you know, I gotta do something to like, move outta here and like, like out of here. I mean like the, what's it called? Red Hook, the projects. Yeah. You know, like I have to do something, not like Yeah. That's, that's a feel like it's gonna be like my way out.

Rachel:

I wish you so much luck.

Michael:

Thank you.

Rachel:

That that's a really, I mean, it's a cool dream to have. And it's a cool thing to pursue.

Michael:

Yeah. It's kind of crazy how you see people like the options that they have based on where they were, they were raised. Like the other day I got on a plane from DR, cuz I was visiting and I was talking to the pilot. The pilot was like, oh yeah, I started flying my um, I started flying a plane when I was 14 years. Yeah. And then like one of the people that was with me, they were like, like he works as a, as, what is those called? Um, flight Attendant. He was like, what? That's crazy. I didn't even have access to a plane when I was 14 years old. But like, you know, that's like, it depends where you're being raised. You're gonna get different options, you know? That's why most people are more successful. Yeah. Now I feel like I shared everything I had to say.

Rachel:

Michael, thank you so much.

Michael:

Thank you.

Rachel:

You're so smart and thoughtful.

Michael:

Thank you. Thank you.

Rachel

Thanks for sharing. It's really generous of you.