



**Name:** *Jarod Junco*  
**School:** *Virginia Tech*

My family and I have always been fresh food fanatics. While living in Savannah, we took for granted our access to a local farmer's market. Forsyth Park is the ideal setting for the weekly farmer's market. It is located in the center of downtown Savannah and is lined with old oak trees which provide for a serene and peaceful setting. Saturdays were always an enjoyable time to check out what the vendors had to offer. There were fresh farm eggs, local honey, and people selling locally grown plants and herbs. The aroma of freshly popped popcorn would fill the air. You could find almost anything you wanted. Our favorite vendor carried organic vegetables. Their table literally looked as if they have spilled a box of crayons. You could see vibrant orange carrots, luscious red strawberries, bright yellow squash, deep purple eggplant, ruby red radishes, and vivid green sugar snaps that were so sweet you could almost eat them like candy. We didn't realize how fortunate we were to be so close to the market. When we moved to Sylvania, a very small rural town in southeast Georgia, we were sorely disappointed to learn the nearest farmer's market was over thirty miles away. You can just imagine our excitement when we discovered that my SkillsUSA club won a grant from Lowes for a community farmer's market.

It was during my senior year in high school that our club received a grant. In order to win this award, we completed a detailed written explanation of the project and how and why it will benefit the community. We were responsible for the designing, developing and construction of an outdoor pavilion to serve as a community farmer's market. We worked the majority of my senior year with Lowes, SkillsUSA, and the City of Sylvania to complete this project. Most of the students involved in this task were seniors and were busy keeping up with AP Calculus, taking SAT's and applying to colleges. During the winter, we had many cold, rainy days which delayed our progress. At times we were skeptical that we would be able to complete the project on time. To guarantee that our project would be completed for the opening day, we volunteered to work after school and on weekends.



Our team was successful and completed the pavilion in time for the June 1 opening. We were completely disheartened when it started pouring down rain on June 1st. Would anyone venture out in this summer rainstorm to visit our new farmer's market? We worried needlessly. The community showed up in crowds to support the new farmer's market. Customers were crowded shoulder to shoulder to see what the farmers had to offer. Throughout the summer, there was continued interest. Each week, local citizens continued to gather at the Market on Maple to see what was in season. There are picnic tables and benches in the center of the pavilion so people can sit a while and catch up with other and admire each others' purchases. It has served as a great way to connect people of all ages, races, and backgrounds. The market has been a great way to unite the community. Since it is conveniently located in the downtown area, many citizens are within walking distance. This ideal location has helped to rejuvenate and revitalize the business area.

Our farmer's market has become the envy of surrounding communities and this is just the beginning. The City of Sylvania has plans to expand the area to include a passive park and a green area. This venture was really appealing to me. It gave our team vast first-hand experience with developing a project from just an idea to reality. Being a part of this project taught us how to work through unforeseen snags and obstacles in order to bring our farmer's market to successful completion in time for opening day. Not only was it a tremendous learning experience for the current SkillsUSA students, but it will serve in teaching future students as they assist with the upkeep and future plans for the area. This project demonstrated to me how important it is to collaborate to improve and enhance our community. Seeing how this has enhanced our community has ignited my aspiration to continue to make a difference. I am currently a freshman at Virginia Tech. Their motto is Ut Prosim- that I may serve. This is one of the many things that attracted me to Virginia Tech. Not only will I be gaining a great education, but I will be learning even better how to be of service to my community.