

## Veteran Finds Purpose Again

“I really want to encourage other veterans, please take a look at this as a form of recovery, as therapy, and stress management,” said [Veteran Farmer Training Program](#) (VFTP) intern, Ramon Madrid. Having had a rough transition out of the military himself, he stressed that while Rodale Institute is a working farm and not an *Agri-therapy* farm, going through the program has given him a way to serve *again*. “Agriculture has given me purpose again,” he said, “it’s a chance to show others how to eat better, and how to grow their own food.”



Madrid selected the long track VFTP, which started in March and concludes this coming November. His favorite part of the internship program was the field trips to other farms. Learning different styles of farming, different farm sizes, and the inspiration that started them, and how they got their start. He was intrigued by the variation of successful farmers. “Some operations have only been successfully farming a year or two,” he noted, “while others have been farming successfully for seven generations!” In addition, he said the internship afforded him a wide range of great advice from professionals in the industry. “It’s like Gold Nuggets,” he said, “every time you step foot on a different farm, you have to listen for that one piece of advice that strikes you.”

Madrid said he finds farming very fulfilling. Like many other veterans, he finds fulfillment in planting the seed, nurturing it, and harvesting it. He says it is especially rewarding to put fruits of his labor in the hands of someone in the community that needs it. Ramon likes that tangible, measurable, part of farming. It gives his mental health a boost, as well. It’s very encouraging for him to see the progression in the process.

He said that going to the farmers markets in under-served areas was also fulfilling. It really hit home for Madrid. Originally from New Orleans, he said there are whole communities there that are food deserts with very little access to fresh produce. At the market Rodale attends, consumers not only can purchase produce but are offered educational opportunities on preparing those products.

Ramon said he had several options that he is currently contemplating when his internship ends. He has been invited to participate in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year internship at Rodale Institute, he is considering Poco Organics and he has a real interest in a program at the University of Florida Controlled Environment Agriculture (CEA). CEA systems are certainly on the rise, the last Census of Agriculture data showed a 5-year 59% increase in the area of vegetables and herbs grown under glass or other protection, according to the USDA.

Specifically, Ramon would like to link up with other farmers or programs where he can learn about soil remediation/soil remediation. He stated, “down south we experience land erosion and pollution, and I would like to experiment by using the cleaning properties of hemp and fungi to combat these issues. I think there is a whole generation of people just waiting to find purpose and contribute to our ecosystem.” If someone can help point him in the right direction, he is motivated to put in the work and make it happen! He can be reached through MarketMaker. [contact@foodmarketmaker.com](mailto:contact@foodmarketmaker.com)