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Slow food, KA style

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Fraternity brothers Will George (left) and Nick Millette amid the fruits of their labors.

MAX DUTCHER

Slow food, KA style

THANKS IN LARGE PART to one brother's love of good food and background as a chef — and his May Experience trip to Italy — Furman's KA fraternity has joined the slow food movement.

Will George '12 was part of a Furman group that traveled abroad in May 2010 to study "Slow Food, Italian Style." Slow food is an international effort that links "the pleasure of good food with a commitment to the community and the environment" and encourages people to take a sustainable approach to the things they eat, according to www.slowfood.com.

Led by professor William Allen, the students spent two weeks living on a farm near Sora, Italy, experiencing traditional farming and food preparation firsthand. George, who's been a cook in a restaurant in his hometown of New Orleans, says he was already aware of the value of "local food" and high quality, fresh ingredients. But the trip reinforced his belief in "the pleasure of growing and enjoying food on site."

Last spring and summer at the fraternity's house on eight woody acres in Travelers Rest, George, Max Dutcher '12 and several other KA brothers began cultivating an organic garden. They used no chemical fertilizers or pesticides and planted primarily heirloom varieties of fruits and vegetables, including okra, peas, tomatoes, canteloupe, squash, collards, arugula, and assorted herbs. It wasn't long before their table overflowed with bounty.

As summer transitioned into fall, so did the garden.

The brothers added a second plot and filled it with such crops as cabbage, bell peppers, lettuce and broccoli. Given the abundant results, they began to investigate donating their extras to local food pantries and other community organizations. They also added turkeys and chickens, with goats a possibility if they can figure out how to keep the coyotes at bay.

George, a political science and history major, says the garden offers much more than gastronomical benefits: "It promotes a greater sense of community among our fraternity. We all have a role in planting, maintaining and harvesting. Meals have become more of a slow, communal affair. We enjoy both our food and each other's company."

And you can't beat dining on veggies at the peak of their freshness. George makes special mention of his vine-to-table record for preparing a meal: "Six minutes," he says. "Grilled bell peppers."

So now Furman students have more choices. They can sample produce grown at Furman's own organic farm, located beside the David E. Shi Center for Sustainability, or dial up the KA house and ask, "Hey guys, what's for dinner?"

But who'll pick up the pitchfork after George, Dutcher and other leaders of the movement graduate in May? Chances are someone will emerge from the group that heads back to Italy this spring for another May Experience in sustainable food practices.

— JIM STEWART