



NMSP Internship Helps Cornell Transfer Student Nicole Smaranda Further Her Career Goals

By Lisa Fields

The journey to finding her true path has been transformational for Nicole Smaranda. She's on track to graduate from Cornell in December of 2017 with a BS in Agricultural Sciences (Crop Production and Management Concentration) and a minor in Business.

"It took a couple of tries to find the right place for me, but ultimately the unorthodox route through college has given me perspective and focus in my studies," Smaranda said. "When I entered college right after high school in 2011, I was really unsure of what I wanted to study, but it was important to my mom that I went straight into college. As I paid my own way through school, I came to appreciate the price of my education and I realized it had to be my own path. So I decided to leave school after two confusing years and explore my options."

Smaranda returned home and worked retail jobs to make enough money to hike part of the Appalachian Trail. She backpacked 700 miles from Springer Mountain, Georgia, into Virginia during the summer of 2013. The time spent in physical challenge and introspection helped her to realize her true interests.

"I came home after my hike ready to start studying and exploring my interests in agriculture and food systems," Smaranda explained. "I entered LaGuardia Community College and found new confidence in my ability to excel as a student. LaGuardia Community College had a matriculation arrangement with Cornell's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CAL S) and I worked through the requirements so that I could attend Cornell University as an Agricultural Sciences major."

Smaranda's interest in agriculture developed during her childhood. "I spent many summers on my family's farm in Poland," she said. "Growing and harvesting the food we ate was a huge influence on me."

In the spring of 2016 Smaranda entered Cornell as a junior in the Agricultural Sciences major. She noted, "It was my first semester on campus but I immediately started looking for

ways to get involved. When I heard about an internship opportunity with Professor Quirine Ketterings' Nutrient Management Spear Program (NMSP) to update the Northeast Region Certified Crop Advisor (NRCCA) Study Manual, I was very excited to apply for it. I was eager to work with Dr. Ketterings. She's accomplished so much in both research and educational outreach, is the director of the NMSP, and a strong woman role model in the male-dominated field of agriculture."



Nicole Smaranda updated the NRCCA Study Manual for her internship with the NMSP and NRCCA.

Ketterings, who co-chairs the NRCCA program said, "Nicole was a perfect match for the NRCCA internship. With her enthusiasm to learn as much as she could about the study materials, her attention to detail, social skills and eagerness to quickly learn and apply new knowledge we were able to complete the task. The [manual](#) is now available at the NRCCA website."

The study manual covers four main management areas: Pest, Crop, Soil and Water, and Nutrient Management. Candidates have to pass the NRCCA exam that covers those areas and the international exam. They also need two

years of field experience before they can become fully certified. Professional CCA certification is a stamp of assurance of a certain level of knowledge and skill. Provisional certification status is now available to those who pass the tests but still need to gain some experience, allowing students to take the tests while still in college. Provisional certification when graduating from college gives students an extra advantage as job applicants. "I learned a lot about the key aspects of crop production during this internship," Smaranda commented. "My work mostly involved communication with the authors, including emails and in-person meetings to coordinate everyone's efforts in updating the study manual. With Quirine's guidance I learned how to structure and direct productive meetings. The chapter authors are all highly regarded specialists, so sitting down with them was a great opportunity for me."

Smaranda described a highlight of her work. "I was able to work more in-depth on the crop adaptation section, assembled by Professor Cherney. We worked together to update the section so that the text read more smoothly and the information was presented clearly. The reorganization took a lot of thinking, reading and consulting with outside sources. It was a very rewarding process and helped increase my knowledge of crop physiology. It was really exciting for me when Dr. Cherney reviewed my changes and gave me very positive feedback."

Jeannette Marvin, administrator for NRCCA, said, "Nicole was our first intern and we were thrilled with her exemplary work updating the program's keystone Performance Objectives and assisting with the Study Manual that showcases them. Nicole's work was essential to maintaining the program's viability."

Smaranda's internship included attending extension field days and events. She noted, "Participating in field days, where researchers, growers, and industry folks came together, gave me the opportunity to see how different sectors of agriculture interact. I got a glimpse into my own future and saw the possibilities."

In spring 2017, Smaranda is heading a unique independent study project with a few other students. She explained, "We'll be doing a feasibility study for a rooftop farm at Cornell University. This will involve learning about building and maintenance codes, city and campus regulations, water infrastructure and supply as well as producing crops. The outcome will be a report that includes clearly defined barriers and opportunities for each topic within the study."

Smaranda explained how this project fits her career vision. "I am very interested in joining the urban rooftop farm industry after Cornell. I want to take the opportunity while I am here to deepen my knowledge about the business, logistic, technical and practical aspects of creating viable growing environments for crops. My vision includes changing typical city dwellers' landscape to include a direct connection with their food supply. That shift in consciousness could impact their world view as well as contribute to a sustainable food system. The NRCCA internship provided relevant knowledge toward this goal."

Describing the NMSP environment, Smaranda said, "I really loved the Monday morning team meetings. Everyone shares updates about their projects and their goals for the week, and work is planned so we all pitch in to help where needed. I learned about the research process by helping with other projects and through presentations the team gave during weekly meetings. The collaborative functioning of the NMSP was a big part of my learning experience." She added, "I'm going to miss school when it's over. It's hectic and challenging in such a good way. I love the constant learning and connecting with people who are devoted to their work."

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The **Nutrient Management Spear Program (NMSP)** is an applied research, teaching and extension program for field crop fertilizer and manure management on dairy and livestock farms. It is a collaboration among faculty, staff and students in the Department of Animal Science, Cornell Cooperative Extension, and PRO-DAIRY. Our vision is to assess current knowledge, identify research and educational needs, facilitate new research, technology and knowledge transfer, and aid in the on-farm implementation of strategies for field crop nutrient management including timely application of organic and inorganic nutrient sources to improve farm profitability while protecting the environment. An integrated network approach is used to address research, extension and teaching priorities in nutrient management in New York State. For more information on NMSP projects and extension/teaching activities, visit the program website (<http://nmsp.cals.cornell.edu>) or contact Quirine Ketterings at qmk2@cornell.edu or (607) 255-3061.