This past summer, students undertook so many unique and impactful initiatives and opportunities all with one thing in common: being the difference they envision for the world! Students spent their summers learning, connecting, discovering and applying their Cyclone-acquired knowledge and skills to the test as they dove into a variety of experiences, many directly focused on ensuring a sustainable future. Live Green! connected with a few students about their unique and memorable summers of sustainability, as interns.

Helping People Help the Land
Sage Coffman (SC), a senior majoring in Environmental Science and Agronomy, noted new personal discoveries and empowerment in sustainability while interning at the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The NRCS helps producers, soil and water conservation districts and other partners protect and conserve natural resources on private lands throughout the United States. Their main mission is to protect natural resources and feed a growing world.

Some of Coffman’s responsibilities included assisting landowners assess any land conservation issues and also provide technical advice and helping landowners to understand the beneficial practices in land conservation. Coffman’s help and assistance was empowered by the NRCS’s mission, “helping people help the land,” and he strived to help people help the land all summer long.

Q: As you think back over your summer sustainability experiences, what surprised you the most? What is your fondest memory?

SC: I was surprised by Iowa’s diversity in its soils, topography, flora and fauna. I had a great time looking for the Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake and saw a lot of cool wildlife. I saw and photographed butterflies, a bobcat, a red fox, a coyote, box turtles, lots of frogs and many bucks. I greatly enjoyed learning a lot about the native grasses and forbs of the tallgrass prairie and had great co-workers who made it a fun experience. A fond memory of mine was on a wetland easement by the Skunk River... discovering and exploring its diversity of species.

Q: How did your summer experiences support your career interests and goals?

SC: My summer experiences are greatly tied to my career goals of working most of my days outdoors with nature and being a good steward of the land. I hope to push for more sustainability within agriculture and help make Iowa, or anywhere I go, a healthier and happier environment.
Q: How do your summer sustainability experiences relate to the upcoming month’s theme, “Refresh, Renew, and Rejuvenate?”

SC: I believe that helping people rejuvenate their land helps the environment and when we help them renew their land into protection from being cropped, it helps renew and refresh the soil health and water quality.

Researching for Rehabilitation
Another student, Sarah Crowley (SaC), a sophomore majoring in Environmental Science with a minor in Urban Studies, developed and enhanced her research skills during her internship for the Nahant Marsh Education Center in Davenport, Iowa. The Nahant Marsh is a rehabilitated urban wetland off of the Mississippi River and serves as a public resource advocating for the protection of native Iowa plants, animals and habitats.

Crowley was empowered to research snakes and the impact of the 2023 spring/summer flooding on their population dispersal. Crowley’s research regarding spring/summer flooding provided valuable insight on the original rehabilitation plan, which occurred in the 1990s when local environmentalists suspected the land’s former use as a gun range was a leaching lead into the soil and water. Crowley also explored how this original rehabilitation plan did not take into account the exponentially changing climate, which would account for unsustainable flood prevention and dwindling snake populations.

Q: As you think back over your summer sustainability experiences, what surprised you the most? What is your fondest memory?

SaC: One of the general focuses of the internship was tracking the endangered Blanding’s Turtle (E. blandingii). Maybe it’s just me, but I don’t often think of Iowa as a place vulnerable to species endangerment. A fond memory was during the first couple of weeks, all the interns put on waders that went up to our armpits. (We seriously looked like those guys in the cranberry juice commercials.)

While interning at the Nahant Marsh Education Center. Then, we waded through vegetation that had grown very thick. We set live traps to catch and tag all the various turtle species for the marsh and Iowa Fish and Wildlife to monitor. Although moving through the water was exhausting and incredibly hot, it was such a fulfilling experience to study and suffer with fellow environmentalists.
Q: How do your summer sustainability experiences relate to the upcoming month’s theme, “Refresh, Renew, and Rejuvenate?”

SaC: My time with the marsh internship was such a refreshing mental experience. All of the 100-degree days where I marched back and forth for miles hunting for snakes only to get bit up by mosquitoes taught me to find peace in every corner of nature. For every snake that bit me, there were dozens of red-wing blackbirds singing to each other. When I lifted a snake board and saw nothing but a massive anthill, I could turn around and see rabbits running through the prairie. And when wasps chased me around the property, all I had to do was pause and see the field covered in monarch butterflies.

Embracing Global Perspective

Haylie Moore (HM), a sophomore majoring in Global Resource Systems, Agriculture Business and Agriculture and Rural Policy Studies (and 2022-2023 Live Green! Team member) took on the empowering opportunity to gain new insight on international food security and embrace aspects of social sustainability while interning abroad in San José, Costa Rica at the Inter-American Institute for the Cooperation (IICA) on Agriculture. The IICA is a specialized agency for agriculture of the Inter-American System that supports the effort of member states to achieve agriculture development and rural well-being.

Moore’s internship responsibilities were with the Digitalization in Agri-Food Systems department and helped them conduct research about agriculture technology companies (AgTechs) and how these companies can help to reduce the impacts of climate change throughout the Americas. The goal of this internship was to be able to disseminate to all of this research to all IICA locations throughout Latin America and the Caribbean.

Q: How did your summer experiences support your career interests and goals?

SaC: The marsh’s position as a public education center encouraged me to consider a career in community outreach and engagement. When we finished our individual projects, we presented our findings to the public and I got the opportunity to speak directly with lots of people about the science I’m so passionate about. My goal after graduation is to be a part of sustainable projects, such as community gardens and native habitat restoration, to bring people together and offer a sense of pride in one’s community.
Alongside her internship, Moore also spent time empowering herself by embracing the social aspect of sustainability. Moore became more accustomed to a slower-paced lifestyle and how important it is to take time to herself, make new friends, visit local cultural attractions and travel outside of the city to embrace the nature that Costa Rica is so famous for.

That day, in particular, was special because it was filled with new experiences.

**Q: How did your summer experiences support your career interests and goals?**

**HM:** While my project wasn’t directly related to my majors in business and policy, I was still able to draw connections from digital agriculture to both of my technical areas. Simply put, technology and innovation have the potential to grow the economy, but it can’t be easily implemented without the support of public policy.

My summer experiences had more to do with my professional goals of working abroad, as it offered great insight into what it would be like to adjust to a new culture and integrate myself into the work environment. I’m happy to say that I’m still eager to continue pursuing this goal because of my summer in Costa Rica.

**Q: How do your summer sustainability experiences relate to the upcoming month’s theme, “Refresh, Renew and Rejuvenate?”**

**HM:** Even though the main purpose of going to Costa Rica was to work, I absolutely had time to “refresh and rejuvenate,” whether by being able to go to bed at 9:00 PM every night or just being able to see the sights and take in the culture.

Alongside her internship, Moore also spent time empowering herself by embracing the social aspect of sustainability. Moore became more accustomed to a slower-paced lifestyle and how important it is to take time to herself, make new friends, visit local cultural attractions and travel outside of the city to embrace the nature that Costa Rica is so famous for.

**Q: As you think back over your summer sustainability experiences, what surprised you the most? What is your fondest memory?**

**HM:** It’s difficult to pick a favorite, but I really enjoyed visiting the national parks. Of the three that I went to, my favorite one was definitely the Arenal Volcano National Park. It was the first time that I had ever seen a volcano and when you went just outside of the park and down the road, there were hot springs where you could relax.

**Rehabilitating Ecosystems**

Ashley Kleve (AK), a senior majoring in Environmental Science with a minor in Sustainability had the opportunity to help habitats help themselves through an internship with The Nature Conservancy. The Nature Conservancy is a global environmental nonprofit working to conserve lands and waters on which all life depends. Over the summer,
Kleve participated in prescribed burns, invasive species removal, seeding, bison conservation practices and various other research projects.

Kleve also was invited to attend the North American Prairie Conference, the oldest and most celebrated native grassland conference that included speakers such as researchers, professors and students that shared their latest findings and questions about the prairie’s plants, insects and ecosystems.

Kleve also made history as she attended the first annual all-women’s Trailblazers Academy. The Trailblazers Academy is a three-day event that was first established this summer and empowers women around the world in prescribed burns. During the three-day event, she gained knowledge on the important aspects of prescribed burns and also put her knowledge to the test as she took part in controlled burns in prairies around Broken Kettle. In a field that is mostly male dominated, Kleve noted that it was remarkable to be able to connect with so many women.

Q: As you think back over the summer sustainability experiences, what surprised you the most? What is your fondest memory?

AK: I was very surprised to discover how important keeping up to date with the latest research is for The Nature Conservancy. They are committed to tailoring their management plans in order to create a truly sustainable ecosystem based on new and existing literature. My fondest memory of my experience was being able to connect with so many inspirational people in the conservation world.

Q: How did your summer experiences support your career interests and goals?

AK: My summer experience at The Nature Conservancy has supported my career interests and goals in many ways. I now better understand how to fully convert farmland into healthy and self-sustaining prairies. I also became certified as a firefighter type 2 (FFT2) and networked with scientists and conservationists in my field of interest. Most importantly, though, I discovered a life path that is truly fulfilling and impactful.

Q: How do your summer sustainability experiences relate to the upcoming month’s theme, “Refresh, renew, and rejuvenate”?

AK: My work with the Nature Conservancy directly contributed to refreshing and renewing Iowa’s degraded ecosystems. My summer sustainability experience promoted environmental
renewal, personal rejuvenation and the creation of a more sustainable way of living.

interactive activities around the Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources (AFNR). In addition, Van Der Kamp also served as the on-site media relations personnel for the Washington Leadership Conference and supervised a team of photographers/videographers.

Each week, Van Der Kamp was responsible with asking students to develop a “Living to Serve Plan,” (community service project). Van Der Kamp helped students develop these projects and identify what they are passionate about and how they can help themselves and their community live more sustainably. These project plans ranged from roadside clean-ups to food insecurity-based programs to mental health-based social media campaigns, hitting all areas of sustainability (environmental, economic and social).

Q: As you think back over the summer sustainability experiences, what surprised you the most? What is your fondest memory?

BV: My fondest memories from these experiences are without a doubt the invaluable friendships made between colleagues and students who share common passion for communicating the future of agriculture and sustainability.

Q: How did your summer experiences support your career interests and goals?

BV: This summer experience taught me more about my passion for sustainability and educating the public on what we can do with what
we have where we are. It even inspired me to seek out another internship opportunity as I now am a George Washington Carver Intern for the World Food Prize Foundation, which works to promote innovative solutions, and empower youth to solve food insecurity globally.

_Q: How do your summer sustainability experiences relate to the upcoming month’s theme, “Refresh, Renew, and Rejuvenate?”_

BV: As I think of the theme “Refresh, Renew, & Rejuvenate,” I see a direct connection between it and my collegiate journey. At Iowa State University, I was provided a new frame of reference and newfound love for the environment. As my time here went by month by month, I often found myself feeling overwhelmed as I couldn’t do it all, especially when it comes to solving global issues like unsustainable practices.

However, I have found that through this summer and with every passing year we can Renew ourselves and find small little ways to take action. In fact, I heard an inspirational quote from Secretary of Agriculture, Mike Naig, which states: “Norman Borlaug was just a farm kid who grew up on a gravel road Howard County

and that man went on to save a billion lives because of the work that he did. He had every barrier and obstacle in front of him and there he was. So, what makes any of us think that we can’t have even a huge impact, let alone a small impact locally.” We don’t need to do everything and burn ourselves out, but we can refresh ourselves each day and take small steps toward a more sustainable world.

Summer offers the perfect opportunity for students to embark on a journey to discover initiatives that are their individual perfect fit for empowerment, learning new skills, connections and overall, sustainable experiences. Through committed and dedicated efforts, students are equipped to return back to campus rejuvenated with newly developed skills, resources and a sustainably filled mindset to carryout through the school year and beyond!