



## Camille Yu-San Koon is Cultivating Crops and Community

In 2021, Camille Yu-San Koon found herself searching for work that would allow her to be outside, see the tangible results of her labour, and contribute to environmental and social change. Farming seemed to align with her criteria, so she jumped in, equipped with a lifelong passion for food and years of experience in environmental education and field biology. Her first farming season was spent at Larkspur Farm in L'Ange-Gardien, Quebec, where she learned quickly and flourished alongside the organic crops she tended. Growing food, she says, "is magic," whether at a backyard- or farm-scale. The magic stuck with her, and Camille continued farming, moving to Beetbox Co-op Farm in Ottawa. She's now in her third season as a full-time seasonal farm worker.

Beyond the magic of growing food and connecting with eaters, agriculture has provided Camille with an avenue to build community, drive social change, and to advance equity. She is actively engaged with the NFU on various levels, leveraging her strong sense of justice and expertise in community organizing. As the BIPOC Engagement Organizer for the BIPOC Caucus, she recently supported a series of farmer-led workshops for BIPOC farmers nationwide. At the Ontario event, BIPOC farmers and farm workers had the opportunity to participate in a tractor training workshop led by Treavor, a Jamaican migrant worker at Pfenning's Organic Farm.

Within the NFU-O, Camille has worked to expand membership, engaging with community members and forging connections across the province. She is also actively involved with the NFU Farmworker Working Group, which convenes monthly to foster a supportive and

collaborative environment for organizing transformative change.

Farm worker rights are particularly important to Camille, who believes that this aspect of the food system is often overlooked. She encourages people to spend time considering what it means for food to have fair labour behind it. Camille emphasizes that the label "organic" does not inherently reflect worker conditions, even though people often interpret "organic" as synonymous with "fair labour." Her advocacy for farm workers extends to migrant workers as well, fully supporting their plea for status for all.

Camille's hobbies further reveal her as a creative, observant, and passionate person. She spends her free time drawing, often inspired by the vegetables she grows; birding, made easier by the location of Beetbox Farm on a migratory bird path; and hiking, which lends itself to her involvement in operating a free outdoor gear-lending library.

Looking ahead, Camille hopes to expand the variety of East Asian crops she grows, as a means of reconnecting with her heritage. As the daughter of immigrants—her mother from Switzerland and her father from Hong Kong—she can, at times, feel detached from her cultures. Immigration often emphasizes assimilation, causing



cultural traditions to fade. Since English served as the common language between her parents, she feels she lacks the anchor that language can provide in preserving culture. Through growing East Asian vegetables, she embarks on a journey of rediscovery, learning Cantonese one vegetable at a time. She's also learning to cook recipes using the vegetables she grows, like her favourite dim sum dish.

Guided by a firm commitment to justice and equity, a thirst for knowledge, and a profound love for food and nature, Camille is a bright light within the NFU, energizing every space she occupies.

### Local News/Events

**Local 340 (Waterloo/Wellington) & Hawthorn Farm** are hosting a "Introduction to Seed Saving" workshop and BBQ on Sunday, August 27 from 12:30-2:30 p.m.! Come hang out with fellow Local members for a free summer BBQ at Hawthorn Farm (6923 Sideroad 2 W, Mount Forest). We'll tour Hawthorn Farm's new facility and learn the fundamental principles of saving seed from open-pollinated vegetables, herbs, and flowers. The tour will showcase a variety of tools and techniques to help you grow, harvest, process, and test your seeds. Want to join? RSVP to [stephen@hawthornfarm.com](mailto:stephen@hawthornfarm.com) or call and leave a message at (519) 343-3375. See you there!