



CASTANEA
FELLOWSHIP

DURHAM, NC
IMMERSION
SEPTEMBER 2023





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"This is having a huge impact on me as a person, it's hard to exactly pinpoint all the ways, but I sit with a lot during and after these retreats and reflect hard on how I show up in spaces, how I hold space for others, how we navigate differences of opinion in our movement work, how we continue doing this work knowing that seeing the end is isn't the ultimate goal, how we find joy and celebration in the middle of it all."

THE IMMERSION: Leaning into Liberatory Leadership

At Castanea, liberatory leadership means co-creating spaces to heal, to vision, and to build new spaces from our wildest dreams. When fellows come together during immersions, we provide the space for them to build reflective practices, reduce isolation, deepen relational networks, and leverage collective capacities to affect change. We want leaders to have a renewed sense of purpose with the stamina and support to continue to make steps towards transforming the food system.

When we are planning an in-person immersion, our first look is towards spaciousness. This fellowship is centered on building power and movement with food systems leaders, cultivating and supporting liberatory leadership in and between them. Rather than focusing on trainings or workshops, we're looking to build spaces of liberation for leaders to move, stretch, and grow in.

These spaces connect fellows that are looking to the horizon and what is possible into the future, even if they're walking on different paths to get there. Their brains are tickled to stretch a little bit more, to dream a little bit deeper, to vision a little bit further. We open up spaces where we challenge each other to begin the uncertain but necessary process of building a world beyond the horizon that we all see in front of us.

We have ideas and good estimations of the circumstances to come: continued chaos caused by climate change, and society's fabric continuing to be torn asunder by a racialized capitalism. But we also know that our communities will continue to come together to fight and build; we will continue to build systems of mutual aid, to organize, to create beauty in the world. One big question is: what are the alternative spaces going to look like that we'll need to inhabit? What rooms will we need to prepare for our children and their children and their children? What are the examples of the ways of being that folks will need to look to, to remind them of what can be and what will be?

Castanea fellows are the builders of these worlds. Their hands are in the dirt and in the water. They are molding this design into being. We need more and more spaces where people are able to become builders, where they are not only organizing community, not only planting literal seeds and caring for soils - we need places where they are building new ways of being and relating to the world around us. There are pockets of this happening all around us, and we need to continue to grow and connect these pockets.

Place-based immersions are our workshop and our playground. This is where we do the work.

“What I appreciated about this retreat was the sense that everyone was eager to fully engage and invest themselves. The initial hesitancy that was present during our first retreat has dissipated, and we all appeared to come together and connect as a cohesive group.”

JOURNEY TO DURHAM

In September, we came together for our first place-based immersion for Cohort 3 in Durham, North Carolina. Our trip started with a powerful grounding in place and context setting at Stagville Plantation, led by indigenous leaders and descendants from Stagville. We visited with partners EarthSeed and Sankofa Farms, who are doing food and land justice and sovereignty work. We made time for activities such as a Whistle Stop Tour about activist icon Pauli Murray, and an excursion to enjoy the Saxapahaw River via kayak and hiking. We laughed, ate delicious food, and bubbled over with new ideas about growing movements and what it means to take care of ourselves and our communities.

After laying groundwork for collective relationship building and culture setting at the retreat earlier in the year, the North Carolina immersion program opened the opportunity for fellows to deepen their relationship to each other and begin building relationships with partners in Durham. Fellows are building with one another toward future allyship and solidarity, seeding potential collaborations, and creating stronger cross-sectoral networks and webs. The more we work the muscle of relationship-building, the better we become at it. We immersed ourselves in Durham to deepen relationships, cultivate collective power and movement potential, rest and rejuvenate, and build solidarity with the land and people of North Carolina.

NORTH CAROLINA PARTNERS

SITE VISITS

STAGVILLE PLANTATION

Descendants of Stagville

Historic Stagville is a state historic site that interprets the lives, culture, and labors of enslaved people on one of the largest plantations in North Carolina. By 1859, over 900 people were enslaved across 30,000 acres of the Bennehan-Cameron plantations. Today, Stagville preserves 165 acres of land, four original slave dwellings (c. 1851), a massive barn (c. 1860), and a Bennehan family house (c. 1787-1799). The historic site is dedicated to research, teaching, and reflection on the history of enslaved people and their descendants.



EARTHSEED LAND COLLECTIVE

In Pursuit and Practice of Collective Liberation

"We believe that creating intergenerational relationships and skill sharing promotes and increases resourcefulness, community wellness, financial independence and self-determination for our current past and future generations. We believe that in cooperation and with analysis of systems of oppression we will create a center for economic liberation and environmental sustainability. We believe that lasting systems change and birthing just communities requires us as POC to trust and depend on each other in the face of oppression, fear and risk. We believe that trust is built when we are able to integrate the whole of who we are and to connect to others in their wholeness. Earthseed is a place and a practice to reclaim our cultural and community ways, further bolstering our movements and strategies for justice and equity."



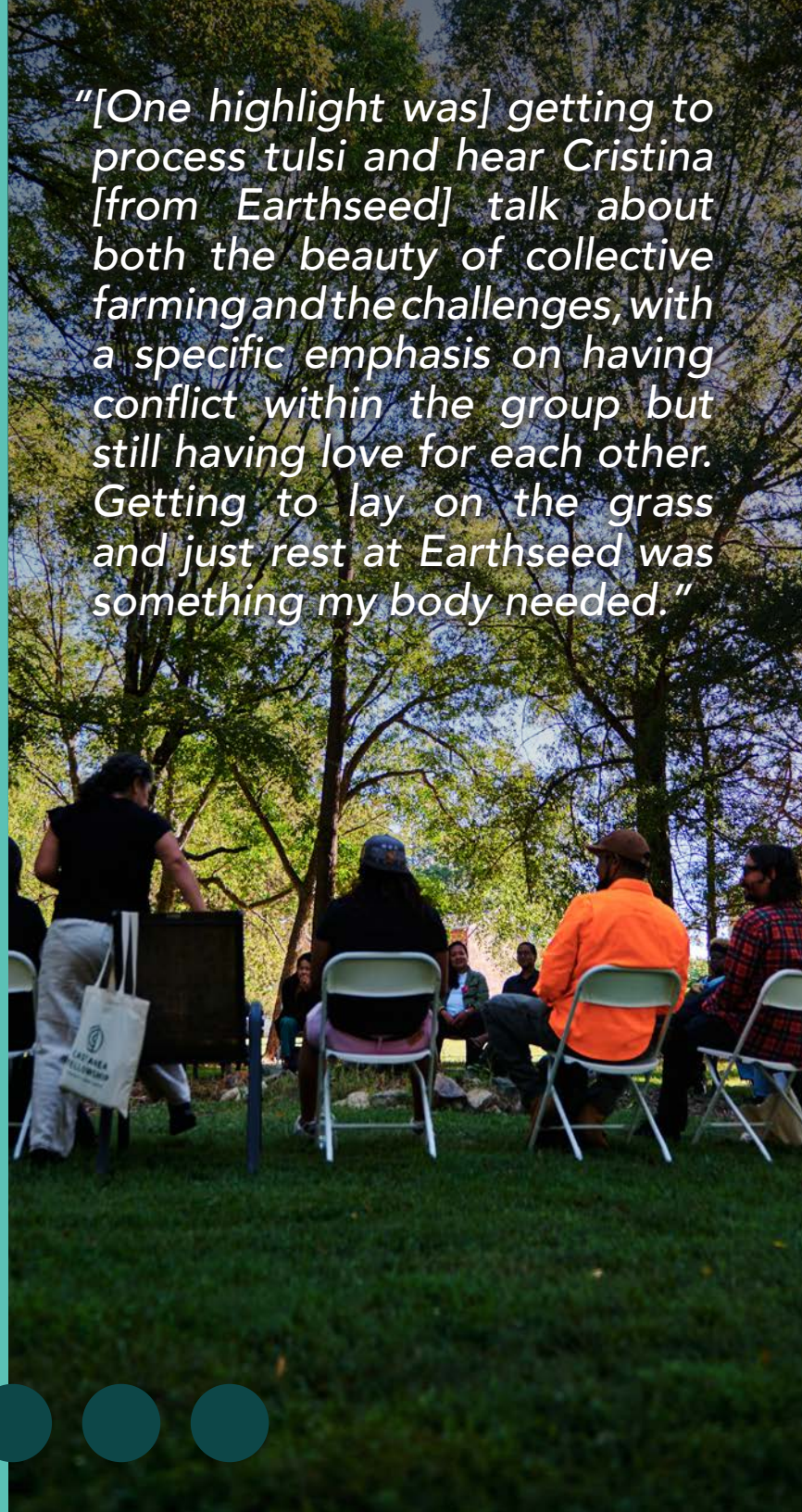
SANKOFA FARMS

Kamal Bell

Sankofa Farms LLC is a multifaceted agricultural entity that seeks to assist in changing the food intake habits of those living in and affected by food deserts. The goal of Sankofa Farms is to create a sustainable food source for minorities in both rural and urban areas located in Durham and Orange County, North Carolina. We developed Sankofa Farms Agricultural Academy to provide opportunities for young men to engage in agriculture-focused STEM skill development and currently partner with 5+ community organizations to take our food from the farms to the tables of people who need it most.



"[One highlight was] getting to process tulsi and hear Cristina [from Earthseed] talk about both the beauty of collective farming and the challenges, with a specific emphasis on having conflict within the group but still having love for each other. Getting to lay on the grass and just rest at Earthseed was something my body needed."



"I had not had a desire to visit a plantation before our trip, and now the only way I would visit one again is if there was a similar curated experience that offered such deep context and solemn reverence for the people and the land at such a site."



PROGRAM PLANNING PARTNERS AND HOSTS

Our immersions wouldn't be possible without the support and invaluable input of our local program planning committee and our friends on the ground. These folks bring their collective experience and brilliance to help us curate an experience that is rooted in community, justice, and joy.

Santos Flores

(Earthseed) is an associate researcher and educator with an interest in models of conflict transformation and social justice for application in community engagement. Santos lives in Durham, North Carolina with his partner, child, and a bunch of fish. He enjoys nature, outdoor recreation, cartwheels and martial arts. He supported us on the planning committee and hosted us at Earthseed.

Alexis McKenney

is a community organizer, writer, family archivist, and herbalist born & raised in North Carolina where most of her people call home. She currently serves as the project director for Tall Grass Food Box, a regional Black farmer CSA program based in Durham, North Carolina. Alexis provided invaluable support on our planning committee.

Tavia Benjamin

is a healer and facilitator, born and raised in Winston Salem, NC. They build infrastructure for BIPOC-led healing community and leadership as a 2020 Castanea alum. Her work moves towards a moment where queer Southern Black folks are birthing new social models and structures that support their freedom. Tavia supported us on our planning committee and provided support for fellows on the ground during the immersion with healing and care.



Cristina Rivera Chapman from Earthseed played an important planning role for our NC visit and led us in conversation and connection at Earthseed and Tierra Negra Farm.

Vivette Jeffries-Logan of Biwa Consulting and an enrolled member of the Occaneechi Band of the Saponi nation, welcomed and grounded us at Stagville Plantation.

Nnedinma U, an Igbo activist and healer, helped hold space for us at Stagville Plantation alongside current Fellow Georie Bryant.



"(The immersion was) Intense in a good and necessary way. Intense as in I wish all people could experience introduction to place in this way - in its full, complex, layered history, woven threads of culture, grief, walnut trees, songs, seeds, sweet basil scent lingering on fingers, voices and essences inviting a reciprocal relationship, inviting loving reconciliation, inviting grounded connection and collaboration. Intense as in staying up late and waking up early with some of the most intelligent and passionate humans I've had the privilege to know. Laughing so hard the last night that my core was sore the next day. Intense as in having the space to rest and eat and try new things like kayaking and realizing it tires not just the body but also the brain, with its multitasking asks to steer, balance, coordinate, steer the other way."

DURHAM, NC IMMERSION PROGRAM SCHEDULE

	MONDAY 9/11	TUESDAY 9/12	WEDNESDAY 9/13	THURSDAY 9/14	FRIDAY 9/15	SATURDAY 9/16	
MORNING	ARRIVAL	Grounding Together at Stagville Plantation	Partner Site Visit: Sankofa Farms	Recreation in Durham: Kayaking the Haw River or Whistle Stop Pauli Murray Walking Tour	Partner Site Visit: Earthseed Land Collective	DEPARTURE	
MIDDAY			Wellness Activities	Fellows Book Exchange	Power Mapping		
LATE AFTERNOON		Dinner	Dinner Together	Fellows Led Cooked Dinner	Dinner Together		Partners Dinner
EVENING/ NIGHT							

COLOR KEY: ● Arrival & Departure ● Fellows Connection ● Local Partners, Land, & Culture ● Rest & Recreation





11th Hour Project
The Schmidt Family Foundation

FUNDER PARTNERS

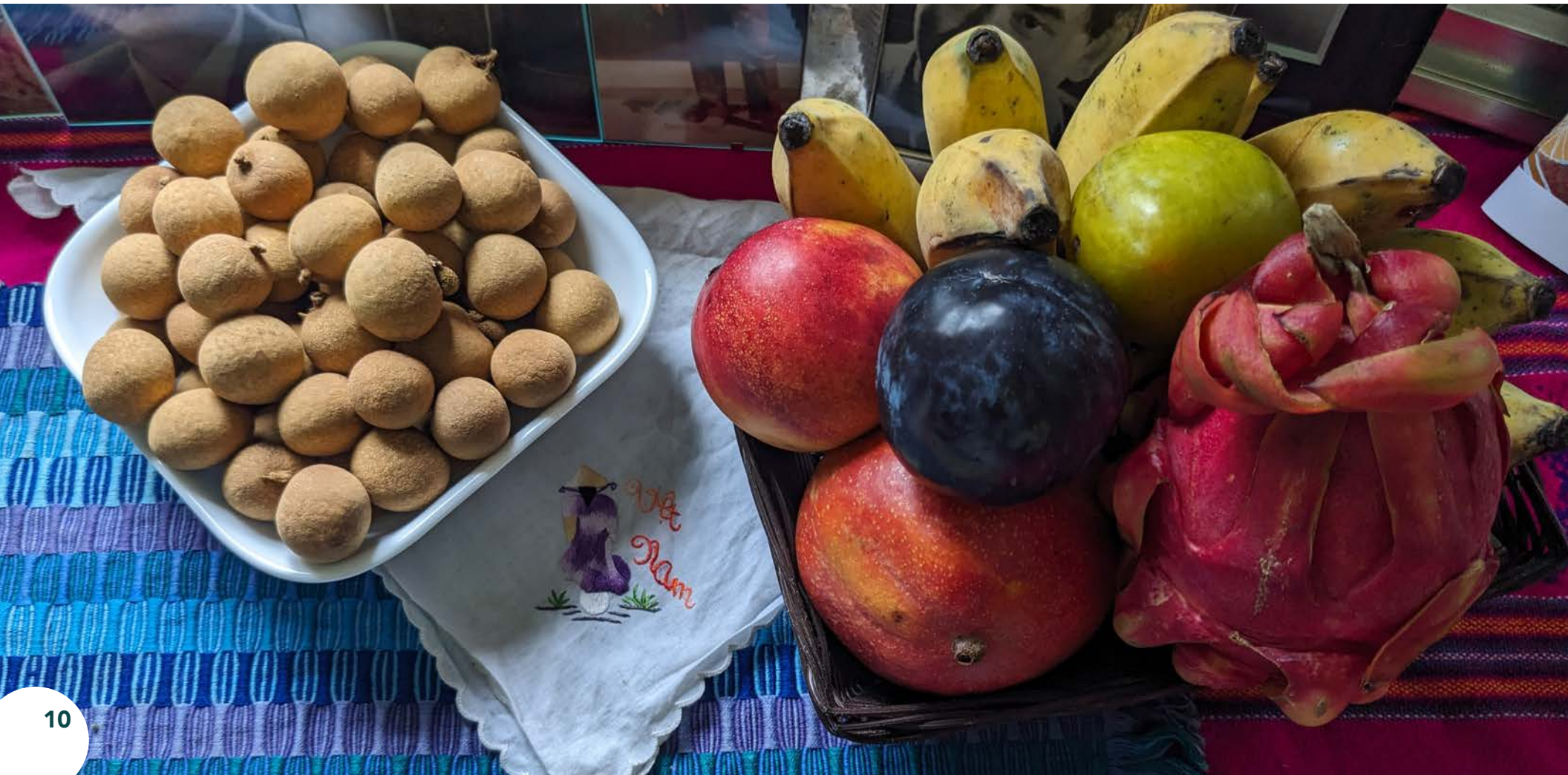
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