

## The *G&LR*'s Writers and Artists Grant

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**A description of the project addressing its impact and potential contribution to LGBTQ+ scholarship or the arts, and the proposed article to be published in *The G&LR*, demonstrating accessibility to a nonacademic, general audience (750 words).**

This project will be a multimedia publication that builds on Taylor's dissertation research. It represents an effort to celebrate co-constructed knowledge, document queer narratives, encourage play and joy within academic spaces, and explore relationships to the more-than-human world through multiple artistic media.

Taylor's dissertation research, which forms the basis for this project, consists of semi-structured qualitative interviews and ethnographic observations of queer<sup>1</sup> farmers who reside and work in the Midwest United States. Data collection for this project began in June 2022, and to date, they have met with and interviewed more than seventy queer farmers across Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, and Wisconsin. In summer and fall 2024, Taylor is planning to visit a handful of queer-run farms and land-based projects to better capture the day-to-day dynamics and experiences of these farmers.

Social identities like race, class, gender, and sexuality shape the ways that farmers are able to engage in agricultural networks, resources, and communities. The "family farm," for example, is organized around a heterosexual marriage, where romantic partners become business partners. However, marginalized gender identities and sexualities are often rendered invisible in sustainable agriculture, making it difficult to properly and formally allocate resources and support for these farmers. This invisibility also makes it difficult for queer farmers to build community, leaving vulnerable people in relational isolation. Currently, there is a growing body of academic work on how queer farmers experience and engage with agricultural systems, and Taylor aims to contribute new perspectives to this scholarship through their research and artistic practice.

Rather than containing their dissertation work to academic spheres, Taylor is committed to finding avenues to share these stories with wider audiences. One of the most resounding needs

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<sup>1</sup> The term "queer" here refers to people who are not heterosexual or cisgender (people whose gender identity aligns with their sex assigned at birth), including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and non-binary identities.

from the folks Taylor has interviewed is more queer-created, queer-centric resources for growers. Queer farmers who try to access existing resources often encounter cost barriers, risks to safety, lack of representation, or other obstacles that make it difficult to engage in agriculture in the ways they choose.

As one way to address this need, Taylor is organizing an editorial team of farmer-artists to help produce a publication tentatively titled *Playing in the Dirt*. Their hope is that this publication is an opportunity to 1) share the stories from their interviewees in an accessible and engaging way, 2) disseminate knowledge produced in the academy to a general audience, and 3) incorporate artistic expression of co-produced knowledge.

Taylor is hiring four queer farmer-artists to help plan, design, and publish an edited volume of work organized around key findings from their dissertation research. This team will be responsible for helping edit Taylor's written content, create visual content to accompany writing, and recruit artistic submissions from queer Midwestern farmers around key themes from the dissertation. Taylor is also bringing Patricia Mathu, a current MA student and queer Midwestern farmer, to this team to support the bridging of academic and public worlds. Furthermore, as graduate students on different timelines, this is a unique opportunity to explore generous, queer, and joyful academic mentorship. As an editorial team, we will solicit submissions in multiple media (prose, poetry, photography, visual art, etc.). All contributors will be paid for their time and contributions as a way to materially support folks whose work is typically unpaid or under-paid.

We anticipate the impact of this project to be wide-reaching and incredibly well-received. Taylor received over ninety applications for the editorial team and dozens of messages indicating interest in contributing to, reading, distributing, and supporting this project. Furthermore, many people outside of the Midwest expressed interest in producing a similar publication that highlights experiences from their region.

As a contribution to the *Gay & Lesbian Review*, we would love to co-write an article that braids together our experiences interviewing, visiting, and collaborating with queer farmers throughout this project and its many facets. We envision this as an opportunity to engage in creative non-fiction and autoethnographic writing that is not necessarily suited to other outlets available to us in the social sciences. As firm believers that we uncover different findings through different styles of writing, we're eager to have formal support in exploring work through these multiple paths. While there are certainly many things that general audiences can learn from the narratives and art that will be shared through *Playing in the Dirt*, we believe it's particularly important to reflect on the ways that academic work can be a tool for relational connection, network building, and collaborative knowledge production.

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**A brief biographical sketch that describes your credentials in completing this work and how this project fits within your broader research agenda (250 words max per applicant).**

**Taylor E. Hartson** (they/them) is a Sociology PhD student, a goat-wrangling farmer, and a fiber and fermentation geek whose learning, teaching, and making happens primarily on the traditional homelands of the Haudenosaunee, Miami, Peoria, and the Pokagon Potawatomi (what is now known as South Bend, Indiana). Their dissertation work explores the ways that queer identity and queer orientations to the world help farmers, growers, agriculturalists, and land stewards rethink their relationships with more-than-human entities. A voracious learner, Taylor's experience is wide-ranging: they have almost a decade of experience conducting collaborative and independent academic research, four years of experience managing an arts and writing journal, several seasons of experience growing vegetables and raising livestock, and a few years of experience organizing in community with the Hoosier Young Farmers Coalition and the Queer Farmer Network.

This project brings together Taylor's eclectic collection of interests, passions, and skills. With more than seventy interviews from queer farmers and growers based in the Midwest, Taylor is hoping to find ways to share these collective narratives beyond the academy in ways that promote collaboration and co-created knowledge through multiple types of media. They are particularly excited about the opportunity this project presents to highlight and promote the work of folks who are typically overlooked in agricultural spaces, in rural spaces, and in academic spaces. Taylor's hope is that this project becomes a site for imaginative resistance, collective solidarity building, and deep relational connection as we navigate a rapidly changing world together.

**Patricia Mathu** (she/her) was born and raised in Wisconsin, where she learned a love for Midwestern land, community, and food. As an Anthropology MA student at the University of Alabama, she has had the pleasure of learning more about southern foodways and ecology over the past year. Her thesis uses archaeological plant samples to explore the prehistoric foodways of Muskogean-speaking peoples. Beyond this, she also studies college food insecurity and Alabama waterways pollution. She started a queer- and youth-led farm with friends during the pandemic on the unceded lands of the Kickapoo, Peoria, Kaskaskia, Potawatomi, Myaami, and Očhéthi

Šakówinj peoples (so-called Sheldon, IL). In the time since, that project has hosted over 50 young farmers in their apprenticeship program and has converted acres of corn-and-soy to diversified and perennial agriculture. Patricia has worked on a variety of food justice projects and interned at a handful of environmental and agrarian non-profits.

She is so excited to have a reason to return to contemporary food systems and the Midwest -- and is excited to integrate her queer identity! -- into this project. As she transitions into a PhD program in fall, she is eager to learn from farmer-artists and academic mentors like Taylor. She is deeply committed to justice-oriented approaches to land access and food production and she knows that art, community, and joy have a place in all of it!