As a rising third year biochemistry and chemistry double major, I have had very little exposure to global health and more specifically the country where I was to live for 10 weeks: Guatemala. Prior to this summer, the only thing I knew about Guatemala were statistics I had used last spring for a research paper on breastfeeding rates in the valley. However, these statistics did no justice in explaining the rich history and cultural diversity this country has to offer.

I was initially hired by MealFlour to optimize mealworm output by making accommodations to the existing farm model. This would be accomplished by first troubleshooting the current issues of the farm: mite infestation, temperature regulation, and beetle and egg separation. With these changes, the farms could be up-scaled, and start functioning as a community based effort rather than operating solely on the household level. While plenty of research, consults, and trial and error went into farm adjustments, with my background heavily based in research and engineering, it was something I knew I could eventually accomplish. Rather, my biggest challenge this summer was catering to and connecting with a community with whom I didn’t share a common language.

With my work cut out for me, I began by taking Spanish classes 5 hours a day, 5 days a week. I started reading on the history of Guatemala, the benefits and dangers of global health, and shifting paradigms concerning foreign aid. During journal club we discussed weekly how we were going to be intentional and aware as an NGO as to have a give and take relationship with our clients; offering aid where it is wanted but in no way directly dictating what to do. These discussions were incredibly relevant to my work in everyday: literature reviews, grant writing, connecting with MealFlour partners, providing women and children with vitamin supplements when working with Primeros Pasos, our partner clinic, and most apparently when conducting home visits to our participants and discussing their farm’s success and their own stories. Our participant’s excitement for their farms and offering their families new sources of bioavailable protein motivated me all the more in working with farm design.

I am so grateful for the incredible experience MealFlour has given me in the front lines of global health, working with an NGO, learning Spanish, taking salsa classes, hiking volcanoes, kayaking in Lake Atitlan, ziplining down mountains, and most of all meeting amazing people from around the world. I have a newfound passion for global health and I hope to provide women's healthcare in developing nations after medical school. Thank you for the opportunity of a lifetime!