My Action Plan addresses the issue of inspiring my fellow classmates to become active in supporting local agriculture. I wanted my peers to understand the importance of supporting their neighbors instead of supermarkets. I wanted my peers to realize how rewarding it is to be involved in their community. On the individual level, I wanted my peers to benefit from the unrivaled nutritional value of local food. The scale of my action plan has been relatively small, but I know that the impacts of my project will ripple out and touch many members of my community. Because my Action Plan was not organizationally convoluted, I did all of the organization and planning myself. I do have to credit Mountain Alliance, an organization I am a part of, for allowing me to use some of their resources (such as a bus for transportation).

The strategies I am using in my Action Plan are education and direct action. I took a group of my peers to St. Luke’s community garden in our town to provide education on the social aspects of community gardening and the basic skills and practices of gardening. The director of this garden, Bill Marr, illustrated to the group that powerful relationships that are formed when community members choose to garden together through his colorful narratives. Bill also talked about the general timeline for planting, growing, and harvesting crops in western North Carolina. The rest of my Action Plan has involved direct action.

As a part of National Youth Service Day, I organized for students to go to St. Luke’s community garden to do tasks such as tilling and planting. On Youth Service Day, students learned how to use garden tools, work together towards a unified goal, and appreciate spending time outside. In addition to our work with St. Luke’s, I also organized for us to volunteer at F.A.R.M. Café, which stands for “Feeding All Regardless of Means.” A group of Mountain Alliance members and I helped with renovating and cleaning the space that F.A.R.M. Café uses. F.A.R.M. Café aims to provide nutritious, local food for all who need it and allows people to volunteer their time in exchange for a meal. We volunteered here once in February and again on Youth Service Day. Because F.A.R.M. Café supports community agriculture and communal dining, it was the perfect place for students to see how community agriculture can have many social impacts. I know that what I have already contributed to my community is sustainable because Mountain Alliance will continue taking students to do volunteer work at St. Luke’s and F.A.R.M. Café long after I graduate this year.

There have been a total of four trips that have involved my Action Plan, on which there were 10-15 students each. Not counting students that came on multiple trips, at least 30 students have been directly impacted by my Action Plan. Although it is too soon to gauge how students will react to their experiences in the long run, I believe that they will share their findings with their friends, family, and peers, which will make the impacts of my Action Plan much broader than just 30 students. I know that students enjoyed their time at both F.A.R.M. Café and St. Luke’s garden and found that the time they spent giving service was very rewarding. From what can be perceived from my perspective, my Action Plan has encouraged students to become involved in something new and to sustain their involvement throughout high school.

My involvement with my peers in my community will extend throughout the summer. I am going to encourage my peers to join me at St. Luke’s gardening workdays twice a week in order for them to deepen their gardening experience and reap the fruits of their labor. In addition to garden workdays, I will also be doing cooking demonstrations at farmer’s markets in my county and two other surrounding counties. I hope to inspire
people to creatively use the produce in their farmer’s market to make delicious meals they can share with their friends and family.

Planning and executing my Action Plan has taught me to be more relaxed and to go with the flow of life instead of trying to force things to happen the way I want them to. I do not have an unlimited supply of extra time to work on my Action Plan on top of my schoolwork and job, so I have used the connections I have through other organizations to serve the goal of my Action Plan. Attending the Leadership Symposium in November gave me a feeling of support and understanding, which helped me develop my ability to adapt. Sybil, who led the group I was in, encouraged us to do as much as we feasibly could in our personal situations. This gave me relief that other people realized I could not dedicate my entire life to my Action Plan, even though it is very important to me. Organizing my Action Plan also reaffirmed that I do truly enjoy working with other people to plan meaningful things, such as getting a group of students to work in a community garden. Overall, my Action Plan allowed me to see that I do not have to be anal-retentive in order to make a difference in my community.

What has motivated me to go through with my Action Plan is my genuine passion for the issue that my Action Plan deals with. I think the issue of people making responsible decisions regarding their food may be the most important issue of our time. Not only must people choose nutritious food, but also they need to choose to obtain their food from a responsible source. To see my peers out in a garden getting their hands dirty on a beautiful Saturday morning (and to know that without my guidance, it would not have happened) was one of the most rewarding experiences I have ever had. I couldn’t help but to smile and feel exuberantly optimistic the entire time we were gardening and for hours afterwards, as well. Though my Action Plan may have not been the most expansive or flashy, I am truly proud and grateful for giving the gift of my Action Plan to my community.
Photographs:

First trip to F.A.R.M. Café

Second Trip to F.A.R.M. Café

Youth Service Day Workday at St. Luke’s Garden

Youth Service Workday at St. Luke’s Garden