

Trajectory of the Purple Carrot Farm

Written by Lauren Brady and Dane Whitman, Farm Interns 2015

Key Points:

- **We believe that while it is important for the farm to maintain an active presence in the dining hall, increased participation in curricular aspects is a priority.**
- **We would like to reiterate the proposal to have an Environmental Studies discipline that facilitates Advanced Work and Plans in sustainable food and agriculture. We see an opportunity to further this goal through our current faculty searches, as well as through a staff-level Farm Coordinator.**
- **We have recognized that there is a valuable educational aspect to the financial component of being a farm intern, therefore we would like to continue our current method of transactions with Dining Services (individual invoices rather than lump sum).**
- **We are proposing the construction of a new sanitary work space/storage space on the site of the farm, and the purchase of reliable cultivation equipment to be funded through our revenue.**
- **In order to develop long-term plans for the farm, we would like to determine a permanent location by next season.**

1. Education & Production

In October 2015 we led a Farm Trajectory discussion at the Bennington Sustainable Food Project (BSFP) meeting. As a group, we know that we can produce, but we wanted to pose the question: what other needs can be better met? Out of 31 members, there was overwhelming interest and support for increasing educational opportunities on the farm. The suggestions of how this could take shape included getting more faculty and staff members involved, having classes on the farm, making the farm conducive to experimentation, and connecting it to other academic “disciplines.” While each person was allotted only one response, 10 out of 31 people listed at least one of those as their first priority.

Meanwhile, 5 out of 31 people gave first priorities related to food in the dining hall. These responses included that food in the dining hall should be from “recognizable sources,” and that people should “feel good” about the food they eat. We believe that while it is important for the farm to maintain an active presence in the dining hall, increased participation in curricular aspects is also important. We would describe our relationship with the dining hall as evolving and strong, and we’d like to build a similar strong relationship with the academics of the college.

2. Curricular Resources

We’ve had a greater academic presence in the past, and we would like to reflect on what did and did not work. It has been expressed to us that in past classes, people were most impacted by visiting farms and having practical experiences in both the thoughts and actions involved with the art of agriculture. Last Spring Term, *Agroecology* was successful at reading and researching alternative agricultural techniques and applying them through project proposals

for True Love Farm. Looking to the future of the farm's involvement with Environmental Studies, we hope for a similarly balanced combination of theoretical framework and public action. A theoretical agriculture curriculum would be groundwork for students to put theories into practice, test them, and create new frameworks for the future of sustainable agriculture.

Over the summer we launched a new Pre-Orientation trip for first-years that centered on local farms. In addition, we have had increased participation in the BSFP, approximately between 15-35 students per meeting. Both CAPA and Dickinson have been hosting or sponsoring student engagement with speakers on sustainability and food. Along with these accomplishments, we see an increased willingness to generate new resources for education in sustainable agriculture.

We would like to reiterate the proposal to have an Environmental Studies discipline that facilitates Advanced Work and Plans in sustainable food and agriculture. We see an opportunity for this through our current faculty searches, as well as the potential for a staff-level Farm Coordinator. Proposed in the past, this position would act as a resource for students pursuing projects and experiments, and would engage the appropriate faculty and administration with student work.

During this Fall term of 2015 we have witnessed increased momentum and interest in sustainable food from students, faculty and people outside the college. In the wake of our new relationships with Bill McKibben and Michael Pollan, we recognize a shared understanding of the connections between environmental action, sustainable food, and the liberal arts.

3. Finance Report and Reflection on Growth

During the 2015 season the farm produced and sold \$4805.99 worth of produce. In light of the work that has gone into invoice and budget tracking, it has been proposed that the farm take a lump sum from Aramark. While this would be simpler, we have recognized that there is a valuable educational aspect to the financial component of being a farm intern. We have also learned that having ownership over revenue is a large component of the farm's self-determination, and this connection of food and finance has made our relationship with the dining hall even stronger.

During this season, the farm intern hours increased from 40 to 60 hours per week, which was a significant increase that allowed us to accomplish more. There was also an increase in acreage and production size of the farm. In addition, we raised a greenhouse in the spring which extended the length of our growing season. We would like to continue growing while being cognizant of our strengths and limitations.

4. Infrastructure Proposal

With our end of the year profit, we are proposing two immediate ways to further the goals of the farm. Our first goal involves addressing storage space, organization, and perhaps most importantly, sanitation. The farm shed and coop cart that we have been using do not currently meet our or Aramark's sanitation standards. That is why we are proposing the construction of a new shed, as a storage and work space on the site of the farm. We recommend that we have further conversations regarding the shed's location, design, construction, and how it can meet the farm's needs.

Our next goal is to improve the ease and efficiency of tilling ground on the farm. In the past we have relied upon the help of Christopher Larsen's restored push tractors and Carl Johanson's horses. However, the time has come for a more reliable means of ensuring that this essential part of farm management is available. That is why we are proposing the purchase of a small tractor specific to use on the farm. The type and model of tractor we choose will take into account our concerns for safety, fossil fuel use, and soil disturbance, as well as efficiency and reliability in tilling. We are bringing these two proposed changes to our attention now, in order to make significant progress or completion of these goals possible by next season.

5. Location of the Farm

For several years, there has been some contention regarding the permanence of the farm's location. This has been a handicap for the farm's implementation of fertility building, perennial plant production, and laying new foundations of infrastructure. In addition, members of the BSFP have identified accessibility and visibility as a priority for the farm. In order to continue developing our long-term plans, we would like to determine the final location by next season. We expect this to require further conversation with Buildings and Grounds and other administration.

We would like to thank you all for your support and interest, as well as for a great season of collaboration and discovery.

Regards,
PCF