

The Bennington Sustainable Food Project

P R O P O S A L

Spring 2010

Statement of purpose

The Bennington Sustainable Food Project is an initiative started by Bennington College Students to address the fact that eating is a political act. We are dedicated to the promotion of human health and humane animal husbandry, maintenance of ecosystems, and the support of local economies. Climate Change, food security, economic inequality, hunger, an increasingly industrialized food system, and human health are among today's most pressing issues. It is important that Bennington considers its actions more closely, and takes measures to reevaluate, change, and improve its interactions with the environment, the local community, and the global community. Our food choices affect the vitality and health of our environments, communities, and economies. We believe that we have both the opportunity and responsibility to make these choices from an educated position.

Sustainability is a popular word associated with a wide range of theory, from fields including, but not limited to agricultural studies, social sciences, economics, and environmental sciences. Sustainability is different for each person, family, business, and institution. But what does it mean to make sustainable food choices? Our specific definition of “sustainable food for Bennington College,” must come from a deeper understanding of our economic, environmental, and communal strengths and limitations. This foundation has helped us to focus our work.

We plan to work with students, faculty, staff, administrators, Bennington College alumni and members of the greater Bennington community in order to educate ourselves, and promote and initiate projects that will work to strengthen the connection between the College and the food system of which we are a part. We believe the self-guided, experiential, and collaborative nature of this project is aligned with the Bennington College educational philosophy.

We will initiate the following three separate, though inherently linked sub-projects that make up the Bennington Sustainable Food Project. These three sub-projects mutually support each other; informed food sourcing in the dining hall and developing a composting system will make help us become more aware of our consumption habits and strengthen our connection to our food. Finally, the compost will reduce landfill-bound waste and produce nutrient rich fertilizer for the garden. All of these steps exemplify the potential cyclical nature of a food system.

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The Student Garden Project

The Bennington College student garden will serve as a living, working example of the connection between the land and our food. The garden will be a resource for students, faculty, staff and Bennington community members. We see the garden as an educational tool, used to spread knowledge of sustainable farming practices, as well as an experiential and self-guided classroom. Not only will it serve Bennington College students in their education, but it will also be an outlet for community outreach, connecting summer garden interns with youth programs and local non-profits; strengthening communication, collaboration, and education between Bennington College and the greater Bennington community.

Weekly volunteer days

During the fall and spring terms there will be weekly volunteer day(s) facilitated by the members of the Bennington Sustainable Food Project

Summer of 2010 Student Garden Internship Pilot:

A sustained garden at Bennington College necessitates a structured internship program led by committed student interns. The immediate growth and future production of the garden will depend on the work done this summer, serving as a bridge between the spring and fall terms, during which the garden will be maintained by the Bennington Sustainable Food Project members and student volunteers.

The garden should be a space for experimentation, and each summer will express the individual interests of the garden interns. However, basic garden guidelines will be upheld from year to year. For this initial pilot, the summer garden interns will help to design the basic garden guidelines.

PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITIES

The primary responsibilities of the Summer garden interns will be the maintenance and upkeep of the garden, an estimated 20 hours of work per week.

Additional responsibilities include hosting weekly community/youth groups (ex: DREAM's summer program, Blooming Chefs etc.) for educational activities and workdays.

The summer garden interns will keep a detailed record of garden processes: preparation of soil, planting, fertilization, weather, watering, weeding, and harvesting.

Additionally garden interns will create a blog to chronicle their process and experiences of working in the garden and with community partners. In the fall the summer garden interns will present their work to the both the Sustainability Committee and the greater campus community.

Throughout the summer, garden interns will visit at least two local farms, and community gardens to contextualize the work that they are doing on campus within similar efforts going on in the greater Bennington community.

FACULTY AND COMMUNITY ADVISORS

Susan Sgorbati and Valerie Imbruce have agreed to be faculty advisors for the summer 2010 Student Garden Internship Pilot Program. We have made connections with several community farmers and gardeners, in the hopes that they will help advise the summer garden interns through tutorials and workshops held this summer. Nancy Higby, a local gardner and landscape architect, and Carol Adinolfi, founder of Blooming Chefs have both agreed to be involved in this project.

EMPLOYMENT SPECIFICATIONS

The student garden internship positions will be part-time, paid positions. Our goal is to have two interns. One intern would serve as the student coordinator, and would facilitate regular communication and meetings with the faculty advisors.

GARDEN LOCATION

We have identified using an estimated 20' x 30' portion of the faculty community garden next to the observatory as a potential and viable location for the student garden.

POST HARVEST

Student interns will utilize some produce for weekly community/youth group educational activities, including cooking and tastings. The Bennington Rutland Oppotunities Council and The 6 Bank Street Homeless Shelter will be potential recipients of surplus produce grown in the garden. Additionally, a weekly harvest dinner could be prepared by the student interns for the residents of Six Bank Street. This would build off of the dinners that several students in the Community Outreach and Action group have recently done at Six Bank Street. Student interns will be encouraged to take some produce for their own consumption. Because this is a pilot program, we are not committing to growing a predetermined quantity of food to outside parties.

THE FUTURE OF THE GARDEN AND THE SUMMER INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

As the garden becomes more established, the Bennington Sustainable Food Project would be interested in working with faculty to create a module that would serve as a prerequisite to prepare students to be a part of the summer garden internship.

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