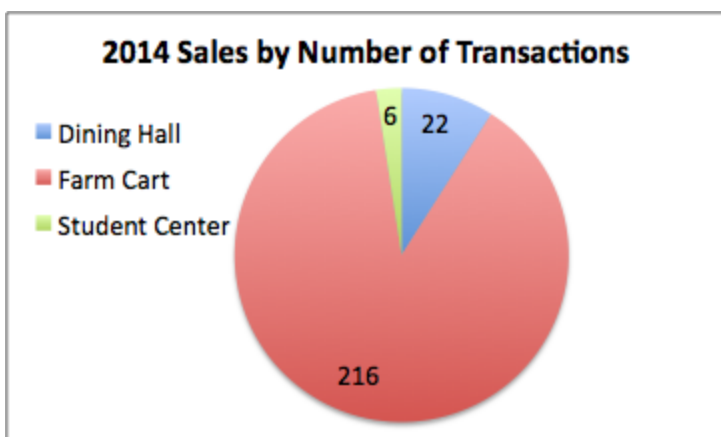
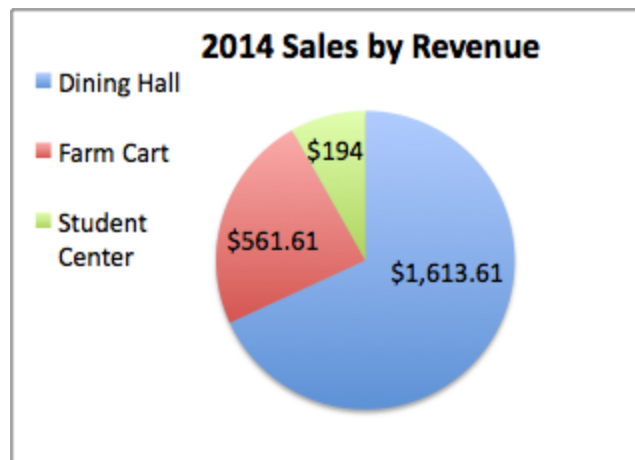
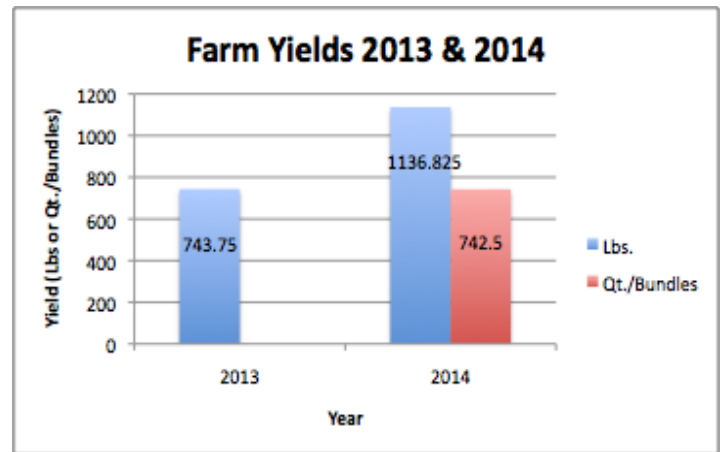
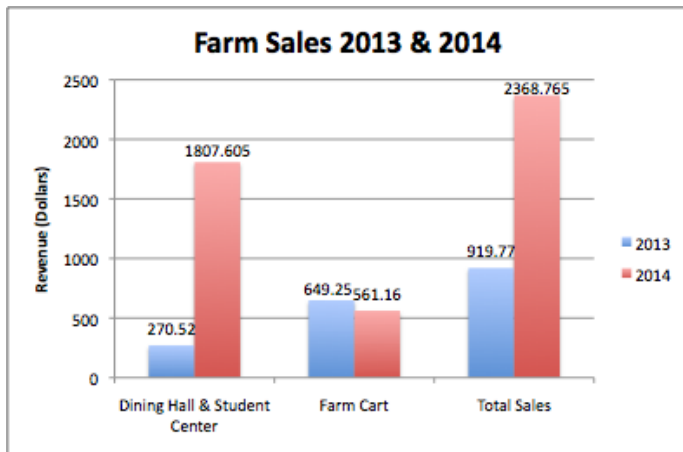




Bennington Sustainable Food Project Logo from Spring 2010--Artist Unknown

2014 Annual Report



of Farm Tours 2014:

2

“To encourage sustainability and foster a conscious food culture within our community.”

-The Bennington Sustainable Food Project Mission Statement 10/23/12

Foreword:

As story has it, the Bennington Sustainable Food Project (BSFP) was founded by students roughly seven years ago, and its presence and impact have since grown considerably. Bennington faculty, staff, and administration have given it commensurable support, and in return students have carried out a substantial amount of work. Community engagement through environmentally conscious agriculture, as well as many other projects and events, make up our realization of the BSFP's mission statement.

The purpose of this report is to track progress within the BSFP. Through data and narratives, it hopes to provide a historical resource, a template for future measurements, and a source of reflections and recommendations for our present future. Additionally, this report hopes to provide a means to properly acknowledge, celebrate, and share this work with the Bennington Community and the world.

There are a number of factors that lead us to consider the sustainability of our food system. The increasing volatility of our climate, the dependency of our economy on non-renewable and environmentally harmful fuel resources, and the fragmentation and degeneration of communities are but a few of the issues that the BSFP hopes to address at Bennington College. While we recognize that our actions are small in a global context, we believe that the social change we embody and encourage is a crucial first step towards achieving broader goals.

In the past, our record keeping has not been perfect because we have not considered it to be a priority. Therefore, we are beginning to be more thorough in our bookkeeping so that future iterations of this club can look back at, build upon, and sustain this archive. Our current focus, however, continues to be centered on tangible actions. Recognizing our limited amount of time and resources, we hope that this report can be a testament to the thought and dedication that Bennington students have given towards encouraging sustainability by fostering a food conscious culture.

Table of Contents:

1. Community Engagement
2. Farm Harvest, Sales, & Fertility
3. Membership and Volunteerism
4. Leadership
5. Member Testimonials



Volunteer squash and tomato plants growing out of compost pile.

Community Engagement:

The Bennington Sustainable Food Project (BSFP) is committed to being a resource for education and wellness, both on campus and beyond. Over the past year, we have achieved this through the sharing of agroecological knowledge, delicious food, and common spaces for celebration and community engagement. This happened through two youth tours on the farm, two donations of produce to charity events, and a number of events.

One of the highlights of 2014 was working with local youth through two tours of the college farm. The first tour was organized through the college's Bring Your Kid to Work Day and the second was organized through DREAM, an organization that aims to empower youth from affordable housing neighborhoods. Looking forward, we hope to continue working with the younger crowd, having fun and taking advantage of the farm as a resource for agroecological knowledge.

Similarly, we hope to continue playing a role as a source of delicious and nutritious food for charitable dinners and fundraisers. This year, we were happy to donate vegetables and volunteer hours to the Empty Bowls fundraiser as well as the GANAS end of the year potluck. These brought to light our potential to collaborate with both the dining hall and fellow student organizations to provide environmentally conscious and delicious food for the public.

The BSFP likes to celebrate its hard work, and invite others to join in the fun. Our seasonal farm parties, recently granted the titles "Concert in the Rye" (Spring) and "Beetzapalooza" (Fall), have served as venues for campus musicians, potluck dinners, and beautiful sunsets. One goal for future celebrations will be to include a greater diversity of collaborators into this seasonal celebration. The Farm Cart (a.k.a. "Coop") has also made appearances at events organized through student life, such as Harvest Fest and SunFest. Besides offering attractions such as Carl Johanson's horse-powered hay rides and Chris Larsen's gas-powered ice cream machine (which was featured on the college's website), we also use this mobile storefront to sell our produce and prepared goods.



Farm Harvests, Sales, and Fertility:

Maintaining a sustainable food system is no easy task! Keeping operations alive from farm to plate (and hopefully from plate back to farm through the power of composting), is one of the most challenging components of the Bennington Sustainable Food Project. With limited resources and limitless ambition, two farm interns and a band of volunteers take on the mystifying task of growing a season's worth of vegetables. Nonetheless, the year of 2014 has brought great accomplishments, valuable insights, and strong recommendations for moving forward.

Over the course of Year 2014, The Purple Carrot Farm (PCF) was faithfully stewarded by our two farm interns Sam Lawson and Sylvia Madaras. Through their hard work, the farm yielded over 1,136 lbs.* of produce, from breakfast radishes to butternut squash. Clear problems in our current system, however, have become apparent throughout this year's growing season. Measuring yields through metrics of bundles and quantity (e.g. 1 bundle of Kale, 1 heirloom tomato) left almost 750 items out of our lbs. measurements. Overworked and surrounded by dying seedlings, Sam, Sylvia, and the BSFP were compelled to make a proposal* for a functioning greenhouse and increased hours for the farm interns as appropriate means to improve the farm's maintenance.

Meanwhile, more and more produce has made its way into the dining hall, student center, and farm cart customers' hands. With well over \$2,000* in revenues, it is becoming increasingly important to make sense of the cash flows between the the dining hall, the PCF, and the college itself. Coop has even featured two student entrepreneurs: Saucy Gals' Applesauce and Joana's Mouthwash. All parties agree that the current system can be improved to ensure efficiency of transactions, and effectiveness in bringing as much quality, "real" food into the dining hall as possible.

In interest of maintaining the farm's fertility, the PCF looks to further its environmental and economic practices that put the "Sustainable" in BSFP. These are not the easiest questions to answer, and thus far, there has been a lack of uniform record keeping regarding our utilization of crop rotations, soil amendments, mechanical tillage, and other management techniques. Addressing the issue of fertility will necessarily become a priority for the farm, as we evaluate the myriad approaches to growing food in the context of our current global problems.

** For access to these documents, contact the BSFP or refer to our shared Google folder.*



Membership and Volunteerism

Membership:

In the Spring of 2014, around the time of President Mariko Silver's inauguration, she proposed introducing herself to the BSFP for the first time over dinner. Hoping to know how many guests to expect, Mariko also asked how many members there were within the BSFP. This inquiry, while incredibly magnanimous, caused such great befuddlement within the BSFP that the invitation was unconsciously neglected as we moved on to the next agenda item of defining our membership. In service of future dinner arrangements, this section of the Annual Report aims to get a grasp on the somewhat vague concept of BSFP membership, and its remarkable yet concerning characteristic of combined popularity and fluidity.

Two major meetings, the Tuesday night BSFP Meeting and the Sunday afternoon Farm Meeting serve as incubators for much of the BSFP's organizational structure. Attendance at these meetings is variable and undocumented, but often with numbers floating around 10-20 attendees per BSFP meeting (with upwards of 50 students at the first meetings of term) and 5-10 attendees at Purple Carrot Farm meetings. Off hand, around 20 students in particular maintained a consistent presence at BSFP meetings over the Fall term of 2014, with countless other attendees circulating in and out throughout the year.

Volunteerism: Besides these meetings, there is a considerable student body that could care less about "squash politics" but instead takes joy in volunteering as farmers, cooks, salespeople, and foragers. The diverse accomplishments of the BSFP would not be possible without the countless students who invest their time energy without receiving academic credits or monetary compensation in return. It is highly recommended that volunteer hours become more reliably recorded, documented, and commemorated, its the least we can do to pay thanks.

For the purposes of this report, below are **rough estimates** of volunteer hours for 2014.

Work Parties: **130 hours**

[One work party a week= 26 work parties a school year (omitting long weekends). 26 x 5 volunteers minimum x 1 hour average time = 130 hours]

Farm Cart: **28 hours**

[One farm cart a week (weather permitting)= 14 farm carts minimum a school year
14 farm cart days x 2 hours a day = 28 hours]

Maple Syrup: **73 hours**

Two hours setup x 5 volunteers =10 hours + 36 hours boiling nonstop x 1-2 volunteers average=54 hours + 3 hours boiling down indoors x 3 volunteers = 9 hours; 10+54+9=73 hours

Apple Cider: **24 hours**

Roughly 4 cider days x 3 minimum workers x 2 hours= **24 hours**

Total Volunteer Hours 2014

130+28+73+24 = Roughly 255 volunteer hours

Good work, everybody.

Leadership:

The BSFP values group participation, inclusiveness, and shared responsibility. It seeks to maintain its operations while continually empowering new members to introduce new projects, express opinions, and steer decision-making. It is a goal of the BSFP that these leadership opportunities will provide valuable working experience for participants' futures.

The BSFP's leadership structure is neither hierarchical nor set in stone. However, needs for reliable fulfillment of responsibilities have arisen over time, leading to the natural creation (and sometimes abandonment) of certain leadership positions. Listed below are the more prominent leadership positions for the year 2014.

Facilimates: BSFP meetings are stewarded by two facilitators, or "facilimates" who are appointed the week prior. Facilimates are responsible for creating the meetings agenda, adding proposed agenda items, and keeping meetings orderly and efficient. As volunteer leadership opportunities, these positions are taken up by a variety of members over the course of the term.

Farm Interns: The two farm interns serve as the backbones of the Purple Carrot Farm. One of the only paid positions within the BSFP, farm interns are responsible for growing, harvesting, and selling produce from the PCF. For the year 2014, Joe Makuch and Brendan Tang, held the farm intern position for the Spring, passing on their duties to Sam Lawson and Sylvia Madaras for the Summer and Fall.

Secretary: The Secretary position is one of the larger volunteer responsibilities within the BSFP. Secretaries are responsible for archiving notes from BSFP meetings, writing and releasing the weekly newsletter, and managing the BSFP gmail account. During Spring 2014, this position was held by Sylvia Madaras, and then passed onto Maria Urbas in the Fall.

Treasurer: This last Fall, the realm of finances became a topic of increasing stress and uncertainty for the BSFP, leading to the creation of a volunteer Treasurer position. The roles of the Treasurer are to write invoices for farm sales, compile and synthesize data from the PCF and Coop, and to make sense of BSFP finances. Dane Whitman took up this position for Fall 2014 and Aidan Baxter-Ferguson has expressed interest for Spring 2015.

Student Labeling Position: This position was created in an attempt to increase transparency between the dining hall and student body concerning our purchase and use of local food. This paid position entailed meeting with Chef Michael Crane once a week, and updating a chalkboard in the dining hall detailing the weekly features for local food. This position was occupied by Eli Calhoun in Spring 2014, and by Dane Whitman in Fall 2014.

Member Testimonials

As a contribution to this report, participants of the BSFP were asked to share their thoughts and experiences with the organization. Enjoy.



Webb Crawford, First Year: I enjoy the BSFP as an extracurricular activity. It is one of the few extracurriculars that I participate in which does not induce stress. It feels good to work with the BSFP and on the Purple Carrot Farm. It feels productive, purposeful, and important. The BSFP is important to me as a personal source of happiness and enjoyment. The BSFP is important to the world and to the Bennington community because of its efforts to pursue the most efficient, environmentally sound, sustainable (!), and ethical means of producing food (given the restrictions of a tight budget and limited human-power). The people behind the BSFP are intensely dedicated, productive, intelligent, purposeful, thoughtful, and able-bodied (they can successfully operate a farm!). They are excellent citizens of the Bennington community as they are excellent citizens of the world, and I hope to become like them given three years and an excess of vegetables (and perhaps also some chickens and hazelnuts if the BSFP is provided with the funding and freedom they deserve!).



Alison Dennis, Alum: The Bennington Sustainable Food Project is self-driven education and learning by doing at it's joyful and rigorous best. It is a rare circle of leaders who can translate their ideals into living practice; the members of the BSFP have this skill in spades (not to mention shovels, wheelbarrows and compost buckets). Our College's community, food quality and student enrollment all benefit directly and measurably as a result of the BSFP's presence and stewardship.



Christopher Larsen, Junior: The BSFP has always meant community, always been a place of like-minded students with extraordinary enthusiasm and excitement for environment, food, and a place where I can explore my personal interests, bring them to a group, and at the same time get behind the things that other people are doing in a meaningful way. In a sense its a place of student empowerment on this campus. We dont really have this set up, and its not like this is student government in any way, but its a place where students are getting on the ground real action made in the college, expresses our values and is able to interface with the wider community, i think in a really wonderful way. But a lot of it is about community for me, and the people that it brings together that are not just active members of the food project. All of the community outreach things that we do are some of the most amazing things we do. And its just really great to learn about maple sugaring and farming, plowing over fields all the physical things provide challenges. I know as an architecture students, sort of the understanding of land use the basic infrastructure we need to run a farm, its been interesting investigating those things. So yes, I think its a wealth of knowledge and wonderful place for the community.



Sam Lawson, Junior: The BSFP is a place to insert oneself into the location of Bennington College. If our educations are only a set of theories with no regard to physical location, or our physical bodies, then our ideas will blow away in the wind.



Joana Santos, First Year: I think currently, I find that the style of open leadership and how the meetings are conducted and the work is done on the farm is very encouraging for participation because there aren't very strict leaders which gives everyone a chance to develop their own ideas and stuff that they want to do. While it needs people to participate regularly, and the members that come every time are always very thankful to get help, it still open to people that come and go regularly, making it almost more of a space than a club.

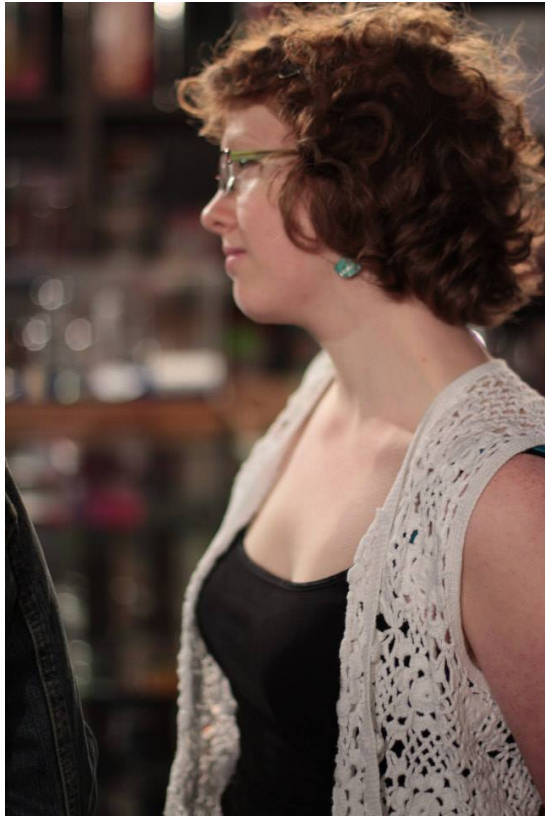
I think a good long term goal is for it to not only be sustainable food project but a sustainable living project, which I think the BSFP tries to support in different things that it does.

I also think that in term of long term goals, the BSFP can be great way of creating community through common goal, and the idea of sustainable living. I think farming, since it is tightly related to livelihood and humanness, can be quite an empowering tool in a world where there is so much technology all over. It can teach us about ourselves, and working together.



Dane Whitman, Junior: I would do my advanced work in Sustainable Food if such a thing existed at Bennington. While I find it disconcerting that we are without such a thing, I also find myself fortunate to have the opportunity to participate in having self-direction in designing my own sustainable food education, rather than having a three course curricular “lunchables” served to me on a plastic plate. In other words, I appreciate this challenge.

Through field work terms and my work with the BSFP, I am finding that creativity, discipline, and team building are essential--not only within the fields of food and farming--but also within my quest to become a very happy person and perhaps even moderately competent adult.



Sara Wilson, Senior: As a music student, the BSFP has been an outlet for me to explore my other passions that couldn't fit into my Bennington Plan. Moreover, it has transcended the bounds of a club and has truly become a family. Working with our hands on the farm while thinking broadly and open-mindedly is truly the Bennington way, where the lines between work and education are blurred.

I could not have asked for a more beautiful community. Everyday I get to interact with phenomenal people whom I am honored to call my friends, all due to the magical charms of the BSFP, and for this I am forever grateful.

I believe there will always be a place at Bennington for the BSFP. As long as there are students whose passion for food excites and thrills them like no other, there will always be a Food Project. Which is just as well, because there will always be a need for one, too.



Emily (Cleo) Zars, Sophomore: I think one key thing that I appreciate about the BSFP is the lack of hierarchical structure. It has been the only group that I am involved with that has successfully passed leadership around through different facilitators every week. Facilitators are volunteers who lead each meeting through the agenda and small groups in order to efficiently manage our time.

I think as a group we have been very successful engaging an extended community with the farm and our local products such as cider, sap, and acorns.

**Authored and edited by Dane Whitman and the BSFP.
Released March 2015**

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