

Outreach Programs Research and Recommendations for the Penn State Student Farm Initiative

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Over the past semester I researched different possible outreach programs for the Student Farm Initiative. For this project I have looked at different farms, both student farms and other farming practices, as models to be used for four specific programs; K-12 student programs, volunteer days, on-farm events, and senior citizen programs. Based off of the information that I collected, I conclude each section with suggestions for future Penn State Student Farm programs.

The first program is the K-12 program, which would focus on outreach towards the younger generation. There were three models chosen for this program; Stone Barns Center for Food and Agriculture, UC Davis Student Farm, and Shelburne Farms.

Stone Barns Center for Food and Agriculture- This farm is a non-profit farm and educational center that has a partner restaurant Blue Hill at Stone Barns that is located in Pocantico Hills, New York. The property that Stone Barns now resides on was once part of the Rockefeller estate. The Stone Barns Center for Food and Agriculture was founded by David Rockefeller and his daughter Peggy Dulany as a memorial for Peggy Rockefeller, David's wife and Peggy's mom, who died in 1996. This center has been open since 2004 (Stone Barns). They have a total of 80 acres including pasture. Their total growing space is around 60 acres. They do have a separate children's garden that is included in the 60 acres and is about 2 acres. Each program is one day a week usually around 10am-12 pm. These can support 50 students at a time. The students are split up into groups of 12 with at least one adult chaperone from the visiting group as well as the Stone Barns representative (Madden).

Their most popular program is the Farm-Kitchen program in which the students see all the processes of making food from the seed to the plate (Madden). They go on a tour of the farm where the kids have a chance to harvest vegetables for themselves. They then go to the kitchen and prepare a lunch and a dessert. This program is aimed more for 3rd-5th grade students. This program runs about three hours and is usually offered September through June. The garden used by the kids is separate from the main production areas, which are managed by staff and harvested and sold to the on-site Blue Hill Restaurant (Stone Barns).

When they were starting out with youth programming in 2006, Stone Barns got the attention of schools by inviting teachers to do workshops and offering a free class tour. They then relied on word of mouth to advertise the farm's youth programs (Madden).

They also have a family farm tour which is aimed at families with children 4 years of age and up as well as the adults. They usually get around 45 visitors for these tours each weekend (Madden).

After students and teachers go through their programs, Stone Barns asks them to fill out a survey. The purpose of this survey is to find out what the children/teachers liked about the program, and to find out what they can improve on in the program (Madden).

Stone Barns said that in the future they would increase the size of their children's garden to accommodate more students. This is so that they can meet the demand of the surrounding schools. They did not specify why they have not expanded yet (Madden).

UC Davis- The educational program at the UC Davis student farm started about 20 years ago as a small student initiated project at the University of California Davis in Davis, California. It started out as experiential field trips for classes. They then started offering workshops for both professional and non-professional (home-school parents) educators.

The UC Davis student farm has two different gardens; the ecological garden and the market garden. Many of the K-8 programs take place in the ecological garden and a few of the junior and senior high programs take place in the market garden. They also have a compost pile that is involved in teaching children about composting. They use the market garden to grow food for the UC Davis Dining Services and the Coffee House as well as producing food for direct selling.

In the spring, kids visit the farm to experience gardening and farm ecology through harvesting crops, tasting fresh produce, feeding chickens, looking at composting operations, and exploring nature.

The tours for older students (junior-senior high) are more in depth about food system concepts, farm ecology, and other related topics. Older students also are more actively involved by participating in planting and harvesting activities in the ecological garden.

All educational programs are arranged and led by UC Davis students, grad students, and occasionally by staff members. Undergraduate students take a class during their winter semester that teaches youth education. Then, in the spring semester, the students can put what they have learned into practice by leading student groups at the farm.

The UC Davis Student Farm K-12 educational program has a library of garden-based information and teaching materials, children's literature, and gardening information that is open to the public.

Shelburne Farms- Shelburne Farms is a farm in Vermont whose pure intention is educating for a sustainable future. This farm started in 1886 when Dr. William Seward and Lila Vanderbilt Webb bought farmland to create a model agricultural estate. This estate was known for its innovative practices, however in 1910 all activities began to shrink and the farm just about went out of business. Its rebirth came about in 1972 when a family member founded a non-profit organization. This organization is what Shelburne Farms is today (Shelburne).

Shelburne farms offer several opportunities for children K-12 education in a broad range of topics from sustainable agriculture to forest ecology to dairy production (Shelburne).

What I really like about the programs at Shelburne is that they keep organized by having a specific focus for each program. For example, *Super Soil* is a program intended for students grades K-3, focused on soil education and their main focus is on the interdependence of all living things. This program is an on-farm program that lasts about 2-3 hours. A staff of instructors teach all the programs, however there is only one instructor teaching a program at a time. Most of the time, depending on the size of the group, they also have assistants who help with keeping the children under control and accounted for (Shelburne).

They also have programs for educators to come and learn how to integrate farming into curriculum. These programs are offered throughout the year and are an interactive and refreshing time for teachers to learn and reflect (Shelburne).

They also provide summer programs and camps for various ages, numbers of students, and amounts of time. For example the *Adventures Summer Program* is offered for students from ages 3-8 and the students attend one day a week for six weeks. This farm also has a 4-H program for students ages 8-17 that goes in depth on various farming practices (Shelburne).

Suggestions for the Penn State Student Farm- My suggestions for a K-12 Program at the future student farm at Penn State are as follows:

- 1) We should have a separate garden area specifically for students (K-6th grade) to explore and learn and do hands-on activities. A separate area for the younger children will give them room to learn and make mistakes without damaging marketable crops. A quarter to a half an acre would be sufficient to start a children's garden. This garden should be something like UC Davis's Ecological garden.
- 2) This would require that we have an area for bus parking or that the parking lot should be big enough to accommodate at least two buses.
- 3) Subject matter and program ideas should be formulated by students in Ag Extension and Education, and other students from the College of Education, with guidance from faculty. These and other students could also then implement the programs. This should be able to count as an internship or independent study credit for these students. This model has worked very well for the UC Davis program.
- 4) Starting off, I recommend offering only one or two programs to schools during the fall and spring, once a week to once a month. Time frame depends mainly on the subject matter of the program. These programs should hold about 20 students with parent and teacher chaperones present with each group. The number and size of the programs can increase as demand increases.

5) Educators (teachers as well as homeschoolers) should be offered a train-the-trainer workshop. We could offer one or two each semester to start. These workshops should focus on introducing ways to include agricultural and food systems topics into their classroom curriculum. This would require one or two staff members to work alongside students to organize and advertise this event, however, it would mainly be students who would lead this effort.

6) Older students (15 and older) can be offered the opportunity to help during planting and harvesting, which serves to both give them meaningful learning opportunities on the farm, and help with maintaining the teaching garden. This could be coordinated through the volunteer programs which I will talk about below.

7) Children's programs should be offered on a fee per student basis. There can be group price discounts if over 15 students. I recommend that the maximum number of students on the farm at one time would be 20-30, depending on volunteer status and size of the garden.

The second program that I looked at was organizing volunteer days. Volunteer days are a way of getting the rest of the community involved with the farm. It is a great way for people to learn hands on and in turn helps the farm get work done. The three model farms chosen for volunteer days are; Plowshare Produce farm, the UMass student farm, and Sweetwater Organic Community Farm.

Plowshare Produce- Plowshare Produce is a family farm located in Huntington PA, not 30 minutes away from State College. The farm is owned by Micah and Bethany Spicher Schonberg. The farm has been in Bethany's family since the 1940s and every generation since then has kept the same organic farming practices. Plowshare Produce farms offers a work-share and sells its produce through a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) model (Plowshare).

This local farm sends out newsletters to their clients every week. If they need help with harvesting or planting, they will indicate in the newsletter that they would like volunteers. They seek help from their members approximately 2-3 times a year, and each time the number of volunteers varies from 5-15 people. These volunteer days are typically around 4-6 hours and are held on weekday evenings and Saturdays (Spicher Schonberg). Volunteers perform tasks such as hand planting seedlings, weeding, planting seeds, and harvesting vegetables.

The couple who owns the farm as well as their interns (they have about two interns at a time), teach the volunteers how to perform these tasks and then monitor the volunteers as they work alongside them. Volunteers are extremely helpful for interns because otherwise the interns would have to do all the work themselves (Spicher Schonberg).

UMass Student Farm- The UMass student farm is on its 9th season of growing. It began in the fall of 2007 when two students grew a quarter acre of kale and broccoli for an independent study, which then turned into a year-long class in 2008. Since then the farm has grown into seven acres of production also servicing a 60 member CSA, Earthfoods Cafe, the UMass Dining Services, and so many more (UMass).

This farm uses social media to promote their volunteer days. Their Facebook group creates volunteer day events chosen specifically on days that the farm crew will need the most help. They then share this on their Facebook page and ask other students to do the same (UMass).

The word spreads around campus and on that day they teach the students what tasks to do and how to do the tasks. Tasks included are; helping plant, helping harvest, or helping package CSA baskets. Around 5 volunteers consistently come to these volunteer days that happen around 2-3 times a year (UMass).

Sweetwater Organic Community Farm- Sweetwater Organic Community Farm is a non-profit farm focused on supporting urban agriculture in Tampa, Florida who also offers a CSA program. This farm was established in 1995 and has about six acres of suburban property along Sweetwater Creek in Hillsborough County (Sweetwater).

As part of their CSA membership, they ask members to volunteer at least 4 hours each season to build up community. Their growing season is November through May and they ask for volunteers on Thursdays-Sundays during that time. These volunteer days are organized and run by their staff on the farm. Each day they have an assigned task for that day (Sweetwater).

Thursday 7:30-12:30- Planting and weeding in the fields

Friday 8:00-4:00- Greenhouse work and planting and weeding in the fields

Saturday 8:00-4:00- Planting and weeding in the fields, other projects

Sunday 7:30-12:30- Harvesting, washing, and prepping for CSA pick-up

They have a general age requirement of age 12+, and ages 12-16 need to be accompanied by a parent or guardian.

All this information and more is found on their *Volunteer* page of their website (sweetwater-organic.org) along with more information and some frequently asked questions (Sweetwater).

Suggestions for the Penn State Student Farm- My suggestions for a volunteer program for the Penn State student farm are as follows:

- 1) Have specific volunteer days throughout the season that focus on activities that we know will require lots of people, and make those a seasonal event. (These might not be identified till a year or two after starting the student farm.)

2) Also have volunteer days throughout the season that are announced one to three weeks ahead of time, depending on the nature of the volunteer work. This could be done by creating a listserv of people who would like to volunteer and emailing them when volunteers are needed. It could also be promoted by creating an event on a social media site and having students involved in the farm share it with their friends. For the first couple volunteer days, collect a list of volunteer's names and email addresses and ask them if they would like to become regular volunteers. Create a listserv from that list of names. This could be implemented as soon as the farm is up and running.

3) Volunteer age minimum should be around 12+ and parent supervision should be required for ages 12-17 or 12-15 if people working on the farm have the certification or training to work with people under the age of 18.

4) Volunteers should be taught what to do by people working at the farm and then will be supervised by those same people.

5) Volunteer days and times will depend on the season and what tasks need to be accomplished.

The third program that I looked at was on-farm events. On-farm events would be ways in which we can integrate different communities and bring them together for fun and educational events. Two farms have been identified as models for executing on-farm events; the KU student farm and the UC Davis student farm.

KU Student Farm- The University of Kansas student farm was started in 2009 when a group of students drew up a plan for an area where people could grow their own food for an Environmental Studies Capstone course. Students, staff, and faculty got on board with the idea and the student farm was born. The main focus of the KU student farm is to build relationships with the community around it (University).

Every year the KU farm has gardening and composting 101 classes as well as workshops. The gardening and composting 101 classes are taught by the same woman every year and they usually draw 20-40 students each (McClure).

To determine the content of the workshops, the student leaders send a poll out to determine what workshops students/members would be interested in learning about. This poll is usually sent out around June or July via email (McClure).

The workshops are taught by students as well as community advisors. Community advisors are people in the community surrounding the student farm who support the farm. Many are past student leaders who have stayed in the area and others are local farmers and people who have an interest in agroecology and horticulture (McClure).

The farm also holds a yearly farm potluck, held in July. This potluck includes staff, students, members, and also local non-profit environmental groups in town (McClure).

Other spontaneous events held at the farm are demonstrations of different new farming systems developed by students. These typically occur about 2-3 times a year, depending on student interest in offering these demonstrations (McClure).

All events that are held at the farm are organized and managed by students because the farm is managed by a student organization as opposed to being a university-led program and facility (McClure).

All of the farm members and community advisors are often given gifts of fresh farm produce. Katrina McClure, the events coordinator at the KU student farm, has a goal to "not treat the farm like a charity". Every time someone gives to them they give them something back (McClure).

Because the KU student farm shares garden space with the biological survey group they don't have a large amount of space for events. They are also five miles away from campus, which makes it hard for students to go to the garden to attend events. The KU student farm partners with local community gardens that are closer to campus, so that students are able to attend events and also volunteer at a more proximate garden area (McClure).

Katrina also stated that she would love to be able to have a kitchen, enough space to hold an event for 40 people, good parking, and an area to hold potlucks.

UC Davis Student Farm- See above in the K-12 section for a description of the UC Davis student farm.

The UC Davis student farm also holds annual events such as Picnic Days and some workshops.

They also host more frequent events such as potlucks for the students, staff, and faculty that work on the farm. These are mainly used to build community and to have a fun event to look forward to.

They also have miscellaneous events such as a *Food Chains* film screening in the beginning of April and discussion and a Nitrogen Speaker Series in June.

These random events are not always at the student farm, however they are all hosted by the student farm and are in buildings on the UC Davis campus.

The farm has several facilities near and on the farm where events can be held, (both indoor and outdoor facilities).

Events are organized and planned by a committee of students that participate in the Student farm.

Suggestions for the Penn State Student Farm- My suggestions for on-farm events for the Penn State student farm are as follows:

- 1) Have a committee of students in charge of organizing and planning student events. This committee could be started even now and could start planning events even before the farm is up and running. This would just mean that other buildings and meeting spaces would have to be found.
- 2) Create an outdoor space for potlucks and other events to take place (outdoor area).
- 3) Plan regular potlucks and community building events for students involved in the farm. Like I said above, this is something that can start now.
- 4) The committee of students will be searching out events throughout the year to make up miscellaneous and interesting student events. They will also contact the speakers and set up the event itself.
- 5) Use other buildings on campus but make sure to emphasize that the farm is hosting the event.

The fourth and final program is the Senior Citizen's program. This program would be focused on making sure that the senior citizens in our community also have a chance to benefit from the student farm. There are surprisingly few farms that have programs that focus on helping to connect senior citizens with agricultural and food systems. I was unfortunately unable to do ample research in this area.

Suggestions for Penn State Student Farm: My suggestions for a senior citizen program for the Penn State student farm are as follows:

- 1) Continue to look for model farms. AgrAbility may be a source of model programs that can be researched more (agrability.org).
- 2) Use specialized tools (i.e. tools with long handles or tools that are painted white to make the tool more visible).
- 3) Include raised beds in the design of the student farm.
- 4) These programs might require more thought and planning so they probably will not be implemented until a year or so after getting the farm established.

These are a few of many ways that we could get the community involved with a future student farm. Community involvement is a way that the farm can benefit more than just Penn State campus and will also create more learning and teaching opportunities for students. Other farms, especially student farms, that have implemented these programs have found them to be an enriching experience and a way to make a difference in their community. The Penn State student farm aims to be a place where the university and community can come together in collaborative learning about sustainability, food and agricultural challenges and solutions, and these community outreach programs will help to achieve that goal.

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