

Student Farm Community Engagement Project

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Farmers

A community-engagement seminar in Landscape Architecture conducted outreach with the agricultural community of the Centre County region to identify possible collaborations and tensions for the proposed Penn State Student Farm.

General Overview

The SFSP links education, in both classroom and experiential settings, as a way to promote the growth of **knowledge, leadership, and self-development** while also promoting a positive change to the surrounding community and the Penn State campus. In order for the seminar to be successful, the students must accomplish **four goals**.

- Teaching and Learning:**
 - Expand the knowledge of community members, students & faculty.
- Research and Discovery:**
 - Research the precedence of campus student farms.
 - Discover tensions and collaborations specific to this project.
- Outreach and Engagement:**
 - Communicating with the public about the proposed student farm.
 - Opportunities for outreach (i.e. with food banks)
- Administration and Operations:**
 - Improve the proposal for the Penn State student farm by incorporating results from the community outreach effort.

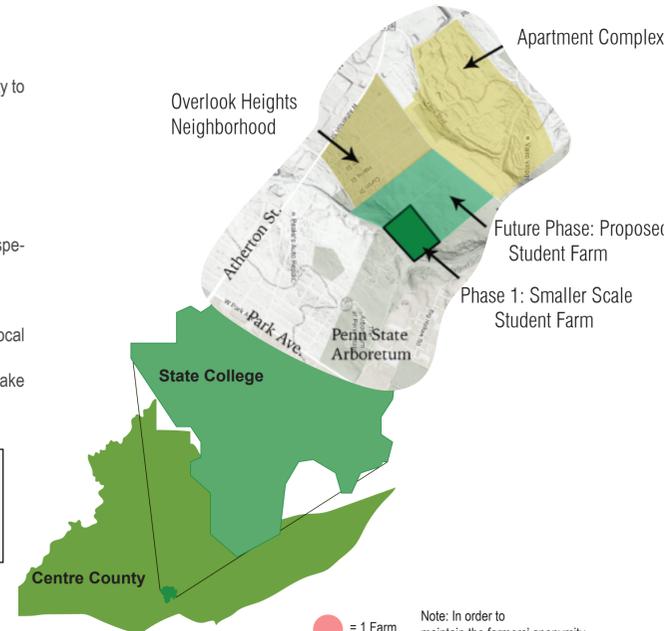
Methods

- **14 farmers interviewed**
- **9 survey questions**
- **Conducted by phone, or in-person.**
- **Interviews transcribed by group members.**
- **Interviews ranged from 15 - 45 min. long.**
- **Recorded with farmer approval.**
- **All farmers consented to anonymous use of their survey responses for reports and analysis.**

Conclusions

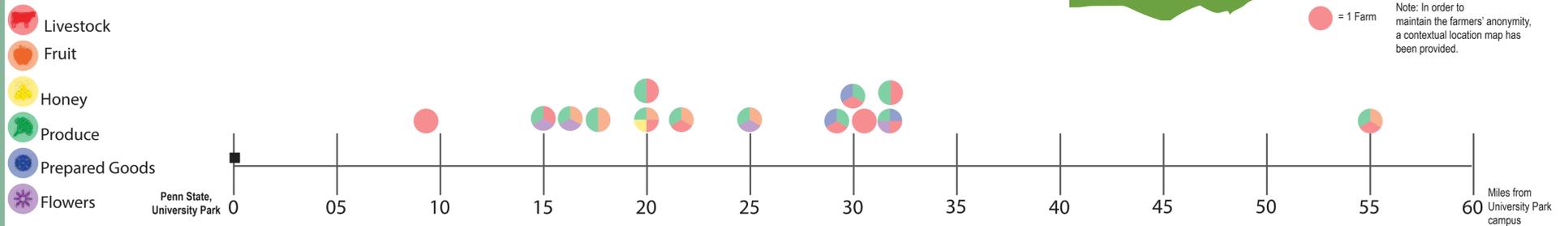
- Farmers have mixed opinions about the relationship between their farms and the proposed student farm.
- Most are supportive of the effort to educate the next generation of farmers and consumers, and see an opportunity to collaborate with students. Some have experience working with students as interns, volunteers, and visitors to their farms.
- 50% of farmers are willing to conduct workshops, trainings and other vital farm skills activities in order to create a network of resources for the student farm.
- Some farmers are concerned about market competition, especially from subsidized or volunteer labor.
- Initially the student farm will not negatively affect these farmers' lifestyles and businesses, and can be a sustainable member of the market economy if demand for local products keeps up with supply.
- Almost all farmers emphasized the hard work required to make a living farming; but many commit because of their love for agricultural lifestyles, and desire to support the food system.

Student Farm Context Map



“One of the huge obstacles to student farms is that the growing season and the student academic cycle don't match.”

Farm Location Map



Farmer Interview Notable Quotes

Farmer Relationship with Restaurants and Institutions.
“It's hard to find a restaurant that would change their menu to suit to seasonally what's available; they usually want to make their menu and hope you have what they want.”
“It's a difficult match. Because having the quantities that a restaurant needs in time is difficult for small producers... there may be an advantage for restaurants to be able to say that they're sourcing from a student farm.”

Recommended Student Experience
“To be consistently working. If it's got to be harvested, it's got to be harvested, whether it's “quitting time” or not.”
“(Familiarity with) the hard work involved. I think marketing is important. It is not just growing the food, but having a place to sell it. Charging sufficiently to actually cover costs and make a profit. So I think marketing and financial background are important.”

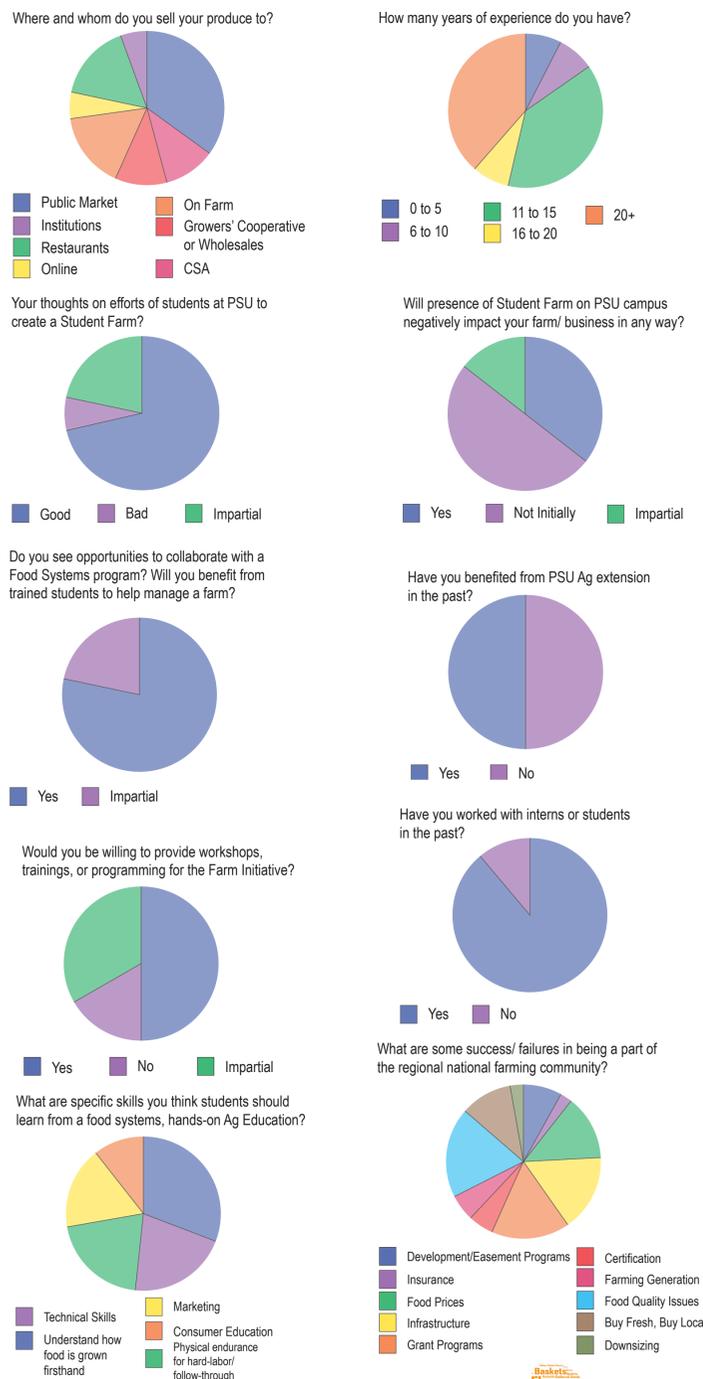
Current Consumer Interest in Local Foods
“Produce is in big demand; it's especially hard to get fresh local veggies off-season. However, market traffic is going down – there was more competition and business twelve years ago. We used to sell whatever we brought here (to market).”
“Yes, it's increased, but it could go further. More people should be involved in that. More farmers, mainly more consumers. When you're on the farmer end, it feels like there are too many farmers. When you're on the consumer end, it feels like there are not enough farmers.”

Tensions for Farmers
“I never applied to a grant program. I just feel like I am obligated. That is (also) why I never did CSA's. I feel like it would kill me to have that commitment and obligation, and that to me is stressful. Some years certain crops are just a failure.”
“We aren't necessarily impacted by the development pressure; if we wanted to expand, it would probably be impossible, there isn't land to rent in our neighborhood. We've just gone to more intensive, raised-bed farming.”

Opportunities to Collaborate
“If you were able to be a go-between for local farmers and the dining halls, I think that would be an incredible service to the community and farmers, to offer slots (of production); I would suggest that marketing students with access to the dining hall could be a terrific service as an outlet for good farmers (to connect with the dining halls).”
“In my opinion, instead of trying to start up their own farm to learn as interns, they should volunteer at local farms to help local farmers out.”

“We are going to see a huge changing of the guard here shortly. And what is happening is the younger generation flat out cannot afford to buy these farms. If you are a young 20 year-old person, you cannot afford to buy a million dollar farm. What is happening is even the owners are being pressured to sell it for development rather than pass it on to the next generations.”

Farmer Interview Summary Responses



“There's a great learning curve for farming, if it's your second career or how do you learn all that stuff?”

Some Recommendations

- Student skillsets:**
- Tolerance, practice, and building up endurance for hard physical work and long hours.
 - Good understanding of where growing food starts, no matter whether the student becomes a farmer, goes into marketing, or just wants to become a better-educated consumer.
 - Learn irrigation, fertilization, transplanting, and marketing techniques; possibly even connect to web design?
 - Understand how to find disease-resistant seeds, build up soil, buffer streams, and steward the land they're working.
 - Learn how to grow chemical-free produce/understand organic growing methods.
- Equipment Needs:**
- High tunnels for season extension, hand tools for small-scale work and/or labor intensive crops, rototillers, tractors, skid loaders, motor-carts with trailers, and power tools for small- to mid-scale projects.
 - Solar array for off-the-grid energy production.

Program/Marketing:

- Farm should be GAP-certified.
- Farm might benefit from fruit and vegetable insurance; must keep detailed records to qualify and it be of a certain size to be worthwhile.
- Host regular tours, workshops, and skillshares open to the public.
- Require a spring-summer-fall commitment from students desiring a full season of farming experience; preparation and planning for the growing season begins in February and goes until December.

Protecting the Local Market:

- Even with a really vibrant and robust student farm, it's important to preserve the regional markets regardless, because these sustain the community throughout and despite educational trends and program fluctuations on campus.
- If the student farm accepts LionCash or PSU ID credit in exchange for produce, this same program should be instituted at the local markets to even the playing field.
- If more markets are created, indoor markets with year-long capacity may benefit the local ag community; such efforts like the Friends and Farmers Co-op are closely aligned with this mission and could be strong partners.

Word Maps Depicting Word Choice Throughout Interviews

