Community outreach through the Greens Growing Project
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Abstract

During the spring 2016 semester, I worked with the Finger Lakes Institute and the Environmental Studies program to conduct research for the Greens Growing Project (GGP). My role was to work with project participants, coordinators, and community members to find new ways to improve the program for next year’s cohort of students. I interviewed former participants to identify the most impactful aspects of the program, as well as strengthening my own connections with the Geneva Community Lunch Program (GCLP) through completing regular volunteer shifts. I spent the semester working with others towards the common goal of providing healthy food for local residents in need of some additional support, and I hope that my work will continue to positively impact community members and project participants alike.

Introduction & Background

Each fall, senior environmental studies students who enroll in Professor Robin Lewis’ ENV 400: Group Senior Integrated Experience course have the unique opportunity to take part in the GGP, a multiyear collaboration between the Colleges and the GCLP that involves students growing salad ingredients (greens, carrots, beets, and radishes) in the high tunnel on HWS Fribolin Farm and delivering and serving these organically-grown greens to visitors at the GCLP. With guidance and support from Sarah Meyer, Finger Lakes Institute Food Systems Program Manager, ENV400 students learn to care for the greens from start to finish. Throughout the semester, students complete twice daily high tunnel shifts during which they water, weed, check for pests, and harvest the greens. Students also complete regular volunteer shifts at the GCLP, where they are able to prepare and serve the fruits of their labor and directly observe the impact of their efforts on the community that have called home for the past three years.

In my position as an independent study student this spring, I was able to extend my role in and perspective on the GGP through joining the team of people researching the impacts of the project. My experiences throughout the semester, as well as during my four years at the Colleges, have allowed me to see the importance of students giving back to the Geneva community. Programs like the GGP have the ability to make a difference in the lives of community members and students alike, and having the opportunity to be part of this community-based research project has been the perfect way to close out my time at the Colleges.

Findings & Reflections

My main objective throughout the semester was to continue the work of the GGP during the off-season, as well as forming new connections with community members in order to improve the project as a whole. My primary tasks included:

- Compiling harvest data compiled by the students over first two years of the project in order to develop a planting plan for next season;
- Developing an FAQ sheet and letter to Future Students as resources to next year’s cohort of ENV400 students;
- Conducting semi-structured interviews with previous ENV400 students to gain further insight into the impact of the GGP on their understandings of the local food system;
- Volunteering with the GCLP on a bi-weekly basis and discussing the GGP with other volunteers;
- Collecting and compiling greens recipes to be used at the Lunch Program in the future; and,
- Creating an Instagram account to publicize the work of the GGP to the broader Geneva community.

Project Goals & Deliverables

Recommendations & Next Steps

• Hold an introductory meeting at the GCLP so that the students can quickly see how the fruits of their labor will serve the Geneva community.
• Have the class host the GCLP coordinator and interested members of the community at HWS Fribolin Farm to strengthen connections between these two groups of people during the course of the project.
• Prior to the beginning of the fall semester, work with the GCLP to appoint one volunteer liaison per week day crew who can serve as an advocate for the GGP and help ensure that the greens are integrated into meal planning efforts.
• Hold training sessions for GCLP volunteers during which they are able to become more familiar with the greens provided and the easiest ways to integrate them into the dishes they prepare for community members.

• The majority of ENV400 students had little to no knowledge of the GCLP before working on the GGP.
• Many students saw social value in working at the GCLP and the GGP is a way to bridge the perceived gap between the HWS Community and the Geneva Community.
• Many students articulated the ability to strengthen the local food system through active participation in the GGP.

Resources for Future Students

• It is important to instill a sense of ownership and accountability in the GGP from the start.
• Providing students with more resources is only effective if the students use them, so it is important to make these materials accessible and visually appealing.

Volunteer Experience

• Volunteers that work at the GCLP are very attentive to preparing well-balanced meals. Yet, volunteers are limited to what the GCLP receives in donations, and also face the challenge of preparing meals that appeal to lunch program participants.
• By providing volunteers with a recipe book for greens using only the most commonly available ingredients at the GCLP, volunteers should be better equipped to incorporate GGP produce into meals while also preventing food waste.

Student Interviews

• Many students saw social value in working at the GCLP and the GGP is a way to bridge the perceived gap between the HWS Community and the Geneva Community.
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