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Working for Veggies: A Workshare Program at the Grand Valley State University Sustainable Agriculture Project

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ABSTRACT

Grand Valley State University's Sustainable Agriculture Project – often abbreviated to the SAP – grows a wide variety of produce while teaching students about environmental and social issues surrounding food. However, the GVSU student body is generally unaware of the SAP's purpose or existence. In addition, the food being grown at the SAP does not always end up in the hands of students, while at the same time many students have difficulties affording healthy foods. We sought to find a solution to all of these problems. Through multiple brainstorming processes and consultations with various stakeholders, we were able to create the structure for a workshare program, which would allow students to work at the SAP in exchange for food each week. We finalized an official workshare application and multiple advertising materials. While we are faced with some limitations for this work, such as the implementation of the workshare program being dependent on the SAP team, our hope and mission is that our material is strong and thorough so that this workshare may create a positive change for years to come. Future work to be considered includes posting the advertising materials and adapting the program as it continues to grow.

INTRODUCTION

Grand Valley's Sustainable Agriculture Project is a place where a variety of produce is grown using environmentally friendly methods. The SAP was created by a group of students in 2008 who were passionate about contributing to a sustainable food system, while building upon organic farming practices. What began as a community garden grew into two full hoop houses, a greenhouse, and many outdoor raised beds. Located on Luce Street, approximately a mile south from the main campus, the SAP is operated largely by Grand Valley student volunteers and interns. It serves both as an educational space where classes are held, and a functional farm that sells its produce in CSA shares (community supported agriculture) and at a farmer's market. The SAP seeks to educate about sustainable farming methods through hands on learning, increase awareness of environmental issues, promoting food justice, and creating a sense of community ("Sustainable Agriculture Project"). While successfully growing an abundance of fresh produce, the SAP has struggled to find ways to get this food into the hands of Grand Valley Students.

At the present time, "Nearly 60 Percent of College Students Are 'Food Insecure'" (Radcliffe, 2014). This means that more than half of college students have difficulty finding and affording nutritious food. College students spend the majority of their time in class, and many work in addition to being a full time student. Despite this, many fear that between paying for tuition, books, parking, rent, utilities, and all the other living and unexpected expenses, there will be little money left in their budget for food, let alone healthy food. Even more

surprisingly, students with jobs are "almost twice as likely to report experiencing food insecurity" (Radcliffe, 2014).

By providing more students with the produce grown by the SAP, students will have the opportunity to obtain more nutritious food on an affordable level. It is well known that healthier options, such as produce, are more expensive, and so many students turn to less expensive and nutritious options that are possibly dangerous in the long run. "Eating a healthy diet vs. an unhealthy one costs about \$1.50 more a day, which might not sound like much, but works out to more than \$2,000 more per year" (Rehel, 2013). By nutritious food being more accessible to students, this issue can be amended. Students can also gain many other benefits from being exposed to the SAP. Aside from healthy produce, students also have the opportunity to be outdoors and through this they may find companionship, physical fitness, and community at the SAP, while also getting hands on experience and learning about how to grow their own healthy food. There is power in knowing where your food comes from, and as Wendell Berry says, "A significant part of the pleasure of eating is in one's accurate consciousness of the lives and the world from which food comes" (Berry, 1990). With this in mind, it is clear that the SAP has the potential to reach many more students in a variety of ways.

ACTION PLAN

The main issue of getting the food being produced at the SAP into the hands of Grand Valley students was the driving force for our project. As a group, we collectively decided to focus on

expanding the workshare program, while developing an effective advertising plan. The workshare program will provide options and resources to Grand Valley students who want to be able to achieve healthier ways of living while attending the university. In order to get the attention of the students we chose to make colorful and informative flyers to spread the word. While the workshare offers a solution to this, it also offers much more.

Not all students know how to eat healthily or know what options are better for them than others. While grocery stores may be accessible, the option to choose healthy and nutritious food often is not. By having students work on the farm they will get a better understanding of the many fruits and vegetables that the SAP has to offer. Students also get the experience of helping others, and the satisfaction of getting rewarded for their hard work. Through our program students would be able to work at the SAP for four hours a week and would receive fresh produce in return, while also benefiting from the farm experience as a whole. Hand in hand with helping the students on campus the workshare program allows for us to help the SAP by bringing more students to the farm and spreading the word of its existence. We truly believe that the workshare program has great potential to produce a positive and long lasting effect on students of Grand Valley and the Sustainable Agriculture Project.

We want the students who participate in the workshare program to see the bigger picture during their time spent at the SAP, and allow them to be a part of it. With that being said, we want the students to understand that their

community has a lot to offer in the fight for a healthy and sustainable food system, and we want the SAP to provide the knowledge to the students that they need to live a healthy lifestyle.

PROCESS

The Sustainable Agriculture Project is a diverse and lively place to be. We were eager to focus our project onto an idea that would really capture all the SAP is and all it can be. We discussed with the SAP's farm manager, as well as other SAP members, how we could accomplish this by reviewing our brainstorming ideas and learning more about what the farm has to offer. While our initial target was aimed at raising awareness, we soon shifted our view to focus on how we could get more food into the hands of Grand Valley Students. Through consulting with the SAP team and our group's research efforts in understanding the SAP better, we were able to gain a better understanding on what may or may not work. Through these sources we found that many ideas we were discussing were already occurring on campus. We found that the SAP hosted many events, including the Harvest Festival, as well as holding produce stands to sell their product. With this in mind we began to narrow down our ideas to hopefully find one that would create something new and innovative for the SAP.

With all this taken into consideration, we began a more extensive brainstorming process, which was eventually narrowed to three ideas that we considered to be the strongest. Our first idea was to host a movie night at the SAP where students and the SAP team could come together to

enjoy a film with the farm as their backdrop. We hoped this event would raise awareness of the SAP's location and what the farm offers. We considered providing snacks that had been made using the food produced at the SAP, while students enjoyed a bonfire. While this was one of our most popular ideas, we decided this would only provide a short-term effect, and the impending cold weather also posed a problem.

These same issues arose with our second idea which included hosting a club event at the SAP. For example, we considered hosting a yoga class, in collaboration with Yoga Club, where students would practice alongside the hoop houses. This again, seemed like it wouldn't have the longstanding effect we were hoping to capture.

Our final idea focused on expanding on the SAP's existing workshare program. It had yet to be implemented, and we saw this as a possible opportunity to refine and finalize the program. While we were worried about some potential drawbacks, such as the program only being available during the summer months, the potentially positive and long-lasting effect outweighed any problems that were considered.

The program would allow Grand Valley students to work at the SAP during one of two summer sessions for four hours a week in exchange for one full CSA share. The CSA share, which stands for community-supported agriculture, would translate to one week's worth of produce. With perfecting and finalizing the workshare application, which was our most important task, we also decided to formulate different advertising flyers for the program that may be used in

promoting the workshare opportunity. These efforts combined will give Grand Valley students the chance to be involved in a hands on experience that will have a positive impact on the students and the farm.

The study, "Perceived value of a community supported agriculture (CSA) working share: The construct and its dimensions," demonstrates just how powerful that impact can be. Through this work, author Weiping Cheng attempts to discover the perceived value of a CSA workshare. After an extensive process - including comprehensive interviews, factor analysis, and survey data - Cheng found that CSA workshare programs can have emotional, social, educational, functional, and epistemic benefits for those involved (Cheng, 2013). Not only will Grand Valley students be enriching their bodies with the nutritious food they earn, they will also be enriching their lives.

RESULTS

We took the application created by a previous SAP intern and revised it to ensure that we were offering the strongest program possible. We worked on confirming dates and sessions that would be available to students, while ensuring that the student expectations and duties were clear and concise. Our final product is an informative and relatable application for students to see how the workshare operates as a whole, while also understanding the responsibility and expectations of the program and students (see Appendix A).

Once we had the application developed, we began working on possible advertising flyers to represent and promote the

workshare program (see Appendix B). We produced three different flyers in hopes that a variety will appeal to different students. Our first flyer, “Thyme to Work,” includes colorful photographs and details for what the workshare entails. The second flyer, “Do You Like Eating Healthy?,” offers similar information, however, the formatting and style differs by asking students questions that they may find themselves identifying with. Finally, we produced a prototype for a mini-flyer. This flyer, which proclaims “Will work for veggies,” would act as an informal way to spread the word and get people intrigued and curious about the program.

After gathering feedback from our classmates, during our Progress Implementation Report, we made a few revisions to our project. It was mentioned that some of our advertising design could be altered to be more aesthetically pleasing. Another student raised an interesting question of whether or not students would be permitted to share their workshare hours and CSA with a fellow classmate. We were grateful for the fresh perspective and carefully considered each contribution. We began to edit and refine our advertising design and found that we were much more satisfied with our final development. We then discussed the possibility of CSA sharing and decided that we would include this into the program, as it fosters the opportunity for better access to healthy food, education, and community.

While our process of creating this program was quite smooth, we were faced with some challenges and limitations. Our biggest challenge while working came in the form of finalizing dates and times. While we eventually got

it settled, it took great effort and communication to achieve this. The biggest limitations we face comes after we hand the project over. While we’ve provided the resources of the application and advertising, it will no longer be in our control once we pass it on to the SAP farm manager. While we may be available to offer our services post-semester, the SAP team will be responsible for the implementation of the program. Another issue that we are challenged with is ensuring that this program lives on. It has the potential to become a permanent and impactful program and we hope that it is pursued with as much passion as it was created so that it may reach its full potential as we have intended it to do.

FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

There are many aspects that need to be considered in regards to the future of the SAP workshare program. People interested in participating in the workshare now need to apply. Unfortunately, how many actually apply is out of our hands. Perhaps in a future project, a survey can tally how many more students have heard of the SAP since the implementation and how they might be interested in participating in the workshare in the future. Those running the workshare need to be prepared for the amount of people applying and participating, whether that be many or only a few. Since our hopes are that participation will grow from year to year, there must be an agreement on how many people the farm can accept and supply a CSA share to so that the SAP can continue to accept more applicants.

It is also important to consider other ways for informing students of the workshare

program. As this program is just starting, flyers and social media provide a good start in informing students of the workshare program, however, if the aim is for this partnership to grow between the SAP and students, more advertising strategies could be necessary. Some other considerations include delegating someone to the responsibility of scheduling and managing the participants, so that the amount of people working for the workshare program is well balanced. It will also be important to consider how the workshare will be delivered to students. Will they be able to accept their share once their weekly quota of hours is fulfilled? Or will they accept their share at the farmers market? This will need to be considered and established.

There will also need to be some sort of check in so that participant's hours and work can be tracked to ensure they are actually accepted in the workshare program and are fulfilling their duty, this job could be fulfilled by the management representative. Since background agriculture experience and knowledge is not a requirement, perhaps a training session would also be beneficial to the students to ensure that they are properly prepared for their duties around the farm. Since most of the future concerns posed regard the actual implementation of the program, there are many ways that this program can continue to be improved and expanded on. Our team's main goal was to establish the basics of the program – to finalize the application and create advertising – however the actual

organization and maintenance of the program will need more reflection and focus in the future. In all, the future of this program is brimming with possibility and through the workshare we can successfully ensure that the products of the SAP will end up in the hands of Grand Valley students.

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Sustainable Agriculture Project Workshare Application

The SAP Workshare Program is an exchange between students and the farm. It is a reciprocal relationship where students work at the SAP on a weekly basis, and in return receive a full CSA (community-supported agriculture) share. CSAs are intended to be a weeks worth of produce.

Students have the choice of which session to participate in. Regardless of which session, students will need to attend an additional training session the first week of the program which will include food safety. The food safety portion of training will include both harvesting techniques and post-harvesting handling of the product. Students will be allowed to miss one week during the session and still receive a share for that week. A majority of the work will involve harvesting, although other activities may be required occasionally. Students are also allowed to split the share with another Grand Valley student (each student would work two hours contributing to one shared CSA). If splitting a share, both students are still required to apply.

The SAP commits to not only providing fresh, sustainably grown produce to the participants, but also teaching the students about sustainable agriculture. The SAP strives to show students how to grow food in a way that is good for the environment and good for people. The capacity for this program is limited, so applying early is encouraged.

Student expectations:

Commitment to a ten-week long workshare session

Commitment to the same day and time each week unless discussed ahead of time with the farm manager

Willingness to work in less than ideal weather conditions

Ability to perform manual labor

No previous farming experience required

* Required

Name *

Your answer

Address *

Your answer

Phone Number *

Your answer

Email Address *

Your answer

Availability *

- Tuesdays 8am - 12pm
- Tuesdays 9am - 1pm
- Tuesdays 10am - 2pm
- Tuesdays 11am - 3pm
- Tuesdays 12pm - 4pm
- Wednesdays 8am - 12pm
- Wednesdays 9am - 1pm
- Wednesdays 10am - 2pm

Session Preference *

- April 27th - July 5th (4 hours/week)
- July 6th - September 11th (4 hours/week)

If you are splitting the share with another student, write their name here:

Your answer

Why do you want to participate in this program? *

Your answer

What do you hope to learn from this experience? *

Your answer

SUBMIT

Never submit passwords through Google Forms.

Appendix B

Flyer 1: Thyme to Work



THYME TO WORK

GVSU's Sustainable Agriculture Project Workshare Program
Apply now for the 2017 season!

WHO: You! Any Grand Valley student is welcome to apply.

WHAT: Through this workshare program you would have the opportunity to work at the SAP and be "paid" in delicious fresh produce that you helped grow!

WHERE: The SAP's on the on-campus farm - located on Luce street.

WHEN: There will be 2 seasonal sessions available to students:
summer and early *fall*.

WHY: The SAP workshare offers a fantastic space to learn and gain hands-on experience growing food. It also offers a way for you to incorporate more fresh produce into your everyday life.

HOW: For more information on the program and how to apply contact SAP farm manager, Youssef Darwich at SAPmanager@gvsu.edu

Flyer 2: Do You Like Eating Healthy?

DO YOU LIKE EATING HEALTHY?
HATE STORE PRODUCE PRICES?
JOIN THE GVSU SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE PROJECT
WORKSHARE!

Earn weekly produce by volunteering at the SAP!

The SAP is located right off campus at

4539 Luce St, Jenison, MI 49428



To learn more about the SAP, visit our website:

www.gvsu.edu/sustainableagproject

To apply for the 2017

workshare sessions contact:

SAPmanager@gvsu.edu



Flyer 3: Mini-Flyer

