

The Role and Future Goals of the Student Farm in a Bennington  
Education

Bryan Markhart

Valerie Imbruce

Advanced Projects in Environmental Studies

May 28, 2012

## Introduction

During the past four years the Bennington Sustainable Food Project (BSFP) has begun to make a strong impact, creating a new consciousness in the Bennington College community through various speakers, student events, behind the scenes work with the college, the early beginnings of a student food co-op and the creation of a student farm on campus. This student farm plays a very important role as a cornerstone of the whole BSFP and growth must continue in order for it to maintain a significant driving influence on campus. Until this point this latest attempt at campus agriculture has existed with the support of the student body, faculty members, staff, and administration as a project that everybody appreciates and wants. However, it has lacked strong goals and justification as to its relevance to a Bennington education. For the student farm to grow it must be grounded as an integral part of college scholarship as well as campus life. Strong structure and definition is essential to the future of the farm. A serious examination of its role on campus and how it will function can allow the farm to truly flourish and reach its full potential. I will demonstrate the important role of campus agriculture as an integral, long-term aspect of Bennington's *ideas-into-action* signature pedagogy. The farm has the potential to fully realize the specific educational philosophy of Bennington College where students are expected to (1) formulate an inquiry; (2) identify, analyze, and use resources; (3) create and revise work; (4) present and explain work; and (5) connect their work with broader contexts (Expectations of a Bennington Education, n.d.). The farm lacks a strong definition and purpose of its role as an educational tool for the school while at the same time expressing the needs and desires of the student body.

This paper is structured as follows to make the case for the future of the Bennington student farm:

- a brief background history of the ‘food movement’ with the intention only to frame the current student farm project in a broader historical context;
- how campus food projects fit into the food movement and provide relevance to Bennington College;
- a history of the current student farm and what will come next;
- and most critically, a clear definition of the mission and goals of the Bennington student farm and strategies to fulfill these goals.

### Why a New Consciousness About Food?

Before really delving into what is going on specifically at Bennington in terms of the food movement and student-run agriculture it is very important to first frame the BSFP and farm in a historical context. A brief look is needed at the current issues with the American food system, and the resulting social and environmental movements that have come to be collectively referred to as the modern alternative food movement.

Agriculture in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, specifically after World War II, not unlike many other industries saw significant technological change. Advances in the synthesis of chemical fertilizers and herbicides, high yielding hybridized and later genetically modified (GM) seeds, and larger scale heavy machinery has significantly increased the staple crop yields. The highly efficient yield-oriented, industrial agriculture that resulted allows for far fewer farmers to produce far more food. Despite the growing population, the proportional number of farmers in the US is the lowest in history, less than 2% (EPA, 2012). But this seemingly miraculous feat did not come without cost; there

have been many direct long-term negative socioeconomic and environmental consequences associated with the many impressive advances in agricultural technology (Shiva, 1991; Glaeser, 1987). It is these extensive consequences of mechanization, input-based agriculture, and as well as highly consolidated corporate control over the global food supply that have been at the heart of the modern alternative food movement.

The production efficiencies coupled with the dramatic agricultural policy reform of the early 1970s under Secretary of Agriculture Butz, encouraging farmers to over-produce a few commodity crops, have produced the largest grain yields in human history, and as a result the lowest food prices too (Pollan, 2010). As Pollan describes it, “the age-old ‘food problem’ has been largely solved for most Americans” and so “[they] have not had to think very hard about where their food comes from.” Although access and food justice issues are still severe, a great majority of the present day human population in industrialized, prosperous nations, no longer needs to be concerned with producing food, at least from a calorific stand point.

The problem here, according to Pollan, is that when the majority of people stop worrying about how to get their food or where it comes from it becomes an invisible issue and the effects our food choices have on the health of our bodies, planet, and society go unseen. By making food invisible, it has become divorced from the strong place it once held in human culture. Food plays a much larger role in our lives than merely a means to satisfy hunger; simply because food can fulfill this one role doesn’t mean we can disregard its many other less obvious but nonetheless very important roles. Beyond its most basic role of satiating hunger, it has also served humans as healthful nutrition and preventative medicine (Beaton G.H. & Bengoa J.M., 1976); carried strong cultural traditions (Hassanein, 2003; Light, 2001) and served as a means to bring people together

(DeLind, 2002; Light, 2001; Donahue, 1999). A meal that satisfies ones hunger but does not nourish the body and soul, as well as support a socially just and a both economically and environmentally sustainable system is not yet a complete meal. The unsustainable nature of the industrial agricultural system may bring into question whether this food problem is solved forever, but the consequences discussed above exist regardless.

### Ideas Into Action

Looking to the future, if we as society are to address the issues discussed above it is imperative that we be capable of making informed decisions about the food we eat, where it comes from, and the impact that a meal has on the land and the people that produced it. Lyson (2000) introduces the concept of Civic Agriculture (CA) as a means of doing just this, defining CA as a “way of locally-based agricultural and food production system that is tightly linked to a community's social and economic development.” DeLind (2002) describes food production as a civic responsibility rather than simply an economic issue and occupation for farmers, or rather the food industry. CA has the potential to ground people in their food system as more active participants helping everybody to understand the impacts of their choices and therefore make informed decisions.

Food democracy is another very important concept to consider when searching for ways to address the problems in our food system; this is the idea that consumers must play a more active role in shaping their food system. One of the major issues with the current industrial food system is the consolidation of its production, processing, and distribution sectors into massive capital-driven corporations structured to put their public and private shareholders first, not the interests of consumers. Hassanein (2003) argues that through the practice of food democracy, consumers become more engaged actors in this inherently

essential part of our society and affect change by making the common interest more important, or at least more equal to private interests.

The broader food movement is made up of many distinct organizations primarily concerned with addressing different faults of the current food system. Different key players include sustainable agriculturalists, local food advocates, food security activists, environmentalists, public health workers, educators, workers rights organizers, and animal rights activist; the list goes on. Engagement can take form in loud, obvious ways such as political lobbying, grass roots organizing, protest, popular media, education campaigns, or subtle ways such as daily thoughtful engagement with the food system through community gardens, discussions with friends, and the choices of what food to eat. If we as a society are to tackle the sizable challenges presented by the current condition, food system activists must form a strong collaborative, interdisciplinary coalition of different organizations with different skills and interests (Hassanein, 2003), and action to influence change must take many forms and come from many directions.

In addition to the many players and strategies summarized above, universities and colleges have been demonstrated as key players in educating future societal leaders, contributing to think tanks, and providing a campus atmosphere for promoting action and food democracy (Barlett, 2011). There has been a long history of public action oriented movements on university and college campuses, especially in the liberal arts, and the current food movement is certainly no different. The liberal arts have an inherently advanced capacity for civic engagement (Coleman, 2009) creating a very powerful forum not only for thinking about food and production issues but also grounding in real life involvement in the food system. Sustainable food groups have become increasingly common on many campuses and have a wide range of agendas from food purchasing

goals, to academic programs and curriculum, to experiential learning opportunities through hands-on work. But however the tactics or foci differ between schools, the ultimate purposes of these initiatives are to serve as “incubators, pioneering new nodes in an alternative food chain for local regions (Barlett, 2011).” Barlett goes on to say that “[campus food projects] evaluate, disseminate, and legitimize the critiques of the conventional food system, both inside the classroom and in co-curricular activities.”

These campus food projects serve as very important means of promoting awareness of food issues and in some cases causing fairly substantial impacts on the eating habits of the student body through changing food sourcing in the dining halls (Barlett, 2010). But more importantly in the college setting is the educational credit potential of these projects. While creating real life positive impact on a campus food shed is by no means insignificant, without a strong educational framework behind the school’s food sourcing decisions, these impacts are less likely to affect the student body’s food choices outside of their school life. As is seen in the growing number of small liberal arts schools with campus farms, most relevantly but not exclusively, Hampshire College, Green Mountain College, Middlebury College, Evergreen State College, Sterling College, Dickinson College, and Warren Wilson College, as well as many larger universities, campus agriculture can serve very important educational purposes.

Specifically at Bennington College, campus agriculture has great potential as an education tool that is very much in keeping with the guiding principals of the school’s educational philosophy. The student farm can very successfully aid in fulfilling the Requirements of a Bennington Education (n.d.) while simultaneously grounding student’s intellectual and imaginative pursuits in civic engagement and act on one of the more critical societal challenges of our time.

The student farm can provide a structure for students to formulate inquiry the environmental impacts of our agro-food system, the role of food in our society, and how to address the many consequences of our food system, while strengthening the campus community. Beyond this, it may potentially provide the basis for more scientific inquiry into agroecology, ecology, biology, microbiology, chemistry, and botany. The farm will serve as a living laboratory for students to experiment with personal interests that may very well inform their academic pursuits. I am personally a testament to this as I find it unlikely that I would have been able to develop the true passion in my studies that I have or been able to understand the breadth of application possible in this field without the BSFP and the opportunity to work with the fledgling student farm during my time at Bennington. In the future, a more established farm will make the path I have taken easier and more accessible to other students. Mark Kimball, owner and operator of Essex Farm, describes farming as “the most intellectually challenging exercise [he] could ever find...how do you interact with an ecological world and shape it into something that is successful?” (Stechschulte, 2011). This is a question applicable in most any field of study requiring engagement with and influence of systems much larger and more complex than the individual.

The nature of the BSFP as an entirely student driven initiative, delving into projects independent from the regular curriculum requires students to identify and use the resources available to them in order to complete their goals. The student farm’s role as more of a framework and support for students to expand their own interests and inquiry, rather than directly teaching students, requires that students become more involved with directing what they learn, how they learn it and what resources they need to do so.

Where the student farm has the potential to move beyond purely intellectual inquiry is its capacity for students to create work and put it into action. Students interested in looking at the principals of agricultural systems or the dynamics of the food system can gain experience engaging with their own agro-food system first-hand, learning how to manage an extremely complex system and working to actively shape it. Those more interested in social and political sciences organizing around food issues and influencing change are presented with an established forum to apply the principals they study in class by working to increase interest and awareness about the BSFP and farm and explore different ways of engaging with the student body.

Use of the farm as a formal educational tool provides students one of the most powerful and rewarding forms of presenting work, not simply as a final product that is over at the end of term, but as a part of an ongoing collaborative effort, an inherent part of successful work in food activism and agriculture. In this field, the fruits of ones labor are in fact often times fruit! The opportunity for student work to culminate in feeding the entire student body, as was the case in the fall of 2011 when the student garden harvested over 740lb of butternut squash for the harvest dinner during parents weekend. What better way for students to show off their work than through the very universal medium of the meal? Beyond the actual harvestable goods from the student farm however, the farm itself is very impresses form of presenting student work. Kristen Kimball of Essex Farm describes a farm as “a physical expression of the inner-life of the farmer. A farm is truly a work of art as much as a painting or a chunk of writing” (Stechschulte, 2011).

Beyond the beauty of the farm itself as expression of student work in the sciences, it also serves as a gallery of sorts for other student work in artistic expression. The 2011 student garden incorporated student sculptures as bean, pea, and cucumber trellises.

Another example is in the spring of 2012 when the newly relocated student farm drew upon the skills of a student interested in design to help create a beautiful, and functional bed design for the years to come.

While all of the educational merits of the student farm discussed above are very important and inherent to the BSFP, philosophically they exist primarily to reach the ultimate goal of connecting the student body to broader context of their food system; for it is this purpose that sets the BSFP apart from other interdisciplinary student projects. It is the farm's powerful ability to introduce students and other participants to the larger implications of their choices that will make the student farm such an indispensable asset to Bennington College. At the current, or foreseeable future scale for that matter, the student farm is not going to make any real noticeable environmental impacts by replacing current food sourcing, or directly altering the broader food system. The real importance is more in its ability to connect people to their food system, and introduce students to the civic of agricultural production. In doing this, the student farm certainly has the potential to influence the lives and decisions of students encouraging them to more actively engage in their food system after they are long past their undergraduate years at Bennington, and ultimately support Bennington to continue this awareness building.

### The Early Years

Here at Bennington College, the current student sustainable food movement has existed in the form of the BSFP, founded in the spring of 2010. The purpose of the BSFP, as stated in its mission statement, is to “address the fact that eating is a political act...[through] the promotion of human health, humane animal husbandry, maintenance of ecosystems, and the support of local economies...[They] believe that [they] have both the opportunity and responsibility to make these choices from an educated position (BSFP,

2010a).” In the beginning the BSFP focused on several projects including working with the dining hall to improve food labeling, looking into the possibility of composting food waste, improving campus food sourcing, creating co-op like sales in the student center, and most relevantly an interest in student led campus agriculture. It was the BSFP that submitted the original proposal for the 2010 student garden pilot season, which has served as the starting point for the current student farm. The vision for the garden at that time was to “...serve as a living, working example of the connection between the land and our food...as an educational tool, used to spread knowledge of sustainable farming practices, as well as an experiential and self-guided classroom.” There has also always been strong community outreach and civic engagement goals as a key driving force of the project (BSFP, 2010a).

In this first growing season the student garden existed as a part of the community garden located just to the south of the Stickney Observatory. Two of twelve 30’ by 30’ plots in the community garden were allocated to the student garden project and two student interns, Forest Purnell and Emi Reyes were hired to plan and care take the plots for the summer. Their stipends were paid for by a \$3500 grant from the Sustainability Committee, accounting for two interns working 20 hours per week for 11 weeks at a wage of \$8.15 per hour (BSFP, 2010b).

As to be expected, this first season saw many difficulties but was ultimately rather successful and showed that with some tinkering, this project has impressive potential. Because this was the first season and the proposal was passed just a littler earlier that term Purnell and Reyes weren’t hired until rather late in the term and were somewhat under-prepared for the season. This made it difficult to thoroughly plan the garden before term let out for the summer. It was also noted in both Purnell (2010) and Reyes’s (2010) annual

Garden Reports that it is essential to the success of the project that the summer interns be able to either self-select with their co-interns or at least put more emphasis on hiring a strong team, rather than simply strong individuals during the hiring process. Reyes also made a strong point that in order for the student garden project to truly flourish it must expand and take on a more permanent structure. The goals set out by the BSFP (2010) were also somewhat extravagant for this first season causing many of the community outreach goals of the project to slide, as well as a lack of sufficient post harvest uses for garden products causing much of the produce to be underutilized and even left to waste in the field. Some of the primary concerns expressed by the Sustainability Committee (2010) in its' *Garden Feedback Report for BSFP: Student Garden Project* along with many of the points discussed above, regarded a lack of organizational structure for the project and the need for a sustainable financial business model independent from annual school funding.

Despite the many difficulties and faults of this pilot season it can ultimately be argued a success in several ways. Although there were organizational issues with the internship and some issues with what to do with the produce, the structure was in place to learn from Purnell and Reyes's experience and fix many of these problems in the coming years. This was especially true with respect to the internship hiring process and structuring of work throughout the summer.

The 2011 growing season saw the second year of the student garden. This second season was conceptually very similar to the pilot season, and built off of the foundations laid in 2010 showing significant progress in growing and legitimizing the project. Another two interns, Sofie Sherman-Burton and myself, Bryan Markhart, were hired and paid in the same way as the first season, but the internship was given much more structure. For

example the interns were hired earlier in the term so that they were able to more easily adjust to their responsibilities and the garden could be planned extensively before the end of term in collaboration with the rest of the BSFP. During the second summer a much more scheduled workday was established to ensure that both interns worked regularly and as a team. There were also more explicit plans for post-harvest uses of garden products such as pickling and canning. Beyond the miscellaneous crops grown, the garden interns began working with dining services to grow crops specifically to serve for the harvest dinner during parents weekend in the fall with the ultimate goal of moving towards a self-sustaining economic model. To do this the student garden was able to take on another 30' x 30' plot in the community garden, and this additional land was used to grow an approximately 740-lb crop of butternut squash that was sold to the dining hall for a little more than \$800. The dining hall was very supportive of the garden and was eager to take anything additional the garden could supply. There were some initial issues with pricing of produce and payment due to the informal nature of the transaction, but these were quickly settled and are being more formalized for future seasons. In the latter part of the summer the interns also began holding small biweekly *picnic markets* at which they set up a farm stand-like blanket in the barn courtyard to sell excess produce and value-added goods. There was also some attempt to sell garden products to the MFA students but it was not as successful.

During the 2011 season the interns also began a strong and very successful relationship with DREAM, beginning to act as a form of civic engagement, exemplifying the powerful educational tool that food production can be. The kids involved with DREAM would come to the garden in small groups once or twice a week and help with small garden tasks. Mostly the role of the garden for DREAM was to introduce the kids to

the growing of food, where it comes from, and to introduce them to how delicious and exciting vegetables can be. It was very powerful to see the transformation seen in some of the kids through the course of the summer. For example, one of the kids, otherwise mostly interested in playing videogames and generally reeking havoc, by the end of the summer, would show up bounding out of the car yelling something about peas and immediately proceed to clean out a good chunk of the ripe sugar snaps. Alice Waters the found of The Edible Schoolyard Project (n.d.) speaks of edible education like this work with DREAM as having the power to transform the health and values of every child in America.

During this year it also became apparent that it was very possible for the project to move towards a more sustainable business model, but to do so it must grow significantly and exist in a much more farm-like manner (ie. efficiency and production oriented), but it was important to continue to build on its other important educational and outreach purposes as well. The squash crop for the dining hall showed that somewhat-trained, and eager interns are very capable of managing more land, and that larger cash crops for the dining hall, if planned efficiently, can be grown without dramatically increasing the amount of labor required. In order to do this however, more land would be required. There were also concerns about the impermanent, annual nature of the community garden. It became clear that the garden was outgrowing its original site and new land designated solely for the student garden would be necessary in order to continue growing.

A proposal was submitted to the Sustainability Committee in the fall of 2011 asking for the use of land on campus for a permanent student garden that would “allow [the] activities [of the garden] to be more effective and visible to the college community. The BSFP and the student body could have more freedom to shape and nurture the garden in ways that are more beneficial for the whole community (BSFP, 2011).” Just before term

let out for winter break and after some deliberation and discussion the BFSP was officially granted use of the field just west of the Ohio parking lot, across the road from the community garden, and next to the tree nursery.

Thus far in 2012, in preparation for the very exciting third season of the project much is being done to continue the growth of the garden project. The project has begun to take on a much more farm-like nature and has been given the name *Purple Carrot Farm*. This name comes from an experience during the 2011 season when a seven-year-old girl apart of DREAM saw a seed packet for purple carrots and did not at all believe that they were real. As the summer progressed the interns occasionally showed this girl the progress of the purple carrots, even by the end when she was chomping into a freshly pulled purple carrot she didn't really fully believe they were real. This story behind the name exemplifies many of the goals of the student farm: education, experiential learning, community outreach, and diversified vegetable production. The choice of beginning to call the project a farm as opposed to a garden has more to do with the intention of the project rather than actual on the ground differences. The intent is to build a much more production-oriented side of the project that shows the potential for efficient, but sustainable agriculture. The initial land for the new student farm location, a little less than half an acre, was scheduled to be tilled by the local dairy farmer that tills the community garden and grows feed corn on campus. The BSFP also began growing its own transplant starts for the farm. In the future it is hoped that Purple Carrot Farm will have its own permanent location for growing transplants, such as a heated hoop-house, but for now they have been in student's rooms and then under a small makeshift low tunnel. This has worked well but it expects somewhat unreasonable and unnecessary sacrifice of time and

living space on the part of individual students and will not be able to meet the needs of the farm in the future.

### The Future of Purple Carrot Farm

Now, looking toward the third growing season and transition from a rather small, annual garden to a larger, more farm-like operation and growing role in the campus community, it is important to clearly define the student farm's guiding mission, goals for the future, and strategies for the business model and organizational structure of the farm, and how this will all be implemented.

As described above, there is a significant disconnect in our society between people and the source of their food, and very important educational and social role that liberal arts colleges can play in addressing this problem, as well as bringing people together and creating a sense of place (Esteva & Prakash, 1998; DeLind, 2002).

The purpose of the Bennington student farm is to broaden the pathways for pursuing liberal arts education. This can take many forms from formal learning to informal consciousness raising. For example, it will serve as an educational tool simply through exposure and experiential learning. By having a working farm on campus that students can engage in on various levels as they choose, anything from simply appreciating the food it produces and the contemplation space it provides, to organizing and planning when and where to plant what crops and what to use them for, the possibilities for engagement in the project are as broad as the imagination of the student body. No matter the level or form of involvement in the project the farm will serve as a way for people to engage in their food system, learn to make informed decisions about what they eat, and bring the community together over this most basic and universal part of life. When Hassanein (2003) discusses food democracy she summarizes Welsh and

MacRae (1998) by describing “the transformative potential of food democracy [as a] significant challenge to the structure of capital and transforms people from passive consumers into active, educated citizens.” By providing the structure for students to be active parts of their food supply the student farm will allow students to begin to think about the impacts of the food they consume and encourage them to take action in which ever way or scale they see fit.

Students can only draw on and learn from the experiences they have and the opportunities they have been exposed to. In my own case if it were not for my FWT experiences on farms during my freshman and sophomore years there is no way that I would have discovered the true direction of my Plan and passion in life. If it were not for my family connections with interesting, progressive farms, I would likely have had very little exposure to this field of study and would not be the student or person that I am today. FWT plays the very important role of allowing students to explore and investigate new fields of inquiry, but without a strong means of continuing with interests discovered during FWT, it is difficult to further develop these new interests. Through the student farm, students that would otherwise not be exposed to the study of agriculture or food systems and the social and cultural issues around food will have the opportunity to explore applying the overall theme food and food production systems to any field study. It will also serve as a way for those students who have discovered a strong interest in agriculture to continue their education at Bennington, rather than follow the regular pattern of students that find a love for agriculture and subsequently leave the school to pursue their interests elsewhere. It is necessary for the school to support a means for students to peruse interests in this field of growing importance that fits so well with the Bennington philosophy. By supporting a student farm on campus the school will create the

opportunity for these oftentimes-passionate students to formally pursue their interests at Bennington College and enrich the campus community, rather than transfer to another school with an agricultural program, or simply drop out entirely. This will maintain the diversity of the student body and allow the modern alternative food movement to flourish at Bennington. It will also offer a lot for the growing number of perspective students interested in campus food production.

Through interdisciplinary incorporation into various parts of the curriculum the farm can serve as a much more formal educational tool for faculty teaching classes directly relating to food issues as well as a myriad of other classes in a wide range of disciplines, for example, as a laboratory for ecology and other biology students, visual arts and design, creative writing, and as demonstrated earlier, political and social sciences. The farm can also be the focal point or at least the root of interest for a cross disciplinary group tutorial studying public action in relation to the broader food movement, or simply in understanding and managing agricultural systems and the different roles they can play. In a less obvious manner the farm can serve as a medium for design students interested in landscape and architectural design, as well as subject matter for painting, sculpture (Dickinson College, n.d.), photography, or drawing classes. It can also serve as a gallery space for artists, giving more long lasting purpose to student work after the end of term evaluation. As previously discussed, this has already been done with sculptures, but again, the breadths of possibilities are only limited by the imagination of the student body.

The student farm will play a major role as a catalyst for bringing one of the largest growing social and environmental movements of our day to light on the Bennington College campus. It will create an academic arena for the discussion of environmental,

social and political problems surrounding food issues and attract the growing number of prospective students looking for schools offering agro-food studies.

Beyond the many goals of the student farm discussed above there are also very important production goals directed at both enhancing the educational potential of the farm project and to ensuring the financial sustainability of the project. In order to create the most learning potential, it will be important to incorporate as many different agricultural production practices into the farm as possible and present the student body with many opportunities to reconnect with their food system. For starters this means supplying the campus community with as diverse a spread of fresh produce as possible during the spring, summer, and fall allowing students to discover the wonderful diversity that exists in our common and uncommon culinary vegetables. One issue here is that students are away from campus during the most productive months of the growing season, making it somewhat difficult to expose the full extent of the farm to the full student body. For this reason, rather than waste the heart of the growing season, another large aspect of the farm will be to preserve what those in the area for the summer cannot be consumed. This will require pickling / canning, and drying what is possible; this, in and of itself, will help to educate people on an essential part of humans relationship with food that has become invisible to a majority of the population.

A second production strategy of the student farm is to incorporate livestock production into the practices on campus. Meat as well as other animal products such as eggs and milk are very important parts of our food system as well as a very integral part of creating sustainable agricultural systems. Therefore, livestock must become a key aspect of the student farm.

The farm must also eventually expand its production substantially in order to provide an educational laboratory for understanding the work and skills required to grow the food that feeds them. Diversified vegetable gardens are nice and serve to build awareness but do not demonstrate the capacity needs or skills needed for a working farm. Students need to appreciate what good agricultural practices look like that also exhibit the production efficiency necessary to actually feed people. This does not mean sourcing the school's food exclusively from the farm, but simply a small-scale, attractive garden will not suffice for education in even small farm agricultural practices.

The other, equally, if not more important side to the farm's production goals are financial. From the beginning of the student garden the Sustainability Committee made clear that the grant used to hire the summer interns was temporary and efforts must be made to move towards financial independence from institutional funding (Sustainability Committee, 2010). There are several avenues that the farm is pursuing in this regard, all of which are simultaneously addressing many of the other goals discussed above. Through building a strong relationship between the farm and the two dining halls on campus the farm will have a much larger market than it could ever fill. The farm will be able to continue in the same manner as the 2011 squash crop for the harvest dinner by supplying more large scale crops for sale to the Commons dining hall with the intention of feeding the entire student body.

Beyond the larger crops intended to feed the whole student body, there are several smaller scale markets available on campus. Executive chef Joe Greco has showed interest in sourcing ingredients from the student farm on a small scale for the smaller lunches and dinners that dining services caters (conversation with author, April 3, 2012). The Student Center also goes through a much smaller quantity of food, making it a much more

manageable market for a campus farm to keep up with for certain crops, especially during the summer. For example, members of the BSFP are currently growing about 5 pounds of sprouts a week for the student center to use in wraps. There are plans for the coming 2012 growing season to provide the student center with a mesclun mix to be used for salads as well as leaf lettuce for sandwiches, and pickling cucumbers. Nick Disorda, the student center manager has excitedly, but informally agreed to source any of his ingredients from the student farm (conversation with author, April 8, 2012). Many of these ingredients for the dining hall's catering service and the student center will be much more labor intensive than a large squash crop for instance, but are also more lucrative products and will serve to diversify the farm's markets allowing it to have an income throughout the growing season rather than be entirely dependent on a single or even a handful of crops for one harvest.

The student farm will also have another means of generating income through the continuation and formalization of the small biweekly markets on campus used to sell surplus produce, and value added items to the campus community during the summer as well as during term. During the 2011 summer, the garden interns discovered that by allowing customers to name their own price, people were more likely to overpay than underpay, but it also made the markets more inclusive of students low in funds. Products for these markets can include canned goods, dried vegetables and herbs, herbal tea blends, herb infusions, kale chips, maple syrup, and eventually eggs. While these markets will be available over the summer and during term to students, faculty, and staff as products are available, special emphasis must be placed on times when alumni and parents will be on campus, such as parents / alumni weekend, and graduation, to capitalize on these high traffic times. It has been suggested that parents and alumni are more likely to be willing to

spend money on well marketed value added products during their short visit to campus than students who are here all the time and are less likely to be moved to spend money on such products.

### Summary

This paper discussed the current state of the food system focusing primarily on issues within the United States, and the potential for significant and necessary change in this arena. There are many different interests and approaches to this field of action, and educational institutions can play a very important role. Specifically at Bennington College, agro-food studies fits perfectly with the schools educational philosophy as laid out in the Expectations of a Bennington Education (n.d.) as well as its goals of advancing public action. The growth and development of a strong student farm is an essential part of these educational goals that the school mustn't ignore.

### Works Cited

- Barlett, Peggy F. (2011). Campus Sustainable Food Projects: Critique and Engagement. *American Antropologist*. 113(1)101-15
- Beaton, G.H., Bengoa, J.M. (1976). *Nutrition in preventative medicine: the major deficiency syndromes, epidemiology, and approaches to control*. World Health Organization Monograph Series. 62.
- Bennington Sustainable Food Project (BSFP). (2010a). Student garden proposal. (contact author for access).
- BSFP. (2010b). Student Garden Internship Application. (contact author for access).
- BSFP. (2011). Permanent Student Garden Space Proposal. (contact author for access).
- Coleman, L. (2009, February). Liz Coleman's call to reinvent liberal arts education [Web log message]. Retrieved from [http://www.ted.com/talks/liz\\_coleman\\_s\\_call\\_to\\_reinvent\\_liberal\\_arts\\_education.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/liz_coleman_s_call_to_reinvent_liberal_arts_education.html), accessed May 2012.

- DeLind, Laura B. (2002). Place, Work, and Civic Agriculture: Common Fields for Cultivation. *Agriculture and Human Values* 19(3):317-324
- Dickinson College. (n.d.). Dickinson College Farm. <http://www.dickinson.edu/about/sustainability/college-farm/>, accessed May, 27 2012.
- Donahue, B. (1991). *Reclaiming the Commons: Community Farms and Forests in a New England Town*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Edible Schoolyard Project, (n.d.). The Edible Schoolyard Project. <http://edibleschoolyard.org/>, accessed May 27, 2012.
- EPA. (2012). Demographics, *Agriculture*. <http://www.epa.gov/oecaagct/ag101/demographics.html>. Accessed May 27, 2012. Updated May 24m 2012.
- Esteva, G., Prakash, M. S. (1998). *Beyond the individual self: regenerating ourselves*. Grassroots post-modernism: Remaking the soil of cultures (chapter 3). London: Zed Books/New York: St. Martins Press
- Expectations of a Bennington Education*. (n.d.), Bennington College. Retrieved from <http://www.bennington.edu/Students.aspx>
- Glaeser, B. (Eds.). (1987). *The green revolution revisited: Critique and alternatives*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Hassanein, Neva. (2003). *Practicing Food Democracy: Apragmatic Politics of Transformation*. *Journal of Rural Studies* 19:77-86.
- Light, A. (2001). "Elegy for a Garden: Thoughts on the urban environmental ethic" *Philisophical writings* 14: na.
- Lyson, T. A. (2000). Moving Toward CIVIC Agriculture. *Choices: The Magazine Of Food, Farm & Resource Issues*, 15(3), 42.
- Pollan, M. (2010). "The Food Movement, Rising" *The New York Review of Books*. ncssm.edu
- Purnell, F. (2010). A report on the new student garden summer 2010. (contact author for access)
- Reyes, E. (2010). Summer Garden Intern Final Report (contact author for access)
- Shiva, V. (1991). The green revolution in the Punjab. *The Ecologist*, 21(2), 57-60.
- Stechschulte, B. (Director) (2011). *Small farm rising* [Theater]
- Sustainability Committee. (2010). *Feedback Report for BSFP: Student Garden Project*.

Bennington College. (contact author for access)

Welsh, J., MacRae, R. (1998). Food citizenship and community food security: lessons from Toronto, Canada. *Canadian Journal of Developmental Studies*. 19(4), 237-255.