



FOOD FOR THOUGHT: THE HISTORY OF AGRICULTURE AT BENNINGTON COLLEGE

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Agricultural projects are increasingly popular on college campuses, and Bennington College is no exception. The Bennington Sustainable Food Project is currently attempting to grow the student garden of the past two years into a larger farm, but there have been other such endeavors in the past. These prior projects stand as important examples of the successes and failures of farm projects within the Bennington College culture. Understanding how such endeavors operated and why they ultimately ended is important information for future projects. However, real understanding of the attitudes of students, staff, and administration during the 1940s War Farm and the 1990s Community Farm at Bennington College are not common or accessible knowledge for those curious about such endeavors by the College. Before we can learn from these past projects, there must be a greater insight into how they functioned.

Having a sense of where one is growing food is important for a farmer; knowing whether the land worked has been farmed before tells something of the soil quality, and more obviously weather patterns, typical seasonal fluxes, and the composition of the soil determine what can be grown. In the college context, knowing the history of our land provides us with a different insight. Though selling produce is what sustains campus farm projects, the student farm is not one that is driven by profit. If there are weather events or other calamities that prevent the farm from supporting itself, students could seek out help from the administration; while we worry about late frosts and torrential downpours, students don't have to worry about the effects they might have on our livelihood. Maybe the soil and location of the farm isn't the best, but it suits our purposes.

While understanding the ecological context of our land is valuable, the cultural milieu more profoundly informs our present projects. We have the fortune to be situated in an institution of liberal education, where we have to do little other than engage our minds. This option was not so widely available in years past, and the history of the College land demonstrates that clearly. The

campus has a long history of agriculture, and before it was purchased as the estate of the wealthy Parks in the 1860s Bingham Hill was the site of modest farm houses and small farms. The War Farm of World War II was another act of farming out of a perceived need to do so; without the War Farm, the quality of life of the Bennington College community would have suffered. As a part of an educational institution, the Bennington community is a part of a philosophical lineage. Whether we'd like to admit it or not, by coming here we have elected to be a part of the place that, no matter the upheavals of the 1990s or other dramatic events, has changed dramatically evolved since its foundation. Part of this lineage is the very land that we are situated on; Bennington College would not be the same were it in another location, or had it developed differently. The placement of buildings, woods, and common spaces changes the interactions that people have with one another, and thus change the nature of a place.

The act of growing food is by no means separated from this structural lineage. Knowing the history of farming at Bennington College necessarily renews our perspective toward the land that we are attempting to cultivate. By engaging with the history of our environment, our understanding of it deepens. The significance of our own actions changes in response. Just as knowing the famous accomplishments of prior Bennington College students and faculty qualifies our educations, knowing the history of the land here generates a more profound theoretical perspective of our affiliation with the dirt.

Before the College

Plans to open a women's college in Bennington were formulated by Vincent Ravi Booth, the pastor of the Congregational Church in Old Bennington, in 1923. Over the next nine years, prior to the opening of the College in September of 1932, the College's location was an important topic of conversation. One of the College's earliest backers, James C. Colgate, had promised the founders 45 acres on Mt. Anthony. However, even before the collapse of the stock market, Colgate demonstrated growing doubts about the direction of the College by failing to attend trustee meetings. In December 1929, two months after the Wall Street crash, Colgate resigned as treasurer. In the summer of 1930 – only two years before the College was set to open – Colgate notified the trustees that he would not offer his property as the future campus. He was free to do so, as the offer was dependent on the trustees raising \$2.5 million by that fall. However, he stated that he could not take responsibility for the development of the College even under a recently revised financial plan developed by President Robert Leigh, and that by providing the property for the College would make him accountable for its imminent failure (Brockway 1981).

Luckily, Lila Jennings stepped in to offer 140 acres of her land near North Bennington. There were some ill effects of the switch: one donor withdrew a pledge of \$100,000 and smaller donors in Old Bennington withdrew theirs as well. Booth, who had hoped the College would enliven downtown Bennington, had to hope that the College could do so from a more remote location. But the change in location dramatically changed the agricultural context of the school and made possible the various farm and garden projects that would occur in the future (Brockway 1981).

Maps dating back to 1835 show that at the time, the land that would become Bennington College, called Bingham Hill, was primarily agricultural with three structures: the homes of Bingham

and Madden, which have since been demolished, and Shingle College (then the Edgerton House) which was built in 1775. A fourth farmhouse, then called Old Fasset House and now known as Cricket Hill, was constructed around 1840. Around 1860, Trenor Park purchased the Bingham Hill property. Park was a prominent lawyer who made his fortune in California real estate and mines, and in the construction of railroads in Vermont and Panama. He was married to Laura Hall, the daughter of Hiland Hall – at the time the governor of the Vermont. This marriage gives some indication of the wealth and status of the family and the area during the late 1800s. The Parks had three children; one of whom, Lila, married Frederick Jennings, a prominent investment attorney in New York City, in July of 1880. The couple inherited a third of the Park estate, and shortly after numerous buildings were constructed that are now used by the College – many of them with agricultural uses (Getty Proposal).

Many of these buildings were concentrated around what is now referred to as the Orchard. In 1885 a mansion was built at the top of Bingham Hill, which was replaced by Jennings Hall in 1903. The Deane Carriage Barn was constructed circa 1890 and also housed a root cellar. By 1900, a blacksmith shop, a carpenter shop, a milkman's house with the dairy in the cellar, a corn crib, a pig house, and a cow barn were all constructed. Although little is known of the amounts of livestock, produce, and grain produced, the existence of these buildings indicates that there was significant farming on the property. The Getty Report, compiled during a historical study of Bennington College in 2006, also states that products of the 1940s War Farm were situated where they had been historically which must reference the Jennings estate. This mention gives some indication of where certain crops were located on the estate. Crops were also grown in the Walled Garden, which was built in 1903. Apparently because they were better protected by the high walls, specialty products like peaches, peanuts, and cherries were grown there.

Around 1900, other farm buildings were constructed closer to the heart of what is now the Bennington campus. The chicken coop and brooder near the maintenance building were constructed during this time, and another chicken house, which has been renovated to become the East Academic Center, was also built. The barn was erected during this time as well, which housed cows and horses.

The War Farm

No doubt the biggest agricultural movement in Bennington College's history was the War Farm during World War II. Victory gardens, an idea that had begun at the end of World War I, began to be promoted with renewed enthusiasm in December of 1941, shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor (Miller 2003). The primary goal of such projects was to offset food sent to Europe to support civilians and United States soldiers, but in informational materials other goals were commonly listed (Miller 2003 and Weissman 2012). Victory Gardens were promoted in different forms: on the property of individuals, in community spaces, and also in schools. In February of 1942, just a few months after the strike on Pearl Harbor, the Governor's Commission on Education and the Civilian War Effort in Kansas released a pamphlet outlining the potential that Victory Gardens could have in the state's public schools. The four-page pamphlet lists five purposes of a Victory Garden:

1. To produce food for the consumption of families whose children raise it.
2. To furnish food for school lunches.
3. To give recreational activities to children and parents.
4. To cultivate an appreciation of the land and growing plants as fundamental to life.
5. To offer participation in the National Victory Program. (2)

While the war effort was mentioned lastly, the rest of the pamphlet addresses this goal with more emphasis. For instance, it states that, "From our farms and gardens, as well as from our mines and factories, come the munitions of victory against the oppression of dictators and the hunger which is their ally" (1). The bottom of the first page declares, in large, bold font: "VEGETABLES FOR VITAMINS FOR VICTORY." The document also promotes school gardens as a way for families or communities to start their own. The "good food" would lead to "good health and civilian morale." The beauty of the gardens was also stated as a potential benefit, in that they would benefit morale.

At the time of the attack on Pearl Harbor, the College was a community of about 270 students, 50 faculty members, and around 80 staff. Soon, students began asking what they could do to support the war effort and science faculty member Robert Woodworth suggested that, because food shortages would increase as more support was sent to Allied nations and American armed forces, the College should utilize its available agricultural lands to their full extent. The significance of the farm for the College was stated explicitly in different documents. In March of 1943, the Bennington College Bulletin presented an overview of the farm, its beginnings, and plans for the coming growing season. Subscriptions to the Bulletin were open to anyone who inquired, but presumably it was primarily sent to alumni, donors, and the families of those that attended the College; for these reasons, the farm project is presented in a very positive light, and the motivations for the farm are stated explicitly. The report on the farm states:

The farm project... is one aspect of the war program of Bennington College. The great importance for the war effort of utilizing all available resources of land and manpower in food production is so obvious as to require no elaboration here. Bennington College is fortunate in being in a position to make this direct contribution to the war production in addition to the more enduring contribution to the national life which is the permanent responsibility of the liberal arts college. (3)

A separate report by the farm manager in 1944 also points out that the farm “give[s] students the opportunity to be effective in contributing to the war effort in a way that would not conflict with their beliefs and loyalties.” For students that were not excited about supporting the war ideologically, the farm provided a way for them to support their own well-being as well as the College community’s. Still, the primary motivation for the farm was a profound sense of patriotism and duty during wartime. Later in the Bulletin, another benefit is mentioned: “An urban population, cut off from the soil and generally unacquainted with vegetables or meats except on store counters, misses one important phase of life” (15). Since many students at the time did come from urban

environments, the farm provided another kind of education (citation). The language of the documents that record the farm's history makes it obvious that educational motives were secondary to involvement in the war effort.

By 1942, the College had grown to the point that a substantial farm was realistic. The College had recently acquired 200 acres (40 of which were arable) from Lila Jennings' remaining estate, just prior to her death that July, for \$20,000. By February of 1942, Bennington College was taking stock of the agricultural products consumed by its community members annually as a manner of assessing how much could be offset by on-campus agriculture production. Soon, the College installed a 2,000 cubic foot quick freeze in Jennings so that the planned 17 acres of vegetables could be harvested and frozen at their prime. Two men from Maintenance were used on the farm part-time for heavy labor and the running of the machines, while the 400 college community members were expected to provide the majority of the farm labor. Plans for a root cellar were put into place, and construction began in the spring. When students returned to campus after Non-Resident Term, Woodworth put them to work planting 14,000 seedlings in the greenhouse attached to the science wing of the barn – tomato, broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, sweet pepper, celery. Plowing proved difficult because of a wet spring, but soon volunteers were seeding hardier crops and transplanting seedlings as the weather warmed. In late May President Jones announced that on June 7th the College would hold a Farm Day, when the whole college community would come out to clean up neglected farm buildings and clear fields of brush and rubble. In early June, the farm had planted 7 acres of potatoes, 6 of beans, 1 acre each of sweet corn, peas, green beans, winter squash, and another of miscellaneous vegetables.

From the beginning, it was apparent that there would be certain challenges in running a campus farm. As Woodworth mentions in his farm manager report, "It was perfectly clear to those

who thought about it that such a venture would not be efficient in any sense, but it was still considered worthy.” The initial excitement of the farm – in engaging in the war effort in a productive way – seemed to wane as the reality of running a farm set in. As Rebecca Stickney ’43 mentioned in a 2006 interview, “When it came to the community meeting to decide whether to do it or not everybody was very enthusiastic. And of course you know what happened; in the end it was a few people who did most of the work.” The Bulletin indicates that the reason for the lack of student volunteers on the was that the need for labor was not obvious to the campus community: “While some students responded enthusiastically and faithfully to the calls for labor, the need for such volunteer work was by no means apparent in the spring of 1942, and papers due seemed far more urgent than digging or planting” (7).

The lack of enthusiasm by students is well exemplified in comments by Stickney, as well as a number of troubled projects. In 2006, Stickney recounted:

There was one day when we had to take... hundreds (hundreds!) of little chickens, little baby chickens up to the brick garden where they could roam free instead of in the greenhouse which was attached at that point to the science wing of the barn. And we had to have a farm day which meant that classes were off and everybody needed to pitch in and do whatever needed to be done. And a lot of people didn't want to carry a chicken up to the garden. So a lot of students made quite a lot of money by saying, “Well alright I'll take your chickens but you're gonna owe me four bucks.”

Instead of valuing the farm labor as a legitimate contribution to the country's war effort, students were willing to pay others to do the labor for them. While many may have been enthusiastic about the project ideologically, when it came to the actual labor many simply did not care to do it and did much to avoid it.

Apart from the lack of student engagement, the farm suffered other issues in its first year. The College had a long inventory of farm equipment, some of which was inherited from the

Jennings' and dated back to before World War I. Some necessary equipment was missing and had to be improvised, while other machinery was in such disrepair that it had to be stopped and mended so often that the pace of work was slowed dramatically. For example, the old tractor lacked a cultivator, and so three horse cultivators were rigged to the tractor – requiring four men to complete a job which ordinarily could have been completed by one. Other unforeseen difficulties presented themselves, too. The root cellar proved to be a much more difficult project to achieve than had been originally anticipated; the combination of New England rocks and clay soils made it exceedingly difficult to dig the nine-foot hole, 42 feet by 22 feet. By July, very little progress had been made and the six or eight students that had stayed on over the summer were left to finish the project with men in Maintenance and their equipment. The weather presented further problems. Because of wet yet warm weather, the peas ripened quicker than anticipated and most were ready for harvest when only a few people were on hand to harvest the whole acre and freeze them in the ice cream freezer; the quick freeze plant, which was intended to be installed in April, was not ready for use until mid-August. By the time the plant was ready, all of the peas and spinach, most of the broccoli, and the best crops of chard and beans had passed and so could not be preserved for future use (Bulletin).

Despite these obstacles, the war farm still produced and preserved enough vegetables that it met 50% of the kitchen vegetable needs for the entire school year. As the farm continued, many of the issues of the first year were resolved and the program continued to grow. The majority of equipment was either repaired or replaced, and the calendar was adjusted with less than a month-long break during the summer so that more people were on campus during the growing season and the pea problem would not occur again (the change also offset heating costs and more oil use in the cold winter months). The adjustment also meant that more food could be consumed soon after

being harvested instead of having to preserve it for the coming semesters. The root cellar and the quick freeze plant were both constructed already, and so the infrastructure of food storage and preservation were not major projects. Instead, the farm could focus all energies on growing food. In 1943 and 1944, the farm grew to 100 acres, meaning that a quarter of campus was being cultivated. The farm also began raising livestock. In 1943, over three thousand tons of chicken were preserved in the quick freeze – all of which had to be hand plucked. In 1944 they were moved to the cow barn, but the cats that had formerly been controlling the rats had to be removed so they would not eat the chicks as well. Later it was discovered that over half of the chicks had been killed by rats. Only half as many chickens were frozen as in 1943, but the College had acquired a machine to pluck the chickens, rather than rely on student hand work. In 1943, the farm raised pigs and preserved over two tons of pork. In 1944, the College bred their own pigs, but the sows and boar were sold in the summer because the price of pork did not warrant feeding them over the winter and there was no room in the freezer. In the fall, as Woodworth writes “student interest in farm work dropped almost to zero,” the pork operation was abandoned altogether. Beef production also began in 1943. The project was exceedingly expensive because of the high cost of concentrated feed and because the calves suffered respiratory problems. Still, four tons was frozen once the steers had reached maturity in 1944 – a great luxury considering the scarcity of beef during the war (Farm Manager Report).

Throughout the three primary years of the farm’s operation, the principal problem was student labor. Numerous systems were implemented in an attempt to involve more students, but ultimately none of them were successful. In her report on the farm project, Farm Council secretary Mary Walsh detailed these myriad methods. Initially, the requirement was that each student would spend two hours each week working on the farm. But during the first term, there was no way to

determine whether or not students had actually attended their assigned shifts – based on free time listed on their student schedules – and the labor program became a volunteer system by the end of the spring of 1942. In the fall, squads of student workers were organized. Squad leaders were appointed to direct individuals, who were then expected to contribute five hours per week to farm labor. The squad organization did little to improve the commitment of students. During the winter, faculty member John Lydenburg took on organizing student labor and spent the time away from campus carefully organizing labor “based on a requirement of five hours weekly for each student into the individual programs. The required contribution of each student was broken down into two hour and three hour periods to suit the convenience of each student.” The squad system continued, and specific students were chosen to feed and care for the animals. Lydenburg also directed the field work and did the clerical work associated with the farm. Walsh concludes that, “unquestionably this was the most successful semester of the farm program although the student response failed to fill the outlined requirements of the program.”

By the end of term Lydenburg was overwhelmed, and suggested the formation of a student Farm Council to relieve him of creating policies and doing all of the clerical work. Thus, the students elected a farm council of five students and two faculty representatives. Walsh states the purpose of the farm council was: “to take an active part in planning farm activity, in educating the student body as to the aims and progress of the farm program, and to serve as a clearing house for all problems arising on individual squads and in the community as a whole, with regard to the farm program.” The only change in labor policy in the spring of 1943 was that the student Farm Council did the secretarial work, and that reports were made by squad leaders about each individual’s participation and cooperation. These were submitted along with class reports to the students’ counselors and advisors. Rules were established and enforced to promote regular attendance, and students could

only officially evade farm work with a written note from the nurse or alternative patriotic service (i.e. working for the Red Cross). Even with these measures, student attendance was low and, though everything was harvested and stored or preserved, the majority of the work was done by a handful of the students. After the continued failure of students to perform their allotted labor, Lydenburg resigned from the farm council and did not organize student labor. Mary Walsh herself was appointed by the College president to coordinate students, and a more liberal policy without reports was instated. Problems became apparent, and it was decided that notices would be sent weekly to counselors reporting student absences. This decision became such a clerical nightmare that the Farm Council members were putting in twenty to thirty hours of work per week. Members resigned as a result. It was thus decided that student labor would be completely voluntary, which did nothing to increase participation. After trying techniques of “propaganda, enticement, and every other imaginable scheme,” the farm council was forced to rely on the small group of students who put in their weekly two hours.

Ultimately, the severe lack of student volunteer labor led to the loss of faith by the Farm Council that the farm could continue in future seasons. In September of 1944, the Farm Council wrote to President Jones: “It has been impossible to operate a successful farm program dependent upon student labor. Therefore the Farm Council recommends that the community farm program be discontinued.” The recommendation was supported by George Lundberg, the faculty advisor of the Farm Council. He wrote:

I have no objection to the recommendation if it has been so voted by the Council. It probably is not true that it is impossible to operate without student labor; it just doesn't work well without a different type of organization making considerable use of psychological coercion. Also, there may be other and even better reasons for discontinuing the project. These should be noted by the administration in reporting its decision.

The farm, though, did not end in 1944. It was, however, significantly downsized to include only potatoes and corn – both of which require “minimal hand work,” according to Woodworth’s 1944 report – as well as high quality hay in other fields. Of student involvement during the 1945 season, Woodworth wrote: “There will be no attempt to make farm work available to every student but at times when help is needed anyone interested may feel free to join in this much simpler food production program”. Ultimately, the College resigned to a lack of interest on the part of the student body and the ambitiousness of the farm project was abandoned for reality of a lack of commitment.

A lack of student labor was not the only problem that the farm was still dealing with. In the 1944 farm manager report, Woodworth wrote:

Probably the most unexpected outcome of the farm program was the unprecedented amount of criticism, almost entirely unfavorable, which was voiced by everyone toward everyone else; varying from reproof of the college administration for failure to insist that all students do their stint of farm work to disdain for the for the farm manager for not knowing the ‘right’ way to plant peas.

Even if the farm project was one of mutual frustration, there is evidence that whatever collective effort was present did improve the overall quality of life for the college community. In September of 1945, [Mrs.] Cooke, the aptly named Director of Dining Halls and Residences, took a trip to other colleges in the region to see how their services were being affected by the war. She visited Middlebury, the University of Vermont, Goddard, and Dartmouth, where she found that conditions there were generally worse than at Bennington College. She noted that dormitories and other campus buildings had been neglected, storerooms had been depleted, and there was little or no meat. These were apparent to some extent at Bennington, but here the kitchens had not become so desperate as to use the labor of high school students and elderly women. Cooke also wrote that

three directors of dining services were “just leaving,” apparently due to “health breaking under the strain of war conditions.” In conclusion, she wrote:

I am satisfied that we have not let students or faculty down and I am sure we have much to be grateful for here at Bennington. Our Quick Freeze, of course, saved our situation. Without it I am sure we would have been in real trouble. I found the trip quite advantageous and exchanging ideas I found to be quite helpful. I came back with greater confidence in myself as Director and with the feeling that we are better set up to start off a post war period than most places.

The Quick Freeze, of course, was primarily used to preserve produce coming straight from the fields, so Cooke is referring to the assistance of the farm in the maintenance of the diets and general well-being of the campus community. Even for all of his comments on the difficult aspects of running the farm, Woodworth stated that, “Far more food was produced than was thought likely at the beginning and the students had ample opportunity for farm work.” Given that these accomplishments were the principal goals of the farm when it began, the war farm could be deemed successful overall. However, there are vital lessons to be learned from a more profound understanding of the relationship of students to the farm.

Often, when discussing current projects, the Sustainable Food Project collectively laments that a little more support from the administration or faculty could improve the overall success of the endeavor. And yet in the war farm we see an example in which much of the administration, faculty, and staff invested tremendously in a project that ultimately left a bitter taste. Most students wanted little to do with the farm, or held that their time could be used better doing something else. I do not wish to blame students for valuing their academics over farm work – their families were paying what was considered a tremendous amount of money for their education. Still, why students were disinclined to contribute even two hours of farm labor a week – a pretty small amount – is a question that begs some investigation.

In working on this project, I have had a number of conversations with current students about their impressions of the War Farm. Almost all respond enthusiastically, noting that the decision by the administration to turn a quarter of campus into food production was a positive, progressive one that could be imitated today for the benefit of the College and the students. This sentiment, I believe, stems from present-day notions of sustainability, where local food and self-subsistence are heralded as the best means of decreasing environmental impact. While a college farm is no doubt valuable and one of large enough size could really change the purchasing of the dining services, students speak without understanding the pitfalls of the war farm program.

Surely, knowledge of the rhetoric and motivations behind the farm might influence the way that current students view it. Instead of an experiment in sustainable subsistence, the farm's main motivation was a sense of patriotic duty. Exemplifying this aspect of the farm is that students could be relieved from farm work if they were contributing to the war effort in some other way, such as volunteering at the hospital or for the Red Cross. Students presently are philosophically opposed to military conflict and so a farm viewed in terms of patriotic duty rather than sustainable inclinations would be generally less attractive.

Another aspect of the war farm that is crucial to the current view of the program is the supposed sustainability. Present-day farms at liberal arts colleges are not generally associated with environmental degradation or mistreatment of livestock, but the war farm was not completely free from these issues. As Woodworth wrote in his farm report, "The fields which have been cropped have been thoroughly worked and heavily fertilized and limed and when they are converted to meadow land with new seeding will be in much better condition than heretofore [sic]." He also mentions the concentrated feeding of the cattle, which is neither environmentally responsible nor especially considerate of the life of the animal. As mentioned previously, without such efforts the

lifestyle of the college community would have suffered, and so perhaps all of these efforts were worth it. But in hindsight, perhaps the College could have provided for students just as well with half of the cattle or a crop rotation of some kind.

Ultimately, there is a lot of misunderstanding expressed in the attitude through which the College community discusses the War Farm. While the images that it produced are romantic and the prospect of a farm of such size on campus intriguing, the romance disappears with the knowledge of dispassionate students and less-than-ideal farm practices. Often, the scale of production of the War Farm is expressed as the unattainable goal of current farm projects. Achieving such a volume of production for campus consumption would have an actual effect on the college food system and (hopefully) sustainability. Still, closer examination of how such a project might be organized and potential reactions to endeavors of that scale are useful in informing our ideals and future goals.

The Community Farm at Bennington

College

It does not necessarily seem natural that, after fifty years, Bennington College would decide to start farming again. The College had gone through waves of cultural changes, gone coed, and gone broke. The focus and fame of the College lay in the arts, rather than sciences or environmental studies. There was no pressing need to produce the College's own food, as there was during World War II. The College was, however, going through an identity crisis, and desperately trying to recreate its public image, campus culture, and community structure.

In the spring of 1993, the Board of Trustees initiated a process known as the Symposium, during which time they solicited feedback about Bennington's future from all members of the campus community. Their stated intention was to receive comments from every faculty member, every student, every staff member, every alumna and alumnus, and friends of the College regarding particular issues and their solutions; in the end, over 600 people had given their input. The reason for drastically reconsidering the organization and programs of the College was, as President Elizabeth Coleman stated in a 1994 interview with the *New York Times Magazine*, that, "Bennington had grown mediocre over time," and became known only as the most expensive college in the country (Edmunson 1994). The College was broke and, the Symposium Report contends, headed towards closure without drastic intervention and reformulation. As a result, the College fired 25 faculty members in favor of teacher-practitioners, abolished tenure, and got rid of academic departments.

But the Symposium also accomplished other things. While the media focus and popular

memory recall the firing of professors and the abolition of tenure - no doubt thanks to a case filed by the fired teachers that was ultimately settled out of court - the Symposium was the result of many conversations, and many different solutions to the College's challenges emerged. For one, the school took a renewed interest in environmental studies, in part due to a stated intent, "to emphasize the connection between the pursuit of one's own work and the well-being of one's community," (Symposium Report 1994, p. 12). Part of this new emphasis on the College's ecology, as stated in the Symposium Report, was "the re-establishment of the College's farm, started in World War II, but undertaken in the coming decade as an experiment in sustainable agriculture," brought up by ecology professor Kerry Woods during the Symposium conversations (p. 26). Not only was the College going to have a farm again, but the Board of Trustees philosophically made the link to the War Farm of so many years earlier. This reference makes farming seem a natural progression of Bennington's ethos and the cultural tradition of the College. To some extent it may be: situated on agricultural land, the College is in a prime position to make use of its resources and produce its own food, encouraging experiential learning in the process. Simultaneously, however, the War Farm and the 1990s farm are distinct in their motivations, and separated by 50 years of cultural change at the College. In a March 1996 grant application to the Vermont Community Foundation, the goals of the farm were comprehensively list as to:

- fulfill the College's dream to utilize its land and agricultural heritage
- offer students and the community an opportunity to learn, in a participatory way, the value of land stewardship
- experience and explore the cultural, geographical, and environmental context in which the College is situated
- provide high quality College-grown sustainable food to the student dining halls
- offer opportunities for students interested in agricultural systems to work as interns
- develop a growing link between the farm and the curriculum through tutorials and research projects in agricultural, ecological, and economic disciplines.

The grant application also expressed hopes for the farm to partner with Mount Anthony High School to act as a research farm for the high school students, and to team with Head Start, Vermont Arts Exchange, and the College's Early Childhood Center to provide education opportunities to younger children. The Community Farm also intended to act as a demonstration farm - the first in the region - to disseminate information to area farmers.

To bring the farm to fruition, an advisory board was organized, comprising college staff, faculty, students, and community members. In 1996, the farm's first season, the board was comprised of former Vermont State Senator Mary Ann Carlson, Sally Dodge Mole (who was the head of the now-defunct Vermont Community Agriculture Center), as well as ecology professor Kerry Woods and Special Assistant to the President Joan Goodrich. They placed an advertisement in the newspaper looking for a manager for the college farm, and in January of 1996 Emily Hunter was hired. She was compensated with housing, benefits, and a salary of roughly \$20,000. Hunter grew up in Vermont, but spent time in the Midwest completing undergraduate and graduate programs. From the other candidates who applied, Hunter's skills and personality seemed to especially fit the new farm program and Bennington College (from personal correspondence with Goodrich 11/26/2012). The intentions of the farm were threefold: to reach out to the greater Bennington area through a Community Supported Agriculture program, to provide a forum for student research, and to promote environmental sustainability on campus.

Whereas there are now over 12,000 Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) projects in the United States and nearly 200 in Vermont, the numbers were much smaller when the Community Farm at Bennington College was established (USDA NASS). In 1996, there were only 635 CSA farms nationally, with about a dozen in Vermont and two others in Bennington County (Galt, et al. 2011 and Paine 1996). Had Bennington College successfully established a CSA program, it would have

been on the cusp of what has turned into a huge national movement. CSAs can be organized in innumerable ways, but generally “members” pay a lump sum in the spring for a weekly “share” of goods from the farm. CSAs are most popular on farms that grow a diverse variety of vegetables, but can also contain meat, eggs, honey, and other products. The reasoning behind such a model is that farmers get more funds at beginning of the season, when little income is coming into the farm but there are the most expenses (seeds, equipment, compost, etc). Philosophically, this arrangement links the consumer with the success or failure of the farm; they pay the same amount for any amount of food that they may receive, be there a drought or a bumper crop. If there are a lot of zucchinis (as there so often are), the CSA members will receive a lot of zucchinis. If the tomatoes get late blight, then there will be no more ripe tomatoes for the members that season. More than only buying farm products, CSA members are investing in local agriculture and local farmers. CSAs are also often lauded with generating a greater sense of community between farmers and their consumers, in part because of the financial relationship but also because of greater social interaction between the two groups. Socializing might occur when members are picking up their shares, work on the farm, attend community events like potlucks, and myriad other potential exchanges.

The College decided on the CSA model for two primary reasons. The first was that they hoped that it would help the farm to become self-sufficient. While the College supported the farm fiscally for the entirety of its run, the goal was to eventually grow to financial self-sufficiency. Utilizing the CSA model would ideally ensure income on the farm, and the retention of CSA members would ensure the next year’s income as well. The farm advisory board figured that about seventy-five members would be needed to sustain the farm financially (from personal correspondence with Goodrich 11/26/2012). The other reason that the model was chosen was to

try to connect the College with the surrounding community. The idea was that the neighbors of the College and others in the town could source their vegetables from the Community Farm, and that by mutually depending on one another (community members for food, the College for farm funding) a better, more tight-knit relationship would form between all parties involved. The relationship between the town of Bennington and the College is notoriously strained, and often rife with animosity. By working on the farm and attending farm potlucks, CSA members would also interact with College students and staff socially, further promoting better relations.

In 1996, the first season of the Community Farm, a full share of the CSA cost \$300, and a half share cost \$175. Working shares were also available, for \$225 for a whole share and \$138 for a half share. Members who purchased working shares were expected to work twenty hours throughout the growing season, and most who chose these shares completed the hours expected of them. Working members generally scheduled a time to come every week, though that system tended to disintegrate once the school year started and members tended to work more towards the end of the growing season. Along with two of the working members, Hunter produced three newsletters to distribute with the CSA shares. The newsletter included a note from Hunter, information about the farm, and often a recipe. The season was punctuated with dinners for CSA members in the spring and the fall. In the first season, 25 shares were purchased and a total of 32 individuals received produce from the farm. Seven members purchased full shares, and seven others purchased working shares. Nine of the CSA members were somehow associated with the College, and the other 16 were purchased by a variety of people living in Pownal, Bennington, North Bennington, and Shaftsbury.

The share prices at the Community Farm were moderately lower than those at the other CSAs in the county. As reported in the *Bennington Banner* on April 22, 1996, Someday Farm in East

Dorset offered a full share for \$330 and a two-thirds share for \$219. In Arlington, Long Roads Farm's full share cost \$325 and an individual share was \$200. Long Roads Farm also offered working shares, lowering the price to \$275 for full shares and \$150 for individual shares. Hunter wrote in her 1999 report that the CSA had 31 members, which was comparable to the other CSA farms of similar ages in the area. Still, the Community Farm consistently failed to meet its membership goals.

While such early use of the CSA model is compelling enough, looking at the context of the Community Farm as a campus farm is interesting as well. Over ninety college campuses in the U.S. have a campus farm or garden. While this includes the land grant universities created as a result of the Morrill Act of 1862, most of these farms have started since 1995 - especially at liberal arts colleges (Barlett 2011). In Vermont, such projects started even later; the Middlebury College Organic Garden wasn't established until 2003, even with its especially pronounced culture of environmentalism. The flourish of farm projects reflects a heightened concern for sustainable agriculture specifically and sustainability in general (Sayre 2011). These programs typically fulfill a variety of roles: classroom and experiential teaching and training, a farm or another site for that learning, and a direct marketing strategy - usually a CSA. The Community Farm fits nicely into this trajectory, but whereas the current Bennington Sustainable Food Project and Purple Carrot Farm are coming late to the movement of campus farm, the Community Farm was spearheading the movement. Even if it didn't strike the College as revolutionary in this way - from the literature, infrastructure, and name of the farm, we see that the focus was on community outreach - the Community Farm came at the very beginning of a lasting movement. This early start has interesting implications. Rather than trying to "catch up" and learn from other campuses across the country, Bennington's farm could have - were it successful - stood as a model for other schools in the region and the country. Very few, if any, colleges of Bennington's size and focus have

successful, established campus agriculture programs. Had the College made the Community Farm work, perhaps the model and knowledge could have assisted in the implementation of other projects.

Although it was one of the first projects of its kind in Vermont, the Community Farm noted some other operations that served as examples of successful CSAs and campus agricultural projects. For models of successful CSA projects, the College investigated Caretaker Farm in Williamstown, MA, Someday Farm in Manchester, VT, and Genesis Farm in New Jersey. Campus farms at Dartmouth College, University of Vermont, Hampshire College, and Wilson College were named as specific examples of campus projects that the College considered. The Smokey House Project in Danby, VT, which brings at-risk youth to a 5,000 acre property to engage in agriculture and forestry projects, also served as inspiration (<http://www.smokeyhouse.org/>).

The Community Farm kicked off with only two acres in vegetable production, though the College set aside twenty acres for the farm to grow into. The farm needed an estimated \$25,700, primarily for equipment costs, steps taken to restore land fertility, and constructing the farm stand. Because the farm could not offer very many CSA shares in the first year, it was especially dependent on funding from the College. It also applied for a grant with the Vermont Community Foundation for \$5,000, but the funds were not awarded. The farm also raised \$10,000 from alumni and individuals before the first season. Although it needed significant economic assistance to begin, the goal was for the farm to become economically independent within five years. No students were hired during the spring, so labor costs beyond Hunter's were minimal. A summer intern was hired, but she was reimbursed with room and board rather than an hourly wage or stipend. Once students returned in the fall, a few were hired to assist with the harvest.

Although growing crops on new land is always a challenge, the cool summer of 1996 made

the Community Farm's first year especially trying. The summer was very wet with lower than normal solar radiation, an environment conducive for plant pathogens and fungi. There was also only one small application of manure before the start of the growing season, and even with other fertilizer inputs the crops had a difficult time. Even so, Hunter reported that most members were satisfied with their shares and indicated that they would return the following year. Only \$210 worth of produce was sold to the dining hall, however, far below the goal that the farm had set. Hunter explains that there was "too much of too few crops" for the produce to be useful to the dining hall during the summer months. Summer squashes were by far the most plentiful crop with over a thousand pounds grown (you read that right), followed by cucumbers (about 800 pounds), tomatoes (about 600 pounds), and lettuces (332 cases were sold through the CSA, and seven cases went to the food service). A host of other crops were grown as well, totalling around forty different varieties. There were likely more than one variety of some crops grown (multiple kinds of tomato or kale, for example), indicating an incredible diversity in such a small area.

Some members of the farm community were concerned about food waste. While Hunter mentions that a few members often failed to pick up their weekly share and thus wasted their vegetables, for the most part excess farm produce was able to be captured. On three occasions during the summer, Hunter delivered excess summer squash and cucumbers to the Bennington Meals-on-Wheels program and also to the Harvest House soup kitchen. In 1997, a power supply was hooked up to the farmstand, and refrigeration decreased the amount of wasted produce. Other suggestions included raising pigs to consume the excess crops, giving the produce to members for distribution to families that they knew were in need, setting up a delivery system to alleviate the need for members to come to the farm at a particular day at time, and selling to local restaurants or

health food stores. In addition to produce, the farm also grew cut flowers to be included in the CSA shares, as well as a variety of herbs.

In line with the educational goals of the Community Farm, a number of youth groups visited the farm. A group of 12 year-olds from the Farm and Wilderness Camps came during the summer and picked rocks, mulched the crops, and painted the farmstand. A group of summer camp students at the Vermont Arts Exchange constructed sculptures for the farm. Students from the July Program, a summer day camp that the College ran at the time, made some flowers beds and an entrance to the perennial section of the farm. Children from the Early Childhood Center came to the farm a few times throughout the summer, and especially enjoyed looking for worms, hunting for gourds, and seeing how the farmstand functioned. As has happened in the last few years, freshmen orientation allowed for incoming students to come and work on the farm. Four students went to work with Hunter, and they moved rocks, prepared a perennial bed, and planted 48 sage plants. They ate dinner together afterward. Hunter also participated in events during Parents' Weekend and a Reunion. In addition to the immediate outreach that Hunter coordinated with area youth, she also participated in a number of classes and workshops that connected her to other farmers. The Community Farm was profiled in a number of *Bennington Banner* articles in 1996, and Hunter was interviewed on the radio. This media attention generated a few requests for information, and hopefully a few new members.

Although he was not involved in the operations of the farm directly, Jason Fridley '97 used part of the fields for his senior thesis, which compared corn and bean intercropping versus monoculture planting and the success of weed communities. He was the first Bennington student to use the farm in such a way, and it was hoped that other students would conduct research in the fields in the future. Fridley remembers being excited that Hunter was hired and that the school

would be operating a farm of its own (from personal correspondence with Fridley, 11/24/2012).

Even given the difficult weather during the 1996 season, Joan Goodrich's performance evaluation in December is overwhelmingly positive. In it, she praises Hunter "eas[ing] gracefully into the College community." Hunter had a lot of tasks to accomplish by herself during the late winter and spring - shed design, budget, CSA recruiting, seed selection, etc - and Goodrich writes: "These were all accomplished with a seamlessness and because of your talent at handling the inevitable but vexing obstacles of weather, bureaucracy, and everyone's busy schedules." Goodrich expresses that all of the students hired to work on the farm were eager to join again during the spring, and reported that their time on the farm was a learning experience, "a real testament to how well [Hunter] supervised, taught, and organized," their time on the farm. Other than expected goals for the farm (like working towards financial solvency), the only criticism expressed in the evaluation is lateness to meetings.

After her first season working on the farm, Hunter outlined a number of goals for the future growth of the farm. The first was to become a producer of organic grain on a larger scale, not only for animal feed but also to sell to bakeries in the Bennington community or for use on campus. Hunter also hoped to add a team of oxen on the farm. Oxen would serve three purposes: they would provide manure for the farm instead of it having to be purchased, they would be used for tilling the vegetable fields, and also to appeal to more students. Ideally oxen wouldn't be the only livestock at the Community Farm, as Hunter also wanted to add some pasture animals, like chickens or sheep. She also hoped to care for the trees in the old orchard. Hunter recognized that some of these projects, like the livestock and the grain, would require more financial support from the College for equipment.

Perhaps in an attempt to make up for the previous summer, the 1997 season was hot and

dry. Farms in the Bennington area had to reconcile twenty days without rain in June and another sixteen without rain in August, suffering moderate to severe drought. The Community Farm received less than three inches of rain each month, and less than two in June. As a result, some crops failed completely, while others were stunted. The rain also created a fertilization problem, because even though the crops were side-dressed with fertilizers, the dry soil conditions made them unavailable for crop uptake. Crops were also rotated to a different part of the farm, so they were again growing on virgin land. A potato leafhopper outbreak devastated potato and dry bean yields. A few new perennial crops were added to farm, including two varieties of raspberries, asparagus, and five hazelnut bushes. Hunter started experimenting with grains, and working to revive the orchard.

Despite the hopes and efforts of the CSA, it shrunk instead of growing during the 1997 season. Only the equivalent of 13.5 full shares were sold, compared to 16 in 1996. Part of this may be due to more members splitting shares amongst friends instead of purchasing a share for each individual, which Hunter mentions was happening. A canning share was added as an option, at the request of a 1996 member. It included excess of particular crops that could be turned into pickles or preserves. Only one member purchased a canning share. Most new members were obtained through word of mouth, although Hunter actively tried to reach out into the community. Brochures were placed at several locations around town, and there was a cover photo in the *Bennington Banner* (although there was little information accompanying it). Part of a public radio drive included a prize of two weeks of produce from a local CSA, and a woman from Manchester won shares from the Community Farm. Hunter wrote that the recipient expressed interest in returning the following year. The Community Farm also received some advertising through the Department of Agriculture, which published a list of Vermont CSAs.

Labor on the Community Farm was distributed more or less the same way as it had been in 1996, with Hunter and student employees doing the vast majority of the labor. Of the seven CSA members that purchased working shares, five completed all of the required hours. Six students were hired to help prepare the farm in the spring, five of which had working with Hunter during the harvest in the fall. Two summer interns were hired, rather than just one, and were again compensated with room and board. During one week before the start of the school year, the interns had to move out of their housing and so were paid hourly. The interns had more responsibility on the farm than in 1996, if only because Hunter was pregnant and her daughter was born during the season. This resulted in some confusion, with dining services deliveries, for example, but for the most part the farm continued smoothly. Hunter mentions in her end of year report that contracts with the interns would be important in future years, primarily to outline the appropriate timing and length of vacations.

In addition to the youth that visited the farm, which continued, there were a number of community outreach programs that were new in 1997. During the winter months of 1997, the Community Farm and a local gardening club sponsored a lecture by aptly-named Bennington alumnus Jo Ann Gardner about gardening with herbs and other perennials. The event was very well received, and the hope was that it would be another way to reach out to potential new members in addition to connecting with the community in general. Other outreach programs included inviting John Williamson, the farmer at State Line Farm in North Bennington, to grow some sweet sorghum at the Community Farm to be turned into syrup. During Parents' Weekend, Hunter lead an apple cider making activity, and brought a farmer and her team of oxen to the farm to do a draft power demonstration.

The report for the 1998 season is much shorter and less descriptive than for the first two

seasons, but still lends plenty of important information. The spring was cold and wet, and the construction of the new houses made Hunter concerned that more drainage issues would ensue. She proposed a number of costly solutions, like constructing a diversion ditch, deepening the pond, or digging a new one. CSA membership increased tremendously, from 13.5 full share equivalents in 1997 to 24. The farm board hoped to have 23 full equivalents, and so 1998 represents the first (and only) time that the Community Farm exceeded its CSA membership goals. Hunter notes that the increase in CSA members meant a lot more labor for the farm staff, and that more labor would need to be hired as the CSA grew. She suggested offering a full or half share in exchange for labor, and noted that the working members could not really be relied on to meet the farm's labor needs.

A few new products were added to the farm, to the delight of CSA members. The farm started raising chickens, which turned out to be a profitable enterprise even though the hens weren't very productive. Hunter describes the chickens as "free fertilizer," as long as the sales from the eggs covered the costs of raising them. The Community Farm was purchasing manure and bagged fertilizer, and so the chickens were seen as a potential money saver. Hunter brings up the issue of winter housing and care for the chickens, but it isn't clear how that was ultimately resolved. Eggs were sold for \$1.25 a dozen, and CSA members said that they were willing to pay more. Local honey was also included in the CSA during the 1998 season.

In addition to the CSA, the Community Farm was earning money in a few other ways. The farm continued to sell produce to the dining hall, but in 1998 they again fell short of their goal by about half, only selling \$529.99 to the food service. The farm also received a grant of \$350 from the Fund for North Bennington to organize an after school garden club for students of the North Bennington Graded School. The USDA sent \$726 to the farm, although Hunter understood that they were going to be receiving \$1000. She was told to expect the amount received from the USDA to

continue to decrease. The farmstand brought in \$247.12, though it is unknown how often it was open. Hunter also made unfruitful trips to the farmers' market. An additional \$77 came in from crops (14 pounds of garlic and 21 pounds of broccoli) bartered with an area farmer. All of these numbers, though, were dwarfed by the \$7643 reaped by the CSA memberships.

There were a few other small changes to the farm in 1998. A greenhouse was donated to the Community Farm, but a way to heat it was not established. As a result, the farm continued to start its plants in the greenhouses at Clear Brook Farm in Shaftsbury and transferring them to the one at the College when they were mature enough or the weather was less severe, or when Clear Brook ran out of space to sponsor the transplants. The idea for a diversified grass plot was also conceived, and the project came into fruition in 1999.

In the fall of 1998, there was apparent controversy over whether or not Hunter could teach classes at the College in response to a request she submitted to regularly teach a tutorial. She taught one in the spring of 1997, titled "Current Agricultural Topics." Hunter was obviously well-versed in agricultural issues, not only as the manager of the Community Farm, but also because of her completion of a masters program at Iowa State University in Crop Production and Physiology. Kerry Woods and Joan Goodrich wrote letters to the Academic Policies Committee (APC) supporting Hunter's request to teach a regular class. Goodrich's was especially glowing:

She has been working with students since she arrived, and the response to the Farm and to Emily has exceeded our expectations... Each year - among students and among applicants [for the summer internship] - the interest increases, not just in the Farm, but in the areas of agriculture and horticulture. It would be advantageous to respond to that enthusiasm by offering a more academic approach than farmwork.

Ultimately, the APC approved the course and it was offered in the spring of 1999.

The 1999 season was particularly plentiful, and Hunter writes in her report that CSA members remarked that their half shares felt more like full shares. Tomatoes, potatoes, and

peppers, which struggled in 1998, did exceptionally well. This was in part due to a warm summer, over-planting to compensate for potential losses, and a new type of “plastic mulch” that the farm used. But it also had to do with increased efficiency in the field and at the farm stand. Soil fertility, by this time, had also improved dramatically as compared to the first year.

This is not to say that the season was without its issues; irrigation was especially challenging and at times transplants had to be watered via a tank in the back of a truck. Drainage also continued to be an issue, but that was set to resolve with a new drainage plan as a part of the construction of the new houses. Because the farm continued to purchase manure from outside sources, the introduction of new weed seeds persisted. Cover cropping practices helped to abate the issue, and also acted to further improve soil fertility.

The CSA increased in 1999 to 31 members, a 30% increase. This fell short of the farm’s goal of 35 members, however. Growth and size were comparable to other CSAs of about the same age. A total of 58 families were involved, and 17 working shares were sold. By 1999, the price of farm shares had increased. A half share cost \$185, a full share \$310, a half working share \$145, and a full working share \$238.

The increase in CSA membership also meant an increase in needed labor. The harvesting capacity was taxed “to the limit”, and although produce was delivered to dining services in a timely manner, CSA pick ups were often chaotic. A third, quarter-time position was added to the labor force. A student was hired for the position, and was compensated with a half-share of produce. Nine students were hired in the spring and the fall. Hunter proposed adding another paid half-time employee for the 2000 season, for someone to help supervise field work. Contracts with student workers continued to be a problem, as students often missed an unacceptable amount of work.

One student worker had several other jobs, and so missed too much farm work or was too tired to work efficiently when present.

As usual, there were other small events and projects on the farm. Clear Brook Farm donated money towards the purchase of a heater for the greenhouse, as the Community Farm was outlasting its welcome starting transplants there. A winter speaker was planned as usual, and professor Kerry Woods gave a talk at Mount Anthony High School called, "What Did the Irish Eat Before Columbus?", about historically important food crops. Farm and community members attended, and two new CSA members signed up in response to the event. The chicken program intended to expand, but of the three dozen chicks that the farm ordered, only five of the all hen brood were, in fact, hens. The roosters had to be given away, and so even though the farm raised the price of eggs to \$1.80 per dozen, the project was unprofitable. The farm also received \$150 from the National Wildlife Foundation's Campus Ecology program to establish a native grass nursery on campus. Twelve of the twenty species were planted by the VAPA parking lot and were tended to by a Dartmouth student that was living in North Bennington for the summer. The eight other species were to be purchased and planted in the spring of 2000. Hunter continued to teach a group tutorial, titled "Sustainable Agriculture and Farming in the US." In the farm report, She mentions complaints about the workload and lackluster discussions, but the Student Educational Policies Committee evaluations by students were very positive and praised Hunter's efforts and abilities. Hunter was also interviewed on the local radio station about the farm, and offered a week's share of produce to CAT-TV's annual fundraising event. Extra produce was also donated to the Bennington-Rutland Opportunity Council.

Details from 2000 and 2001 are more difficult to navigate because there are no available farm reports for those years. The issue is confounded by the many documents in the archives that

are without a date, including CSA membership lists. In 2000, 38.5 full share equivalents were sold, but only \$255.34 worth of produce was sold to the dining services. After the 2000 season, Hunter produced a document of new farm scenarios apparently in an effort to make the project economically self-sufficient. Proposals included keeping the CSA running more or less as it had, making the CSA smaller and emphasizing sales to dining services, or dropping the CSA and focusing only on food service. This rough document also notes that over sixty students had been involved with the farm by the end of the 2000 season: eight from tutorials, ten as summer employees, forty as student workers during the term, and one field researcher in the first year. The cost of the CSA rose in 2000 to \$191 for a half share, \$320 for a full share, \$150 for a working half share, and \$245 for a working full share.

In April of 2001, the College released an employment advertisement for a field manager, which Hunter mentioned in her 1999 farm report. The position was full-time from May until September, and required farm experience. The position was filled by Thomas Wiehl, a Bennington student who had experience working on the farm at the Putney School in Putney, Vermont. Perhaps because he was a student, his work started June 4th and continued through the end of August.

	1999	2000	2001	2002
Farm Expenses				
<i>Salaries and Wages</i>				
Farmer	20,664.64	21,542.11	21,752.04	5,300
Student Wages	1,861.15	4,332.09	5,850.96	5824.67
Benefits	3,568.05	4,456.56	1,1811.08	353.88
Farm Costs	5,583.18	7,922.32	5,596.27	1,736.85
Total Expenses	31,677.18	38,253.08	35,010.35	14,240.44
Farm Revenues	10,282.64	13,165.36	12,170.61	1,822.16
Net Loss	21,394.54	25,087.72	22,839.74	12,418.28

Although Hunter's reports state that the farm was well within the allotted budget, the cost of operating the farm was much higher than revenues. Records from the Business Office available from 1999 to 2002 (others were lost during Tropical Storm Irene) show that the farm was consistently costing the College over \$20,000 per year, excluding 2002 as the farm ended in March of that year. Coincidentally, this is roughly the same as Hunter's salary, especially including benefits. Given the costly nature of operating the farm, perhaps the administration's decision to end the Community Farm prior to the 2002 season is justifiable. From the beginning, the goal was for the farm to be financially independent within the first five years. And obviously, it failed to meet that goal.

Still, my inclination is to feel that there had been so much invested in the project, and so many alternative structures to attempt, that it may not have been time to scrap the project altogether. On March 4, 2002 Hunter sent a letter to CSA members to announce the end of the Community Farm. It is worth quoting the entirety of Hunter's letter here:

Dear Farm Members and Supporters -

It is with a heavy heart that I write to tell you that the Community Farm at Bennington College has come to an end. I have found it very difficult to write this letter as the work has been so meaningful to me and the connecti'ns with all farm members, workers, and kindred spirits even more so. Since the Farm's inception, the College always had the goal of financial self-sufficiency in mind and we had not yet reached that goal. The hope was for an ever-increasing membership from the community; these kinds of ventures often have a tough time in our town. On a personal level, I have been thinking about a job where I can teach more and continue to explore that interest.

Just as odd as it was to hear the red-winged blackbirds on my walk to campus this morning, are my idle seed catalogs and empty seed flats. The sound of the blackbirds seemed so usual that took some time to filter in (although it should perhaps be more alarming to experience the early arrival of spring migrants and warm days in light of global climate change) but the lack of plans for three plus acres of produce seems to be an oddity I can not get used to. Hannah and I do plan for one, maybe two tomato plants and *maybe* two squash plants in our backyard, and she says she will also miss picking lettuce and there of course must be basil all summer long. We also console ourselves with a plan for a few laying hen chicks. Then there are the blackberries to tame in our yard, a structure to build for the hops plants...

Of course there will be no replacing the times spent at the ever-more bustling Farmstand during pick-up times. We will miss seeing you all the most.

In these times we not only need more conscientious food consumers but also more food growers. We know the importance of sustainability, of conservation, of a working, agrarian landscape, but it is harder to internalize the need for more people in the business of healthy food production. Who will do that for us in the future? Or will we do it for ourselves? I urge you to continue your quest for locally grown produce and more than that, for a farmer to support. There is a CSA program at Caretaker Farm in Williamstown and at Berle Farm in North Hoosick. If you are really motivated, start your own; many CSAs start in backyard, neighborhood gardens. I have always felt that the best possible outcome of a program like ours was to get a new pair of hands dirty. A new experience for a child or adult in the garden - eating green beans right off the plant or cutting all the flowers you could want - rewarded me for the whole season. So fill up a large pot on your porch and plop a tomato plant in it, if that is the gardening plan for you. Look up the Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont (NOFA-VT) on the Internet to keep abreast of organic and small farming issues and biotechnology updates.

That is my treatise and I am sticking to it. I will continue to work in ways that I can to educate about food production. "The future belongs to those of us still willing to get our hands dirty."

We thank you for your time and interest. Come visit us in North Bennington.

Peace,
Emily

The letter expresses a real sense of surprise and disappointment. It's clear that the closure of the Community Farm was not the outcome that Hunter desired, nor was it easy for her to share the news with the members of the CSA. As Hunter mentions in the letter and Goodrich has expressed, at the time it may have been unrealistic to expect the town of Bennington to be able to support a CSA as large as the Community Farm hoped to grow. The farm hardly achieved half the membership of seventy-five members that was outlined for financial success. But was the CSA the only model available for the farm to support itself? Obviously not. The dining service seems to be the most obvious market for produce grown on campus, and it seems peculiar that it was not better accessed. Perhaps with so much emphasis placed on the CSA, planning for sales to dining services was not a priority. Hunter outlined the hybrid of a thirty member CSA and more intensive production for dining services. This model seems to be a potentially effective way not only to achieve financial solvency, but also to achieve all of the goals that were defined for the farm. While the College certainly was in a financially difficult period during the time of the Community Farm, dropping the project leaves it unresolved and the ideals unfulfilled.

All of the focus on economics also seems to devalue the accomplishments of the farm, as well as point out some administrative inconsistencies. Over sixty students were in some way involved with the farm between its inception in 1996 and the end of the 2000 growing season.

That's five growing seasons, and an average of twelve students somehow involved in the project each year. In 2000, there were twenty-one different student positions. While some were surely filled by the same people (especially the work study positions, with some of the nine in the spring returning in the fall), that is a tremendous opportunity for students to get involved and learn about farm operations. Besides the internships and Hunter's tutorial, these were not formal learning opportunities. But students were still gaining practical skills. There are likely some hired teachers (for example, those who give music lessons) who don't impact that many students during an academic year. Not only were students being educated inside of the classroom and out, but great community members were regularly coming onto campus. Given the traditional strain between Bennington College and the surrounding towns, the CSA provided an excellent opportunity to ease that tension. Notably, no staff member other than Hunter was expected to produce revenue to cover her salary for the work that she did. Yes, this was outlined as an original goal of the farm, but perhaps it was an unfair expectation given the varied benefits of the farm.

There are also potential economic benefits that were gained from the Community Farm, but not comprehensively considered. As Kerry Woods pointed out, at least three students that he was aware of came to Bennington because of the opportunity to be involved with the farm project. Looking at financial records, the tuition dollars of these students - not including others who may have been less vocal - was nowhere considered in the revenue of the farm, but likely would have amply covered Hunter's salary. It may seem unlikely to consider a college farm as the keystone for choosing which schools to apply to or attend, but such programs can be exceedingly important for the right student (such as myself).

Any controversy over the decision to end the farm project aside, there is much to be learned and considered from the Community Farm and its five seasons. For example, consider that

the farm's deficit was roughly equal to Hunter's salary and benefits. It seems unlikely that the farm would have been able to grow to the size that it did and produce as much without a farm manager, and there are definite benefits for hiring specifically to administer all aspects of a farm. Students alone, for example, would likely have been unable to sustain the same organization and production by themselves. But the deficit brings up the important question of at what scale a college farm (and the Bennington College farm in particular) can support both regular expenses and a modest salary. It would be unfair to say that the farm ultimately failed because Hunter was hired, or that college farms with managers have greater difficulty achieving financial solvency. But especially in the context of future Bennington projects, how the manager is going to be paid and where that money is going to come from are important questions for us to ask ourselves.

There is an interesting dichotomy between Bennington College's two historical farm projects. While the War Farm is part of the college lore and heralded as an important part of the College's history, few know of the Community Farm or what to make of it. There aren't the same romantic images on the Bennington College Flickr, and no one has written about it for the alumni magazine. The question becomes, why? Is the project seen as less in line with the Bennington mission? Is it not as dramatic as a farm at an all-girls college in the 1940s? This distinction is hard to pinpoint, but no less important to consider. In part, it may be that the Community Farm provided fewer postcard-quality images, or that the scale of the farm was not as grand. But also, the War Farm was understood to provide the school with crops during the war, after which point it would no longer be necessary. The Community Farm was a project that was intended to be successful over the long term. It was meant to act as a link between the greater Community and the College on long into the future. While the War Farm was ultimately successful in its original goals (if only the production oriented ones), the Community Farm was not. Regardless of their situation in

Bennington College's collective memory, from the two projects we gain important insights into the way that future projects may operate.

After examining the War Farm as well as the Community Farm, one similarity in particular is clear: both projects were the idea of the administration or faculty, rather than being generated by students. Especially in the case of the War Farm, longevity of the project depended on student dedication and interest. Because students didn't feel compelled to take part in the project, the labor force needed to maintain a project of such a scale was absent. In the case of the Community Farm, student interest wasn't the problem, but student involvement wasn't the ultimate goal of the project either. But perhaps if students had been the intended recipients of the farm produce to a greater extent, through sales to the dining hall, the farm could have been more successful on the whole. *There needs to be something else here but I am not sure what it is.*

Ultimately, neither the War Farm nor the Community Farm were effectively organized for achieving longevity. Even the War Farm, which was not explicitly intended to be a permanent part of the College, struggled to last through wartime. When the administration or students initiate campus projects, the intention is never for them to be fleeting. The hope is that they will become an active and contributive aspect of the campus culture, and possibly even something that the College is known and praised for. Neither of the College's past farm endeavors succeeded in this respect, but both offer lessons on how a future project might be organized differently. Examining the failures of past projects by no means ensures the success of future ones. But knowing which models definitely don't work in the Bennington context is no doubt worthy of consideration.

Methods

The vast majority of information about the farms came from the Bennington College Archives. In order to access the archives, you need to make an appointment with librarian Oceana Wilson. There are a number of boxes that are labeled “Farm”, and these contain nearly all documents pertaining to the farm projects. Because of the nature of the documents, they are difficult to cite; authors are ambiguous, as are dates, and information is often repeated in many different variations. Here, I have attempted to include the title of documents that have them, and cited other sources in the footnotes.

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