

# The Sustainability Fund Project Application

Application Date: February 27, 2015

Project Title: Increasing sustainable food systems education through the Agroecology Education Farm

Total Requested Amount:

\*Total available for funding is \$120,000 for all projects in the current funding cycle. Individual project funding amounts will vary depending on number and scope of projects funded. In exceptional cases, funding renewal will be considered with re-application.

## **Applicant Information**

Name of Primary Contact:

Please mark your status with an "X":  Student  Staff  Faculty

Campus Affiliation (Name of Organization, Department, or Office):

Email Address:                      Cell and/or Work Phone:

Campus Mailing Address:

*Please include a bulleted list of any attachments (including file names) here:*

Appendices:

- Julieta Sherk            *Letter of Support*
- Chris Dunham        *Letter of Support*
- Dr. Jeff Mullahey    *Letter of Support*

## **Increasing sustainable food systems education through the Agroecology Education Farm**

### **I. Project Description**

The Agroecology Education Farm (AEF) is dedicated to educating diverse audiences about sustainable agriculture, local food systems, natural resource management, and conservation. Located at the Lake Wheeler Field Research Facility directly adjacent to the Historic Yates Mill Park in Raleigh, this 6 acre facility offers innovative experiential learning opportunities to students at NCSU, faculty/staff at NCSU, and the surrounding community. One of our challenges in being off campus is engaging the greater NCSU campus community at this unique educational facility. This proposed project will address this challenge through strategic engagement at the Agroecology Education Farm and through linking sustainable food systems education back to campus.

Our objectives with this project are:

1. Increase student participation and surrounding community engagement at the Agroecology Education Farm.
2. Enhance student awareness and outreach of the Agroecology Education Farm on NCSU main campus.
3. Increase overall student awareness of sustainable agriculture and local food systems as a result of the activities above and our partnership with University Dining.

Approach:

*Our strategic methods for successfully carrying out this project are listed below under each objective.*

#### **Objective 1. Increase student participation and surrounding community engagement at the Agroecology Education Farm (AEF).**

1. Develop an Educational Pavilion at the Agroecology Education Farm. To carry out these workshops successfully, it is critical to develop a dedicated educational space at the farm. Through this grant, we will design and construct an innovative educational pavilion that is dedicated to experiential learning. With this space we will be able to increase the number of educational workshops offered, provide student groups with a space to hold meetings, increase class participation, and encourage community involvement over the long term beyond this grant. The pavilion will be able to hold at least 30 people sitting down and provide storage space for educational materials.
2. Initiate an agroecology student internship program at the Agroecology Education Farm. Through this grant we will support two student interns over an 8 month period (one paid through the grant and one in match to the grant). These student interns will work directly with the AEF farm manager from September 2015 through May 2016 at about 10 hours per week. They will learn aspects of sustainable agriculture production practices, curriculum development, leadership and campus engagement. They will also have a sustainable agriculture outreach and education requirement described below.
3. Develop at least four student-centered educational workshops/activities at the Agroecology Education Farm. Working with the AEF Farm Manager, each of the two Agroecology Student Interns will help develop at least two educational workshops focused on promoting an aspect of sustainable agriculture.
4. Develop at least four community-centered workshops at the Agroecology Education Farm. The AEF farm manager will develop four new community centered-workshops that engage a diversity of audiences including families and children. The Agroecology Student Interns will assist with the community workshop advertising and education during the events to gain further skills in communicating sustainable agriculture concepts to diverse audiences.

**Objective 2. Enhance student awareness and outreach of the Agroecology Education Farm on NCSU main campus.**

1. We will strategically partner with a new NCSU student chapter of Slow Food to plant a small heritage fruit “pocket” orchard at the Agroecology Education Farm and a corresponding one on campus in front of the new Talley Student Center. Through a dedication and sign at this Slow Food pocket orchard on campus, we will also be able communicate the partnerships between students, Slow Food, the AEF, the new Talley Center, the Sustainability Fund, and University Dining.
2. Lastly, to increase students’ (and faculty) awareness of the AEF, we will engage at least two new NCSU courses to visit and learn about the farm. One of these will be Dr. Julieta Sherk’s Horticulture Landscape course (HS401) and we will work on engaging a new course over the grant period.

**Objective 3. Increase overall student awareness of sustainable agriculture and local food systems as a result of the activities above and partnership with University Dining.**

1. We will work with NCSU University Dining to increase advertisement and materials about the AEF and the local food economy in the Dining Halls. This will include branding and signage to indicate local food in the dining halls, especially those grown at the AEF, as well as highlighting University Dining’s contributions to the AEF(see support letter).
2. To quantify increased student awareness at diverse levels and through the various strategic activities described, we will conduct short surveys (written and online) from student participants in the workshops, students that visit the AEF from courses and with students that eat in the dining halls.

## **II. Anticipated Outcomes/Impact**

We anticipate that this project will increase student and community knowledge of sustainable food systems, NC State’s involvement in sustainable agriculture, and an increase of experiential learning opportunities at the AEF. These outcomes are possible with the investment in infrastructure, education, outreach, experiential learning, grounds, and sustainability personnel.

The roots of this project start with the building of infrastructure on campus and at the AEF. By planting and caring for the pocket gardens we create a connection between the farm and campus. The decision to plant trees over a garden is deliberate and designed to emphasize the longevity of the project. Investing in an orchard is similar to investing in the educational pavilion at the farm. The pavilion will be designed as a gathering place for students and community members. It will be a place for teachers to bring their classes and for students to learn about sustainability in a setting that encourages the motto “*Think and do*”.

The support of two educational interns is the heart to this project. Students are the impetus for our farm and provide our direction. Being able to involve two students, as interns, in this initial phase will ensure that our programs and educational material are directed at the right demographic. Students introducing the farm to their peers through classes, workshops, student groups, in their dining halls, and on their campus will attract a diversity of people.

Our project hinges on the visibility of our campus education. For this reason we have incorporated increased advertising as an objective of our proposal. University Dining has agreed to match funds to support this aspect. We will use this to label our produce and other locally sourced produce in the dining halls as well as to work with UD’s marketing department to develop materials to display and hand out.

### **III. Project Benchmarking & Innovation**

It is important for NC State, as one of two North Carolina Land Grant Universities, to be a model for education about sustainability in agriculture. It is our responsibility to provide students with opportunities to learn and lead not only in the classroom, but on campus, in their dining halls, in their student groups, and in the community. Supporting educational space at the farm is supporting NC State's motto to "*Think and do*".

Our focus on education and student involvement, combined with our community partnerships makes the NCSU Agroecology Education Farm unique among the many campus farms. To support this programing and outreach, we need infrastructure and personnel support. This proposal provides us with a way to make a long-term high impact on our students and their involvement in sustainable local food systems.

Within the southeast, there are many land grant universities that support teaching opportunities at a sustainable farm run by the university. Several close universities have expended their farm to have some sort of space dedicated to education on their farm. Both Duke, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and Clemson University have been gracious enough to share some of the insights of their farm educational pavilions and outreach with the campus community. The pavilion at Clemson is available to be used by the university and community groups and has been a part of the farm for many years. The Clemson farm manager thought that it was an important way to bring groups out to the farm that might not have visited the farm otherwise. All universities have noted that their pavilions get a wide diversity of use, from supporting educational events to dances and music to washing vegetables.

Advertising and branding of local food systems within the dining halls is a growing trend across the nation. Many similar sized universities have a specific commitment to purchasing a percentage of local food in their dining halls and for specific meals. Two close examples of that are University of North Carolina and Virginia Tech. Our own NC State University Dining team has made a substantial commitment to not only use food grown at the Agroecology Farm, but also to be involved in many aspects of the local food system from purchasing to composting. Most students are not aware of this. By advertising University Dining's commitment we will be showcasing an aspect of sustainability that reaches a wide audience.

### **IV. Metrics for Assessment**

To be able measure the success and effectiveness of our project, we will assign quantifiable levels of evaluation to our objectives.

#### *1. Increase student participation and surrounding community engagement at the Agroecology Education Farm.*

To capture our success at this objective, we will measure the number of students and community members who visit the farm, use the teaching pavilion, bring groups out to the farm, volunteer, and interact on campus with our program. These data will be compiled and compared to previous year's participation. Additionally, we will use a survey on selected groups to determine knowledge before and after their experience to gauge the effectiveness of our programing. This survey will be administered to groups at the farm.

#### *2. Enhance student awareness and outreach of the Agroecology Education Farm on NCSU main campus.*

The success of our on campus out-reach will be measure three places; the dining halls, our pocket orchard, and in classrooms on campus. An increase in new class participation with the farm will show evidence of growing recognition of the value of the experiential learning opportunities with the farm.

Adding two additional classes to our existing class interaction paves the way for sustainable growth and increased learning opportunities. Dr. Julieta Sherk is already interested in incorporating her course (HS401) in the design of the landscape around the teaching pavilion. Additionally, we will survey selected groups to determine knowledge before and after their experience to gauge the effectiveness of our programming. This survey will be administered to groups on campus.

To assess the effectiveness of our pocket orchards and our partnership with the student Slow Food group, we will measure the number of students involved in the project from our farm and the student group, the effectiveness of the signage, the interaction between the club and the farm, and the health of the plants.

*3. Increase overall student awareness of sustainable agriculture and local food systems as a result of the activities above and partnership with University Dining.*

The success of our outreach with University Dining will be quantified with a survey that captures the student's knowledge of local foods and the AEF. This survey will be administered in the dining halls and online and will ask questions about the students' knowledge before and after of food systems and of University Dining's participation with the local food system.

#### **V. Cost Savings**

*Will the project result in cost savings? Yes X No*

*If yes, what is the payback period?*

#### **VI. Broader Vision**

This project can very easily be scaled up, added on to, and expanded to the community. Our existing community ties and partnerships make us uniquely situated to expand NC State programs and information outside of the campus.

This project is supporting permanent infrastructure that will enhance the programming available to the campus community. By pairing infrastructure with student and community involvement we are ensuring that the project has support and will continue to grow. By making the facility available to the community and by involving our community partners, we are inviting community participation and investment.

