Fostering Local Food Procurement: Promoting Sustainable Practices
Prepared by Abbey Wemimo, Student Intern

University of Minnesota Crookston Business Department
2900 University Avenue
Crookston MN, 56716
Phone: 973 698 3409. Email: abbey010@umn.edu

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**Executive Summary**

Students across the University of Minnesota system expressed their interest in local food procurement at the first Student Engagement Leadership Forum on Sustainability in September 2011. In response to this convening, held at the University of Minnesota Morris, (UMM) we propose a broad base initiative to examine ways the University of Minnesota Crookston (UMC) can become a regional leader in local food production and procurement. We argue for investing in three major components.

1) Perception Study: Invest in local foods by employing an annual research project to gauge student perception of the dining hall.

2) Campus Garden: Establish a student operated garden/farm utilizing our rich farmland, and fostering student learning through teaching and research.

3) Food Hub: Develop a food hub to aggregate local food products pivotal to the University of Minnesota Crookston becoming a regional leader in campus sustainability, and will improve access to healthy and fresh food choices as well.

As a proactive response to the conference on the Morris campus, the Northwest Regional Sustainable Development Partnership proposed a project to the Fletcher Law School at the University of Minnesota Twin Cities specifically – to the Environmental Sustainability Policy Clinic for second year law students. The project was therefore undertaken by Susan R. Hallquist, Student Attorney, where she reviewed the current U of M contracts and policy, investigated model provisions from successful universities that have uniform and successful local food procurement plans, outlined provisions and developed recommendations for the U of M contracts and policy in order to create more uniformity across campuses.

Following Hallquist’s investigation, we established a Food Advisory Board to help devise feasible methods and effective routes that UMC could seek to promote local foods. In partnership with the Associate Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs and the UMC Sustainability Committee, the University has been reviewing many food related strategies. One of the easiest to implement and a true win-win for everyone, is the implementation of recycled, reusable beverage containers in the Eagle’s Nest and Evergreen Grill (EGG). There will be new beverage cups available that customers can initially purchase and then receive a discount toward future beverage purchases (i.e. Caribou Coffee and soft drinks) when using that cup.

Other initiatives include composting, conversion of cooking oil into biodiesel fuel for campus vehicles and equipment, growing produce in a campus garden and greenhouse, and working to bring in more local foods through the development of a local food hub.

This white paper outlines specific action plans which UMC should adopt, and is an effort to build a centrally located business management structure that can assist with aggregation, storage, processing, distribution, and marketing of locally and regionally
produced foods to be sold to Sodexo in the nearest future. We propose the following in an effort to sell locally grown foods to Sodexo the coming year:

- Local food production at the UMC green house from July – March annually.
- $10,000 grant to finance a high tunnel for local food production.
- One acre of farm land designated to local food production.
- Revenue to manage and sustain local food production.
Quotes

Because of the increasing rates of obesity, unhealthy eating habits, and physical inactivity, we may see the first generation that will be less healthy and have a shorter life expectancy than their parents.

~ Former U.S. Surgeon General Richard Carmona

What we eat has changed more in the last 40 years than in the previous 40,000. The survival of the current food system depends upon widespread ignorance of how it really operates.

~ Eric Schlosser

Changing your eating behavior to source more of your diet locally is a great first step to reducing your carbon footprint.” Pat Thomas “Stuffed: Positive action to prevent a global food crisis.”

~ Soil Association
The growing emergence of a perceptive food customer has caused a niche demand for local food and how it is prepared. Rising interest in locally sourced food poses social, economic and environmental impacts in different communities, depending on the time and effort invested. Embracing and satisfying this need should be a top priority for food service providers. Thus, production of local food should not be a round table discussion but rather a proactive movement to help the local community. The industrial model is decades in the making, and is responsible for many benefits; however it can also be a detriment to local food production. The UMC campus is no exception to that shift. This White Paper serves as an effort to breach that gap and encourage local food production on campus with special emphasis on short-term plans. A program that can help guide such movement is The Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System (STARS) through the Association for Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE). STARS® is a transparent, self-reporting framework for colleges and universities in the US and Canada to gauge relative progress toward sustainability (Hallquist, 2012).

Introduction

Have you ever questioned why the University of Minnesota Crookston, with a vast and rich agricultural land and history, lags behind in local foods production or consumption? You are certainly not alone. According to Hallquist’s report, UMC ranked dead last against other campuses in the percentage of local sourced foods with 6% on fruits and vegetables, 55% of bread/grains, and only 1% in protein while the University of Minnesota Morris sourced 15%, 60%, 10% and 100% respectively. Morris also targets 50% locally organic foods by 2013 and is an active member of the AASHE (Hallquist, 2012). If Morris is capable of doing this, UMC can as well.

Figures 1 and 2 show a percentage breakdown of Luther and St. Olaf College estimates of the portion of locally sourced foods on their campuses in these categories: fruit, vegetables, breads, grains, proteins, and dairy. Evidence presented from these figures reveals approximately 20% of foods in their dining hall, especially meat and dairy, is locally sourced.
Hallquist, S. (2012). *Increasing local food procurement on University of Minnesota campuses*

**Figure 1**

![Pie chart showing local food procurement at Luther College]

**Figure 2**

![Pie chart showing local food procurement at St. Olaf College]

Hallquist, S. (2012). *Increasing local food procurement on University of Minnesota campuses*
Table 1 compares UMC and UMM locally sourced foods using a standard rubric of produce (fruits and vegetables), bakery (bread and grains), protein, and dairy products. UMC local produce accounts for only 6%, 55% of bakery product, 1% in protein, and 100% dairy while UMM sourced 15%, 60%, 10% and 100% respectively. UMC difference compared to UMM is -9% in produce, -5%, and -9% in protein.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local Food Type</th>
<th>Crookston</th>
<th>Morris</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Produce</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>-9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bakery</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>-5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protein</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>-9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dairy</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hallquist, S. (2012). *Increasing local food procurement on University of Minnesota campuses*

Constructing a feasible model to have locally sourced food supplied to the University of Minnesota Crookston Dining Services is a daunting task considering the UMC’s food service contractor, Sodexo’s, insurance policies. These policies understandably are employed to protect Sodexo from lawsuits and ensure the quality of food. They do not justify why UMC must import vegetables outside the state or country when they can produce richer and healthier produce easily. Although insurance policies pose a serious threat for local farmers, UMC can lead the University of Minnesota systems by producing local foods on the campus integrating the intellectual capacity of students, faculty, and staff as a step in the right direction.

An investment in a green house, high tunnel, and one-acre of farmland that yield produce to sell to Sodexo will be the principal focus of this white paper. Investment such as this will enable UMC to produce locally grown food with the possibility of facilitating a food-hub where local farmers can aggregate their products sold to Sodexo.

**Audience**

The primary audience for this white paper encompasses five important groups at the UMC campus.
1. **Students**: provides healthy choice for students and opportunities for a research facility.
2. **Faculty**: should include in the curriculum to get student more involved and enthused about local foods.
3. **Staff**: aid facilitation of food production sources.
4. **Sodexo**: ensures more meal plans are sold as a result of quality and healthy food production on campus.
5. **Administration**: sell more meal plan as a result of active research addressing student needs and available healthy choices provided by the farm.

However, this paper also addresses stakeholders who are convinced that local food consumption is indeed the best route to seek, considering its social, environmental, and economic impact for the University and the surrounding community.

**Campus Community (students, faculty, staff & other stakeholder engagement)**

Implementing these short-term goals will provide a mutual benefit for students, faculty, staff, administration, and Sodexo.

**Students**
- Research opportunities.
- Academic enhancement.
- Service learning.
- Volunteer opportunity.
- Employment opportunities.
- Experimental facility for students to carry our research on local foods.
- Internship opportunities and experience.

**Faculty**
- Student research mentorship.
- Experimental facility for faculty to research.
- Opportunity to put theory to practice.

**Staff**
- Employment opportunity.
- Research facility.
- Management opportunity.

**Administration/ University**
- Regional leader in local foods and agricultural research facilities.
- Enhancing student learning experience.
- More meal plans sold as a result of active research addressing student needs and available healthy choice provided by the farm.
• Ability to impact the local economy.
• Hands-on experience for graduating agricultural student.

Sodexo
• Higher meal plan enrollment.
• Help Sodexo fulfill its pledge found on the Sodexo Sustainability page:

   At Sodexo, our mission is to "Improve the Quality of Daily Life." We embrace sustainability ideals to make sure we consider the environmental, social and economic implications of all our actions.

   Our Pledge
   At Sodexo, we pursue the use of:

   4. Locally grown and sustainable food products.
   5. Environmentally friendly food service products, such as plates, cups, utensils and cleaning supplies.
   6. Biodegradable disposable products, such as plates and bowls produced from 100 percent post-industrial reclaimed fiber.


Other Stakeholders
• Employment opportunities from a pool of experienced UMC graduates.
• Student assistance on projects.
• Research facility.

Our Goals

The Northwest Regional Sustainable Development Partnership envision an environmentally preferable means products or services that have a lesser or reduced effect on human health and the environment when compared with competing products or services that serve the same purpose. These purchases will meet one or more of the following criteria:

• Be grown and processed on campus or within the target radius (250 – 300) miles but preference is given to the most local.
• Be approved by third party certification as organic, sustainable, or fair trade (i.e. USDA certified organic, Marine Stewardship council Blue Ecolabel, Food Alliance, Fair Trade); and,

• Grown on a farm that operates as a cooperative, has a profit sharing policy for all employees, or has a social responsibility policy covering the following for all workers: union or prevailing wages, transportation and/or housing support, and/or health care benefits.

**Short-term Goals**

• Establish a Food Advisory Board facilitated by the Crookston Student Association.
• Craft a quantitative research study that measures the importance of sustainability to the University of Minnesota Crookston students.
• Facilitate local food production at the UMC green house from July – March annually.
• Negotiate a $10,000 grant from administration to finance a ‘60 X 50’ high tunnel for local food production.
• Secure an acre farm land designated to local food production.
• Acquire Funding sources to manage and sustain local food production.

**Long-term Goals**

• Facilitate a food hub housed on campus.
• Apply for a $100,000 grant from the Minnesota Department of Agriculture or USDA to help finance a top class facility to aid a regional food hub.
• 30% locally sourced food at the UMC dining hall by 2020.

**Annual Perception Study**

UMC should adopt an annual research program that involves brainstorming sessions, work groups, survey collection, student legislation, committee meetings, and forum discussions involving student, faculty and staff to continuously improve the quality of food and environmental standards on the Brown Dining Hall.
Quotes

For all the benefits of local food, the realities of the local-food debate are far more complex than they often appeal.

~ Paul Roberts

Locally produced foodstuffs, bought directly from the producer or via a local shop, save transport. It will also probably save in packaging and manufacturing.

~ Chris Goodall

One quarter of the US annual consumption of freshwater is wasted. 300 million barrels of oil are used to produce food that is eventually waste.

~ Turning Earth

Conclusion

The University of Minnesota Crookston possesses the land to house and facilitate a food hub, and a farm big enough to supply at least 50% produce to the UMC dining hall however, we need to focus on steps to attain that goal. According to the Importance of Sustainability to the University of Minnesota Crookston Students study, 79.6% of students believe UMC should support local food producers, 71.9% support a UMC campus garden, 70.7% believe that the UMC dining hall should offer seasonal menu to promote local foods, and a staggering 51.2% said if the cost of food were to increase due to the purchase of local foods they would still be in support of locally sourced food. Based on the evidence presented, majority of UMC students want and support locally sourced food. The good news is we do not need to re-invent a new model to satisfy this need, rather, all we need to do is follow the footsteps of other coordinating campus like the University of Minnesota Morris or the Twin Cities to craft a model that works best for the Crookston campus.

In summary, UMC should focus on specific action steps to build a centrally located business management structure that can assist with aggregation, storage, processing, distribution, and marketing of locally and regionally produced foods to be sold to Sodexo in the near future. The UMC Sodexo contract expires in 2018, hence working on continuous improvement can help both Sodexo and UMC administrators operationally define contract terms and aid the chances of a contract renewal in 2018.

The main focus of this white paper is to nurture the short action steps to assist the University of Minnesota Crookston and Sodexo, help the campus be more sustainable and foster local food production on campus by implementing the short term plan.
References

