

St. Mary's College Sustainable Community Cookbook

An Independent Sustainability Project

Submitted for Consideration to Professor Barry Muchnick

For ENST 450: Applied Sustainability Practicum

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Executive Summary

The community members of St. Mary's College of Maryland are interested in and responsible for sustainability because of the rich ecological, historical and cultural resources on campus. This sustainably minded approach has already begun to manifest itself on campus in the food system, however, we are required to continue its development. I wanted to create an avenue through which the wealth of food knowledge and wisdom held by individuals on campus could surface and become easily accessible community information. I opened dialogue with the vegetarian cooperative, whose goal is to eat sustainably, and eventually broadened the conversation to all community members in the form of all-campus emails calling for contributions. I was pleased by the enthusiastic response of the community, confirming my initial suspicions that a sustainable community cookbook would be supported into its completion. Based on support and feedback from the campus community, the cookbook is planned to be released online both in a printable hardcopy form and as an open sourced webpage, accessible to anyone. This will ensure that the cookbook serves as an evolving source for sustainable food initiatives on campus.

Introduction

Wendell Berry once wrote that “eating is an agricultural act” (1). This was his statement to those who had forgotten the connection between eating and the land, to those who had fallen victim to the crookery of industrial agriculture. However, in the context of sustainability I would argue that food is also an environment act, climate act, social justice act, waste act and health act. In a setting as small as St. Mary’s College, where each personal decision makes a noticeable difference, it is these connections that provide a beautiful opportunity for sustainability.

At St. Mary’s College we are inspired and responsible as a community to think and act sustainability because of the riches of our environment, history and culture. We have addressed food sustainability on campus through the adoption of the reusable to-go boxes, the establishment of the campus community farm, the sale of nature friendly and fair-trade products at The Grind, contracting with a sustainably-minded food service, and the establishment of a student apartment composting system. In order to achieve true food sustainability, however, we are required to continue our development of food awareness.

As the next step in achieving food sustainability I am compiling a St. Mary’s College Sustainable Community Cookbook. The aim of this cookbook is to teach St. Mary’s community members how to eat more sustainably on our campus by drawing on the wealth and diversity of individual and community knowledge of food and sustainability. Only through a community effort and a sense of place can we establish a standard of sustainability that is clear in scope and accessible to all on campus.

Context

Eating was once an act largely of local consequence; food was grown, distributed and eaten within a relatively small locale. As a result food systems were naturally sustainable because food was seasonal and regional. However, with globalization, food has evolved into a web of international food affairs, tacking on innumerable “food miles” (2) and a general ambiguity of food production and responsibility.

In order to meet the dietary needs of a rapidly expanding population, agriculture has become the greatest human land use on earth and food is now the second most internationally traded commodity (3); produce travels on average 1500 miles from farm to plate (2). In some countries, like India for example, agriculture constitutes 50% of all land cover (4) and employment (5), exerting a considerable influence on the people and environment with the current models of agriculture. Genetically modified biotechnology, for example, which has been adopted by 60% of the countries worldwide (6), is reliant on the use of chemical inputs such as pesticides, herbicides and fertilizers that degrade the surrounding environment. Meat production is responsible for 14-22% of all CO₂ emissions worldwide (7). And the rise of international food trade has led to the exploitation of distant people, and their land, who have no voice to protest. Changing the food systems we participate in is a powerful way to confront the many faces that threaten local and global sustainability.

At 21 million individuals (8), college students represent a sizable portion of the American population, and have great influence in markets, policy and culture. Additionally, the transition to adulthood, ages 18-24, is an influential period, and most adulthood lifestyle habits are developed in those years (9). Therefore, it is imperative that college students are equipped with

the proper knowledge and resources to make sustainable decisions about their food system. Studies would suggest that current college environments are lacking this knowledge, given that an alarming number of college students are at risk of obesity (10), diet and behavior related cancer (11), or experience food insecurity resulting in malnutrition (12). These issues are of vital concern to the feasibility of sustainability. The continued use of unhealthy, and often packaged or highly processed food, or the lack of access to healthy food will continue to support food systems that exert unfavorable pressures on the environment and community. Further, the lack of support for changing these consumption behaviors in young adults will diminish efforts to achieve food sustainability into the future.

College campuses are hot spots for sustainability for many reasons: the innovation and inquiry of academia, the activism and accessibility of youth, the smaller sphere of influence, and the availability of funding. Food sustainability initiatives are appearing on college campuses in an effort to tap all of these resources. The University of Massachusetts Amherst, for example, has established an award winning Permaculture Initiative that has successfully converted grassy lawns across campus into edible, nutritious and easily managed gardens that contribute to the campus dining service (13). At Cornell University, to address food waste issues, all campus dining facilities collect waste for compost, including compostable utensils and flatware, accounting for 37% of their total waste stream (14). A college writing class at Kent State University wrote and sold online a community cookbook that benefits the Campus Kitchen Project, whose aim is to provide meals and service to families in need through student volunteerism (15). These initiatives represent the burgeoning awareness surrounding food sustainability and I believe that the next step is a more defined, accessible educational approach.

Case Studies

The medium of my project has changed considerably since the previous draft was written. This cookbook was once supposed to be printed and distributed in common cookbook formatting, and while it will be accessible in this way online, it will also be presented as a webpage that is accessible and open to continual contribution. I looked at multiple cookbooks that address healthy, sustainable and college eating: “The Food Matters Cookbook” by Mark Bittman (16), “Student’s Vegetarian Cookbook” by Carole Raymond (17), and “The \$5 a Meal College Vegetarian Cookbook” by Nicole Cormier (18). Each provided unique insights into the compilation of the St. Mary’s College Sustainable Community Cookbook.

Bittman begins his book with an appeal to the logic behind eating sustainably. He lays out chapters on how food policy has shaped our diets, the problems and dangers of consuming animal products and highly processed junk food, and then introduces his concept of “Sane Eating” which is a rough guideline to improving the sustainability and health of a diet. After this he presents chapters on the key to enacting sustainable eating: cooking your own food, and he debunks some myths about cooking, like its reputation for being challenging. In the next section, he presents his recipes which are broken up by meal and/or food type, for example soup, salads, grains, desserts. In the final section he presents information on where to find recipes that coalesce with the goals of his cookbook. In essence he provides the evidence for the destructive habits of the current food system, and from where these habits have arisen in the system, and then provides the solutions through cooking your own meals, whereby he issues a few recipes to get the reader started and sources to continue the development of a sustainable eater.

I think Bittman's formatting is effective in conveying the message of sustainable eating to a wider audience because of its appeal to the greater food system and dietary science with the inclusion of multiple citations. His use of an introduction to the present state of the food system and where the issues lie are valuable in creating informed and purpose driven sustainable eaters. I think the St. Mary's College cookbook could find value in presenting on this topic in the context of the college. I think in terms of sourcing recipes, Bittman's cookbook does an adequate job in meeting the rough standards that I've established for the St. Mary's College cookbook, however, some recipes are fairly exotic or complex.

Similar to Bittman, Raymond begins her cookbook with something of an introduction. She debunks the myths surrounding vegetarianism such as, "vegetarians are weak and frail" or "vegetarians are a tired lot". She addresses certain nutritional components and controversies of vegetarianism, such as calcium and protein intake. After she addresses the nutrition-based controversy of vegetarianism, she thoroughly addresses the environmental side. However, she does this more in establishing confidence in the power that the consumer has in choosing foods that don't harm the environment, such as GMO free and in season. She concludes the introduction with a guide to purchasing every kind of produce in terms of what to look for and when, and an introduction into cooking techniques. She establishes her argument that vegetarianism can be an adequate diet and concomitantly be healthier for the environment, however, contrary to Bittman, she uses more of an emotional appeal rather than a factual or scientific appeal. Her recipes are organized by content: noodles, grains etc, and by mealtimes. There are some great recipes for meeting the rough standards of the St. Mary's College cookbook, like her "Curry in a Hurry", which takes 10 minutes to prepare and is made with all vegetable products.

Cormier presents a simpler message in her introduction. She makes the case that college students can eat vegetarian for cheap and quick, however there is little mention of sustainability or health. The majority of the book is a long list of recipes organized by mealtime. I found a few decent recipes in this cookbook to include in the St. Mary's College cookbook.

I found that the formatting was fairly consistent across these cookbooks which presented different goals for eating. They all organized recipes by mealtime or content. I think the best format for the St. Mary's College cookbook will be to, similar to Bittman and Raymond, present introductory information including where to source sustainable food on campus and then present the recipes by meal and allow the reader to attempt as he or she would like to. In addition, I see the St. Mary's College cookbook appealing both to science and emotion, like we saw in Bittman and Raymond, respectively. Sentimentality may be the best tool for inspiring sustainable eating at St. Mary's College because of how linked our emotions are to this place and because emotion is a driving factor in eating better, based on the responses I received from campus contributors.

Project Overview

A community cookbook can be a useful tool to educate a campus community because of its accessibility, equity, and diverse sourcing of knowledge. If the community cookbook is tailored to a single place, for instance, the St. Mary's College of Maryland campus, then the value and wealth of the knowledge and the practicality of its use for members of that community grows immensely. As my approach to this project developed, it became my goal to create an avenue for those who hold this diverse knowledge of St. Mary's College campus and its

surroundings to contribute so that our community, and the world, could reap the benefits of sustainability.

I did not start this project with a community understanding. To educate college students on healthy, sustainable eating I knew that to some degree I would have to meet the readers at the level of a college dormitory. All recipes, I thought, had to be cheap, simple and quickly prepared. I took it upon myself to search through food blogs and cookbooks for the best recipes that fit into my model. I found multiple blogs that coincided with my goals, however, I quickly realized that what I was developing was missing the mark of true, equitable sustainability, and was instead becoming a collection of recipes that fit my worldview of sustainability. With that revelation now firmly implanted in my mind, I took to reaching out to the food-wise individuals on campus.

I began by contacting members of the community directly involved in food on campus: Head Chef of Bon Appetite operations Carmen Allen, food literature professor Jennifer Cognard-Black, President of the student vegetarian cooperative Jillian Hurst, and local organic farmer and author of a sustainable cookbook Brett Grohsgal. While all but one contact has fallen through, I was successful in establishing a meeting that proved invaluable in diversifying my understanding of food on campus.

One night, at the invitation of Jillian Hurst, I attended a “Family dinner” at the vegetarian co-op along with multiple members of the co-op. This interaction really opened my eyes to the strength of community. In the matter of an hour, as a group, we had cooked a delicious, mindful meal and sat around the table and developed a long list of ideas to approach sustainable eating at St. Mary’s. This included simple recipes, ways of buying food, wild foraging and even dumpster diving at the local Food Lion. I was offered an invitation to the next big outing, which I merrily

accepted. Also, to my great pleasure, Jillian had taken the time to excavate the old hand written cookbooks from the co-op in the 90's and early 2000's. She kindly handed them over into my temporary possession. The books later become valuable both for sourcing new recipes and for developing the history of sustainable eating on campus.

Because most of my contacts had fallen through, I decided it was time to access the campus at large and allow food-wise individuals to come to me. I sent out an all campus email asking for recipes and ideas. In the email, I tried mining for personal information with questions like "Where is your favorite place to eat on campus?" in an attempt to add to my historical and cultural understanding of food on campus. The initial email drew only a few responses, so after consultation with Dr. Muchnick I slightly modified the message. The new email contained a paragraph that related my own experiences of being inspired towards food sustainability by the garden fresh salads my mother would make when I lived at home. This email drew many more responses and so I learned that relating to community member at a personal level was effective in drawing out contributors, but that I also had to reveal my own personal stories for this approach to be successful. I also found that telling people about my project in conversation was effective in drawing contributions. Almost every person I mentioned it to at least said they would send me a recipe, though admittedly only a handful have. My future attempts to access recipes and knowledge from campus community members will continue to build on what I have learned: giving and receiving personal information. I plan on sending out one all campus email a week and to continue developing new ways to reach hiding or forgetful contributors.

I also reached out to the Green School List Serve and was met with multiple responses from members of universities across the country. I was offered examples of what had been done at other schools, projects that were currently under development, ways to think about and

structure my cookbook, and even an offer to help digitize and distribute the cookbook after completion. One student from UMBC, Kelsey Donnellan, completed a similar project for her senior capstone project. She developed a gardening and recipe guide by season for students. She also conducted some research and found that students involved at the campus community farm ate more vegetables and fruit. We have since established a connection and we plan on sharing our findings. I also received a response from the sustainable campus program coordinator at Florida State University, Kristen Lee. She, her colleagues and students are developing a season based cookbook centered on their campus garden. She has agreed to share her findings, as well.

Finally, I came into contact with Eric Lewis, a permaculturist from Chesapeake's Bounty in St. Leonard, MD, through class. He takes a radical approach to eating sustainably, finding multiple ways to only consume food that is immediately around him. He provided multiple recipes and an index of wild substitutions for common kitchen ingredients.

Recipes were tested on an as-possible basis. At the beginning of the week, before going grocery shopping, I selected 4-5 recipes to test during the week and bought ingredients. I estimated the price of each recipe and recorded the preparation time. I also made any special notes about oddities I encountered in the preparation and substitutions that could be used. At times I outsourced this work to friends and neighbors who were more than willing to contribute. Here is an example of two recipes that have been contributed from the community and which I find especially fitting to the goals of this cookbook:

Vegetarian Crab Cakes by Whitney Rupard

2 Medium Zucchini
2 Medium Yellow Squash
2 Eggs
1/2 cup Flour (I like Quinoa)
2 tbsp Old Bay
Coconut oil

Shred zucchini and yellow squash.
Mix with beaten eggs, and stir in flour and Old Bay.
Form into cakes and fry in coconut oil till golden brown on each side.

To make vegan substitute eggs with egg replacer or arrowroot powder.

Simple Banana Pancakes by Elmo Garcia

Prep time: 15 minutes

1 banana
2 eggs
½ T coconut oil

Heat coconut in frying pan on medium-low heat.
Chop up banana and crack eggs into a bowl.
Mix until smoothly blended.
Pour small circles of mixture into frying pan.
Flip when mixture begins to bubble.
Serve hot.

To complete the cookbook, I have many tasks to execute. To begin with, I have to write the cookbook. This begins with developing a format through which campus-linked sustainable food knowledge and recipes will be presented. At first I thought that the organization of recipes would be my message, however my sentiments changed and I realized that the sourcing of sustainable food knowledge could have a separate section in the cookbook that addresses the messages of seasonality and locality. This information will be presented in an introductory

manner and will then be followed by the list of recipes organized by mealtime, similar to Bittman and Raymond.

In addition to writing a printable version of the cookbook I plan to develop a webpage on Weebly (19) that will be linked with the Campus Farm Facebook page and web page on the school website. This page will serve as a repository of sustainable food knowledge and recipes that can evolve through campus member contributions in real time. The campus farm serves as the perfect host to the cookbook because of the mindedness of the involved students, staff, and faculty as well as the organic atmosphere. In addition, I may attempt to install hardcopies of the cookbook in all community kitchens on campus with blank pages for members to contribute knowledge, recipes or thoughts to. Therefore, there will be an avenue through which sustainable food-based community can arise.

Conclusions

The creation of a community cookbook has the potential to affect sustainability at St. Mary's College for many reasons. First, our community has contributed a wealth of knowledge of food sustainability, however, I believe that there is still much more of this to uncover. As an accessible online resource, the cookbook will now serve as a permanent, free and evolving source of this information. Second, the land surrounding St. Mary's College is ripe with fruits for our taking, whether that be produce or wild edibles. While the campus farm is an attractive place to learn about fresh produce, one only has to stroll through a vacant lot to find numerable wild edibles. Approaching these immediate resources with seasonality can reduce the stress we exert on global environments and communities as well as foster resilience among the greater

community. Finally, and most importantly, our community has exhibited an overwhelming support for sustainable eating, however, I would argue that we have lacked an outlet through which to express this. Perhaps the cookbook will serve to unify and direct this enthusiasm into even greater things, it is, however, only a first step.

Recommendations

Ultimately, it is my hope that this cookbook can serve as an introductory guide to eating sustainably for St. Mary's students. I believe that by giving a few recipes and opening a few eyes to the sustainable food options on and around campus, the community cookbook can contribute to possible future movements. Perhaps the cookbook will initiate an interest that grows into a passion to tackle food sustainability issues on campus. However, this cookbook has the potential for a lot more.

I think that the cookbook could become both a tradition and a source of community, knowledge and history. As it becomes opened sourced through the creation of a web page, community members can continue to freely add to it recipes and sustainable food knowledge. It may serve as a space for students, staff and faculty to connect and innovate as we build off the knowledge gathered. It is my hope that it does this, stays alive and dynamic in time, adapting and growing with the students and science of the times. The borders of this cookbook are endless in scope. It is my sincere hope, that at the very least, it becomes an ancient relic that some kid, decades later, digs up in the vegetarian co-op.

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