Strengthening Sustainable Food Systems
Through Environmental Education Workshops

Executive Summary

Project Introduction

Ann Arbor is known as a local food hot spot while the City of Ypsilanti continues to decrease barriers to urban farming for its citizens. Both cities are making room for new and/or updated spaces to see locally produced fare. And yet, the ways in which residents throughout Washtenaw County interact with their local food system is limited. Increased skill building and resource access can encourage more full and diverse local food system participation.

Considerable work on sustainable, local food systems is conducted at the University of Michigan. An increasing number of faculty, staff, and students are turning their attention to their immediate food system. While UM produces considerable knowledge about local food systems, it is not being widely disseminated at the county level. Increased information flow between UM and the Washtenaw County community is needed. Thus, this environmental education workshop series in partnership with UM and local community groups fills this gap. A focus is placed on skill building and connecting residents with the resources necessary to use these skills far beyond the workshops.

Summary of Expected Key Impacts

- Increased participation in and use of local food system
- Increased collaboration, partnership building, and information flow between UM students, faculty, and staff and Washtenaw County community groups
- Long-term skill development and resource identification for participants
- Community based outreach and learning for students
- Survey data collection on:
  o Initial local food systems knowledge base
  o Feedback on workshop
  o Post-workshop engagement with local food system
- Creation of community workshop development best practices document

Key Stakeholders

The key stakeholders for the workshop series are:
- UM Community Members (Faculty, Staff, Students)
- UMSFP Student Groups (leading role in creating workshop content)
- Washtenaw County residents who attend a workshop(s) and those who benefit from increased participation and sales in the local food system
- Washtenaw County community organizations that co-produce a workshop(s)
  - Specific community groups are not finalized until UMSFP member groups indicate while workshop topics they are most passionate about creating

**Total Amount Requested In Additional Funding**

No additional funding is requested at this time.

**Goals**

Beyond achieving the expected key impacts listed above, additional goals include:
- Fostering long-term, local-food-related behavior adoption that improves environmental, economic, food access, and health outcomes
- Provide Washtenaw County community groups and residents additional access to UM community, promoting free campus and out-county university events
- Continuously improve the workshop series template and apply it to future community based learning opportunities
- Create enough interest in workshop series to continue them into the future

**Progress Report**

**Background**

Considerable work on sustainable, local food systems is conducted at the University of Michigan (UM). This work is a response to the environmental degradation caused by resource-intensive industrial agriculture. Fossil fuel, water, and topsoil are consumed by industrial agriculture at unsustainable rates, monocropping depletes soil of essential nutrients while reducing biodiversity, and toxic inputs pollute the environment and increase health risks (Horrigan, Lawrence & Walker 2002). As average food-miles increase so do fossil fuel consumption and air pollution. An estimated 40% of food is wasted in the US (Neff, Kanter & Vandevijvere 2015), increasing landfills’ methane and CO2 emissions (Hall et al. 2009). Furthermore, conventional agriculture has not adequately addressed the fact that many people do not have sufficient access to calorically and nutritionally dense foods. In Washtenaw County, 14.7% of residents are food insecure or dealing with chronic hunger (Feeding America 2015), mirroring the national food insecurity statistic of 14% (USDA 2014). Fortunately, increasing support for and use of local food systems improves environmental, economic, and societal conditions (Bareja-Wawryszuk & Golebiewski 2014). Yet, while UM produces considerable knowledge about local food systems, it is not being widely disseminated. Increased information flow between UM and the Washtenaw County community is needed. This environmental education workshop series in partnership with UM and
local groups will address this need. The series will use a variety of learning strategies to match community learning preferences (Jacobson et al. 2006). Skill building will be achieved through active, cooperative, and tactile activities. Emphasis will be placed on building knowledge of local food systems and actionable steps for increasing sustainability (Sobel 1995). However, building awareness and positive attitudes is insufficient for behavior change (Zint & Wolske 2014) thus the series will focus on action strategies and resources that support long-term behavior change (Braus 2013; Ramsey & Hungerford 2002).

The UM Sustainable Food Program (UMSFP) leadership team along with faculty advisor Dr. Raymond De Young will be overseeing this workshop series by connecting local food based student groups with Washtenaw County community organizations, developing workshop templates for each workshop development team to utilize, creating the workshop series schedule, and spearheading promotion efforts.

**Scope**

During the 2016-2017 school year, UMSFP will facilitate the development of three unique local food system workshops. Each workshop will be executed at least three times in different locations throughout Washtenaw County to maximize accessibility for residents. While UMSFP is tasked with creating the overarching workshop template, its member student groups along with faculty, staff, and partner community groups will develop the workshop content. This content will focus on local food systems. More specifically, it will build participants’ skillsets for engaging with their local food system while providing them with information about available resources that can decrease the barriers to long-term skill implementation. Skills that increase the likelihood of sustainable behavior adoption and create potential to have economic, environmental, food access, and health impacts will be prioritized.

A total of 700 workshop participants are anticipated in the 2016-2017 school year. However, the pool of residents that have the potential to be impacted by these workshops is greater. For example, workshop participants will learn strategies for sharing food systems knowledge with their spheres of influence. Furthermore, workshops will be filmed and uploaded online to increase this project’s reach.

**Impacts**

*Increased participation in and use of local food system* is expected of workshop participants in the short and long term. Participants will not only be learning skills that give confidence to and build excitement around engaging with the local food system, they will learn about resources to reduce their barriers to participation even further.

*Increased collaboration, partnership building, and information flow* between UM students, faculty, and staff and Washtenaw County community groups. These
workshops serve as a critical touch point between UM and the wider Washtenaw County community. This is particularly the case for workshops held outside of Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti, which is where most campus groups that engage with their location environment concentrate their efforts.

**Community based outreach and learning opportunities for students** throughout the development and execution of this workshop series will build student research, public speaking, and communication skills. This project will also increase students’ awareness of the local food system and best practices for engaging with community groups.

**The creation of community workshop development best practices** document will be made possible by **survey data collection and analysis**. Quick pre-, post-, and follow up surveying of participants will provide information on what the workshops have done well and what needs to be improved as well as skill utilization after the workshop ends.

**Progress**

**Creation of UROP Project Posting:** two Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program (UROP) assistants will support the workshop series. The job posting went live 9/14/16 along with all UROP project job descriptions across campus. Interviews and hiring decisions are scheduled to be completed by 10/3/16.

**Development of overarching workshop template:** UMSFP has begun to create the workshop template that each workshop development team will use to fill in their content and development their skill-building activities.

**Washtenaw Country community group interaction:** UMSFP has reached out to several local community groups that work on or interested in supporting local food systems. All feedback on the workshop series has been positive. Final determination on which community groups will co-produce workshop content will happen once UMSFP student groups provide their finalized list of workshop topic interests.

**Remaining Plans**

The project proposal was submitted for this workshop series at the deadline. This was at the end of the Winter 2016 semester, which made it difficult to coordinate with member student groups initially since most students are off campus for the summer and checking their emails less frequently. All feedback received from student groups on this project has been positive, with several UMSFP member student groups interested in being on a workshop content development team. Now that the Fall 2017 semester has begun, movement on this project is expected to move at a much faster pace.

The next highest priority for this project is to collect responses from all UMSFP member
student groups on the workshop topics that interest them the most. This will then allow UMSFP to pair student groups taking on a workshop content development role to be connected with a Washtenaw County community group that best aligns with any given workshop topic chosen.

Additional outstanding activities include:
- Create participant surveys & email content
- Create workshop content and activities
- Create 2016-2017 workshop series schedule
- Publicize and execute workshops
- Review survey results and make improvement
- Upload workshop videos online

**Timeline**

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<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Fall 2016</th>
<th>Winter 2017</th>
<th>Summer 2017</th>
<th>Fall 2017</th>
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<tr>
<td>Develop content team for each workshop theme</td>
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<tr>
<td>Create participant surveys &amp; email content</td>
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<td>Upload workshop videos online</td>
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**Budget**

$750 – reference materials printing  
$250 – workshop marketing  
$2000 – venue fees  
$2000 – materials for workshop activities

Total: $5000

*No additional funding is being requested.

**References**


