



National Wildlife Federation®
CAMPUS
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**Prescott College and the University of Arizona
Tucson, Arizona
Spring 2008, Dining Services**

BACKGROUND

Campus Profile

The University of Arizona (U of A) is located in Tucson, Arizona, and serves a student population of more than 30,000 graduate and undergraduate students. In the last few years, U of A has made big moves toward becoming a green campus. Some examples of U of A's move towards sustainability include:

- incorporation of grey water into campus irrigation systems
- use of electric vehicles for maintenance purposes
- support and implementation of rainwater harvesting basins throughout campus
- installation of solar panels and rainwater harvesting cisterns at the visitors' center
- implementation of a green roof on a new U of A building
- support of the weekly campus farmers' market

Prescott College is located in Prescott, Arizona, and has a firm focus on environmental education throughout all programs of study. The school is a small, private liberal arts college and is known for its emphasis on experiential education. Prescott College has a satellite program in Tucson, and this is the branch that NWF Campus Ecology fellow Jessica Williams attended. Because the branch in Tucson is a small operation and there is no main campus, it was a privilege to use the U of A as a secondary campus on which to implement projects. Both the weekly farmers' market and the Arizona Association for Environmental Education Conference were held at the University of Arizona.

Contacts

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GOALS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Goals

This NWF Campus Ecology Fellowship project was most unique in that it was a joined effort between the University of Arizona and Prescott College. Although a student of Prescott College, Jessica Williams, Campus Ecology Fellow, implemented the project on the University of Arizona campus because of its size and ability to reach a large population. Working closely in the coordination of the farmers' market was also the Campus Health Department at the University of Arizona.

The promotion, management, and coordination of the farmers' market on the University of Arizona campus had the purpose of educating and demonstrating the importance of sustainable food production to students, faculty and staff of the university. In addition to coordination of the farmers' market, this project also included the coordination and successful implementation of a statewide educational conference on

environmental sustainability. The overall aim of both aspects of these projects was to offer a solid educational opportunity for a variety of people in order to promote environmental sustainability on college campuses and beyond.

The farmers' market at U of A offered a unique opportunity to educate the campus population about sustainable food production and its immense importance to the environmental movement. The market occurred weekly in the middle of the mall, where there was high foot traffic of students, faculty and neighbors. All vendors selling at the market came no farther than 100 miles with the goods they were selling. Each vendor offered a product that held some aspect of environmental sustainability, whether it be certified organic apples from Wilcox, Arizona, or grass-finished, free-range beef from McNeal, Arizona. A large part of the research put into this project had to do with the actual distance the majority of food found in supermarkets travels and how that petroleum-based travel impacts the environment by adding large amounts of carbon into the atmosphere.

The second aspect of this project is also intricately centered on education about environmental sustainability. The project morphed from an idea to assist putting on a statewide conference into becoming the head coordinator of the entire conference. The main point of the conference was to offer educators, both traditional and nontraditional, the opportunity to gain tools with which to teach their students the fundamentals of environmental sustainability.

Accomplishments

Farmers' Market at the University of Arizona

In order to educate market patrons about the lack of sustainability in the current food system, diagrams were made illustrating the distance traveled for food at the farmers' market versus food at the supermarket. The research for these diagrams concluded that not only is our food traveling from very far away, it is also incredibly difficult to find valid information about food importation to the United States and where the food originates.

A survey of 200 patrons was also done, including students, faculty, staff, visitors and U of A neighbors, on what their definition of sustainable food production includes and what was most important to them when thinking about buying food in an environmentally conscientious manner. In addition, tours were led of the farmers' market for City High School, a charter school in Tucson, to give the students a hands-on experience of local food production.

The main success of the farmers' market was the opportunity to spend time with patrons of the market and have discussions about the problems of the mainstream food system. It was encouraging and enlightening to speak with students who shared their awareness and concern for the sustainability, or lack thereof, of the food system. Providing the students and faculty with an alternative to buying food shipped from thousands of miles away was greatly appreciated.

Another success of the farmers' market is the implementation of the "plastic bag free" market. With funds from the Campus Ecology Fellowship grant, we were able to purchase reusable canvas bags that the vendors sold to customers instead of using plastic bags. The vendors and customers really enjoyed this, and it was a neat way to illustrate the folly of plastic shopping bags.

Arizona Association for Environmental Education "Educating for Sustainability" Conference

We were able to provide more than 100 teachers, environmental educators, students and others with workshops that were hands-on and gave specific teaching tools that will be useful in communicating the fundamentals and importance of environmental sustainability.

We opened the conference on Thursday, October 25, 2007, with a keynote address by Dr. Jonathan Overpeck, Director of the Institute for the Study of the Planet Earth at the University of Arizona and a main author of the 2007 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Report. Opening the conference with a keynote speaker so well versed in climate change was meant to bring everyone's attention immediately to the connection between environmental sustainability and climate change.

On Friday, we provided the participants with a number of choices for workshops and field trips that took place throughout the day. The workshops and field trips were divided into four different tracks of sustainability: water conservation, community food security, permaculture and climate change. All were led by local experts in the different fields and all received great feedback from participants. We closed on Friday night with a keynote address by Dr. Gary Paul Nabhan, Director of the Center for Sustainable Environments at Northern Arizona University and renowned lecturer, writer and indigenous-food advocate.

The conference closed on Saturday with workshops and field trips in the morning and a green festival in the afternoon. The conference was funded through local business support; and huge support also came from the Arizona Wildlife Foundation. Because of the generous support given the conference, I was able to offer 50 teachers and students fully paid scholarships to attend.

Challenges and Responses

Farmers' Market at the University of Arizona

There were many logistical challenges with the farmers' market in dealing with an educational entity as large as the University of Arizona. Because of their contracts with large food chains that sell food in the Student Union, the U of A placed stringent regulations on the types of foods we could allow our vendors to sell. For example, we were not allowed to have any ready-to-eat food at the market because it would be in direct competition with the Student Union. This made a serious dent in the number of sales the vendors were able to achieve, as most students passing by were on their way to class and did not have any place to store the fresh foods during their classes. Having the chance to sell sandwiches made with all local ingredients, or hot tamales, a southwestern favorite, would have made a huge difference in the revenue the vendors earned.

Another challenge was simply the level of apathy of most students towards making changes that are inconvenient to their lifestyle. It is difficult to convince a student who is not particularly environmentally minded to spend a little extra money to buy and a little extra time to prepare food that is locally and organically produced. The level of dependence on petroleum of the food system is clear, but many people are not yet making the clear connection to the high level of petroleum use specifically in food transportation and the heightening level of global warming. This is a more abstract connection and one that people are less likely to follow without some previous knowledge of the food system and global warming.

Lastly, attitudes about food were a main deterrent to the market being financially successful. People in this country are very comfortable with the idea that they should have access to all kinds of foods, no matter the time of year and the growing season. In order to have a viable local food market, patrons must be willing to give up certain foods as the growing season shifts and understand that not all produce grows year-round.

ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT

Leaders and Supporters

Faculty and staff from Prescott College and the University of Arizona participated in the survey and conference.

Funding and Resources

This project was funded through an NWF Campus Ecology Fellowship grant.

CLOSING COMMENT

The farmers' market completed its second year of operation in May 2008, and changes and improvements are being planned and implemented for next year's market. Although we were not able to complete a final version of a best-practices manual for operating a campus farmers' market, we were able to reach out to a large population of people at the University of Arizona.

The Arizona Association for Environmental Education conference became the main focus of this project, and the event turned out to be an exceptionally memorable experience for the coordinators as well as the participants. The connection formed between the Arizona Wildlife Foundation and the Arizona Association for Environmental Education continues to grow, with both organizations working together to increase environmental education in Arizona. The green festival is now going to be an annual event in Tucson, with families and community members able to learn about local environmental actions and environmentally sound products.