



George Mason University

Fairfax, Virginia

Environmental Outreach

SCHOOL

George Mason University, in Fairfax County, Virginia, is a public four-year research institution. Current enrollment is over 32,000 headcount, with over 22,000 in full-time equivalent.

ABSTRACT

The George Mason University Potomac Heights Vegetable Garden was started in April 2009 with the help of Lenna Storm, Colin Bennett, and Danielle Wyman from the Office of Sustainability. After a rocky start, the garden is now thriving! A large part of its success is due to a student club (the George Mason University Organic Garden Association) that oversees the garden. This group is responsible for garden outreach and education within the Mason community. They are also in charge of coordinating volunteer efforts on the garden. Danielle Wyman is the Garden Manager and assists the Garden Association (GOGA) with garden projects, grants, and initiatives.

GOALS AND OUTCOMES

Goals

When the garden started in 2009, the major goals included vegetable donations to garden volunteers and area food banks. Our goals for 2010 included donations and sales to Mason Dining. In 2010, over 300 pounds of fresh fruits and vegetables were donated to volunteers and to Food for Others (a local food bank.) 17 pounds of produce were sold to Mason Dining to be served in Mason's Southside Dining Facility. We added another goal for 2011- vegetable kiosk sales! Due to an increase in production in 2011, we were able to sell a portion of the produce to members of the Mason community at a small kiosk in one of the main student centers. The kiosk sales have been extremely helpful with raising community awareness and support of the garden.

Over the coming years we hope to expand Mason's garden program. We intend on achieving this through raising garden awareness at each of our campuses (Prince William, Arlington, and Fairfax). We aim on pulling in more of Mason's students for on-garden education. The incorporation of more academics/hands-on learning at the garden will expose a larger portion of Mason's community to the activities and opportunities available. We also hope to offer regularly-occurring garden-related workshops and lectures to those interested (not exclusive to Mason's community) in learning more. Continuously increasing levels of community participation are key for the continued success and growth of our garden program.

Lastly, we have partnered with several of Mason's professors the number of service learning hours at the Potomac Heights Vegetable Garden. Involvement and support from Mason's academic community has resulted in the completion of over 150 service (volunteer) learning hours. Our goal is to reach at least 300 (collective) service learning and volunteer hours for the Potomac Heights Vegetable Garden.

Accomplishments and Outcomes

Mason Dining Executive Chef, Peter Schoebel and Auxiliary Enterprises and Campus Retail Operations Executive Director, Mark Kraner worked together to allow vegetables grown at the Potomac Heights Garden

to be sold to Southside (a central dining facility at Mason's Fairfax campus.) This was a huge accomplishment for the garden as there are typically very strict regulations for all food served on campus.

Challenges and Responses

One of the biggest challenges for the Potomac Heights Vegetable Garden is summer coverage. From the beginning of May to the end of August, the majority of Mason's students leave campus. The garden is most productive and needs the most amount of upkeep during those summer months. In response, the Office of Sustainability offered to fund a part-time Summer Garden Intern. Amanda Wall (former George Mason University Organic Garden Association President) was selected to be the intern this year. She worked tirelessly to keep the garden looking and producing its best! She also oversaw a handful of volunteers and service learners at the garden. Amanda has also been in charge of vegetable kiosk sales, food bank donations, and garden mapping for the upcoming growing season.

Campus Climate Action: Your School's Carbon Footprint

It would be very difficult to measure the amount of greenhouse gasses reduced from this project. Many of last year's garden volunteers felt so inspired by their work at the garden that they decided to start vegetable gardens of their own. One student rented a plot at a local community garden, another started one at a friend's house, and many others started gardening at their home!

Commentary and Reflection

It is very important to hold the vision for the project. Be sure to clearly articulate your vision in a proposal or white paper. Campus and community support is central to a successful garden project. This is especially true with gardens as the work can be daunting if done alone. Consider starting a club or assist a group of people interested in starting a gardening club. Lastly, have fun! The production of delicious, fresh vegetables is an effect of a community of dedicated people coming together, getting their hands dirty, and connecting with the earth- all while having a great time!

ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT

Leaders and Supporters

The George Mason University Organic Garden Association (student club) has been primarily responsible for the success of this project. Namely the garden club leadership; Amanda Wall, Nya Jackson, Cassie Coleman, Donielle Ward, James Given, Lauren Peery, Jason VonKundra, Dan Stock, and several others were leaders in moving the garden toward greater success. Tom Calhoun (Vice President of Facilities), Lenna Storm (University Sustainability Manager), and Larry Spaine (Director of Facilities Management) made the garden possible through their consistent support and in some cases, allocation of resources.

Funding and Resources

Over the past 2 years approximately \$6,000 has been spent on the garden. The majority of this money (\$5,000) was from a generous grant provided by Transurban Flour. Student and community volunteer hours at the garden were the most effective form of internal resources. The land for the garden was made possible from a very generous donation from Mason Housing. Housing offered a courtyard from one of the upperclassmen residence buildings for cultivation. This area has proven to be both visible (to the students which reside in and visit this particular building) and protected as it is surrounded by three brick sides of the building.

Education and Community Outreach

Mason's community and its neighbors have been extremely supportive of the Potomac Heights Vegetable Garden. The garden has been featured in various on-campus publications (the Gazette, the Broadside, and

Mason Spirit). Additionally, the garden received attention when a photo taken at the garden was placed on Mason's home page (gmu.edu.) Vegetable sales at one of Mason's major student centers (the Johnson Center) have created much excitement and interest in the garden. Lastly, participation from professors through the incorporation of class tours, students service learners, and other research activities have set the garden 'on the map' for focal points for sustainability at Mason.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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MORE ABOUT YOUR SCHOOL

Campus Sustainability History

George Mason University faculty, staff, and students formed an Environmental Task Force in the mid 2000s to start a dialogue with the university administration about the need for Mason to take a leadership role in sustainability by demonstrating sustainable operations and by providing sustainability education. From the seeds of this dialogue sprung the desire to sign the American College and University Presidents Climate Commitment and to create a formal administrative role to support university sustainability. The Office of Sustainability at George Mason University was formed two years ago, in summer of 2007, with the hiring of the first Sustainability Coordinator. Now, Mason's sustainability efforts spring up, without prompting, across all campuses, and can be seen in projects like the new organic vegetable garden, the first all-native plant demonstration garden, the commitment to building all buildings to the LEED Silver standard, the commitment to sustainable dining practices, and the formation of a Faculty Fellow for Sustainability Curricula out of the Office of the Provost, among many others. Find out more about Mason's programs and activities at <http://green.gmu.edu>.