



Augustana College
Rock Island, Illinois
Dining Services - Farm2Fork/Augie Acres

SCHOOL

Founded in 1860 and situated on a 115-acre campus near the Mississippi River, Augustana College is a private, four-year college of the liberal arts and sciences related to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The college enrolls 2,500 students from diverse geographic, social, ethnic and religious backgrounds and offers more than 70 majors and related areas of study.

ABSTRACT

Augustana's Farm2Fork Initiative teaches students and others about issues related to food production and consumption, and promotes locally grown food products. More broadly, it addresses issues of sustainability in food production while raising the awareness of the campus and surrounding community regarding the hidden costs of unexamined food consumption. By partnering with local small-scale family farms and converting urban brownfields into orchards and gardens, Farm2Fork has dramatically increased the amount of food consumed on campus that is raised within 25 miles of the college, provided biodiesel for local producers, and engaged students, faculty, staff and neighborhood residents in hands-on food production.

GOALS AND OUTCOMES

Goals

The initial goals of Farm2Fork were to increase the amount of recyclable/compostable products used in Augustana's Dining Services, decrease the total amount of fuel used in transporting food to campus, increase the amount of fresh, non-processed food consumed on campus, and explore partnerships with local family farms. In accomplishing these objectives, new goals emerged, including conversion of waste oil to biodiesel, composting food waste solids, and repurposing brownfield lots surrounding the campus to food production. In the years ahead, Farm2Fork will explore expanded relationships with small-scale ag producers intended to keep families on farms. Continuing to decrease waste in the campus community's food cycle remains a priority, including adding more local sources of food and exploring entrepreneurial uses for the glycerin by-product of biodiesel production, such as soap. Augie Acres is in the development phase of orchard space, with harvests anticipated within 5 years.

Accomplishments and Outcomes

Augustana's Farm2Fork Initiative began with a relationship with Jim Johansen, owner of a 50-acre farm in rural Rock Island County that had been in his family since 1937. Subsequent partnerships with Cravers' Little Red Barn, Thrushwood Farms, and the Illinois Crown Beef Cooperative have enabled Augustana to significantly increase the amount of food it serves that is produced locally by small-scale producers. The relationships have been based on mutual learning and respect, and have given the farmers access to faculty resources at Augustana in developing prairie- and wetlands- restorations on partner farms.

Additional outcomes:

- Working with our partner farms, a weekly Farmers’ Market is provided on campus year ‘round, offering students, employees and community residents access to food that is produced locally and sustainably.
- Three urban “brownfield” lots owned by the City of Rock Island were given to Augustana in order to create Augie Acres, a community garden that produces a variety of vegetables for consumption by Augustana Dining Services, and also for purchase by members of the community at weekly Farmers’ Markets.
- Dining Services posts information on the transportation costs related to many of the items it offers in Augustana’s cafeterias, allowing consumers to judge the relative sustainability of produce raised locally versus that raised hundreds, if not thousands of miles distant.
- Food waste from Dining Services is composted by Wesley Acres and other local farms (see “Commentary/Reflection” below).
- Waste oil from Dining Services is processed into biodiesel, which is used in running equipment on our partner farms.
- Glycerin, a by-product in the biodiesel production process, is used in the manufacture of soap. One proposal would sell the soap in order to raise funds for the outreach efforts of Global Affect, Augustana’s student sustainability organization.
- Small- to medium-size farm operations have been returned to profitability, diminishing the pressure on farm families to sell land to larger corporate farm operations. The latter can have serious negative impacts on local ecosystems – related both to water quality and fuel usage.

Challenges and Responses

Insofar as the Farm2Fork and resultant Augie Acres programs grew out of Augustana’s Board-endorsed Campus Sustainability Plan (<http://www.augustana.edu/x556.xml>), few obstacles were faced in their implementation. The quality of the food consumed through Dining Services is such that demand for local produce has increased, generating more wide-spread support for these and related programs. Challenges related to funding have largely been addressed by cost-savings generated by the projects, and by strategic partnerships (e.g., with the City of Rock Island) that have made the necessary investments attractive.

Campus Climate Action: Your School’s Carbon Footprint

Farm2Fork and Augie Acres both diminish Augustana’s carbon footprint by reducing the distance produce and other food products must be shipped to reach our Dining Services. Additionally, the converted biodiesel component of Farm2Fork means less refined petroleum products are needed in the production of the food we consume. These are important pillars in broader initiatives aimed at reducing the use of personal vehicles by students and employees (free-ride program with two local mass transit systems, incentives to students for agreeing not to bring a car to campus, etc.), that have contributed to a reduced carbon footprint.

Commentary and Reflection

Dick Stahl is a 1963 graduate of the college who went on to become our community’s first Poet Laureate in the early 1990s. After a recent visit to learn more about the composting of Augustana’s food waste at Wesley Acres, he wrote the following poem, which he graciously gave to Augustana College:

*Ministry of Worms
for Augustana’s dining director Garry Griffith
and Milan farmer Jim Johansen*

“That’s my banana peel sliding out

of Garry's broken white trash sack! This green stem's speckled, and my right thumbnail bit down here this morning," I tell Jim.

My peeling's drawn into this straight mound heaped like a windrow for the feeding redworms. It's gone into Jim's rising piles of squeezed grapefruit, orange rinds, rusty lettuce, cracked eggshells, split celery ends, smoking coffee grounds and stamped bingo cards, all biodegradable as the forks, spoons, knives and straws made of switchgrass, potato starch and bamboo fibers. As worms wiggle into the skin of my breakfast treat, I work my faith in consuming.

To eat is to move and to move is to eat under this compost site where 10,000 worms rise to chew table scraps. Blueberry skins and golden delicious apple cores prompt humming the school song. This is a hymn, a calling, a heaven-sent victory, a postage-paid package for a green environment. These pilot pitchmen underwrite their own poetry across the rolling Illinois prairie with worms.

Everything turns around like the worms themselves, heads up to this fresh leaf-and-refuse pile. When the peeling's a worm casting, Jim spreads the simple fertilizer over his garden. He pulls up a carrot from a row where he scatters compost. He hands it to me, saying,

"Here's your banana peel. It's a miracle."

ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT

Leaders and Supporters

Most of the early inspiration for Augustana's Sustainability Plan came from student activism, primarily through the Global Affect organization. Their efforts led to the creation of the Campus Sustainability Committee, charged with writing and implementing the Campus Sustainability Plan (<http://www.augustana.edu/x556.xml>). The Committee encouraged curricular innovation, resulting most notably in a Learning Community (LC) that paired a professor of geography, Dr. Charlie Mahaffey, with a professor of English, Dr. Jason Peters. This LC combined the science of sustainable living with the literature of sustainability, including especially the works of Wendell Berry (Dr. Peters is editor of Wendell Berry: Life and Work (2007, University Press of Kentucky)). Among the recent and current students whose efforts have been invaluable in the success of Farm2Fork and Augie Acres are Joshua Schipp, Dana Swanson, Anna VanderVlugt, Pamela Larson, Stephanie Dilling, Bryan Schmid, Jaron Gaier and Melissa Hayes.

Funding and Resources

Given that a premium is often charged in connection with improved sustainability (e.g., compostable service-ware often costs more than disposable), the increased costs related to these initiatives have been minimal, and have been absorbed into the normal operating budgets of Dining Services. Volunteer involvement in maintenance of Augie Acres has minimized the impact on budgets for Facilities Services, and the donation of land by the City of Rock Island (combined with expertise and loaned equipment from our farm partners) meant Augie Acres began with minimal cash outlay.

Education and Community Outreach

The Farm2Fork Initiative has been shared in detail by Garry Griffith, director of Augustana's Dining Services, and Jim Johansen, owner of Wesley Acres, in presentations made to other institutions of higher learning in our region, several multi-campus medical systems, and beyond our region in conferences related to sustainability and institutional food services. Both Farm2Fork and Augie Acres have been featured in local and regional publications.

National Wildlife Federation's Campus Ecology Program

Information from other campuses we gained from the case studies featured by the National Wildlife Federation's Campus Ecology Program inspired us to be more ambitious in outlining our own expectations of ourselves and the success of our programs.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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MORE ABOUT YOUR SCHOOL

Campus Sustainability History

"As a community, Augustana College is striving toward sustainability through its academic programs and institutional policies. In 2007, the Augustana College Board of Trustees approved a broad and ambitious action plan in an effort to reduce the college's environmental footprint. A central point of this plan was the establishment of the Campus Sustainability Committee, composed of students and members of the faculty and staff. This committee oversees and helps facilitate numerous activities on campus, including recommendations of institutional policies. In addition, Global Affect, a long-standing student organization, supports numerous environmental activities on campus." (from www.augustana.edu/sustainability)