

**To:** Dr. Christine Grogan  
**From:** Laurel Petrulionis  
**Date:** July 7, 2016  
**Subject:** Proposal: Incorporating Food from Local Farms in Dining Halls

This proposal requests to further research increasing the sustainability of the dining halls at Penn State's University Park campus by partnering with local farms to provide in-season food to students. Currently, the dining halls offer a variety of nutritious foods; however, no options currently exist to encourage students to eat locally. By offering local choices, Penn State can practice its agricultural mission, enriching the local economy with its patronage of local farmers and increasing student awareness of making responsible food choices.

## **Problem: Agricultural Extension Ends at Dining Halls**

In 1862, the Morrill Land-Grant Act established Penn State as a land-grant institution. This mandated the university to not only teach a wide curriculum, but also to serve as an agricultural resource to all citizens of Pennsylvania (Our History). Penn State Extension, an outreach program for producers, agricultural businesses, and consumers in Pennsylvania and the northeastern United States, is now one of the largest institutions within the Pennsylvania State University, offering resources to local farmers including:

- Courses and workshops in more than 35 subjects
- Safety trainings that result in certifications for farms and food handling
- Community engagement to promote an appreciation for agriculture
- Tools and analyses to improve the productivity and health of farms (About Extension)

Penn State has also invested in sustainable practices as well as education. According to the Penn State Sustainability Strategic Plan, the university's "vision is to embed sustainability as a fundamental value at the university through the development of sustainability literacy, solutions, and leadership." One way to extend this goal of sustainability in both education and practice is to allow for students to make more sustainable choices at dining halls.

Penn State University currently offers a wide variety of nutritious dining options that are inclusive of a variety of dietary needs. Food Services at Penn State prioritizes equal access to food, and they have put together an Allergy Advisory Board of students to "discuss concerns, successes, new recipes, and issues related to having a food allergy or intolerance on campus" (Food Allergies). Additionally, daily menus and nutritional information are available for all dining halls on the University Park campus. This emphasis on making dining information available shows that the university understands the importance of students making responsible and healthy food choices.

Sourcing food from local farms is an ideal solution to bring the values of agricultural extension and sustainability into the daily decision-making of students. The “eat local” movement is popular for its holistic approach to making responsible food choices. Food from local farms can:

- Support the local economy and create new relationships between farms and the university
- Remove the fossil fuel spent on transporting food across the country
- Waste less food through immediate distribution
- Increase the variety and freshness of produce eaten by students
- Educate students about making local food choices

For these reasons, I propose that the university create a local foods program that offers seasonal produce from Pennsylvania farms in the dining halls on campus.

## Research Plan

- I will begin my research by compiling a list of farms within a 50 mile radius of Penn State University. My goal is to understand how much food could be provided locally by farmers. I will be researching:
  - How many farms are within a 50 mile distance of Penn State?
  - What types of produce are available throughout the academic year?
  - What type of transportation and delivery systems exist?
  - How much does this produce cost?
- I will continue my research by contacting Housing and Food Services at Penn State to discuss current sources of produce. I plan on asking about a reasonable timeline of implementation and preemptively troubleshoot problems by asking:
  - Where is produce currently sourced from?
  - How much is currently spent on produce?
  - Is it possible to source from multiple producers seasonally?
  - What other problems might arise from implementing my proposal?
- Penn State has recently opened a student run farm. I plan on meeting with its operators to discuss how this farm could serve as an initial source of produce at the beginning of implementation. I am expecting the timeline on this project to be lengthy, so using the student farm as a pilot could help develop the project further.
- Finally, I plan on surveying current students to see what type of demand exists for local food. The implementation of local food could be modified to include educational aspects or it could be increased to include more products depending on the demand. I will ask the following questions:

- Do you try to purchase local food when it is available?
- Do you try to make sustainable food choices?
- Would you choose local foods in the dining hall if they were available and labeled?

## Schedule

In order to complete the project in a timely manner, I have developed the following schedule:

### **Week 1: July 11 – July 17**

- Send initial emails requesting information from Housing and Food Services
- Preliminary research on local farms
- Meet with student farm leaders

### **Week 2: July 18 – July 24**

- Follow up with any further questions from Housing and Food Services
- Compile unanswered questions and contact local farmers
- Draft initial report

### **Week 3: July 25 – July 31**

- Collect survey information from students
- Begin to design report
- Complete second draft of report

### **Week 4: August 1 – August 4**

- Integrate any new information into report
- Revise and complete report
- Draft and complete presentation slides
- Present presentation and submit final report

## Qualifications

I am a senior double majoring in International Politics and International Agriculture. Throughout my studies, I have learned that sustainable sourcing and limiting food waste are two of the most important factors in achieving global food security. While I hope to eventually tackle the macro-level aspects of this problem, I see Penn State as a place to have a significant effect. My goal in proposing this project is to not only connect Penn State students with the reality of where their food comes from, but also to send them into the world as responsible consumers.

Because my family values environmental awareness, I have participated in growing my own food in a family garden and traveling to local farms as a participant in Community Supported Agriculture (CSA). I still travel to farms to purchase meat and produce, and I attend weekly farmers markets in order to ensure that my food choices are sustainable. I know firsthand the difficulty of making responsible food choices while living on campus and participating in the campus meal plan. I will use my experiences as a student and as a life-long participant in the local food movement to create a project proposal that is achievable and educational.

## **Authorization**

This proposal has made clear the gap between the university's agriculture extension and the ability for students to support local farms. My solution is to bring local foods into the dining halls, which will support the local economy and create stronger relationships between Penn State and the farms that it has a mandate to support. This partnership will also educate students about the importance of responsible food choices and the sustainability of eating locally. With my interest in local farming and educational focus on agricultural systems, I am qualified to create a formal proposal on the subject. My research questions and schedule show that I understand the timeframe and can complete the proposal fully. I request that you grant me permission to further research and present on bringing local foods into dining halls.

If you have any questions, please contact me at 555-555-5555 or at [xxx5555@psu.edu](mailto:xxx5555@psu.edu). Thank you for your consideration.

## **References**

About Extension. (n.d.). Retrieved July 06, 2016, from <http://extension.psu.edu/about>

Food Allergies and Intolerances. (n.d.). Retrieved July 06, 2016, from <http://foodservices.psu.edu/food-allergies-and-intolerances>

Our History. (n.d.). Retrieved July 06, 2016, from <http://www.psu.edu/this-is-penn-state/our-history>

Penn State Sustainability Strategic Plan. (n.d.). Retrieved July 06, 2016, from <http://sustainability.psu.edu/sustainability-strategic-plan>