

Food Sovereignty, Food Insecurity, and Mental Health Proposal

One Page Synopsis of Proposal

Dear College of Arts and Sciences Senior Staff:

The CAS Faculty Council proposes that USF Senior Staff commit to supporting the creation of a campus food forest and organic garden and to bolstering its support for the USF Botanical Gardens and Feed-A-Bull Food Pantry.

Importance of USF Commitment to Food Security and Mental Health

College students are more food insecure than the general public. A recent USF survey demonstrates that food insecurity is integrally connected to adverse mental health outcomes and low academic performance, including the risk of dropping out of school altogether (see DeBate, Rith et. al, Food Insecurity, Well-Being and Academic Success among College Students: Implications for Post COVID-19 Pandemic Programming, published online 07, Oct 2021). Across the United States, including Florida, academic programs, community gardens, food forests, and food pantries are being implemented to address food insecurity. It is imperative that USF join with other educational institutions to address food insecurity and improve the mental health of our students.

Background

The Center for the Advancement of Food Security and Healthy Communities and the Food Sovereignty Initiative have both been at the forefront of addressing food security at USF. With a multi-disciplinary approach and inclusivity of faculty across academic disciplines and colleges, both groups have successfully secured external grants and awards, conducted research studies, and developed curricula associated with food sovereignty and security.

Program Summary and Proposal to Provost

- Provide resources to establish a USF campus food forest and organic garden.
- Support full-time garden staff, faculty director, student volunteers, internship programs and student clubs/organizations at the USF Botanical Gardens.
- Support and expand the USF Feed–A–Bull Food Pantry and Farm Stand at USF
- Establish a USF Sustainability landing page to highlight all USF academic and programmatic accomplishments in the effort to support food security, food sovereignty, and sustainability.

Benefits to USF

- USF students will learn marketable and essential problem-solving skills that will enable them to be leaders in sustainable food systems. They will be the next generation of food sovereignty researchers, advocates and community leaders.
- USF faculty, students, and community partners will build a cross-discipline and college community in a joint effort to pursue external grants and awards, conduct research studies, and design curriculum associated with food sovereignty and security.

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Dear College of Arts and Sciences Senior Staff:

The CAS Faculty Council proposes that USF Senior Staff commit to supporting the creation of a campus food forest and organic garden and to bolstering its support for the USF Botanical Gardens and Feed-A-Bull Food Pantry.

Importance of USF Commitment to Food Security and Mental Health

College students and, in particular, underserved and underrepresented students are more food insecure than the general public. The results of a recent USF survey demonstrate that the consequences of food insecurity are integrally connected to adverse mental health outcomes such as anxiety, depression, stress, hopelessness, and feelings of isolation as well as low academic performance and risk of postponing graduation (see DeBate, Rith et. al, Food Insecurity, Well-Being and Academic Success among College Students: Implications for Post COVID-19 Pandemic Programming, published online 07, Oct 2021). Across the United States, including Florida, academic programs, community gardens, food forests, and food pantries are being implemented to address food insecurity among college students. It is imperative that USF join with other educational institutions to address food insecurity and improve the mental health of our students. (See bullet points below for programs at FIU, FGCU, Miami Dade, UCF, and Eckerd)

- FIU Institute of Environment
- FIU Institute of Environment Agroecology and Food Security
- Florida Gulf Coast University Food Forest
- University of Central Florida Community Farm and Garden – Arboretum and Sustainability
- Miami Dade Earth Ethics Institute
- Eckerd College Community Farm
- Eckerd College Office of Sustainability

Background

The Center for Advancement of Food Security and Healthy Communities and the Food Sovereignty Initiative have both been at the forefront of addressing food security at USF. With a multi-disciplinary approach and inclusivity of faculty across academic disciplines and colleges, both groups have successfully obtained external grants and awards, conducted research studies, and developed curricula associated with food sovereignty and insecurity. Collaborations with the Judy Genshaft Honor's College, the Patel College of Global Sustainability, Housing and Residential Education Living and Learning Communities, the USF Botanical Gardens, and community partners such as The Coalition of Community Gardens, WellFed Community, Homegrown Hillsborough Partnership, Feeding Tampa Bay, and USF Feed-A-Bull Food Pantry are essential for ameliorating food insecurity at USF and relieving students' anxiety, stress, depression and senses of despair and hopelessness.

Program Summary for Reaching our Goals

- Establish, with the expertise of Nicole Brand, ECORE System Director, a location, or multiple locations on the USF campus for a food forest (to include edible plants and trees) as well as an organic garden that may include hydroponically grown vegetables. Ideally, the location(s) would be near the USF Botanical Gardens.
- Provide opportunities for academic courses, research grants, and awards.

- Provide and support full-time garden staff, a faculty director, student volunteers, internship programs and student clubs/organizations.
- Use the organic garden and food forest as laboratories for exploring the latest technologies in growing food sustainably.
- Support the USF Feed-A-Bull Food Pantry and Farm Stand at USF through high yield production of fruits and vegetables.
- Provide tabling opportunities for community partners such as WellFed Community, Coalition of Community Gardens, etc.
- Provide support and additional funding for the USF Feed-A-Bull Food Pantry to raise awareness about their services, enable them to extend hours, and create awareness among the USF population to the food insecurity problem on campus.
- Establish a USF Sustainability landing page to highlight all USF academic and programmatic accomplishments in the effort to support food security, food sovereignty, and sustainability.

Benefits to USF

- USF can showcase its programs and be recognized internationally (like FIU) by the Sustainable Agricultural Education Association.
- USF students will learn marketable and essential problem-solving skills that will enable them to be leaders in sustainable food systems. They will develop the critical, analytical, and creative thinking skills to help design systems to feed the world in an ever-changing climate.
- USF students will benefit from the vast and diverse courses that incorporate a food sovereignty component as well as internships and opportunities offered in all aspects of food systems. They will be the next generation of food sovereignty researchers, advocates, and community leaders.
- USF would be building a community across disciplines and colleges that will bring faculty, students, and community partners together in a joint effort to pursue the goal of food sovereignty and security. Gardening helps foster community and strengthens social connections. Gardens cultivate a sense of wonder, curiosity, and passion for learning. Most importantly, gardens and all their bounty offer a sense of belonging and hope for the future especially at a critical time when students continue to experience mental health challenges.

Proposal to Provost

We propose that the provost's office support initial start-up costs, which can then be funded through external grants and with the help of the Office of University Community Partnerships and the Office of Student Affairs. We recommend an increase in the operating budget of the USF Botanical Gardens so that they can work with Human Resources to hire a full-time community garden supervisor/manager. We also recommend the appointment of a faculty director who will be the link between the USF Botanical Gardens, research, and academic courses that benefit from a garden "laboratory." As the organic community garden and food forest receive more recognition, external support would help fund the garden as well as future endeavors. There are endless possibilities with expanding the garden such as adding hydroponic and solar systems, AI technology and robotics, bio digesters to transform food waste to energy and fertilizer, composting and so much more.

We propose that the Office of the Provost substantially fund the USF Feed-A-Bull Food Pantry and other outreach programs to help provide nutritious food to USF students. The Office of the Provost can sponsor educational outreach to students such as a home food delivery program, which minimizes the stigma associated with food insecurity. Campus food services could establish systems to minimize food waste by offering unused food at a reduced cost to students. "Too Good to Go" has just been launched

in Tampa Bay and can be used as a prototype for USF. There are endless possibilities for promoting food security at USF.

Progress towards the Goal

- Both the Food Sovereignty Initiative and the Center for Advancement of Food Security and Healthy Communities have their own websites. Similar to many other universities, USF can establish an overarching landing page that publicizes all events, courses, internships, research grants, awards, publications and more that showcase food security, food sovereignty, and sustainability.
- A major project outcome of the 2023 “Urban Food Sovereignty in the Humanities and Beyond” NEH grant (PI, William Schanbacher, Religious Studies) will have more than 15 courses from across disciplines that incorporate a food sovereignty component.
- The Agrarian Club, Botany Club, and the Judy Genshaft Honors College Community Garden Club (JGHC) all currently grow small amounts of food using plots provided by the USF Botanical Gardens, and they donate the items to USF Feed-A-Bull Food Pantry. These three clubs are actively collaborating to increase their scope, amplify their efficiency, and harmonize their goals and efforts.
- The Agrarian Club and JGHC Community Garden Club have organized a once per semester Farmer's Market with participants from community gardens and local vendors from the Tampa Bay Community.
- The Coalition of Student Environmental Organizations supports a USF Food Forest and has many ideas for how to use the space to increase student awareness around issues of food sovereignty and food security.
- Student Council and the Coalition of Student Environmental Organizations are collaborating to propose a university-wide composting program that would both make a food forest more sustainable and lead to many educational opportunities for students.
- Under the successful leadership of Dr. Whitney Fung Uy, from the College of Public Health, the Student Government Energy Fund supported the Campus Food Waste Recovery Project which piloted Dr. Culhane's biodigesters on campus. This project is in the process of being expanded by graduate students at the Patel College of Global Sustainability.