



Outback to the Forefront: Preparing the Outback Farm for Market

From Campus-to-Cutlery

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Purpose

We propose to integrate food grown in the Outback Farm Environmental Learning Center into the on-campus food system at WWU. Practically since the inception of the Outback, students have plotted and planned ways for the Outback to sell its produce to the campus community. Forty years after its inception the Outback is still in the same position; this is largely a function of the significant concerns of various WWU offices that students have been unable to address related to the project about the project.

We want nothing more than for the Outback to have the ability to share its bounty with the campus community, and receive financial compensation. Our role in that process is to draft a roadmap, to be carried out in the following two quarters, so that the Outback will have this ability to sell its produce by the time early June harvest rolls around. This document is that roadmap, and serves as a resource to be referenced by future Campus Sustainability Planning Studio classes and the Outback Farm; CSPA groups should work closely with the Outback to carry the project forward. This document identifies most of the things that the project will need to be viable in the eyes of WWU and successful as a program; these needs were identified by stakeholders at WWU and by farm managers who oversee successful student farm programs at Evergreen State College and the University of British Columbia.

Following our work this quarter, we recommend that CSPA classes in Winter Quarter work with the Outback and the Small Business Entrepreneurship class offered through the Business Management Department to write a business plan (more info in the logistics section). In Spring Quarter, the business plan can be implemented and by June the Outback will be rolling out the produce and raking in the dough!

1.2 Outback Farm Culture

The Outback Farm is a unique, special place on Western's campus that cultivates more than just vegetables--- The Outback creates community. The Outback is a 5-acre, sustainable farm, which comprises a dynamic system of wetlands, steep slopes, and an educational garden, community garden, ethnobotanical garden, forest garden, and herb garden. It functions mainly through volunteers who attend work parties and programs, a Student Coordinator and Co-Coordinator, and a crew of paid Americorps and Work/Study students. Work parties are held twice a week, and seasonal programs and workshops occur throughout the year. The unique farm culture at the Outback would be altered by a shift to a market farm model, so we suggest considering the consequences of such a change ahead of time.

Benefits of Implementing the Program

1.3 The Outback Farm

The Outback Farm directly benefits from the integration with the students, faculty, and staff through establishing a market. The Outback is rather hidden on South

Campus, where there is significantly less foot traffic, and the funneling of bounty across campus through the sales of produce will increase the visibility of the farm and strengthen the community by engaging more participation and fresh faces. Providing vegetables to the faculty, staff, and students creates visibility for the farm by establishing a direct consumer-student relationship across campus.

Establishing a marketplace also enhances an educational mission in the Outback Farm. By providing a true market opportunity and learning experience for students and employees, there is a clear function for its bounty and an ability to become a regenerative, self-sustaining system, as it recoups some of the costs of seeds, programs, and other on-farm costs.

1.4 Students

Last year in CSPA, a survey was conducted across campus, which showed that 71% of students on campus will support locally-grown food if it were a convenient option, and 69% of students professed support for paying more for locally grown food in general (WWU OS CSPA website). This Outback marketplace would help to satisfy student demand, providing the opportunity to purchase the freshest, most nutritious, locally-grown vegetables available--nourishing food to sustain a student's body and a healthy student body.

With increased access to food grown in The Outback, students will become aware of The Outback, might be inspired to attend work parties, and may begin personally growing their own food in their own plot. Grown by students, enjoyed by students!

1.5 Western Washington University

The University benefits immensely by following through on its commitment to "engaged excellence in environmental stewardship and sustainable practices through programs, scholarships, and actions". The food from The Outback farm is not only sustainable, but is actively contributing to the environmental health of the campus, where it is grown, providing a regenerative learning opportunity and experience for students, staff, and faculty for years to come.

Our project is ripe for success - other local colleges in the Pacific Northwest have established similar programs, and WWU may see greater admissions and interest with programs like these that increase prospective student appeal. The sustainable agriculture classes at WWU, offered by Gigi Berardi and John Tuxill, are already wildly successful and may find an increased academic value in being involved in the Outback if it is a full-fledged market farm.

2.0 Marketplace Opportunities

There are several different marketplaces at WWU that the Outback Farm could explore once it has in place all the necessary infrastructure to do so safely, reliably, and with support from the university. In this section we weigh some of the benefits and drawbacks of a few different options:

Farm-stand: In Winter quarter of 2011, a group in the Campus Sustainability Planning Studio developed a plan to sell produce from the Outback on Vendors Row, operating as a farm stand. A farm stand would provide the Outback with the opportunity to sell food directly to the people who will eat it, and has high visibility. However, the farm stand requires additional labor to sell the produce each week, and sales can fluctuate unpredictably from week to week.

Community Supported Agriculture: Another marketplace option for the Outback is Community Supported Agriculture (CSA). This fall, the Viking Supported Agriculture (VSA) drop-off location started at WWU. The VSA is provided through farms that participate under the Growing Washington CSA program. In the VSA program, students will sign up at the beginning of the growing season with some level of investment (between \$22-\$30 per week depending on the size of the share) in the farm. In return for the initial investment, shareholders then receive boxes of produce each week, to be picked up on campus. There is potential for the Outback to sell their produce to Growing Washington, to be distributed in the VSA each week. Clayton with Growing Washington said that they would be willing to pay market price for any produce grown in the Outback, and that it would be included in the boxes. There is potential to include one or so items per week in the boxes from the Outback. Benefits in this approach are that Growing Washington is doing the marketing and that there is no additional off-farm labor necessary to sell the produce. A primary challenge for the Outback is that there is uncertainty in the size of the VSA, and if the program included several hundred students, it would be impossible to provide enough food on a weekly basis. Another option would be to sell produce through a modestly-sized independent Outback CSA. CSA's are good options because the farmer can depend on the same customers week after week, and because no marketing is required after initial sales.

On-campus Food Vendors: Another option for the Outback is to sell produce to existing vendors at WWU. The largest vendor at WWU is Aramark, which operates the dining halls and all other dining services outside of vendors row. Several other universities, including Evergreen College and the University of Vermont, sell produce from their student-run organic farms to Aramark. Unfortunately, Aramark is unable to pay full price to the Evergreen Farm for the

food for their dining halls, but the organic farm does it because it is such tremendous exposure for them on campus. Other food vendors on vendors row, and an eventual student-run food co-operative are other potential buyers.

3.0 Logistics

If the Outback Farm is to be integrated into the WWU food system in a meaningful way, there are many questions to answer. This section exists to address the concerns that stakeholders have raised about the project. It is not a question of if the Outback can be integrated, but only a question of how. This section serves as a guide to addressing the concerns of this project's stakeholders.

3.1 Program Development

This spring quarter of 2012, the Outback will be expanding it's cultivation into the lawn at the farm, north of Buchanan towers. The intention is to grow more food this year and in future years, to meet student demand for the most local food available. This could be a first step in the restructuring of the Outback farm. By growing on that land, the Outback would be taking a step in the direction of emphasize cultivation for market on the farm, rather than cultivation just for the kicks of it like it is now. This shifting in emphasis provides a window of opportunity for changing some things structurally in the sustainable agriculture programming on campus.

Over the winter, we recommend that a team affiliated with the Outback reach out to the Small Business Entrepreneurship class offered through the business management program to write a business plan. This class has worked with other groups, including the WWU Student Food Co-operative, to write business plans in the past. We believe this partnership would be beneficial for all involved, and could turn out a very useful document. The business plan can certainly use this report as it's guide, as this report lays out many of the needs to be addressed within that plan.

3.2 Business Plan

Paul Mueller, the head of WWU Risk Management, identified the need for a comprehensive business plan for the requisite for the project in the eyes of the university. Some of the benefits of creating a business plan are that it can be distributed quickly and easily to stakeholders which would allow the information contained in the document to be easily communicated, and it could serve as a vision document for the Outback for the coming years. The business plan should address risks to the university that result from the change in the programming of the Outback resulting from this project; these include financial risks, risks to the WWU reputation, operational risks at the farm, and more.

As we've conceived of it, the business plan would have two distinct components: a financial sustainability plan and a program sustainability plan. Much of the information that will make up the business plan can be adapted from this document, as the business plan serves to address the needs identified in this report.`

The financial sustainability plan would take into account all additional costs that would result from the change in operations. The project needs identified below in this section comprise the majority of those costs. Of course, the plan would also take in to account additional income sources that result the changes at the Outback. Income sources would include the sale of produce, or grant money that might be available for specific projects. With the change in the operations of the Outback, it is possible that there are grants available to help cover additional costs.

The program sustainability plan should address concerns related to maintaining the continuity and reliability of the program. This means ensuring that buyers can depend on the program both on a week-to-week basis, as well as on a season-to-season basis. Students need to be able to depend on the harvest week after week, especially if there is a CSA program. While our stakeholders identified this as a need, the bigger concern will likely be ensuring continuation of the program season to season. Right now a hefty responsibility falls on the Outback student coordinator; so if there happens to be a less experienced or motivated student coordinator down the road, the program may be vulnerable. Additionally, the change in operations to include market farming will likely add more responsibility to the coordinator. These questions should be addressed in the business plan, and suggestions are offered below.

To be Covered in the Business Plan

Liability Insurance

One of the primary areas that must be addressed in the business plan is liability. The university will require liability insurance in the event that there is a health issue related to sold produce. There are a couple of different routes that the Outback can pursue for getting liability insurance coverage. One option would be to pursue Growing Washington sell produce through them, utilizing their \$5,000,000 liability insurance policy. However, this partnership may not be ideal for a few reasons. First, the partnership could limit the Outback's ability to function autonomously, constraining the farm to pursue fewer market options. Second, the Outback's unique brand could be watered down if functioning under another organization. Finally, if Growing Washington fails for any reason, the Outback will be without insurance. Benefits of a partnership with Growing Washington are that Growing Washington's insurance policy satisfies the Aramark's stringent requirements for food suppliers, in the event that the Outback wanted to contribute in some way to the dining halls.

An alternative option for the Outback farm to provide it's own liability insurance. \$1,000,000 liability insurance is would likely be satisfactory in the eyes of the University, which costs between \$150 and \$500 per year. Roby, the current Outback coordinator, said this cost could likely be written in to the current

Outback budget. By purchasing it's own insurance, the Outback community will have complete freedom of self-determination.

Third-party Safety Certification

Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) certification is a voluntary program through the WSDA that can be carried out locally through the WSU extension office. It's primary function is to demonstrate that farms and farm workers adhere to the FDA's "Guide to Minimize Microbial Food Safety Hazards". So far this seems like the best option for addressing operational risk on the farm, as identified by Paul Mueller with WWU Risk Management. There are no compulsory safety certification requirements through the state or the county health departments, this certification would purely be meant to ensure health and safety to WWU as an institution. GAP is a seven part verification process that requires review of on-farm infrastructure, personnel, storage, and distribution. It requires documentation of the standard operating procedure, sanitary operating procedure, and of the person designated to oversee the program. An advantage of GAP certification is that the audit can be adapted to the needs for certification of the farm. It is also a relatively simple process to go through. In the short term, we recommend GAP as a safety certification program.

Another option for addressing concerns of operational risk is to pursue organic certification. Organic certification requires much more extensive paperwork than the GAP certification and carries a cost of \$400-\$2000 per year. There is an exemption from the certification fees and process for farms grossing less than \$5000 per year; however because the certification in this case is intended to address operational risk, the certification process is important. Organic certification also requires extensive documentation of operations at the farm, which presents another challenge. While it is certainly more expensive and more scrupulous, organic certification may be worth pursuing down the road if it gives confidence to a broader base of people in the operations of the farm and the quality of the food.

Business Licenses

Business licences are required for any business in the State of Washington. Licenses and are available through the Washington State Business Licensing Service. A standard business license is very simple to acquire, and can be filed for online, by mail, or in person. There is a \$15 application fee and a \$5 fee for trade name registration, but no fees for the general license beyond that. Additionally, for any operation that uses a scale to measure, such as a farm for weighing certain items like salad mix, a weighing and measuring devices

license is required. For the Outback's purposes a license for one scale and items between 0-400 lbs will be satisfactory, and costs \$10.

Additional Land

Next season, Roby, the Outback coordinator, plans to expand cultivation into a field on the south end of the Outback, which is just north of Buchanan Towers. This space will dramatically increase capability of the Outback for growing food. Currently, this is the most logical area for expansion, and is the only planned expansion. Because of the opportunity to expand cultivation for next spring, it is even more important that CSPA teams work together with the Outback to execute the plan detailed in this report, so that the Outback will be supported in its desire to sell food on campus

Additional Labor

The farm produces the most food in summer months, the time when the work study program that provides most of the labor in the Outback is inactive. Additionally, the expanded cultivation may necessitate more labor at the farm. Roby has identified the need for two additional sets of hands during the summer harvest months. An inquiry for additional paid labor through work study may be a hard sell, due to a constrained budget. Therefore, Roby is currently pursuing a proposal that would free up money to pay a couple of farm hands through the AS instead.

Additionally, one of the ways that the Evergreen Farm maintains enough labor while remaining financially sustainable is by utilizing the energy students interested applied education in sustainable agriculture. Their Practice of Sustainable Agriculture program is integrally involved in the farm and all students are expected to contribute their own labor to the farm each week. Currently there is no such program at WWU aside from a few sustainable agriculture classes. Noting the wild success of Gigi Berardi's and John Tuxill's sustainable agriculture classes, it may be worth suggesting the restructuring of the sustainable agriculture programs to stakeholders to see if there is support for such a move within the university. This would satisfy the desire of students for applied experience in sustainable agriculture and meet the needs of the Outback for labor.

Additional Infrastructure

The change of operations at the Outback will necessitate some additional infrastructure including things like a washing station, scales, a rototiller, and refrigeration/storage equipment. Washing stations can be built for \$200 or more, depending on the facilities needed. Costs may be even less at the Outback because, by the time the harvest season rolls around, there will be an open structure available for housing the washing station. Refrigeration and storage

are less of an immediate concern right now because the food would likely be distributed the same day as it is harvested.

Additional Faculty Assistance and Oversight

At both of the case study schools in this report there is a relatively high level of faculty involvement and oversight. Oversight is an advantage as those faculty members are able to contribute to administrative and operations work, provide continuity to the program even as student farm coordinators graduate or move on, and serve as a resource to the student-farm community and other individuals interested in the history and operations of the farm. Currently the Outback has little faculty oversight, and managed almost exclusively by student farm managers. The Outback has had a remarkable run of outstanding student farmers, but there is concern that if a less experienced or motivated coordinator were to step in that the Outback may fall off. The concern of the farm's vulnerability to change would only be amplified by the implementation of a market program, as the need for dependability would be enhanced. At other farms, faculty oversight adds resilience to the programs, so that even when there are setbacks the farms continue to be reliable. Although it may not be an immediate need, we suggest looking in to the feasibility of hiring a faculty farm manager down the road as a way of increasing the resilience of the farm, and so it is worth including in the business plan. Faculty managers can be either part or full time.

3.3 Contacts & Meetings

Paul Mueller, WWU Risk Management
Roger Gilman - Dean, Fairhaven College
Bill Managan - Asst. Director of Maintenance Operations
Sara Richards - Vice President, Associated Students
Kurt Willis - Contracts
Greg McBride - Viking Union Operations
John Tuxill, Outback Farm Faculty Director
Roby Ventres-Pake, Outback Farm Coordinator
Halli Winstead, Farm Manager, Evergreen State College
Anelyse Weiler, University of British Columbia

We organized an ad hoc committee, with the contacts at WWU above, to assess the program's feasibility, receive insight from the inside, and to see where this project must go next. From the meeting, we discovered that, since the 70's, Outbackers have been trying to implement the same marketplace function. The committee discussed the associated roles of ownership and responsibility of the AS and Fairhaven College in The Outback as a program, and, we found out that these are not delineated out formally. To become a successful venture in the future, another meeting must be convened with all of the stakeholders in The Outback-- from both the AS and Fairhaven College-- to

discuss and lay out these responsibilities. With this information, a business plan can be put into work *and action!*

Halli at Evergreen and Anelyse at UBC were both very helpful to us, and are a resource that the next groups who pick up this project should plug. Halli's email address is winstead@evergreen.edu; Anelyse's email address is anelyse.m.weiler@gmail.com.

4.0 Case Studies

Our group looked at two case studies at universities in our region. Both of these universities are close to WWU geographically, and are publicly funded universities. Moreover, they have student farm programs that are worth emulating and that are more integrated into the respective on-campus food systems than the Outback farm. In each of our case study schools we looked to specific things at their farms that are transferable to WWU, that could provide benefit to the farm.

4.1 Evergreen State College

Evergreen has a very well developed farm-to-market program on-campus that utilizes a number of marketplace opportunities including CSA, farm stand, student-run cafe, dining halls operated by Aramark, and donating food to the local food bank. It is about a 5 acre farm, with about a third of that in cultivation. Thusfar the Evergreen organic farm has received some resistance from Aramark: Aramark has been unwilling to pay a full price for Evergreen's organic produce; additionally, Aramark keeps a tight grip on their dining dollars, and thus far students are not able to spend them anywhere that features products from the Evergreen farm.

One thing that make Evergreen's farm successful are that they have faculty oversight that provides continuity to the farm over longer periods of time; students are frequently coming in and then graduating, causing the potential for a lack of stability. A paid farm manager provides oversight that benefit's Evergreens farm. Additionally, Evergreen's sustainable agriculture class works extensively on the farm, providing free labor and thus eliminating labor costs. The Evergreen Farm is also organic certified, and salmon safe, which buyers and the university are proud of.

Halli Winstead, the faculty farm manager, provided guidance on some of the certifications, licenses and infrastructure necessary to make the farm safe and satisfactory in the eyes of the state and the University. Halli should continue to be a resource to the team that will carry this project forward, and should be kept in the loop in our research and progress, as our ideas may be relevant to their university.

4.2 University of British Columbia

University of British Columbia runs a twenty-four acre, sustainable farm, which is supported by a strong organizational structure, which provides long term continuity and

success. This foundation is comprised of a crew of paid staff, including directors, coordinators, and people in charge of specific projects (i.e. Poultry Project). There is also an advisory committee, which acts as a sort of “Farm Government” of students, faculty, and staff, who work together to make major site use decisions.

The UBC Farm is highly integrated into curriculum, spanning across 8 departments, allowing 2,500 students to engage and experience an agricultural system at work! This integration involves student support, providing more hands to meet adequate labor demands.

During the season, produce is sold twice a week at an on-campus farmers market, and they have shown great success with their CSA Program, maxing out at 40 members annually. Dining services also purchases produce from the farm, utilizing it across campus cafes and dining establishments.

5.0 Conclusion and Future Works

Practically since its inception on WWU’s campus, student farmers involved in the Outback have dreamed about ways to distribute the food grown on the farm. Forty years on in the Outback’s history, it is time to take the necessary steps within the institution to receive all of the proper certifications, licenses and infrastructure to bring that dream to fruition.

In alignment with WWU’s and Fairhaven College’s long-term strategic plans for sustainability, with demonstrated student demand for sustainable food, with the goals of the current student team farming the Outback, and with the academic best interests of the university, it is not a question of *if* the Outback can sell what it grows, it is a matter of *how* students and faculty oversight can cooperate to satisfy the concerns of all parties with shares in the project. Many other universities with student-run farms have integrated them into the institution moreso than WWU has; once they do, it is something they are proud of, and that they show off all over their websites and school literature. With this document as a spark, it is due time that WWU faculty and students work with one another to finally make the Outback Farm ready for market.

This project provides the foundation and framework upon which The Outback will build their business plan for the future vision of marketing their produce. This spark needs some gasoline to it can ignite into a full-fledged inferno. In winter quarter we recommend that the next CSPA class team up with the Small Business Entrepreneurship class to write the business plan. By then the inferno will have eased back to a refined flame, enough to light the torch that winter’s team will pass on to the team in the spring. In the spring the business plan can be implemented, and that torch the team carries will light the way for students to follow, all the way to the freshest most nourishing food at WWU. In the future, The Outback may be interested in expanding their production to support a larger customer base. This project provides the opportunity to address logistics and gain the necessary tools to make this future feasible, while

gaining true potential and momentum. Together, we can finally make this happen-- no more spinning that same 1970's wheel!

6.0 Works Cited

WSDA Small Farm Marketing manual: <http://agr.wa.gov/marketing/smallfarm/>

WSDA GAP Certification: <http://agr.wa.gov/Inspection/FVInspection/GAPGHP.aspx>

Washington State Department of Health: <http://www.doh.wa.gov/>

WWU Strategic Plan: <http://www.wwu.edu/president/strategicplan.shtml>

UBC's Farm: <http://www.landfood.ubc.ca/ubcfarm/about.php>

WWU OS CSPS Projects - See Winter 2010 Farmer's Market project for local, organic food statistics: <http://www.wwu.edu/sustain/academics/csp/Library.shtml>

Evergreen State College's Organic Farm: <http://www.evergreen.edu/cell/organicfarm.htm>