

# **Local Food from the Outback**

**--Students growing and serving the Western community--  
With healthy natural produce grown on campus**

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## **1.0 Project Overview**

### **1.1 Project Summary**

We propose to grow food in the Outback through an (ongoing and developing) Fairhaven course, and sell the raw produce to the larger Western community through a farm stand on vendor's row.

### **1.2 Purpose of Project**

The need to evolve the (extra)-curricular activities of students in the Outback is upon us. Local foods is in greater demand upon campus, as students become increasingly concerned with their health, the health of the environment, farm workers, the local economy and more. The outback currently does not have a goal or vision for what is to become of the food grown there, and is needing a concrete outlet, as to serve as a tool for publicizing, marketing and distributing organic vegetables grown by students on Westerns campus.

The development of a market gardening class will benefit the Outback as an organization, the population who already utilize the Outback, as well as the students participating within the class. The larger Western community will benefit from the supply of healthy extremely local and fresh produce. It will benefit the larger Bellingham and Whatcom county, as a tool for beginning to increase the viability and access to local produce for many people on campus—something that could have long-lasting impacts on peoples consumer, and lifestyle choices.

### **1.3 Goals & Mission**

It is our goal to develop this model in a manner than is sustainable, and resilient. By having short and long term goals, we can develop another component of the Outback that will attract a wider population of students to start participating in the programs there. Not only will this proposal strengthen the overall programming of the Outback, it will providing a focal point for students looking for alternatives to commercial produce.

### **1.4 Stakeholders**

Primary stakeholders for this project include the Outback (OELP), Fairhaven College, and Jim Shuster. These are all people (and organizations) that directly affect the outcome of this project. From the growing (outback) to the management (Fairhaven curriculum) to the distributing and marketing (Jim Shuster via Vendors Row) there are many people who are critical in the success of this project.

Secondary stakeholders include the AS, Sodexo, other Outback stakeholders including; the Huxely College of the Environment, the Child Development Center. Other stakeholders include Westerns Office of Sustainability office (Seth Vidana), western students, Whatcom farmers and anyone who might stop by the farm stand!

## **1.5 Methodology**

This proposal comes about through extensive research about small scale organic gardening businesses, health and safety regulations, Western food codes, and more. From specific tasks to long-term management there has been extensive collaboration and resulting developments from our research. Meetings with Jim Shuster, John Tuxill, Seth Vidana, Greg McBride and email correspondence with Paul Muller, have been extremely helpful in informing our group of the necessary steps to developing this plan. Phone and email correspondence with Evergreen State College' organic farming program, as well as the USDA small farms coordinator for Washington State, Fred Berman has informed us about the potential of this proposed program. Collaboration with various university groups, including Students For Sustainable Foods, Outbackers, and other individuals have provided much inspiration for the actualization of this project. Thanks to everyone who has lent a helping ear and provided us with insight into the workings of this institution. We hope that this report outlines some of the greater factors affecting small scale and urban farms around the country.

## **2.0 The Outback Assessment**

### **2.1 The Outback**

The Outback is a 5 acre experiential learning site, where students, staff and community member learn about sustainable land-use practices. Organic gardening is the main focus by which Outbackers develop, learn and participate in activities that redevelop relationships with our land. Currently there are 5 different themed gardens, which work study, volunteers, AS staff, community members and WWU classes collaboratively maintain. The community garden (consisting of 52 individual plots), the education garden, and the ethnobotany garden are all located within the main garden area. The herb garden and forest garden located respectively, at the North and South end of the Outback are also focal points for experiential learning.

Our proposal consists of evolving the focus of the education garden, into a productive market garden which is collaboratively managed through a Fairhaven course. The class would participate in the development, growing, management, sales and business aspects of a small plot intensive market garden. Learning skills of organic gardening, soil fertility management, sales, and marketing the course would introduce students to a wide spectrum of real-life skills.

We propose a three tiered action plan for transitioning one of the focuses of the Outback into a small scale agribusiness. Listed below are three scenarios of varying land capacities that the Outback could currently support. They are listed in priority and easy of transitioning, as expanding to our maximum capacity in our first year is unreasonable and unwise

### **2.2 Market Garden**

#### **The Education Garden**

The Education Garden consists of land mass approximately 50 ft. by 150 ft. of land which has been under cultivation since the beginning of the Outback. The 7500 sq. ft. is available for cultivation, with 1 ft paths between beds and currently has 45 beds which have been properly cared for and revitalized during the last 5 years. It is properly protected from deer and has a drip irrigation system installed, making the management and care for the crops that much easier and eco-friendly. The Education garden is the main garden in the Outback, which has

consistently produced an overabundance of food in years past. With proper care and an increase in activity in the garden during the growing season, the production capacity of this garden can be greatly increased.

The education garden composed the vast bulk of our experiential knowledge of what crops are specifically suited for this site. **[See appendix 2 for specific listings of vegetables and herbs suited for the Outback]** By transitioning the goal of the production within the Education Garden from experiential demonstration to market gardening, we will be able to continue utilizing the site as a educational demonstration garden. Community gardeners, as well as classes and general Outback volunteers will benefit from seeing a student management urban farm.

## **2.3 Potential growth areas within the Outback**

**1.Terraces above amphitheater**--Located between 24th st and the Amphitheater, there is a series of terraced beds, followed by a larger flat area. This larger area (approximately 900 ft<sup>2</sup>) is currently cover-cropped with an over-wintered crimson clover planted last Spring. This area lacks deer protection, but has access to irrigation and has good soils which haven't been under cultivation before.

Completing and utilizing the terraces will require many hours of work and collaboration with other entities within the Outback. Completely under cultivation the site will offer nearly 3000ft<sup>2</sup>. Not only is this a logical expansion for marketing gardening in the Outback, once completed this garden will offer a unique opportunity in promoting the business, as students walking up to school on 24<sup>th</sup> street will have a visual connection with where the food is coming from. Plantings within the first year will have to consist of deer resistant plants, with potential for expanding a deer fence around the garden in the future.

2. South lawn--Located South of Education garden furthest South in the Outback this is a large grassy area surrounded by plum trees. Currently it is not under cultivation and lacks any sort of deer protection, as well as irrigation. The area is 150 by 50 sq ft. (or 7,500 ft<sup>2</sup>) equal to that of the Education Garden, however would have to be configured differently due to its shape. The South lawn has the best sun exposure of any site in the Outback, and is unique shaped as a sun catchment zone.

Development of this site would require collaboration with Facilities Management, Buchanan Towers and Fairhaven College. Currently this site is unmaintained and unused expect for the small orchard of plums. The development of this garden would be larger development not able to be tackled until the basic operations of the Farm Stand/Market Garden are practiced.

## **2.4 Future Growth and Development**

Though this proposal does not deal with long-term developments, it is useful to note visions of sustainability which we are striving for. It is not unrealistic to think that with ongoing success of this proposed farm stand, curriculum around sustainable land use, urban agriculture and organic gardening could be expanded to encompass multiple WWU colleges and curricular tracts. That said, it is also necessary to begin planting the seed of expanding our agricultural enterprise onto other tracts of land. By increasing cultivation, we can supply the campus (and eventually the dining halls) with more access to local healthy foods. Developments of entire

programs run through Fairhaven college (concentrations) or Huxely college (minors) will lead students on a path that delves them into the practice of small scale market gardening. We envision a school where students participate in a number of facets related to sustainable land use and food production. By using such schools as Evergreen State College as models, we can develop long-term academic and management goals that will increase the sustainability (economically, socially and environmentally) of our campus.

### **3.0 Business Plan**

This proposal is outlining our goal to implement a model Market Garden business as a component to the Outback. This will be a developing student run course that will oversee the production and distribution on campus of produce from the Outback. Our business plan will outline the general operations and management practices of a small scale Market Garden, as well as safety and liability issues surrounding the growing of produce.

#### **3.1 Management and Operations Plan**

The Outback Market Gardening class will a cooperatively managed business model under the direction of 1-2 student coordinators. Specific roles will be delegated to students participating in the course, with responsibilities being transitioned throughout the quarter. Students will individually and collectively be responsible for growing, harvesting, sales and distribution of farm goods. This will require different skill sets and knowledge of key market gardening components.

Market hours will run once a week from 11-2 pm on Vendors Row between the months May through October, during the active school year. Extending seasons and increased market dates will be an evolving goal as students learn the complexities of market gardening. Our market and labor force are limited by times that the academic year and the growing season overlap. Our proposed market schedule will allow at minimum 16 weeks of sales, allowing students ample time to participate in the full farm to market cycle.

Students participating in the Market Gardening class will meet twice a week, to collectively run all aspects of a small scale farming business. Organization of planting cycles, general farming tasks, educational resources and necessary trainings will be facilitated by student coordinators. Students will be taught a number of food and work safety procedures to insure the health and integrity of our workers, the land and our customers. The beginning of every quarter will commence with mandatory trainings including; Good Agriculture Practices (see below), farm safety, and food sales regulations.

The Outback Market garden will follow the Good Agriculture Practices (GAP) recommendations put forth by the Food and Agriculture Organization and follow health recommendations put forth by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Food and Drug Administration, and Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition. Washington State Retail Food Code does not require us to have a permit to sell fresh, raw, uncut produce if the customer is intended to wash the produce after purchase and before consumption. Although there are no regulatory practices that are required by Washington State law or the Health Department, we feel the inclusion of a mandatory GAP training taught by our local Washington State University extension agent every quarter will result in qualified individual running the farm stand.

Every week students will rotate responsibilities between farm and market operations. Groups of three students will be responsible for the assembling of harvest, transportation, sales and marketing of the Outback Farm Stand. Students will collectively plant, maintain and harvest produce in the Outback. Students with Market responsibilities that week will transport produce to Vendors Row utilizing hand carts. Profit from produce sales will be returned to the student coordinator who will work in collaboration with Kathy Hutchinson, who is

currently one of the budget authority for the Outback Farm. Profits generated from sales will be utilized for the ongoing maintenance and development of the Market Garden.

### 3.2 Financial Plan

With this proposal we are striving to develop a blue-print for a self-sustaining business model. The Outback Market Garden is an extension and redirection of the products and activities already happening in the Outback. This makes start-up needs relatively inexpensive and simple as we are building upon existing infrastructure. With our proposed market ranging from May till the end of October, we will have 16 market days. Pricing of produce (listed in section 3.4) will allow for compensation of initial seasonal expenses, as well as allow for development.

Initial costs for start-up needs are approximately as follows

farm stand materials (table cloth, baskets, cash box, pricing boards)	\$200
promotional materials (signs, pamphlets) calculated from PC pricing	\$85
seeds (purchased from Uprising Seeds)	\$150
post-harvest equipment	\$75
	total: \$510

### On-going expenses

#### Revenue Analysis

- Price per unit of seed
- Total area planted
- Approximate revenue from planted area

### Financial Section:

#### Source of Funds

- Current allocation from Associated Students
- Revenue from sales
- Possible application for more funds from AS
- Student ISP grant money

#### Expenses

- Seeds
- Extra hoses, irrigation equipment
- Buckets & baskets
- GAP training
- Advertising & promotional materials

#### Organization

- Book keeper
- Excel spreadsheet log
  - track money movements
- Monthly budget

#### Contribution Margin Crop Plan

- Cost of seed & materials
- Amount of Area planted
- Net income of planted area
- Compile crop plans into monthly expenses & earnings

#### Sales Forecast

- Track market sales
- Predict future sales opportunities
- Create sales pattern based on data

#### Assets & Purchasing Plan

- Log starting assets
- Plan needed purchases

### **3.3 SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats)**

Market Gardening in the Outback has a number of factors that will strengthen the overall potential success and sustainability of this endeavor. Such strengths include the already established infrastructure and reputation of the Outback Farm.

The farm is utilized by both Main Campus and Fairhaven classes, which represents its importance to the school community. From the hands on work these students experience also comes a vast pool of volunteers who are interested in implementing our goal of a market garden. An example of our interest pool is The AS club Students for Sustainable Food. This group will be a crucial partner in our developing our market garden as they have shown keen interest in our project. Additionally, having access to the many resources offered through the AS, including collaboration with on-site projects between the two student coordinators currently funded through the AS will strengthen both the operations of the Outback as well as the Market Garden.

The physical state of Outback requires little modification for our project. The educational garden is split into beds, contains preexisting paths and requires little structural preparation in order to grow. In addition to the current infrastructure in place, the tools necessary for growing are already present in the Outback tool shed, reducing our overall expenses. Lastly, we have access to the whole campus community as our potential market, a population numbering over 13,000.

Implementing a market garden will require a stable and consistent workforce of volunteers. Our plan requires that a small group (8-12 people) will commit a total of 12 hours a week through their enrolment in the Market Gardening class. Since the Outback and other student led clubs on campus have shown to have inconsistent attendance at times and this is something that must be emphasized to ensure the continuity and success of our market garden. Cohesion between work forces and quarters will be our biggest challenge, but is hopefully mitigated through our tiered development and insurances of our course proposal.

This project that we are to implement has not been attempted at WWU before. As a result of our entering new territory, there are various opportunities for us to help make our project successful and long lasting. Western Washington University has made a commitment to more sustainable practices, and our farm stand would complement that. The idea of food sold to

students that has been grown on campus by students is, and will be an exciting reality. The -Eat Local movement is thriving in Bellingham, something that can only benefit our market garden. People want to know where, how and who is growing their food, and what an exciting idea to know that along with a full day of classes, one can pick up a bunch of beets and a head of lettuce as well.

In addition to the plentiful array of opportunities for our market garden to grow in, no business is complete without threats. Sodexo currently holds the food services contract for our campus and supplies the majority of food to students. Our food culture currently favors speed and convenience and coincidentally the dining halls and on-campus markets excel at these characteristics in the food they provide. This poses a challenge to our market stand, because our food is unprocessed and requires time in the kitchen. Due to the size of our garden we are expecting to be able to produce \$200-300 worth of food a week, which is comparison to the farmers market stands that we are familiar with, is a meager market quantity. This will be a challenge continually stocking enough vegetables to satisfy the needs of the buyer.

As with any government system there are numerous policies and regulations that must be met in order for a business to run appropriately. We must be vigilant to meet local and state regulations in order to keep our market garden alive and running. This will take time to research and check in with local authorities to ensure adherence to newly updated rules that apply to our production process.

### **3.4 Marketing Plan**

#### **Farm products description**

The farm stand will sell fresh produce that is seasonally available from the Outback Farm. Common crops that thrive in the Outback include artichoke, beans, beets, berries, broccoli, brussels sprouts, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, chard, chinese vegetables, cucumbers, daikon, garlic, greens, kale, kohlrabi, leeks, lettuce, onions parsnip, peas, plums, potatoes, pumpkins, radishes, spinach, winter/summer squash, tomatoes, turnips, zucchini, basil, cilantro, chives, dill, lavender, mint, parsley, rosemary, sage, tarragon, thyme.

Since our farm stand will be located on Vendors Row here on campus, we will mainly aim to sell our fresh, affordable produce to students. A significant goal for this project is to make fresh local food more accessible to students at a reasonable cost. We of course would love to provide our produce to anyone within the Western/Bellingham community while they stroll down Vendors Row. We plan on selling produce in bunches priced at 1 for \$3 or 2 for \$5.

#### **WWU Community Interest**

**Survey: Students and Staff. Accessed, 02/08/2011.**

A survey was taken recently recording the perspectives of 444 students and faculty members on campus addressing their interest in local and organic foods available on campus. Over 71% of the people surveyed had reported that they would eat and buy more local produce if it were convenient to them. This reveals an important interest for WWU community members with regards to local food. Price for food is a large consideration for students and faculty members. 55% of people buy food based on the affordability rather than if it is local or not. Produce in the Outback could have the potential to be sold at affordable prices to entice customers. Finally, the survey reported that 60% of students would prefer the Farmer's Market on campus to operate between the hours of 11am to 3pm on weekdays.

McDevitt, Cailen. Cooper, Jonathan. Mack, Connor. W W U's Relationship wit h Local Food.

### **Promotion Methods:**

We will advertise in the Western Front. Our group will also use leaflets to advertise. In addition we will also use posters and signs to spread awareness about organic food that is produced from the Outback. Our target demographics will be students and faculty and community members.

Promotion Methods:

- Advertisement in Western Front, Free Press
    - target: Students, Faculty & Community
  - Leaflets
    - target: Students
  - Posters & Signs
    - target: Students, Faculty
- Recipes available at stand that correlate with produce available
- Raw recipes? (cater to dorm students/sustain nutrition)

### **3.5 Future Development\*\***

Though it is important not to count your chickens before your eggs hatch, it is important to note potential developments of the Market Garden and Outback Farm stand. We are currently proposing a 16 week market cycle, but within our second operating season could easily extend this to 24 weeks (setting up the Farm stand through the end of Fall quarter). There is also future potential for expanding our range and quantity of production. Eggs and mushrooms, fruits and processed goods are all within our short term potential (2-5 yrs).

### **Developments Towards a sustainable Market Garden**

- CSA shares available to students
- Growing Washington CSA shares/market stand on campus
- Students for Sustainable Food/Human Ecology Involvement
- Creation of Fairhaven Class
- Farm manager paid position

## **4.0 Curricular integration**

### **4.1 Proposed Outback Market Gardening course**

#### Course description:

The production of food is the single most important human activity affecting our nation's and our planet's ecosystems, with enormous environmental, economic, and social consequences. How we manage the ecological relationships inherent in growing, tending, and

harvesting food is crucial for determining the health of our environment and the sustainability of our society.

Sustainability on campus through the Outback Farm will be a prioritized goal for this course. This will be achieved by the development of the Outback Farm and the growth of its business.

Organization and a coalition to support the production and potential growth of the Outback Farm will create a hands on learning atmosphere for those in the university inspired by farming, permaculture, CSA's, farmers markets, local, organic and fresh foods, production analysis, business models, terrestrial education, etc.

This course explores the concept and physical reality of sustainability through shared reading, group interaction, guest lecturers, demonstration of new techniques, the development of new skills, and applied learning.

Students will utilize a practical applied hands-on approach to learning to gain field experience and to benefit the existence of the Outback Farm. Other beneficiaries will include students, faculty, and staff which in turn will benefit the vision and appearance of the University. This course will directly produce a learning environment for the Fairhaven and Huxley Colleges, encouraging students to be committed and engaged to the Outback Farm.

This course will be student facilitated with a Fairhaven College faculty sponsor (John Tuxill). For this course to perpetuate, student facilitators will be 1-2 students who have previously taken the course or have experience with the Outback farm and its business status and history. Facilitators will spend two quarters preparing for this course, the first quarter will be an independent study to research the possibilities for the direction of the course, and the second quarter will be an independent study to form a curriculum for the course. Each course will record analysis, research, and progress of the farm and business for future courses. This course will be offered spring and fall quarters.

Students are expected to have some previous experience with plants, environmental education, natural sciences, or hands-on gardening experience.

Specific motivations for Students:

- Who are looking for a career in sustainable farming or interest in organic practices.
- Who want to create sustainable food systems.
- Who value a comprehensive education in all aspects of the business of farming, including selling and distribution.
- Who want a hands-on -on the farm experience.
- Who are changing careers to a more environmentally and ecological connected profession.
- Who want to learn about small-scale, diversified farming.

#### Course content:

Each week, students will be involved in hands-on farming activities and classroom work in a wide range of farming topics. Students will take time to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the Outback farm and business model and will consider possible improvements. This farm serves as the -home-base from where students learn about how farmers -see the whole picture and prioritize work on the farm throughout the season. Students observe crop planting and field preparation, planting methods, weed, pest, and disease management, harvesting needs, etc.

Students will spend time in the classroom where they cover a wide range of topics taught by a wide range of experts – farmers, University professors and extension agents, and other folks engaged in the local food system. Examples of topics include: permaculture, input/output analysis, business models, grant writing, bureaucratic blockades and solutions, sustainability, community supported agriculture structure, foraging, ecology, etc. The classroom time includes hands on labs as well as field trips to farms.

Food produced on the farm will be for the students use in the business aspect of the operation, initially, as part of the weekly farm stand they will manage on campus. Students will work with models that will benefit the Outback and the Western community with consideration of produce affordability, profit, marketing and advertising, business hours, volunteers, work trade, etc. Students will work on expansion and development of the business model i.e. community supported agriculture model.

Students will focus on the production potential of what can be grown and in what quantity in the Outback. Also, by monitoring production and the current business status, students will consider economic, production, client base and other variables to provide produce to the community at fair prices. Students will also record all analysis, considerations, progress, goals, and reflection of their research and implementations to the farm and business to provide documentation for future students groups and for the necessary organization of the farm to business cycle.

Credit/Evaluation: Students are expected to attend regularly and to participate actively in the class discussions, guest lectures, exercises, and outdoor projects. For experiential learning to be successful, students must be present and engaged. Students will need to spend time each week in the Outback as well as alternate weeks managing the farm stand. Students will also be required to write one five-page research paper on a related topic, or a reflection paper on a service learning experience of their choice, and make a brief presentation of their topic or experience to the class.

### **Group Collaboration** (resilience through integration)

- Students for Sustainable foods
  - Motivated to getting involved
  - 100% support for this farm to farmer's stand operation
  - Resources
  - Extensive email list to reach out to an interested audience for suggestion, volunteer opportunities, etc.
  - A.S Club Funding for things such as advertising, farmer's stand appearance, etc.
- Applied human ecology and sustainable systems (has firm foundation)
  - support from course sponsor, Gary Bornzin
  - within course students must complete 10 hours of service work
    - The Outback farm and farmer's stand would count
  - for quarter project, students could be inspired to research and possibly work to develop attributes of the Outback farm and business
- Huxley courses
  - research and business opportunities for students to develop attributes of the Outback farm and business
- WWU student community
  - volunteer opportunities and potential work for produce
- Dining services, Sodexo collaboration?
- A.S
  - Possible activities council funding
  - Publicity center resources for advertising
  - Campus events
  - Events calendar
  - VU main lobby calendar

- Environmental Center (Chelsea)
- Outreach
- Support
- Surveys
- student input

There is also the potential for students in the Applied Human Ecology class to assist in the operation of the market garden. Every quarter, students in the Applied Human Ecology class are asked to complete 10 hours of service learning. Working to uphold the market garden would be a great way to aid in projects happening right on campus as well as to further the sustainability of our University.

The Students for Sustainable Food club on campus is also interested in fostering a partnership with the farm stand and will be a great help in the future maintenance of the market garden and farm stand.

### **4.3 Timeline of academic integration**

For this project to be truly successful over the long term, it will require a invested staff person, that would oversee the management of the Market Garden and Farm Stand. While we realize that in these times of economic uncertainty it is difficult to propose new staff person, we hope that a phased approach that builds upon student driven success will result in a sustainable model.

First year—the proposed Market Gardening course would be run as group Independent Study Project (ISP) through Fairhaven college, with Professor John Tuxill as the faculty supervisor. Throughout this time students would develop systems and approaches to market gardening, spending a significant portion of their course work developing this new program. The program would be coordinated by 1-3 student facilitators. Students having taken the course for one quarter, would be eligible for coordinating the program in future quarters.

Succeeding year(s)—Following the success of initial developments of the Market Garden/Farm stand, we plan to propose an adjunct professor position through Fairhaven or Huxely college. Working with those colleges curriculum committees, we hope to make this position available part-time 4 quarters a year. This person would be responsible for teaching the course and overseeing the farm stand. Having a long-term invested individual will allow for the cohesion between academic quarters and years that is so necessary in running a successful market garden.

Short Term Management: (present until June 2011)

- Focus on finishing logistics
- Cooperation with the Outback work study students
- Outreach to Students for Sustainable Food

## **5.0 CASE MODELS**

### **5.1 Evergreen State College**

Similar to Western Washington University, Evergreen State College has a thriving five acre farm on their campus, making them a strong example of the success we envision for the Outback Farm here at Western. The certified organic Evergreen farm sells their produce during the growing season on campus through a farm stand and through CSA shares. The farm and CSA at the college are maintained and run by the full-time farm manager and part -time assistant manager positions, both paid by the college. The farm also receives around 6000

dollars a year for work study farm assistants.

In addition to paid help, the farm is maintained by a full time class, the Practice of Sustainable Agriculture, taught by the farm manager during spring, summer and fall quarters. Students who enroll in the class become interns at the farm, maintaining, planting, harvesting and selling produce as part of their investigation into how to run a small scale farm.

The harvested produce is then sold on campus. During the growing season the Farm Stand sells produce every Tuesdays and Thursdays from 11-3 and to CSA shares. The farm currently has around 23 full and half size shares producing around \$25 dollars worth of produce in each full size box.

**Contacts:** Arielle Spayd

[spayda@students.wvu.edu](mailto:spayda@students.wvu.edu)

303 956 7689

Nick Spring

[nick988spring@yahoo.com](mailto:nick988spring@yahoo.com)

360-610-3700

Masyih Ford

[masyihford@gmail.com](mailto:masyihford@gmail.com)

253-548-4345

Eric Nelson

[ericdavidnelson@gmail.com](mailto:ericdavidnelson@gmail.com)

206-550-2701