Cultivating the Future of Mount Holyoke

The dining halls on campus are spaces that every student at Mount Holyoke experiences frequently. But how many of the students who frequent these dining halls stop and think critically about where the food that they consume comes from? It just magically appears to be prepared by the lovely dining staff for us to enjoy, right? The truth is that a large percentage of our food comes from commercial farms across the country, which means that a great amount of energy is put into bringing that sprig of parsley to MHC so that the chefs can add flavor to those potatoes from Idaho. Commercial farming does not concern itself with the quality of food or the long term impact on the environment that it has. By moving towards growing food on campus and educating the students about the processes involved in regenerative farming, Mount Holyoke could begin to create that lasting change that we claim not to fear.

Bringing a Farm to Mount Holyoke

• According to the 2011 Princeton Review, 69 percent of college applicants say that having information about a college’s commitment to environmental issues would contribute to their decision to apply to or attend the school. EG
• Organic farms make approximately $2,700 more per acre than conventional farms. AR
• Approximately 4 tons of composted horse manure could be used per acre for fertilizer. AR
• Approximately 1,000 on campus jobs are available. AR

College Farms in the Consortium

• Book and Plow farm, an organic farm, started its new chapter this season as an Amherst College Department. Book and Plow began in 2013 and now has grown to be a 50-acre farm. EG
• Amherst College’s Valentine Dining Hall uses 32 tons of produce from Book and Plow Farm per year. AR
• Book and Plow hired 58 student workers in 2016 and 2300 total students in the farm’s lifetime. This number is greater than the student population at Amherst College. EG
• Hampshire College Farm produces 75,000 lbs of vegetables from 20 acres. AR
• UMass Amherst uses a student run farm for a class as part of the Stockbridge school of Agriculture.

The Changing Face of Agriculture

• An average of nearly 60,000 high-skilled agriculture and related job openings are expected annually in the United States over the next five years, with only about 35,000 grads in food, agriculture, renewable resources or the environment graduating each year to fill them. EG
• The number of U.S. farmers declined between 2007 and 2012 going down 4.3 percent in the case of principal operators. EG
• The average age of principal operators is increasing, 54.3 years old in 1997 to 58.3 years old in 2012.3 EG
• Women hold 44% of doctorates in agricultural sciences, but only make up 23% of agricultural science-related tenure-track faculty positions. AR

Above two graphs show Greenhouse Gas Emission and Energy Inputs by source for Organic vs Conventional Farms.
Student Health

- According to the Indian Journal of Psychiatry, low glycemic index (GI) foods such as some fruits and vegetables, whole grains, pasta, etc. provide more lasting positive effects on brain chemistry, mood, and energy levels than the high GI foods - primarily sweets - that provide immediate but temporary relief. EG
- Spending 90 minutes in a natural setting decreases neural activity in the subgenual prefrontal cortex, an area of the brain associated with depression and rumination. AR
- The American Psychological Association stated in 2014 that approximately a third of students at American colleges and universities had reported experiencing depression in 2013-14. Depression and anxiety directly impact learning ability and lowers GPAs. 20% of students who used counseling services at their schools reported considering dropping out of college due to their mental health situation. KR
- The student to counselor ratio on campus is 220:1. KR
- In a study done by the Association for University and College Counseling Center Directors, in which Mount Holyoke participated, small schools (1,501-2,500 students) Counseling Centers had an average of seventeen students on the waitlist, 309 students served on average, and a mean of 1,749 sessions per semester. KR

Conclusion

Bringing a farm to Mount Holyoke would be a boon to the school, by attracting more applicants, creating more student jobs and creating an agricultural program that would make alumnae highly successful in the job market. There is a shortage of workers, and especially female agricultural workers, and Mount Holyoke would be an excellent institution to address this shortage. There are already three college farms in the Pioneer Valley and they have been highly successful. Students would be especially happy to have access to more fresh fruits and vegetables, and this would increase the happiness and well being of students on campus. AB

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