

**Practicing what we Preach: A Final Report on UBC-O's Potential for a Campus**

**Community Garden**

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## **Practicing what we Preach: A Final Report on UBC-O's Potential for a Campus Community Garden.**

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### **Background:**

The concept of a community garden is nothing new but the importance of these gardens is most certainly on the rise as people have begun to realize the potential problems that surround local, national, and global food security. With the world's population on the rise and the amount of available land on the decline, combined with the unsustainable nature of our world's global food market, the community garden is becoming a valuable tool for supplementing local food supplies. Similarly, the global food system is now being seen as an "untapped source for greenhouse gas emission reduction... as 20% of US energy consumption originates from the food and agricultural system."<sup>1</sup> Close to 10% of the energy created by the food and agricultural system can be reduced through the use of community gardens, as 3.5% of the energy consumed by our food system is due to the average 3000 kilometre journey it takes from site of production to our plates. The organic nature of community gardens will help reduce another 6.2% of energy consumed as there are no synthetic fertilizers used in the process.<sup>2</sup>

The successful completion of a preliminary study in December 2008, which sought to determine whether a community garden was viable for the University of British Columbia Okanagan, has lead me to undertake a directed study which would attempt to

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<sup>1</sup> The University Local Food Toolkit: Sustainable SFU, Centre for Sustainable Community Development, Local Solutions. Environment Canada: 2008. 4

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

take the study to the next stage of creating a campus community garden. It became obvious that UBC-O, with a student body which continues to grow and an administration which continually strives to move towards an environmentally sustainable campus, has a great opportunity to make its campus even more green. The creation of a campus community garden would assist with the production of fresh food, produced by its fellow students, lessen the amount of pressure placed upon the environment and upon our community food system, create greater community ties within as well as outside the school community, provide valuable knowledge to students who could potentially gain gardening skills to use for the rest of their lives, while also helping our institution become a shining example of sustainable food practices within Kelowna.

## **Goal**

To use the literature, the wider Kelowna community, and the UBCO community as sources for research in order to produce a report summarizing a wide variety of views and suggestions on how best to successfully set up and manage a campus community garden. With the successful synthesis of information, the second phase of the project will involve submitting to the UBCO community at large as well as to all relevant decision makers, a plan for creating a garden on campus.

## **Research Questions:**

For a community garden on campus to be successful there are a number of questions which need to be asked and answered. These questions will be answered through

informal interviews as well as a more formal survey. At this point in time, there are three main areas of questioning which include:

1. Is there support from students, faculty, and staff for a campus community garden and what are the reasons for this support?
2. Who does the UBCO community believe should have access to the garden and for what purposes?
3. How does the UBCO community think a campus community garden should be setup and managed for long term success?

## **Plan of Action**

The plan of action for implementing a community campus garden will require further questioning and more action in order to make such an endeavour successful. These questions and actions include but are not limited to:

1. Review the literature and consult with relevant members within the wider community of Kelowna on how to set up and manage a campus community garden.
2. Talk with UBC O students, professors, and staff about the possibility of a campus community garden to gauge the level of interest in and support for the idea and to solicit their participation and suggestions on the setting up and management of the community garden.
3. Take an inventory of all available land on campus to help determine potential growing space.

4. Survey UBC-O's student body, faculty and staff about the direction they would like to see a community campus garden take.
5. Pull together data and complete a report to summarize the results of the survey.
6. Raise awareness about the garden within the university community.
7. Organize a meeting of relevant and interested parties, including students, faculty, staff, and members of facilities management to discuss forming a planning committee and the findings of the report.
8. Finalize the different logistical issues which surround the setting up and management of the community garden.
9. Secure a plot(s) of land on campus where a community garden can be planted, secure the required resources (soil and water), and secure funding for the tools and other necessities which will guarantee the garden's success.
10. Get students and other UBCO community members involved and supporting UBC-O's community garden.
11. Set up the garden and implement a plan for long term management.

If all actions are achieved there is no reason why the University of British Columbia Okanagan could not become a leader and an example for the rest of the community when it comes to sustainable food practices and the education of a surrounding community on such practices.

## **Literature Review, Interviews, and Land Inventory Methods and Results:**

A review of current literature pertaining to campus community gardens from across Canada was conducted as a preliminary exercise. The University of British Columbia Vancouver, the University of Victoria, Sir Sanford Flemming, the University of Northern British Columbia, the University of Alberta, and the University of Toronto were looked at for the purpose of this study. Each of the respective universities had community gardens on campus whether it be designated plots on school grounds or rooftops or on adjacent properties just off campus. Each garden was open to students, faculty, and staff and had a variety of fruits, vegetables or herbs planted within them. For those who had an active role within the garden it was seen a great community building project as it brought different types of people and personalities together, it was also seen as a great way to relieve stress and improve one's diet. The information gathered from the Canadian universities had one thing in common: community gardens are an excellent way for campuses to improve the health of its student body, faculty, and staff.

A number of meetings and interviews were conducted with students, faculty, and staff at UBC O during the research portion of the project as a way to gauge the level of initial interest in and support for the idea of a community garden on campus. During these interviews it became clear that those whom I spoke with were very supportive of the idea and were willing to help in any way possible. Initial meetings and interviews with staff members Claire Budgen of Health and Wellness and Shawn Swallow of Career Services provided great potential for the creation of student work-study opportunities within a garden. The potential student work-study opportunities would be a major advantage for ensuring the long term success of a garden as they would provide a great

amount of continuity after students head home for the summer months. Interviews with UBC-O's student-run Sustainability Club created the potential for a great partnership, as club president Danielle Huot was interested in making a campus community garden one of the clubs major mandates.

An important partnership were also made with Bob McCoubrey, a local organic farmer and board member for the Central Okanagan Community Gardens Society, who said he would be willing to help with introductions to local contacts such as Katimavic and the Boys and Girls Club of Kelowna. Clubs such as these have volunteered with previous community garden projects Bob has been involved with. Bob also was very helpful with connecting me to horticultural supply dealers in the area, a key component for any garden. The overwhelming support displayed by key members both within and outside of the university community continues to strengthen the already impressive support for a community garden on campus.

Perhaps the most important aspect of a community garden would be the availability of land. In February of 2009 a meeting was arranged between Roger Bizzotto, manager of Facilities Management and myself to discuss the availability of land on the UBC-O campus for a community garden. Three main areas were discussed including an area near the student residences, land near the cafeteria, and an open space by Dr. Veronica Gaylie's Faculty of Education's Learning Garden. Roger believed that gardens in open and unprotected spaces like those found at residences and near the cafeteria have greater potential for vandalism and thus put the garden in more jeopardy. Open space by the Learning Garden had great potential for Roger as it was more hidden away. Location

will be of the utmost importance for a community garden however the amount of land available on campus is abundant and should not be of great concern.

### **Survey Method:**

Last but not least, between the weeks of March 16<sup>th</sup> to March 27<sup>th</sup> a survey was conducted among students, faculty, and staff that focused on a variety of questions surrounding the importance, management, and operation of a campus community garden at UBCO. During the survey period, students, faculty, and staff were selected at random from areas such as the cafeteria, courtyard, and classrooms within the UBC-O campus. The survey, which was approved by the Research Information Services' (RISe) ethical review process, was confidential with no personal information recorded and therefore the respondents' privacy was protected. At the culmination of the survey period a total of 48 respondents had successfully completed the survey.

### **Survey Results:**

The survey involved forty-two random students, three faculty, and three staff amongst whom 55% were between the ages of 18-22, 33% were between the age of 23-29, and 11% were above the age of 30. Amongst those surveyed 16% lived on campus in residence while 83% lived somewhere off campus in a private residence. 77% of those surveyed had gardened before with the average person having somewhere between 3 and 5 years of experience.

When asked if a campus community garden would be of value to the UBCO community, 94% answered yes with varying reasons why they believed this. 28% of

those surveyed believed a garden would be of value because of the “community” aspect which it would create within the university. 24% believed a campus community garden would be of value because of its sustainable qualities, while another 24% saw the garden as a way to promote a healthier lifestyle. 20% believed that a garden would be a great way to expand ones knowledge about the issues of food security and learn more about horticulture. The last 3% believed a campus community garden would be a way to improve upon the food served in the schools cafeterias. The importance of volunteers amongst students, faculty, and staff will be critical to the gardens success, fortunately 72% of those surveyed said they would be willing to volunteer in the garden for one hour or more.

If the university were to introduce a community garden on campus students, faculty, and staff believed the best way to use the produce was as follows: 33% thought the food produced should be returned to those who worked in the garden, 31% thought the setting up of a campus produce stall which sold the produce back to the UBCO community was the best way to approach it. 22% believe that the food should be used in the schools cafeterias while 13% saw the best way to use the produce would be through donations to the student food exchange.

Over 50% of those surveyed thought the garden should be open to the students, faculty, and staff within the university community while 39% thought the garden should be open to both the UBCO and wider community. Only 11% thought the garden should only include the students of UBCO.

Another important piece of the gardens infrastructure comes from answering the tough question: who should be responsible for the management and up keep of the

garden? 66% of those surveyed saw the only way for the garden to be successful in the long term was to set up a student run club which focused entirely on UBC O's campus community garden. 22% thought the garden should be run by a student coordinator and 10% thought it should fall under facilities management's responsibilities.

One of the most important pieces of information this survey caught was how students, faculty, and staff believed would be the best way to raise awareness and market the garden. 50% of those surveyed thought simple promotion through the use of flyers, posters, Facebook, and other social networking devices would be the best way to let the UBCO community know about the garden. 20% thought having some sort of event (School Harvest, Special day in the cafeteria) would be a good way to successfully market the garden while 12% thought that once a booth is set up to sell the produce the garden would market itself. 9% of those surveyed thought setting up tours would help market and raise awareness while another 9% believed the university should create accredited classes which worked in the garden.

The financial future of a campus community garden will most certainly determine how large or small a piece the project will be within the UBCO community. When asked who should be responsible for financing the project? 40% believed that once the garden is up and running it should be somewhat self sufficient meaning the food produced will be sold and that money will be put back into the garden. 25% thought the university should finance a campus community garden, 10% thought a one dollar fee being added on to the student's tuition would be a good idea, and while another 10% saw the best way to finance the garden would be to charge those making use of the garden. Another 10%

were unsure and the last 5% thought the government should provide some sort of funding.

The continuity which needs to be there once students head home during the summer and prime growing months is a question of great concern. Amongst those surveyed 28% believed the best way to attain the required continuity could be attained through the services of the wider UBCO community. 24% believe that there should be enough students on campus during the summer months to keep the gardening running, while 20% saw volunteers as the answer. 20% were unsure of what should be done and 8% thought those who are using the garden should be responsible.

### **Conclusion:**

Those who were surveyed brought a number of very interesting ideas to the table which could help with the management and operation of a campus community garden at UBCO. The most important piece of information which this survey has attained would most certainly be how supportive the UBCO community is when it comes to the creation of a campus community garden. Without a supportive community this project would be dead before it started, but with 94% of the surveyed population believing a garden would of value to the campus, I feel such a project has enough interest amongst the community to be successful.

### **What's Next:**

The last stage of the project includes a planning committee meeting as this will allow for all the supportive students, faculty, staff, and outside sources to meet face to

face. A planning committee will also allow for everyone to have a voice on how best to successfully set up and manage a community garden for the long term. At the successful completion of the meeting it will be up to interested parties to fulfill the remaining steps outlined in the report's plan of action and thus make UBC O a shining example of sustainability.