

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

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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,

- 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

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 area from the Tampa Bay area.