

MSU Center for Agroecology and Sandhill Restaurant

Strategic Plan Theme: Stewardship and Sustainability

Funding Level: Between \$1-5 million

Facility Needs: New facilities will be needed

Submitting Unit: CANR/Horticulture/MSU Student Organic Farm

Collaborating colleges/departments/units involved with this proposal.

Residential Initiative on the Study of the Environment, MSU Student Organic Farm, MSU Student Life and Engagement, Multicultural Unity Center, James Madison College, Department of Community Sustainability. Potential future Collaborators: Jude Barry (Center for Regional Food Systems), Phillip Tocco (MSU Extension)

What is the proposal's big theme or idea?

What if MSU became a destination for farm-to-table dining, community workshops focused on indigenous foods and traditional ecological knowledge, nationally recognized sustainable/regenerative farming conferences, and a land lab for interdisciplinary sustainability courses? Our Big Idea is to expand and enhance the MSU Student Organic Farm (SOF) to become The MSU Center for Agroecology—a space that offers inclusive education and outreach that fosters reciprocal relationships with the land and environment among students, educators, and the community. Established in 2001 by students seeking courses in sustainable agriculture, the SOF is a 15-acre living learning laboratory that grounds students' understanding and engagement with the 'wicked problems' of climate, human health, and systemic injustice crises covered in their coursework through hands-on experiential learning. For students working on the farm, being in close contact with nature, working as a team, and growing food for the community offers refuge and a sense of agency to make change as engaged citizens. The MSU Center for Agroecology will be modeled after several nationally recognized centers of excellence such as the Stone Barn Center for Food and Agriculture and highly acclaimed farm to table restaurant Blue Hill, the University of California Santa Cruz Center for Agroecology, University of Vermont's Agroecology and Livelihood Collaborative, Washington State University's Center for Sustaining Agriculture and Natural Resources and University of Michigan's Campus Farm.

What is the proposal's goal?

We propose a 3-pronged approach to the creation of the MSU Center for Agroecology and farm-to-table restaurant.

A. Development of a community of scholars offering place-based courses and/or modules designed to facilitate experiential learning and foster students' sense of belonging, wellbeing, connection to place, ecological knowledge, including traditional ecological/indigenous knowledge

The Farm as Habitat- principles of ecology taught through the lens of food and farming First Food- indigenous food sovereignty, principles of traditional ecological knowledge, cultivating diverse foodways at MSU Climate and Environmental Considerations of Food and Farming- What are organic and conventional farming? How do they interact with the environment at various scales? Peace Corp and Self Sufficiency Preparation – basic skills needed for Peace Corps such as beekeeping, composting, small livestock, hand scale farming practices, seed saving The Urban Farm- with over 50% of the world living in urban centers, how to sustainably grow food on a small footprint; uplifting the voices of urban farmers

B. Infrastructure Development

Planning, design and construction of a multi-purpose structure - possible MI barn rehab or straw bale construction with solar power. This structure will serve as a restaurant and teaching/learning space. To be designed as a collaborative effort with students and faculty. Purchase a new truck for farm work and negotiate contract with CATA or Uber for for student transportation to and from farm New barn for livestock and equipment storage (livestock is critical for ecological “stacking” for regenerative agriculture)

C. SandHill Farm to Table Restaurant

Develop partnership with School of Hospitality Business and RHS Culinary in planning and development of business model, courses and student internships -Crop and menu planning with farm manager -Once monthly dinners, build reputation for dining experience -Quarterly culinary workshops for the mid-Michigan community such as plant based cooking, indigenous foodways cooking, whole animal butchering and utilization

Year 1: Form a community of scholars. Host first annual 1-2 day work session to share ideas, resources, match partners with courses, add courses to system Course design Begin farm-to-table restaurant visioning and design Break ground on construction of multi-purpose facility Formative evaluation with community partners at year end Year 2: Offer at least 2 courses, assess and evaluate, redesign Continue to enhance SOF infrastructure for teaching and learning, experiential learning Host student conference on creating a just food system at MSU Host at least 2 community workshops in collaboration with Extension Community Food Systems Educators Formative evaluation with community partners at year end Year 3: Offer at least 2 additional new courses, assess, evaluate, redesign Disseminate findings to partners at 1 day workshop/conference Begin hosting meals at Sandhill

Define the significance, or impact of your big idea.

Viewed through the lens of the MSU 2030 Strategic Plan, the SOF is positioned to become a prized institutional asset cutting across multiple disciplines. Beyond learning agricultural practices and the daily operations of a complex production system, students develop strong leadership, systems thinking, problem solving, and communication skills. The farm provides a safe physical (not virtual) space for students to cross boundaries, grow their confidence, find purpose, develop a sense of belonging, and build community. The SOF aspires to uphold what should be the contemporary commitment of a Land Grant institution. Recognizing the need to unpack and revise the contested meanings of “land grant”, we see the need for conversations about MSU’s history and legacy in order to enrich MSU with a stronger Indigenous presence, especially as it relates to our land stewardship and lack of reciprocity.

The SOF is a university asset with vast potential for economic impact, student success, and community engagement. We propose and are currently working with Student Life and Engagement and the RISE Program to strategically realign the academic home for the SOF where it can flourish and grow to its full potential. The SOF is currently self-funded by produce sales, siloed in a department that is challenged to see its value, and not prioritized for support, which limits its ability for robust programming, campus partnerships and recurring funding compared to similar university farms, such as the University of Michigan Campus Farm. SOF is uniquely positioned to engage multiple themes of the MSU Strategic Plan 2030, to respond to the unique needs of students in this moment, and to be a space for students to engage in critical conversations on environmental justice, food sovereignty, and the systems and culture that uphold injustice and inequity in our food system and on our campus. According to a 2021 Pew Report, GenZ is overwhelmingly concerned about climate change with 76% saying it is one of their biggest societal concerns. The report also indicates that GenZ students are aware of the disproportionate impact of climate change on marginalized populations.

Who will be impacted?

MSU undergraduate and graduate students seeking place-based experiential learning or research

Greater Lansing community will benefit from economic development associated with adult education workshops, destination dining, school field trip opportunities, and food systems engagement accessible to those who are often excluded from these conversations.

MSU Advancement will utilize as a flagship program and destination for fundraising, Gore and Thorp have 10 years’ experience fundraising with SOF Gala (~\$200K)

150 CSA members (community members who buy food subscription)

MSU Culinary chefs and employees who prepare our food for campus dining halls

Students, staff, faculty, visitors, and community members who utilize campus dining

K-12 local schools – tours

Faculty seeking place based learning labs

Health4U workshops

Registered Student Organizations (RSOs) related to sustainability, agriculture, horticulture, food systems, business, engineering, design, and more.

Local organizations focused on food, farming, gardening, and horticulture (e.g. Allen Neighborhood Center, Master Gardener, local Garden Clubs, etc.)

Food & Farming Entrepreneurs- Center for Regional Food Systems

MSU Extension educators, especially Community Food Systems Educators and those with a need for expertise in organic farming

What does sustainability for your proposal look like?

The MSU Center for Agroecology and Sandhill Farm to Table Restaurant becomes a hub for the study of agroecology, destination agritourism site, workshops have waitlists, we have attracted state-wide and national attention for our award-winning dining experience, students are waitlisted for the courses, internships and paid crew.

MSU uses this site as a recruitment tool for both faculty and students.

MSU widely views this site as a place for indigeneity conversations, rematriation, and revitalization of our Land Grant commitment.

Conservation monitoring and action plan in place for restoration of the land/ecosystem

Citizen Science project supporting this monitoring

Mini grant funding for faculty stipends to teach credit-bearing courses and community workshops at the farm

Initial funding for free programming, users pay a fee once programming is established

Revenue from CSA and MSU Culinary, which allows us to become self-sustaining