

Scaling Up



Farm to SUNY Nothing but the Best—Local and Fresh

ON A BRISK OCTOBER morning, Peter Ten Eyck of Indian Ladder Farm and his staff packed over 800 apples into wooden crates for Carioto Produce to deliver to University at Albany's inaugural New York Campus Crunch. As part of a nationwide celebration on Food Day 2014, Peter joined nearly 4,000 participants on 18 campuses across the state in taking a bite of a freshly harvested, New York-grown apple to express support for healthy, local food and farming. A resounding 'crunch' rang out as students, faculty, staff, local politicians and community members tasted different varieties of apples from nearby farms and celebrated New York State agriculture.

Radha Urribarri, a sophomore environmental science major at University at Albany, took great pleasure in planning the Campus Crunch. As a Farm



to SUNY intern, she "envision[s] students creating a stronger push for local food and practicing this at home as well."

Farm to SUNY was born out of the initiative of *SUNY Commits to New York State Agriculture*, coordinated by the SUNY Office of Sustainability. Under *SUNY Commits*, campuses worked with regional farmers, food processors and distributors to develop a branded SUNY pizza sauce made with New York-grown tomatoes. This effort led to the collaboration with FINYS to expand local food purchasing and



Farm to SUNY Campus Crunch at University of Albany with farmer Peter TenEyck.

leverage SUNY's 550,000 mouths to feed and annual food purchasing budget of \$150 million. With support from a USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant, FINYS is leading an effort to raise student awareness of local agriculture and increase purchasing of New York fruits and vegetables by four SUNY partners: University at Albany; SUNY New Paltz; SUNY Oneonta; and SUNY Oswego.

In its first semester, the Farm to SUNY program demonstrated exciting potential for local food procurement at all four campuses. The University at Albany experienced a 38% increase in local produce sourcing from 2013 to 2014, investing \$156,129 back into the local economy. At SUNY Oneonta, purchases of apple cider increased from 24 gallons in 2013 to 588 gallons in 2014!



Spearheaded by American Farmland Trust, Farm to Institution New York State (FINYS) is a partnership of agriculture, health and economic development organizations working to increase purchasing of NY grown foods by institutions. FINYS is addressing the systemic challenges to scaling up with demonstration projects, advocacy of supportive policies, regional and statewide networking, and market readiness training. For more information, visit www.finys.org

"The most important learning opportunity for our students in this campaign is to educate them not just THAT we buy local, but WHY we buy local. Teaching them the impact that we as an institution are able to have on the local economy, the impact we have on specific farms, is really important.../ I want students to be informed and educated so that when they shop for themselves, their first choice is to buy local."

JAMIE ADAMS,
SUSTAINABILITY
PROGRAM
COORDINATOR,
SUNY OSWEGO.

The Puzzle of Tracking Local

SINCE PURCHASING New York foods is not brand new to SUNY Dining Services, the first phase of the project was to establish a baseline—how much of which New York-grown products were being purchased? The Farm to SUNY team sifted through 2013–14 purchasing records from campus dining services and their distributors. They quickly discovered that current record-keeping systems do not easily document which products are New York-grown, and rarely trace back to individual farms.

Despite the challenges, the baseline analysis revealed ‘hot products’ that could be sourced from New

York farms: apples, potatoes, onions and winter squash are available during much of the school year; and salad greens, especially romaine, in season. College kitchens preparing thousands of meals each day require that some products arrive ready to use—squash peeled and cubed, romaine chopped, potatoes and onions sliced or diced.

Working with Distributors

A CRITICAL STRATEGY of the project is instilling a preference for New York-grown by campus buyers and their produce vendors. Carioto Produce, Mento Produce, C's Farm Market, Red Barn Produce and FreshPoint expanded their

sourcing of New York-grown, identified the farms and what they are buying from each of them.

Farm to SUNY helped cultivate the relationship between Sodexo Dining Services at the University at Albany and Carioto Produce. Sodexo chefs work closely with Carioto during the ordering process. “Carioto has been an amazing partner in our sustainability journey,” said Tim MacTurk, Sodexo District Manager. “Anthony and his team are very willing to source different products and to let us know when local products are available. I see our relationship growing even more in the upcoming years.”

Owner and operator Anthony Carioto observes



SUNY Oneonta works with distributor Mento Produce in Syracuse to feature New York-grown.



Produce distributor C's Farm Market purchases onions from Jacobson Farms in Fulton, New York for SUNY Oswego.

substantial growth for locally grown produce: "Due to increased demand, we've made new relationships with local farms to secure new items to broaden our local produce line." One of these is Bulich Mushroom Farm in Catskill, whose fungi were featured on a special Mushroom Day. Ken Migliorelli, owner of Migliorelli Farm, sees specialty distributors like Carioto's as great partners, effectively streamlining the marketing process and giving him access to institutional markets. He has witnessed a significant increase in his wholesale business in the past 10 years and expects that institutional interest in local purchasing will help his business continue to grow.

Student Engagement

CORE TO THE SUCCESS of Farm to SUNY is building awareness and student engagement with educational events and fun activities.

Harvest of the Month

School chefs were delighted at the opportunity to exercise their creativity and experiment with seasonal recipes for "Harvest of the Month." In 2014, September featured corn, October apples, and November winter squash. The monthly



Kale Day at University at Albany

selection was widely promoted across the four campuses through signage, samplings, and events.

Albany's Tim MacTurk and his team especially loved educating students about the different varieties of apples and creating apple-focused recipes such as apple pumpkin soup, apple and fennel slaw, and roast pork loin with figs and apples.

For Farm to SUNY student interns—and sisters—Shannon and Alanna Bergstrom at SUNY Oneonta, tabling in the dining halls was a highlight. They could talk to students about seasonal eating and the local foods currently available on the menu. "It was great to get students involved with incorporating local products into meals in the dining halls and I think students were excited to be part of that process," Shannon said.

Make It Fun! National Kale Day

Campus dining staff stared in disbelief as students happily devoured kale-centric dishes such as curried kale and sweet potatoes and kale smoothies on National Kale Day.

Championed by Lisa Mitten, Campus Sustainability Coordinator at SUNY New Paltz, this celebration of kale was initially met with skepticism from dining staff. Would students even try anything made with kale? Lisa persisted with enthusiasm and on October 1, 2014, all four campuses featured kale tastings and special menus.

Farm to SUNY interns set up displays touting its health benefits, handed out recipes, quizzed passersby on kale trivia, and handed out t-shirts featuring 'Eat More Kale.' The event was a huge success! "Social media was blowing up and so many students were eating kale who had never tried it before," Christina Georgalas, biochemistry major and Farm to SUNY intern at SUNY New Paltz, declared.



Kale Day at SUNY New Paltz

"I like featuring a different product each month. This allows us to focus on seasonality and also tell the story of the farm and the farmer to our campus community. We will continue to do that going forward."

TIM MACTURK, SODEXO DISTRICT MANAGER, UNIVERSITY AT ALBANY

Going Forward

BY WORKING TOGETHER, and enlisting student champions, the pilot campuses have increased their ability to purchase and promote local food. The campus teams will continue

Launched in December 2013, Farm to SUNY has already seen impressive results across its pilot campuses.

- ▶ University at Albany increased local purchasing of fresh and minimally processed produce by **38%**, investing **\$156,129** back into the local economy
- ▶ SUNY Oneonta increased purchasing of New York apple cider from **24** gallons to **588** gallons
- ▶ SUNY New Paltz increased purchasing of locally-grown onions by **151%**
- ▶ SUNY Oswego purchased **1,660** pounds of peeled and cubed butternut squash in 2014 sourced from a New York farm-processor, seven times more than in 2013
- ▶ **4,000** students across 18 campuses participated in New York Campus Crunch in 2014
- ▶ **62%** of students surveyed at University at Albany and **73%** at SUNY Oswego said it matters where the food they eat is grown
- ▶ **68%** of survey respondents at SUNY Oswego and **33.5%** at University at Albany would be willing to pay more for local food

to engage their community with local food and dining services staff will prioritize local seasonal foods when creating the menus.

"I hope to see other schools adopt the program. We have created some neat marketing tools, strategies and common events that can drive the education piece of it," says Mary Ellen Mallia, Director of Environmental Sustainability, University at Albany. Project findings and the marketing and evaluation tools will be made available to the other 29 SUNY campuses with on-site dining, as well as private colleges in New York.

Who will fill the key role played by FINYS staff and partners, Hudson Valley Ag Development Corporation and Cornell Cooperative Extension, of "value chain facilitator" beyond the pilot project? Identifying new farm sources, testing the potential for new products, working with distributors to track each product back to the farm source—these are functions not easily



absorbed into campus dining services. How and where to replicate this role will be critical to expand local food purchasing within the larger SUNY system and beyond.

The biggest challenge—and greatest opportunity—is how to institutionalize traceability and transparency back to the farm source. Christina Grace, Co-coordinator of FINYS and Farm to SUNY Project Manager explains: "This means, for example, that a farm name

and location needs to be associated with a case of tomatoes from the farm to the co-packer to the processor to the distributor to the campus. Ideally the farm source is on every invoice and even on labels."

The Farm to SUNY pilot ends in September 2015, but the work will continue, as SUNY Oswego's Jamie Adams asserts: "Through the success of this four-campus pilot, I am confident that Farm to SUNY will gain momentum SUNY-wide."



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