The Intervale Gleaning and Food Rescue Program

Introduction

My internship this summer will be with the Intervale Center Gleaning and Food Rescue Program. Jessica Sanford is the founder and current program director, as well as the co-manager of Adam’s Berry Farm in Charlotte and an adjunct professor at UVM, teaching ENVS 195: Vermont Food Systems. I had the pleasure of taking Jessica’s class my sophomore at UVM and not only was the material a catalyst for my interest in food systems, but also her attitude and passion for improving access to local food was truly an inspiration. It was this class that first introduced me to the process of gleaning food from farms and it sparked my interest in the program, so I am thrilled to be participating in the program as my senior capstone internship. Due to growth of the program in the past few years, Jessica does not participate in the day-to-day gleaning operations, so I will mostly be working with Sarah Alexander, the gleaning coordinator and recent graduate from the UVM Environmental Program. This is Sarah’s first year working for the Intervale and I am excited to work alongside her throughout the summer.

The Intervale Center plays an enormous role in strengthening and maintaining a healthy local food system in Burlington. Among its wide variety of educational programs and farm incubation resources, the Intervale Center is home to the Intervale Gleaning and Food Rescue Program. Jessica started this program with the goal of supplying low-income Burlington residents with healthy, locally
low-income individuals struggling to access fresh, healthy food. In a city like Burlington that has such a vibrant and progressive local food scene, it is often overlooked that there are hundreds of impoverished individuals who lack basic access to healthy food. In the state of Vermont, 32% of all residents are unable to afford enough nutritious food (hungerfreevt.org, 2014) and Burlington, despite its reputation, is not immune to the issue of food access. Recognizing this, the Gleaning Program believes “all Vermonters should have access to—and be able to enjoy-fresh, locally-grown food” (intervale.org, 2015). In order to do this, the Gleaning Program has partnered with local farms such as Digger’s Mirth Collective Farm, Jericho Settler’s Farm, Pitchfork Farm, Maple Wind Farm, and Intervale Community Farm (intervale.org, 2014) to glean some of their produce in order to provide people with organic, fresh vegetables and fruits. The gleaning process involves building a relationship with the farms and maintaining clear communication so that there is solid understanding of what produce is being harvested and rescued. In establishing this relationship, the Gleaning Program is not only working to strengthen the connection between the recipients and the farms, but also for the farms to become educated and involved in the issue of food insecurity that is prevalent in their community. Connecting farms and people through education and delicious food is one way the Intervale Gleaning and Food Rescue Program is working to strengthen the Burlington food system and address the issue of food insecurity throughout the city.

My internship position is a hands-on approach to addressing the issue of food security. I will be at the Intervale every Friday to help coordinate volunteers
local level and work to rebuild those relationships between consumers and farmers that are necessary to build a vibrant, healthy local food system.

My concentration, food, land, and community is directly represented by the work I will do in this internship. Of the many lessons I have learned from ENVS classes at UVM, one of the most prominent is that strong communities are the foundation for solving most environmental issues. Given that modern agriculture is one of the most pressing environmental issues we face as a nation, it is necessary that strong communities begin working towards a solution. However, there is a sizeable community in Burlington that is completely removed from the amazing local food scene that has emerged in the city, simply because they cannot afford local food. If Burlington hopes to continue to be a leading city in the local food movement, then the issue of food insecurity needs to be addressed, and the Gleaning and Food Rescue Program is doing just that. In the context of local food systems, communities are not strong if only a portion is able to access it, a strong community is one where everyone has equal access to the food that is being grown there. This internship will help bring the community together around food and directly address the issue of food access that plagues so many Burlington residents.

**Learning Objectives**

- Fully understand the process of gleaning and food rescue as it relates to food insecurity
- Gain an understanding of the objectives and goals of the Intervale Center and do my best to reflect those in my work
the emergence of “Green Revolution” technologies in the 1960’s that agriculture was catapulted into a steady trend of environmental degradation. Dr. Norman Borlaug’s dwarf strand of wheat coevolved with the creation of synthetic fertilizers and chemical pesticides, herbicides and fungicides, resulting in massive crop yields and the beginning of agriculture’s dependency on chemical inputs (Manning, 99, 2004).

Fast-forward to the 21st century, where, after years of pumping the soil with nutrients, planting massive fields of monoculture crops, and widespread application of toxic chemicals, soils are devoid of most organic matter due to high rates of erosion, waterways have either been exhausted for irrigation or contaminated by chemicals, and fields have suffered irreplaceable biodiversity loss. It has become clear to many, but certainly not all, that modern agriculture has severe environmental implications and in many cases “is altering the conditions of life on the planet” (Manning, 100, 2004). The lack of ecological integrity involved in food production has prompted many Americans, individuals and communities alike, to reevaluate what foods they are eating and where their food is coming from.

The city of Burlington is an example of a community that is working towards decreasing the environmental impact of their food system and ensuring a stable, healthy future for food production. Burlington was quoted by Mother Earth News for being “the poster child for the core values” that are written about in Mother Earth, going on to say “its vibrant local food system is central to the city” (Compton, 2014). The catalyst for this vibrant local food system is the Intervale Center, which is “creating a food system that supports local economies, farmers, our precious land and water, and all of us who love to eat” (intervale.org, 2014). Thanks to the
solution is not increased food production, but more financially accessible food 
(Gregory and Coleman-Jensen, 2013). Hungry households struggle to meet the U.N. 
requirements for food security because the price of food, especially fruits, 
vegetables, and whole grains, has reached a point where impoverished consumers 
simply cannot afford a healthy diet.

The lack of federal support, both financial and policy, for the production of 
fruits and vegetables has resulted in unattainable prices for those living in poverty. 
For many poor communities in the United States, "it is easier—and often less 
expensive—to buy a Twinkie or frosted cupcakes than fresh vegetables or fruits" 
(Allen, 160, 2012). This example is indicative of food choices in general for poor 
communities. Heavily processed foods are the most affordable because their main 
ingredients—corn and wheat—are heavily subsidized and supported by the federal 
government. Healthy foods, as a result, are subjected to much higher prices that 
many people cannot afford. The incredibly high prices of fruits and vegetables are 
contributing to high food insecurity in the U.S. because many are forced to rely on 
cheap, processed foods that do not "meet their dietary needs and food preferences 
for an active and healthy life" (WFP, 2015).

Despite a more progressive and vibrant food scene than most states, 
Vermont still struggles with feeding its population. As of 2012, "13% of all Vermont 
households are food insecure" and throughout the state "adults have decreased the 
quality and quantity of food they consume because of lack of money" 
hungerfreevt.org, 2014). There is an ongoing effort to address food security in 
Vermont and according to Vermont Farm to Plate, "Because food insecurity is rooted
security in Vermont, Salvation Farms sought to serve the “community’s most vulnerable citizens primarily through the efforts of directed volunteers” (Ackerman-Leist, 107, 2013), an approach that not only fed people but also involved community members in the process. The first three years of Salvation Farms yielded eighty-eight thousand pounds of rescued produce and, following a partnership with the Vermont Food Bank, was able to connect with 120 different farms that established a statewide gleaning effort (Ackerman-Leist, 2013). Other gleaning programs, such as the Intervale’s, have been established in the state over the past few years, but the movement has also grown nationally. The Society of St. Andrew is a gleaning program that operates in the southeastern United States and was founded with the goal of “building a network that will take food...and get it to agencies that are feeding the hungry” (NPR, 2011). While this approach does not supply families directly with food, it is indirectly feeding food insecure householcs and expanding the network of farms that contribute to feeding the hungry. In 2014, the Society of St. Andrew g leaned over 18 million pounds of produce with the help of 31 thousand volunteers (endhunger.org, 2014), numbers that suggest gleaning programs in the United States have potential to be effective contributors to increased food access among poor communities.
educational backgrounds concluded that while many adults were “motivated to expand their knowledge and understanding of functional food products” there were still older adults who demonstrated “the need for more information, specifically with regards to the health benefits of functional foods” (Vella, et al., 2014). Those results echo one of the main goals of the Gleaning and Food Rescue Program, which serves mainly adults in Burlington, in their effort to “engage with participants in food and nutrition education activities” (intervale.org, 2015). Especially for adults living in poverty who may not have a connection to healthy food, it is important for them to learn and understand the importance of eating fresh fruits and vegetables.

**Key Writers and Thinkers**

Food access has gained recent popularity as a pressing issue in the United States and globally, and various people have taken roles as effective leaders in addressing the issue. Jeff Bridges, as a well-known celebrity, has used his fame to create awareness around hunger in the United States. He cofounded the End Hunger Network, is a strong supporter and spokesman for the No Kid Hungry Campaign, and has used his opportunities in the public sphere to spread awareness about the relatively unrecognized issue of child hunger in the United States.

Raj Patel is a food activist and has written several books highlighting the issues with the global food system and the reasons why there is such a large discrepancy between those who are hungry and those who are obese. His book, *Stuffed and Starved* opened people’s eyes to the sobering affects of the global food system on hunger throughout the world.
People, Sustaining Farms" embodies their mission of fostering community engagement in order to create a sustainable system of farming and food production. While the Intervale Center's mission is focused on food production, its influence extends beyond that to education and community engagement within the food system. It is a unique organization in the sense that it houses a large parcel of farmland within a city of 40,000 people that not only provides food to the community but also provides an incredible resource for education, engagement, and a connection to the natural environment that often gets lost in a city.

The Intervale is home to numerous programs, all of which work to celebrate farmers, improve the sustainability and viability of the land, connect the community with their food, and encourage the support of local farmers. The Farms Program was established in 1990 and serves as an incubation program for new farms and new farmers. Its goal is to minimize barriers that may prevent the success of new farms otherwise, such as available land, initial capital, training, and access to viable markets. It also offers accessibility to equipment and tools that usually pose financial obstacles to new farmers. The program has helped numerous farms establish themselves and maintain success in a typically challenging business to start in.

The Success on Farms program (SOF) helps Vermont farms around the state establish themselves as viable businesses by increasing profitability as well as maintaining environmental and social sustainability. With the help of experienced farmers and business consultants, SOF works with new and young farms establish themselves and help ensure future success.
The Intervale Center houses a staff of 18, but the farms that use the land have variable staffing depending on the time of year. The staff has grown with the Intervale as new programs and opportunities present themselves. Many of the staff have experience with farming and sustainable food production, making them valuable in communicating the message and mission of the Intervale to the public. Due to its status as a 501(c)3 non-profit, the Intervale Center relies largely on donations and grants to fund projects. Dedicated community partners and members play an integral role in supporting the work of the Intervale, solidifying the fact that it is strongly connected and ultimately reliant on community members who share the same goals and values.

Methods

The majority of my time at the Intervale will be spent in the field with volunteers. I will be there all day every Friday gleaning at different farms. In the morning, Sarah and I will drive to Jericho Settler’s Farm in Richmond, Vermont to glean from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. Volunteers who sign up beforehand will meet us in Richmond, and my role will be to welcome them and help coordinate the harvesting process. I will be in the field with volunteers harvesting whatever the farm has left for us, continuously interacting with volunteers and working to establish relationships with them, rather than acting as a superior. Upon our return to the Intervale Center in the afternoon, all the harvested food will be weighed, recorded, and stored in the cooler. Starting at 1:30 p.m., I will meet volunteers at Intervale Community Farm, located down the road from the Intervale Center. I will play the
Bibliography


