

Resolution to Establish the Institute for Agroecology

Whereas in AY 2021 the Office of the Vice President for Research (OVPR) established a competition to support the development of transformative research ideas at the University of Vermont; and

Whereas a proposal to create a center focused on Agroecology put forward by Dr. Ernesto Mendez of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences was chosen as one of these transformative research ideas; and

Whereas Dr. Mendez with the support of the OVPR developed a proposal to establish an Institute for Agroecology (IFA) (proposal attached); and

Whereas the University Manual states that “Proposals to establish, substantially change or eliminate academic centers and institutes must be approved by the Board of Trustees, upon recommendation of the President and Provost following application of appropriate governance protocols, the latter to include Faculty Senate approval” (University Manual, 204.5); and

Whereas the Research, Scholarship, and Creative Arts Committee of the Faculty Senate reviewed the proposal to establish the IFA on behalf of the Faculty Senate and recommends that the Faculty Senate accept the proposal to establish the IFA (recommendation attached);

Therefore be it resolved that the Faculty Senate of the University of Vermont agrees with and accepts the proposal to establish the Institute for Agroecology at the University.

Recommendation from the Research, Scholarship, and Creative Arts Committee

13 January 2023

Dear President Borchert,

The Research Scholarship and Creative Arts (RSCA) committee voted on the 12th January 2023 to strongly recommend that the Institute of Agroecology be recognized by UVM and approved by the Faculty Senate. This decision was based on our reading of the proposal, public comments from the UVM community, and discussion with the Institute's proposed Director Ernesto Méndez (Department of Plant and Soil Science). The idea for an Institute of Agroecology came as the result of a direct call from the Office of the Vice President of Research (OVPR) for proposals in AY21. The OVPR review process led to an invitation to form the proposed Institute of Agroecology with funding for at least three years, and provided commitment to finding a shared space for its activities and key personnel at UVM.

The RSCA committee had a few questions on the structure and functioning of the proposed Institute during their December 2022 meeting that we felt were sufficiently addressed by Dr. Méndez.

1. We sought clarification on the role of the internal and external Advisory Committees. We were advised that these committees would act as sounding boards that could help with periodic reviews and be the voice of communities (e.g. non-profit agencies and small farms owners) that will potentially be impacted.
2. It was suggested that it might be useful to more explicitly tie the budget line items to either the International Agroecology/Global Agroecology Knowledge Alliance program or the Activating Agroecology in Vermont program. The distinctions are implied but not made explicit.
3. There was a question as to how much of the UVM community would be able, or have the desire, to participate in the Institute given that only three faculty were mentioned. We learned there is a much longer list of faculty that want to participate. Furthermore, since socializing of UVM to the idea of an Institute of Agroecology probably only extended to 70% of departments, there is the potential for getting further faculty interested. Finally, it is likely that the proposed Institute will be smaller in reach than some other UVM Institutes (e.g. the Gund), but might expand over time.

4. A member of the RSCA inquired as to whether the Institute of Agroecology would be competing for funds with the Gund Institute. Dr. Mendez recognized that continued communication and joint ventures would be required to stymy overlap between the Agroecology Institute, Gund, and Food Systems program. However, given that he is on the Gund Steering Committee, he doesn't think this will be an issue. He also pointed out that these three entities currently have very different funding models (e.g. the Gund runs from an endowment), suggesting little internal competition for funding. There is also huge interest from external sources (e.g. the Kellogg Foundation) for funding Agroecology specifically.

We would be happy to answer any questions about the above information.

Sincerely,

Jill Preston

Mary Cushman

RSCA Co-Chairs