

Sustainable Food Campaign Case Study

Fall 2018 | By Makayla Salas

Project Overview

The 2018-2019 professional development offering for the UVM Eco-Reps was a symposium centered around food concerns entitled *Taking Root Student Symposium*. Having been introduced to a wide variety of food-related topics from food insecurity to the benefits of the farm-to-table model, we decided to broaden the scope of this campaign. While we normally uniformly focus on one issue (say, the effects of animal agriculture), the symposium helped to inform and inspire our Change Agents who were then encouraged to tackle any dimension of food that spoke to them.

Background

Most of our community team events focused on food insecurity and animal agriculture impacts. The food insecurity aspect hit close to home, as we learned through a guest presenter from Hunger Free Vermont that 1 in 10 Vermonters are 'food insecure', meaning they lack consistent access to enough food. Furthermore, the Wisconsin Hope Lab released their third annual food insecurity in college survey in 2018, which revealed that 36 percent of university students and 42 percent of community college students were food insecure in the 30 days preceding the survey. A few factors that contribute to food insecurity include low socioeconomic status, low levels of education, and poor health. Furthermore, among college students, food insecurity was found to disproportionately affect students of color, LGBTQ students, low-income students, and first generation students.

Our focus on animal agriculture impacts stemmed in part from growing interest among the UVM student body for more vegetarian and vegan options in the dining halls. The UVM Green Mountain Veggies club helped launch a pilot program for Meatless Mondays where no meat was served during dinner at one of the main dining halls for the last month of the fall semester. By Spring of 2019, all dining hall staff underwent a period of training and experimenting with new vegan recipes. Offering more plant-based options is important, as animal agriculture comprises 44 percent of all anthropogenic nitrous oxide (a greenhouse gas) emissions, is extremely water-intensive, and directly linked to deforestation.

Goals

In partnering with various groups such as UVM Green Mountain Veggies and UVM FeelGood to provide various interactive and informational events, our goals were to a) explore the multidimensionality of food as it relates to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals and b) disseminate related information to the student population to encourage food-related behaviors that help work towards those goals. Food insecurity

and animal agriculture directly relate to goals such as 2) No Poverty and 13) Climate Action.

Implementation

The UVM Eco-Reps program consists of 20 students that are divided up into five community teams, with each team assigned to a specified residential area on campus. Efforts included a campus wide intervention as well as smaller events held in residential locations.

Full-team events/initiatives:

1. Presentations from relevant resources: To equip the Eco-Reps with the relevant knowledge to tackle the different angles of food, presentations were given to them by members of Hunger Free Vermont and UVM Dining.
2. Taking Root Symposium: This symposium by Sodexo was held on campus and acted as the annual professional development offering for the Eco-Reps, centered around food concerns.
3. Inter-Residence Association (IRA) Wings Fest: Eco-Reps were present at one of IRA's most popular events, providing help with composting and waste-sorting.
4. Brennan's Movie: Eco-Reps held a screening of *Wasted* at Brennan's, a popular on-campus restaurant.
5. Meatless Monday tabling: Eco-Reps joined UVM's Green Mountain Veggies group to discuss the impact of animal agriculture in the dining halls during dinner periods where no meat was being served.
6. Weigh the Waste: Eco-Reps monitored and weighed plate waste during dinner in a main dining hall for four days in a row in order to measure the ounces of waste per person produced and increase awareness of food waste impacts. Those who produced no food waste were given a sticker reading "Clean Plate Club".
7. Re-plating: Eco-Reps collected uneaten food from plates placed on the dining hall conveyor belt and re-plated them to make a display. The food looked like a new meal and served as an engaging info table and helped students think about their personal food waste footprint.
8. Farm Tour: Eco-Reps brought a group of 10 students to UVM's Catamount Educational Farm for a tour. Many students received extra credit from their classes for attending.

Community team events/initiatives:

1. Thanksgiving/Friendsgiving: Eco-Reps held or joined Thanksgiving/Friendsgiving events such as potlucks and vegan baking instructionals in the reshalls. Materials about food insecurity, the effects of animal agriculture, and composting were given out at these events.
2. Food Drive: one of the residence halls held a food drive to donate to the Chittenden Emergency Food Shelf in Burlington, Vermont.

Timeline

10/19/18 - 11/3/18

- Presentations to Eco-Reps by relevant departments and organizations
- Eco-Reps attend Taking Root Student Symposium

11/4/18 - 11/19/18

- *Community team level interventions begin (details above)*
- IRA Wings Fest (help with compost and waste-sorting)
- Screening of *Wasted* at on-campus restaurant
- Meatless Monday tabling

11/20/18 - 12/5/18

- *Community team level interventions continued*
- Meatless Monday tabling continued
- Weigh the Waste (4 times)
- Re-plating demonstration

12/6/18 - 12/21/18

- *Community team level interventions end*
- Farm Tour

Financing

<u>Expense</u>	<u>Revenue</u>	<u>In Kind</u>	<u>Description</u>
\$60.56			Food items for events
\$90.00			Van rental for farm tour
		\$15.00	Baking supplies provided by Res Life

Our largest expense for this campaign was renting a van to bring students to the farm. The cost per interaction of this event was high because only 10 students could fit in the vehicle. That means we spend \$9/person. However, those participants had a much higher engagement and richer learning experience than the 9 people who attended the baking event at a cost of \$1.66/person. We continue to find a balance with return on investment of our time and money when designing programming. Having support from other campus partners like ResLife is always helpful and we will continue to pursue this.

Results

This campaign resulted in a total of 3323 impressions. Many of these impressions were low engagement impressions (i.e., people who interacted with us at a Weigh the Waste event, but who did not ask us questions or seem particularly engaged with what we were doing and why), however we had a significant number of high engagement impressions (i.e. people who asked for more resources/materials related to our event) particularly at the IRA Wings Fest and Meatless Monday tabling events. We joined Green Mountain Veggies for 100% of their Meatless Monday tabling sessions, where more than half of all participants were highly engaged each time.

As far as full-team events and initiatives, the IRA Wings Fest and Weigh the Waste initiatives garnered the most participants, with 330 and ~600 people attending, respectively. Partnering with well-known organizations like IRA, or being present in highly-trafficked areas such as the dining halls has proved to be useful in gaining a wider audience. Smaller full-team events included the screening of *Wasted* and the Farm Tour, which had 50 and 10 participants respectively. The Farm Tour was a high engagement event and very well-liked by those who attended but it could only be offered to as many people as could fit in one van.

As far as community team events, there were a total of 43 attendees at baking events and 52 attendees at potluck-style events. A total of 50 items were donated for the food drive by a single reshall; this suggests we should consider holding a similar drive across more reshalls in the future, as it was largely successful. There was a total of 149 participants across all community team initiatives. The community team events were particularly successful in gaining participants for a few reasons specific to this campaign, including:

- A) Eco-Reps pursued purposeful partnerships with residence hall staff (such as RA's, IRA, and hall council) and other well-known groups who have the capacity to effectively market to a broader audience than Eco-Reps can alone.
- B) There are many food related events happening at this time of the year (around Thanksgiving) and it was easy for Eco-Reps to add value to existing events. This is a better return on investment of our planning time and funding.
- C) The topic of the campaign was more broadly accessible and enticing to a wider audience (i.e. hearing about an event related to 'food' is likely more approachable than hearing about an event related to 'waste-sorting' or 'sustainable transportation').
- D) The broadness of the campaign allowed Change Agents to pursue aspects of food that were most interesting to them, incentivizing them to create events they were particularly proud of and motivated to advertise and gather support for.

Lessons Learned

While the Thanksgiving/Friendsgiving potlucks were successful in drawing in crowds, the dissemination of relevant information was sometimes difficult to get across. When engaged in a casual meal with others, especially people who live in your own building, it can be difficult to turn the conversation toward educational material. In the future, perhaps there could be a continuous slideshow of information playing by the table so that people glean information from the event even if they don't directly interact with the Change Agent hosting. Furthermore, Change Agents should keep in mind their primary purpose in hosting event is to spread environmental awareness, and purposefully create opportunities to include relevant information in conversation.

While having the ability to focus on whatever aspect of food was most interesting to each Change Agent gave them more freedom to engage with something they were passionate about, some Change Agents felt that this created a shallower understanding and availability of resources than had we stuck to one component of food. For example, if everyone had to focus on the impacts of animal agriculture, Change Agents could have pooled knowledge and resources on the topic, expanding the amount of relevant material they could provide and present at events.