

SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE IN WESTERN WISCONSIN

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ABSTRACT

The United States Department of Agriculture provided \$459,849 in CSREES funds to Chippewa Valley Technical College (CVTC), the Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service (MOSES) and the University of Wisconsin-River Falls (UWRF) to work together from 2007 to 2010 on a number of projects to enhance educational opportunities related to sustainable agriculture in Western Wisconsin. Grant work focused on curriculum development and outreach activities. Partners developed seven new courses, a high tunnel teaching facility, nine special guest lectures for potential infusion into existing courses, a new horticultural degree and a new sustainable agriculture minor. They engaged in community outreach, sponsoring three conferences that served a total of approximately 600 people, including faculty, staff, community members and students. Subject matter of the conferences included promoting the purchase of locally grown foods, high tunnel production, and basics of sustainable agricultural systems. Partners engaged students in community garden and high tunnel projects. Partners publicized their efforts related to sustainability in the region at various conferences and workshops. The grant partners successfully promoted sustainable agriculture by completing the majority of their stated project objectives, in addition to collaborating with ___ other organizations.

INTRODUCTION

Interest in sustainability concepts has increased exponentially over the past few years. Growers, gardeners, landowners, and scientists alike, as well as those that simply understand the significance of agriculture and the resources upon which it depends, have taken a special interest in sustaining these resources by a variety of methods. Creating and ensuring the sustainability of appropriate agricultural systems, of course, requires an educated public.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

- To increase the number of students pursuing agricultural and related degrees in Western Wisconsin;
- To increase awareness of sustainable agriculture among students, producers, and the general public;
- To contribute to the growth of markets for sustainably grown products throughout the region;
- To establish a Sustainable Agriculture major at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls
- To create experiential learning opportunities for students at both UWRF and Chippewa Valley Technical College ; and...
- To create or recreate at least six Agriscience, Farm Business or Production Management courses at CVTC devoted to sustainable agriculture topics.

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

- UW-River Falls developed a Sustainable Ag minor, available to students beginning Fall 2010.
- After surveying faculty, MOSES's Outreach Coordinator developed and offered several topics related to sustainable and/or organic agriculture (e.g. Permaculture; Soil biology and fertility) for presentation and infusion into UWRF and CVTC courses. Selected presenters distributed packets of topic-related information to class participants.
- CVTC completed an Associate degree in Horticulture emphasizing sustainability.
- UWRF developed new courses: Natural Animal Systems; Land Use and Sustainable Ag Law; Organic Production Systems.
- CVTC developed new courses: Sustainable Land Use; Integrated Plant Pest Management; Landscape Design and Construction; Pesticide and Fertilizer Applications.

OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

- Grant partners sponsored a Local Foods Workshop that attracted 225 area residents and 16 food vendors. Winona Duke, the featured speaker, provided rationale for purchasing locally produced foods.
- Partners constructed a 30' x 48' high tunnel at CVTC. Students provided some of the labor, learning construction techniques and later learning management techniques. Growers and community members observed.
- CVTC held a one-day Sustainable Soil Practices Conference.
- Members of the UW-RF Crops and Soils Club participated in River Falls, Wisconsin's Grow-to Share Community Gardens project by collecting soil samples and sending them to a testing laboratory, by tilling the garden plots and by applying manure and compost.



Winona Duke keynotes the Local Foods conference at UW-River Falls.



UW-RF Crops and Soils Club members take soil samples to ensure garden productivity.



Crops and Soils Club members clear land of debris and rocks.

OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

(CONTINUED)

- Our grant intern assisted with Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings class, hosted at UWRF; she also revised the Center for Integrated Ag Systems Price Tags/Costs Tags with editing help from the scientific community.
- Partners promoted our sustainable agriculture efforts at several conferences: the Upper Midwest Organic Farming Conference, the Value Added Conference, the Wisconsin Ag Educator's Conference, the High Tunnel Production for Beginning and Medium-Sized Commercial Growers

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