

Sustainability Projects Fund Final Report and Impact Metric

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Project Title: The Out of the Garden Project 2

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Measuring our Accomplishments

Since its inception, the primary mission of the Out of the Garden Project (OGP) has been to improve food service at McGill University's Macdonald campus by providing a healthy and sustainable food option for both students and staff. The initial vision of this project was to create a closed-loop food system in which food grown by the campus farms would be processed and served to the Mac campus community via a student run cafe.

The goal for the Fall 2013 semester was to operate one breakfast and one lunch service per week for 12 weeks, with the aim of serving a total of 900 customers. It was initially believed that this would require four part time employees and the assistance of a pool of student volunteers, and that it would lead to projected sales of \$5,400.

In addition to providing this food service, the project also aimed to provide practical skill development to the many dietetics, nutrition and food science students on campus, while extending learning opportunities to other members of the student body via various educational workshops.

Indicator (qualitative or quantitative)	Target	REALITY
Total sales expected for fall semester	\$5,400	\$6297
Number of plates served (fall semester)	900	830
Number of breakfast events (fall semester)	12	9
Number of lunch events (fall semester)	12	10
Average customers per breakfast event	25	30
Average customers per lunch event	50	57
Catering events	1	3
Number of student workshops (fall semester)	3	3
Number of community kitchen events (fall semester)	3	3
Number of dietetics students using OGP for stage placement	4	4
Number of students employed by project (fall semester)	4	4
Number of students trained for Food Safety certification	4	4

Number of hours worked on SFP project (Aug-Dec 2013)	900	820
Number of jars of preserved vegetables	300	50
Number of volunteers involved	15+	33
Number of members of OGP club	75	110
Number of partner student groups	4	7
Number of faculties involved	2	2
Number of local farms supported	2-3	8

Table 1: Impact Metric comparing the OGP's Fall 2013 semester targets to realized accomplishments.

As can be seen in Table 1, despite serving less breakfasts and lunches than originally planned due to scheduling conflicts, the café was able to exceed its projected sales by over 16%. This is largely due to the fact that more meals were served per event than what was initially projected. Furthermore, the café received sales revenues from three additional catering events that also contributed to total sales: the MCSS Café Crawl, the Lift Off Sustainability Soirée, and a visit from the Provost.

In addition to the breakfast and lunch events, the café worked closely with the School of Dietetics and Human Nutrition to offer preservation workshops and community kitchen events. The café reached its initial goal of offering 3 workshops and 3 community kitchens with the help of four U4 Undergraduate Dietetics students. These events saw high attendance rates and according to feedback received from participants were also incredibly informative and thoroughly enjoyed.

As per the original plan, four students were employed for the fall semester as the café's primary administrators. These staff members received professional food safety training and certification from TrainCan Inc. under the supervision of Judy Campbell RD, of the School of Dietetics and Human Nutrition. Over the course of the past 4 months, these four students worked a total of 820 hours on this SPF project. On top of providing weekly meal services, a significant portion of this time was spent preserving freshly harvested produce received from local farms, which could then be used during meal events over the winter months. Initially the goal was to preserve a large portion of this produce using jars, however it was soon realized that freezing in bulk was the quickest, cheapest and most efficient means of getting the job done. By the end of the Fall 2013 semester, OGP has preserved 50 jars of vegetables and frozen an additional 130 liters.

The execution of food preparation, preservation and weekly meal services was supported in large part by a collection of over 30 volunteers, which nearly doubled the café's initial projections. This overwhelming support demonstrates the appreciation and importance of this project to the Macdonald Campus community. These volunteers make up just a fraction of the 110 members of the OGP club.

Over a relatively short period, OGP has forged close relationships with several other like-minded student groups, a number of which are SPF projects themselves. These include the Macdonald Student Ecological Gardens (MSEG), Happy Belly, Gorilla Composting, the McGill Food Security Club, the McGill Apicultural Association (MAA), the Farm-to-School project, and the McGill Food Systems Project (MFSP). In addition to these student groups, the OGP has worked closely with the Faculty of Agricultural and

Environmental Sciences and the School Dietetics and Human Nutrition. In turn, OGP has supported a total of nine local farms both on campus and in the surrounding area. These include MSEG, the McGill Horticultural Centre, Jardins Carya, Jardins Glenorra, Quinn Farm, le Vallon des Sources, the MAA, and Le Poulailler de Rachel Beauregard.

What We Learnt

So far this project has been an incredible learning experience for everyone involved. For example, the core staff members of the café have gained valuable experience into what it takes to set up a business on campus, including developing a business model, writing a formal business plan, and fundraising. In addition, they have learned a great deal about what it takes to actually run a business. They now have practical experience in project management, financial management, marketing, advertising, customer service, event planning, staff scheduling and volunteer coordination. Finally, in running a food service operation they have learned about menu planning, food sourcing, food preparation, quantity food production, food safety and event catering.

Another important lesson we have learned from this project is how valuable this initiative is to the community at Macdonald Campus. Meal events were commonly sold out and customer feedback throughout the semester was overwhelmingly positive. During the second last lunch event of the semester customer feedback forms were disseminated and OGP patrons were asked to fill out a survey rating their experience at the café. Furthermore, they were asked to provide suggestions on how the café could improve and for ideas on what direction they should take for the future. Again the general feedback received was tremendously positive as can be seen from actual customer comments in Table 2. In addition, many valuable insights were gained as to ways that the project could be improved. Most importantly, it was found was that the community on campus would prefer to see the café be open for both breakfast and lunch two days a week instead of just one day each. This move would allow the project to get increased exposure and to provide more meals to customers each week. This falls in line with our gradual expansion plans for the project moving forward.

<p>"This is an oasis in our food desert!"</p> <p>"Quality is amazing better than any option around"</p> <p>"You have shown me the diversity of kale"</p> <p>"You are saving us students, please keep up the great work"</p> <p>"You guys rule"</p> <p>"Delicious food. Right price."</p> <p>"Price is just right. Food is delicious. Level of healthiness is perfect."</p> <p>"I'm delighted in the variety of food you serve. So different from what I'd get elsewhere"</p> <p>"I really appreciate the effort you put into this"</p> <p>"Great quality to value. Best in Ste-Anne's for flavour, freshness, taste, quality and surprise. Big thanks!"</p> <p>"The best food ever!"</p> <p>"DELICIOUS!! And healthy. A little expensive but large amount of food."</p> <p>"Good ambiance for studying. Good food. Nice people working there."</p> <p>"Delicious, nice to have variety from week to week. Its great to have something different than the only other food source on campus. Thank you for bringing this to Mac!"</p>

Table 2: Examples of actual feedback received during the end of semester customer survey

Challenges and Improvements

One of the primary challenges faced during the initial phase of the project was an inconsistent stream of volunteer participation. Even though in total the project received nearly double the amount of volunteers than was initially expected, there were numerous times throughout the semester, generally around midterms and finals periods, where volunteers were less likely to get involved. In an attempt to incentivize volunteers, a system was put in place to reward their efforts by offering discounts on food items and meal events. Volunteers were also informed of the expansion plans of this project, which could possibly lead to more staff positions, and that these positions would most likely be filled by the most committed volunteer members of the project.

It is recommend that moving forward there needs to be an increase in the number of part time staff members involved with the project and a better system needs to be developed to encourage more volunteer participation. The addition of three casual employees working roughly seven hours a week each, and a baker working 3 hours a week, should address the staffing needs of the project and provide it with a much more flexible and reliable workforce. Also, to encourage more volunteer participation we are planning on doing short recruiting presentations to specific undergraduate classes in departments such as nutrition, dietetics and food science. We hope to highlight to these students the valuable hands on experience they can receive by being a part of this project and how this will be applicable to their future careers. In addition, we have been coordinating with the freshman class coordinator at Macdonald Campus in an attempt to advertise this project to these students. Freshmen students are now required to participate in community activities. OGP will be listed as a recommended group to fulfill this requirement. Lastly, we will continue to develop and employ our volunteer incentive plan to show our appreciation to our volunteers.

Another major challenge we faced in our opening semester was having to share the kitchen space with other student groups. As a formal business, it is crucial that we maintain certain food safety standards, however it was difficult to guarantee that other groups would be equally as vigilant. Consequently, often our staff and volunteers would have to spend time cleaning up others' messes prior to working in the kitchen. Sharing the space also meant that most of our inventory and supplies had to be stored in a room on a different floor, thereby adding several trips and a significant portion of time to our daily workload. Finally, although sharing MCSS' kitchen allows all the student groups to use the available cleaning supplies (*e.g.* sponges, sanitizers, dish soap, etc.), this often left us with empty bottles.

In the coming semester, OGP plans to host a formal meeting with the other student groups to refine the policies regarding the use of the kitchen in terms of food safety and general organization of the space. In addition, one of the staffed students will be responsible for ensuring that cleaning supplies are always replenished. Furthermore, OGP is in the process of acquiring a secured storage area within the kitchen to keep some of the more commonly required tools and ingredients. This should allow us to save time lugging items back and forth between the kitchen and our current supply closet.

One important difficulty experienced this fall was the unreliability of the kitchen range stove. In particular, the oven was unable to maintain steady temperatures therefore baking times were unpredictable and ideal cooking procedures were complicated by the fact that the oven could not be used for broiling. On certain days, it took an incredibly long time to heat up foods to the required temperature, and on one particular occasion we were forced to cook our food in the Mary Catherine Freeman Food Lab, which is reserved almost exclusively for undergraduate and graduate Dietetics and Food Science classes. Furthermore, the range only provided us with four small- and medium-sized elements that under-performed on a regular basis. For example, on some days a large a pot of water may take over 20 hours to boil. Altogether, the unreliability and the inadequate capacity of the current range can be identified as the number one limiting factor in the growth and expansion of OGP. Based on the fact that we have sold out almost every week, it can be said that the demand is there but that we are being held back by this piece of equipment. Therefore, it is essential that a more reliable range stove with six electrical elements replace the current one in the winter.

Conclusion

Overall the initial phase of this project has been an incredible success. As can be seen in the impact metrics (Table 1), nearly all of the original goals set out by the OGP for this semester were accomplished including sales revenues, average customers per service, community workshops performed, volunteer participation, membership numbers, and number of local farms supported. The support and positive feedback received from the community at Macdonald Campus has been overwhelming, providing everyone involved in the project with encouragement and motivation to continue their efforts.

OGP Photos from the Fall 2013 Semester



The OGP Team (L to R): Anna Kusmer, Patrick Mooney, Theresa Harris, Bernice Ting



Customers enjoying OGP breakfast of bagels, baked goods, oatmeal, fresh apples, tea and coffee



OGP's famous carrot-apple muffins



OGP staff gets a visit from one of our farmers (MSEG) during lunch service



Inside the Ceilidh during a typical OGP lunch service



OGP lunch – Vegetarian Shepherd's Pie with mushroom gravy and kale salad



OGP lunch – Roasted Vegetable Polenta Pie with potato-leak soup and collard-cabbage slaw



Anna in the kitchen roasting McGill Horticultural Centre apples and squash...mmmmm!



One of OGP's dedicated and tireless volunteers hard at work



OGP canning workshop event participants peeling and chopping away



OGP community kitchen event participants enjoying the fruits of their labour



Patrick and Anna sourcing freshly harvested vegetables from the McGill Horticultural Centre



OGP preserved goods using fresh produce from the MSEG Farm