

September 30th, 2009

# Sustainability Commissioner's End of Summer Report

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With night time temperatures now dropping to below zero, summer is coming to a definite end. With it comes the end of the growing season and its affects on the LUSU gardens, and so the LUSU Local project is a good place to begin the report.

## **LUSU LOCAL- Local food and food security program**

The project is intended to A) provide an increase in availability of local food to student and campus community members, B) increase awareness about food security issues C) offer workshops on skills related to food security- such as canning and preserving D) raise awareness about the Sustainability Initiative's (SI) existence.

## **An honest assessment of the program so far goes as follows:**

- The garden project has been very successful thus far in improving access to local foods. In late August, we brought our first harvests to the CLE farmers market for two Saturdays. Both days were a success, having sold all our produce. In September, with the return of the students, we shifted our sales from the farmers market to the Agora. We sold produce for the first two weeks of September and at the Sustainability Initiative Open House. Foods included fresh produce such as carrots, beans, cucumbers, celery, beats etc., as well as blueberry jam and apple sauce - all grown locally, fairly and without pesticides or chemical fertilizers. These activities earned the Sustainability Initiative \$352.58, making our September revenue \$6.11 greater than our September expenditures. Although the margin is very small, it is no small significance that in the first full month of operation, the program enabled the SI to break even. Of course, to be a major contributor to our budget, the program requires more growing space and great people power- something to aim for in the coming years. As of the end of September, there is still much produce and preserves to sell.
- This aspect of the program was less successful. This is partly because we have not established any sort of baseline by which to measure any increase in food security issues. Having the table in the agora with local produce may have had some success, but realistically, the people buying local produce are likely the individuals who are already conscious of food security issues. This aspect of the program will have a better chance at success following the completing of our outreach program "What We Mean, Here" program (see below). We need to know what food security issues are relevant to students, and where their knowledge is lacking so that we may supplement it accordingly.
- Solution! In order to more effectively address this challenge, SI will be participating in world food day on October 16th. In the Agora we will be raising awareness about food security issues on campus.
- Additionally, we have recruited a volunteer who is in the process of answering the who, what, when, where and how of food security. These questions will be compiled as a resource for students on our website. The work will be done in phases, the first phase of "what is food security" will be complete by the end of November. The entire project will be complete by the end of the year.
- We have offered a number of workshops to students, with sign ups at the table in the Agora. Some of those workshops were canning and preserving workshops, but we have seen little to no interest in them. I believe this is for few reasons: delivery method is insufficient. Tabling in the Agora is not effective, and our communication strategy must be improved: we need a better web presence and we need a better classroom presence. The other issue is related back the awareness around food security issues. If people do not understand the importance of food security, then they will not be inclined to learn skills that address it.
- Here we have had some success. Beyond having a table in the Agora with our food and posters, I hosted a Sustainability Open House on September 16th in the Study Coffeehouse. The evening was intended to give students and community members an opportunity to find out what is happening and also to have a say in how the rest of the year goes. It was a complete success, with a packed house and diverse turnout of students and community members. I facilitated a group discussion about the kinds of changes students want to see and answered questions on a variety of topics. It was also the first night that I distributed the preliminary questionnaire for our Outreach program. Awareness of the SI has greatly improved since last year, with the additional help of our new website, [sustain.lusu.ca](http://sustain.lusu.ca) and a Facebook group. However, although we are gaining momentum and now have an impressive showing of engaged students, we also require further outreach in order to meet and bring in those individuals who are typically intimidated by or uninterested about social and environmental action. The out reach

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program is intended to do this.

Also worthy of notice, this summer the Braun Building Courtyard has undergone extensive improvements at the hands of SI and its volunteers. The courtyard hosted a large garden plot and a composter that takes organic scraps. The Lakehead University Forestry department milled and donated enough cedar lumber to build two picnic tables and two benches in order to improve the social value. Currently, one table is complete, the second is underway, with the benches yet to begin. Although the future of the Braun Building is uncertain (rumored to be replaced next summer), the efforts to restore the courtyard are significant in that the space has become a tangible example of what sustainability can look, feel and taste like. From it we have gained financial, social, educational and nutritional benefits. LUSU will continue to squeeze value out of this small and unique space. Do more with less.

## **Community Outreach:**

Because the SI is relatively new, it is important we dedicate a significant amount of our efforts on getting out there and making connections with students. Although there was a part time commissioner last year, that individual's efforts were not focused on outreach. It is our belief that if SI is to be sustainable itself, it must become a staple in the Lakehead community.

## **What We Mean, Here:**

What we mean, here is a consensus and vision building program. The goal is to learn what students and community members believe is necessary to make the world a better place, what is their understanding of sustainability and what changes they want to see on campus.

**OPEN HOUSE:** To kick off the program, SI hosted an open house on the evening of Wednesday September 16th in the Study Coffeehouse. The meeting was packed to capacity. The point of the gathering was to give students an opportunity to meet the commissioner, find out what's been happening and discuss relevant issues and changes that need to happen this year. The round table discussion was productive and many had an opportunity to share their visions for Lakehead. The evening was also the initial release of our preliminary questionnaire. The questionnaire is continuing to be circulated and the results shall be release somewhere toward the end of the first semester.

**SURVEYS:** The surveys will be distributed to the wider University population in order to get a broad and thorough sampling of the campus community and what people want/need. We are currently in the process of recruiting help- volunteers to distribute and collect surveys. The surveys will be used to establish a long term strategy for LUSU sustainability that comprehensively includes the input and actions of students and faculty.

## **October- Up coming:**

This month is primarily occupied by two major events. The first is the October 24th International Day of Climate Action. The international non-profit organization 350.org has registered over 1200 climate action events all over the planet. The purpose of these events is to show governments and big business that citizens across the world are ready for change and want our leaders to take meaningful action and make meaningful commitments to change this December at the Copenhagen talks. We are holding a climate day rally in Thunder Bay at Waverly Park from 2-4pm. The event will host community leaders and opportunities for everyone to take meaningful action.

Additionally, in February, we will be hosting Sustainable Communities in the North Conference. The point of the conference is to establish a regional forum where communities can come together to address the challenges and opportunities for creating a sustainable Northern Ontario. Although the conference does not take place until February, the majority of the work must be front-loaded onto October in order to ensure the conference goes off without a hitch. Currently , we have organized a planning committee that consists of individuals from the University, the college, FSRN, Eco-superior, Earthwise and Northern Connections. We are in the process of finding our keynote speakers, setting budgets and other preliminary necessities. More to come in the following weeks.