

Stockton's Sustainability Program Offers New Conservation and Agroecology Concentration

Campus Farm Serves as Platform to Implement New Solar Array, Food Projects

For Immediate Release; [Photo](#) of Campus Farm

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Galloway, NJ – Stockton University's Sustainability degree program now offers a concentration in Conservation and Agroecology in response to students' growing interest in farming and food security.

Agroecology, which is the study of sustainable food production, goes beyond traditional agriculture programs by taking a whole-systems approach that looks at economic, ecological, cultural and social perspectives.

"I've been at Stockton now for 18 years. For the first 14 of those, I never had a student come into my office or lab and say, 'I want to be a farmer.' Never happened. Now it happens about once a month," said Patrick Hossay, associate professor of Sustainability.

Students can gain hands-on experience at the university's electricity-free campus farm, which was built by students in 2012 after they outgrew a campus garden. Completely run by students and volunteers, the farm serves as a platform for numerous senior projects and internships including a solar array with battery storage, a grape trellis and composting projects this spring.

Wyatt Chingery, a senior Sustainability major from Frenchtown, N.J., was studying environmental policy at Champlain College in Burlington, Vermont when he decided that he wanted to take a more active role in life. After discovering Stockton's Sustainability program, he transferred to Stockton to pursue his interest in food systems.

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He got involved as a volunteer on Stockton's campus farm before completing a four-month apprenticeship under Ben Falk of Whole Systems Design in Vermont.

"I was immersed in regenerative and resilient systems, permaculture, homesteading, agroforestry, horticulture and ecological design among many other things," he explained.

Through the apprenticeship, Chingery earned a Permaculture Design Certificate. Permaculture is a conscious and sustainable design process that looks to mimic natural patterns within farming, landscaping, home building and communities. "This was the pivotal moment for me. I knew that working through these systems to regenerate and build more resilient landscapes and communities was what I wanted to focus on for my life time," he said.

Chingery is now applying the skills from his apprenticeship to Stockton's campus farm. Through an internship focused on viticulture (the science, production and study of grapes), he is building a trellis and planting grape vines this spring. In addition, he is breaking ground this semester on a community garden on the Galloway campus. He describes the project as "taking an unused space on campus and bringing beauty to it while providing an environment for students, faculty, staff and the community to come and learn, grow and become inspired."

The community garden will be located at the end of Louisville Avenue nearest the freshman residence halls.

Joseph Rubenstein, professor of Anthropology, has coordinated school and community gardens in Atlantic City, Pleasantville and Little Egg Harbor Township. He said, "It's important for students to know how food is grown and to begin to be a part of the healthy foods, healthy choices movement."

Rubenstein is working with students in the agroecology concentration to enhance the Campus Kitchens Project in Atlantic City, which provides 130 meals per week from September through April to families in need in Atlantic City and Pleasantville. The goal is to eventually funnel food from the campus farm and community gardens into a community food bank or directly into the Campus Kitchen program.

Rubenstein explained that students who have been involved with Campus Kitchen were transformed after going out into poor neighborhoods and sometimes into motels due to the displacement of families after Superstorm Sandy. "They saw how people lived. They saw how people needed food and how grateful people were. It was a real eye opener," he explained.

Vaughn DePalma-Farr, a senior Sustainability major from West Milford, N.J., is currently the manager of Stockton's campus farm and worked at Beach View Farms in Manahawkin as an intern over the summer. "I learned more from the internship than I ever thought I could. It really turned me on to the idea of local sustainable farming and helped me narrow my focus on what I wanted to learn more about," he said.

In the coming weeks, DePalma-Farr is bringing a new level of energy to the farm. Sustainability students are installing a solar array with a battery storage component to heat a greenhouse that is also being constructed.

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The solar array will bolster the current single-panel system that powers the irrigation system which pumps collected rain water from a pole barn roof upward into a holding tank for later use.

“I enjoy thinking of the many ways I can apply the sustainable technology and techniques I learn in my classes to a farm,” said DePalma-Farr.

Other course topics within the concentration include aquaculture, economic botany, green finance, forest management, fisheries science and regional planning.

To arrange a farm visit to see the solar construction and current projects underway, please contact Susan Allen at Susan.Allen@Stockton.edu or 609-652-4790.

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