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AQ’s Community Garden

This semester has been nothing less than exciting for AQ’s community garden. With the addition of two new raised beds, we have more room to grow delicious vegetables and herbs—including our newest addition, garlic!

At homecoming, our garden was the center of the kid’s section. We hosted a booth entitled “Lettuce Grow Together” where children could plant lettuce seeds in homemade newspaper pots. Also at homecoming, the Aquinas Alumni voted to add strawberries to our garden next year.

On October 22, we hosted children from St. Thomas to teach them about gardening, composting and sustainability. The students explored our garden and planted marigold and lettuce seeds to take home. Thanks to Anne Marie Ferratt for organizing this fun visit.

If you are interest in volunteering in the garden or have crop ideas for next year, please contact us.

External Reporting Update

The Center for Sustainability completes reports to demonstrate our sustainability progress to internal and external stakeholders.

1. The ACUPCC (American College & University Presidents’ Climate Commitment) Progress Report has been completed every other year since signing the commitment in 2008 and the update is due in January. This report focuses on how sustainability and climate change are integrated into campus life, research, programming, and operations. Check out previous reports, such as our carbon footprint here.

2. The AASHE (the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education) STARS report: STARS is the Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating system, which is a self-reporting framework for college and universities to measure their sustainability performance. This report covers areas such as: academics, engagement, operations, and planning. Aquinas’ first submission to STARS will be completed in early 2014, so stay tuned for our “score.”

Reporting not only keeps people motivated internally, but it shows us where we stand compared to other colleges.
A Word from our Sustainability Committees:

Since January 2014, Aquinas has been piloting a new committee structure to reflect the college’s focus on Economicology. The committees have been working hard on several projects, many of which came from the summer 2013 Sustainability Summit.

Community Sustainability Committee

Co-chairs: Dr. Todd R. Yarbrough & Paula T. Meehan

Not surprisingly, the Community Sustainability Committee was created primarily to engage the Aquinas and broader communities in sustainability efforts. The committee is working hard to create and implement a Green Revolving Fund, an investment fund dedicated to energy efficiency and renewable energy projects. After an investment is made in a campus energy project, the returns from the project are reinvested back into the fund.

The ultimate goal of the Community Sustainability Committee is to “encourage Aquinas employees and students to lead change to address contemporary human and ecological issues.”

Learning Sustainability Committee

Co-chair: Dr. Chad Gunnoe

After a high level of turnover this summer, the Learning Sustainability Committee has been recently reconstituted and is assisting the College in fulfilling the strategic goal of creating “opportunities for all stakeholders to increase their understanding of the principles of Economicology and the symbiosis of Economicology and the Catholic and Dominican traditions.” Moving forward, we aim to enhance programming and participation in the College’s Friday Economicology Forums. We likewise have the mandate to identify and develop educational signage opportunities and market the sustainability attributes of campus.

In that spirit, a subcommittee is working on developing a mobile app of Aquinas’ tree map which we hope to use to tell the College’s sustainability story.

Infrastructure Sustainability Committee

Co-Chairs: Dr. Rob Peters & Len Kogut

The Infrastructure Sustainability Committee is focused on three main tasks:

1. Establish a Sustainable Food Purchasing Policy (Goal of implementing by 2015).
2. Help re-establish and develop a vision for AQ’s community garden.
3. Advise the college on a real time energy monitoring system.

The committee has made significant progress in the community garden and in development of the Sustainable Food Purchasing Policy during spring, summer and fall 2014. Center for Sustainability student interns are also assisting in the processing of food purchasing data.

President Olivarez’s Economicology Vision:

On Wednesday October 8, President Juan Olivarez outlined the College’s game plan for advancing Economicology and reviewed the specific initiatives that the Wege Foundation has partnered with the College to develop. The vision of Economicology is very much in keeping with the vision of the Center to simultaneously advance the interests of people, profit and planet.

The vision includes three key goals:

- Aquinas College will become an intellectual incubator integrating the Catholic Dominican tradition and the framework of Economicology
- Demonstrating the relevance and currency of the liberal arts, Aquinas students and faculty will lead change to address contemporary human and ecological issues.
- Aquinas College will become a living lab of sustainable practices.

The presidential Economicology Leadership Fund and Green Revolving Fund are two components of the larger vision that are supported by the Wege Foundation grant. President Olivarez’s presentation is available on campus here.
Get ready AQ for the coolest thing since Twitter. “My Actions” is a social media platform that allows students to engage and deliver real world impact of green, caring, and healthy actions across friends, clubs, classes and organizations. You simply text in or download the app to conveniently share your sustainable actions. My Actions will allow you to connect with other Aquinas students that are participating in the same action as you are!

Student Lane Hokanson is your My Actions intern, and we hope you are excited as we are. Coming soon!

The Friday Economicology Forum was established to promote understanding of the six "Es" of Economicology: economics, environment, ecology, ethics, empathy and education. Upcoming events can be found on the Sustainability Initiative web site.

- December 5th: Faculty Sustainability Fellows will share their on going efforts to integrate sustainability into the classroom.

The success of the Zero Waste Initiative at Aquinas is something worth celebrating! Our current campus waste diversion rate is 79% and we continue to inch closer to our goal. Just two years ago, we only diverted about 45% of our waste from the landfill/incinerator.

The progress is truly a reflection of a dedicated community effort and we would like to thank our Zero Waste Gurus (who volunteer as experts to the community), housekeeping, and each and every one of you for choosing to compost, recycle, and reuse.

While we will likely fall short of our 90% diversion goal by 2014, we are not quitting and we hope you won’t either. We are still making great strides towards our goal! Since January 2014, we’ve sent the following into Terracycle: 7,292 granola bar wrappers, 693 cereal bags, and 587 personal care and beauty items. Besides taking great steps with Terracycle, AQ composted approximately 11,000 pounds of waste in October alone!

The college is currently re-evaluating the zero waste initiative and hopes to release an updated goal date and “Zero Waste 2.0.” The next phase of zero waste at AQ will be more personal and measurable. Accomplishing the last leg of this initiative is going to be a challenge, as the last 10% is always the hardest. We can do this.

Keep your eyes peeled for additional zero waste updates as we move forward together in this next exciting initiative. Take the Zero Waste Office Pledge, contact us for a zero waste training, and continue to champion the cause.

AQ recycled 3,859 books with Better World Books, during fiscal year 2014.

Since January 2014, Aquinas donated 1,274 pounds of unwanted items to Goodwill.

Over 5,500 pounds of e-waste have been diverted from the landfill/incinerator and recycled with Comprenew Environmental so far this calendar year.
Best Kept Secrets. . .
Brought to you by the Center for Sustainability. . . You’re welcome.

Organicycle - www.organicycle.org
Organicycle is the first curbside pick-up composting service in West Michigan for your home. They pick up food waste, yard waste, and soiled paper—much like your traditional waste service—except the waste is composted into usable soil. Organicycle composites with the same facility as Aquinas, so the list of accepted materials will be the same. Check out their web site for more information.

Doorganics - www.doorganicsgr.com
Doorganics is an organic foods delivery service in Grand Rapids. Their mission is to deliver the freshest food possible from sustainable farms right to your doorstep. Their services are provided year round by delivering food from local greenhouses during the winter months. On their website, customers can shop from menus that vary from week to week, choose a convenient scheduling option, and obtain information on the farms providing your food. Visit “Doorganics” to see how you can get healthy, fresh food in a convenient way!

Green Safe - www.greensafestore.com
Green Safe is a restaurant supply company located in Detroit, MI. They offer a variety of biodegradable products such as to-go containers, cups, and silverware. Not only are their products biodegradable, making them environment preferable, they are just as useful and affordable as conventional products. Green Safe works with more than 300 businesses, universities and hospitals.