

Sustainable Agriculture (SAG) Undergraduate Program Implementation Plan 2017 Annual Report

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Note: Only accepted recommendations are listed here.

Recommendation 1: Complement the Steering Committee with an Advisory Council comprised of a diverse mix of internal and external stakeholders which might include alumni, community based organizations, representatives of farm groups, etc. Such a Committee could provide for continuous improvement in program and curriculum.

Assessment method: Identification of appropriate stakeholders and community members to serve on the Advisory Council, and organization of a biannual meeting to gain feedback on existing curricular activities and recommendations for programmatic development.

Results: The SAG program underwent substantial change since our last review, based on student and faculty feedback and student job placement. This change has resulted in a substantial restructuring of the program, incorporating Specialty Support “tracks” - Farming Systems and Community Food Systems. We previously reported that this change in the program necessitated delaying the formation of a formal Advisory Council. However, in the process of continuing to advise our students in each of these tracks, we have continued to expand our network of community partners to provide program input as we place students in experiential learning coursework (EXP 399, PLS 395, etc.). Further, we have been seeking feedback informally from our alumni, as well as farmers and community members with knowledge of the program. As such, we are moving towards an *ad hoc* Advisory Council, to help us address targeted curriculum and programmatic issues in an efficient, ongoing, and conversational manner.

Analysis of results and reflection: Based on student input and faculty observation, the SAG steering committee revamped the curriculum to create two distinct coursework tracks: Community Food Systems and Farming Systems. This effort has been ongoing and students have been taking classes in this curriculum for 2 years. We are now moving towards “formalizing” the SAG undergraduate major, with an *ad hoc* Advisory Council as described above.

Ongoing improvement actions: Although we have decided to somewhat limit formal external stakeholder feedback via the Advisory Council, we have continued to expand our Curriculum Steering Council, which functions as the Faculty of Record for the program. We have continued to recruit new hires in CAFE in the social sciences (CLD) and natural sciences (PSS and ENT). These

faculty increase the teaching capacity in the program, but also offer greater diversity of thoughts in our Steering Committee meetings.

Recommendation 2: Additional faculty resources are needed for the program to continue to grow, particularly in animal and agronomic (row crop) agriculture. Consideration, as noted above, should be given to new faculty position announcements that include collaboration with programs such as SAG. Attracting additional faculty in the College and University would help overcome a perception that some may have suggesting that the SAG program is really a Horticultural Science program.

Assessment method: We have assessed the composition of the SAG steering committee and core group of faculty members involved with the SAG program, to identify opportunities to incorporate more diverse views.

Results: As the curriculum has been going through the revision process, it has become apparent that the steering committee, as well as faculty involvement in the program, could be improved by incorporating new faculty members. As such, there have been some changes in the Steering Committee membership to gain additional expertise in the areas of curricular expansion.

Analysis of results and reflection: Faculty members from programs such as Ag Biotech, Plant and Soil Science, Community and Leadership Development, and Dietetics have been added to the steering committee. Discussions with faculty around the university have made it apparent that there are several new related programs and classes that will help augment the choices for our students, and increase recognition of our program across campus.

Ongoing improvement actions: The SAG program will continue to reach out to faculty across our college and university to create an inclusive environment, where faculty from diverse interests can be involved in the program. The program is aware of at least one new faculty hire (PSS) where an interface with the SAG program was discussed during the hiring process. This new faculty member is currently on the steering committee and has further modified one of the interdisciplinary courses used in our program (PLS404) to increase its inclusion of sustainable agriculture principles. Other new hires in PSS and ENT have expressed strong interest in SAG and sustainable agriculture in general. These new faculty relationships are being cultivated as appropriate to their career stage and level of teaching obligations. Further, we are proposing to modify SAG 101, to be co-taught each semester by a social scientist and a natural scientist. This change in course structure will create opportunities to engage more CAFE faculty in teaching in the SAG program. We intend to follow up on these changes by reaching out to a broad pool of potentially interested faculty to capture their input and seek to engage them directly in the SAG program.

Recommendation 3: The Steering Committee (advisory committee, perhaps) along with the College and appropriate departmental administrators should address the quality/quantity tradeoffs and impacts of increasing student enrollment including resource needs for:

- **Curriculum management – The curriculum includes significant experiential learning components. (Expansion may decrease the quality of the instruction and the ability to carry out such activities.)**
- **Advising**
- **Resources (faculty and staff)**
- **Line item operating budget**

Assessment method: Tracking of student enrollment and the impact of enrollment on faculty time and resources. Evaluation of recruitment resources and identification of priority needs to increase student enrollment while minimizing impact on faculty instructional and advising time and resources.

Results: Over the last 4 years student enrollment in the program declined, due to a large “bump” in students we experienced ~5 years ago. We have stabilized our numbers of majors since that time. However, with an understanding that we are essentially at a fairly stable number that is lower than our capacity, we re-vamped our website, created some branded items (shirts, bags, hats), and leveraged the support we receive for recruitment and initial advising.

Analysis of results and reflection: Funds were acquired from the college to help hire a website developer, and the re-vamped website went “live” in Summer 2016. With the support of our part-time recruiter, we have printed some t-shirts and tote bags to increase program visibility. Our support staff has a majority appointment as the recruiter for the Individualized Program in Modern Agronomic Crop Production, but has also incorporated some SAG slides into her power point recruitment presentation, with the strategy of driving interested students to our new website. However, we have realized that the “low hanging fruit” of increasing visibility internal to existing CAFE students and recruitment efforts have likely plateaued for the program. As such, we are seeking to formalize the major to access improved visibility at the college and university levels.

Ongoing improvement actions: The DUS and Steering Committee will continue to work with our staff support (provided by the College of Agriculture Administration) to make targeted recruiting efforts, with an emphasis on keeping the website up to date, enhancing our video content (including student testimonials), and otherwise optimizing its use in recruiting. In engaging in the process to formalize the degree program, we hope to remove the visibility “ceiling” we experience as an Individualized Degree program. Further, the College committed support for a part-time recruiter (25% SAG, 75% Modern Agronomy). In past years, we have seen some website improvements (e.g. student video testimonials) and an exciting profile in the CAFE view book in 2016. However, it is clear that we can do more to engage with this valuable staff

resource. In this coming year, we are committed to engaging in better, consistent communication and strategic goal setting to increase SAG program deliverables and better support our staff team member.

Recommendation 4: Strengthen formal development efforts.

Assessment method: Evaluation of the need to proceed to formalize the program based on student enrollment and job placement.

Results: Although our students are consistently getting jobs in areas related to sustainable agriculture, enrollment in the program has maintained numbers deemed too low to move forward with a request for a formal major (target number is ~40 students).

Analysis of results and reflection: We have tried to identify the potential reasons that enrollment has declined and our assessment is that we have poor visibility. We have made several efforts to alleviate this problem, including revamping the curriculum and modifying our recruiting efforts through website redevelopment and hiring a recruiter.

Ongoing improvement actions: With the curriculum changes and enhanced recruiting (website and recruiter), we hope to increase our total student numbers to 50-60. One additional significant change is that the DUS position was formally transferred from Mark Williams to Krista Jacobsen in Summer 2016. It is our intention that this change will foster a new period of enhanced enrollment growth and recruitment resource development by bringing in new ideas and leadership. Initial efforts are to formalize the major and update the SAG minor.

Recommendation 5: Develop an Organic Farm Unit incubator.

Assessment method. Evaluate incubator programs around the country and assess the potential for such a program in KY by working with local farmers.

Results: We have spent substantial time traveling to and studying existing incubator programs around the country.

Analysis of results and reflection: Although it may be possible to develop an incubator program in the future, it has become clear that the focus of developments in this area would be better spent building a beginning farmer training program to generate students that could take advantage of the incubator. We have been applying for funding to create a beginning farmer training program, and have secured some initial funds to begin training farmers specifically in growing and marketing for a Community Supported Agriculture model (grant-funded work with Dr. Tim Woods and Dr. Mark Williams). We are

also pursuing donors to help fund the training program and subsequent incubator efforts.

Ongoing improvement actions: The SAG program is attempting to create a beginning farmer training program. Once funding is obtained to develop this program, we will determine how an incubator could augment this effort.

Recommendation 6: Develop a certificate program in Organic Farming.

Assessment method. Evaluate how other programs are developing certificates to provide hands on training around the country.

Results: Our assessment of other programs and our success with our apprenticeship (SAG 397 Apprenticeship in Sustainable Agriculture) has made it clear that we have many of the pieces already in place to develop a nationally recognized beginning farmer training program.

Analysis of results and reflection: Once funding is secured, we will develop a beginning farmer training program that will serve as an organic farming certificate. This year-long program will be available to UK students and the general public.

Ongoing improvement actions: We have been applying for grants and seeking donor funding to support the development of a beginning farmer training program. Funding will primarily be used to hire an on-farm education director for the program. Once developed, it is anticipated that the program will be funded through student fees. We will continue to pursue funding from as many appropriate sources as possible over the next period to make this program a reality, including the possibility of USDA Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program funds.

Recommendation 7: Develop partnerships and alliances with private farm owners to develop whole farm plans to help create jobs for graduates and to serve as outreach models for other producers to consider.

Assessment method: Track and evaluate the number of students working in the farming sector during and after their undergraduate careers.

Results: Our students are gaining employment in a wide range of jobs and we are developing strategies to track these jobs.

Analysis of results and reflection: We are placing more students in a range of jobs related to sustainable agriculture and the number of students developing their own farms is increasing.

Ongoing improvement actions: We continue to partner with community organizations and farms in the central Bluegrass as part of SAG 397 and EXP 399 course credit. We are considering systematizing our alumni tracking process in the years to come, to strengthen our longitudinal data on our graduates.