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G'burg College students living green

CRAIG K. PASKOSKI *The Evening Sun*

There is just a little Swiss chard, bok choy, and garlic poking through the ground now out back in the garden. It's not nearly the bounty of produce that students were harvesting when they returned to school in August. But for students living at Gettysburg College's **Farmhouse**, the vegetables and herbs they grow in their small, backyard plot not only end up on their table, they are a symbol of their mission to spread the word about self-sufficiency, the environment, and community living.

"Everybody sees our garden on this section of campus and they see us out there," said Antonia Hernandez, co-leader of **Farmhouse**, one of more than two dozen theme-based student residences at Gettysburg College.

The garden is not the only thing unique about **Farmhouse**, which was established for the 2009-10 school year.

The house is evolving into a focal point for things sustainable and green on campus and in the community. It's eight residents work to promote local agriculture and social justice, and try to serve as examples of a minimal carbon footprint lifestyle.

"Especially since it's a small campus, we can be leaders in the community and be recognized on campus," Hernandez said.

The **Farmhouse** idea grew out of several student initiatives to unite and direct the sustainability movement on the 2,650-student campus. Sustainability means practicing a lifestyle that attempts to preserve the earth's resources, often through reducing energy consumption and altering transportation methods and diet.

"We really wanted to create a house that focused on intentional living, create a different alternative," said Hernandez, who along with junior Sara Tower worked to establish the **Farmhouse** in 2009. The house is geared for those students studying or interested in health sciences or sustainability and who "want to focus on energy conservation," Hernandez said.

Farmhouse's mission is based on its garden and its connection to small, local farms.

"We're really involved with local food groups," said junior Rachel Wynn, the other co-leader at **Farmhouse**.

Tower, who is studying in India this semester, worked on the garden over the summer, tending to green beans, tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers and more. When students returned to the house in late August they were in time for summer harvest and the planting of late-season items such as broccoli, cabbage, and bok choy.

"We grow about 20 or 30 percent of the vegetables we eat here," said Hernandez, a senior double-majoring in political science and globalization studies. "We now have our winter crop in."

What produce the students don't grow, they get through community supported agriculture (CSA) agreements with Broad Valley Orchard and Everyblossom Farms. Students work on the farms in exchange for food dropoffs during the week.

They also contribute to a house fund at the beginning of the semester that is used to buy items from the Gettysburg Farmers' Market, area grocery stores, or organic milk, butter, and eggs that are delivered by Apple Valley Creamery of East Berlin.

Sharing alike

Sharing food is a pillar of the **Farmhouse** experience. The house has two refrigerators, one for private food items and one for communal items.

"We buy everything pretty much together," Hernandez said.

Growing up in Columbia, S.C., Hernandez had limited exposure to sustainability issues before attending Gettysburg.

"It was never something I really thought about. South Carolina is a very conservative state," she said. "But when I came here and starting taking classes outside my comfort zone, and I started focusing on globalization studies, I realized how wasteful people are. It kind of opened my eyes as to why there needs to be a sustainability movement, especially on a campus this size."

A semester spent studying in Copenhagen, Denmark, last spring sparked Wynn's interest in sustainable living.

"Their way of life is so different than Americans. They don't have as much processed food," said Wynn, who is from St. Johnsbury, Vt. "They are incredibly efficient. They have solar everything."

Through working on the CSA farms, looking up information on the Internet, and talking to other gardeners, the residents have pieced together their farming skills. They learned about canning and preserving food through one of the residents taking a CSA course, and have tried their hand this year, canning peach and apple sauce and pickles.

"Pretty much everything we've done is through trial and error - a lot of error and a lot of trial," Hernandez said.

A three-bin homemade composter behind the garden offers the promise of future good soil. The campus dining hall, SERVO, contributes about 15 percent of its compost to the house.

"We're the only house that composts. Other houses now bring us their compost," said Wynn, an interdisciplinary major focusing on business media and communications.

Bigger picture

Although agriculture is a large part of the **Farmhouse** focus, the goals are much broader.

Many students are also involved with Gettysburg Research and Action by Students for Sustainability (G.R.A.S.S.), Gettysburg Environmental Concerns Organization (GECO) and assorted recycling and food groups.

According to Salma Monani, assistant professor of environmental studies at Gettysburg and adviser to **Farmhouse**, the house serves as a center to coordinate projects and activities on campus.

"It's very much a coordinated effort," Monani said. "They are very linked to other efforts on campus."

House residents have participated in the Adams County Local Foods Network's potluck dinners and the college's Sustainability Week, and hosted movies at the house and information tables at area events.

"We're really involved with certain external groups and local farms," Wynn said.

Earlier this semester, the house played host to two seminars for incoming freshmen, who are required to live in dorms on campus. **Farmhouse** residents provided them with information on sustainability opportunities, an overview of the house, and a chance to work in the garden.

"We got to see that there are a lot of students interested in sustainability," Wynn said.

Over the summer, Gettysburg College renovated the 2,000-square-foot house, on the corner of Lincoln Avenue and Carlisle Street, installing energy saving appliances, more efficient lighting, and a dual-flush water conservation toilet. The renovations created a spacious feel, with a large communal area for events and a dining room good for group meals. Bedrooms on the second and third floors were also updated.

Wynn said the college plans to furnish chairs, tables, and a couch made from various recycled materials over the winter holiday.

"It's really neat because they are getting a lot of sustainable products," Wynn said. "We're really very grateful."

Plans call for the college to eventually install passive solar panels on the roof that will also heat the house's water as part of efforts to make the house LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certified.

Last year, 14 students applied to live at the house. This year, there were more than 25 applicants. Residents were generally chosen based on their level of commitment, and involvement, in sustainable issues.

"They're not all environmental studies students, but they are all interested in this," Monani said.

Residents are required to participate in two activities a semester and attend weekly house meetings to discuss issues and foster the community feel. They are assigned house roles, such as resource manager, waste manager, education coordinator and community liaison.

"This year everybody is involved," Hernandez said. "We've had more than 10 events this semester."

For Hernandez, being part of establishing the house and seeing it's influence expand across the campus has been worth the effort.

"This house has completely changed my way of thinking on how to live," she said. "This has really been an opportunity that I never would have had anywhere else."

Looking out at the garden and compost bins, Wynn proudly talked about how the house has influenced the campus and herself.

"I never thought I'd be a hard-core composter," she said. "This is a good way to live."

Photo:

Rachel Wynn, right, and Hannah Cross hang out in Hannah s room while studying at Gettysburg College s **Farmhouse**. Students living in the house focus on sustainable and green living on campus.

Photo:

Hannah Cross prepares a pan of hot chocolate with milk that was delivered to the house from Apple Valley Creamery, one of the farms that **Farmhouse** students work on.

Photo:

Antonia Hernandez, left, Rachel Wynn and Hannah Cross hang out in the **Farmhouse** s kitchen while making hot chocolate. The students use energy-efficient refrigerators and a stove in the house.

Photo:

Students Antonia Hernandez, left, Hannah Cross, and Rachel Wynn are part of eight students that live at Gettysburg College s **Farmhouse**, which is dedicated to sustainable living practices.

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