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We propose to initiate a program that will allow for students, faculty and the surrounding community to engage in a dialogue about sustainability. Each of us have been exposed this issue in various capacities. Our studies of sustainable agriculture, third world development, economics, and government as well as our co-curricular commitments to environmental and social justice campaigns have permitted us to realize the unprecedented role that our generation has in shaping the future. In the face of numerous global issues, we must turn to local solutions. In order to find such solutions, we must learn how to most effectively educate ourselves and one another about how to live sustainably. In order to begin such a process, we are proposing to embark on a summer research project that would involve an experiential survey of how people in various areas of the United States are meeting their food, transportation, and energy needs in a sustainable way. Beginning next Fall, we would like to use the information gained from our summer research to put together a coalition on sustainable practices that will utilize the preexisting programs and policies at Smith to further their impact on our practices regarding energy, conservation, transportation, and food choices.

Our plan for this coming summer is to run a diesel bus on straight vegetable oil and visit various organic farms throughout the United States. A diesel engine can be converted to run on straight vegetable oil with an auxiliary fuel modification system. The Greasecar Company, located in Easthampton, can provide us with the converter that will allow us to fuel this vehicle with filtered frying oil, which we can collect from restaurants. Using vegetable oil waste is an ecological and inexpensive alternative fuel source. We plan to travel to organic farms in North Carolina, New Mexico, Colorado, Missouri, and New York. In a twelve week period, we hope to visit five different sites, living and working on each farm for at least two weeks. We are in the process of contacting farmers in these states and selecting those who creatively use sustainable methods in a number of ways. As we drive across the country, we will be as self-sufficient as possible. We hope to only eat food grown on the farms at which we work and prepare simple meals on the road. We will also learn the mechanics of the bus so as to have the ability to make necessary repairs. The goal of our trip is to learn first-hand how people living in different climates and cultures within the United States utilize various sustainable practices while meeting the needs of the local community. We plan to work from a model set out by a class on sustainable agriculture in which the three of us are currently enrolled at the University of Massachusetts. This model includes frequent visits to local farms followed by a critical analysis of each farm's practices. Most important in this analysis is discovering ways in which we, as students, can incorporate many of the farmers' methods into our own lives.

Upon returning to Smith in the Fall we plan to start a student-faculty coalition, tentatively titled the Sustainable Education Initiative, whose aim is to raise awareness about sustainable practices with an emphasis on agriculture. This coalition would be made up of a carefully chosen combination of interested participants from various fields such as Engineering, Biological Sciences, Landscape Studies, Government, and Anthropology. We have already been in contact with John Gerber, a professor in the Plant Soil and Insect Sciences at UMass, about our proposed coalition and he has expressed extreme interest and support in the project. In the formation of this coalition, we hope to collaborate with the pre-existing networks here at Smith, such as the Green Team and Smith College Sustainability Committee, and initiate interactive dialogue on the subject of sustainability.

In order to achieve these goals, the coalition would be responsible for a number of activities such as:

hosting guest-speakers who can talk about sustainable practices such as organic farming or green building; offering workshops on practical skills such as mechanics and alternative fuels; and organizing volunteer opportunities at local farms. The coalition will act as a single resource through which students, faculty, and community members can find out about various activities, programs, or internships that relate to the idea of sustainability. In order to act as such a resource, we will begin by organizing with Smith students and faculty who are already working on sustainability projects or campaigns and forming together to find out how we can most effectively work together on these issues. From there, we can begin to reach out to the community and the other four colleges and begin the process of educating one another, collaborating on various academic and co-curricular projects, and engaging in meaningful dialogue. Our vegetable oil-fueled vehicle can serve as an alternative form of transportation for student groups to attend conferences, the co-operative houses to pick up their weekly local CSA shares and dispose of their compost, and those who might want to undergo summer research projects similar to our own.

This project will address the needs of the Smith College community as set by the Strategic Planning Committee in a number of ways. Our plans for the summer will integrate our experiences in the classroom with co-curricular exploration in a manner that directly responds to the Committee's concerns about the promotion of a culture of research, inquiry, and discovery. Our experience will build on our personal capacities such as car mechanics and farming practices in ways that the current Smith curriculum does not. It will broaden our awareness of national and global issues by providing us a context in which such issues are both encountered and effectively addressed. While Smith provides us with many opportunities to interact with other cultures abroad, our proposed trip will include a similarly rich cultural immersion within the United States.

The Sustainable Education Initiative will strengthen essential student capacities by making use of the resources from each of the five colleges such as the Plant, Soil and Insect Science Department at UMass and the Hampshire Farm. The Initiative will operate upon the goal of discovering the root concerns involved with sustainability and forming complex solutions to such problems.

Through skill-building workshops, the coalition will compliment the academic and theoretical study of sustainability with practical knowledge. Our proposed work will most directly respond to the Strategic Committee's inquiries on Smith's commitment to sustainability. Through our work with the Green Team and the Sustainability Committee, we will be working with preexisting programs while attempting to form new strategies for raising student, faculty, and community awareness about sustainable agriculture so as to develop a respect for farming as a dignified and viable profession and encourage the undertaking of such practices in other capacities that are applicable to all of our lives.

By opening a dialogue between farmers, students, faculty, and community members we hope to actively and critically engage ourselves in the topic of sustainability. Our summer plans mirror, in many ways, the work that has already been accomplished by students at other colleges. In the past few years, Dartmouth, Middlebury, and Duke gained much publicity for funding students to use biodiesel vehicles to travel the country and educate others about the importance of alternative energy sources. The environmental, political, economic, and social issues that are involved with the question of sustainability are gravely important and we recommend that Smith take action to address such issues in a concrete and creative manner by funding our proposal.