

Proposal

Introduction

Our aim is to develop a revenue neutral model for schools to provide local and nutritious food that is accessible and appropriate for students, while bringing the student's thought process of food choice into light. In hopes of investigating the current state of food preferences and subsequently propose solutions, we will be showcasing the meals through taste tests, and finding viable meal options with accessible and local produce. Our main objectives of this project are finding out food preferences of students and encouraging proactive participation in local and nutritious foods. This would be fulfilled by applying our pre-existing knowledge to the underlying issues we find. Our areas of interest lie in the players of the potential market, incentives behind each interaction, as well as the improving local food security.

Background and Significance

The initiative for this project stemmed from the small number of students buying cafeteria food as well as the nutritional content thereof, and the concern of cost in preparing and selling the meals to students. David Thompson Secondary School is located in the Victoria-Fraserview neighbourhood of Metro Vancouver, B.C. The culinary arts teacher Chef Lee Green enlisted the help of Fresh Roots-an organization entrenched in increasing accessibility of local, nutritious food to everyone- to establish a schoolyard market garden in the vacant courtyard (Fresh Roots, n.d.). The Schoolyard Market Gardens are led by volunteers and seasonal produce is used by the school.

Healthy, Hunger-free Kids Act (HHFKA) an initiative in the United States by Michelle Obama, provided kids with a greater variety of fruits and vegetables, more whole grains, and less sugar and fat (USDA, 2015). This change was not only to reduce obesity rates, but also to help instill healthy habits from an early age; a theme we will encounter throughout our project. By allowing the students to become more involved in the entire process of their meals from growing the produce in the Schoolyard Market Garden to preparing the meals in the culinary class or having input in what is being prepared for them, will get them more aware and involved in their food system increasing the likelihood of them choosing healthier, local food options at school and in the future. The students can then relay that knowledge and experience gained and bring it home to discuss with their families, increasing the awareness and involvement of the parents, therefore creating a healthier, more connected community.

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A study done at the University of Minnesota showed school food policies that reduced amounts of fat and sugar in foods are associated with fewer lunch items purchased by high school students (Neumark-Sztaienr et al., 2005). A shortcoming presented itself when the policies were written while ignoring student preferences. In our project, the surveys and taste-test will help us utilize the preference of the students to help choose meals that are culturally and personally appropriate, not just nutritiously adequate. This may help to ensure that the students will want to buy and enjoy the meals provided by the cafeteria, and continue to do so in the long term.

We will evaluate and strategize in hopes of integrating locally grown produce into school cafeterias such as the higher cost of local food compared to companies that can provide cheap produce to school cafeterias such as Sysco; labour costs and the additional time it may take to produce the meals using local, seasonal food; the availability and transportation of local food; training and skills of staff and students preparing the meals (Roche & Kolodinsky, 2010).



Figure 1: David Thompson Schoolyard Market Garden Story (Fresh Roots)

(<http://freshroots.ca/projects/david-thompson-secondary-school/>)

Methods

The main focus will be the collection of qualitative data from the survey. Depending on the responses from the students, we will either present the data qualitatively (i.e. word cloud) or quantitatively (i.e. pie chart). The study will be conducted at David Thompson Secondary School. A survey will be developed based on The Center for Ecoliteracy (2013), which aims to identify students' perceptions of their school cafeteria. With permission, a group of 12 students from Lee Green's class will fill out this survey, allowing us to gain an idea of the student bodies' opinions. However, caution should be taken when interpreting these results as the sample was not randomly selected, and because they are in the culinary class their responses may not be representative of the school's.

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For the taste test, Chef Green will choose and prepare one of five recipes developed in Fall 2015 with her culinary class. Students will taste the food and give a comprehensive score for appearance, smell, texture, flavor, and overall taste, and compare this with existing food served by the cafeteria. We will then lead a discussion introducing the importance and value of local vegetables, and obtain student opinions on the incorporation of local ingredients into their meal. Ethical concerns are addressed by having the teacher conduct the survey, thereby diminishing interaction with students and minimizing any risks.

- 1 Where do you normally get lunch on school days? Mark all that apply.
 - a From the school cafeteria.
 - b I bring my lunch.
 - c I buy it off campus.
 - d I do not eat lunch.
 - e Other? Please describe: _____

- 2 How often do you eat the cafeteria food? Mark one.
 - a About six or more times a month
 - b About two to five times a month
 - c About once a month
 - d Never

Figure 2: Example survey questions (Center for Ecoliteracy)

(http://www.ecoliteracy.org/sites/default/files/uploads/shared_files/CEL_School_Lunch_Survey.pdf)

Success Factors

The first key to success is being able to identify major factors that drive students to purchase food, or lack thereof. This will be crucial in determining how to move forward with the project, as well as recognizing and addressing the potential issues of food security in the school, such as accessibility or appropriateness of the food. Successful construction and implementation of the survey will be imperative for effectively achieving this objective.

An ABCD approach emphasizes the empowerment of the community through recognizing and utilizing its assets to their greatest potential (Holmer & Mercado, 2007); therefore, the education of chefs and students is another success factor. Ultimately, we hope that the school will be able to run the cafeteria in a revenue neutral way; provide local, nutritious food for students that they will be interested in purchasing and consuming; create and adjust recipes as required due to produce availability, and continue to educate new generations of students in order to keep this programme running.

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As previously mentioned, many other studies and projects have been conducted in order to improve the quality of school lunches provided for students. The success and endeavors of our project may inspire other schools to undertake this initiative, as well as highlight the advantages and importance of these initiatives in school communities. We hope this project will also showcase the possibilities of healthy eating to other students, in order to get them interested and involved in this process.

References

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