To: Dr. Erika Patterson

From: Shakti Ramkumar

Date: October 13, 2018

Subject: Proposal for Improving UBC’s Food Sustainability Commitments

**Introduction**

The University of British Columbia has identified sustainability as one of its key institutional priorities, outlined on UBC’s main website and in UBC’s recently released Strategic Plan, which is intended to be a guiding document that shapes the development of the university for the next century. Additionally, UBC’s Climate Action Plan has a target of reaching 100% net zero greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, with a baseline of 2007 levels, by 2050.

With these strong commitments made to sustainability, UBC aims to serve as an example to other institutions around the world. However, one aspect of sustainability that is missing from UBC’s climate action commitments is the issue of food.

**Statement of Problem**

Industrial agriculture and fishing operations are a major contributor to the production of greenhouse gas emissions, deforestation, and have harmful impacts ecosystems that are often irreversible. Yet, this connection between food systems and climate change is not explicitly addressed in UBC’s Climate Action Plan.

Food insecurity and access to affordable sustainable food is also a growing issue for students, yet the [Sustainable Food Guide](https://sustain.ubc.ca/sites/sustain.ubc.ca/files/images/UBCSustainableCampusFoodGuide.pdf) is outdated, featuring vendors that no longer exist, and also does not provide tangible information on pricing and ecological footprints that would be useful to students on a day-to-day basis.

**Proposed Solution**

One solution to highlight the links between food and climate change is to incorporate evidence-based information about sustainable food systems UBC’s Climate Action Plan. This would be significant because these documents inform where funding is allocated for innovative emissions-reductions projects, future research priorities, and for student-focused initiatives. However, recognizing that institutional change can take a long time to trickle down, a simultaneous student-centered approach is also necessary. For this, I propose a re-issuing of the Sustainable Food Guide, to update it for 2018 and make it easily accessible for students.

**Scope**

To assess the feasibility of improving UBC’s food sustainability initiatives, I plan to pursue the following six areas of inquiry:

1. What are UBC’s current strategies and commitments to improve the sustainability of food systems locally and globally at the following levels?
   1. **Operational**: UBC’s procurement strategies, vendors’ priorities, price setting
   2. **Research and Academic:** research clusters, courses, designated staff, professors exploring food sustainability
2. What do students know about sustainable food initiatives on campus, particularly the Sustainable Food Guide?
3. What food-related issues do students care about that extend beyond campus?
4. What would encourage more students to make use of the Sustainable Food Guide in their decision-making?
5. How were students consulted in the creation of UBC’s Sustainable Food Guide and other food sustainability initiatives?
6. What are the pathways available to students and student groups to lobby for changes to UBC’s climate change and sustainability commitments?

**Methods**

My first area of inquiry will involve a deep dive into publicly available information on UBC’s website to summarize UBC’s current food sustainability initiatives, and to identify staff and researchers in the field who may be useful to interview. To address my areas of inquiry 2-4, I will need to speak directly with students. In order to connect with more students at once, I plan to reach out to a diverse set of student groups or representatives, rather than focus only on a survey for individuals.

For my final two areas of inquiry, I will speak with staff from UBC Sustainability, UBC Farm, and Campus & Community Planning to get a clear picture of how thoroughly UBC conducts student consultation.

**My Qualifications**

I have been studying food sustainability and food security in my discipline of Geography at UBC, as well as independently in my extracurricular work. I worked on a food security strategy and asset map for the City of Surrey’s Department of Sustainability, where I realized that high-level strategies and commitments need to be directly actionable for the public in order to be successful.

I have also been involved with sustainability groups on campus for several years, serving as the Co-Director of Common Energy UBC, and as a member of the Sustainability Collective. With the Sustainability Collective, we successfully advocated for climate change and climate justice to be included in UBC’s strategic plan, so I gained some experience in identifying and speaking with staff during that process.

**Conclusion**

The issue of food sustainability is a necessary addition to UBC’s climate change action c Food sustainability commitments. Food sustainability initiatives at universities also to be centered on principles of equity and inclusion, ensuring that all 50,000 students at the institution have access to useful information. Improving student outreach tools such as the Sustainable Food Guide is one step to take towards this goal. With your approval, I hope to begin research on this project.

MEMORANDUM

To: Dr. Erika Paterson

From: Shakti Ramkumar

Date: October 13, 2018

Subject: Research Proposal Posted to A-Game Group

Dear Dr. Paterson,

I am writing to inform you that I have posted my research proposal, *‘Proposal for Improving UBC’s Food Sustainability Commitments’*, on my Team Forum for the A-Game group. I have attached a copy of this research proposal for your review.

In this proposal, I outline the need to incorporate food sustainability into UBC’s official climate action commitments, and to update and improve the Sustainable Food Guide targeted at students.

The proposal contains the following information:

* An introduction to UBC’s sustainability commitments
* A problem statement that outlines why the issue of food systems needs to be addressed
* Six areas of inquiry that aim to understand UBC’s existing efforts to improve food sustainability, to understand what students know and want from the university, and to obtain a broad picture of what pathways are available for students to advocate for changes at the university
* Proposed methods of inquiry including review of publicly available documents, interviews with key staff and faculty, and a broad survey of student groups
* My qualifications for exploring this research topic

I am happy to answer any questions or concerns regarding my topic. Thank you for reviewing my research proposal.