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SUNY Cobleskill uses sustainability dinners to promote its Farm-to-Fork program.

COBLESKILL, NEW YORK

Cobleskill Auxiliary Services (CAS) is a non-profit corporation that serves the State University of New York (SUNY) College of Agriculture and Technology in Cobleskill, New York. CAS is responsible for the operation of various services around campus including Dining Services, which serves more than 400,000 meals each year.

One major goal of SUNY Cobleskill's strategic plan is to become a more sustainable institution. In the area of foodservice, SUNY Cobleskill looked at purchasing locally produced food products, such as vegetables, fruits and regionally raised meat products. By doing this, SUNY Cobleskill planned to pique students' interest in thinking about the sources and content of the foods they eat.

SUNY Cobleskill looked at several areas where using locally grown products could make a difference. Locally grown products are high quality and of known origin. In addition, they also provide healthier and tastier food and support New York communities.



SUNY Cobleskill implemented a Harvest Dinner to promote all local farm-fresh foods. The local menu brought more than 650 customers to a Friday evening feast. The 23 percent increase in participation was credited to the use of local food, which encouraged more campus faculty, staff and community members to



attend. The dinner brought together growers, harvesters and chefs and thereby completed the agricultural loop. The dining room was filled with students and guests enjoying food and discussing growing, harvesting and cooking issues.

CAS Dining Services' goal is to increase the meals to three season dinners over the academic year. Since students, faculty, staff and commu-

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nity members have requested more of these dinners, attendance is expected to be higher as more people become aware of the Harvest Dinner.

CAS Dining Services intends to build partnerships with local farmers and discover new sources for local produce. By doing this, SUNY Cobleskill will establish the most economically feasible methods to include local foods into weekly menus. The objective is to create a continuous demand for the local products in order to reduce future costs.



The aforementioned events hope to accomplish several goals, which include increasing the number of commuter students purchasing meal plans, increasing the number of people attending the events by 40 percent, raising the level of appreciation for local foods and developing partnerships with farmers.

SUNY Cobleskill is determined to continue the Farm-to-Fork program even though purchasing local products costs more than buying the items from a commercial distributor. Currently, SUNY Cobleskill is spending \$16,000 a year on locally produced food.

As CAS expands the events, more people are expected to attend. CAS hopes the increased attendance will result in a 12 percent increase in commuter meal plans. Also, community residents who attend the dinners are charged \$20 each. Both of these incomes will contribute to sustaining the CAS Dining Services at SUNY Cobleskill Farm-to-Fork project.

CAS will work to establish a relationship with the local producers to allow them to provide a set, consistent quality of food for use by the CAS Dining Services at a price that is closer to what is paid to large food distributors. In the future, CAS plans to have a more economically sustainable Farm-to-Fork project.