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UGA TODAY

Today's top news from the University of Georgia

UGArden growing into more than a teaching plot

May 12, 2015

UGArden, a 4-acre, student-run farm, is teaching students about sustainable food while growing produce to feed families in need.

Located on South Milledge Avenue, the farm started out as a garden in 2010 for students of all majors throughout the university to learn about sustainable food. Initially financed by the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences' horticulture department, UGArden is a tool for instruction, sustainable practices, experimentation and service-learning.

And now land used for sheep and hog farming grows vegetables, fruits, shiitake mushrooms and herbs using organic practices.

"The primary reason UGArden exists is to teach students how to grow fruits, vegetables and herbs organically," said CAES associate professor David Berle, director of UGArden. "Some come to learn how to garden, others to learn

about composting or growing and making herbal teas. Some come just to get outside after being in a class or lab all day and some come to be part of the local food movement.”

More than 50 students visit the farm weekly, and excess food production is donated within the Athens community.



(At left, UGarden volunteers work in the field. The garden contributes thousands of pounds of food to the Athens community. Photo by Jake Goodman)

“Seventy-five percent of the produce grown at the UGarden is distributed to families in need in the community, either through the

Campus Kitchen program, Clarke Middle School or through the weekly produce stand at the Athens Area Council on Aging,” Berle said.

In 2014 alone, UGA’s Campus Kitchen harvested 2,600 pounds of fresh produce from UGarden to make meals for grandparents raising grandchildren.

Through the UGA Office of Service Learning’s Experience UGA program, meant to connect Clarke County School District students with the university, UGarden gives local seventh-graders the opportunity to take part in outdoor activities at UGarden, where they learn about ecology and the farm experience.

Under the direction of Berle, JoHannah Biang, who received her bachelor’s and master’s degrees in horticulture from UGA, is the farm’s manager. As a former graduate student, Biang would often spend time at the UGarden conducting research and helping out as needed.

Now, Biang oversees planting, works with student interns and assists with class instruction.

“Sometimes I call (UGArden) a garden and sometimes I call it a farm because it really started small as a garden, and then it exploded. Our goal isn’t to make money, so it’s cool that we can try out nine different types of peppers and see which ones work. We’re trying to use the UGArden as a teaching tool for the community,” Biang said.

Students can volunteer at the garden through designated work events, typically centered on planting and harvesting. The UGArden Club is also a UGA student organization whose members help staff educational exhibits at events and sponsor festivals and other public events at UGArden. Any UGA student can join.

Several courses are taught at UGArden including two freshman seminars and three upper level courses: Organic Agriculture Systems, Sustainable Community Food Production and a UGArden Internship.

“Being an intern at UGArden has allowed me to interact not only with fellow students interested in sustainable agriculture, but also the community,” said Madeleine Breza, a senior from Annapolis, Maryland, who is double-majoring in anthropology and international affairs with a certificate in local food systems. “It is such a great opportunity for students to get out of the classroom and to come spend some time outdoors, while learning how to maintain an organic farm.”

The garden holds a weekly produce stand Thursdays from 4:30–6 p.m.

Contact garden.uga@gmail.com for more information.

–Maggie Dudacek, College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences

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