



Growing Community on Campus: Urban Agriculture Promotes Educational Opportunities Regarding Food Insecurity, Sustainability and Civic Engagement

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ABSTRACT

Food For Thought, a newly established student run organization at Marymount University, aims to raise awareness about two urban agriculture related issues: the promotion of sustainable living and the alleviation of local food insecurity. To this end, over the eight months since its inception, **Food For Thought** has engaged over 75 students and faculty members in urban agricultural activities in the community. One of these programs involved planting and distributing basil seedlings with **Arlington's Friends of Urban Agriculture** to promote urban sustainable gardening. Another program allowed Marymount students to work alongside local gardeners to plan, plant, and maintain a 4500 ft² charitable vegetable garden, resulting in the harvest and donation of over 2200 lbs of produce to the local food bank, **Arlington Food Assistance Center (AFAC)**. For the future, the club's goals are to maintain and grow these community ties and to foster a sense of community on Marymount's campus. In the next six months, **Food For Thought** intends to establish its own charitable garden at Marymount through the collaborative efforts of students and faculty across many disciplines.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT - DEVELOPING A COMMUNITY OF SERVICE AT MARYMOUNT

Food for Thought was established this year through the interest and efforts of a few members of Marymount University's Biology Department, to raise awareness about and address issues of sustainability and food insecurity. Since its inception just 8 months ago, **Food For Thought's** membership has grown to over **75 students** and **faculty members** from disciplines as far reaching as, **nursing, politics, biology, sociology, psychology, health sciences, English and fashion design.**

Community service is a core value at Marymount University where students are required to participate actively in community projects through student groups, courses and athletic teams. **Food for Thought** has helped engage a variety of students in service activities, primarily through weekly gardening days at the **St. Andrews Episcopal Church** garden.

Food For Thought gardening events have hosted:

- **"Repeat servers"**, students who voluntarily returned to gardening events with **Food For Thought** after fulfilling their service requirement at the garden.
- **Athletic teams**, teammates who worked together toward a meaningful goal off the court.
- **Marymount alumni**, who are spreading the message beyond the borders of the Marymount campus.
- **International students**, who bring a world of agricultural and culinary traditions to share.



DEVELOPING COMMUNITY TIES IN ARLINGTON

Arlington Friends of Urban Agriculture (FOUA): Throughout the late winter and early spring Marymount's **Food For Thought** students partnered with **FOUA** to help promote ideas of sustainability and local urban gardening. This partnership has included planting and distributing over 200 basil seedlings to commuters at local metro stations. Through this effort students learned the science of starting seeds, the maintenance of seedlings, and repotting requirements. Through the distribution activities, students promoted the concepts of sustainability (by providing instructions on repotting the basil plants) and the ease and benefit of urban gardening (by providing simple recipes that use basil).



Arlington Food Assistance Center (AFAC) and St. Andrews Church Plot Against Hunger Program: A major goal for **Food For Thought** has been to help alleviate food insecurity in Arlington. Through a partnership with the **St. Andrews Episcopal Church Plot Against Hunger Program**, students have had the opportunity to learn from seasoned gardeners about planning, planting, maintaining and harvesting a successful vegetable garden. Proceeds from this garden are donated to **AFAC** to serve food insecure residents of Arlington.

Gardening activities carried out by **Food For Thought** members through the **St. Andrews** garden work:

- Soil sampling
- Garden planning using computer software
- Seed starting
- Seedling planting
- Weeding
- Irrigation system installation
- Harvesting



FUTURE GROWTH

Student-run university garden: planning and ground work underway to establish campus charitable garden. Sun studies completed to determine campus location.

Educational opportunities: engaging local experts to speak about food insecurity, sustainability, and urban gardening

Food Recovery Network (FRN): currently establishing a Marymount chapter of **FRN** with proceeds to benefit the **Arlington Street People's Assistance Network (A-SPAN).**

Growing Marymount's Service Community: continue to foster campus wide initiatives to promote service opportunities. Involvement of faculty and students across all disciplines to establish future projects and programs.

