

Growing a Healthier Community

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2018

UMMS Capstone for Impact

Branch: Patients and Populations

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Project Summary

Established in 2010 at the St. Joseph Mercy Ann Arbor hospital campus, The Farm at St. Joe's (known simply as "The Farm") has made its mission to grow a healthy community by empowering people through food, education, and relationships. However, despite widespread involvement and outreach, formal analysis of the impact of The Farm has been limited. In summer 2017, we initiated a survey of volunteers and interns to learn how their involvement with The Farm affects their food choices, levels of physical activity, and feeling of connectedness with their community. We also wanted to better understand participants' motivations for interning and volunteering at The Farm.

Action Items/Outcome

This impact project will be submitted to the Michigan Journal of Sustainability as a photo essay for publication.

As there is little prior research on hospital-based farms, my project provides a framework for thinking about the ways in which these farms can shape the communities in which they are started. Additionally, the photo essay offers evidence that would be available to other organizations evaluating the costs and benefits of implementing a hospital-based farm. The Farm is frequently contacted by institutions interested in starting similar programs, and my project aims to provide further support for these institutions by contributing to the limited literature on this topic. One survey that was initiated in summer 2017 looked at current volunteers and interns. Information gathered from that survey was used in The Farm's annual report as well as submitted for publication to the Michigan Journal of Sustainability.

Another survey initiated in summer 2017 is an ongoing data collection project which will be used by The Farm to better assess how their hospital based farm changes people's perceptions and behaviors over time.

Conclusion/Reflection

The results of the survey demonstrate that volunteers and interns on The Farm were positively impacted by their experience, particularly in the domains of community engagement, physical activity, and food choices. Their responses lend strength to the hypothesis that the volunteer and internship program contribute positively to The Farm's goal of fostering healthier communities. Their responses also provide insight into the unique and positive effects hospital-based farms can have on those who participate.

This program not only fosters healthy habits among participants but promotes responsible behaviors among the hospital and wider community. A recurrent theme throughout the survey responses was the desire to spread the mission and ideals of The Farm amongst participants' communities. In addition to healthy eating and increased exercise, these ideals included increased local food consumption and commitment to sustainable food production, which also create healthier inhabitants and communities.