November 25, 2009

Student Sustainability Committee
Campus

Dear Committee Members:

I wish to apply for a sustainability grant to provide partial funding to bring the University of Illinois Student Farm to a self-supporting enterprise that provides fresh, locally-grown produce to the campus while providing significant educational, outreach, and research activities for the University community. With the support of the Student Sustainability Committee, we initiated the farm in 2009 and have made very good progress. With continued support in 2010, I firmly believe we will reach our goal of a self-supporting operation in 2011.

Our progress in 2009 has been substantial. With notice of the award from the Student Sustainability Committee, we hired a farm manager, Zachary Grant, and identified land on the new Pomology Research Farm at the SE corner of Lincoln and Windsor roads. We began harvesting salad greens in May and other produce from June through September. In total, we delivered almost 19,000 lbs of fresh vegetables and fruits and over 4000 ounces of fresh herbs. Dining Services has transferred $25,192 to our account in payment for 2009 production.

We have also successfully sought over $36,000 from other University funding sources to purchase three 30' x 96' high tunnels, or plastic-covered greenhouses that are used to extend the growing season to 9-11 months instead of the usual 5 months of production typical for Central Illinois. As of November 23, one high tunnel is completely finished, one has the structure finished with additional bracing and end wall installation to complete, and the third has approximately 40% of the structure erected. Once fully operational, these structures will permit us to deliver produce to Dining Services from February thru December.

Our plan is to continue to ramp up our operation in 2010, our second year of operation, so that we can generate enough income to be self-supporting by year three (2011). To achieve this goal, we need $25,000 in funding for 2010 from the Student Sustainability Committee. Funding at this level plus our produce sales from year one will permit us to ramp up production in 2010. The high tunnels are a major part of this business plan as they allow a more seasonally distributed work load, i.e. harvesting operations take place over a 10-month period instead of five months common in outdoor production. Further, the high tunnels permit the production of higher value produce that is

not available with outdoor production, i.e. tomatoes in May and June or salad greens in February and March.

We will continue to work closely with Dining Services to better match the needs of the campus with what we grow. We must reach a production volume that can significantly reduce the needs of the campus community in order to contribute meaningfully to carbon emissions reductions.

As a student farm at a tier one research university, we should be involved in teaching, research, and outreach activities on the farm. And we do intend to expand our scope to include these activities in the farm operation; however, at this time we are focused solely on making the farm sustainable. This means that most of our efforts are geared towards production activities that generate income. As our operation grows, more effort will be made to engage students in courses and internships related to the farm and local food production, initiate research projects, and engage growers, K-12 students, etc. in outreach activities. These activities have begun as we have worked with University classes, e.g. ARTD 410, Advanced Graphic Design, used the farm as the basis for a design and advertising exercise, and with K-12 as the University laboratory school visited the farm. And this is just the beginning. This summer we will part of a Master Gardener program on season extension, and we are initiating joint research projects with Michigan State University on season extension.

Our goal is to contribute to campus sustainability by providing a significant portion of the food needs of the campus community through the student farm. The concept of food miles, the distance traveled from farm to plate, has been useful in framing the debate on agricultural sustainability. However, the current view is that food miles are not a particularly accurate method of assessing sustainability from a carbon emissions viewpoint. Regardless, there is no doubt that production on campus, within 3 miles of the dining services storerooms, will reduce the carbon emissions necessary to provide fruits and vegetables consumed on this campus.

We are truly appreciative of the support given to the U of I student farm in 2009. The interest in the farm from students across campus, the Daily Illini, the University of Illinois Alumni Association, and others has been tremendous. I am quite confident that with partial support in 2010, we can achieve our goal of self-supporting operation by 2011.

Sincerely,

Bruce Branham
Professor
Department of Crop Sciences

Budget outlines for 2010 and 2011.

University budgeting information

On soft money positions, i.e. those not funded on State or State/tuition dollars, of which the student farm is an example, the University budgeting system obligates salary expenses for the entire year. Unless we begin each fiscal year with a balance that exceeds the salary of the farm manager, the account used to operate the student farm will be considered in deficit since the entire year salary is considered spent when the new year begins. When new interns are to be hired or equipment purchased, the account will show a negative balance and special permission is needed for deficit spending. Therefore, my goal is to have most of each year's budget in hand at the beginning of each fiscal year. This will also provide a cushion should production be affected by an unforeseen calamity such as a hailstorm that could decimate outdoor and indoor production.

Assumption:

Our production in 2009 generated revenue of $25,000 from outdoor production only without any high tunnel production. We intend to increase outdoor production in 2010 and also change the mix of what we produced in 2009 towards more high value crops. We estimate that the high tunnels will generate $5-10/ft^2, which translates to $33,750 to $67,500 based upon a conservative estimate of 2250 ft^2 of usable space within each high tunnel. I don't expect nor count on achieving this level of revenue in 2010 as it will be our first year of production, but I do expect to achieve this level of production by 2011.

Our budget for the 2009 calendar year, including donated funds from other on-campus sources, is detailed in the final report that accompanies this addendum. Below are my projections for 2010 and 2011.

One of my concerns regarding budgeting for 2011 is the mix of revenue from high tunnels versus outdoor production. Since outdoor production peaks beginning in mid-July through mid-August, there is a limit to how much Dining Services will need at this time. Thus, while we may have the capacity to produce significant amounts of food in this time frame, there may not be the demand from Dining Services. This decreases our ability to project into the future, and is the reason I did not forecast more revenue from outdoor production in 2011.

The high tunnels circumvent this problem as peak vegetable production occurs more during the academic year. Our goal is to earn enough money in 2011 and beyond to expand our ground under high tunnels.

Budget for 2010

Expenditures

Salary plus benefits for Farm Manager position	
(35 K annual salary plus benefits @ 29.3%)	$45,255
Student interns/farm workers (3 @ 4000/summer plus part time	
Fall and spring semesters)	16,000
Seed, compost, and miscellaneous supplies	5,000
Contingency funds	2,000
Total operating budget for 2010	$68,255

Revenue of 2010

Grant from Student sustainability committee	$25,000
2009 revenue from production	25,192
2010 crop production revenue	18,063
Total revenue for 2010 calendar year	$68,255

Estimated Production Revenue for 2010

Outdoor production – increase production from 1.5 to 2 acres,	
Increase planting density within this area, plant higher value	
Crops	$40,000
High tunnel production 6750 ft^2 @$3/ft	20,250
Total estimated revenue for 2010	$60,250

Revenue reserved for 2011 growing season (60,250- 18,063) = 42,187

Budget for 2011

Expenditures

Salary plus benefits for Farm Manager position	
(37 K annual salary plus benefits @ 29.3%)	$47,730
Student interns/farm workers (3 @ 4000/summer plus part time	
Fall and spring semesters)	22,000
Seed, compost, and miscellaneous supplies	5,000
Contingency funds	2,000
Total operating budget for 2010	$76,730

Revenue of 2011

2010 revenue from production (less that used for 2010)	42,187
2011 crop production revenue	34,543
Total revenue for 2010 calendar year	$76,730

Estimated Production Revenue for 2011

Outdoor production – increase production from 2 to 3 acres	$50,000
High tunnel production 6750 ft^2 @$5/ft	33,750
Total estimated revenue for 2010	83,750

Revenue reserved for 2011 growing season (83,750-34,543) = 49,207