

Brooke Powell

Introduction to Journalism

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Have you ever been in the middle of picking out your produce at the grocery store and realized that the label reads "Product of Mexico"? Then it dawns on you, that you've never given it much thought to where your food coming from. With a growing concern about this issue, it has become common for communities to start more sustainable-food projects. In Houghton, there are two local sustainable food projects: The Wadsworth Hall (Wads) garden on Michigan Tech's campus and the Pewabic Street Community Garden located, near the Houghton County Courthouse.

The Wads Campus Garden was initiated when Vice President for Student Affairs and Advancement Les Cook approached former staff member of Housing and Residential Life Alex Burns and asked if he would be interested in starting a garden on Tech's campus. "It was a vague request, but that was fine by me," Burns said. Cook wanted to see a garden on campus that would not only look nice but also be functional and could be used in Housing and Residential Life community through Dining Services. However, "The garden was not intended to even make a dent in the demand of dining services.... I was hoping (it) would make people think about where their food actually comes from."

The Pewabic Street Community Garden was established in 2007 by a group of citizens from Houghton, one of whom is Sarah Cheney. They saw a potential in a right-of-way piece of

land that was not being used by the city. The land was ideal for a garden because it received more hours of direct sunlight than most peoples' yards. The Pewabic Street Garden also does a annual community outreach with Mrs. hall's fourth graders, from Houghton Middle School. They help plant and harvest the vegetables, then take them home where their parents help them cook. The dishes they create are then serve as part of the lunch. The attention gets directed to what is food and where does it come from. "There's less of a need for produce, and more of a need for learning to grow your own vegetables." Cheney said. They want the kids to know what different vegetables look and taste like, so they can honestly answer if they like something or not.

According to Roberta Mazzucco, author of *From the Farms to Your Table: Where Does Our Food Come From?* "More and more of our foods are coming from outside of the United States; thus, throwing us into a global economy where food production is not always held up to strictest environmental standards." The last few generations of children essentially grew up on fast food and convenience meals, leaving them with very little knowledge of where their food is actually coming from.

This lack of education follows children as they go to college, where budgeting for food is one of the last things students have on their mind, especially if they live in the residence halls, which is required of first and second year students at most four-year universities. It isn't until you finally move into your own place, when you are no longer required to purchase a meal plan through the school, that you realize you are solely responsible for feeding yourself.

So why are universities not teaching their students more about where their food comes from, how to grow their own or even how to make a food budget? When asked if there was much student involvement in either of the community gardens, the answer in both cases seemed to be

"not really". Lack of interest on the student's part seemed to be the main reason Burns said that when he asked student organizations to get involved with the Wads Garden. most of them said no and "...one of them told me I was crazy to try to garden in Houghton." According to Cheney, Lack of time seemed to be the determining factor for no students had ever gotten involved in the Pewabic Community Garden.

According to Manager of Dining Services Ernest Beutler, the Wads Campus Garden has evolved, since its start, and the student involvement is much higher now. Although they are select few, they make up roughly 98 percent of the participation needed to help maintain the garden. "We're still trying to define our customer," Beutler said. "We'd really like to donate to the HuskeyFAN food pantry, but FDA regulations make it difficult to 'give away' any food products." The Wads Garden does try to inform the students as much as possible through signs in the dining halls and a special dinner that Dining Services puts on once a year to showcase the food items grown in the garden. Last year, they grew the produce required to make salsa and the vegetables required in pasties.

Another issue for students is they don't know how to cook. So even if they were to get involved with the gardens, they wouldn't know how to use the produce. As part of the Success Summit held earlier this semester, Beutler held a cooking class for students, which focused on making good food on a college budget. "It got great reviews and, hopefully, will not be the last of its kind," Beutler said.

It is true that university students have some of the most challenging schedules and gardening takes a lot of time and dedication. However, if we continue to ignore where our food is coming from, our problems will only worsen. According to Jason Mark author of the article

The Outsourcing of Food, the U.S.'s 2 million famers face the issue of outsourcing food. Making it difficult to make a living, when buyers can buy the product they want from an outside source for a third of the cost.

"Phil Howard, a researcher at the Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems at the University of California-Santa Cruz, says the U.S. is losing a key element of self-sufficiency. "This isn't like computer chips from China -- we can live without that," says Howard. "If we keep importing our food, we'll be completely dependent on other countries. Are we going to send the military around the world to protect our food imports as we do now to protect our oil imports?"

If we don't start teaching our children how to provide for themselves, they will be left to fend for themselves when we are gone. None of these things will change, unless we do.