Sunrise Ranch Farm to Kitchen Liaison Independent Study

SUMMER OF 2012

Diane Estella Beck

Key Leaders & Support~ Chef Joel, Patrick, Susannah, & Edward + inspiration provided by kitchen & garden crew

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Initial Proposal:

**Sunrise Farm to Table Liaison Project**

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**Description~**

  During my time as a permaculture intern at Sunrise Ranch I would like to examine the interactions between the garden (permaculture garden included) and the kitchen’s preparation of meals for the community & event groups.  I am interested in analyzing the fundamental barriers/challenges that both the farmers and the chefs encounter when attempting to integrate freshly harvested ingredients into the meals at Sunrise Ranch. Bill Mollison’s interpretation of the aim of permanent agriculture is “ to stabilize and care for the land, then to serve household regional and local needs, and only thereafter to produce a surplus for sale or exchange.”  I want to center my attention on the feasibility of increasing the exchange and communication between the garden and the kitchen.

This project will concentrate on how to implement efficient strategies and tools to help synchronize the demanding schedules of garden harvesting to meal planning.  In order to assess what would be beneficial additions to Sunrise Ranch I will conduct a series of interviews to become aware of what is already being done, current challenges, and brainstorm future plans of action.  I anticipate researching preservation methods and figuring out how to create culinary menus that utilize what is provided by our land.  The people that are directly associated with Sunrise Ranch that will be useful to have conversations regarding my project will be Chef Joel, Michael Costello, Suzanna, and and Patrick.

I would like to gain experience facilitating farm to table interactions.  Someday I hope to be a leader in bringing healthy food systems alternatives to institutionalized settings by incorporating gardens & the gardens’ yield into the meals served.  This could include senior centers, prisons, schools, hospitals, and many other places that have the potential and buying power to dramatically influence and aid the local economy that they exist within.  My intention is to use this project at Sunrise to build my understanding of what it takes to provide those alternatives and some tools that can make the interactions go as smoothly as possible.

Some ideas I have before conducting interviews with the current key administrators that make the current farm to table interactions possible is to create a type of harvest calender so that the kitchen team knows when certain products will be available and ready to use.  I also am interested in producing some hard data/numbers to use as a point of references when analyzing how much food from the garden is used in the meals &/or groceries for the community.  That way we can set goals or figure out how to increase those numbers in the future and be able to use it as an outstanding marketing point to groups that may be intrigued about our meals.  I will be keeping a journal of what is harvested while I am partaking in my usual garden internship activities, intermixed with aesthetic culinary journal entries.  This will help me to develop my culinary familiarity and palette in terms of starting from the garden.  In other words to document the connections I experience between the garden and the dining room.  I plan on watching the Power of Community as a source of inspiration and reading sections of Bill Mollison’s textbook on permaculture.  At this point I don’t have a specific product that will be created.  However I believe after doing my research and directly participating and talking with community members at Sunrise Ranch I will begin to see where I can serve as a helpful liaison between the garden and the kitchen.  I think this project will highlight what is already going on between the farm and the garden to a larger amount of people in the community/visitors which will generate excitement and pride for the ranch.  Also by committing to a role in which I can be responsible for being focused on the social communication between the garden and the kitchen I might be able to take on some duties that right now are difficult to accomplish because those key leaders involved are very busy and pressed for time.

**Abstract.**

I arrived at Sunrise Ranch with the intention to explore the daily interactions between the garden & kitchen activities.  I wanted to create spaces that would most efficiently influence positive communication between the two crucial components that make up a successful farm to table system.  Along with my physical implementation of the harvest boards, I sought to assess potential outlets that increase the utilization of our fresh produce from the garden.  These included preservation methods, visualizing how other interns project can be functional for our farm to kitchen program, and brainstorming how to increase members involvement/awareness about how critical the role of our food and garden is in a functioning, healthy community. I laid out the paradigm shifts that will be necessary in order to apply more frequent farm to table interactions in order to translate this project to the cultural system we are a part of in the United States.  These are just the initial stepping stones and beginning of the process to reach our full potential of utilizing the wonderful gifts from the garden to educate, nourish, and inspire many individuals.

**MAIN report.**

**What:**

I analyzed the current interactions between the farm team and the kitchen team and how they worked together to deliver fresh food in an artistic fashion to the table for community members and our guests at Sunrise Ranch.  I identified the strengths and the weaknesses and then brainstormed ideas that would most efficiently address the most urgent weaknesses that I saw.  I conducted interviews & informed people in the community about my ideas and visions.  I received positive feedback and agreement from the community about my concerns & their support for trying to implement some new measures to address the issues.  The issues were:

A lack of communication or space for the kitchen team and garden team to interact in their shared vision.

 Inefficient use of space in the kitchen/walk in cooler.

Overabundance of produce with not enough uses or people to preserve it in an appropriate and timely manner.

 A lack of community participation in the entire supply-chain of farm to table therefore leading to uninformed assumptions about the process or a feeling of isolation from the garden interns & in some cases the kitchen team as well.

There was a large margin we as community members were missing to do a better job of supplying an increase in farm to table/school/CSA activities with the surplus of gifts from nature we contained on the farm.  These type of activities deeply identify with the fundamental philosophies of permaculture & in fact were being marketed in our outreach material. Therefore, implementing measures or an action plan to elevate these interactions was/is a priority.

After identifying the areas I wanted to change to better the community while staying within the parameters of my desire to get experience managing farm to table interactions & the limited time I had at Sunrise Ranch; I made the decision to build some harvest boards in the prep room of the kitchen.  I obtained 2 white boards through the executive team of Sunrise Ranch & constructed them to fit my initial vision.  I also took an active role by dehydrating apricots in our solar dehydrator ( built as a part of a peer’s independent project) because in 2012 we had an enormously bountiful harvest from our apricot trees.  They were taking up room in the cooler and they were also going bad even though we were using them as sauces for chicken/jam/crisps ect. Along with Chef Joel we added them to an alternative community batch of granola to provide increased nutrition  & a diversified & seasonal approach to the usual Sunrise Granola.

**How & Why:**

First and foremost I completed this project by being actively involved in the day to day activities between the garden and the kitchen.  Through the process of growing, protecting then harvesting the raw product out of the ground or picking it from a tree I had a strong connection with the fruits & vegetables of my labor.  I would then deliver them via a pull cart to the back door of the kitchen in harvest bins.  Depending on what the product was we would prepare it for its next step of being stored in whatever space was appropriate (cooler, root cellar, ect. ) I would then recognize when the kitchen would serve the food as ingredients at meal times & ingest the food, when I was very hungry from working out in the garden as substance.  It gave me the substance I needed to keep me going to grow more food.  It was a physical embodiment of a complete and closed cycle and taught me the fundamental principles of permaculture.  I discovered the coolest part of it is that **I am part of it.**

The point of the paragraph above is to stress the importance to me of treating the fruits and vegetables of our garden with the respect, recognition, & dignity that they deserve from the entire supply-chain (community).  Therefore it is important to provide the necessary communication and opportunities for this to occur.  I had a meeting with Chef Joel discussing his past experiences with facilitating farm to table interactions into his menus in Seattle.  He was extremely helpful and willing to sponsor my project because we had correlating visions for Sunrise Ranch.  I wrote up a preliminary plan accompanied with my materials needed, a blue print of how it would be placed in the prep room, & steps of actions.

Materials Needed

-Dry Erase Boards (ideally 3)

-Dry Erase Markers

-Electrical Tape

-Clip Board with a Pencil Cup

The Steps of Action

Acquire the Materials

Assemblage of the System (Redesigning some of prep room space)

Implementation of System & Educating people of how to use the new tools and space effectively

Appoint Key leaders responsible for keeping the system in motion meaning who’s responsibility will it be to update the system?

I made a copy of my plans and distributed it to Michael, Joyce, & Susannah Light ( the current garden manager.)  I received some verbal feedback from them.  Mostly confirmations that the project would be a beneficial permaculture independent project for the Ranch.

Joel agreed to purchase two boards for me.   I created the main calender board to be divided into three weeks with the idea that the current week would have been forecasted then updated as needed to follow with the true harvest.  The future two weeks would always be filled out with a rough estimate of what Joel could expect to see coming into the kitchen.  There would be an appointed intern that would speak with Susannah on a regular basis, perhaps during Monday mornings after pipe change.  There is a good amount of flexibility on who/how that would be handled as long as there was a decided process so that the kitchen could depend on the information to be available.  Most importantly it would need to be updated before the kitchen put in their kitchen order on Wednesday.

I utilized the second board to list the produce available to the public in a written format.  This increased the general knowledge of the community of what was being harvested at what times & decreased confusion.  Also I had noticed that the grocery system was difficult for some people because since they didn’t know what exactly fresh garden produce was available they just wouldn’t order it.  I thought if we labeled it or had this second board in plain sight it would help address this issue.  There would be less people going into the walk in wandering around looking for stuff, which was an expressed frustration by the kitchen crew.

There were two mobile shelfs used for storage for the bins produce went in along with a bunch of miscellaneous things, including the clip board that contained the quantitative harvested data (what was harvested & how much & in what condition).  My harvest boards would not be replacing the clipboard system because we still need that detail recorded.  However, the shelfs were taking up a lot of space in the prep room at the same time that within the walk in cooler there was an abundance of produce and not enough room with the current assemblage.  So I moved one of the racks into the cooler so that we could stack all the apricots and other produce in a more effective manner.   There was then room directly next to the cooler to hang up the boards.

**Goals:**

1)  To create an open and accessible space for communication between the garden team and the kitchen team.

 Accountability & oversight of our fresh inventory

2) Tools to use of our food efficiently and decrease waste

3) Projection & meal planning tool for the kitchen team

4) Increase community awareness and involvement within the garden & kitchen teams AKA  food sector

5) Improve our record keeping and utilization of data for future actions/seasons/meals by making it more accessible

**Successes:**

I think it was a success to implement an additional communicational tool into the current Sunrise Ranch system to make things run more cohesively.  It was successful to hear positive feedback from community members and generate some excitement.  I believe that the harvest board worked in conjunction or supported other independent projects by providing a space where their ideas could be broadcasted or documented.  For example, perhaps someone wanted to make public a preservation workshop of making jam with our extra fruit because they saw on the harvest board that we were overloaded with apricots and needed to do something with them before they went bad.  There would be another board provided to write down that information.  This would be true with letting the community know about harvesting parties.  It was a success because the kitchen was more aware of what was coming in from the garden so that Joel could order more effectively and appropriately.  That way we were keeping more money circulating in the community when possible instead of wasting it on external sources.  It added value to our marketing of Farm to table activities.  Also, once Kai a hi’s herb garden comes to fruition outside the kitchen she will be able to add onto the harvest calender.   Or for Emmy’s shampoo or rachel’s seasonal lotion they could list that for sale on one of those boards as another means of publication.  On that note, I was able to give Rachel the pits of apricots I was dehydrating to use for her lotions because of the communication of an overabundance of apricots.  So these closed loop activities were definitely a success relating to the implementation of the harvest boards.

**Challenges:**

The number one challenge I see with the harvest boards is a continual effort to update them to allow them to reach their full potential of helping the community and our farm to table activities.  They have to be seen as a source of value (helpful) and not a hindrance (another thing to do) for either the garden or kitchen team.  I think you address this challenge by a designated system to appoint a person to be responsible of updating them.  It would make the most sense to have this be an involved intern that already was exposed to kitchen and garden activities.  It would naturally flow into their schedule then.  I don’t think it has to be specifically one persons responsibility for the whole season.  It would make sense to have one person committed to it for an entire week though so they are fully aware of what is going on.  I see it be appointed similarly to how weekend chores are appointed now.

**Advice for Future Pursuits:**

I think it would be really cool to use the goals the harvest boards were attempting to address to increase Sunrise Ranch’s public community outreach.  I started to look into the regulations associated with donating food to schools.  A future pursuit could incorporate those ideas to develop a relationship with a local school or local food bank.  Or research the history of CSA’s on Sunrise Ranch and then develop a modern plan that fit within our existing resources (time, people, produce) in a reasonable manner.  I would like to see someone fill a specific internship as a Communications Coordinator or Public Relations for the ranch.  Then there would be a allocated position to ensure the harvest board is being updated and everyone is on the same page in terms of the Board of Directors/Garden Manger/Chef/ and all the interns + farm team.  I think this has  huge potential to allow us to be more organized, effective with the energy provided, and develop a successful internship program.  I also had the idea that one shift, one day a week the kitchen team and the garden team would switch responsibilities and then when the kitchen team brought up the produce we would all make lunch for the community together.  I think it is very important that shared responsibility is practiced on the Ranch to keep peoples weeks diverse and involved.  It also makes very visible to the surrounding community what we are doing and why we care about it.

**SUPPORTING Evidence:**

**My Powerpoint Presentation** presents my process of ideas and how I went about connecting my ideas to this tangible project.  There are pictures incorporated with the presentation.

**PERSONAL & PROCESS REFLECTION:**

I enjoyed having the freedom to develop a project incorporating my interests and applying them to supporting Sunrise Ranch.  I think the more tangible the project is, the more ability one has in succeeding in accomplishing their goals.  I wish I had time to do more research of other models of harvest boards and see how the board integrated within the community and our day to day activities.  Time was a definite restriction.  I think I would ncorporate permaculture Wednesdays with the independent projects since they are tied together with similar ideas already.  This might provide a boost of energy and time for the team to help each other brainstorm or work on each other’s projects, like we did with Drew’s shelter or Kev & Devon’s greenhouse.  I am happy with my results and think it will be successful if utilized by the community in the future! Joel is a champion and I think he will put forth the momentum to try to keep the harvest board as an active part of his kitchen.  It helps to have multiple people in the community supporting the interns ideas/projects.

LOVE & LIGHT....

~~Diane Estella Beck