UC SANTA BARBARA

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Feed the World

Known for a vast biodiversity most famously surveyed by Charles Darwin, the Galapagos Islands have seen extensive conservation efforts on land. Yet the exploitation of its marine environment — particularly of its key fisheries — is jeopardizing those resources and threatening local livelihoods in turn.

Aiming to address such problems, UC Santa Barbara's Sustainable Fisheries Group (SFG) is employing ocean management, conservation and sustainability practices to protect and improve the health of vulnerable low-volume fisheries in the Galapagos and other locations around the world. The solutions-through-science approach has vast potential to inform and impact policy at levels from local to global.

The ecological research expertise endemic to SFG is but one item on the diverse menu of best practices, eco-innovations and cutting-edge ideas that UCSB brings to the table for a new UC effort to address food security.

Newly unveiled by President Janet Napolitano, the UC Global Food Initiative will harness the system's collective excellence in research, outreach and operations in a sustained effort to develop, demonstrate and export solutions — throughout California, the U.S. and the world — for food security, health and sustainability.

"President Napolitano's food initiative is designed to coordinate the diverse resources of the University of California to help ensure adequate nutrition for all," said Bruce Tiffney, dean of the College of Creative Studies at UCSB and co-chair of the Chancellor's Sustainability Committee. "Every campus in the UC possesses

particular areas of expertise that will contribute to this undertaking. By example, UCSB has particular expertise in marine fisheries through its Sustainable Fisheries Group, involving researchers in the Bren School of Environmental Science & Management and the Marine Science Institute, who seek to integrate innovative scientific research with economic incentives to create policies that will favor sustainable fisheries on a global scale."

'Protect, Preserve and Regenerate'

Posted front and center in the De La Guerra Dining Commons at UCSB, a massive gleaming white board announces the day's sustainable specials. These rotating items are in addition to the standing stock of organic produce and dairy products, free-range chicken and eggs, fair trade coffee and tea and an impressive array of local foods available every day at each of the campus's four residential dining halls.

Besting, by years, a UC goal of procuring 20 percent sustainable food products by 2020, UCSB's Residential Dining Services (RDS) by 2013 purchased 38 percent sustainable foods; 41 percent of its produce was grown locally, within 150 miles of campus, and 15 percent of it was organic.

Food waste in the dining commons has been cut by more than 50 percent since going "trayless" in 2009, a move that has also saved some 1 million gallons of water and benefitted student nutrition by promoting better portion control. Today, every ounce of unconsumed food is composted; the campus recently received its first load of soil created entirely from its own composting efforts.

"We have a very strong commitment to sustainability, but also to nutrition," said RDS dietitian Danielle Kemp. "We really try to protect, preserve and regenerate the environment we're in by offering earth-friendly dining practices. It's always on our mind and incorporated into everything that we do — especially when we're procuring food.

"And I think the UC initiative is another way to continue on the right path to make all the campuses more sustainable," she added.

'At Any Point, Any of Us Can Be Hungry'

Among the best practices that RDS is likely to share and promote to its sister campuses, Kemp said, is UCSB's unique take on a national program that gifts

unused meal credits to students grappling with food security.

A collaboration of residential dining, the Associated Students (AS) Food Bank and the umbrella organization Swipes for the Houseless, the offshoot Swipes for Us provides meal vouchers to UCSB students in need. A smaller percentage of the roughly 1,000 surplus meal credits donated each quarter is transferred into cash, which is then used to purchase food that is donated to houseless people in the larger community.

“The idea was: A lot of students have unused meals on campus, so why can’t we put those to better use?” said AS President Ali Guthy, co-founder of UCSB’s Swipes for the Houseless chapter and creator of the Swipes for Us model. “It’s a two-part program and it really benefits a lot of people. We hope to expand it across the UC system and, really, nationwide. We’ve experienced a lot of success here at UCSB.”

Part of that success includes a partnership between Swipes and the AS Food Bank; many of the donated meals go to Food Bank clients and some of the cash is used to stock its shelves. Established in spring 2011 by two then-undergrads, the campus pantry by spring 2014 had served 3,000 students. More than 2,000 of those used the food bank this academic year alone, said Tuyen Nguyen, coordinator for the center that distributes shelf-stable food, fresh produce and basic toiletries three days per week.

“There has been an increase in awareness of our services, but also we see there is a major need,” Nguyen said. “Hunger for us is a byproduct of larger issues that our students are dealing with, so how are we helping them to be more food secure, be more sustainable in their lives? This initiative will allow us to work collaboratively to find solutions to those deeper issues that are facing everyone, because at any point, any of us can be hungry.

“Hopefully we can also find the solutions that we need to not have any more food pantries on our college campuses,” Nguyen added. “For now though, we do, so how can we work better to provide more comprehensive solutions? I think we are at a good momentum to really be able to critically sit at the table and talk about real solutions for our students, both in programmatic ways and in conceptual ways … and in policy-oriented change. That’s really what it’s going to take.”

Building on Success

Policy-oriented change. On campus and across the UC system, that’s among the key goals of the food initiative that ultimately aims to help put the world on a path to sustainably and nutritiously feed itself.

UCSB is in a prime position to play a crucial role in the endeavor. Long a leader in all things environmental — the first U.S. university to earn a platinum LEED certification for one of its buildings is also known to be the birthplace of Earth Day — the institution has been making strides in green food practices for years. A new weekly farmer’s market on campus, offering easy access to sustainable and healthy foods, is the latest addition to an impressive list of local efforts with global implications.

“This is a really great opportunity for us to build on successes that we have had in the past and be able to be part of something at statewide level that will have impact globally,” said Katie Maynard, sustainability coordinator based in UCSB’s geography department. “We’re really excited about how we’ve approached this issue from a full sustainability perspective, looking at the environmental, social and economic components of sustainability. We’re pulling all that together to make sure we are developing solutions that are good for the planet, for our bodies and for society as a whole.”

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.