

The SDG Accord

The University and College Sector's Collective Response to the Global Goals

Free Produce Pop-ups



Niagara College

SDG focus

- ☒ Goal 2 - Zero hunger
- ☒ Goal 12 - Responsible consumption and production
- ☒ Goal 17 - Partnerships for the goals

What did you do?

The Niagara College Sustainability team, in partnership with United Way Niagara and the help of Greenhouse Technician program students, set up a series of Produce Pop-up events in fall 2024 where students were invited to shop, at no cost, for fresh vegetables grown in the United Way Garden plots on campus. The United Way Garden Hub, consisting of 39 garden beds, a greenhouse, tool shed, produce washing station and gazebo, was first established on the Niagara-on-the-Lake campus in 2022 aiming to reduce food insecurity in Niagara. Greenhouse Technician students tend to the garden, managing year-round planting plans as part of their Sustainable Food Production course, providing valuable hands-on learning opportunities. Approximately 80 students were able to participate and choose from over 33 kilograms of fresh produce, including eggplant, tomatoes, peppers, okra, zucchini, cucumber, garlic, kale, jalapenos, carrots, and more.



Image: Niagara College students picking up free fresh produce at the Produce Pop up event.

What were the benefits and outcomes?

1. Provide support to address global hunger and food insecurity on campus.
2. Strengthened community partnerships to support broader sustainability goals at Niagara College. "We are grateful to United Way who worked with us very quickly to get this first pop-up up and running within a very tight timeframe," said Katie Bristow, Sustainability Program and Outreach Coordinator. "The produce pop-up aligns with Niagara College's [new Sustainability Plan](#) and the UN's Sustainability Development Goals (SDG)."
3. Supported student well-being by addressing food insecurity through access to fresh, healthy produce, promoting nutritious food choices, and reducing financial stress to create a more supportive and sustainable campus environment.

What barriers or challenges did you encounter in embedding sustainability into your learning and teaching practice and how did you overcome them?

1. **Time Constraints.** There is a time constraint to when food is available for harvest and when most students are physically on campus, due to the growing season peaking in summer months when enrolment is typically lower. This affects the ability to maximize the use of locally grown food in teaching and outreach events. NC Sustainability was able to coordinate with United Way Garden Hub and the Greenhouse Technicians program students to host the events the day that the produce was harvested to ensure everything was as fresh as possible and available as soon as possible to students.
2. **Dedicated Resources.** Having dedicated people and financial resources would have allowed for more opportunities for sustainable food initiatives, like an increased ability to provide fresh produce to students more frequently and to scale up the initiative. Sustainability initiatives were carried out by passionate staff working across multiple portfolios, but the lack of full-time, dedicated resourcing reduced the ability to host more regular or larger-scale food access events.

What are your conclusions and recommendations for others?

This initiative supported student well-being while promoting local, sustainable food systems. It was well received, with strong student participation and enthusiastically supported at all levels across the college. It demonstrated the power of partnerships and a whole-institution approach to supporting students' basic needs while advancing sustainability goals.

Web link to further information:

[NC Sustainability and United Way Host Produce Pop-up for Students - InsideNC](#)